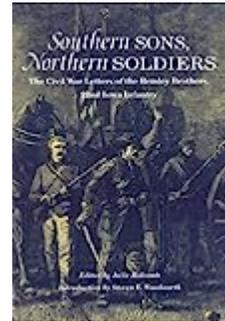




Julie Holcomb, ed. *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers: The Civil War Letters of the Remley Brothers, 22nd Iowa Infantry.* Woodworth. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004. xxiii + 168 pp. \$32.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87580-319-7.



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Southerners Go West

Civil War scholars will benefit from the publication of *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers: The Civil War Letters of the Remley Brothers, 22nd Iowa Infantry*. Ably edited by Julie Holcomb, College and Special Collections Archivist at Navarro College, and introduced by Steven E. Woodworth, Associate Professor of History at Texas Christian University, *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers* is based on the letters of George and Lycurgus Remley and assorted family members during the Civil War. The publication of these letters is the product of an accession of documents to Navarro College's Pearce Civil War Collection.

Steven E. Woodworth's introduction synthesizes the family's background with the national struggle. The Remley family had Southern roots, a fact that inspires the title and marks the Remleys as distinctive. Father James, a Baptist minister and schoolteacher, had emigrated from the state of Virginia because of his anti-slavery attitudes. These sentiments had developed in the 1840s and 1850s and were passed on to George and Lycurgus. The latter was dismissed from college for expressing them at a student meeting. The Remley family settled near Johnson City, Iowa, along with anti-slavery Midwesterners

and other ambivalent or openly anti-slavery Southerners from the Upper South.

The brothers joined the Union Army in 1862, after the nation's need for soldiers had become more acute than most had anticipated in 1861. They were mustered in to one of several newly formed state regiments, the 22nd Iowa. After basic training, the unit was assigned to garrison duty in Missouri in 1863. It served there several months before being transferred to Mississippi and action in the Vicksburg campaign. That campaign put the unit's soldiers in Missouri, Louisiana and Mississippi, where they clashed with Confederates at Port Gibson and, later, Champion's Hill. The 22nd departed for the Bayou Teche campaign and operations in Texas. In 1864, the 22nd Iowa was transferred to Virginia to serve under Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan and the Army of the Shenandoah.

The brothers' literacy and knack for language greatly aid the effects of this book by imparting a particularly observant and reflective character to their correspondence. George writes about action at Port Gibson, "One of the first shells very boldly introduced himself to me by puffing his hot breath into my face. I didn't admire the man-

ner very much and as he did not stop to apologize I concluded not to renew the acquaintance” (p. 62). The inevitable and intimate encounters with death are noted poetically.

The brothers are commentators on a soldier’s life, military life, and on the larger meaning of the Civil War for themselves and their civilian community. The letters contain many references to wartime domestic politics, especially contempt for the ever-dwindling number of Iowa Democrats. The brothers’ Southern heritage and adherence to the staunchly Republican Iowa political culture sheds light on the western aspect of the Civil War. The personal events described in these letters contain the capacity to surprise, no mean feat in territory as well trodden as the Civil War.

The letters also show profoundly religious worldviews of the conflict. These views derive from the Remley brothers’ deeply held beliefs and characters, which in turn influenced their anti-slavery attitudes and convictions about the war. They long for nurturing of the Christian spirit (individually and corporately) and Christian companionship. They decry the faithlessness around them and the weakness of those unable to resist the loos-

ened moral restraints of soldiers’ lives. For example, Lycurgus writes, “we have *no* opportunities for prayer meetings, and few for private devotions. Add to this the contaminating influence of the example of all around us, and you have some idea of the difficulty of maintaining an upright Christian walk” (p. 43). Rather than being battlefield converts, it is apparent from the brothers’ correspondence that they are Christians in a war, and those perspectives have affected their thinking.

Although the letters are overwhelmingly from George and Lycurgus to their relatives, this account contains several letters from the “home front” that give socio-political balance to the military account.

The superbly edited *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers* makes a vital contribution to Civil War studies. The content of the letters and the writers’ personal convictions and worldview contribute to the “new social history” of the Civil War. This book will be of special interest to historians of American religion for the centrality of the brothers’ religious convictions. It is hard to level a criticism at this book except that we can wish the Remley family had written more letters.

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