

The Louisiana Tigers in the Gettysburg Campaign, June-July 1863

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Review

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Mingus, Scott L. Sr. *The Louisiana Tigers in the Gettysburg Campaign, June-July 1863*. Louisiana State University Press, \$34.95 ISBN 9780807134795

A Focused Study of the Louisiana Tigers at Gettysburg

Scott L. Mingus's *The Louisiana Tigers in the Gettysburg Campaign* offers an in-depth examination of General Harry T. Hays's First Louisiana Brigade during the summer of 1863, highlighting its role both in the Confederate triumph at the second battle of Winchester and in the defeat at Gettysburg. The first brigade was better known as the Louisiana Tigers, and Mingus begins his book with a discussion of the origins of this moniker. Renowned both for their ferocity in battle and for their unruly behavior in camp and in interactions with civilians, the Louisiana Tigers earned both praise and scorn from Confederate officers. After explaining the unit's beginnings, Mingus moves to the main focus of his work—the Gettysburg campaign. In contrast to many authors who start their discussion of Gettysburg on July 1 or a few days earlier, Mingus begins his detailed description on June 13 with the battle at Winchester, where the Confederates, partly because of a skillful flanking movement by the Tigers, achieved a great victory. This starting point enables Mingus to examine the Tigers both in battle and on the march into Pennsylvania. When the Tigers entered the North, many civilians, according to the author, discovered that the Louisianans were not the dreaded, blood-thirsty bogeymen that they had feared. Mingus continues with a meticulous narrative of the Tigers on both the first and second days of Gettysburg. In particular, the Tigers' failed assault on Cemetery Hill on the evening of July 2 receives a blow-by-blow retelling. Finally, he concludes with the Confederates' retreat out of Pennsylvania in the days following the battle.

Mingus's work succeeds in many respects. First, he has extensively researched the primary sources on the Tigers, supplying views from privates to generals. He wants to let the men tell their own story, and he has accomplished

that. Second, because of his wealth of experience in mining primary sources from other units and civilians during the Gettysburg campaign, Mingus, the author of several books on Gettysburg, is able to provide many firsthand descriptions of the Louisiana Tigers from outside the brigade. Too often, unit histories only offer the perspective of the unit itself, but Mingus gives the views of comrades, enemies, and civilians thereby creating a much fuller portrait of the Louisiana Tigers. Most telling, northern civilians often expressed their surprise that the Tigers did not live up to the savage reputation that Union rumors had established for them. Third, Mingus's expertise on the battle of Gettysburg enables him to present an extensive analysis of the brigade's operations on the second day of the battle. Often marked as a key "what if" of the campaign, the brigade's early evening attack on Cemetery Hill is thoroughly depicted here. While the attack started well for the Tigers, the lack of support from other Confederates doomed it to failure. Finally, by covering the whole campaign, the author enables the reader to view not only the failed attack at Gettysburg but also the prior victory at the second battle of Winchester and the subsequent reaction to Confederate defeat during the retreat back into Virginia thus painting a more complete picture of these Louisianans.

Despite its obvious merits, *The Louisiana Tigers* possesses some key weaknesses as well. Allowing the men to speak for themselves is an asset, but in too many places, more analysis from the author could have added to the work's value. For instance, issues such as desertion, soldiers' attitudes towards their officers, the role of immigrants in the Confederacy, and the soldiers' views of the Confederacy and the Union all are recorded without enough assessment from the author. Given the opportunity to make valuable contributions regarding topics including Confederate nationalism, the "rich man's war, poor man's fight" debate, and why men fought, Mingus declines to offer his opinions. Nevertheless, Mingus has proven himself to be an expert on the Tigers' role in the Gettysburg campaign and that might be enough reason for some to pick up this book. However, for those interested in other Civil War soldiers in other campaigns, a greater analysis would be beneficial. Additionally, the book suffers from a poor use of maps. Eight maps appear in its first 98 pages leading the reader up to June 30, 1863. Inexplicably, no maps cover the brigade's movements after that. In other words, neither the first nor second day of Gettysburg receive a map. In a book that exhaustively traces the Louisiana Tigers' intricate movements during those days (more than fifty pages are devoted to the second day at Gettysburg) more maps are essential. Even people

well read on the battle of Gettysburg will have trouble following the narrative of the confusing attack on Cemetery Hill, a flaw that could have been easily fixed with a few additional maps.

Overall, these weaknesses do not undermine the value of *The Louisiana Tigers in the Gettysburg Campaign* for those interested in the Tigers, the campaign, or firsthand accounts of soldiers and civilians. While Terry Jones's *Lee's Tigers* remains my first choice as a study of the Tigers, Mingus makes it clear that his book is not intended to replace that one. Instead, his work is expected to complement Jones's by providing in-depth analysis of a single campaign using multiple firsthand accounts. He has succeeded in that effort.

John M. Sacher is an Assistant Professor and Associate Chair of History at the University of Central Florida. He is author of A Perfect War of Politics: Parties, Politicians, and Democracy in Louisiana, 1824-1861, and he is currently researching a book on Confederate conscription.