

Library Offerings Help Us Reflect on Military Sacrifices

Dear wife, I will take this opportunity of writing again, as it may be the last time that I will have the opportunity of writing for a good while and perhaps forever. We are on the eve of leaving for Vicksburg....I hope that I will be lucky enough to come home safe, but we don't know who will be the unlucky one.

This letter dated December 19, 1862 is from Sgt. William Winters and can be found in a fascinating book, "The Musick of the Mocking Birds, the Roar of the Cannon," edited by Steven Woodworth. William was born in Connecticut, moved to Cincinnati and eventually wound up settling with his wife, Harriet, in Bartholomew County, Indiana- more specifically in Hope. He made his trade as a saddle and harness maker. By 1859, William had a family of three girls and signed his name to the petition for Hope's incorporation.

In 1862, the country was deep in the midst of a civil war. Abraham Lincoln issued a call for 300,000 more soldiers and William heeded the call. That summer he assembled in Madison as part of Company I and was sworn into service on August 19.

William would find himself fighting in campaigns in Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana. All the while he kept a diary and wrote many letters to his wife. What makes this record of war so interesting is that it truly is the experiences of the common soldier. He reflects on his surroundings, on life, on death, and on his desire to be back home with his family. In one particularly tough passage, William deals with some terrible news from back home:

Dear wife, it is with feelings of the deepest grief that I attempt to answer your last...with the sad news of our little willie['s] death and your illness....to only think that I could not even see his little face once more or his innocent prattle again is enough to make me wis[h] that I had never left you or them but let the government taken care of itself...

I think we all try to understand and empathize with what it must have been like for both the soldiers and the families that were left behind during the Civil War. However, we will never understand. Even the soldiers of today cannot fully comprehend. These men left their lives and families, not for job or educational opportunities, but because they truly believed in the cause.

As we are now 150 years from the start of the Civil War and 10 years from September 11th, I encourage you to take time to remember the sacrifices all soldiers and their families made and are currently making. Not only should this be done through personal reflection, but here at the library we believe this should be done as a community as well. Therefore, we are offering several programs in our Red Room that hopefully will start the discussion.

On September 8 at 6:30pm, Staff Sgt. Brad Staggs will provide information on the role of the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center. On September 10 from 10am to 5:00pm, we will be showing four documentaries about 9/11. On September 12 at 6:30pm, Duane Straw from the USO will talk about ways in which the USO supports our military and how you can help. On September 22 at 7:00pm, Judy Cook will present "One Man's Civil War", a program of songs and stories. Then on November 10th, we are going to host the first of hopefully many sessions of a Civil War Book Discussion. We will start at 7:00pm and be discussing "Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief" by award winning author James McPherson. The book is available in many different formats including as a downloadable audio or ebook.

I hope you will join us for these and our other programs as we aim to be your source for lifelong learning and enjoyment.

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