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Kenneth W. Noe, ed. *A Southern Boy in Blue: The Memoir of Marcus Woodcock, 9th Kentucky Infantry (U.S.A.)*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996. xxvi + 348 pp. \$32.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87049-921-0.

Reviewed by Randall C. Jimerson (Western Washington University)
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One reason that the Civil War remains fascinating to many Americans is that it presents an almost infinite variety of new perspectives on a critical period in the nation's history. No other period is so richly textured by personal narratives, diaries, letters, and memoirs of ordinary men and women engaged in both extraordinary exploits and mundane routines. This memoir of Marcus Woodcock, a native of north-central Tennessee who fought for the Union, adds yet another valuable perspective to our understanding of this complex era.

William Marcus Woodcock was born in 1842 in Macon County, Tennessee, located in the central highlands adjacent to the Kentucky border. His father was a yeoman farmer and self-educated doctor, who "seems to have moved in and out of the slaveholding class" (p. xiv), according to editor Kenneth W. Noe. The eldest of eleven children, Marcus Woodcock was both a Democrat and a Unionist, and when Tennessee seceded, he joined a number of his neighbors in crossing the nearby state line to enlist in Kentucky's Home Guards. For three years he served in the 9th Kentucky Infantry (U.S.A.), rising from the rank of private to first lieutenant.

Woodcock's service was confined to the western theater. Two distinctive features set it apart from other memoirs: the rare perspective of a southern Unionist from a region other than the Appalachians, and its immediacy of tone and perspective. Written largely during the spring of 1865, the memoir at times discusses the war as an ongoing event and comments on Lincoln's assassination as recent news. This perspective means that Woodcock's account does not partake of the consensus view of the war that developed by the 1880s, and that it does not sugarcoat the horrors of battlefield and hospital or de-

vote excessive attention to defending or impugning the reputations of military and political leaders. Although many passages are clogged with purple prose and self-conscious literary affectations, the story has the vigor and forthrightness found more often in wartime letters and diaries than in memoirs.

A Southern Boy in Blue thus presents the best of both genres. It has the candor and immediacy of contemporaneous letters and diaries, coupled with the sense of perspective and reflection shown in the best memoirs. Most of Woodcock's memoir is based directly on his wartime diaries, although his commentary and elaboration clearly extend beyond what the diaries recorded. In August 1862 he lost his diaries, and the account of his early months in service are therefore based entirely on memory. The difference is clear. His diary-based accounts are less self-conscious, more direct, more detailed, and less stilted than the earlier passages.

The benefits of this are seen most clearly in his vivid, detailed, first-hand account of the confusion and roller-coaster emotions he experienced during the battle of Chickamauga. After a self-conscious literary effort to recreate his thoughts on the eve of battle, his lengthy description of the contest presents almost a minute-by-minute account of a single soldier's perspective on the progress of the battle. It is both excellent literature and superb personal narrative—one of the best first-hand battle accounts one could find. During the second day of fighting, Woodcock observed the desperation of Union soldiers trying to avoid defeat:

"Oh the terrible feelings that must have possessed the heart of any witness of this scene—there were less than three hundred men, regardlessly throwing them-

selves into the scale against thousands of the enemy, who were rendered more furious by their recent success on our front lines – every man seemed willing to sacrifice his life if it would in any way retrieve the fortunes of the day which we now saw was surely lost without some almost superhuman effort.–I saw tears streaming from many an eye as the poor boys would cast their eyes to the right, left and rear, and see unmistakable evidence that the day was lost” (p. 206).

Woodcock also offers a detailed depiction of the battle of Stones River (Murfreesboro) and an excellent account of the storming of Missionary Ridge. His seemingly breathless account of a Confederate charge at Stones River is rendered with dashes for punctuation, as though composed in the heat of battle. Yet this contrasts with his account of the beginning of that day and his eagerness just before his first battle, clearly written with a veteran’s hindsight:

“I had never yet realized the horror and bloodshed that are met with in battle–felt not the usual dreads and eventual sufferings that are peculiar to the veteran soldier, for my imagination had not pictured the battle with half its horrors–the crash of the skirmishers’ musket, or the boom of the heavy cannon did not cause that feeling of uneasiness and fear to creep over my limbs as it always did in subsequent actions” (p. 121).

Woodcock’s memoir, however, is more than a running account of battles and engagements. His description of joining the Kentucky Home Guards in September 1861 illustrates the confused and fluid situation that existed in the border states. In traveling the few miles from his Tennessee home across the state line, he had to avoid Confederate troops and partisans; yet his father was able to visit him in camp, and he stopped at home before leaving for the front. Later, when his regiment reached the Unionist enclaves in eastern Tennessee in November 1863, Woodcock rejoiced in the hearty welcome he received:

“To day we began to find some of the people that were so long the prominent subjects of rebel tyranny–loyal East Tennesseans. All along the road they seemed to welcome us as deliverers and received us with all possible demonstrations of joy” (pp. 243-44).

Woodcock also documents and comments on many of the common views and experiences of Union soldiers: Southern political demagogues; camp life and routines; the importance of writing and receiving letters; sickness and disease (Woodcock missed Shiloh because of an almost fatal attack of measles); execution of a deserter; pil-

laging of Rebel property; emancipation and the use of black soldiers; and the 1864 election.

One of the most significant and interesting aspects of his memoir is its depiction of his changing views on slavery, blacks, and national politics. It is the unprovoked attack on a black man by his fellow soldiers that prompts Woodcock to reconsider some of his racial prejudices. “Many a time has my blood fairly boiled with rage when I have seen some of these poor fellow[s], whose only fault is a *black skin*, and the fact that they have always been *slaves*, stunned by a stone thrown by some specimen of the *noble and magnanimous* Anglo Saxon race” (p. 147).

Although his family had from time to time owned one or more slaves, Woodcock strongly denounced slaveowners. In February, 1863, he wrote:

“Yes, they are waging a most terrible and bloody war which is costing our country the lives of thousands of patriots and millions of treasure that they may enslave an unfortunate race which is decreed by heaven shall be free. But we will come victorious out of this struggle, and if our country’s history is stained with the black spot of one civil war, it will be the brighter by the removal of the blacker one of *slavery*” (p. 149).

Despite growing sympathy for blacks and hatred of slavery, Woodcock opposed the initial plans to recruit black soldiers for the Union. However, he reports this as an opposition that he no longer maintains: “I had not yet got rid of all the prejudices to the negro race that had been instilled into my mind as a consequence of living in a Southern State, and therefore I was violently opposed to having any *negro troops* in our Army” (p. 147). Unfortunately, he does not provide any explanation of when or why his views changed on this issue.

During the 1864 election campaign, Woodcock initially supported Gen. George McClellan. He spent considerable time studying the issues and writing an address on behalf of McClellan. However, after trying to find objections to re-electing President Lincoln, Woodcock finally “saw the untenability of my position” (p. 273) and tore up his address. After this complete change in his principles, he cast his ballot for Lincoln.

Marcus Woodcock was wounded in May 1864 at Pickett’s Mill, during Sherman’s Atlanta campaign. His memoir ends abruptly on June 4 with an account of his trip home to recover from his wounds. The remainder of his military service is described in a brief epilogue, written by the editor. No clear explanation is given for the nar-

rative break, although Woodcock himself clearly did not intend this to be the end of his memoir, for it has no final summation or conclusion. It ends, unceremoniously, with a comment about maggots under the blankets of the railway car in which he traveled home from the front, with no indication that this was the end of his war service.

Woodcock returned to his regiment near Atlanta in July 1864. When his three-year enlistment expired in 1864, Marcus Woodcock decided not to re-enlist. He was mustered out on December 15, 1864, and arrived at his home on Christmas Day. In March 1865 he won election to the Tennessee House of Representatives. The former southern Democrat had become a Radical Republican who supported "Parson" William G. Brownlow, the new governor of Tennessee. Soon after arriving in Nashville, Woodcock began transcribing his diaries, expanding the account into a full wartime memoir. Although most of the memoir was completed in early 1865, there is evidence that portions were written later that year.

Woodcock dabbled in politics for several years, but his varied career involved work for a Nashville newspaper, for several hardware firms, as U.S. Collector of Internal Revenue, and as an iron and steel industry executive. He also became increasingly involved in religious work, and he served for many years as treasurer of the Tennessee Baptist Convention and of the Baptist State Mission Board. He married Ellen Waters in 1868, and they had eight children. Woodcock died in February 1914 at the age of seventy-two.

Kenneth W. Noe has edited Marcus Woodcock's memoir with proper attention to accuracy and with a due concern for letting Woodcock tell his own story. For the sake of readability, Noe has divided the work into eleven chapters. His brief introductions to each chapter provide

useful context for Woodcock's account and link his personal perspective to the broader sweep of military and political events. The chapter introductions and other editorial notes are based on solid research in both secondary and primary sources. They are informative—particularly for readers who are unfamiliar with the campaigns and battles Woodcock describes—without being obtrusive.

Noe has taken to heart Gary W. Gallagher's valuable admonition "not to impose the type of pedantic scholarly apparatus that sometimes overpowers" such works (p. xxvi). His notes identify people, places, and events mentioned in Woodcock's narrative. Noe also identifies a few points at which Woodcock presented differing accounts of the same event in his memoir and in a later reminiscence, written in 1911. As with any account based on memory or on a limited knowledge of overall military strategy or tactics, Woodcock makes a number of errors in recounting events, and Noe uses notes effectively to correct his mistakes. On at least one occasion, however, Noe only partially explains a reference made by Woodcock. In a note describing the Fort Pillow massacre, which Woodcock mentions, Noe discusses Union charges that Nathan Bedford Forrest's troops "shot, burned, and even buried alive Federal prisoners" (p. 330); but he does not state that these atrocities were committed against black troops. It is a significant omission, even though Woodcock himself does not link the massacre to racial motivations.

A Southern Boy in Blue should take its place as yet another fascinating personal narrative of the Civil War. As the account of a southern Unionist from north-central Tennessee, it provides an instructive look into the experiences, thoughts, and opinions of an intelligent and articulate young man forced to choose between loyalty to his state and neighbors or to his country. It marks a valuable addition to our Civil War literature.

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