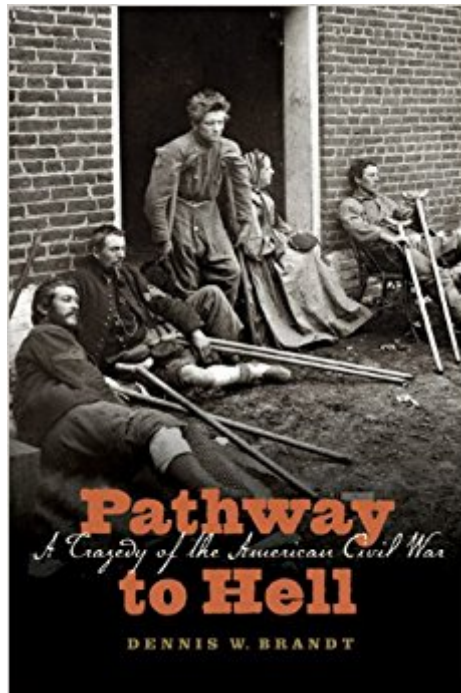




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Pathway To Hell: A Tragedy Of The American Civil War



Synopsis

Shell shock, battle fatigue, posttraumatic stress disorder, lack of moral courage: different terms for the same mental condition, formal names that change with observed circumstances and whenever experts feel prompted to coin a more suitable descriptive term for the shredding of the human spirit. Although the specter of psychological dysfunction has marched alongside all soldiers in all wars, always at the ready to ravish minds, rarely is it discussed when the topic is America's greatest conflict, the Civil War. Yet mind-destroying terror was as present at Gettysburg and Antietam as in Vietnam and today in Iraq and Afghanistan. Drawing almost exclusively from extensive primary accounts, Dennis W. Brandt presents a detailed case study of mental stress that is exceptional in the vast literature of the American Civil War. *Pathway to Hell* offers sobering insight into the horrors that war wreaked upon one young man and illuminates the psychological aspect of the War Between the States.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dennis W. Brandt is a freelance author-historian and the author of *From Home Guards to Heroes: The 87th Pennsylvania and Its Civil War Community* and *Shattering the Truth: The Slandering of Abraham Lincoln*. Richard Wheeler is the author of over sixteen books of military history, including *Voices of 1776: The Story of the American Revolution in the Words of Those Who Were There*. Thomas P. Lowry is a retired psychiatrist and associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California at San Francisco and continues his work as an independent historical scholar. He is the author of *Venereal Disease and the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Nebraska 2005).

I write my first review. The work and author have been in thought for a while. With Angelo Crapsey's letters, and "historical" progenitor, Dennis Brandt in this work called "Pathway to Hell", I feel compelled to think, write and possibly see some meaning for it and ask myself, why the work has had this effect on me and in deed, to recommend it for others. I, like many today have delved into history and genealogy, spending many hours among the dusty deteriorating records. I am compelled by my search to seek and record findings, to look for clues to my own mystery, search for answers and then sit back in impossibility after "looking under every rock, stone, and pebble" and ask the one question... "Why?" If you have ever gone there, you will be more than interested in Dennis Brandt's book, and work of life. Emerging from a career in information technology, one finds oneself having been face to face with logic and its coldness and its absoluteness. It is a mental training ground for being "anal" as some have described it. "Exacting" and "on the mark" is how it should be described. It does give one a valuable set of tools to carry out research and analysis, I believe. I have thought about this during my own second career and knowing some of Dennis's background, I considered this again as I read his welcomed, meticulous footnotes. Dennis's work also made me think of so many things in my own life as I read. I found myself in sort of ADD mode with the mention of Angelo's experiences and I would find myself switched to a life memory, a distant travel, a walk in the woods, a hearing of a fire and brimstone preacher, a commitment, a good hunt with friends, bouts with diarrhea, sharing, reading, and listening to words of friends, cousins, brothers and fathers of the true hell that war is. I had a renewed thinking and rethinking of words like: tragedy, inhumanity, justice, a man's life, challenge, duty, obsession, conscience, responsibility, *raison d'être*, truth and action. This is a very fine work. Most likely, by accident and later by intention, Dennis Brandt has been immersed and re-immersed, or should I say plunged, himself into the environment and life of Angelo Crapsey. This is to our benefit. Dennis has a huge physical and mental database to draw from on the Civil War. He also has a knowledge and intuition to draw from, of where to go, what to look at, and who to ask, to successfully see this story. Just as important though, he has decided to share it. In the clue-filled search, fact finding and setting down of words, we are given along with the help of the hindsight of recorded history and Dennis's hard work, the tragic conditions of man in war and the decisions and circumstances that arise in Angelo's life and lead to his final days. Life is tragedy, all will have their day. It is us and creation. We have circumstance and sometimes choice. These beget circumstances and sometimes choices. The logical switches of our being in life can be turned off and on, in an infinite set of possibilities, but not by our will alone. I leave you to "take in" this "on the mark" work "Pathway to Hell" and come to your

own conclusions. Yours with respect. Jeffrey M. Clinton

From around 1980 until 2010, I examined and treated (as a VA subcontractor) many veterans for PTSD. In some cases, the PTSD was valid and its debilitating effect on the person was remarkable. Other situations proved more debatable with 30 to 40% of the combat claims being distorted, fabricated, and based on a malingering motive for money! Even though I would write in my report, "no PTSD apparent, possible malingering," the VA disability board incomprehensibly awarded the truanting veteran a magnitude of benefits. The Civil War veteran had it tough. Archaic and painful medical practices, little if any rehabilitation, and, not until much later, service related disability type payouts to the veteran or his immediate family. The Civil War veteran was in most of these latter cases dead by this time so his family in a minor way was compensated for their loved ones time and plaguing experiences in the service. The book *Pathway to Hell* is an eye opener. I found it not only interesting reading, but highly educational as well. It deals yes, with PTSD, but also comorbidity factors encompassing bipolar and biological variables (Angelo's father was likely manic and suffered from periods of severe depression and grandiose religious delusions). Angelo entered the service idealistic, moralistic and Union committed. He was in numerous combat situations (including Gettysburg) besides being a POW in Richmond. He introjected a combat soldier's mentality "kill or be killed. Depersonalize the enemy. When he was discharged from the service, he evidently could not live with himself because of things he had done and experienced. Angelo's suicide was horrific and ominously self-destructive but understandable. He wanted to rid (as well as punish) himself of the guilt and haunting memories of the cold and callous actions that he had evidently yielded to in the name of the Federation. After I read about Angelo, I learned that his gravesite was about 45 miles from my home. I visited his burial place (very well kept thanks to a retired state trooper from New Jersey) and put a solar light on Angelo's grave, a symbol of gladness and hope; components totally counter to the sadness and despair that Angelo left this world with. As you can see, this book made me think and remember; overall a good reading experience and a healing one for me.

I've recently been researching a lot of history about the Civil War Pennsylvania Bucktials. I've gone from their formation to their battles, and finally to the soldiers themselves. *Pathway to Hell* introduced me to another Bucktial soldier and the impacts of the Civil War on that soldier. This psychological perspective gives one another appreciation for what many soldiers give up in battle

environments whether it was the Civil War, World War II, or today's battle on terrorism. This is not leisure reading- I'm still getting chills as I write this review. We should say thank you to all our soldiers who put their lives- physically and mentally - on the line for us and for our freedoms.

A very well researched story of a tragic survivor of the Civil War in America. Very relevant today in light of modern behavioral research regarding all of our returning veteran heroes of any war and all the more relevant for me as Angelo Crapsey's mentor Laroy Lyman is a grandson of one of one of my ancestors, Major Isaac Lyman, one of the founders of Potter County, Pa.,

I ordered it for my daughter-in-law for a college class she was taking and read it before giving it to her. The author does a thorough job of exposing a young Union soldier's descent into madness due to PTSD. It is not something I would read for pleasure, however, and I had some difficulty sticking with it.

This book is a real eye-opener to the horrors of war. Putting it in the perspective of a man directly involved in it brought it more to life and gave me a better understanding of the wounds, both physical and mental, to those on the war front and home front.

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