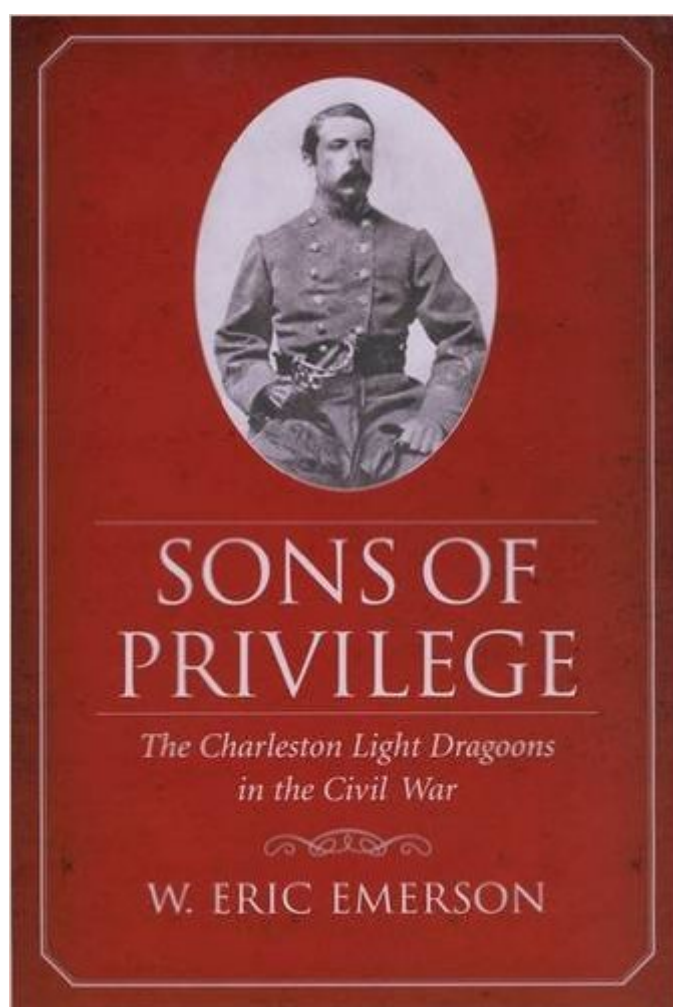


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Sons Of Privilege: The Charleston Light Dragoons In The Civil War (Civil War Sesquicentennial Edition) (Civil War Sesquicentennial Edition (University Of South Carolina Press))



Synopsis

Sons of Privilege traces the wartime experiences of a unique Confederate cavalry unit drawn together from South Carolina's most prestigious families of planters, merchants, and politicians. Examining the military exploits of the Charleston Light Dragoons, W. Eric Emerson finds that the elite status of its membership dictated the terms of the dragoons' service. For much of the war, the dragoons were stationed close to home and faced little immediate danger. As the South's resources waned, however, such deference faded, and the dragoons were thrust into the bloody combat of Virginia. Recounting the unit's 1864 baptism by fire at the Battle of Haw's Shop, Emerson suggests that the dragoons' unrealistic expectations about their military prowess led the men to fight with more bravery than discretion. Thus the unit suffered heavy losses, and by 1865 only a handful survived. Emerson tracks the return of the survivors to ruined homes and businesses, the struggle to rebuild lost fortunes, and the resurrection of exclusive social organizations that would separate them from Charleston's more prosperous newcomers. He chronicles efforts of veterans to reestablish the unit and evaluates the influence of writings by survivors on the postwar veneration of the dragoons.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Eric Emerson has taken an in-depth look at a fascinating Confederate unit. The Charleston Light Dragoons were pedigreed men on thoroughbred horses, drawn from Charleston's aristocracy and

assigned to a low-intensity theater on the South Carolina coast for most of the war - until thrown into the meatgrinder in northern Virginia in 1864. Emerson has done a tremendous amount of research and puts it to excellent use giving the reader a fine sense of the world these men lived in. It should be stressed that the CLD's were an anomalous unit; their ranks were so exclusive that men resigned officers' commissions in other units to serve as ordinary enlisted Dragoons, while others served briefly in the Dragoons as a stepping-stone to prestige in other units - a resume-builder, as it were. Emerson demonstrates very well the "privileged" status the title refers to, in the men's flaunting of military discipline and natural assumption of social superiority even over fellow Confederate cavalry. He does not, however, denigrate the noblesse-oblige which was the flip side of that privilege, and faithfully chronicles the valiant service the "Drags" would put in when faced with the horrors of late-war campaigns. It would be hard to assert the War was not a "Rich Man's Fight" as well, after any honest look at their battlefield performance and the "butcher's bill" they paid. If this book has a flaw - and you do have to hunt to find one - it is perhaps in an emphasis on "class" which occasionally protests a bit too much.

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