

Voices from Company D: Diaries by the Fifth Alabama Infantry Regiment, Army of Northern Virginia

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Review

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Hubbs, G. Ward, Editor *Voices from Company D: Diaries by the Fifth Alabama Infantry Regiment, Army of Northern Virginia*. University of Georgia Press, \$39.95 ISBN 820325147

Creating community:

An Alabama company and a postwar town

G. Ward Hubbs companion volumes, **Guarding Greensboro** and **Voices from Company D**, are important contributions to Civil War scholarship that are sure to please a diverse audience. Both works utilize a narrative structure that makes for compelling reading. In **Guarding Greensboro**, military chronicles of Company D, Fifth Alabama Infantry are paired with considerations of life in wartime Greensboro. In **Voices from Company D**, the author weaves together diaries from eight Greensboro-area soldiers. This approach speaks to the unity, or single story, that Hubbs finds emerging from company's wartime experiences in the Army of Northern Virginia. It also gives the reader valuable insight into soldiers' lives in camp and in battle. From tedious days at camps in Virginia to the battles of Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Petersburg, the diaries of the Greensboro Guards provide insight into soldiers' wartime experiences. Professor Hubbs's deft editorial skill in weaving together the experiences of soldiers—whether bivouacking, marching, or fighting—enable the reader to experience the war through their eyes and to glimpse how the bonds forged through war helped the Greensboro Guards create a sense of community after the war. As Professor Hubbs explains in the preface to **Guarding Greensboro**, he was less interested in what divides people than in what unites them, less interested in identifying and blaming those who destroy communities than in discovering circumstances that allow communities to be created. As both volumes show, the Greensboro Guards played an important role in this process.

For those interested in the Confederate home front, **Guarding Greensboro** shows how a single local regiment could help build a community. Professor

Hubbs argues that residents of Greensboro were able to forge a community in Alabama's plantation belt in four short decades. The sense of community that emerged, he argues, was strong enough to overcome challenges of individualism, a black majority, and sectional party interests. This process was accomplished initially through antebellum voluntary societies, such as the Masons, and then by the Greensboro Guards themselves. The Guards originated in the need to secure the white community from the perceived threat of slave insurrections. The author finds that in this role, as explained on page 79, the regiment would both represent and protect the town. During the war, the author maintains that Greensboro's white community was united, especially in their support of their local regiment. This overcame the individualism that Hubbs feels plagued Greensboro since its founding.

Guarding Greensboro fits within the recent scholarship on the Confederate home front. It differs, however, from research that has emphasized divisions within southern wartime communities. Unlike David Williams' findings in his study of the lower Chattahoochee Valley, *Rich Man's War: Class, Caste, and Confederate Defeat in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley*, and Wayne K. Durrill's work on Washington County, North Carolina, *War of Another Kind: A Southern Community in the Great Rebellion*, Hubbs does not find class divisions in wartime Greensboro. Indeed, the volumes place little emphasis on popular disaffection. For example, in a discussion of women's nursing activities on page 113, the author quotes a public letter printed in the *Greensboro Alabama Beacon* that favorably compares the nursing activities of one woman to the so-called brave and patriotic men who remained at home. While this source clearly raises the possibility of resentment and divisions within the community, the author fails to elaborate on the fact that at least one resident, and likely more, resented the able-bodied men who remained in Greensboro and were unwilling to volunteer.

Voices from Company D provides similar indications that all was not as unified in Greensboro as it appeared at first glance. In the volume, the editor provides the reader with a fascinating juxtaposition between the diary of active Greensboro Guard John S. Tucker and Sam Pickens, who remained in Greensboro. Although Pickens would join the company in September 1862, his diary begins when he is at home. It documents his efforts to obtain a substitute for his brother, James, so the latter could avoid conscription. Sam is unsuccessful, finding substitutes scarce and prices high, but his efforts indicate that beyond the first year of the war, at least some Greensboro residents were unwilling to serve in the Confederate Army. Pickens' diary also depicts

deteriorating agricultural conditions in Greensboro, exacerbated by a drought and the unwillingness of some residents to plant grain instead of cotton. Faced with this evidence, it is unclear just how successful the Greensboro Guards were in uniting the wartime community. Did, for example, Greensboro experience civilian dissent over Confederate impressment, as William Warren Rogers, Jr., has found in his study *Confederate Home Front: Montgomery During the Civil War*? Was the community divided politically over the Davis Administration's policies, as was the case in Huntsville? One suspects that the focus on the Greensboro Guards has limited investigations into these issues. Formed in the antebellum era, the company was the first to mobilize in response to the secession crisis. Many of the community's wealthiest and most promising sons were members of the company. These men, it can be argued, had the most to lose through the destruction of slavery and were most likely to be the Confederacy's strongest adherents. In a similar way, the voluntary societies formed by women early in the war were led by mothers and wives of these men. Significantly, these were women who had the most time, resources, and incentives for sustaining the war effort. While the Guards and its ancillary organizations doubtless brought people together and created what was deemed a loyal community during the war, as the author maintains, readers are left to wonder if all of Greensboro's white residents shared in this community. Moreover, it is unclear how slaves, who made up a majority of the population, contributed to, or undermined, this sense of wartime community. In the preface, the author acknowledges that many of these questions remain because the answers are not found in the sources.

These observations should not detract from the obvious merits and prodigious research that has gone into both volumes. Indeed, Professor Hubbs has presented a paradigm of community development that military and social historians will build on for years to come. In addition, **Guarding Greensboro** and **Voices from Company D** present a useful model for the ways in which home and front were tied together throughout the war, as well as an intriguing narrative format that weaves both together. In essence, these thought-provoking works push Civil War scholars in new directions to consider the role local companies played in both the North and South, the diversity of home front experiences within both Alabama and the Confederacy itself, and the legacy that military participation had for communities throughout the Union after the war.

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