

## REVIEWS

### *A Fierce, Wild Joy*

#### *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Edward J. Wood, 48th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment*

Edited by Stephen E. Towne

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*A Fierce, Wild Joy* presents the Civil War letters of Edward Jesup Wood of Goshen, Indiana. Some ninety letters written by Wood to his wife Jane (now held by the Indiana Historical Society) are presented in thirteen chronologically arranged chapters; an additional three letters, two written by Wood and published in Goshen newspapers, and a third penned by Wood's Confederate half-brother, appear in appendices. Editor Stephen E. Towne offers an informative and perspicacious introduction providing biographical data and an overview of the content and style of Wood's letters. He also provides brief introductions to each chapter, a postscript on Wood's postwar life, and numerous explanatory endnotes for the letters.

Wood was born in Florida in 1834, the son of a Connecticut steamboat captain and a mother from a plantation family. After his father's

death in 1840, Wood was raised in New York by relatives, schooled in Connecticut, and graduated at age 18 from Dartmouth College as an engineer. Arriving in Indiana in 1853 to work on the construction of a railroad, he soon went into law and politics, running for local office as a Republican. He married in 1859, and in May 1861 his first child was born. The following fall, Wood began recruiting a company for the 48th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment. He began as a captain in charge of a company and over time became the commanding colonel of the 48th. The letters cover the period from January 16, 1862, to February 27, 1865, during which Wood participated in such battles as Corinth and Champion Hill, the siege of Vicksburg, and Sherman's March to the Sea.

While Wood's letters include a few intriguing combat narratives,

their major interest comes from their accounts of other aspects of military life. Wood is especially thorough in his descriptions of camp accommodations, the movement of men and their baggage, and diet and the procurement of food. His training in law and engineering was put to good use as he found himself, at various times, put in charge of road and bridge construction, detailed to serve as a court-martial judge, and assigned to the office of provost marshal. (His account of his actions as provost of Paducah is especially informative.) Wood's letters also nicely describe sundry other aspects of camp life, from picket duty to a fishing picnic with other officers. Among their most unusual passages are those dealing with Wood's efforts to gain information about his southern relatives and find ways to communicate with them. A particularly poignant entry juxtaposes Wood's hard hand-of-war values with his awareness of what his Dixie loved ones are suffering at the hands of Union troops.

Oddly enough, Wood, an abolitionist, writes little about the slavery issue, and what little he has to say about blacks is sometimes insensitive. Concepts such as order and duty seem more central than slavery to Wood's understanding of the war and his role in it. It also seems odd that Wood, who ran for office in Indiana

both before and after the war, has so little to say about Hoosier politics. In fact, Wood does not appear to have closely identified with his adopted state, and he talks of Hoosiers in the third person as if he were not one of them. His wife left Indiana to live in her native upstate New York during the war, and neither of them had much good to say about Goshen or Hoosierdom.

Beyond war and politics, Wood's letters also provide some insights into the values and domestic life of a northern, urban middle-class family. There are numerous expressions of Christian fatalism, advice on child-rearing, and career concerns. Also common are passages articulating the affections and the longings for reunion of a man long separated from wife and daughter. Finally, a number of passages deal with Wood's literary tastes and the titles of fictional works that he was reading.

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