

of the tragic drowning at Matagorda; Capt. John Macy's reminiscence of the capture of Fort Blakely; and Perry's touching portrait of Solomon Harter, "The Sergeant of Company F"

The full compilation of soldier data and military material in this volume can be instructive for genealogists, Indiana historians, and specialists on the war in the trans-Mississippi West, but finally one wonders if those audiences could still have been served if this project had been put up as a web site in the first place. Then millions would have access to the words written by the

men of the 69th, from Pvt. T. P. Hollingsworth's remark that it was "no harm to confiscate a hog" belonging to a Southerner (p. 219) to the commander's conclusion that his regiment "marched away too gaily to the war" (p. 215).

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Mac's Boys

Branch McCracken and the Legendary 1953 Hurryin' Hoosiers

By Jason Hiner

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. Pp. xii, 345. Illustrations, appendix, notes, index. Paperbound, \$24.95.)

My guess is that Jason Hiner is too young to have been around for Indiana University's 1952-53 season—*season*, not just the NCAA championship that crowned it. During that year so many Hoosier frustrations were shed, replaced by joyful firsts—IU's first 100-point game, first outright Big Ten championship, first taste of No. 1 national ranking. I am old enough to have made that joyride, not with a reporter's shackles but with the unrestricted glee of a fan. As a senior at Huntington High School, late on a midweek March night with static complicating the in-and-out faintness of the only attainable radio signal, I

suffered through the agonizing final seconds of the NCAA championship game: IU up 69-68, Kansas with the ball, "shot from the corner-r-r at the buzzer-r-r..."

In *Mac's Boys: Branch McCracken and the Legendary 1953 Hurryin' Hoosiers*, Hiner captures the unique quality of IU fans' year—their fatalistic resignation throughout, conditioned by past second places and near-misses; their undying hopes—"wouldn't it be fantastic if"? Both extremes of pessimism and optimism collided for so many Hoosiers while that game-determining shot hung in the air—a shot they couldn't see,

because there was no TV. Everything hung on what that radio voice would say, after a silence that seemed like weeks.

My read-through of “Mac’s Boys” was as swift as a ’53 fast break. I quibbled with Hiner at times: “I don’t need all this play-by-play; I don’t care who scored to make it 6-4 in the Wisconsin game.” I winced at some of the hyperbole: Did this team’s feats really cleanse college basketball of the stains of the 1950s gambling scandals? But as I was quibbling a bit and wincing a little, I was racing through the pages to get to the delicacies: the 91-79 jinx-ending blowout at Illinois, clinching IU and McCracken’s first clear-cut Big Ten championship; the Big Ten-record 113-78 score against the perfect foil, Purdue; the revenge regional romp over Notre Dame that assured a Final Four trip.

And that volatile championship game—three technical fouls against the Hoosiers, none against their excitable coach, whose fuse was tested by an official scorebook change that kept Kansas star B. H. Born in the game after the scorer had buzzed him out with five fouls. Everything led up to that final Kansas shot, against an IU team that had lost only three times all year, always on last-second shots.

This one missed, to a state-spanning feeling of deliverance.

IU had earned a previous NCAA basketball championship in 1940. But the 1953 victory came after the tournament had matured into national attention and just as television was

dawning. Hiner captures the significance of the marriage of IU basketball and television, which would spread a little Hoosier heaven around on many a winter night to come.

Hiner’s research is impressive. He culls from at least ten books, surely a hundred contemporary newspaper accounts, and a good dozen radio and TV recordings. That is how he beat the handicap of setting out on his task too late to talk to key people—McCracken and his partner wife, Mary Jo; scoring center Don Schlundt; the team’s unsung great player, Dick Farley; and several others. He used printed and recorded works that brought in the McCrackens’ voices. And he used others’ testimony to show how revolutionary was Schlundt’s scoring, and how crucial was Farley’s remarkable defensive work against opponents of all heights.

Schlundt’s fellow All-American, guard Bobby Leonard, is still around, to Hiner’s great benefit, because no one was more forthcoming. Leonard was maybe even more of a fan favorite than Schlundt: he played with a sense of imminent explosion, of fire, of determination, of being the team’s rogue. Hiner confirms the last on page 149: “When McCracken laid down the ground rules at the first practice of the 1952-53 season, he placed special emphasis on his players avoiding three things: smoking, drinking and gambling ‘I think everybody knew that, for Bobby, those were three of his favorite occupations,’ said (teammate) Jim Schooley.”

So, Bobby Leonard was a rascal, but a great player and leader. A Hoosier all-timer—as was this team.

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To Bear Any Burden

A Hoosier Green Beret's Letters from Vietnam

By Daniel FitzGibbon

(Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2005. Pp. xxv, 144. Photographs, maps. \$19.95.)

Personal letters written by American soldiers from combat areas of operation can be insightful artifacts. While veterans' war stories, told years after the event, can be warped by tricks of time and memory, letters often offer more immediate and honest assessments. Daniel H. FitzGibbon's correspondence from Vietnam to his parents in Columbus, Indiana, lends particular insights into a war still intensely debated today.

Young FitzGibbon was not the average soldier in Southeast Asia, having graduated from West Point and serving as an officer in Vietnam. His letters reveal the thoughts and feelings of a more "elite" group of servicemen. Given his background, it is perhaps not surprising that FitzGibbon never wavered in his support for the war. However, his letters do indicate a growing concern with the ways in which higher-ups were conducting the fighting. In one letter written in mid-1968, he frankly noted, "We've had trouble getting contact with [the enemy] under favorable circum-

stances although we're pushing quite a bit—this is one of the reasons I think this war will never end in our favor" (p. 86). This and other negative observations by the young Hoosier regarding the U.S.'s conduct of the war would prove prophetic, and it is interesting to see how his sense of the war's imminent failure grows.

FitzGibbon's letters also offer a sense of the day-to-day life of a low-level officer leading men directly into combat. After one of his first combat experiences, he writes his parents that he was "definitely excited and . . . my heart was beating swiftly." These are not always easy letters to read. In the same correspondence he explains that "[o]ne does not go through combat and experience what I have experienced without being affected in some manner. I have come to notice a certain smell in the air when someone is killed on an operation" (p. 65).

Even the seemingly mundane events of FitzGibbon's time in Vietnam often come across as interest-