

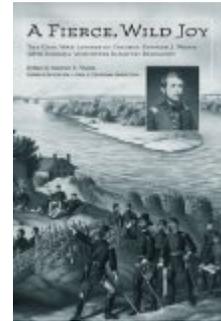
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Stephen E. Towne, ed. *"A Fierce, Wild Joy": The Civil War Letters of Colonel Edward J. Wood, 48th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007. xxviii + 296 pp. \$38.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57233-599-8.

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A Window on the Civil War

"This war is for the purification and sanctification of the nation," noted Edward Jesup Wood in May 1864. Wood commanded the 48th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment during the Civil War. In ninety letters edited by Stephen E. Towne in *"A Fierce, Wild Joy": The Civil War Letters of Colonel Edward J. Wood, 48th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment*, Wood chronicled his wartime experience to his wife, Jane Augusta Williams Wood. One appendix includes two letters from Wood published in the *Goshen Democrat* and the (Republican) *Goshen Times*; in a second appendix, a letter from Wood's half-brother, Robert Corley, highlights the wartime conflict between loyalty to nation and family. *"A Fierce, Wild Joy"* is a volume in the Voices of the Civil War series, edited by Peter S. Carmichael.

The letters edited in this volume now constitute the Edward Jesup Wood Papers (M 0794 and OMB 94) at the Indiana Historical Society in Indianapolis. The collection guide is accessible at http://www.indianahistory.org/library/manuscripts/collection_guides/m0794.html. Other Wood documents beyond the wartime letters from Edward to Jane Wood remain in the possession of a family descendant. No wartime letters from Jane to Edward Wood survive. Victorian women often asked their correspondents to destroy their letters, but we do not know that Jane Wood made such a request. Many Civil War soldiers' letters to correspondents on the home front survive, but few letters from such correspondents to soldiers in the field survive; most were casualties

of the hazards of camp and battle.

Stephen E. Towne has transcribed Wood's letters literally (in accordance with the best documentary editing practice), retaining the spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations of the original manuscripts, which are no hindrance to modern readers. Notes concisely identify personal and place names and literary allusions. Excellent maps supplement the text. Towne has grouped the letters into chapters, each with an introductory note that provides background and context.

Edward Wood was born in Florida. His father died in New York City when Wood was six years old. His mother sent him and his brother to live in New York with their paternal grandmother. The grandmother arranged for Wood's excellent education but also saw to it that he rarely if ever saw his mother again. An 1853 graduate of Dartmouth College, Wood applied his training in civil engineering by supervising construction of the Michigan Southern and Northern Indiana Railroad. His work on the railroad led him to settle in Goshen, Indiana, where he became an active Republican partisan. For John C. Frémont's 1856 presidential campaign, Wood wrote a paraphrase of the folksong "Jordan is a Hard Road to Travel," which Daniel Decatur Emmett later popularized in another paraphrase, the wartime song "Richmond is a Hard Road to Travel."

Wood read law with a local attorney, began to practice law in Goshen, and served as surveyor of Elkhart

County. In 1859 he married Jane Augusta Williams of Syracuse, New York. The first wave of Civil War enlistments began just before Edward and Jane Wood's first child, Marie Gautier Wood, was born in May 1861. But by September Edward Wood was raising a company, recruited in Goshen, of the 48th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment, commanded by Norman Eddy, a South Bend attorney and former Democratic congressman. The regimental and national flags that were presented to the 48th Regiment in 1861 are in the Battle Flag Collection of the Indiana War Memorial Museum in Indianapolis (<http://www.in.gov/iwm/2313.htm>).

Like most of his contemporaries, Wood anticipated a short war. Before the battle of Shiloh in April 1862, he thought it "will be decisive of the contest in the section and regiments like ours not in the field will probably be mustered out of the service—All recruiting is stopped and the administration doubtless think they have men enough in the field to crush the rebellion" (p. 21). But he later described Shiloh as "the late disastrous battle" (p. 24).

The 48th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment received its baptism of fire at Iuka, Mississippi, when Wood was on duty away from the regiment. The regiment broke, suffered friendly fire casualties, then recovered and drove the Confederates back. Wood reported "a fierce wild joy" (p. 63; from which the title of the volume) pursuing Confederates after the battle of Corinth, Mississippi. For lack of reliable food supplies from contractors/sutlers, the troops foraged and stole food from Southern farms—in Wood's view they were carrying the war to Southern civilians: "certainly, we ought to eat of the substance of the enemy, and cripple him in resources in every way possible," concluded Wood (pp. 51-52).

The 48th Regiment entered the war with 950 troops, but by August 1862 Wood noted that it "now musters only about 400 fit for duty." His company, originally 103 troops, was by then reduced to 83. During the Vicksburg Campaign in May 1863, the 48th Regiment crossed the Mississippi River with 420, lost 141, and by the end of the month had only 230 fit for duty (pp. 57, 99).

Also during that month, Wood assumed command of the regiment at age twenty-nine. He visited his wife and daughter in Syracuse in September, then presented to Indiana governor Oliver P. Morton a plan that Wood called the "Veteran Volunteer arrangement" (p. 151). Under that plan—ultimately adopted by Indiana and the federal government—veteran volunteer regiments would return to their states on recruiting duty to fill their depleted

ranks. On the way back to rejoin his unit, Wood visited the recently opened Missouri Botanical Garden in Saint Louis.

The 48th Regiment fought at Missionary Ridge and participated in the relief of Chattanooga, Tennessee, which Wood described as "the grandest military movement of the war" (p. 131). In November 1863 he confided to his wife, "I think I see signs of the beginning of the end" (p. 137). In accordance with his retention plan, after three-fourths of his regiment reenlisted, Wood accompanied his unit home to Indiana for recruiting duty in February 1864—gaining 160 recruits—and was briefly reunited with his family.

Confronted with irregular guerilla warfare in Georgia and the devastation of his mother's property, Wood confessed to mixed feelings: "I feel there is no other way to subdue these rebels, but by extermination & depopulation, but when this theory runs into practice against Mother & birthplace, natural ties claim to be heard on the defence, and the conflict is no easy one" (p. 209). During Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's March through Georgia, Wood was appalled by the ignorance of the population: "It might seem that there was some hope for a Union feeling among these poorer people, that would inure in time to our great advantage, but their ignorance is so profound, & so hopeless, that there is very little ground for encouragement. Through a great portion of the State which we traversed, not one family in ten can read or write" (pp. 217-218).

Wood was mustered out of the army in January 1865, and the following month he was in Washington, D.C.. Edward and Jane Wood were Easterners with Eastern tastes—they subscribed to *Harper's* and the *Atlantic* magazines. His college education, law practice, and leadership experience in the army all marked Wood as part of the postwar elite. Despite these advantages, he had trouble landing a job commensurate with his qualifications. His wartime correspondence had expressed dissatisfaction with small-town life in Goshen and his desire to relocate from there to New York City or Chicago. But his inquiries in those cities produced no results, and he reluctantly returned with his family to Goshen. There he reestablished his law practice and worked as a soldiers' claims agent.

In peacetime, Wood had an alcohol problem, which his political enemies quickly cited against him. Democrats also called Wood—an ideologically committed abolitionist—a "Negro Suffrage Candidate" and a "Negro Equality Candidate." Unfazed by the Democratic attacks

against him, his constituents elected Wood as clerk of the Elkhart Circuit Court. But in the 1868 Republican county convention, he was defeated for renomination as clerk. Also in that year, a son—Clarence Williams Wood—was born to Jane and Edward Wood. In 1870 Edward Wood was appointed judge of the Court of Common Pleas for the district including Elkhart, Saint Joseph, La Porte, and Marshall Counties. He fulfilled his duties vigorously but was defeated in the 1872 election. The following year he traveled to Jackson, Michigan, where he became ill in his hotel room. A physician diagnosed delirium tremens

(which is induced by excessive and prolonged consumption of alcohol). Sadly, on April 9, 1873, Wood shot himself with a revolver, an apparent suicide. Jane Wood returned with her children to Syracuse, where she died in 1892.

“*A Fierce, Wild Joy*” sheds light on not only Edward Wood the man but also the Civil War in its state, regional, and national aspects. It is a commendable and well-edited resource for researchers and public and academic libraries with collections on the subject of the Civil War.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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