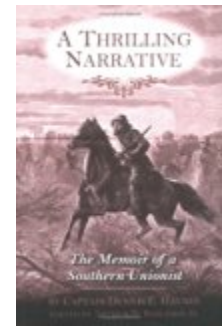


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Dennis E. Haynes. *A Thrilling Narrative: The Memoirs of a Southern Unionist*. Bergeron Jr. Civil War in the West Series. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006. xxi + 192 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-55728-811-0.

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A Fugitive Unionist

Captain Dennis E. Haynes joins a growing list of Southern unionists whose stories are now being told or, in this case, retold since very few original copies remain available. Haynes's opposition to secession began in Texas where he stood boldly against leaving the Union. In 1862, he attempted to organize a company of troops loyal to the Union, a plan hastily quelled by the Confederates, which sent the organizers fleeing for the safety of the swamps. While in hiding, Haynes was chosen to attempt a meeting with Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Banks at Alexandria, Louisiana, but, unfortunately, Banks had left the city before Haynes arrived. Meanwhile, Haynes traded his land in Texas for a farm near the Calcasieu River, thirty miles from Alexandria. Once there, his unionism would take him into the service of the Union.

Accusations against Haynes led to his arrest in October 1863, which began a series of escapes from Confederate regulars and the home guard militia. When he attempted to reach Union lines, he was forced into hiding in swamps. Along the way, he encountered notorious characters such as Robert Washington "Bloody Bob" Martin and William Ivey, both of whom had the nasty habit of shooting people indiscriminately. Of the two, Ivey was apparently the worst. Haynes described him as "a low-bred petty grog-shop gambler, and as mean a wretch as ever disgraced human nature" (p. 23). People like Ivey and Martin formed "home guards" to protect the country from the "Jayhawkers," using this as an excuse to carry out a "reign of terror" (p. 81). Their actions of burning houses, shooting or hanging people, and steal-

ing prompted Haynes's description of them as "butchers and villains, bloody cannibals" (p. 29).

As is pointed out by other unionists in their memoirs, Haynes received a great deal of support from Union sympathizers, which included being nursed back to health, and given aid and comfort. On his sojourn to the Federal lines, he was captured. After his escape, he was wounded and then suffered from near starvation, a broken shoulder, sickness, and vermin. Often Haynes posed as a loyal Confederate, claiming to be someone else, who he knew to fit the description. At other times, he had to convince the Federals he was a loyal unionist. Capture by either side presented the constant threat of possible execution. While a fugitive, Haynes witnessed his friends and their families suffer atrocities at the hands of their former neighbors, a price he knew very well as one who lost his own wife, property, and friends during the war.

Eventually he joined Banks's ill-fated Red River Campaign in 1864 as captain of Company B, First Louisiana Battalion Cavalry Scouts. Haynes's service was brief, lasting only three months; after Banks's miserable failure to take north Louisiana, Haynes left the army, apparently due to bad health. After Haynes left military service, Governor James Madison Wells appointed him to be sheriff of Madison Parish, a position he held for a year before returning to Rapides Parish. Haynes described the job as "an eggshell without meat" due to the fact that the inhabitants had abandoned the Parish (p. 67). He never approved of what he considered Wells's lenient policy

during Reconstruction as is evidenced by the chapters on correspondence and Reconstruction. In an anonymous letter to Wells addressed through the *New Orleans Times*, Haynes warned the governor that his policy of “appointing notorious rebels to office” gave great dissatisfaction to Wells’s “old Union friends” (p. 87).

In December 1865, Haynes traveled to Washington, D. C., where he testified before a committee on Reconstruction, pointing out the inhumanity to which he and his unionist neighbors had been subjected. He returned home and became involved in local Republican politics, briefly serving as district attorney and surveyor in New Orleans. He disappeared from the public record in 1873.

Haynes’s account provides intriguing insight into Unionism in the Trans-Mississippi Theater. His memoir voices the sentiments of many unknown unionists whose stories would never be told otherwise. The military, political, and social arenas of war between neighbors is graphically revealed by Haynes as he recalled the “dark and bloody deeds which [were] committed on both sides during the ‘Reign of Terror’ in the northwest section of Louisiana” (pp. 81-82). Haynes continued his disgust saying, “murder, arson, and plundering of the Union men was the order of the day” (p. 83). He recalled, in his correspondence, the recrimination of Union forces against the rebels for such actions. Haynes emphatically stated he “never justified them [and] advised against it” (p. 99).

Arthur W. Bergeron Jr. has done an admirable job of

editing the memoir, identifying as many people as possible and explaining military actions without obstructing the story itself. The editor uses appropriate primary sources for his notes, which are informative and explanatory but not obtrusive and overdone. His reproduction of this forgotten memoir adds an excellent work to the historiography of the Civil War in the West. As part of The Civil War in the West series, Haynes’s memoir will be appreciated by both scholars and casual readers interested in unionism in the Confederate South.

If there are any weaknesses, one would be the lack of a map of Louisiana during the war years, which would aid the reader in locating the several parishes and towns Haynes mentions. Also, a reader who is unaccustomed to the assignment of names to military units might be confused about which units are Union or Confederate forces. A simple listing of units, North and South, would have been helpful. Neither of these points detracts from the story nor the importance of this new addition to the study of Southern unionism.

This memoir and others like it are raising the awareness and recognition of the surprising number of unionists in the South and their activities in aiding the Northern cause. Often they paid for that aid with their lives or, at the least, the loss of their property. Having co-edited *Chickasaw, A Mississippi Scout for the Union* (2005) with Michael Ballard recently, this reviewer found striking similarities in the two memoirs. As more of these memoirs come to light, an entirely new dimension in Civil War dissent in the South will emerge.

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