Thanks to Rhoda Sneller for hosting our website

Des Moines Civil War Roundtable

October 2025
Headquarters District Iowa
General Order No. 503

- The **Second meeting** of the Fall campaign will **October 1** at the **The Machine Shed**
- The bar will open at 5:30 with the meal served at 6:30.
- Our program ***Jim Epperson(Ann Arbor, MI) The Great Slave Hunt of 1863: The Little-known Story of What Lee's Army did in Pennsylvania***
- Meal choices **Steak Tips and Hickory Smoked Chicken** at **$26.00**
- **Reservations & payment will be accepted until August 31.**

By command of Brigadier General Gordon McKenzie

Ronald R Nurmi
Colonel & Adjutant
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1424 E Walnut St #4 DM 50316

Our web address www.dmcivilwar.com

We have a price increase for the meal to **$26.00.**

It is time for many to renew your membership the dues are the same this year
$30.00 for Newsletter via PDF
$35.00 for Newsletter via USPS
$40.00 for families

If you have any question please contact me at dmcwrt@gmail.com or 515-491-3626

Where "Must" Meets "Should": The Difference Between What Is Legal and What Is Ethical

by Kevin Donovan Posted on September 9, 2025
https://emergingcivilwar.com/2025/09/09/where-must-meets-should-the-difference-between-what-is-legal-and-what-is-ethical/

Imagine you are a Civil War soldier on picket duty. The enemy's rifle pits are uncomfortablyclose. There was brutal fighting over this ground the day before. After the enemy killed one of your comrades who was dragging a wounded friend to safety, your regimental commander has expressly ordered all pickets to shoot any foe who shows himself. And one does, slipping out of a trench and crawling towards your position. As you level your rifle, you notice that the man appears to be carrying several canteens. The enemy soldier apparently intends to bring water to his wounded comrades strewn between the lines. You have your orders. Do you shoot him?

This scenario represents the difference between what is legal and what is ethical. Under the "law" (the order from the commanding officer), the picket not only has the *legal* right to shoot the enemy soldier but the duty to do so. But would it be the "*right*" thing to do? To answer that question requires the picket to consult his personal value system, his sense of what is morally correct. That inquiry is far more complicated.

Reduced to its essence, the "law" is any rule adopted by a governing authority that will be enforced against those subject to the authority's jurisdiction. Properly written, a law provides clear notice of what conduct is forbidden or permitted and is not subject to debate or

discretion. Some laws are proscriptive, *i.e.*, they forbid certain action (*e.g.*, do not drive over 60 mph). Other laws are permissive (*e.g.*, allowing charitable tax deductions). But the law is imposed from above, is objective, and mandatory. The law intends to produce predictable results.

The concept of "ethics" differs from the law. Ethics spring from within individuals, arise from multiple sources that create our personal values system, and are anything but mandatory. We learn our values from family, religion, society in general, and particular social groups with whom we interact. Our acquired values are experientially based, and thus highly subjective. Moreover, when we seek to act in what we believe to be an "ethical" fashion, we are applying our values to a particular situation to make a decision. Ethics are complicated, and the result of applying such unpredictable.

Another key difference between law and ethics is that the former tends to be static. Laws stay on the books unless they are repealed or amended. Conversely, an individual's (and even societal) ethics may develop and change over time, based on new experiences or changing mores. Further, one's personal ethics may lead to conflict with controlling law.

The pre-Civil War period furnishes an excellent illustration of this last point. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Law gave slaveholders a powerful legal tool to force the rendition of escaped enslaved persons. Many in the North accepted the situation, because it was "the law." Even Abraham Lincoln repeatedly expressed support for the law, because the right of rendition was enshrined in the Constitution itself. Others, however, could not reconcile the law with their personal ethics, which led them to assist escapees even to the point of violently assaulting law enforcement officers.

Yet the clash of individuals' ethics with existing law can lead to momentous legal reform. Thus, increasing popular resistance to the perceived oppression and undemocratic features of the Fugitive Slave Law contributed to changing



Those escaping bondage hoped to find allies in the North despite the Fugitive Slave Act.

public attitudes (in the North at least) towards the evils of slavery, a factor that contributed to the outbreak of the Civil War. Then, as public mores continued to evolve during and after the conflict, the way was paved for political action to destroy slavery forever. Not only was the Fugitive Slave Act repealed, but pro-freedom legislation was enacted, ultimately culminating

in Constitutional Amendments that enshrined freedom and citizenship rights to the formerly enslaved, including by overturning the infamous *Dred Scott* Supreme Court decision that had held that African Americans never could be citizens. This triumph of ethics over law is reflected in the fact that whereas in 1850 Lincoln's future Secretary of State William Seward had relied on an ethical opposition to slavery, when he proclaimed that there was a "higher law than the Constitution," referring to a moral law established by "the Creator of the universe," by the time the 14th Amendment was ratified in 1868, the law finally had caught up to the new ethics of society.

The war itself offers numerous examples of law vs. ethics situations. U.S. officers returned escaped enslaved persons to their purported masters early in the conflict because they believed the law mandated that course. Some commanders considered it both lawful and ethical to force enemy POWs to walk in front of their troops when they suspected buried torpedoes (landmines) in the road. General Thomas Ewing's infamous anti-guerilla General Order No. 11 forced thousands of Missouri residents to abandon their homes. Other actions against civilians and their property raised difficult issues throughout the conflict. Meanwhile, the Lieber Code—adopted by the Lincoln

believed the law mandated that course. Some commanders considered it both lawful and ethical to force enemy POWs to walk in front of their troops when they suspected buried Administration to set forth the laws of war—cautioned individual soldiers that they remained accountable for their wartime conduct, piously intoning: "Men who take up arms against one another in public war do not cease on this account to be moral beings, responsible to one another and to God." Yet words are easy. Applicability to difficult situations is not.



Ideally, a society's laws enshrine its generally accepted values, its ethics. But a society is composed of individuals; it is not a monolith with a single mind. Law and ethics are not, and probably never will be, one and the same.

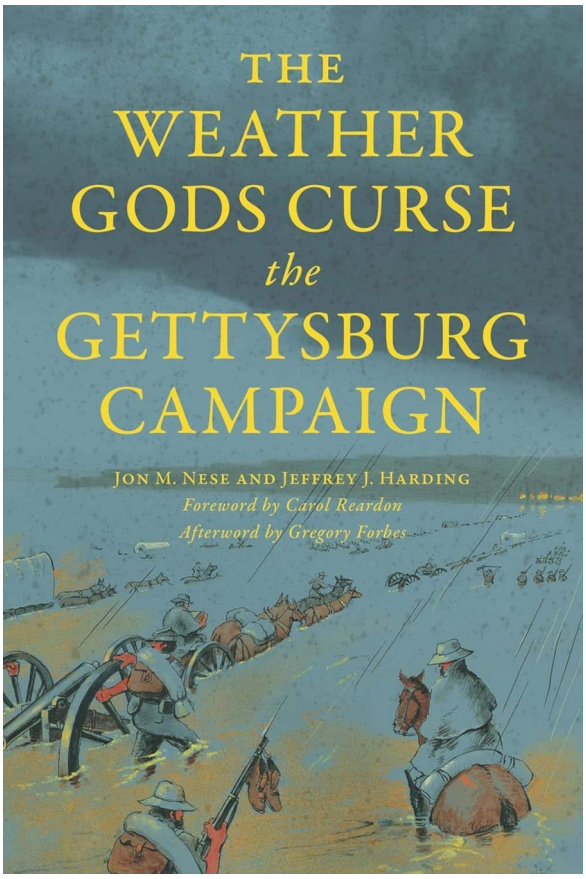
So, would you shoot the canteen-carrying enemy soldier?

Book Review: The Weather Gods Curse the Gettysburg Campaign

https://emergingcivilwar.com/2025/08/28/book-review-the-weather-gods-curse-the-

gettysburg-campaign/

The Weather Gods Curse the Gettysburg Campaign. By Jon M. Nese and Jeffrey J. Harding. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2025. Softcover, 238 pp. $24.99.
Reviewed by Peter Miele



It is probably safe to say that one of the top three questions asked to living historians is "isn't it hot in that uniform?" Now, Jon M. Nese and Jeffrey J. Harding have provided us with a new work that answers that question, at least for the Gettysburg Campaign.

The duo's recent book, *The Weather Gods Curse the Gettysburg Campaign,* is the newest addition to the seemingly recent treasure trove of scholarship exploring the environmental history of the Civil War. It joins works like Judson Browning and Timothy Silver's *An Environmental History of the Civil War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020), Kenneth Noe's *The Howling Storm: Weather, Climate, and the American Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 2020), and Kathryn Shively's *Nature's Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013) to show environment and weather fought as a "third combatant" in the summer of 1863.

At the core of the study is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) re-analysis maps, which utilizes weather observations from the nineteenth century to create computer forecast models. The authors acknowledge that this new methodology "is not gospel; rather, it is guidance" and support these maps through the generous use of primary source accounts. (43) The first chapter establishes the authors' methodology and defines and explains weather terms that we all have heard (dew point, relative humidity) but likely do not fully understand. The second chapter covers the 19th-century Smithsonian Meteorological Project, a network of volunteer individuals who observed the weather from different locations throughout the United States and reported their findings back to Washington, D.C. Most students of the battle of Gettysburg know that Michael Jacobs, a professor at Pennsylvania College was one of these volunteers, but many do not know that he was joined by hundreds of others undertaking the same work.

Chapters three through nine cover the Gettysburg campaign, day by day, between June 3 and July 14, 1863. These chapters are richly detailed and well-structured. Each begins with background information of the movement of the armies or, in the case of July 1-3, the fighting. This is followed by a high-level explanation of the weather, drawn from the reanalysis maps. Primary source accounts put a human face on the situation and support the quantitative claims made through the NOAA modeling.

Finally, each chapter has a subsection titled "People, Stories, and Matters to Remember" in which the authors choose one or two individuals or groups and drill down into their experience. It is through these vignettes that we learn more about Michael Jacobs, or Nathan Mullock Hallock who, during the march to Pennsylvania, saved one of his comrades who was suffering from sunstroke. Rarely do books on the Civil War break down campaigns to such a minute level, and even rarer still do they do it so well.

The book is amply supported with maps, charts, and illustrations. Many of these black-and-white images, including temperature maps, images of original weather recording charts, and photographs of key personalities, are within the narrative of the book.

There is a section in the middle with color images. The color images are primarily of maps generated through the re-analysis modeling and strengthen the authors' argument about how they determined the weather in summer 1863. The authors reference these maps in the narrative, forcing the reader to turn back and forth to the middle of the book. This is the only minor criticism of the book, and it was almost certainly a publisher's choice.

The strength of Nese and Harding's book is in its ability to effectively weave scientific, difficult-to-grasp meteorological concepts with rich primary source accounts from soldiers, leaving the reader with an engaging, easy-to-understand study. It is unique and will be a welcome addition to any Gettysburg historian's library. It will become the standard scholarship on the weather for anyone, professional or buff, who is curious about how it felt outside in the summer of 1863. It will be interesting to see if this study can be replicated for other campaigns of the nation's defining conflict.

Kenneth Noe, in "Fateful Lightning: The Significance of Weather and Climate in the Civil War," reminds us of the simple fact that "That American Civil War was largely fought outdoors." Once again, through the efforts of Nese and Harding, we are reminded of what that truly means.