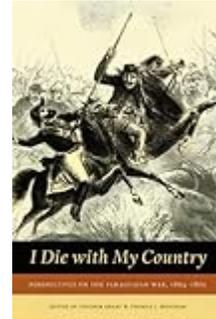


Hendrik Kraay, Thomas Whigham, eds. *I Die with My Country: Perspectives on the Paraguayan War, 1864-1870.* *Studies in War, Society and the Military.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. xi + 258 pp. \$69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-2762-0.



Reviewed by Bruce A. Castleman (Department of History, San Diego State University)

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A Crucible of South American Nationalism?

In 1865, Paraguayan President Francisco Solano Lopez attempted to meddle in Uruguayan politics and ended up at war against Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. The conflict is known variously as the War of the Triple Alliance or the Paraguayan War. The roots of the conflict are many, but principal among them stand Paraguayan concern about Brazilian expansionism, Paraguay's desire to be an important political force in the River Plate region, and the rivalries between Argentina and Brazil in Uruguayan politics. The Paraguayan War may be little known outside of Latin America (or Latin Americanist academic circles), but it was the largest international war in nineteenth-century Latin America. This volume grew out of a panel at the 2001 conference of the Society of Military History.

In the first chapter, editors Kraay and Whigham provide a brief, excellent summary of the historical background and context of the Paraguayan War. They also establish a historiographical context in which to set each of the essays that follows.

Jerry W. Cooney's chapter examines economy and manpower on the Paraguayan side. President Francisco

Solano Lopez fancied himself a military genius and so took personal command at the battlefield. It fell to Vice President Domingo Suarez to handle administrative responsibilities and run the country during most of the war years. Paraguay's economy was tightly controlled by the state which also maintained an army with reasonably effective infantry and cavalry branches. The artillery was a hodgepodge of old and new pieces, and most small arms were obsolescent, muzzle-loading flintlocks. Paraguay's weak industrial base was capable of supporting the old muzzle-loaders which were still adequate in a defensive role, and because the country's geographic position isolated it from delivery of any state-of-the-art weapons it may have purchased abroad, the situation was as good as it could be. This is not to say that the situation was good, because both sides had great difficulty supplying forces along tenuous lines of communication to the battlefield throughout the war. Paraguay's greatest vulnerability was its limited population resources. For Paraguay, this was a war of total mobilization. As early as December 1864, fully half of military-eligible Paraguayan males had been conscripted, and in early 1867, conscription was extended to males between thirteen and sixteen years of

age. Women were conscripted for all types of agricultural work and also to work in Paraguay's nascent industries. Younger children performed corvee labor. For that effort, Cooney contends, Paraguay managed to hold off the allies for two years before the fall of Humaitá—the fortress on the Paraguay River protecting Asunción from invasion—led to the evacuation of the Paraguayan capital. But by that time, the casualties had forced pre-pubescent boys and women to join the Paraguayan colors under arms.

Given that, Cooney argues that Paraguay should have negotiated a peace as early as December 1865. No less than Sebastopol, Vicksburg, and the 1870 siege of Paris, the siege of Humaitá shows the impact of the industrial revolution on nineteenth-century warfare. Its valiant efforts futile, Paraguay was eventually overwhelmed by the combined forces of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay.

Barbara Potthast analyzes the effect of the war on Paraguayan women. She considers their motivation for participating in the war effort, their importance to the Paraguayan economy, and the impact of the war on gender relations in Paraguay after the war. Even before the war, women performed more than half of the subsistence agriculture, and the fraction rose much higher as the war continued. Camp followers did most of the cooking and cleaning at the front, and families were required to send one daughter to the front to serve as nurses. Elite women held “spontaneous” parties and balls to support the war effort, donating jewelry and other valuables, but some records suggest that, especially as the war went on, they were careful to preserve their most prized baubles for themselves. Legends about existence of organized combat units of women continue to be popular in Paraguay, but Potthast states that propaganda to the contrary, no evidence of such units has been found.

Gender issues influenced more than simply the practical participation of women. Paraguayan government propaganda motivated women of all classes with the threat of rape by black Brazilian soldiers. One historian has argued that women were more courageous and outspoken in their criticism of the war, but Potthast suggests that women were more likely to be formally accused of treason because men could be easily transferred to a post where death almost certainly awaited them. Convicted women were sent to remote labor camps and suffered an identical fate. Revisions and clarifications aside, women undeniably bore a large brunt of the war effort in all areas, even including filling bureaucratic posts in the government. Even though war casualties reduced the pop-

ulation to four females for each male, few substantive changes to women's position resulted from the war. Politics did remain contested, but as Potthast notes, neither men nor women had much in the way of political rights in Paraguay at all. After the war's end, pre-war gender subordination remained in place.

Besides co-editing the book, Hendrik Kraay also contributes the fourth essay, which analyzes the effects of the war on racial politics in the diverse society of nineteenth-century Brazil. Black men predominated in the ranks and files sent to fight against Paraguay, and the enemy government never missed an opportunity to portray Brazilian soldiers as monkeys and rapists who threatened the virtue of Paraguayan women. Troops seemed little more than cannon fodder, and one school of historical thought contends that the imperial government's war policy amounted to genocide.

Kraay contends that the reality is more complex. All-black companies of Zuavos and Couracas were recruited in Salvador and Recife, cities in northeast Brazil which had been the center of sugar cane production for centuries. Kraay finds that like the rest of the Brazilian Army, these troops were a mix of volunteers and draftees. In many cases the volunteers sought to escape slavery, to the chagrin of their masters. By 1867, the Brazilian government began to form Sapador companies by purchasing slaves and then emancipating them. The Brazilian First Corps commander considered these independent companies problematic in an army organized around battalions, and so tended to use black companies as service troops. The Second Corps commander frequently dissolved black units when they reported for duty, and re-integrated the soldiers as combat replacements. That process had not been completed, however, when one black Zuavo unit led a charge and carried the day at the battle of Curuzu in September, 1866. Despite this heroism, however, black veterans returned to the poor population of Brazil after the war and black soldiers were once again excluded from service in the Brazilian Army, as they had first been in 1831. When wartime urgency no longer existed, Brazil abandoned the short-term measure of Afro-Brazilian recruitment. Kraay finds that as a result, no long-term changes in Brazilian racial and social structure resulted from the Paraguayan War.

Renato Lemos provides a look at Benjamin Constant Botelho de Magalhães, who became a leading apostle of positivism and Social Darwinism in South America. Rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel, Benjamin Constant (as he was generally known) served first as a quarter-

master officer, and then as an engineer in the Brazilian Army. Lemos uses Benjamin Constant's personal letters from the front as a window on the war, one that provides a much less laudatory view than that of the imperial government. Never a fervent patriot, Benjamin Constant was an ambitious officer who sharply criticized his superiors from the safety of private correspondence. He complained bitterly about the execrable medical service of his own army. Echoing a frequent complaint among Brazilians, Benjamin Constant complained about their Argentine allies, especially that Brazilian troops had to play a major role in putting down a rebellion in Corrientes province against the Buenos Aires government. He felt that Marshal Caxias, the overall Brazilian commander, personally exemplified everything that was wrong with Brazilian society at the time. A serious rivalry existed at the time between combat officers and staff officers of the Brazilian Army. Many of the former came from the ranks and had little formal education, viewing scientifically educated officers such as Benjamin Constant more as bureaucrats than as soldiers. Junior officers in all areas railed against the perceived incompetence of their seniors. (This reviewer contends that for centuries, such attitudes have been common among armed forces around the world. The Brazilian Army was hardly unique in this regard.) Benjamin Constant disdained uneducated people as easily manipulated. Lemos concludes that his war experience intensified Benjamin Constant's positivist attitudes and his admiration of August Comte, and contributed in no small way to Constant's major role in the eventual overthrow of the imperial regime that created the Paraguayan fiasco.

Roger Kittleson discusses the impact of the Paraguayan War on the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. This southernmost state is geographically isolated from the rest of Brazil, and its economy centered on livestock. Its proximity to the war zone of course meant that Rio Grande do Sul would feel a different impact than other parts of Brazil. Paraguayan forces actually invaded it. Rio Grande do Sul contributed 33,000 troops to the Brazilian war effort, more than any other state. The population of Rio Grande do Sul was then 20 percent slave, and the threat of rebellion was a real one. Paraguay kidnapped slaves from ranches and recruited runaways as soldiers in its army. Brazilian Army recruiters did not carefully examine manumission documents provided by prospective recruits. Postwar criminal records suggest that war veterans showed an independence of spirit that chagrined the social elite of the state. Kittleson concludes that despite these various pressures, the social order of

Rio Grande do Sul remained fundamentally unchanged by the war.

Juan Manuel Casal looks at Uruguay's war experience. Uruguay is also known as the Banda Oriental (Eastern Shore) of the Rio de la Plata, and Uruguayans are often referred to as "Orientals." Casal outlines the all-important political struggle between Blancos (Whites) and Colorados (Reds) that dominated Uruguayan politics before and long after the Paraguayan War, and how it triggered the conflict itself. It was a Colorado war, and popular among that party only as long as the threat of Paraguayan assistance to the Blancos remained serious. After the defeat of the Paraguayan advances south along the Uruguay River, sentiment for a complete pullout of Uruguayan troops emerged among the Colorados. The Montevideo government proved unwilling to withdraw formally from its alliance with Argentina and Brazil, but it also provided no funding or logistic support for its Oriental Division once it crossed into Argentina. In Argentina, the division replaced its losses with conscripted Paraguayan prisoners of war. By the end of the conflict, most of the soldiers under Uruguayan colors in its campaign in Paraguay were Paraguayans themselves. Casal provides a campaign history of the Oriental Division, the only contributor that gets into such details of military history. Casal concludes that the Uruguayan military made no substantial gains as a result of the war, save for becoming the Colorado institution that it would remain long after its Blanco sympathizers were dismissed. The Paraguayan War did solidify the Colorado grip on political power that remained solid against Blanco opposition throughout the remainder of the century.

Ariel de la Fuente analyzes Argentina's interior province of La Rioja. Long a bastion of resistance to centralized power in Buenos Aires, La Rioja became a center of opposition to service against Paraguay. The rural population of the provinces on Argentina's Chilean frontier saw the war not as an exercise in nationalist patriotism, but rather as a continuation of the internal struggles between liberal Unitarios and more conservative Federalists. Unitarios envisioned a modern nation-state with power centered in Buenos Aires, whereas Federalists sought to maintain the seigneurial structures of the provinces that had been in place since colonial times. Conscription of the gaucho population of La Rioja removed from the subsistence economy about one-eighth of the male population. One rebellion against conscription liberated 500 draftees from a train, which then joined a guerrilla unit (*montonera*) that attempted to overthrow the Unitario provincial government. A later rebellion

spread from La Rioja to other western provinces. Both rebellions were put down by the Buenos Aires government, but together they showcase lower-class resistance to state-formation processes. De la Fuente also notes that during the Paraguayan War, Spain attempted to flex its muscle against Peru, which, along with Chile, Bolivia, and Ecuador, complained that Argentina and Brazil should not waste resources fighting an American sister nation when a European power threatened them all.

The late Miguel Angel Cuarterolo examines imagery of the war in photographs, lithographs, and other illustration media. A journalist who was an expert in the history of photography, Cuarterolo provides examples of photographs from the wet collodial process that appeared in newspapers in Argentina and Brazil. Many were taken by George Bate, an Irish-born American who emigrated to Montevideo. Brazil sent an official photographer to document its forces. Unfortunately, no photographers covered the Paraguayan side. Sketch artists and lithographers also illustrated the conflict. Some were reporters, and quite a few were active soldiers. The photographs were published in books. Lithographs also appeared in books, but one newspaper in Argentina and three in Brazil also could print lithographs at that time. Cuarterolo notes that the photographic record of the Paraguayan War only received widespread attention after about 1980. Prior to then, books contained mostly lithographs.

In the final essay, Thomas Whigham ties together the earlier chapters and fills some of the gaps in coverage of the political history of Argentina and Brazil. He concludes that the war destroyed Paraguay and allowed (Unitario) Argentina to assert regional hegemony. Argentine nationalism coalesced around the victory over Paraguay. Uruguay emerged less changed than the other belligerents, as the Blanco vs. Colorado politics continued in the pre-war vein. Whigham concludes that the war's effects on Brazil are difficult to assess. He argues that slavery was already on its way to extinction after the ending of the slave trade in 1850, and so the pressures of army recruitment of slaves on Brazil's peculiar institution were not decisive in the march toward abolition. The Brazilian Army emerged as an important political force, and created a nationalist spirit imbued with positivist ideas of order and progress. Within a year of abolition and the overthrow of the monarchy, the landed oligarchies had reasserted their power.

Reviewers of edited volumes often remark that they

find the essays "uneven." The essays in *I Die with my Country* are different from each other, but I found each one to be interesting, informative, and based on solid research. Kraay and Whigham are to be commended for bring them together into such a coherent whole. This broth did not suffer from too many cooks. What criticisms I do have are mostly small-scale. First, I would like to have seen more maps than the three that were provided. I was frustrated that some place names do not appear on any of the maps, and I am a specialist in Latin America. I suspect that readers with other specialties would be even more frustrated. Second is the absence of a bibliography. I reviewed another book in this series which suffered from the same deficiency, and so I suspect the blame belongs with the University of Nebraska Press, and not with the book's editors. Third, a timeline in an appendix would also have been useful, such as the one in Francisco Doratioto's *Maldita Guerra*.^[1]

There are some larger criticisms possible. Some military historians may deplore the absence of a general campaign history and wish that other contributors had paralleled Juan Manuel Casal's description of the Oriental Division. In addition, some of the larger provinces are curiously neglected. The essays deal with war attitudes in La Rioja, Rio Grande do Sul, and Bahia, but nowhere here does the reader get analyses of dominant provinces such as Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, or Minas Gerais. Therefore, if one were to read only a single book about the Paraguayan War, perhaps Doratioto or Whigham's two-volume set might better serve.^[2] But make no mistake, *I Die with my Country* is a notable contribution to the field of Latin American history and of warfare.

Notes

[1]. Francisco Doratioto, *Maldita guerra: Nova historia da Guerra do Paraguai* (Sao Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2002).

[2]. Thomas L. Whigham, *The Paraguayan War*, vol. 1, *Causes and Conflicts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); vol. 2 forthcoming.

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