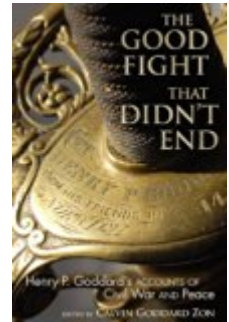


Henry P. Goddard. *The Good Fight That Didn't End: Henry P. Goddard's Accounts of Civil War and Peace.* Edited by Calvin Goddard Zon. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008. 359 pp. \$44.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-57003-772-6.



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As we approach the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, it is likely that a large number of Civil War books will be published, and among these will doubtless be memoirs or collections of letters of participants--“personal narratives” as they are categorized. In varying degrees of detail and with a range of literary skill, these will do what previous narratives have done, namely, flesh out in detail the mixture of boredom, discomfort, injustice, terror, and frustration that was the lot of the average soldier or junior officer. Sprinkled among this litany of discomfort will be a few short accounts of military action, during which the author learned more about himself, his fellow man, and the nature of existence than in the rest of his life combined. This information will be conveyed to the reader sometimes successfully, sometimes less so depending on the literary skills of the author as well as his valor, courage, luck, and fate. Surely, a Civil War scholar is wont to think, I have read enough personal narratives for one lifetime. But no--despite the well-trod turf, there is always something new. The particularity of the human

voice recounting human experience is impossible to resist. And as with all those faces peering out at us from faded daguerreotypes, we are drawn in to scour the evidence as we feel some inexplicable tug of humanity transcending the dust of ages.

In the case of the book under review, *The Good Fight That Didn't End*, its author, Henry P. Goddard, was a journalist in civilian life both before and after the Civil War. He wrote with an eye for detail, a nice turn of phrase, and considerable thought for his reader. A Connecticut native (Harriet Beecher Stowe was a neighbor and friend), Goddard was a Republican but not a radical Republican. He had a short unsuccessful stint in the cavalry (Kilpatrick's Cavalry), but most of the narrative concerns his service with the 14th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry. There is little in the form of serious “action.” Fredericksburg was the high point of Goddard's war, where he was credited with saving the life of his commanding officer. While Goddard was clearly selfless and coolheaded under fire, his “moment” is hardly the stuff of

cinema. Military history buffs and battle enthusiasts take note, there is little in these pages for you.

What you will get, however, is insight into how a Union soldier thought and felt over the course of the war. Goddard instructed his mother: "Please keep my interesting letters from the 14th, as they will serve to form a connected history of my small part in the great drama of the 19th century" (p. 34). By drama he did not mean that he sat in on the meetings of Abraham Lincoln and his generals, or rode with J. E. B. Stuart, George Custer, or even John Bell Hood. Much of what he wrote is tedium: the travails associated with the pettiness of commanding officers; the seemingly fruitless effort to train men; the physical discomfort of soldiering; and the efforts made to relieve that discomfort whether it was lice, poor food, lost clothing, or other misfortunes. His wounding and particularly his delayed recovery are the subject of many letters. Because of this slow recovery, Goddard served on staff assignments and his letters about these positions offer the reader some insight into the rear of the army and the myriad complications attendant on maintaining soldiers in the field. Some wonderful descriptions of meals, female visitors to winter quarters, and how the troops entertained themselves give a strong atmospheric feel for authentic army life.

Goddard was an appealing man, a likable straight arrow. He was a believer and made clear the role of faith in his life and his preparation for the demands of soldiering. His devotion to his family is evident in every letter. He sang his own praises when possible but he was not an egotistical man. As such, he makes a good witness to history.

Fully one-third of the book is devoted to Goddard's postwar career as a journalist in Baltimore. Expressed articulately and fulsomely, Goddard's writing provides us with valuable insight into some of the more elusive nuances of Northern thought. Goddard's postwar life in Baltimore permitted him to fully appreciate the Southern point

of view. As a commentator on Reconstruction and the subsequent redemption of the Southern States (specifically Maryland), Goddard offered an interesting perspective. He comes across as an honest, fair-minded man, struggling to be just to all, towing a moderate line. And from these letters and essays, it might be possible to chart the slow creep of failed compromise and rationalization that characterized Northern collaboration in the failure of Reconstruction.

If there is a criticism of the book, it lies with some of the editorial decisions. The editor, Calvin Goddard Zon, is the great-grandson of the author, and in his introduction, he makes clear that within the family these letters were cherished and preserved, and that he felt an almost sacred duty on inheriting them. Clearly publishing this book has been an act of filial devotion. That said, the corollary is that Zon is not a Civil War scholar and that shows at times, although not grievously. More troubling are other basic editorial choices. Zon tries to provide context for the letters by quoting large chunks of the 14th Connecticut's regimental history to fill us in on the action of the regiment. In the process we lose contact with Goddard and the sense of a "connected history" that Goddard had believed his letters made. There are further breaks when Zon uses Goddard's later reminiscences to provide context or background for the letters. It is hard to know what better solution might have been found, but these breaks are almost as disruptive as they are helpful.

The final third of the book, part 3, is called "Fighting for Principle Before and After the War." Nonetheless, the section concerns itself only with the postwar period. It is arranged by topic—the death of Lincoln, race relations, reconciliation between soldiers, etc. It is disconcerting to jump back and forth between the 1870s and the early 1900s. It might have been better to have kept this section chronological even if it meant interspersing the different topics. It would certainly have helped the reader see how Goddard's thinking

changed over time. One of the most valuable contributions this book potentially makes is to provide scholars with an articulate, thoughtful, reasonable man's perspective on one of the most turbulent and troubling periods of American politics. But by clustering material by topic rather than chronologically, scholars will have to work a little harder to make use of that contribution.

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