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DeWitt Boyd Jr. Stone, ed. *Wandering to Glory: Confederate Veterans Remember Evans's Brigade*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002. x + 332 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-433-6.

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Remembering Evans's Brigade

In *Wandering to Glory* DeWitt Boyd Stone, Jr., attempts to recreate the history of Nathan G. “Shanks” Evans’s Brigade by weaving together eyewitness accounts of the unit’s soldiers. He allows the soldiers to tell their own story through memoirs and diaries, rather than interpreting their words for them. Due to this approach, more interpretation from Stone might have helped mold this into a cutting-edge brigade history of one of the Confederacy’s most active units.

Evans’s Brigade, led by Shanks Evans between 1862 and 1864, included the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, Twenty-second, Twenty-third, and Twenty-sixth Regiments of South Carolina Volunteers, the Holcombe Legion, and the Macbeth Artillery. During the course of the war, more than 8,300 men served in this brigade, including nearly 10 percent of all South Carolinians who fought for the Confederacy. Often called the “Tramp Brigade,” this independent South Carolina unit was never permanently assigned to a particular army. Rather, Evans and his troops fought in both the eastern and western theaters, including the Second Battle of Manassas, South Mountain, Antietam, Kinston, Jackson, Charleston, and Petersburg. During the siege of Petersburg, the brigade achieved perhaps its most famous moment of glory at the Battle of the Crater. On the morning of July 30, 1864, it occupied Elliot’s Salient, under which Union troops had mined a tunnel filled with explosives. When Federal troops detonated the mine at 4:45 in the morning, hundreds of the South Carolina brigade “went to glory, and the remainder found themselves in one of the most glo-

rious and furious battles of the war” (pp. xvii-xviii). Always an infamous unit, due in part to the heavy-drinking and arrogant Evans, the brigade eventually had four different commanders and was subsequently known as Elliot’s and then Wallace’s Brigade.

While Stone’s objective in piecing together the history of this brigade from firsthand accounts is commendable, the book’s title is misleading. It suggests that Stone will examine how and why the brigade’s veterans chose to remember their unit twenty to thirty years after surrender. Even the preface points out the number of Evans’s men who began to record their unit’s histories and wartime experiences during the height of Confederate veterans’ reunions in the 1890s. Yet a great number of Stone’s sources are contemporary diaries, letters, and newspaper accounts of battles and troop movements. The wartime accounts contribute detailed descriptions of numerous topics, including medical care, capture, desertion rates, and troop movements.

While Stone’s work adds to our knowledge of a seldom written-about South Carolina brigade, he could have provided a much more significant contribution on the ways in which veterans’ accounts compared to wartime recordings. For example, in his section on the Battle of Crater, Stone points out that Captain Floyd (date of recollection unknown) misrepresented the stamina of the unit (pp. 196-197). Here Stone could have compared Floyd’s account with wartime testimony to examine how veterans’ recollections compared to contemporary reports.

In the preface Stone even admits that sources written at the time of the war “provide a more accurate portrayal of events than recollections that were written twenty to thirty years later for public, rather than private, audiences” (p. xii). His failure to analyze examples of this disparity within the body of the book is puzzling.

Perhaps more importantly, Stone could have elaborated on the postwar tensions in memory surrounding the Battle of the Crater. He briefly alludes to a bitter disagreement between members of Evans’s Brigade (by this time known as Elliot’s brigade) and Maj. Gen. William Mahone’s Virginians. For years after the war, Mahone’s men recounted how they had rescued the South Carolinians from defeat at the Crater by charging the enemy. In 1898, Captain John Floyd of Darlington, South Carolina, had heard all he could stand from the Virginians and wrote to the editor of a Columbia newspaper. In his letter, Floyd noted that it was “time that the survivors of the old brigade come forward and tell what they know about the battle” (p. 205). Stone, however, ignores the opportunity to connect this evidence with the proliferation of South Carolinians’ memoirs after 1898; at least nine of the twenty-two reminiscences he includes were written after Floyd’s letter. Could this letter have sparked a wave of memoirs to vindicate the brigade? Likewise, Stone could have delved into this dispute over memory among various Confederate veterans groups, an area that has yet to be fully explored by historians of the Lost Cause.

Stone’s failure to analyze his evidence more closely is indicative of another prominent shortcoming—the lack of narrative flow and context. Unfortunately, the reader is left without a clear sense of the brigade’s place within the war or of the overall trajectory of the Confederate war effort. This is due in part to the style in which Stone chooses to present the material. Except for the first and last chapters, the text is comprised of soldiers’ accounts with brief introductions by the editor. These editorial comments usually provide only minimal context—for ex-

ample listing the soldier’s name and location. Most of the time the reader is left to wonder whether the account was written during the war or in the years following surrender (although this can be determined by paging through the bibliography). Perhaps most disappointing is Stone’s failure to introduce each of the major writers at the beginning of the text so that the reader might follow this figure throughout the course of the war.

If Stone neglects to provide biographical information on the primary memoirists and diarists, he spends far too much time introducing a relatively minor actor in the text—Shanks Evans. Contrary to Stone’s claim that Evans “is not the major theme of this work,” the editor devotes both the first and last chapter to this controversial leader (p. xii). Indeed, while the general’s difficulties with his fellow officers are acknowledged, the bulk of the work does not focus on Evans. Either the first and last chapters are inappropriate or Stone should spend more space on Evans, perhaps drawing more heavily on the substantial body of the general’s papers.

Those readers seeking Stone’s interpretation of Evans’s Brigade, a detailed biography of Evans, or commentary on veterans’ memories of the unit will be sorely disappointed. Despite this critique, Stone’s work is not without merit. The firsthand accounts reveal important experiences of this South Carolina brigade told from a range of perspectives, from the poorly written letters of Lieutenant Pursley to the rich detail of William Porcher Dubose. The writings demonstrate conflicts among soldiers, citizens, and officers both during and after the war. Finally, Stone’s work sheds significant light on the battlefield, especially the horror and reaction at the Crater. While there are other works that provide better accounts of “command history,” *Wandering to Glory* contributes numerous original accounts of the battlefield and beyond that make this a useful work on a veteran South Carolina brigade.

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