

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies

By Alan C. Aimone

Historical Background

The United States government achieved a landmark in historical publishing with the printing of *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (*Official Records*, *Official Records-Armies* or the most commonly used *OR*). The 128 bound books have been hyped as “the single most valuable, most-quoted, and most sought-after source of Civil War history,” and “the most notable publication of its kind in America... or ...the world.” Together with the *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (*OR Atlas* or the most commonly used *ORA*) and the navel companion, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (*Official Records-Navy*, *OR-Navy* or the most commonly used *ORN*) these have been used as the major references for articles and books with a Civil War theme. Collectively these are referred to as the *ORs*.¹

General-in-Chief Henry Wager Halleck initiated the project when he found it difficult to compile his 1863 annual report. Halleck recommended organizing and publishing Civil War official documents and reports. Halleck’s recommendation led Chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs, Republican Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, to introduce a Joint Resolution, “to provide for the printing of the official reports of the armies of the United States.” A revised version of the resolution by Superintendent of the Public Printing, Joseph Hutton Defrees stated a printing of 10,000 copies of all significant Union military records related to the war and specified the records be chronologically arranged. An amended resolution by Defrees and supported

¹ United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901; United States War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 2 or 3 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891-1895; United States Navy Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* 31 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894-1927; Everett Beach Long, “The Official Records – Bulwark of Civil War Research” in *Civil War Book Club Review* vol. 4, no. 10 (July 1952): 2-3.

by Wilson was adopted by the House and Senate on May 19, 1864 and signed by President Abraham Lincoln the following day.²

The project had to be revised after army Assistant Adjutant General Edward Davis Townsend compiled eight volumes of field reports of commanding officers. Defrees reviewed the printing project and decided these books did not achieve the breadth of coverage anticipated and delayed their publication. Senator Wilson introduced a new resolution allocating funds to appoint an editor to oversee the compilation and printing of Union and Confederate military records.

Senator Wilson estimated the project would cost no more than a half million dollars and would consist of fifty volumes. Other senators argued the cost would be in the millions and the printed documents would cover as much as 500 volumes. Despite opposition, a new resolution was signed by President Andrew Johnson on July 27, 1866. The 1866 resolution stated the secretary of war was to “appoint a competent person to arrange and prepare for publication the official documents relating to the rebellion” and develop a plan and cost estimate for the project with two years.³

The 1866 resolution stopped the work in progress by the Adjutant General’s Office—leaving about thirty volumes in various stages of completion. The project stopped for several years because of funding and the government’s need to deal with more urgent reconstruction legislation and administration.

Both Union and Confederate veterans’ organizations were disappointed by the lack of progress with the *OR* and lobbied both Congress and the secretary of war to initiate work on the Civil War records. The public at large believed the publication of the official records by the government would be a “guarantee of genuineness.” Funds for the projected started to be requested in the secretary of war’s annual reports but it was not until 1874 that Congress appropriated \$15,000 to pay for the publication through Congressman and former Union General James Abram Garfield’s amendment to an appropriations bill. Garfield served on the House Committee on Military Affairs and he was the first to refer to these records as “the official records of the war of the rebellion.”⁴

Townsend was requested to take charge of the project again in 1875. Although he retired in 1875, the *OR* project moved along with a series of clerks who served as “superintendents” of the project. The first phase resulted in 37 books containing Union papers and another 10 books containing Confederate documents. Since the books were arranged chronologically and not topically, a researcher would have to use several books to track information on one battle or subject.

² Stetson Conn, *Historical Work in the United States Army, 1862-1954* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 1-2; Cong. Globe, 1st Sess. 38 (1864), “Armies of the United States, joint resolution (Senate No. 21) to provide for the printing of official reports of the operations...”, 2300.

³ United States War Department, *Annual Report*, vol. 1, part 2 (Washington, D.C.:1901), 1117; Cong. Globe, 1st Sess. 39 (1866), “Approval of Bills: A joint resolution (S. R. No. 86) to provide for the publication of the Official History of the Rebellion...”, 4230.

⁴ Long, “Official Records”, 2-3; Statues at Large, vol. 18 (18731875), 222.

By late 1877, the secretary of war, George W. McCrary, concerned that the project was both unwieldy and unsatisfactory with the attempts to date, appointed a full-time administrative member to direct the staff of the Publications Office, War Records, a new office established with the goal of organizing and publishing the Civil War official records.

Captain Robert Nicholson Scott, an aide to Halleck during and after the Civil War, was appointed chief of this new office. Scott worked out a plan to re-arrange the records in a manner that would be useful for historical research. He also established criteria by which documents would be selected for inclusion. He supervised the first 18 volumes. The first volume was distributed in July 1881. He served the Publications Office, War Records for ten years until his death in March 1887. He was credited with another 18 volumes published after his death in recognition of his editorial contributions on them.

Scott was followed by Captain Wyllys Lyman but his health failed after four months. He was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Martyn Lazelle who directed the publication of six volumes. Lazelle was dismissed after he was accused of allowing unauthenticated documents to be published in the *OR*. However, he was later exonerated by a Congressional committee. A three man Board of Publication, with a military president, was set-up for the remaining work. Major George Breckenridge Davis served as president of the Board of Publication.

It was during Davis' tenure that an anticipated *Atlas* to accompany the *ORA* was commenced. The first maps appeared in serial form from 1891 to 1895. George B. Davis left the post to become professor of law at West Point. His place was taken by Major George Whitefield Davis (no relation) as president of the board.

Progress under George W. Davis advanced too slowly for Congress and he was replaced by Colonel Fred Clayton Ainsworth, who was also the chief of the Pension and Record Section in the Adjutant General's office. Ainsworth downsized the staff and dissolved the Board of Publication. The War Records Office became the Publication Branch of the Record and Pension Office. He appointed Joseph William Kirkley, one of the civilians on the original Board of Publication, to direct the completion of the last 16 volumes. Kirkley had originally started with the project before 1878 as a clerk in the Adjutant General's office. Each volume passed under his "personal examination."⁵

1901 was the completion date of the *OR*. A revised General Index volume was printed in 1902. The publication had taken nearly forty years from the concept to its end and cost over three million dollars.

⁵ *O.R.*, General Index, xxi and Mabel E. Deutrich, *Struggle for Supremacy: The Career of General Fred Ainsworth* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1962), 62.

Obtaining the Records, Selection & Editorial Policies

The American Civil War was the first conflict in which paper was used on a huge scale. The Federal government required that every order, report, telegram and other communication be copied, transmitted, then recopied and retained. The size of the task of compiling the *OR* can be appreciated, one editor observed, because “the papers examined were well-nigh beyond computation, being counted not by documents or boxes, but by tons, roomfuls or the contents of buildings. The volunteer records of discontinued commands (being the ledgers and papers turned in by volunteer officers when mustered out) filled a large four-story warehouse; the Confederate records alone crowded an entire three-story building...” Each document had to be read, evaluated, checked for duplication, and, if it was to be included, authenticated. As each document was processed, it was marked with a blue War Records Office stamp.⁶

The 1877 appointment of Captain Robert Nicholson Scott as chief of the War Records Office turned out to be an excellent choice. His editorial policy and guidance would serve all the successive editors well. His experience and dedication to the job was invaluable. As the aide-de-camp to Major General Halleck from 1863-1864 and again from 1867-1869, Scott was familiar with the Federal military bureaucracy and the “records management” practices of various branches. His familiarization with the various “ad-hoc” filing arrangements used by the army often gave him useful insight into where particular documents would be found.

Scott knew he needed to cultivate the cooperation of both former Union and Confederate officers in the editorial work. He believed that “absolute accuracy” would “only be secured by putting the *OR* volumes in print under the immediate direction of those familiar with names of persons and places concerned, and with military terms, and who are zealously interested in this special work.” Hiring former Confederate officers as editors was a major step in avoiding biased treatment in editing and publishing. Also a “large percentage of the clerical staff” hired for the *OR* project was from the South. Between 1885 and 1897, an average of six officers and sixty-nine clerks toiled over the *OR* project.⁷

Scott established editorial document selection policies and developed a publication plan for the entire project. The enormous amount of documents necessitated a consistent critical selection policy. The check-list criteria for documents to be included in the *OR* were defined as: it had to be significant, official and produced during the war. Each of these criteria, while straight-forward, caused discussion and second thoughts for the compilers. Scott knew that each document that was to be included had to be authenticated that, especially when only copies were available to the War Records Office. This process took much time in research and correspondence.

⁶ *O.R.*, General Index, xvi-xvii.

⁷ United States War Department, *Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.:1878), 539; United States War Department, *Annual Report*, vol.1, pt.2 (Washington, D.C.:1901), 1106.

The most discussed selection criteria was the standard that documents had to have been produced during the war. Scott ruled that that no correction of statements or alterations be added. He believed unaltered documents would best serve both veterans and historians who could more completely understand on what information (correct or not) war-time decisions were based. This policy was opposed by veterans who strongly desired to edit or “correct” their original papers and add “reminiscences.” Scott was well aware of the unreliability of memory. “If we were to accept post bellum reports from one [officer], we would have to extend the like privilege to others, and soon, we would be overwhelmed with controversial literature.” Scott’s points were well taken against allowing “corrections” or “amendments” and persuaded Congress to defeat a bill introduced in 1882 that would provide for such “doctoring” of documents. However, some annotations were allowed when individuals had been accused of serious charges that were reversed by post-war commissions. In addition, editorial policy allowed for correction of bad grammar and spelling errors.⁸

The actual types of contemporary document to be included were also identified and restricted. After action reports and orders that were already published were not republished in the *OR*. Among these, the Adjutant General’s office published both *General Orders* for each Union army and *Special Orders* and the Quartermaster General published its own *General Orders*, as well as two folios, *Commanders of the Army Corps, Divisions, and Brigades* and *Flags of the Army of the United States*. The Surgeon General’s office oversaw the publishing of its records and history in the three volume *Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion 1861-65*. Other documents not published in the *OR* were reports of the secretaries of war and navy and the Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War. The routine letters of bureaus and departments, such as applications for appointments, arms, contracts, discharges, prisoner exchanges, muster rolls, charges of disloyalty, assorted claims and unsolicited advice or suggestions from individuals, were also not published. These items would have added many more volumes with little added value. Additional sources related to individuals, other than those of high rank, were not included, either. Considering the range of the selection process, the *OR* editors, in general, made good decisions when selecting material to include in the *OR*.⁹

Another time-consuming activity that also took effort for the editors was acquiring Confederate documents. A large amount of Confederate documents were gathered after the fall of Richmond. General Henry Halleck ordered Confederate papers to be collected and sorted. Halleck’s aide-de-camp, Colonel Richard Dominicus Cutts,

⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Robert N. Scott to Brigadier General Robert Seaman Granger, January 5, 1864; Scott to Robert Crane, December 21, 1880; and Scott to Archer Neill, August 28, 1882, War Records Office, 707-708.

⁹ United States Quartermaster’s Department, *Commanders of Army, Corps, Divisions and Brigades, United States Army, 1861-1865*. Philadelphia: Burke & McFetridge, 1888. United States Quartermaster’s Department, *Flags of the Army of the United States Carried During the War of the Rebellion 1861-1865*. Philadelphia: Burke & McFetridge, 1887; Surgeon General United States Army Joseph K. Barnes. *Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion 1861-65*, 6 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1870-1888.

did manage to send “349 boxes, hogsheads, and barrels...” of Confederate papers to the War Department in May 1865. Other records were destroyed in fires when the fall of Richmond was evident and other papers were shipped away by the Confederate government. Less than a month after President Abraham Lincoln’s assassination, Halleck wrote to Secretary of War Edward McMasters Stanton regarding Confederate papers “... that they will prove of great value to those who may hereafter write the history of this great rebellion.”¹⁰

In August, 1865, a total of 499 boxes and barrels of records as well as three wagon loads of mail were in Francis Lieber’s custody. Lieber was a political scientist and pro-Union writer. Stanton and Lieber both expected and hoped the documents would contain evidence of potential treason connecting Jefferson Davis and other Confederate leaders to Lincoln’s assassination. A two year search for possible evidence overshadowed all other searches at that time. However, Lieber did arrange and classify the Confederate archives. But this approach resulted in fewer Confederate leaders voluntarily turning over their private papers to officials in Washington for some time to come.

About a decade after the war former Confederate Brigadier General Marcus Joseph Wright offered a collection of Confederate reports to the Department of War for whatever he could receive. He was paid \$2,000 for his papers. He requested a list of records the War Department had and set out on his own to locate other Confederate papers. On July 1, 1878 Wright secured an appointment as Agent of the War Department for the Collection of Confederate Records, charged with obtaining or borrowing “battle reports, correspondence, rolls, and returns and any matter relating to prisoners of war.”¹¹

Wright’s first significant contribution was arranging with Scott’s approval, an agreement between the Southern Historical Society and the War Records office for reciprocal free access to each other’s Confederate documents. At first the idea was rejected by the War Records Office but later it was accepted. Agent Marcus Wright and other War Records Office personnel improved relations with the Society, which in turned encouraged Southerners to share their documents with that Federal agency because it had “control and management which give assurance of fair play in both the compilation and the publication of the ‘official history of the war’” The Society offered to “take charge” of manuscripts for Southerners while copies were made for both the Society and the War Records Office.¹²

From 1878 to 1917, Wright and other ex-Confederate officers and agents traveled extensively throughout the Southern states looking for Confederate documents. Many were donated and other were loaned and sent to Washington, D.C. for paid copyists to

¹⁰ United States War Department, *Annual Report*, vol.1, pt.2 (Washington, D.C.:1901), 1106; Henry Wagner Halleck to Edward McMasters Stanton, May 11, 1865, *O.R.*, I, 46, pt. 3, 1132.

¹¹ “Battle, Reports, Muster Rolls, returns and Correspondence Wanted” in *Illustrated Confederate War Journal* vol. 1 (June 1893): 38.

¹² “Editorial Paragraphs,” in *Southern Historical Society Papers* vol. 6 (December 1878): 292.

make duplicate documents. Yet some families of Confederate officers considered the documents as “heirlooms” and balked at parting with them, even for copying. Because Scott needed Confederate material he “had to accept as authentic much material that donators could have changed, either through error or a desire to ‘correct’ the original.” The War Records Office plan in these cases was to require that donors certify, in writing, the authenticity of such documents.¹³

Although all efforts were made to acquire significant official Confederate manuscripts, this material was noticeably harder to come by compared to Union records. The editing and publishing of the *Official Records* had to continue with fewer Confederate than Union documents.

Organization of the *Official Records-Armies*

The *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* is contained in 127 books plus a *General Index* and the accompanying two or three volume editions of the *ORA*. Editor, Robert N. Scott, decided to arrange the *OR* topically rather than in strict chronological order. He further planned to divide the documents into four individual topical series.

The first, largest and most complex is Series I, whose 53 volumes features military operations. As many of these volumes are printed in two to five separate Parts, Series I totals 111 books. For instance, volume 12 is complex. Four books are needed to publish its three parts as part 2 contains a supplement. Scott explained the arrangement of Series I: “...reports will be arranged according to campaigns and several theaters of operations (in chronological order) and the Union reports of any event will be immediately followed by the Confederate accounts.” ... the correspondence, etc., not embraced in the reports proper, will follow...” Basically, orders and reports relating to a battle or campaign are arranged to give a complete history of that event in the same volume. Union documents precede Confederate documents for each event while correspondence related to each operation follows the official reports. “The chief idea was to present to the reader in one volume a connected account of any military event both from Union and Confederate records...” Though the plan was to divide official “reports” from correspondence, this separation was not always followed. “One may search in vain through the correspondence for a desired letter – only to find it placed with the reports. On the other hand, many minor reports are treated as correspondence and are placed in different volumes from hundreds of similar dispatches.”¹⁴

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 5 (October 1878): 192.

¹⁴ United States War Department, *Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.:1880), 573-4; “A Mammoth Book: Official records of the Civil War Compiled at Last in 128 Volumes. Cost Nearly Three Millions of Dollars,” Magazine Supplement, *New York Times*, October 6, 1901; Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee’s Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A. to Jefferson Davis and the War Department of the Confederate States of America, 1862-1865*, new ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1957), xiii.

Each volume in Series II-IV is contained within one book. The eight volumes of Series II include Union and Confederate correspondence, orders, reports and returns about prisoners of war and political prisoners. The most noted prison trials, those of Confederate Captain Henry Wirz, commandant of the Camp Sumter prison at Andersonville Georgia. The conspirators in the President Abraham Lincoln assassination plot, are found in Volume 8 of Series II.

Series III has five volumes that cover “miscellaneous” Union correspondence and records mostly associated with the organization and logistics of the Northern war planners. One can also locate correspondence between Union and Confederate administrators in this series.

Additional “miscellaneous” documents and correspondence of the Confederacy including acts passed by the Confederate States Congress are found in the three volumes of Series IV. Historically interesting sources found in Series IV are the General and Special Orders of the Confederate States Army as well as material relating to conscription and blockade running.

Users commonly cite material in the *OR*- and *ORN* by Series, Volume, Part (if it is included) and page. Beginning with the publication of Volume 26, the 36th book, the compilers added a Serial Number to the spine of each book. (Reprinting lists a Serial Number on all book spines.) Serial Numbers 112 and 113 were originally planned for indexes to Series I and additional material found too late to include; though never published; those serial numbers were reserved, so there is a gap of two books between Serial Numbers 111 and 114.

The General Index was published in 1901 and revised the next year. The index covers all 127 books. It also lists each volume and part along with a synopsis of each volume. The 1902 revised index contains “Additions and Corrections” to the earlier 1901 index. The General Index is awkward to use as a user has to go from the General Index to each bound book index to find names of people places and units.

Value of the *ORs*

The usefulness of the *ORs* to the student of the Civil War cannot be overestimated. They historically have been and continue to be, by far, the most complete, accessible, unbiased documentation of the Civil War. The writing of an article or book every day since the Civil War is partly due to the existence and widespread availability of the *ORs*. The thousands of pages contained in the *OR* and *ORN* combined make them a mine of information— much of it yet to be fully discovered, sorted, analyzed and refined. The researcher who uses them effectively finds that the *ORs* provide a structure for the study of any Civil War related subject: battles, campaigns, naval operations, unit histories, biographies and a variety of other military and civilian topics. It is considered unusual if a researcher does not cite the *ORs*.

The editorial policy allowing only documents written during the Civil War to be published in the *ORs* has proven to be a wise decision both historically and politically. From the historian's point of view, the *ORs* are valuable tools; the correspondence and reports of the decision makers were copied without editing for accuracy or 'retrospection.' They show the information and misinformation received by the leaders as well as their knowledge and understanding of the event at the time of the action. The *ORs* reflect the information available to the leaders at that period of time—information that often was inaccurate or incomplete but on which decisions were based. Because both Union and Confederate papers relating to the same event were published with no attempt at fixing, the intelligent researcher can reveal the whys and wherefores of the military planning that shaped the outcome of individual battles, maneuvers, and movements—and ultimately the war.

Politically, the editorial policy to include only contemporary documents without correction allowed both Union and Confederate veterans to praise the *ORs* as an accurate, fair and complete history of the war. There has never been any significant questioning of the authenticity of the majority of the material published. Veterans waited for the volumes to be published and they relied on them as they wrote their memoirs, reminiscences and made speeches.

Officers' correspondence can be more useful and revealing than their official reports and certainly should not be ignored. The correspondence generally was more candid, written without an eye to its preservation for posterity. The officers' opinions and observations were often less self-serving than in their official reports. Many times the correspondence gives an in-depth insight into personality and therefore may be of greater value for biographers.

Unfortunately, a wealth of civilian material has been overlooked. This material, found mostly in Series II and IV of the *OR* and Series II of the *ORN*, is underutilized by social, civil and political historians. The overwhelming emphasis on military operations in the *ORs* has dissuaded those specialists from consulting the resources in the *ORs* with no mention of their "civil" records.

The generous distribution of the *ORs* increased the value of the historical compilation. Over 11,000 sets were originally printed. They were available to essentially anyone who wished to use them. Few of the original sets are in good physical condition today. However, modern reprints on quality paper, DVD and now digital online copies make the *ORs* even more accessible today.

Limitations

Despite the obvious value of the *ORs*, researchers must recognize their shortcomings. No study should rely on them exclusively. The fact that the *ORs* were not edited for accuracy is an important fact but also a problem. A researcher must review facts with other sources such as reference books or manuscripts to verify facts, figures,

dates and spellings. Some unintentional errors or oversights were made by copyists, compilers and editors.

Dates given to minor battles and regional operations are often incorrect. A master chronology was created from several contemporary newspaper accounts and the *ORs* editors did not change the newspaper dates that were not correct. A few copying or typographical errors have also been found.

Approximately one –third of the military operations during the Civil War are not documented in the compilation. Skirmishes, particularly in Arkansas and Louisiana, are not found in the *ORs* but sometimes were mentioned in regional newspapers of the times. Although such actions may be minor and of local interest, a researcher needs to be aware that smaller events or actions will not be found in the *ORs*.

New researchers in particular need to be aware that in many cases the Union and Confederate names for the same engagement were different. Generally Confederate officers named battles after the nearest town while their Union counterparts often used the names of the nearest stream or body of water. The individual book indexes of the *ORs* will lead the user to Confederate and Union reports and papers by looking up only one of the names, often both terms must be known to locate all the related sources.

An additional limitation of the *ORs* is that casualty statistics listed may be misleading. Too often casualties are listed by the larger brigade rather than by the small regiment or company units. This can be misrepresentative in cases where an individual regiment or battery felt the direct effect of fire or was at the attacking point of the fight. The percentage of losses of a brigade or battery as a whole might be fairly low, whereas, when calculated for an individual company or troop of cavalry, it could be significantly high.

OR editors did not review documents for accuracy and some changes were made in some of the documents. Inconsistent editing can be found. To cut down the length of the *ORs* only excerpts of reports were selected for publication. Some abbreviated text needs more explanatory material with the result that correspondence and reports may be interpreted differently.

Some editorial policies authorized correction of grammar and rewording for readability but no change in facts or content. As a result some subtle differences in meaning and feeling can be found in some printed text compared to the original manuscripts in the National Archives and Records Administration holdings.

Any researcher has to understand that historical reports and correspondence written by men will show their biases, judgment, fears, and egos. Some officers like Union Major Generals George Brinton McClellan and Benjamin Franklin Butler and Confederate General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, included personal opinions in their correspondence and reports. Naturally it is human nature to justify one's actions and gloss over mistakes. Officers writing their reports avoided blaming themselves for

their misunderstood orders or their lack of leadership control of their command. One cannot always clearly determine from official reports who won the battle! An officer often covered up his own mistakes by claiming he made a strategic withdrawal or by moving the responsibility for disaster to other officers or military organizations. On the other hand, officers on the winning side often gave themselves too much credit for a victory. It is left to the historian to balance out the concealed facts, the misrepresentation of the event, and to determine what really did happen.

Researchers of Confederate material need to be concerned with limitations in the *ORs*. The *OR* editors were sensitive that more Union material existed than Confederate material. General Wright's efforts led to almost three-fourths of the Confederate records published in the *ORs* thanks to his tact and an attitude more cordial to former Confederate supporters. However, several major Confederate operations lacked comparable Confederate records, such as the papers of General Robert E. Lee's Appomattox headquarters. Likewise correspondence and reports covering the Seven Days' Battles, Jackson's Valley Campaign, Vicksburg, Gettysburg and the winter of 1864-1865, are among the most important campaigns where complete Confederate documents were not available.

Although a considerable amount of time and effort was spent authenticating documents, there is evidence that some Confederate sources may be suspect. Professor Richard M. McMurry uncovered a case where the original diary of Confederate Lieutenant Thomas Bennett Mackall was changed with significant deletions and additions in an apparent attempt to enhance General Joseph Eggleston Johnston's stature while down-grading Lieutenant General John Bell Hood's before it was submitted to the editors of the *ORs*. However, in most cases such changes are the exception. Most researchers who compare original Confederate documents with those published in the *ORs* have found no significant changes in content. Still the historical researcher always needs to compare with other sources to judge a document's consistency with other known facts.

Suggested major sources to use in conjunction with the *ORs* include:

The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac by Bruce Catton's research associate, E. B. Long. The source also includes statistics.¹⁵

American National Biography Online is a starting point for finding the best authors and where papers of prominent Civil War era figures are located.¹⁶

Annals of the War, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events,

¹⁵ Everett B. Long, *Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac, 1861-1865*. Norwalk, Connecticut: Easton Press, 2006.

¹⁶ <http://www.anb.org/>

and the *Southern Historical Society Papers* provide primary sources and accounts by civilian leaders and military officers who were on the scene.¹⁷

The *Supplement to the OR...* consists of one hundred volumes of documents including diaries not available to the *OR* indexers and other papers not found in the *ORs*. The other papers include smaller units such as regiments and companies that are located in over forty archives and libraries across the United States.¹⁸

Researchers can often save time by checking the Jefferson Davis, U.S. Grant and Abraham Lincoln Papers that are both well indexed and have historical footnotes regarding events and secondary figures.

Conclusion

The *Official Records Army, Atlas and Navy* were produced over a period of 63 years. That the United States Congress supported this major project over such a long time is unusual. Veterans of the war compiling their memoirs and veterans' committees compiling unit histories praised the printed sources. The work helped to heal a nation that was divided and at odds. The compilation, expensive for the time, actually saved money in the long run for later generations by cutting down the amount of historical inquiries which would have demanded untold government staff research and correspondence time.

The greatest contribution that the *ORs* provide is that they are still being consulted 150 years after the war by historians and other scholars. Their continued usefulness and importance cannot be overstated as they are the most significant primary sources of information about the American Civil War in existence.

¹⁷ The Times Publishing Company, *The Annals of the War*. Philadelphia: Times Publishing 1879; Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, *Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts*. Boston: Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, 1895); Frank Moore, ed., 12 vols. *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events*. New York: Putnam vols. 1-6, 1861-3/Van Nostrand, vols. 7-12, 1864-8; Southern Historical Society, 52 vols. *Southern Historical Society Papers*. Richmond VA: Southern Historical Society, vols.1-49, 1876-1943/Virginia Historical Society, vols. 50-52, 1953-1959.

¹⁸ Janet B. Hewett, ed. *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot, 1994-1999.