

Lee and Jackson's Bloody Twelfth: The Letters of Irby Goodwin Scott, First Lieutenant, Company G, Putnam Light Infantry, Twelfth Georgia Volunteer Infantry

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Review

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Pearson, Johnnie Perry (ed.) *Lee and Jackson's Bloody Twelfth: The Letters of Irby Goodwin Scott, First Lieutenant, Company G, Putnam Light Infantry, Twelfth Georgia Volunteer Infantry*. University of Tennessee Press, \$38.95
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A Personal Look at War

Lee and Jackson's Bloody Twelfth is the third book in the University of Tennessee Press's "Voices of the Civil War" series that I have reviewed. Hopefully, it will not be the last. Once again, the press has provided researchers with another well-edited and compelling collection of letters.

Irby Goodwin Scott left Putnam County, Georgia, in 1861 to join the Confederate army and eventually became part of Stonewall Jackson's "foot cavalry." As was the case with most Rebel troops, Scott was in his twenties, unmarried, and did not own any slaves. His ideological convictions were typical among white southerners heading to battle. In his letters, mostly written to his father, Scott tells his family of fighting for "freedom and rights," and "peace & liberty" (39, 165). He says his comrades are waging war "not only [for] their property but their lives," and Scott himself notes his antipathy toward the "hireling foe" (142, 42). Scott's letters do not contain lengthy discussions about slavery, but his father was a planter, and Irby Scott apparently had no moral problems with human bondage. Six slaves followed his regiment into the army, and several body servants—one of whom he inherited after his grandfather's death—served alongside him during the war. Those interested in examining the relationship between African Americans and white soldiers in the Rebel army will find Scott's letters useful. His correspondence frequently closes with him sending home his "love to all the negroes" and by the standards of the Old South, he seemed a humane master (39). If he verbally or physically abused his body servants, he refrained from discussing it in his Civil War letters. His body servants, furthermore, had latitude in camp. Scott mentions giving one of his

slaves a pass, and during the retreat from Gettysburg, his servant was not with him, but instead far back in the wagon train. Scott's correspondence emphasizes contentment between whites and blacks, but his letters show that race relations were not necessarily rosy. In late 1863, he considered getting a transfer to Savannah because he worried about his mother's safety in the wake of reported slave unrest in Georgia.

In addition to providing historians with insight into white-black relations in Rebel camps, Scott was a good observer of the quotidian, discussing food, weather, rumors, his health and that of the men in his company, the 1863 religious revival, crops, and market prices. He also discusses Georgia governor Joe Brown (who Scott did not like). Scott's writings, however, do not bear out Series Editor Peter Carmichael's claim of "unrelenting hardship," among Confederate soldiers (xi). In a January 1862 letter, for example, Scott says slaves in camp are doing all the cooking and that he and his comrades have "a table in the tent and a first rate chimney" (55). Such words hardly suggest "unrelenting hardship." Scott came from a family of "moderate wealth," and his family, the government, and local civilians kept him and his fellow Georgians often well supplied (xii). In the summer of 1861, he mentions "plenty to eat," and having "fattened up," and he says of soldiering, "I do not find it as hard as I expected" (12,27,15). Nor were things always bad elsewhere in the Confederacy. In April 1862, Scott expressed shock at hearing how slaves were still fetching high prices in the markets. Scott himself often had hundreds of dollars in Confederate money in his possession and sent what he could to his family. He noted that many men in the summer of 1863 went barefoot, but after the battle of Gettysburg, he told his family that he had good food and plenty of money, even though prices were high.

Scott's letters reflect the ebb and flow of soldier morale and loyalty to the Confederate cause. Scott supported the conscription bill of 1862, thinking military service a burden all white male Confederates of fighting age should bear. Yet, on several occasions, he considered getting a substitute and the fighting in 1864 took an extreme toll on his physical and mental health. Scott's letters, nevertheless, reveal a soldier who would have fit comfortably in Kevin Phillips' *Diehard Rebels*. Scott did not express a blind allegiance to the Confederacy, but he believed in the need for military discipline, and he had respect for his officers. His mixture of stoicism, toughness, and trust in the southern cause kept him fighting.

Scott took part in most of the major campaigns fought in Virginia, but historians looking for grisly battlefield descriptions will find his letters disappointing. Contrary to what Carmichael says in the introduction, Scott was not "always on the move, always fighting" (xii). His letters ably show that disease was a far more prolific killer than battle wounds. And Scott certainly did not exaggerate his own valor. In discussing one October 1861 battle, he admits he did not fire his rifle. He missed the first battle at Bull Run and the 12th Georgia saw little action during Gettysburg. Unfortunately for researchers, there is only one letter from the period of the Petersburg siege. Scott's letters, however, are clear about the war's deadly toll. Scott was wounded during the Second Bull Run campaign, and after the slaughter at Chancellorsville, he wrote that the "dead and wounded were lying thick everywhere" (110). Scott survived the war but, in May 1864, he wrote his parents about the death of his brother Bud at Spotsylvania.

Editor Johnnie Perry Pearson has done an excellent job collecting and annotating Scott's letters and the index is detailed. This volume also includes a helpful appendix that contains biographical information about Company G, which should prove invaluable to regimental historians. Pearson, however, could have proven more precise in the use of footnotes rather than always placing them at the end of sentences. The editors also could have included more information about certain letters. For example, a June 1861 letter mentions an "insurrection" in Georgia, but there is no information about it in the footnote. Also, one of Scott's letters contains a message from his body servant, Franklin, but in checking the footnote, I was not clear whether Franklin wrote the letter or dictated it. Furthermore, I was somewhat puzzled by the editors decision to rewrite misspelled words in brackets rather than use "[sic]."

Such minor criticisms aside, *Lee and Jackson's Bloody Twelfth* provides researchers with an interesting and informative collection of Confederate letters. I hope the University of Tennessee Press continues producing volumes for the "Voices of the Civil War" as good as this one. These books are an invaluable resource for scholars.

Colin Woodward is Manuscripts Processor at Smith College. His book on the Confederate army is under review at University of Virginia Press.