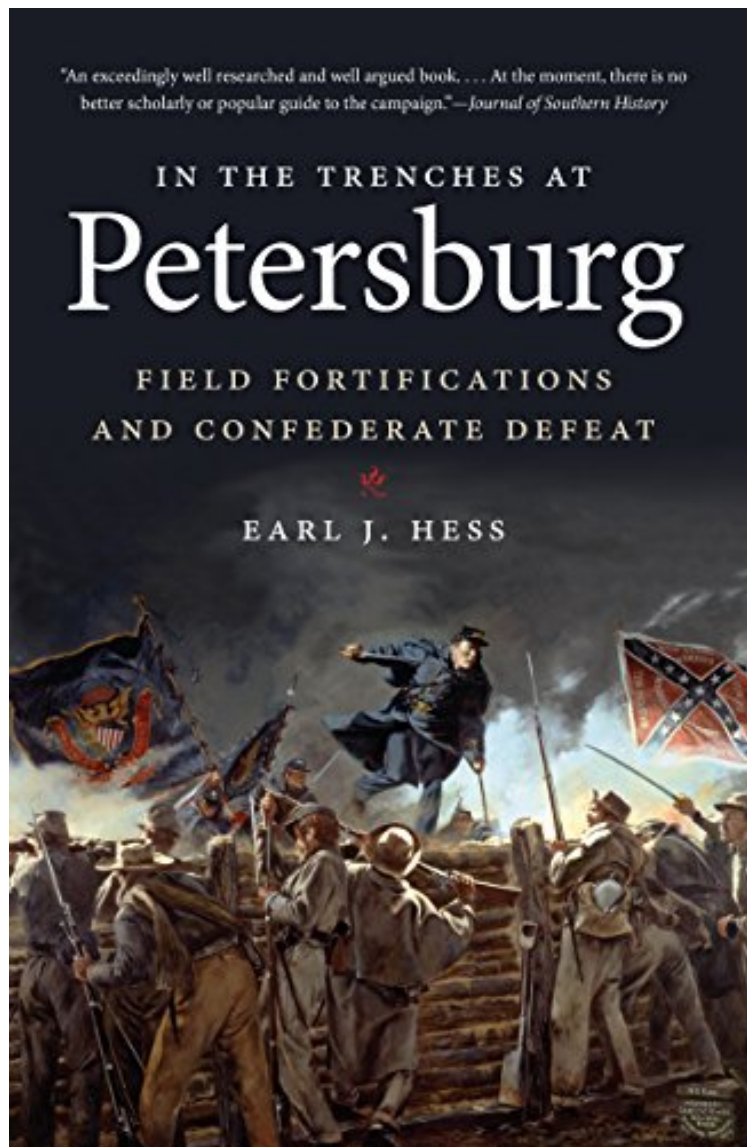


[Download ebook] In the Trenches at Petersburg: Field Fortifications and Confederate Defeat (Civil War America)

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Earl J. Hess

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Earl J. Hess : In the Trenches at Petersburg: Field Fortifications and Confederate Defeat (Civil War America) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In the Trenches at Petersburg: Field Fortifications and Confederate Defeat (Civil War America):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Excellent source on Petersburg

By Ronald SausThe book is an excellent source on the type, location, and dimensions of the fortifications at Petersburg and Richmond. The author has classified the various campaigns about Petersburg in a manner that provides for easy recall of the timeline with a better understanding of Grant's motives for each move. Each offensive provides the goal, movement, organization and result in a few pages, with the understanding that other resources should be used if one desires a blow by blow account. On the other hand, his use of first person accounts of life in the trenches, number and use of torpedoes, desertion totals and accounting of earthworks and dimensions reveal a passion for some details and the use of many resources. I particularly like the chapter on the condition of the earthworks today, indicated by personal visits by Mr. Hess. A must have book for your library. The only downside in my opinion was the meager index. There are many places, items and other details in the book that should have been included for easier reference.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. First-rate Military Scholarship

By Bruce TrinquEarl J. Hess's "In the Trenches at Petersburg: Field Fortifications Confederate Defeat" completes a trilogy begun with "Field Armies and Fortifications in the Civil War: The Eastern Campaigns, 1861-1864" and continued with "Trench Warfare under Grant Lee: Field Fortifications in the Overland Campaign". Together with his "The Rifle-Musket in Civil War Combat: Reality and Myth", these books certainly place Hess in the forefront of military scholars who look at the "how" of battle and not just the traditional "what" and "who". The popular view of Civil War battle is more or less that everybody stood in long lines opposite one another and blazed away until there was no one left standing; Hess's work reveals a far more complex activity. In the preface to his new book, Earl Hess remarks that "Petersburg was less of a siege than it was a traditional field campaign with some limited aspects of siege warfare." And he amply demonstrates thereafter that although field fortifications played a vital role (or multiple vital roles) in the Petersburg fighting, the campaign was much more than static trench warfare. In the past hundred years there have been only two general studies of the Petersburg Campaign published, Noah Andre Trudeau's "The Last Citadel" and John Horn's "The Petersburg Campaign", both works somewhat limited in their depth of scholarship, plus various separate works dealing with specific events during the overall campaign (most notably Richard J. Sommers's "Richmond Redeemed" and A. Wilson Greene's "Breaking the Backbone of the Rebellion"). Therefore, in the present volume Hess has undertaken to provide "a general history of the campaign to set the proper context for understanding fortifications and engineering operations". He has done an admirable job of crafting a one-volume general history of the Petersburg Campaign, although of course special attention is paid to the use of field fortifications within that campaign. Hess contends that such fortifications were not merely of defensive importance, allowing Lee to long hold out against superior numbers, but also that the rapid construction of field works served a vital offensive purpose as well, allowing Union troops to secure newly-won positions against threatened counterattacks. Although Grant's weary army stumbled badly in its initial efforts to seize Petersburg in June, 1864, in large part due to Confederate use of fortifications, within a couple months Union forces had begun to demonstrate a grasp of a strategy (Hess calls it "bite-and-hold") of making short movements to the left to extend the line in short stages, consolidating those advances by means of field fortifications, that would eventually lead to Lee's defeat and the destruction of the South's per-eminent field army. Hess presents a picture of the lengthy Petersburg Campaign as not being so much a long sequence of Confederate successes and Union failures as instead a series of steps that inexorably led to a great victory by the Union forces. Against this background of describing the overall campaign, Hess presents the details of how both Confederate and Union field fortifications were designed and built and their preservation into the modern era, and describes the practicalities of living and fighting in those entrenchments. This is a first-rate work of military scholarship, worthy of a place on the bookshelves of almost any Civil War enthusiast, one of those too-rare books that provide a genuinely new understanding of the past.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Important Work on the Siege of Petersburg that Includes Action in Richmond

By Daniel HurleyThis is Hess' third book on the Eastern Theater, all involving analysis of the use and building of trenches, redoubts and forts during various segments of those eastern campaigns. Hess, who provides more detail on the construction of earthworks than anyone in Civil War literature does, provides an in-depth description of the type of forts and trenches for both Confederate and Union in this 9-month campaign. Starting virtually from the Confederate Howlett lines and the early but relatively weak Dimmock lines around Petersburg, Hess describes the development of the immense construction of trenches and redoubts, later numbering roughly 123 miles. He does this while describing each of Grant's campaigns to take Petersburg and Richmond. The obvious known, the battle of the crater and the late attempt by the Confederates to take Fort Steadman that ended in disaster for both sides, are superseded as Hess takes you further into the detailed on construction of all forts, works, and mining and countermining. What I like about the book are the extensive descriptions of construction, some of which will require a quick study of siege terminology. This includes how these complex works were built. He includes details on not only mining but also numerous countermining efforts. He also describes well the harsh conditions of living in these environs, such as bombproofs used for shelters. Another interesting detail is the unique description of the battlefield operations such as how 'covered ways' were provided developed to protect troops and wagons serving entrenchments and redoubts. The appendixes review the state of the earthworks immediately after the war based on testimony from the period. In addition, Hess discusses the construction of several forts, many that survive today as he discusses their construction with diagrams

and pictures. The book is replete with historic photographs that demonstrate how complex these defensive works were for both sides. Hess borrows significantly from Wilson Green's very good book, "The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign: Breaking the Backbone of the Rebellion's", particularly maps. One critic notes that the book is more a micro view of Petersburg that does not provide in-depth analysis of what led to the overall defeat. However, Hess does provide a brief discussion on the effect of Grant's constant stretching of his line west that not only severely tested Lee's manpower resources but also his engineering ability to maintain competent works. However, that detail is brief since the story is about the works, the campaign actions serving as a backdrop. The primary part of the book is 280 pages, the balance are appendices, references and index.

In the Trenches at Petersburg, the final volume of Earl J. Hess's trilogy of works on the fortifications of the Civil War, recounts the strategic and tactical operations around Petersburg during the last ten months of the Civil War. Hess covers all aspects of the Petersburg campaign, from important engagements that punctuated the long months of siege to mining and countermining operations, the fashioning of wire entanglements and the laying of torpedo fields to impede attacks, and the construction of underground shelters to protect the men manning the works. In the Trenches at Petersburg humanizes the experience of the soldiers working in the fortifications and reveals the human cost of trench warfare in the waning days of the struggle.

The [book is the] result of Hess's indefatigable research in a wide range of sources and his imaginative field study of extant battlefields. . . . This volume and its companions, even more innovative and important than his previous outstanding studies, should give Earl J. Hess his rightful place among the best Civil War historians of our time.--Civil War History
Humanizes the experience of the soldiers working in the fortifications.--McCormick Messenger
Even without the incredibly detailed analysis of field fortifications, [this book] would stand alone as campaign history. . . . A testament to the author's years of study on the topic.--H-Civil War
Hess has a well-deserved reputation as the master on American Civil War field fortifications. . . . [Makes] a coherent whole of the months-long contest by placing the series of offensives and counteroffensives like beads on a string of digging, tunneling, and mining. . . . Hess fans and students of field fortifications will be pleased, and others will find a work of first class military history.--Journal of America's Military Past
This book and its two companion volumes will be the starting point for students of field fortifications in the American Civil War for the foreseeable future.--Louisiana History
Contains the fine scholarship and clear prose we have come to expect from Hess. . . . [It] will stand as a definitive study on the Petersburg Campaign.--On Point
Hess disputes much of what we have come to know about the Petersburg siege in this crisply written and thoroughly researched volume. . . . A splendid book that successfully places the campaign in a larger military context . . . should serve as the standard single-volume history for decades to come.--Register of the Kentucky Historical Society
Wonderfully written, well researched and easy to read. . . . Highly recommend[ed] to any serious student of the American Civil War. . . . Entertaining and enlightening.--This Mighty Scourge
This work on the trenches of Petersburg is quite excellent and should be hailed as the doctrine of trench warfare during the Petersburg Campaign. . . . It is highly recommended to anyone interested in the military strategy and tactics of the Civil War.--Gettysburg Chronicle
[Hess's three-volume] set unquestionably deserves recognition as groundbreaking work on an important topic. It will be the standard for years.--Robert Krick, America's Civil War
The best single study of the grand tactics and strategy of the campaign. . . . An outstanding conclusion to a trilogy of books that belong on the shelf of any serious student of the Civil War's Eastern Theater.--Virginia Magazine of History and Biography
The only book on Petersburg to focus on the significance of its fortifications. . . . A well-documented study. . . . Concludes a series that expertly charts the significance of field fortifications in the Eastern Theater.--West Virginia History
Hess has crafted an exceedingly well researched and well argued book. . . . At the moment, there is no better scholarly or popular guide to the campaign." --The Journal of Southern History
Provides extensive details to illuminate the subject. . . . An outstanding source for anyone researching Civil War trench warfare at Petersburg and Richmond.--Virginia Libraries
Takes an in-depth look at the war's final evolution of field fortifications and countermeasures, and explores the central role they played in the various Union offensives conducted during the ten-month Petersburg campaign. . . . Impressive.-- Civil War Books and Authors Blog
This excellent book will be of interest to those who appreciate military engineering in siege operations.--The Lone Star
By relating the development of the army's field engineering to the course of the combat action, and through the use of previously untapped sources, Hess brilliantly unravels the complexity of the Petersburg story. This is simply one of the finest Civil War studies of our generation.--A. Wilson Greene, Pamplin Historical Park, author of The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign
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