

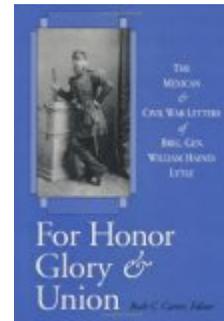
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Ruth C. Carter, ed. *For Honor Glory & Union: The Mexican & Civil War Letters of Brig. Gen William Haines Lytle*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999. xiv + 244 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2108-6.

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## For Honor, Glory, and Union

William Haines Lytle is sometimes referred to as the poet-general of the Civil War. This skillfully edited book constitutes his Mexican and Civil War letters. The editor, Ruth C. Carter, is a native of Cincinnati, Ohio who worked as manuscript curator at the Cincinnati Historical Society, where the letters are housed. Carter is now head of the Archives Service Center and the Curator of Historical Collections at the University of Pittsburgh Library, the institution where she earned a Ph.D. in history.

Will Lytle was more than a poet and soldier. He was an orator, a politician, and an avid horseman and hunter. Born into a prominent Ohio family, Lytle entered Cincinnati College in 1840 at the age of thirteen. He later studied law and established a law practice in his home town. By the time he reached adulthood, he had grieved the deaths of parents, a sibling, and other family members. Despite a strong intellect and a variety of talents, Lytle did not always live up to his potential, perhaps because of his fondness for drink. He was often bored and seemed to have no clear direction in life. As the editor points out in the introduction, "During his brief life Lytle displayed many flashes of brilliance. Yet his failure to channel his energies consistently frustrated those who knew him best"(6-7).

Like his father before him, Will Lytle was an ardent Jacksonian Democrat in a city whose business elites were mostly Whig. He was a states' rights advocate with strong southern sympathies, but his equally strong

nationalism induced him to serve his country not only in the Mexican War but in the Civil War as well. In 1861 he left the Ohio militia to accept a commission as colonel in the Tenth Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment. He was seriously wounded in (West) Virginia in September 1861 and again at the Battle of Perryville in October 1862 where he was captured by Confederate forces. He was later exchanged and promoted to brigadier general. While commanding a brigade in Philip Sheridan's division at the Battle of Chickamauga in September 1863, Lytle was killed.

Collections of letters are generally not published for the casual reader, but they are of great interest to historians and other serious students of history. Their value lies in what they can reveal about individuals, attitudes, and opinions of the times, and this collection is particularly rich. Many of the letters contained herein were written from Will Lytle to his sisters, and the author's fluid writing style makes them a pleasure to read. From them the reader learns about barefoot soldiers, exhausting marches, and that omnipresent request by soldiers for their loved ones to write often. First impressions and changing attitudes are also evident in his letters. While quartered in Huntsville, Alabama in 1862, Lytle once reported that "the women are *venomous*" (p. 117), but a few weeks later he acknowledged that many people in the town were actually quite "kind" (125). In a particularly poignant 1861 letter, Lytle, writing on the eve of battle, instructed his sisters on how to settle his accounts

if he did not survive.

The collection was carefully edited with explanatory notes sprinkled throughout the text. In addition, Carter inserts brief narratives to guide the reader from letter to letter. And as further testament to the editor's diligence, the book contains a lengthy biographical sketch, a useful bibliography and appendices, along with a good index, which is indispensable when using letter collections. The

University Press of Kentucky did its part also by producing an attractive volume and a useful collection of primary source material from a colorful Union officer.

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