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Mark K. Christ, ed. *Getting Used to Being Shot At: The Spence Family Civil War Letters.* Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002. xx + 228 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-55728-726-7.

Reviewed by Christopher A. Schnell (Assistant Editor, Papers of Abraham Lincoln)
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Cannons of War and Canons of Editing

Documentary editions come in all shapes and sizes. Some editions delve deeply into the lifelong writings of great thinkers or through years of correspondence written by our founding fathers. With greater frequency, scholars of social history encounter editions of lesser lights, the common foot soldiers of our past. Historian Mark K. Christ has carefully edited a series of letters that fall into this category.

Christ was curator of "Brothers in Arms: The Spence Family and the Civil War," an exhibit (2001-2002) at the Old State House Museum in Little Rock, Arkansas. *Getting Used to Being Shot At* complements his work on the exhibit and is an attempt to make the Spence family collection of letters, housed at the museum, available for a wider audience.

The Spence family of Arkadelphia, Clark County, Arkansas, represented upper-middle-class Arkansas society on the eve of the Civil War. Solomon Spence Sr. (proprietor of an Arkadelphia hotel, farmer, and slave owner) and his wife Frances had ten children, including daughters who were married to some of the area's wealthiest land owners. Sons Thomas F. Spence, the Clark County sheriff, and Alexander E. Spence, were heirs to the family prosperity and were both on their way to success in the growing local economy when talk of secession began.

Enthusiasts for the Southern cause from the beginning, the Spence family contributed heavily to the war effort. First to volunteer was Alexander, who joined a company that became part of the First Arkansas Infantry Regiment, C.S.A., even before the second Arkansas secession convention voted to join the South in May 1861. A few months later Thomas volunteered and joined the Second Arkansas Mounted Rifles, C.S.A. Both men rose to the rank of captain in their respective regiments and garnered the respect, and in the case of Thomas who died at Murfreesboro, deep devotion of his soldier-peers. Alexander, a veteran in Patrick R. Cleburne's division, a respected fighting unit in the Army of Tennessee, died nearly two years later at the Battle of Franklin.

Christ's edition includes Alexander's and Thomas's letters home to various family members reporting from campaigns in Virginia, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Georgia. Collectively they fought at First Manassas, Wilson's Creek, Pea Ridge, Shiloh, Murfreesboro, Chickamauga, Ringgold Gap, Atlanta Campaign, and Franklin. In an appendix, Christ includes a letter, lacking attribution, but likely written by one of the Spences' brothers-in-law, that described the notorious Poison Spring engagement in Arkansas. Christ also included letters written by other family members and friends during the war. In all the editor includes more than fifty letters, most of which were written by Alexander Spence.

The letters in this edition describe southern experiences during the Civil War. Social historians will benefit from rich content about camp life in the Confederate army, the Arkansas, Texas, and Georgia home front, and the slave experience. Military historians will find descriptions of the aforementioned battles and the thoughts of a most opinionated junior officer. Scholars of the period will find that this edition provides primary sources about what it meant to be a southerner during the Civil War, and more specifically, what the Civil War meant to this family from Arkansas.

Christ introduces the edition with a brief background of the Spence family collection, the Spence family, and Arkansas during the secession crisis. The latter section is especially helpful in setting the context for numerous references throughout the edition to the ambivalence of some of the Spences' fellow Arkansans toward secession. After the introduction, Christ divides the letters into seven chapters, each devoted to a specific military campaign and arranged chronologically. Using standard sources, Christ introduces each chapter with a description of the military campaign. The letters appear

in a different font size than the editorial introduction to each chapter. Christ annotated the edition using end-of-book endnotes and a bibliography. He also included appendices that contain Thomas's and Solomon Spence's obituaries, and a list of military parks and memorials to trace the Spences' military experiences. A minor quibble, given the generous number of illustrations throughout the volume, might be that Christ did not include a campaign map or two.

One of the canons of documentary editing, established in guides to the craft like Mary-Jo Kline's *A Guide to Documentary Editing* and Michael E. Stevens and Steven B. Burg's *Editing Historical Documents: A Handbook of Practice* establishes that an edition should have a clearly stated editorial apparatus.[1] Scholars look to the editorial apparatus to understand how the source texts (in this case the letters) became carefully transcribed and accessible scholarly resources. Scholars want to see: first, the editor's criteria for the scope of the project (what letters to include or not include); second, the editor's guidelines for annotation; and last, the editor's transcription policy. Unfortunately, Christ does not devote much space to discussing these elements of his editorial policy.

As a scope, Christ simply included all of the letters in the Spence family collection, over fifty in number. In addition to Alexander's and Thomas's correspondence, Christ included illuminating, but sometimes unrelated, letters by family friends and in-laws. The additional letters, where they do not add to the context of Alexander and Thomas at war, tend to distract the main story provided by the letters from the Spence brothers. Two of the letters from the collection were apparently transcripts, and while Christ carefully indicates each instance in an endnote, one is left to wonder about the provenance and authenticity of the two letters. Christ makes a good case for including a letter, lacking attribution (the signature was torn off), but fails to provide supporting evidence for the two transcripts in the Spence family collection.

Along with the contextual passages at the beginning of each chapter, Christ annotated "references to names, places and events" where they appeared in the letters in endnotes (p. xiv). Christ provides an extraordinary, but unfortunately distracting, amount of biographical information in his endnotes to compliment his exhaustive descriptions of the events mentioned in the letters. He is at his best when he adds information from obscure sources, namely contemporary and reminiscent descriptions of battles and events by soldiers who fought alongside or against the Spences. For example, Christ quoted from a letter by an officer describing Thomas Spence's actions at Wilson's Creek. It seems as if he has enough sources both contemporary and reminiscent, to build an edition of the community, county, or regional perspective of the war. Indeed, the number of contemporary sources (in addition to the Spence letters) as well as the rich biographical treatment for scores of name references, reminds one of *The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War* a digital project at University of Virginia.[2] If Christ took the Spence letters, along with ancillary letters from friends and in-laws, and placed them with the various aforementioned contextual sources, he would have a community or regional perspective on the war. One could envisage a project that included memorial documents, like obituaries, and ephemera regarding memory and the Civil War.

In his introduction, Christ briefly explains that, while transcribing, he generally did not correct spelling or punctuation errors in the source text. However, he did allow for exceptions to this rule to correct punctuation in certain instances "to make the letters more readable" (p. xiv). Thomas Spence rarely ended a sentence with a period nor capitalized at the beginning of a sentence and Christ added sentence-ending punctuation and capitalized to improve readability (see letter illustration, p. 49). Due to the brevity of Christ's description of his transcription policy, one is left wondering what other minor changes may have crept in while he was transcribing the documents.

These few editorial quibbles aside, Christ's carefully crafted edition is an important addition to the growing body of primary sources for the Civil War era. Stevens and Burg ask the question "Why Edit Historical Documents?" Christ answers with this volume of long-hidden letters. Were the Spence brothers obscure figures in history? Yes, but this edition provides scholars with important new resources from the era to inspire new research.

Notes

[1]. Mary-Jo Kline, *A Guide to Documentary Editing*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); and Michael E. Stevens and Steven B. Burg, *Editing Historical Documents: A Handbook of Practice* (Walnut Creek and London: AltaMira Press, 1997).

Hands-on training is available at the annual Institute for Documentary Editing, Camp Edit, held in Madison, Wisconsin and sponsored by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Wisconsin Historical Society, and University of Wisconsin.

[2]. *Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War*, Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia: http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu.

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