



So Much Blood: The Civil War Letters of CSA Private William Wallace Beard, 1861-1865 Revised Edition

Virginia Cornue PhD, William R Trotter

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"So Much Blood: The Civil War Letters of CSA Private William Wallace Beard 1861-1865" dramatically chronicles Confederate soldier Private William Wallace Beard's experiences during the Civil War. So Much Blood is framed around thirty-three letters (including an original furlough document) that William Beard wrote during the war to his parents and siblings back home in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. The book is rich with meticulous transcriptions of all thirty-three documents. It includes a selection of letter facsimiles; riveting battle descriptions; and family and Mecklenburg County history. Short commentaries or "sparkles" shed light on points perhaps little known to the general reader. William W. Beard was born 1836 in rural north Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, the oldest of ten children. It's unknown if his parents owned slaves, but his environment accepted that "way of life" for whites. He moved to Mississippi and became a plantation overseer in Hinds County ca. late 1850s, whether a cruel or kind one is unknown. Twenty-five when he mustered into the 1,000-man-strong Mississippi 18th Regiment, Camden Rifles Co. G, summer 1861, Beard was among the 100 or so soldiers and officers in this regiment who survived the war. Returning to Mississippi after parole from Point Lookout Prison Camp, Maryland and signing The Oath at war's end, Beard married, begat, farmed and died in 1900. He was a compelling storyteller: poignant, funny, grief stricken, colorful, philosophical and ultimately disillusioned. It is easy to see why his younger kinfolk called him Uncle Windy. The book is 520 pages long, complete with a preface written by Reverend William A. Macaulay, Jr. Beard's great nephew; a short genealogy of William Beard's family; a history of the 18th Mississippi Regiment's engagements; and a list of his battles furloughs, and illnesses. It includes 119 illustrations: battle maps, photos of key Confederate and Union leaders, and gripping photos of battlefield dead. The editors reveal the unlikely discovery of the letters: under the bed of one of their mothers. They detail the search for Beard's history at the end of the war, and the discovery of his still-living great nephew (Rev. Macaulay) only miles from where he grew up. William Beard's story is interwoven with rip roaring battle descriptions that complement his descriptions of Fredericksburg, Sharpsburg, Spotsylvania Court House to name only a few. His broken-hearted eulogy over the grave of his 19 year old brother James is stained with his tears. While much of his correspondence to his mother, father, sisters and brothers survived the war, their letters to him did not, understandably. However as unlikely as was the discovery of the letters in the first place, another discovery of a famous correspondence turned out to be that of his aunt and uncle. The McRaven Correspondence published in 1949 has been cited in many histories of the Civil War. It is a key exchange of letters between a wife and husband that reveals an intimate view of agricultural, familial, slave owning and romantic life on a farm in the rural South. Uncle David Olando and Aunt Amanda Nantz McRaven's letters to each other in 1864 and 1865 particularize life back home on their farm and his parent's farm while William Beard was on the battle front: the Beards and the McRavens lived on adjacent farms. So it is not surprising that they discuss his whereabouts while he mentions them in several of his letters. As William's and David/Amanda's letters reveal the personal side of his life, the riveting battle descriptions reveal the deadly side of his life during these four years. Each major battle that the 18th Mississippi Regiment, and sometimes William Beard, engaged in is described in vivid and thorough detail: history comes alive in "So Much Blood the Civil War Letters of CSA Private William Wallace Beard 1861-1865."

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