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Julie A. Doyle, John David Smith, Richard M. McMurry, eds. *This Wilderness of War: The Civil War Letters of George W. Squier, Hoosier Volunteer.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998. xxx + 130 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57233-006-1.

Reviewed by Kim Allen Scott (Special Collections Librarian, Montana State University, Bozeman)

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One of the chief benefits of the Civil War's popularity among general readers is the constant stream of books which appear every week from the publishing industry. It has been said with little exaggeration that any book on Lincoln will eventually find a publisher, and in my opinion that assertion can be expanded to include any work dealing with the Civil War. A boon for historians is the fact that this avalanche of books includes many primary sources which otherwise would only be available to those few visitors of the repositories holding the original manuscripts. With their Voices of the Civil War series, the University of Tennessee Press has committed themselves to furthering the laudable goal of placing first-person accounts into the hands of both buffs and scholars, and with this commitment will be a sum greater than the whole of its parts. The availability of obscure eyewitness reminiscences will be used by historians to further their own investigations of themes which transcend any one individual's experiences, and the value of a particular person's narrative will be enhanced more by its contribution to broader inquiries than the documentation of the subject's own record. This is certainly the case in *This Wilderness of War* where the voice of a particularly articulate Indiana soldier has been presented to an audience which will likely include those who will find the subject at hand less interesting as an individual than as a representative of the army in which he served.

George W. Squier was a thirty-year-old farmer and merchant who enlisted in the 44th Indiana Volunteers in the fall of 1861. He began his military career as a corporal, but, through his own good efforts and attrition in the regiment, he held a commission as a captain by war's end. Squire took part in many engagements in the war's western theater, including Fort Donaldson, Shiloh, Murfreesboro, and Chickamauga, and wrote home to his wife regularly. He reenlisted with the regiment when his initial term expired and stayed with the army until discharged in September 1865, long after his initial enthusiasm for the war faded.

As a well documented example, Squier stands as almost an ideal prototype for Bell Irwin Wiley's *Life of Billy Yank*, an individual who in many ways seems to have been the typical Union soldier. A religious man who tried to avoid the pitfalls of drink and cursing, he worried as much about home life and events as he did his own encounters with violence and temptation. Squier wrote clearly and concisely about army life, describing the carnage he witnessed and the ailments he suffered. Intensely loyal and patriotic at the beginning of the conflict, his attitudes changed over time as the monotony of camp life, the diseases wrought by exposure, and the terrible results of combat took their toll. Like many who wore the blue, Squier did not appear overly solicitous of black people's plight but he clearly recognized slavery as the root cause of the rebellion and, as a result, supported emancipation. As time passed, however, his lukewarm abolitionist sentiments transformed into outright hostility towards black suffrage, a transformation that was shared by so many of his comrades. What makes Squier different is the fact that he expressed himself on the issue with such clarity.

Squier's description of combat is probably the most interesting part of this collection of letters. He wrote at great length, and in great detail, about his experiences at Murfreesboro in three consecutive letters home. In his serialized essay, Squier switched periodically from present to past tense, which gives the reader a real sense of the immediacy of a soldier's existence. Since Squier had only his own limited perspective from which to relate the battle, the editors have clarified and corrected many of his statements with maps and explanations, but nothing changes the genuineness of the narrative. Squire saw combat up close and personal, and had no diffi-

culty in relating that encounter in graphic detail to his wife. His description of Shiloh was not as detailed as the Murfreesboro account, and the battle of Chickamauga he dismissed as unworthy to relate. However, in his explanation of skipping the details of the latter, Squier used a very significant phrase: "they are so very similar to that of Stone River only mooore so…." The incidents of combat had become almost generic, with the horror of one engagement differing from another only in intensity.

The layout of this book is particularly attractive for researchers. The letters are chronologically arranged in chapters divisions by year. Instead of traditional footnotes or endnotes, the publishers have placed the endnotes for each individual letter immediately following the letter. This allows a reader to peruse Squier's prose without the annoyance of footnotes crowding the text on an individual page, but spared the laborious process of going to all the way to the back of the volume to match chapter divisions with note numbers for elaboration on an interesting point. The inclusion of maps and pertinent photographs also compliment the text and further the goal of clarification.

Overall, *This Wilderness of War* is not a particularly unique Civil War record, but its main value for research is ironically found in its typicality. George W. Squier comes across in his letters home as an ordinary soldier with an extraordinary gift for articulation on matters military, political, social, and military. His eye for detail in combat, his willingness to express his evolving political views, and his keen observations on matters at home and at the front are a treasure for historians seeking anecdotal verification for broader thematic inquiries. As another primary source for those studying the Union soldier and his experiences, Squier's letters are a valuable addition to an ever-growing stockpile of information.

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