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Henry Hotze. Three Months in the Confederate Army

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Henry Hotze. *Three Months in the Confederate Army*. Ed. Richard Barksdale Harwell. 1952. Reprint, Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004. Pp. xxv, 83 pp \$12.00 paper. ISBN: 978-0-8173-5055-0.

As scholars commemorate the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, it remains vital to consider the words of that era's contemporaries. Zurich-born Henry Hotze's *Three Months in the Confederate Army* is a particularly noteworthy example of valuable primary source material, though one with an unusual dual purpose. On the surface, it is the chronicle of a soldier's experiences during the heady early days of the war. Digging deeper, Hotze's work represents a piece of Confederate propaganda designed to glorify southern *esprit de corps* and endear a foreign public to the South's bid for independence. Indeed, readers will find the work difficult to place along the spectrum stretching from factual account to stylized proselytism. When taken in context, however, one may appreciate the work for the interesting niche it was designed to fill at the time—a sympathetic, even chimerical, portrayal of the Confederate cause whose advocates desperately sought allies across the Atlantic.

Henry Hotze served the Confederacy briefly as a private in an Alabama company at the outbreak of hostilities. Recognized for his intellectual and organizational capacities, Hotze was tapped by the South's fledgling government to serve as a commercial agent in London, charged with the ulterior tasks of countering the North's propaganda machine in England and bringing British public opinion on the side of the Confederacy in its bid for independence. Hotze utilized notes taken during his stint in the army to construct this series of anecdotal sketches published serially in 1862 in his London-based newspaper, *The Index*.

Before delving headlong into *Three Months*, readers must be well aware of what the work is not. Hotze cautions readers not to expect “battles and sieges and hair-breadth escapes.” Instead, he recounts events associated with the early development of the Mobile Cadets and its parent regiment, the 3rd Alabama Infantry, from April to June 1861. *En route* to the front lines in Virginia, Hotze and his comrades experience the thrill of encountering doting southern belles, the “log rolling” associated with officers' elections, the onerous challenges of drill, and the solemnity of the unit's official mustering in. He continues by de-

tailoring the Confederate occupation of Norfolk in Spring 1861, social bonding in camp, and the difficulties of enduring “week after week in compulsory idleness.”

There are limitations to this work, particularly for enthusiasts of Swiss-American history who may find themselves disappointed. At first glance, one might expect the book to elicit a struggle of identity for Hotze—a Swiss-born operative in England, advocating the lifestyle and institutions of the American South. In fact, Hotze never once mentions his Swiss roots or emigration (most documentation of this has been lost to history). Apparently naturalized at an early enough age to avoid feelings of “otherness” in the highly stratified society of Mobile, Hotze’s writing is deeply engrained with notions of southern gentility and white, upper-class superiority. His decidedly elitist prose was likely to appeal to conservative, aristocratic Britons whose sympathies more naturally favored the South. For example, Hotze seemingly ignores his Swiss birth as he denigrates the German, Irish, and other European-born soldiers that pervaded Union ranks. “Instead of being the scum of every foreign clime,” boasts Hotze, “we are the representatives of the best families in the land.”

Although the late Richard Barksdale Harwell, accomplished scholar and editor of *Three Months*, should be given ample credit for discovering the value of the work and bringing it to print, the reader interested in an analysis of the propagandist’s life and cosmopolitan status in the Confederate service would be better served examining more recent scholarship on Henry Hotze. When Harwell compiled his biographical introduction for the original volume in the 1950s, he was reliant upon a handful of masters’ theses that appeared in the previous decade. As this section of the book was not updated in the 2004 reprint, it reads as rather outdated and provides only a cursory glance at Hotze’s background. For example, little is mentioned of Hotze’s lifelong work to bring scientific racism into the intellectual mainstream. For a fuller account of Hotze’s life, readers should complement Harwell’s slim volume with fresh scholarship, particularly Lonnie A. Burnett’s edited work, *Henry Hotze, Confederate Propagandist* (2008).

Three Months in the Confederate Army nonetheless occupies a fascinating place in the historical conversation. The work fits nicely into the emerging body of literature that seeks to establish a transnational context for America’s greatest crisis. Likely more useful for the Civil

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War scholar than the Swiss-American enthusiast, the account represents the innovative, but ultimately futile, lengths which one man was willing to go in securing his adopted land's dream of independence and the perpetuation of its notorious institutions.

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