



Scott Walker. *Hell's Broke Loose in Georgia: Survival in a Civil War Regiment*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005. xv + 311 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-2605-4.

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The Experiences of the 57th Georgia Infantry in the Civil War

In 1861 and early 1862 companies of Confederate infantry began forming in central and south Georgia that would become the 57th Georgia Infantry. The regiment came together at Savannah in May, 1862, but soon found themselves bound for the front to take part in some of the bitterest fighting of the American Civil War. In *Hell's Broke Loose in Georgia*, author Scott Walker has taken advantage of a dizzying array of primary sources to weave an excellent regimental history, one that takes into account experiences on the home front as well as experiences on the battlefield. In so doing, the author has helped show other regimental historians how to keep their work relevant to modern historiography by including analysis of the home front as well as the actions of the men in the front line.

After forming, the 57th Georgia made their way to the front where they first saw action in the Confederate General Braxton Bragg's invasion of Kentucky in the fall of 1862. Marching as a part of General Edmund Kirby Smith's column, the Georgians suffered their first casualties from Unionist bushwhackers who ambushed their column not far into Kentucky. After capturing the Kentucky capital at Lexington, Smith's column kept on marching, more than a thousand miles in eleven weeks, all to no avail as Bragg ordered a retreat into Tennessee following the Battle of Perryville. For the 57th Georgia it was a frustrating campaign as they never once fired a shot at regular Union troops.

Following their return to Tennessee, the 57th Georgia became part of the troops dispatched from the Army of Tennessee to help defend Vicksburg. In this twist of fate they missed participating in the Battle of Stones River and instead found themselves attached to Maj. Gen. Carter Stevenson's division marching into central Mississippi. At the Battle of Champion's Hill on May 16, 1863, the 57th Georgia finally got their first real baptism of fire defending a crucial crossroads in the eventual Confederate defeat. In this bloodletting the regiment suffered a

staggering 44 percent casualties as Gen. Ulysses S. Grant opened the door to Vicksburg with the victory. Falling back into Vicksburg, the 57th Georgia was assigned a place in the entrenchments astride the Hall's Ferry Road, and here they spend the Siege of Vicksburg hungry, exhausted, and frustrated as Grant and his Union forces encircled and choked the life out of the Confederate defenders. On July 4, 1863, the Confederate commander, Lt. Gen. John Pemberton, surrendered his starving garrison to the Federals and the 57th Georgia was paroled and allowed to go home along with the rest of the garrison.

In October, 1863, the remaining two hundred members of the regiment gathered at Savannah, Georgia to defend Fort Barstow. Here they first fell under the command of Brig. Gen. Hugh Mercer, whom they would be associated with for the rest of the war. In February 1864, a Union amphibious assault confronted the Georgians at Savannah. The regiment did not fare well, falling back precipitously in the face of the advance. Their performance in this action humiliated the regiment and its commanders, and precipitated a change of assignment. Instead of remaining in Savannah, the 57th Georgia, now increased to roughly 650 men, was assigned to guard the Confederate prison at Andersonville. This assignment also greatly disheartened these Confederates because they were stationed so close to their own homes without being allowed to go home. One Georgian even spied his mother's house from the train as he and his comrades rolled on by to the prisoner of war camp.

The duty at Andersonville proved odious for the Georgians as they watched scores of Union prisoners die from neglect, but their assignment to the prison did not last long. In early May, 1864 they received orders to march north, to participate with the Confederate Army of Tennessee in helping halt Union General William T. Sherman's campaign to capture Atlanta. Hugh Mercer took command of the brigade containing the 57th Georgia along with several other Georgia regiments that had

principally seen action in garrisoning Savannah during the war. The relatively novice brigade was assigned to Maj. Gen. William H. T. Walker's division in Lt. Gen. William Hardee's army corps.

After falling back with the rest of the army to the vicinity of Dallas, Georgia, Mercer's Brigade saw heavy action in pushing Union forces off Ellsburry Mountain in fighting that came to be known as the "Hell Hole" by soldiers on both sides. The Georgians suffered heavy casualties before falling back to the Kennesaw Mountain line to once again try and halt Sherman's advance. In the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain on June 27, 1864, Mercer's Georgia Brigade helped hold crucial Pigeon Hill against repeated Federal assaults in what became one of the most lopsided Confederate victories in the Atlanta Campaign. On July 20, 1864, the Georgians again saw heavy combat at the Battle of Peachtree Creek where they again experienced extremely heavy casualties in a futile attempt to stop Sherman's advancing armies. Falling back into Atlanta that night, Mercer and his brigade joined the rest of Walker's division and Hardee's corps in a vast turning maneuver designed to take the Union Army of the Tennessee by surprise on the morning of July 22. However, Gen. James McPherson, commanding the Union forces east of Atlanta, aligned his men to prevent just such an occurrence, and Hardee's men advanced against a prepared and entrenched enemy. In the heavy fighting, Mercer's Georgians suffered heavily in the Confederate assaults around Terry's Mill Pond in the Battle of Atlanta and then joined General Patrick Cleburne's division for one last assault which failed to dislodge the Union defenders. During the day Mercer's Brigade went through four separate commanders as finally the colonel of the 54th Georgia took command of the brigade. The 57th Georgia was also heavily engaged at the Battle of Jonesboro on September 1, 1864 before the Confederate

commander General John Bell Hood abandoned Atlanta, ending the Atlanta Campaign.

After the fall of Atlanta, Hood decided to march into Tennessee, intent on drawing Sherman out of Georgia and recapturing Confederate glory. Mercer's Georgians, now attached to Cleburne's Division, missed the slaughter at the Battle of Franklin as they guarded the army's wagon trains in the rear. After briefly entering the trenches around Nashville, the brigade again was detached to Murfreesboro to aid Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest in destroying railroad track and distracting the Union forces in Nashville. In this capacity they also missed the Battle of Nashville on December 16 and 17, 1864, but served ably as a part of Forrest's rear guard, protecting the shattered Army of Tennessee from pursuing Federal forces. Finally, the 57th Georgia ended the war with the rest of the Army of Tennessee at Durham Station, North Carolina in April, 1865.

Hell's Broke Loose in Georgia is an excellent regimental history, but there are certain aspects which the author could have taken into consideration. During the narrative, the author often lapses into a history of Mercer's Brigade as a whole rather than staying focused on the 57th Georgia, and he also could have included more information regarding the specific losses and desertion rates of the regiment itself. The use of some statistics to show the impact of regimental losses as well as socioeconomic factors that influenced the regiment are also usually included in a regimental history of this type. The primary sources the author consulted are numerous and excellent, but the excessive use of block quotes is distracting to the reader, when many quotations simply could have been woven into the text. These things aside, *Hell's Broke Loose in Georgia* is an exceptional portrait of a Confederate regiment and a brigade of Georgians who struggled just to survive the American Civil War.

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