

Scout and Sharpshooter, and: The Civil War

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Reminiscences of Major Silas T. Grisamore, CSA,

and: This War So Horrible: The Civil War Diary

of Hiram Smith Williams.


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 ***Berry Benson's Civil War Book: Memoirs of a Confederate Scout and Sharpshooter, and: The Civil War Reminiscences of Major Silas T. Grisamore, C.S.A., and: This War So Horrible: The Civil War Diary of Hiram Smith Williams (review)***

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

264CIVIL WAR HISTORY Slips are rare. It was Albert Sidney Johnston who died at Shiloh, not Joseph E.

Johnston (327.8). Title to Arlington may have "passed to the U.S. government" (377.44; for nonpayment of taxes) in 1864, but the same government reimbursed Lee's descendants after the Supreme Court ruled its seizure illegal in 1882. These volumes are moving contributions to our knowledge of the war from the ground up as seen by two extraordinary Yanks. Michael B. Chesson University of Massachusetts-Boston Berry Benson's *Civil War Book: Memoirs of a Confederate Scout and Sharpshooter*. Edited by Susan Williams Benson; Foreword by Herman Hattaway. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992. Pp. 203. \$19.95.) The *Civil War Reminiscences of Major Silas T. Grisamore, C.S.A.* Edited, with an introduction, by Arthur W. Bergeron, Jr. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1993. Pp. 227. \$24.95.) 7? « *War So Horrible: The Civil War Diary of Hiram Smith Williams*. Edited by Lewis N. Wynne and Robert A. Taylor (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1993. Pp. 176. \$21.95.) One of the great strengths of Civil War history is that it has been profoundly influenced and enhanced by the wartime and postwar accounts of so many participants who recorded what they did, saw, heard, and felt during the war. The writings of these officers and men, who chronicled the conflict in countless published and unpublished letters, diaries, memoirs, reminiscences, and unit histories, speak with an authority even the best historians cannot hope to match. There seems to be, fortunately, no end to the annotation and publication of such rich material nearly 130 years after the end of the war. The three books under review were written by Confederate soldiers whose personal narratives share both an immediacy to the events and personalities they describe and an uncompromising realism but whose accounts were shaped by their dissimilar wartime experiences and give us alternative perspectives on Civil War soldier life. Berry Benson's *Civil War Book*, the most conventional account of the three, is a republication of an outstanding memoir first published during the Civil War Centennial. Benson, who was a sergeant in the 1st South Carolina infantry and later a scout in a South Carolina sharpshooter battalion, took part in most of the great campaigns of the Army of Northern Virginia from First Manassas to Appomattox. His memoir was written in the 1870s with the aid of his wartime diary and correspondence, was intended as a keepsake for his descendants, and was later edited for publication by his daughter-in-law, Susan William Benson. Berry Benson's work is both truly personal, with its focus on such experiences as his capture, his life in Federal prisons, and his BOOKREVIEWS265 ultimate escape, and a fine narrative, for he tells story after remarkable story in a lively yet unromantic style. Those readers already familiar with Berry Benson will applaud this new edition of his memoir and reread it with pleasure, while those who have not yet made his acquaintance will find him an intriguing figure and his book an engaging one. While the publisher has unaccountably neglected to reprint the fine photographs included in the 1962 edition and failed to improve on the original by providing a comprehensive index, this reissue of Berry Benson's *Civil War Book* is both accessible and valuable. If Benson's memoir is representative of many Civil War personal narratives written by soldiers who served in the better-known eastern theater, who emphasize battles instead of camp life, and whose accounts feature a somewhat more informal style, the other two books under review are departures from what many students of the war have come to expect from the genre. The *Civil War Reminiscences of Major Silas T. Grisamore, C.S.A.* was, like Benson's, previously published—first in serial form in the *Weekly Thibodeaux (Louisiana) Sentinel* from 1867 to 1871, then more recently under a different title and by a different press than the present publisher—and was written with a wartime diary helping to corroborate and verify details. The similarities between Benson's and Grisamore's memoirs, however, end here. Grisamore...

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MICHAEL B. CHESON

University of Massachusetts-Boston

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Scout and Sharpshooter, and: The Civil War Reminiscences of Major Silas T. Grisamore, CSA, and: This War So Horrible: The Civil War Diary of Hiram Smith Williams, the Dionysian origin is a media mix.

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