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As soldiers in the American Civil War found themselves far away from home, they wrote countless letters to maintain their relationships with friends and family. Much of this correspondence has been published in edited volumes, but none of these collections are quite like *Letters to Lizzie: The Story of Sixteen Men in the Civil War and the One Woman Who Connected Them All*. Most published collections present the correspondence of two individuals, often between a soldier and a family member back home. *Letters to Lizzie*, however, captures the perspectives of sixteen different Union soldiers and one woman.

The sixteen soldiers whose writings make up this collection of 124 letters were all connected through one woman: Lizzie Brick. Lizzie was a teenager living in the small village of Hurffville, New Jersey, and most of the men she corresponded with were also from that town. A few others were family members or men that Lizzie was introduced to by her relatives. Through a detailed and informative thirty-page introduction, editor James M. Scythes brings the reader into Lizzie's world, the center of which was the local Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church, where Lizzie met many of her correspondents. The social network formed at this church was tested by the war, but, as Scythes argues in his opening comments, letters helped maintain community ties. Many of the letters included information about other soldiers from Hurffville or requested that Lizzie convey a message to someone back home, making plain how important letters were to sustaining social threads strained by distance. Many of the men were barely literate and one even wrote through an amanuensis, but despite these challenges they treasured letters from home and were determined to maintain their relationships.

In addition to showing how important community ties were to soldiers, the letters, containing descriptions of battles and conditions on marches and in camps, also “offer the reader a unique glimpse into the lives and experiences of common soldiers in the Army of the Potomac” (p. 18). The collection is even more distinctive in that it offers a window into not just one common soldier’s ex-
perience but sixteen. One is struck by the different personalities of these men, evident in their writing styles and spelling choices that Scythes left largely intact. Their personalities shine through not only in how they wrote but also in what they wrote. Some described hardships like having to march through rain and mud that soaked shoes while others detailed their actions during battle. The men's reactions to these events also differed. Some remained patriotic and committed to the cause, while others despair. Many started out eager for a taste of battle and slowly transformed throughout the war to hardened (and sometimes disillusioned) veterans. The collection captures this shift well, as the book is organized into chapters that correspond to each year of the war.

Though there are many differences among the soldiers, Scythes's compilation also makes it easy to see the commonalities in their experiences. For instance, two of the soldiers were quite distraught after the Battle of Fredericksburg due to the high casualty rate. Many of the soldiers expressed their appreciation for General George McClellan and preferred him to his replacements. Religion is also a major theme of the letters, in part because most of the soldiers were connected to Lizzie through their church. It is evident how important Lizzie's religious advice was to these men and how both they themselves and Lizzie coped with war through their belief that God had a plan for everything and if they were not reunited on earth, they surely would be in heaven.

Though one learns much about the soldiers from this collection, unfortunately it is a bit more difficult to hear from Lizzie. Only three of the letters she wrote survive, and so readers must content themselves with hearing her filtered voice in the soldiers' replies. Despite this drawback, the collection will prove useful as a teaching tool, supplying students with primary sources from multiple perspectives in one volume. Scythes also ensures the letters will be easy to read and understand, as he provides detailed endnotes with ample genealogical information on the various persons mentioned in letters, as well as other guidance that enhances the reader's journey through the collection. The endnotes are complemented by an epilogue describing what happened to each letter writer after the war. In the process, Scythes makes it clear that many men continued to feel the effects of war long after the conflict ended, as they dealt with wartime injuries that often interfered with their ability to make ends meet. Scythes's insightful commentary alongside the unique correspondence makes *Letters to Lizzie* a valuable contribution to the body of published Civil War letter collections.
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