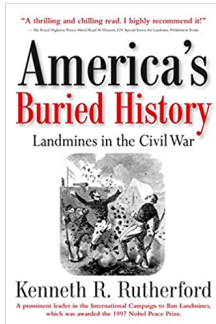


America's Buried History, Landmines in the Civil War by Kenneth R. Rutherford, El Dorado Hills: Savas Beatie LLC, 2020, Reviewed by Emil L. Posey, Tennessee Valley Civil War Round Table (August 2020)



It is estimated that around every 22 minutes one person somewhere in the world is killed or injured by a landmine.* Their widespread, often seemingly indiscriminate use as readily available, easily deployed, low-cost weapons has made them the bane of people caught up in regional and localized conflicts around the globe over the past several decades. Too often left in place after the fighting ends or has moved on to other locales, landmines can remain active for years, even decades. Today's casualties usually are civilians, particularly children, that have little knowledge of their location or the degree of danger they

represent.

* "The Explosive Echo of Past Wars – Removing the Scourge of Landmines", Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation, www.tutufoundationusa.org, April 16, 2012

Essentially defensive weapons, they can be employed in a controlled role (i.e., command detonated) or as uncontrolled "dumb" weapons (i.e., contact-activated by pressure or tripwire). Typically, they are employed to canalize and breakup enemy movement (tactical minefields), integrated into defensive positions (protective minefields), and as individual casualty-producing devices (mines and boobytraps, sometimes referred to as nuisance minefields, but too often employed simply as terror devices).

The origin of the anti-personnel variety dates to 14th-century China. Western use began in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), but they came into their own in the American Civil War. It is here that Dr. Rutherford picks up the story. The Confederacy was quick to adopt naval mines to offset their significant imbalance of combat power vis-à-vis the North on coastal and river waterways, and their use quickly spread to land. The first engagement that saw significant use of landmines was in early 1862 at the siege of Yorktown in the early days of the Peninsula Campaign. Their use continued, primarily by the Confederacy, throughout the war.

Dr. Rutherford walks us through the development of this innovative technology-driven weapon system, from initial employments to its wider use. He uses individual experiences and stories to describe the devastating impacts landmines could have on soldiers physically and emotionally, along with their commanders' attempts at countermeasures. His writing style is succinct and easy to read, yet comprehensive in its coverage. He includes brief bios, operational maps, a few charts, and an excellent glossary to aid understanding, along with a bibliography to assist with further study.

This is a good read on a topic that is dealt with only piecemeal in popular Civil War histories. It is an important book for the casual reader as well as the more experienced students of the Civil War.

As for Dr. Rutherford, he is known for his decades of work in the landmine discipline. He is cofounder of the Landmine Survivors Network and a

prominent leader in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which won the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize. A professor of political science at James Madison University, he directed the university's Center for International Stabilization and Recovery for ten years, which for more than 21 years has been recognized as a global leader in international efforts to combat the effects of landmines and explosive remnants of war. He holds a Ph.D. in Government from Georgetown University, and B.A. and MBA degrees from the University of Colorado, where he was inducted into its Hall for Distinguished alumni. He is also a victim himself, having lost both legs to a landmine in Somalia.

Your reviewer is Emil L. Posey, former Vice President of the TVCWRT, now continuing to support as Secretary. His work history spans almost 45 years of military and civilian service to our country. He retired from NASA/George C. Marshall Space Flight Center on December 27, 2014. He has a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Hood College, Frederick, Maryland; is a former president of the Huntsville chapter of the National Contract Management Association, a life member of the Special Forces Association and the 175th Infantry Association, and a member in good standing of Elks Lodge 1648 (Huntsville, AL). He is a dedicated bibliophile and a (very) armchair political and military enthusiast.