

*The Weary Boys: Colonel J. Warren Keifer and the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry.* By Thomas E. Pope. (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2002. 183 pp. Softcover, \$16.00, ISBN 0-87338-729-5.)

The Civil War is one of the most written about events in American History. Books detailing every aspect of the war find an eager audience made up not only of scholars but also of history buffs. Studies of battles and leaders are especially popular with the general reader, and of this genre Thomas Pope's *The Weary Boys: Colonel J. Warren Keifer and the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry* is one such example.

The 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry was organized on October 3, 1862, under Colonel J. Warren Keifer, a prominent lawyer, at Camp Piqua, Ohio. The men were marched to Winchester, Virginia and were incorporated into the Second Brigade, Third Division, Sixth Army Corps of the Army of the Potomac under the command of Major General Robert Milroy. The regiment fought in the battles of Winchester, the Wilderness, and Petersburg (among others) plus took part in the pursuit of General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia until Lee's surrender. By the time the regiment was mustered out on June 25, 1865, the men of the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio had been involved in twenty battles and had suffered 795 casualties. The regiment, however, is remembered as Milroy's weary boys, a derisive nickname bestowed upon the 110<sup>th</sup> by Major General Winfield Scott Hancock for fleeing during the Second Battle of Winchester.

In the preface to the book, Pope explains that the work was undertaken not only to create a regimental history honoring the men of the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio but also to refute the regiment's derisive nickname. Instead of being a negative nickname, Pope argues that the "110<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry should wear the epithet with honor" and that the regiment should be honored for their "admirable" service and sacrifice throughout the war, rather than as a scornful memory of a single battle (xii). The premise fits neatly into current Civil War scholarship which focuses upon the common soldier and the ways in which memory and reality have combined in the writing of Civil War history. Unfortunately Milroy's *Weary Boys* fails to live up to this promise.

Pope ably constructs the daily life of the volunteers, detailing the hardships, and the boredom, that was endured far more frequently than the fear and excitement of battle. By reviewing and organizing the hundreds of letters written by the men of the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio, Pope turned seemingly unimportant information, such as how soldiers on leave would transport goods and letters between camp and home for their fellow soldiers and how much the sutler charged for goods, into a detailed look at what camp life was like for these Ohio soldiers who, in many cases, were away from home for the first time.

However, all of the detail about the soldiers' daily life does not make up for the fact that Milroy's *Weary Boys* fails to deliver on the promise of a reconsideration of the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio. Pope never sufficiently explains why the reader should rethink the reputation of the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio. The

closest the author comes to offering an explanation is the argument that of the approximately 175 regiments from Ohio that were sent to fight the Civil War, only fifteen had over 100 casualties, the 110<sup>th</sup> being included in that number. While a high casualty rate could be seen as a sign of bravery, the number could just as easily be interpreted as a sign of poor leadership and poorly trained men or as an example of the high toll taken on the troops by disease. Pope does not offer enough information to support either theory.

The focus of the book is clearly on the everyday life of the soldier rather than an analysis of battlefield deportment. Even the account of the Battle of Winchester, where the 110<sup>th</sup> received their derisive nickname, is given just a couple of pages in the narrative and the only reinterpretation of the performance of the 110<sup>th</sup> that the reader is given is a few sentences stating that the regiment did not simply run away, but was ordered to retreat after being outnumbered by Confederate forces. Pope contends that while General Milroy was court-martialed for his conduct at Winchester he was later exonerated of any wrongdoing thus implying that the Ohio troops had not acted improperly either.

The lack of scholarly analysis is the most disappointing aspect of the book. The author chooses simply to describe the existence of the regiment. The narrative skips over large blocks of time and it is assumed that the reader already knows the political and military events that occur throughout the existence of the regiment. Pope clearly admires the soldiers of the 110<sup>th</sup> and tends to allow that admiration to take precedence over historical analysis of the soldiers' writings. The reader is left with a monograph that is similar in style to regimental histories written at the turn of the nineteenth century rather than being a product of the twenty-first century. The format makes sense when one examines the sources used in the creation of this work. Pope makes wonderful use of primary source materials but the majority of his secondary sources date from the early 1900s, almost completely ignoring current historical scholarship. Current scholarship on the common soldier and memory would have added another viewpoint through which to examine the soldiers' narratives from the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio instead of simply accepting the soldiers' words without any attempt at analysis.

Instead of offering a fresh analysis of the regiment the author instead leaves the reader with the following summation of the accomplishments of the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry: "[D]uring their nearly three years of service the men of the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry endured many hardships. But through it they saw areas of their country that many would never get to see again or have seen otherwise. The Civil War experience also showed these men that their nation was real, and it created a personal, everlasting bond between the veterans" (111). While this is not necessarily a false statement, it is not the reconsideration of the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry that the reader was promised. Thomas Pope has succeeded in writing a regimental history of the 110<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry in the style of classic regimentals from the late nineteenth century. Unfortunately, Milroy's *The Weary Boys* had the potential to be so much more.

Lisa M. Smith  
University of Akron  
Akron, Ohio