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James A. Davis. *"Bully for the Band!": The Civil War Letters and Diary of Four Brothers in the 10th Vermont Infantry Band.* Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2012. 300 pp. $49.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-6686-3.

J. Keith Jones. *Boys of Diamond Hill: The Lives and Civil War Letters of the Boyd Family of Abbeville County, South Carolina.* Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2011. 192 pp. $45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-6333-6.

Jerry D. Thompson, ed. *Tejanos in Gray: Civil War Letters of Captains Joseph Rafael de la Garza and Manuel Yturri.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. xxvi + 140 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-60344-243-5; ISBN 978-1-60344-268-8.

Reviewed by L. Bao Bui (University of Illinois)
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Writing and Fighting: Soldiers' Letters from the Civil War

The Life of Johnny Reb (1943) and *The Life of Billy Yank* (1952) established Bell Irvin Wiley (1906-80) as a pioneer in the field of the Civil War studies. To construct what he calls a "social history of men in arms" Wiley sifted through the contents of diaries and letters written by rank-and-file soldiers, "the humble folk," in his words.[1] In the decades since, Wiley's successors have succeeded in placing the daily experiences of ordinary people, whether combatant and civilian, at the heart of our modern understanding of the Civil War.

Recently published collections of soldiers' letters permit a glimpse into the private lives and social relationships of three extraordinary American families during the Civil War era. J. Keith Jones's *The Boys of Diamond Hill* encompasses the letters of the Boyd family of Abbeville, a small farming community in South Carolina. That five members of the Boyd family lost their lives in battle reveals plainly how the Confederacy's failed bid for independence war exacted a grim toll on white Southern manhood. With *Tejanos in Gray,* Jerry Thompson, a Regent's Professor of History at Texas A&M International University, calls attention to the four thousand or so Mexican Texans who fought in both Union and Confederate armies. James G. Davis, a professor of musicology at State University of New York, Fredonia, offers in *"Bully for the Band!"* a fascinating account of four brothers who all served as musicians in the 10th Vermont Infantry Regiment. Taken as a group, these men, from small towns spread across the breadth of nineteenth-century America, participated in nearly all the major theatres of operation during the Civil War.

These collections of letters have much in common with each other and with the innumerable published volumes of letters from the Civil War era. In their letters the soldiers articulated their longing for home, and especially the desire to see their wives and children. Indeed, the oft-expressed yearning for letters, news, and newspapers reveals a persistent desire to remain connected to home communities and prewar social networks. For many young recruits, the war constituted their first major foray away from home; their letters suggest an awareness of the gulf of distance separating them from the rhythms and responsibilities of their civilian lives. Twenty-year-old Robert Pressley Boyd, serving with the 7th South Carolina Infantry Regiment in northern Virginia, penned to his father in mid-1861, "I wod like rit well to bee at home to help you but I nine hundred miles from hom" (Jones, p. 13). Robert never did return home; he fell in combat during Robert E. Lee's invasion of Maryland in September 1862.

Readers will appreciate the complex and nuanced picture of combat motivation and loyalties that emerge from these letters. "Military life is the most miserable there is in this world," lamented Captain Manuel Yturri of the 3rd Texas Infantry to his wife in May 1865 (Thompson, p. 71). Yet, the record showed that Yturri dutifully served the Confederate nation right to its bitter end. Having lost three of his brothers-in-arms the previous year, Daniel Boyd of the 7th Carolina Infantry in early 1863 wrote a few lines that captured his sense of resignation, his will-

ingness to accept further sacrifice, but also, his desire to have a substitute take his place in the ranks: "It seams like all of us wil half to fall in this war. But if it is my lot to go in that way I am wiling to go but I hope that this war wil soon end so we will get back home again. Try and get someone to take my place" (Jones, p. 77).

The monotony of camp life contrasted sharply with what the soldiers saw and experienced on the battlefield. Daniel Boyd, who served alongside his brother Robert in the 7th South Carolina, wrote pointedly that "to see the sufferings and privations of death of poor men and soldiers away from home together with the devastations spread abroad the country shows but faintly the horrors of this unholy war" (Jones, p. 1). Yet, for every Civil War soldier who died of battle wounds, two fell by disease. Joseph Rafael De la Garza of the 6th Texas Cavalry Regiment wrote home in December 1862, "Pneumonia broke out in our brigade about a month ago and we buried from three up to fifteen daily for two weeks" (Thompson, p. 12). Typhoid alone killed twenty-five men of the 10th Vermont Infantry Regiment between November and December of 1862. Charles George, a band musician with the 10th, wrote during that autumn, "I don't see any chance for a man's life if he is sick" (Davis, p. 33). His words proved prescient more than he knew; his brother and fellow band member, Osman, would die from chronic diarrhea in a Washington DC hospital in late 1863.

Osman's fateful journey began in the summer of 1862, when he and two of his brothers–Charles and James–enlisted in the brass band of the 10th Vermont Volunteer Infantry Regiment; the fourth, Jeremiah, joined his brothers in late 1864. A particular pleasure of reading the letters and diaries of the George brothers comes from their matter-of-fact accounts of brushes with famous people and episodes rich with historical meaning or irony. Jeremiah George's diary entry of September 26, 1864, described a memorable visit to the nation's capital. Having seen Abraham Lincoln exit the White House, Jeremiah recalled: "His gait, was not at all elegant, but dignified.... He looks careworn but resembles his picture very much" (Davis, p. 193). Apparently, Jeremiah went so far as "to enter and sit in his [Lincoln's] private buggy" and absconded with souvenir "sprigs of cedar and some pebbles" from the presidential garden (Davis, p. 193).

A half year later, the men of the 10th Vermont would meet their commander-in-chief again, this time in the streets of a just-captured Petersburg, where according to Jeremiah, "the first white man we saw was President Lincoln," whose "homely face [was] so radiant with joy and smiles that it was indeed pleasant to look upon" (Davis, p. 227). Incredibly, Jeremiah reflected in his diary soon after the shooting at Ford's Theatre that he had seen the assassin, John Wilkes Booth, perform "at the Boston Museum as a start actor, about a year ago in the play, of 'Richard III"' (Davis, p. 241). Other episodes described in these letters show how even a regimental band could put its mark on momentous historical moments. "While passing through Halifax [Virginia], the home of Governor Wise, the man who hung John Brown," wrote Charles George in late April 1865, "we played [the song] 'John Brown's body"' (Davis, p. 241).

"Bully for the Band!" highlights the important role of by musicians within the armies of the Civil War era. Bands were "the dominant instrumental ensemble in America" for much of the antebellum period, writes James G. Davis; one estimate put the number of musicians in the Army of the Potomac alone at 2500. Davis quotes Robert E. Lee as saying, "I don't believe we can have an army without music" (Davis, p. 1). Musicians provided much-needed entertainment that sustained morale during the lulls in the fighting. On the march and during engagements the musicians provided the marching tempos, and musicians served as stretcher-bearers and medics. Band members accompanied their regiments onto the field of battle, and they faced many of the same dangers as their armed colleagues: bullets and cannon fire during battle, disease in the camps, and malnutrition in prisoner of war camps. Of the thirty-one men who served in the band of the 10thVermont, six–including Osman George–did not live to see the regiment mustered out in July 1865. Overall, battle wounds, injury, disease, and desertion reduced the regiment's 1016 original members down to only thirteen officers and 451 soldiers by war's end (Davis, p. 253).

Davis' well-researched narration of the battles and campaigns of the 10th Vermont reads like a small rendition of the history of the Army of the Potomac during the last two years of the war, from Gettysburg to Appomattox. Furthermore, the editorial notes accompanying each letter allow the reader to understand the tactical, strategic, and personal contexts behind each composition. Davis also includes colorful quotes and well-chosen photos from other soldiers to help illustrate the full dimensions of the social life of the army community. Some of the comments from fellow regimental members are quite moving. William White of Company I wrote in July 1863, "I have seen a great deal of suffering & destitution caused by this war. More than I ever expected to see before I enlisted, and more than I hope I shall ever see again" (Davis, p. 83).

Only within the last fifty years has the general historical consensus shifted to emphasize the fundamental role of slavery in the cause, course, and outcome of the Civil War. Not surprisingly, the issues of slavery, slaves, and race relations permeate in ways subtle and not so subtle the letters of these writing and fighting men. Yet, Davis should have commented more on the various episodes involving African Americans. Jeremiah's diary entry of March 12, 1865, describes one particularly striking episode involving a camp minstrel show put on by Union soldiers and attended by General Gordon Meade himself. As the campaign in Virginia neared its fateful end at Appomattox during April 1865, and with the Thirteenth Amendment passing through the state legislatures, a few throwaway lines in one of Charles George's many letters to his wife–"The colored people all along the road all say as we pass them 'God Bless you.' Tickled to death most"–captures a moment of historical significance that might not have been entirely apparent to the writer during those heady days (Davis, p. 234).

For Robert Boyd of South Carolina, the war showed little mercy, as J. Keith Jones's *The Boys of Diamond Hill* makes clear. Born in 1804 in Ireland, Boyd moved to America, settled in South Carolina, and saw five of his sons and one son-in-law enlist in the cause of Confederate independence. By the end of 1862, three of his sons, William, Robert, and Thomas, had fallen in battle at places familiar to Civil War memory: Frazier's Farm, Harpers Ferry, Murfreesboro. The following year his son-in-law Fenton Hall died in a skirmish with Federal troops in South Carolina. The deaths of his older brothers in battle apparently did not dissuade the youngest son, Andrew, from following in their footsteps, right to the grave, too. Having enlisted in early 1864, Andrew died in late May from wounds received at the Battle of the Wilderness. The sole surviving brother, Daniel, outlived by only five years the war that claimed the lives of half his family members.

The background information accompanying each letter proves very useful for tracking the tactical and strategic movements of the regiments in which the Boyd brothers served. Yet, the editorial notes omit some key critical information on the Boyd family.

The letters indicate that the Boyd family lived as farmers, but the editor does not say whether the Boyd family owned slaves during any period of time. Indeed, African Americans, nearly all slaves, made up the majority of the population of South Carolina in 1860. White South Carolinians voted for secession and then volunteered for military service precisely because they saw the incoming Lincoln administration as a threat to the South's "peculiar institution."

Daniel Boyd lived to surrender along with the rest of Joseph E. Johnston's army in late April 1865. "The preceding four years had redefined the world in which they [the Body family] lived," writes Jones. "Many friends and most of Daniel's family were now gone. Diamond Hill would not be the same place they had departed in April of 1861" (Jones, p. 138). Jones omits two very significant changes in the landscape of the South. Both slavery and the Confederacy were now gone. The surviving letters make few if any references to slaves, runaway slaves, or even African American soldiers. The Boyd brothers would have seen or heard about black Union troops probably by 1863, and surely by 1865. If the Boyd family had opinions on this momentous development, none of their surviving letters offer any hints. Indeed, neither Jones nor the letters themselves mention how the destruction of formal slavery rendered the postwar South nearly unrecognizable to the Boyds and their fellow whites.

Not all the men who filled out the ranks of the Confederate armies came from Anglo-Saxon stock. With *Tejanos in Gray* Thompson calls attention to some four thousand Mexican Texans who fought in both Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War. Both Joseph Rafael de la Garza (1838-64) and Manuel Yturri (1838-1913) were born in San Antonio and moved within the well-to-do social circle of their birth city. Joseph's sister, Elena, married Manuel shortly before the war began. Unlike other prominent Tejano families in San Antonio, de la Garza and Yturri did not own slaves.

Though the Tejanos in San Antonio in early 1861 constituted a stronghold of pro-Union sentiment, the fever of secession and the unfolding drama of war swept Tejanos like de al Garza and Yturri into the ranks of those who steadfastly by force of arms upheld the Confederacy's claim to independence for four bloody years. De la Garza held the rank of captain in the 6th Texas Infantry Regiment when he was killed in April 1864 at the Battle of Mansfield during the Union's failed Red River Campaign. In the war's final months Yturri complained to his wife that "Yes, my dear, this war has ruined all my physical well being for the rest of my life" (Thompson, p. 67). Yet after the hostilities ended the war-weary Confederate Tejano returned to San Antonio, where he raised a large family, became a rancher and businessman, served as city alderman, and died in 1913, having outlived de la Garza, his brother-in-law and brother-in-arms, by nearly half a century.

Both de la Garza and Yturri were bilingual, and wrote

their letters in both Spanish and English. Thompson does not designate which letters were in Spanish and which ones were in English. It would be fascinating to see how these bilingual Tejanos expressed concepts like homesickness, love, and devotion through the various rhetorical and literary conventions available in the two languages that they used to compose the letters.

Unlike Davis and Jones, Thompson notifies readers of the changes inherent in transferring the written manuscripts to published book format. The editor has to inform readers that the original texts were quite "messy" by modern standards and that editorial changes were necessary to render accessible the writings and thoughts of de la Garza and Yturri. Perhaps a photocopy of a letter and envelope side by side with the transcription would be useful. At the least, readers could see with their own eyes the original handwriting that the letters' recipients saw a hundred and fifty years ago.

Thompson leaves each letter to speak for itself; there are no introductory editorial notes or narratives of the regiment's whereabouts and campaigns. Hence, the reader should approach *Tejanos in Gray* with at least some knowledge of the major actions and campaigns in the western theater of operations. However, the footnotes provide a rich background of information on the names and places mentioned in the letters of de la Garza and Yturri.

All three books would have benefited from the inclusion of maps showing theaters of operations, battlefields, and locations where the authors' respective regiments made camp or were deployed. These visual aids assist the reader's understanding of the strategic and tactical geography in which these soldier-writers wrote their compositions. Still, even in the absence of maps, the letters themselves require only a sympathetic ear to fully make their case. The preserved and now published letters of these soldiers of the gray and blue articulated clearly many heartfelt, deeply personal sentiments while making insightful observations on an American nation at war with itself. Wiley complained that the history books pushed commoners to the margins of the pages. By allowing the written words of these "humble folk" to reach a wider audience, Thompson, Jones, and Davis have helped place the common people of Civil War America squarely on the front and center of the page, where they belong.

Note

[1]. Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1951, 1952), 13.

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