



A. W. Bishop. *Loyalty on the Frontier: Or Sketches of Union Men of the South-West with Incidents and Adventures in Rebellion on the Border*. Civil War in the West Series. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003. xxvii + 228 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-55728-840-0.

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“Traitors to Treason”

Such was Albert W. Bishop’s appraisal of the Union men of Arkansas and Missouri he profiled in *Loyalty on the Frontier*, written in 1862 and 1863. Born in New York, Bishop moved to Wisconsin to practice law. An avid Republican, he joined a Wisconsin artillery company when the Civil War broke out. The war took him to Missouri and Arkansas where he observed first-hand the turmoil of a guerrilla war between Unionists and Confederates in those states.

Bishop’s book is a hodge-podge. Several chapters consist of biographies of Unionists, many of whom joined the First Arkansas Cavalry (U.S.), which Bishop helped organize. Other chapters detail the author’s experiences while stationed at Elk Horn Tavern, Arkansas or serving as a provost marshal at Fayetteville. A concluding chapter discusses the nature of the war in northwestern Arkansas, around Fayetteville. There are also various supplementary matters, such as the official correspondence concerning the Battle of Fayetteville and the “Arkansian Battle Hymn.” In typical nineteenth-century fashion, Bishop interlards the text with long extracts from letters, newspaper articles, or convention proceedings.

What then is the value of these contents? Bishop gives a very good sense of the confusion and brutality that the Civil War brought to Missouri and Arkansas. His protagonists were men, often of considerable standing in their communities, who opposed secession and endured harassment, threats, and violence that drove them to take up arms for the Union. Bishop felt passionately the justice of the southern Unionist cause. Some passages, such as his description of the Arkansas secession convention, capture the heated emotions and profound disappointments Unionists suffered in the border South. These were men driven to hiding in the woods for fear of armed vigilantes visiting their homes at night. Some were arrested for their opposition to the Confederacy and threatened

with execution.

What is missing from Bishop’s work is a sense of balance. Naturally one does not expect a Union army officer, writing in the midst of the war, to give a fair hearing to the Confederate viewpoint. Nonetheless, modern readers will want to retain some skepticism about Bishop’s glorification of his heroes and vilification of his villains. More curiously, Bishop lacks any sense of the direction the war was taking by the time he wrote. Bishop dismisses the idea that Republicans or the Unionist southerners he portrays had any intention of reordering race relations. African Americans do not figure in his story and he never attempts to come to grips with the Emancipation Proclamation and its implications. One senses that the Confederates, whose “absurd notion” that Republicans advocated “negro equality” Bishop dismisses, were closer to the mark than Bishop. (p. 7)

Despite the limitations inherent in Bishop’s work, it is a valuable contribution to the developing historiography on southern Unionists. Works such as William W. Freehling’s *The South vs. the South* are reminding us of the importance of Unionism, especially in the border South, to the outcome of the war.[1]

Kim Allen Scott has ably edited the volume. He has provided a substantial editor’s introduction with biographical information about Bishop and analysis of his work. The introduction is especially interesting because it carries Bishop’s story beyond the war, into a failed political career in 1870s Arkansas politics, and an impoverished and lonely old age in his native New York. Unfortunately, there are a number of typographical errors scattered throughout the text. Scott’s footnotes elucidate Bishop’s passing references, elaborate on the context of political and military events, and occasionally provide a corrective to Bishop’s assertions.

Note

[1]. William W. Freehling, *The South vs. the South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

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