

BOOK REVIEWS

Yankee Cavalrymen: Through the Civil War with the Ninth Pennsylvania Cavalry. By JOHN W. ROWELL. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1971. Pp. xvii, 280. \$7.50.)

In 1865, Clay Sharkey, a soldier of the Confederacy, threw down his arms in defeat and pondered the neglect of the common soldier in the late war:

*Wars are fought and victory won
By the private soldier that shoots the gun
When Wars are over and history writ
The private soldier is not in it.*

In narrating a segment of the history of the opposing Union forces, author John W. Rowell unknowingly refutes Private Sharkey's lament in this interesting general account of the Civil War exploits of the Ninth Pennsylvania Cavalry. This unit, one of the few Eastern regiments to serve extensively in the Western theater of the Civil War, "may have traveled farther and seen more of the South than any other group in the Federal army."

Largely based on the diaries of the author's grandfather, Cornelius Baker, an enlisted man in Company C, and William Thomas of Company B, the reader is given privy to their inner thoughts through the scarcely literate sentences of these common soldiers. Rowell has paid little attention to what the officers of the Ninth Pennsylvania wrote, his purpose being to view the war from the vantage point of the plain Pennsylvania volunteers. William Thomas of Dauphin County enlisted in the army and marched off to war "in defense of our countrys Flag That Has been trampled in the Dust by traitors." Cornelius Baker, a simple farmer from Perry County, and thousands of others from the Harrisburg area joined him although many of the soldiers in the Ninth Pennsylvania certainly were not aware of just why there was war but did know that their country had called for them and the sooner they could put down the rebellion, the sooner they could return home to their Pennsylvania farms and villages. Nowhere in the diaries is there mention of the war as a crusade to free the slaves and in some cases blacks are referred to in a disparaging fashion.

The Ninth Pennsylvania Cavalry first saw action in Kentucky in January 1862. They were half trained and poorly armed. According to soldier Thomas, they were at this time probably their own worst enemy. For instance, while they were encamped at Bowling Green,

"Fred Metzger of our company was shot Through the Head by a pistol while Lieut. Gratz was cleaning it. He expired in few moments After he was shot."

Subsequently, they briefly clashed with rebels under Colonel John Hunt Morgan. William Thomas then was assigned to an expedition which roved the countryside impressing horses for the Union cavalry as well as scouting, foraging, and raiding. Moving into Tennessee, the unit became bogged down in seesaw operations throughout the state for most of 1863 and early 1864. Morale was high, however, because on January 1, 1864, 397 of the 684 eligible men of the Ninth Pennsylvania Cavalry reenlisted, including Cornelius Baker. They received a bounty of \$400 and a thirty-day furlough at their homes. Following their furlough, the two diarists of the Ninth Pennsylvania described their march through Georgia and the Carolinas under General Sherman. Finally on April 26, 1865, Sherman and Confederate General Johnston concluded terms of surrender near Raleigh and the work of the Ninth Pennsylvania Cavalry was over.

During the war years the Ninth Pennsylvania had participated in such important battles as Perryville, Chickamauga, and Bentonville and matched their strength with opposing troops under such famous Confederate cavalry leaders as Forrest, Wheeler, and Morgan. In the years after the unit was disbanded, the veterans prided themselves over their service record and the author rightly asserts that the Ninth Pennsylvania "had never been beaten in an even fight and had never 'skedadddled' in the face of superior numbers." The epilogue entitled "The Old Soldier" follows the two diarists back into civilian life and their participation in the Grand Army of the Republic during their declining years. Cornelius Baker lived until 1923, espousing to the end his firm belief that "I have done my duty as an American citizen."

Based on original sources, this account is both easy and fascinating reading for the general reader and the Civil War scholar. Moreover the numerous illustrations and maps contribute to the understanding of the text and allow one to follow the unit on its prodigious travels through the South. In short this significant book narrates a story that the Keystone State's "plain people" of today can easily identify with and appreciate.

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