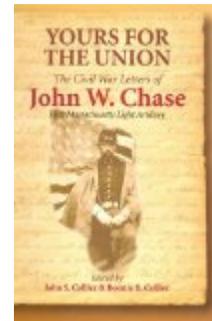


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John S. Collier, Bonnie B. Collier, eds. *Yours for the Union: The Civil War Letters of John W. Chase, First Massachusetts Light Artillery*. 29. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004. xxii + 456 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8232-2303-9.

Reviewed by Matthew Hauck (Department of History, California State University, Northridge)  
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## “Dear Brother”

Since the Ken Burns documentary series on the American Civil War appeared in the early 1990s, publishing the letters and memoirs of Civil War soldiers has become a virtual cottage industry. Sadly, as with studies of Civil War artillery, the letters and memoirs of Civil War artillerists are few. This might be due to the technical nature of this arm of service, or to the seeming lack of glory attached to it. Whatever the reason, *Yours for the Union* attempts to help fill that gap.

John Webster Chase was born in 1825 in Roxbury, Massachusetts, the tenth of eleven children. Although he had spent most of his life in his family’s hometown of Stratham, New Hampshire, at the outbreak of war the 36-year-old widowed carpenter and father of four was living back in Roxbury with the family of his older brother, Samuel. John W. Chase enlisted as private for three years in the First Massachusetts Light Artillery in August 1861. Within two months, he was promoted to Corporal (chief of caisson). In June 1863, he was promoted to Sergeant, and to First Sergeant three months later. When the First Massachusetts Light Artillery was mustered out, Chase transferred to the Fifth Maine Battery in October 1864, having reenlisted about ten months earlier. Sergeant Chase served his final assignment with the Ninth Massachusetts Battery from 28 March to 26 April 1865, when he mustered out near Petersburg, Virginia.

During his service, Chase wrote frequent letters to Samuel, opening most of his letters with “Dear Brother” and ending them “Yours for the Union.” Of these, 172

survive, having been passed down through various family members (John S. Collier is Chase’s great-great grandson). The letters are arranged in chapters that correspond to the different locales of Chase’s service, beginning with Alexandria, Virginia and ending with Petersburg, Virginia. Chase served in most of the major campaigns of the Army of the Potomac.

The letters are not eloquent; however, they vividly convey the concerns of a soldier who is trying to survive, provide for his children, and relate his experiences. One written in November 1861, for example, suggests the importance of tobacco in whiling away the long hours in camp: “I have got it alright and am much obliged to you and all the rest that helped to make it up for tobacco was getting awful short around camp and I have not had a decent smoke untill last night for a fortnight but today they are paying off and the boys are happy as clams at high water and I expect some of them are happier now than they will be after there money is gone for there is plenty of sharper of all kinds here to take they can get hold of.” A constant concern was when soldiers would receive their pay, which was irregularly at best. In the same letter, Collier reported to his family, “I have just been in and got my pay \$26,31 cts and I have sent \$20,00 of it to you which I want you to send up to Stratham to Langdon. I have it sent by Major Mason the Paymaster that paid us off. He will take 2,00 from this battery and as much more from Follets and I suppose it will be very welcome to a good many familys at any rate. I think it will be by mine at any rate” (pp. 9-10).

The letters also help dispel the belief that all Union soldiers were abolitionists; John W. Chase was not. Rather, he was a loyal Unionist and McClellan man. Chase's loyalty to "Little Mac" becomes evident after the general was relieved of command. As he wrote in a letter after the battle of Fredericksburg, "I don't know who to blame or don't care but one thing I do know is General Franklin was not and he is my man next to little Mac. You never would caught George that way" (p.184).

Peppered throughout the book are photos and copies of documents relating to the letters and Chase's service. An appendix includes the letters of Chase's nephew, Asher Chase, who served in both the Seventh Mas-

sachusetts Light Artillery and the Nineteenth Army Corps. Also included in this appendix is a letter from Asher Chase's company commander relating to his illness, which his widow used in her petition for a pension. Other end materials include biographies of family members and friends, as well as information on Civil War artillery.

If there is a flaw in work, it is in the fact that the editors include only an introductory paragraph at the beginning of each chapter. A longer overview of the events discussed within the chapter would have been useful. Nevertheless, this work is an excellent source for anyone interested in or researching Civil War artillery.

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