

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

BOB HAMMEL is the retired sports editor of the *Bloomington Herald Times*.

Named Indiana Sportswriter of the Year sixteen times during his thirty years in Bloomington, he has also won numerous national awards for his sports writing.



### *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-

ing. In one letter, for example, he writes that “with the rainy night, the hammock helped a little, although even with a poncho over head the soaking rain made it difficult to sleep” (p. 53). Overall, these letters represent an interesting set of historical artifacts for anyone wishing to get a sense of a young officer’s trials and tribulations in Vietnam. It would be of interest to read FitzGibbon’s letters alongside those of non-officer-level draftees who experienced combat—the kind that

appear, for example, in *Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam*. Read together, they would reveal a wide spectrum of experiences, thoughts, and feelings about a war that does not seem to go away.

RANDY MILLS is a professor of the social sciences at Oakland City University, Oakland City, Indiana, and author of the just-released *Troubled Hero: A Medal of Honor, Vietnam and the War at Home* (2007).



### *In This Remote Country*

#### *French Colonial Culture in the Anglo-American Imagination, 1780-1860*

By Edward Watts

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. Pp. ix, 275. Notes, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$59.95; paperbound, \$19.95.)

In this intriguing book, Edward Watts explores how Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century constructed and used the history of French colonialism in North America. That history, Watts persuasively argues, became a tool in debates about “what type of nation the United States would become,” with one model—the destructive and racist British empire—set against its kinder, gentler French counterpart. Thus, “even as the French *themselves* were erased” from the North American continent, “their memory retained a powerful presence in conversations the nation had about itself” (pp. 11, 13).

Watts has uncovered a remarkable array of nineteenth-century sources treating the history of French

colonialism in just this way. The French show up in discussions of Indian policy, interracial marriage, middle-class masculinity, and the politics of westward expansion, and Watts treats these topics in some detail. Watts also pays attention to the differences between the interpretations advanced by western and eastern intellectuals and politicians. Western models, he argues, tended to include the French as part of the story, embracing their adaptation to the wilderness and their ability to build relationships with the region’s Indians. Less locally-driven histories, however, tended to treat the French as backward, if sympathetic, failures.

Watts also considers the manner in which Americans used the French