The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War, by James G. Hollandsworth, Jr.

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Craven, ordering the helmsmen to port the helm, would actually be ordering the ship to turn to starboard. It is only speculation as to why Hearn made this mistake, but the fact remains that he misquoted Craven's order.

The prospective reader should also be aware that, as the subtitle suggests, this book is not a biography of Farragut in the classic sense. The first sixty years of his life are covered in the first three chapters. His post-war years are covered in one. In fact, this book would be better described as a chronicle of Civil War operations of forces under Farragut's command. However, the book is informative and a good read. The general reader, with little understanding of the naval side of the American Civil War, will greatly benefit from this work.

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and


Almost monthly there are new scholarly works published on African American military history, and while historians can no longer claim that this is an ignored or overlooked subject, it is a subject worthy of the attention. Two recent works on the Louisiana Native Guards, published by Louisiana State University Press, add to the expanding literature on this topic and are welcome additions. James G. Hollandsworth, Jr.'s fine history of the Guards has been reissued as a paperback and is now nicely complemented by the publication of Colonel Nathan W. Daniels' diary, edited by C.P. Weaver. The first offers a well-researched overview of the unit's history and the second provides a more personal account of one of its officers. Together they cover a unique group of men in unique times and circumstances.

The Louisiana Native Guards first formed as a Confederate unit of free blacks who, shortly after the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861, rallied in New Orleans to show support for the defense of the South. Later, they claimed their decision to join the Confederates was taken because they had little choice—they were going to be drafted anyway. In any case, their career in the defense of the Confederacy was limited to drills and ceremonies. When the Union army threatened New Orleans, the militias were ordered to abandon the town, and the men of the Native Guards stayed behind.

On August 22, 1862, the Louisiana Native Guards reformed under the stars and stripes. Eventually, the Guard mustered three regiments of distinctly different cultures. The 1st Regiment consisted primarily of light skinned free blacks and mulattos. They were refined, often highly educated men, who had attained respected positions in New Orleans' antebellum multicultural society. However, the 2nd and 3rd, especially the 3rd, consisted of newly freed slaves. All but one of the line officers in the first two regiments was an African American. The third, on the other hand, had both black and white officers. Both the 1st and 3rd saw heavy combat at Port Hudson in May of 1863 attempting to charge the Confederate's fortified positions on their right flank. The result was the loss of two officers and 24 men of the 1st regiment, and 10 men in the 3rd. The 1st also had three officers and 94 wounded, and the 3rd had 38 wounded. Meanwhile, the 2nd Louisiana saw little combat during the war, except for a skirmish on April 8, 1863, when they landed briefly at East Pasacagoula, Mississippi and raided the town. In that battle, a short round from a supporting Union gunboat killed four or five men and wounded several, causing a good portion of the casualties in the battle. It also caused
much controversy, for many in the regiment thought that the round was intentionally
fired into the black unit.

C.P. Weaver makes the most of Colonel Daniels' brief diary, adding extensive and
thorough contextual footnotes in an attempt to bring him alive. Weaver's fine editing
adds much more to Daniels' story than Daniels himself puts into it. Daniels is a
complex character, and what we learn of him through Weaver's editing makes us
question the sincerity of his written words. For instance, he writes harshly of a fellow
officer charged with "conduct unbecoming" and who was dismissed for insulting an
officer of the Navy. But Daniels himself was also charged in the same incident.
Something he fails to mention in his diary. Again, Daniels writes of his wife Etta, who
died in 1858, and of his "darling" baby boy, who he left behind in Ohio. But after he
resigned the unit under confusing circumstances, there is no evidence of him
returning home to see his son. Instead, Daniels goes to Washington DC, eventually
marries a spiritualist, who bears him a daughter. They later move to New Orleans
after the war where Daniels becomes active in Republican politics until his death in
1867. Daniels was an ardent abolitionist, and wrote that it was "right...holy...and
just" that the black man be placed on "full equality." All in all, one gets the impression
that Daniels had an audience in mind when writing in the diary, and that his innermost
thoughts were confided.

Despite the claims of the dust jacket the book does not really provide a lot of insight
into the lives of officers and men of black Civil War regiments. There are glimpses,
but page for page, it is mostly about Daniels. The book does introduce another,
to my mind, more interesting character than Daniels. This officer was Major Francis E.
Dumas. Dumas was the first black staff officer in the U.S. Army. Before the war
Dumas was a successful plantation owner in Louisiana, and when the Native Guards
were formed, he "enlisted" his slaves into one of the companies of the Guards.
Dumas was a refined, cultured Louisiana gentleman who spoke three languages
besides French and English. He missed becoming a candidate for Governor of the
state by two votes during Reconstruction. Now, here is an interesting character. His
thoughts on being a slave owner and a Union officer would make intriguing
reading.

Despite my own misgivings of Daniels' character and his diary, I do recommend
C.P. Weaver's book as I also recommend Hollandsworth's effort. Both provide
valuable information about the Native Guards. Hollandsworth gives an excellent
overview of the Guards' history, and C.P. Weaver has done an extraordinary job of
editing and researching the life of Colonel Nathan Daniels.

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On the morning of June 4, 1942 three squadrons of US Navy dive bombers came
screaming out of the sky near Midway Island. Within minutes three of Japan's
first-line aircraft carriers had been reduced to flaming wreckage along with Japanese
hopes for victory in the Pacific. As one of history's most decisive battles, Midway has
been studied extensively. Naval historian Thomas Wildenberg has written his new
book, *Destined for Glory*, on a somewhat neglected topic, the development of dive
bombing and its contribution to the American victory. As he points out, the
victory at Midway was due entirely to dive bombers. Level bombing and torpedo
bombing proved absolutely useless against the Japanese ships. To be fair, the torpedo
bombers had diverted the Japanese CAP allowing the dive bombers a relatively easy
time of it, but that was hardly their intention.

By 1942 the Americans had come to see
the dive bomber as the primary offensive