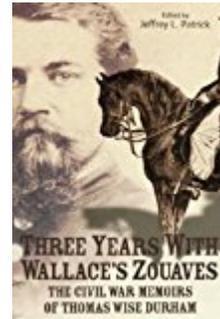




Jeffrey L. Patrick, ed. *Three Years with Wallace's Zouaves: The Civil War Memoirs of Thomas Wise Durham*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003. xxii + 198 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-86554-822-0.



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An Honest Hoosier

As the seemingly limitless supply of Civil War memoirs keep appearing or re-appearing in print, the question of importance should loom ever larger. Besides the particulars of Thomas Wise Durham's life, what can readers learn about the 11th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment, fighting in Virginia and the Western Theater of the war, and the Civil War in general? In this instance, one can actually gain most insight from the last, largest subject, at least from the point of view of an enlisted man and junior officer. Although the 11th Indiana still lacks its modern chronicler, its roles in the battles of Romney, Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Port Gibson, Champion Hill, Vicksburg, and Jackson are sufficiently covered in secondary studies (not to mention its fighting in Virginia in 1864, which is outside of the scope of this memoir). Durham's memoirs, of course, provide an "insider's" view of these battles and the performance of the 11th Indiana, a perspective not easily located in casual searches. Still, the greatest benefit of this memoir is ultimately its tone. Blunt, pugnacious, and opinionated, Durham offers little of the "everyone was brave" sentiment so often found in Civil War memoirs. Rather, Durham is quite critical and humorously cynical about such large ques-

tions as motivation, battlefield performance, patriotism, and leadership. With such a "modern" tone to the writing, the reader feels more like he is reading a history written by Mark Twain, rather than Joshua Chamberlain.

Thomas Wise Durham joined the army to get away from school and farm life. Over the lamentations of his mother and the concern of his father, the twenty-one-year old student joined the "Lagoda Blues" on April 17, 1861, which was soon absorbed by the 11th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Led by the charismatic former State Adjutant General, governor's son, and Mexican War veteran, Lewis Wallace, the regiment adopted Zouave drills and uniform, thus earning its popular name, the 11th Indiana Zouaves. To fire up his new recruits, Wallace exhorted them not only to preserve the Union, but also to erase the blot on Indiana soldiers' record in the Mexican War by fighting bravely. On their knees with hands upraised, the entire regiment promised to "remember Buena Vista" (p. 36).

The 11th Indiana Regiment was quickly shipped to Maryland, and then marched into western Virginia. It led the "dash on Romney" in mid-June 1861, routing the

Confederate forces there with no loss of life for the 11th Indiana. The remainder of its time in Virginia found the regiment marching from town to town, neither stopping the movement of General Joseph E. Johnston's Confederate forces nor participating in the Battle of Bull Run. In July the three-month regiment returned to Indianapolis for its mustering out. That ending proved to be Durham's true beginning of a short martial career. Re-enlisting for three years, he and some friends formed the nucleus of Company G of the re-organized 11th Indiana Regiment. According to Durham, an old friend got him elected 1st lieutenant of Company C of the 18th Indiana Regiment, but he declined the office. He said he was "wedded to my own regiment" and lacked the "ambition" for higher rank (p. 53). After a month of drilling, the 11th Indiana traveled by rail and water to Paducah, Kentucky.

After just eight months in the army, Durham's primary characteristics had become manifest. His quick temper had prompted him to want to shoot a fellow soldier who refused to let him rest in a baggage car (p. 40), actually raise his rifle to fire upon a "college boy" who shoved him while marching (p. 50), and start a long-term feud with Milt Clark, 2nd lieutenant of Company G (p. 54). By his own recollection, he would threaten or physically fight with at least seven different men in the next three years, not counting the numerous times he fought "Eastern" officers in the summer of 1863 when they joined the "Western" soldiers in New Orleans. Durham's anger and resentment were not only explosive but also enduring. He referred to Clark as a "chucklehead" (p. 93), pulled his revolver on a riverboat gambler (p. 94), ordered an obstinate fifty-year-old private to be bucked and gagged (p. 108), and waited a year to punch out a quartermaster who had "insulted him" (p. 167). Despite these altercations, Durham managed to avoid formal charges against him during his three years in the Army.

Other characteristics, courage and daring under fire, would serve him in good stead on several occasions. He kept his men together as they crawled towards Confederate lines as the battle of Fort Donelson in 1862 (p. 73), ordered his men into a ravine to avoid shelling from two Confederate batteries at Shiloh (p. 90), found himself alone with his sword drawn after being startled from his sleep on the march toward Fort Gibson (p. 116), and, most importantly, led his company to charge a battery at Port Gibson in 1863. They shot the gunners and their horses, and captured nearly three hundred men. Durham summarized, "The secret of my success was the boldness of the dash" (p. 119). Durham also showed spunk and de-

termination at the battle of Champion Hill in 1863, when the 11th Indiana made a slow retreat from the battle line, incurring huge losses in the process, but never losing its cohesion (p. 133). Superiors recognized his ability, securing him steady promotions from private to second lieutenant.

Durham had absolutely no patience or regard for persons he regarded as haughty, incompetent, or cowardly. He considered Milt Clark a "numbskull and a coward" after first meeting him (p. 54), and that view never changed. He hated the hospital steward from "first sight" (p. 61), and saw nothing to change his view until the steward was finally discharged in 1863 for unauthorized amputations, which "knocked me out of a chance to get even with him" (p. 139). Durham went so far as to threaten and curse the commanding officer of the 46th Indiana for immobility at a crucial moment in the battle of Champion Hill, though no further confirmation of this story was found by the editor of Durham's memoir (p. 133).

Durham had a cocky air about him, at least in the retelling of his experiences. That durable spirit carried him through bouts of cholera, typhoid fever, and sunstroke, not to mention the shrapnel in his hip at Shiloh (p. 91). It also got him through his fear of battle, "I wish to say that whenever a soldier boasts that he had no fear or dread going into battle, he is a coward and a profound liar... I would have allowed myself to be shot to pieces rather than show the white feather or shirked my duty" (p. 71). His stubbornness helped him get through "the most horrible" night of his life, February 15, 1862, when he and the men of the 11th Indiana, after building wooden bridges in ice-cold water, had to lie in the snow, all night, without blankets, overcoats, or fire, waiting to either attack or be attacked (p. 74). His toughness led him to organize a raid on Copperheads in his own county while on furlough in 1864 and to pretend to be a country bumpkin for two New York City "sharps" while visiting the city in 1864 (p. 178).

A man such as Durham always has favorites. Like many who served under Wallace, he argues passionately for his general, especially regarding the slow relief march to Shiloh that derailed Wallace's career for two years. He defends another commanding officer, Colonel McGinnis, and has nothing but praise for some of the Confederate soldiers at Vicksburg. The most tender feelings in his entire memoir are expressed in his story of the death of Cyrus Blair of his company at the battle of Champion Hill. According to Durham, young Blair "looked on me

as a father.” When dying of a bullet wound to the neck, he gave Durham “such an imploring look that it was forever stamped upon my memory.... There was no braver boy lived than he” (p. 135). The only other passage that hints of sentimentality is his description of the Union men who made the Vicksburg campaign: “with all our starvation and hardships ... there was no grumbling among the soldiers. It seemed that every soldier was determined to make the campaign a success and gladly made every sacrifice necessary to that end” (p. 151).

Other stories that might interest readers include soldiers holding informal truces at Vicksburg on the picket lines and exchanging goods and stories at night (p. 142); swimming in the Gulf of Mexico and being terrified of porpoises (p. 160); and building rope swings that could soar to one hundred feet while camped in the Piney Woods of Louisiana (p. 171).

After a fast-paced recounting of his three years in the Army, Durham abruptly ends with his resignation in June 1864. Firmly believing that fighting in the West had ended, he did not anticipate that his beloved Wal-

lace would get his old regiment ordered east to fight in the Shenandoah campaign of 1864. Consequently, readers miss out on this last critical chapter in the history of the 11th Indiana.

Credit for bringing this illuminating memoir to print should go to its able editor, Jeffrey L. Patrick. An interpretive specialist at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield, Patrick has performed yeoman’s work in providing historical context for the major battles and fascinating detail on even the most minor characters in the book.

In sum, this book should appeal to several audiences. First, scholars and collectors who will want to add another memoir to their shelves groaning with Civil War books. Secondly, to those broadly interested in the Western Theater of the Civil War, especially at the foot soldier’s eye-level. Lastly, the book would keep the attention of a casual reader of Civil War literature and even that hardest-to-please audience, the undergraduate, simply because Durham is a colorful figure whose ironic, combative tone sounds authentic in our age that celebrates “edge” and ego.

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