

Tried Men and True or Union Life in Dixie

Sam Davis Elliott

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Recommended Citation

Elliott, Sam Davis (2012) "Tried Men and True or Union Life in Dixie," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 14 : Iss. 2

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.14.2.05

Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol14/iss2/4>

Review

Elliott, Sam Davis

Spring 2012

Cypert, Thomas Jefferson and Storey, Margaret M. (ed.). *Tried Men and True or Union Life in Dixie*. University of Alabama Press, \$26.00 ISBN 978-0-8173-1750-8

A New Unionist Perspective

Frequently overlooked in the history of the Confederacy is the significant unionist minority that existed in the upper South. Tennessee initially voted against secession in February, 1861. Only after Abraham Lincoln's call for volunteers after the surrender of Fort Sumter in April, 1861 did Tennessee vote, with substantial dissent, to join the Confederacy. Thomas Jefferson Cypert's memoir, *Tried Men and True, or Union Life in Dixie*, is the personal story of one Unionist in southwest Middle Tennessee who stoutly stood by the old flag.

This is a valuable memoir. Cypert was a witness to the pro-secession campaign that occurred in the first half of 1861, blaming "the *preachers*, the *politicians*, and the *press*" in "leading the people astray" (18). Indeed, he lays the heaviest blame on the clergy, because of their immense influence on the people. Cypert also recounts episodes of secessionist intimidation of unionists in the election of June, 1861, which historians have documented in other areas of the state. Cypert's home was in Wayne County, one of the few counties in Middle Tennessee to vote against secession during both elections. Supported by his unionist neighbors and friends, he continued to resist the Confederacy, first passively, and eventually under arms.

The major armies were only in Cypert's portion of Tennessee for brief intervals. The rest of the war saw cavalry raids and guerrilla actions. Raids and counter-raids occurred from the spring of 1862 to the end of the war. In the course of that interval, Cypert crossed the indistinct lines between the two sides on several occasions. Indeed, writing in 1866, Cypert is cautious to withhold the names of certain citizens of rebel-sympathizing areas who might suffer

retaliation for having aided him.

Cypert describes a number of travels and experiences. Hearing of the Federal descent down the Tennessee River in early 1862 and possessing few loyal friends, he journeyed to Ft. Henry to be thrilled by the sight of the Stars and Stripes for the first time since secession. He and his companions made their way back north riding up the river on the Federal gunboat *Tyler*. Providing an odd comparison to his Unionist stand, on another occasion Cypert went north to southern Illinois to be dumbfounded by Confederate sympathy among some of its residents. Eventually, in mid-1863 he and other Unionists in his area organized into a company of the 2nd Tennessee Mounted Infantry, and conducted anti-guerrilla operations along the Tennessee River for several months.

Cypert was almost captured by Confederate troops in May, 1863, and he in fact was captured in April, 1864. Transported by his captors south across the Tennessee River into northern Alabama, he made a daring escape after learning that he was to be murdered by his captors. Cypert's description of his escape and his movement across enemy country to return home is perhaps the most interesting and detailed part of the memoir. He was at Nashville when Major General George Thomas crushed the battered remnant of John Bell Hood's Army of Tennessee, and participated in the Unionist convention held at Nashville in early 1865 that reorganized Tennessee's civilian state government. After the Federal victory, Cypert became a state senator in Tennessee's new Radical government, and ends the memoir expressing disgust at the expressions of pro-rebel sentiment that survived the Confederate defeat.

The memoir is skillfully edited by Margaret M. Storey, who has previously published a significant study on southern Unionists. As is always helpful with a memoir, Storey fully footnotes significant persons and events, and provides a useful biographical appendix on the persons mentioned in the text. A fine introduction includes valuable biographical background on Cypert himself, and sets forth the social and economic context for Wayne County's persistent unionism. Importantly, Storey cautions the reader relative to Cypert's inaccuracies and prejudices, noting that Unionists in Cypert's area of operations oftentimes fought in as dirty a manner as Cypert claimed for his rebel adversaries.

While the story of loyalists in East Tennessee is strongly documented, accounts from Middle and West Tennessee are comparatively rare, increasing the utility of Cypert's memoir for students of upper-South unionism and the civil war within the Civil War that occurred away from the contending armies. Storey's fine editing amplifies that utility, resulting in a valuable contribution to our understanding of these themes.

Sam Davis Elliott practices law in Chattanooga, Tennessee and is the current chairman of the Tennessee Historical Commission. He is the author or editor of three books relating to Tennesseans of the Civil War era, the latest being Isham G. Harris of Tennessee: Confederate Governor and United States Senator (2010).