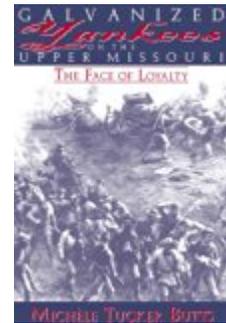


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Michele Tucker Butts. *Galvanized Yankees on the Upper Missouri: The Face of Loyalty*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003. xiv + 292 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87081-675-8.

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Published on H-CivWar (April, 2005)



Sorting through Loyalty on the Frontier

In the fall of 1864, the First United States Volunteer Infantry Regiment made a circuitous trip from Norfolk, Virginia to Fort Rice in the Dakota Territory. The movement by itself was not unusual. Difficulties with the Sioux Indians had grown during the Civil War as emigrants, miners, and trading companies continued their inexorable push west. A military presence would be needed to keep the peace and establish some type of order on the Dakota frontier. However, what was unusual about the movement concerned the enlisted men who comprised the First Regiment. They were all recent Confederate prisoners of war who had been released from Point Lookout Prison in Maryland to join the Union Army. The First Regiment was recruited in the spring of 1864, and five other regiments of “Galvanized Yankees” would eventually join it.

Michele Tucker Butts chronicles the story of the First Regiment and thus fills a substantial void in the historiography. Dee Brown first surveyed the history of all six regiments of Confederate prisoners turned Union soldiers in his 1963 book, *The Galvanized Yankees* (1963). Now outdated, Brown’s book provides only a cursory examination of the First Regiment. Butts’s new monograph is thus a welcome study of a regiment that had the most complex of all missions on the Upper Missouri River. As Butts notes, the government expected the First Regiment to defend American interests against Indian raids, assist overland travelers, supply intelligence of Indian activity, and prevent illegal trade with the Indians. Not surprisingly, it was a job that proved exceedingly difficult and one that severely taxed the capabilities of the regiment

and its commander, Colonel Charles Dimon.

Butts’s examination of the regiment begins with its recruitment at Point Lookout. This section is, in some ways, the most interesting part of Butts’s work and one that directly addresses the sub-title of the book. The central issue for Butts is loyalty. Why, in other words, did over 1,000 Confederates forsake their previous loyalty and join the First Regiment? Butts does not provide a single answer, preferring instead to show that a number of factors undermined loyalty to the Confederacy. For most of the galvanized Yankees, there appears never to have been any strong attachment to the Confederacy. Over 10 percent of the men were either native-born northerners or recent immigrants to America. More significantly, almost 40 percent of the force came from the Unionist leaning, or pacifistic “Quaker Belt,” counties in North Carolina. For all of these men, as well as the remaining 50 percent of the regiment, Butts emphasizes numerous other influences in the decision to change sides. She includes on this list social class and allegiance, family need, concepts of Victorian duty, and perceptions of the health of the Confederate cause in early 1864. Finally, for some prisoners enlistment improved the odds of returning home. Freed from the hellish environs of Point Lookout Prison, these men would desert at the earliest opportunity. After considering all of these factors, Butts rightly concludes that the First Regiment was a mix of ardent Unionists, repentant Rebels, and prudent opportunists.

The First Regiment’s subsequent service on the fron-

tier is remarkable for three reasons. First, the regiment performed capably. As Butts notes, despite the regiment's complex mission and the dubious loyalty of its men, the galvanized Yankees held together and acquitted themselves well. Second, the regiment experienced little actual combat. Aside from one pitched engagement with the Sioux, there was only scattered skirmishing to enliven the unit's daily existence. Indeed, the greatest physical threat to the regiment came not so much from hostile Indians as from the natural elements. In a terrible irony the men were hit hardest by freezing temperatures and malnutrition, much the same as they had faced at Point Lookout Prison. Third, and finally, the commanding officer, Colonel Charles Dimon, dominates the history of the regiment and Butts's narrative. Dimon was a charismatic figure who, in some ways, was the perfect commander for the regiment. Young and zealous for the Union cause, Dimon was a strict disciplinarian who, by the simple force of his will, kept the regiment from breaking down in the bitter winter of 1864-65. Nevertheless, and as Butts demonstrates, Dimon was far too impetuous and lacked the requisite diplomatic skills to succeed on the Upper Missouri. There were too many different American trading interests, Indian bands, and govern-

ment bureaucrats to evaluate and balance. By the time the military relieved Dimon in the summer of 1865 he seemed to have angered everyone and pleased no one.

Michele Butts has written an excellent book. It is engaging and well researched. It is not, however, without flaw. In a somewhat jarring fashion, Butts interjects both the language and the sensibilities of the early twenty-first century into her assessment of Indian-white relations in the Dakota Territory. Butts laments, for example, the breakdown of peace in the late 1860s as a lost opportunity to develop "a multicultural society on the Upper Missouri" (p. 235). She is thus disappointed that the participants on both sides could not adapt their "values and cultural patterns somewhat to blend with the other's lifestyle and worldview" (p. 236). Though the sentiments are admirable, they would have been well beyond the comprehension of Indians and whites in the Dakota Territory during the 1860s.

This complaint is minor, and it does not detract significantly from Michele Tucker Butts's achievement. She has written a book that belongs on the shelves of Civil War and western historians alike.

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Citation: Kyle Sinisi. Review of Butts, Michele Tucker, *Galvanized Yankees on the Upper Missouri: The Face of Loyalty*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. April, 2005.

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