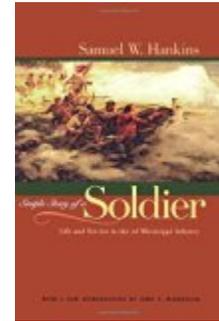


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Samuel W. Hankins. *Simple Story of a Soldier: Life and Service in the 2d Mississippi Infantry*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004. xvi + 73 pp. \$12.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8173-5157-1.

Reviewed by Archie McDonald (Department of History, Stephen F. Austin State University)
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A Soldier's Account

Samuel H. Hankins went away to war because he felt an obligation to serve his country. How could one develop such intense loyalty to a country sixteen years younger than the soldier himself? Likely the explanation is that Hankins's loyalty was to his native state of Mississippi and to friends and relatives who also went "soldiering" rather than to the infant Confederate government.

Hankins had to overcome parental objections, however mild they may have been, from his father, and then endure many hardships without much complaint and none directed toward home. Pride prevented his acknowledging that joining a fighting army at age sixteen was foolish and also the only course he could have followed.

Hankins's account of training and easy early service are presented in a humorous, almost detached fashion, probably owing to the fact that he wrote over forty years after surviving the war. Indeed, there is more good-natured humor packed into this scant seventy-three-page remembrance than in other first-person accounts ten

times its length. Only when recounting his experiences as a prisoner of war following the Battle of Gettysburg, where Hankins also was wounded, does any bitterness toward his former enemies appear.

Hankins provides evidence of an unprepared officer corps, especially in the lower ranks of officers, logistical shortages and hardships among Confederate soldiers, and the elementary medical assistance available to the wounded, including Hankins himself. His adulation of Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson seems genuine, as does his account of the faithfulness of slaves owned by his family in Mississippi. The latter contradicts common sense, but perhaps it was so in the case of his family.

John F. Marszalek's introduction fleshes out the pre- and post-war life of Hankins and provides an overview of his military service. As there is no editor, contextual footnotes are not included.

This is a brief book, but it is interesting and would be a good way to introduce primary sources to young readers.

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