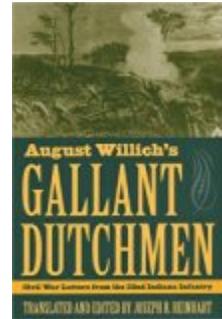


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Joseph R. Reinhart, ed. *August Willich's Gallant Dutchmen: Civil War Letters from the 32nd Indiana Infantry*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 2006. xiii + 262 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87338-862-7.

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Indiana's German Regiment

The role played by German-Americans in the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency in 1860 has been widely discussed and debated in the past, whereas the role they played in the following Civil War has received less consideration in the secondary literature of American historiography. As independent scholar Joseph R. Reinhart correctly observes: "Secondary sources examining German soldiers in the Civil War are few in number" (p. 251). Although there is a body of primary source material available on the topic, ranging from regimental histories to biographies and autobiographies, it really has not been systematically examined and appraised due to the fact that much of this material is in the German language. Also, most of this material dates from the time period before the two world wars, which struck a harsh blow to German-American historical research, even causing the demise of such publications as *German-American Annals*, so that it has long since been overlooked as well.

Works dealing with the German-American participation in the American Civil War, therefore, are few in number, and Reinhart notes that "the dearth of published information about the largest ethnic group in the Union Army is regrettable and deserves much more attention from historians and other scholars" (p. 184). He also follows this up with the comment that "the task will not be easy, however, because most of the necessary documents were penned in German and few modern American historians can understand that language" (pp. 184-85).

Some of these considerations in fact motivated me to co-edit a translation of the standard German-language history of the topic that had been published in 1911, and had never appeared in English translation.[1] My major reason for coordinating this publication project was to make a basic source available as a translated edition, as it provided essential information on the topic. Since that time, more works on the role played by German-Americans in the Civil War have begun to appear, but much, much more work needs to be done, especially with regard to making translated editions of primary source materials available.

With *August Willich's Gallant Dutchmen: Civil War Letters from the 32nd Infantry* Joseph R. Reinhart has contributed to this effort by providing us with a collection of letters written by the members of the 32nd Indiana Infantry Regiment. The 32nd consisted of 937 soldiers, and during its roughly four and half years of service from 1861 to 1865 suffered a loss of roughly one-fourth of its troops: 171 deaths from battle action, and 91 from disease or other causes. Soldiers in the regiment came mainly from Indiana, but also from Louisville, Kentucky and Cincinnati, Ohio.

Although interesting in and of itself, what makes the 32nd Indiana Infantry Regiment all that more fascinating is that it was organized by one of the most well-known German Forty-Eighters, August von Willich, who in America dropped the "von." Willich became some-

what of a legendary character, and rumors even circulated that he was the illegitimate son of a Hohenzollern prince. In Cincinnati he had edited a Forty-Eighter newspaper, *Der Republikaner*, a publication that is worthy of further examination as it relates to German-American perspectives on the growing national crisis that led to the War Between the States. After Lincoln issued the call for soldiers, it was Willich who organized the 9th Ohio Infantry Regiment in Cincinnati, which consisted primarily of members of the Cincinnati Turnverein, and generally became known as Cincinnati's Turner Regiment. Thereafter, he was then called on to take on the task of organizing the 32nd Indiana Infantry Regiment in nearby Indiana. As a result of his reputation, Willich attracted German-American volunteers to the newly formed Indiana Regiment, and not surprisingly drew especially from the ranks of German-American Turner societies. In many respects, therefore, this regiment was comparable to the 9th Ohio Regiment, and a comparison of the two is now facilitated by means of Reinhart's collection of letters, as the regimental history of the 9th is available in translation.[2]

In his introduction, Reinhart notes the value of his edition. First, there are very few collections of such letters available. Second, it provides a valuable source of information on many aspects of the Civil War experience. And, finally, it, of course, provides insight into the German-American dimension. Altogether, Reinhart has collected sixty letters that he came upon by searching through issues of the following German-American newspapers: the *Louisville Anzeiger*, the *Cincinnati Volksfreund*, and the *Freie Presse von Indiana* (Indianapolis). These newspapers provide a window on the German element in the Ohio Valley, and the letters found in them illuminate the Civil War experience of German-American soldiers very well. The authors of the letters display a cross-section of backgrounds, with more than seventeen letters coming from one author from Cincinnati. This author often makes use of classical references, thereby reflecting a good education, most likely at a German university.

Letters cover the gamut of possible topics. For example, a letter by Willich to the *Freie Presse von Indiana* dated August 29, 1861, explained the rationale of his call for Germans to join the 32nd Regiment. He wrote: "In

this way the Germans will prove that they are not foreigners and that they know how to protect their new republican homeland against the aristocracy of the South" (p. 23). A letter from the September 5, 1861 issue of the *Louisville Anzeiger* focused on Willich, noting: "To begin at the top, I can assure you that Willich is the best man one could desire for colonel. He is a born organizer and unites all qualities that you expect for the leader of a large body of troops. He displays energy, military knowledge, experience and tact" (p. 24).

Other letters provide a sense of day-to-day life for the German-American soldier, including the daily menu: "In the morning, coffee, bread, smoked meat. Noon, fresh beef, bread, soup, rice soup, cabbage soup. Evening, coffee, bread soup, cold beef., smoked meat and potato salad. I think." And, the author of this letter from the *Louisville Anzeiger* dated September 12, 1861, noted moreover that: "I think I can endure with such fare." The work is fully indexed to gain access to names and topics covered in the text (pp. 253-262).

Reinhart provides several useful appendices, including one with biographical information on the officers of the 32nd Regiment (pp. 187-190), and another with a bibliography of "Other Books Containing Civil War Diaries and Collections of Letters Written by Native Germans and Published in English," (pp. 193-194). Additionally, he includes a bibliographic essay (pp. 249-252). All in all, Reinhart has provided us with a fine contribution to the primary source material in English translation relating to the German-American involvement in the Civil War, and a good example of how the German-American press can be searched in other areas to locate similar kinds of source material.

Notes

[1]. Wilhelm Kaufmann, *The Germans in the American Civil War*, trans. Steven Rowan and ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann with Werner D. Mueller and Robert E. Ward (Carlisle, Penn.: John Kallmann, 1999).

[2]. Constantin Grebner, "*We Were the Ninth*," *A History of the Ninth Ohio Volunteer Infantry, April 17, 1861, to June 7, 1864*, trans. and ed. Frederic Trautmann (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1987).

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