

Yankee Dutchmen under Fire: Civil War Letters from the 82nd Illinois Infantry

Paul Fessler
Dordt College

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2015 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution

Recommended Citation

Fessler, Paul. "Yankee Dutchmen under Fire: Civil War Letters from the 82nd Illinois Infantry." *The Annals of Iowa* 74 (2015), 192-193.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12195>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

Yankee Dutchmen under Fire: Civil War Letters from the 82nd Illinois Infantry, translated and edited by Joseph R. Reinhart. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2013. 272 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliographic essay, bibliography, index. \$45.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Paul Fessler is professor of history and chair of the department at Dordt College. In addition to writing on immigration and military history, he is the editor of *Dutch Immigrants on the Plains* (2006).

An impressive combination of a letter collection and a regimental history, *Yankee Dutchmen under Fire* provides an engrossing glimpse into the lives and experiences of midwestern German immigrants during the Civil War. About half of the letters included in the volume are “public” letters from members of the regiment that were published in various German-language newspapers in Illinois and Missouri that highlight the positive and downplay (or ignore) the negative aspects within the regiment. The vast majority of the remaining letters are from First Lt. Rudolph Müller to the unit’s founder, Col. Friedrich Hecker, who resigned from the army in early 1864. Müller’s letters accentuate the politics, intrigue, and feuds within the German American regiment, which became part of the German American-dominated XI Corps of the Army of the Potomac that quickly broke in a surprise attack by Stonewall Jackson at Chancellorsville in early 1863, tainting the reputation of German American soldiers in the Union Army ever since. This letter collection follows these soldiers through the rest of the war in Chattanooga and Atlanta and as part of Sherman’s March to the Sea.

Anyone interested in the lives and perspectives of German Iowans who served in the Union Army during the Civil War will find that this volume provides insight into similar midwestern German Americans across the border in Illinois. In the public letters to German-language newspapers, the letter writers convey the discrimination (and misunderstanding) inflicted by English-speaking officers. That said, it is clear that these Germans believed themselves superior in education and military prowess to English-speaking soldiers. Even more interesting is the intraethnic conflict evident even within the public letters. For example, Lt. Müller displays anti-Semitic language to describe German Jewish officer Edward Salomon, who replaced Col. Hecker in 1863. The newspapers and the letter writers come primarily from the liberal wing of the German American community, whose leaders had fled Germany after the failed 1848 liberal revolutions. Col. Hecker was one of the most famous “Forty-Eighters” who supported the Radical Republican agenda that included abolition of slavery. To help readers make sense of this diversity, Reinhart provides an extensive bibliographic essay on German American soldiers in Illinois and the Midwest. He also contextualizes

each letter with extensive footnotes that provide even more clarity regarding the individuals and events mentioned. Reinhart's expertly woven combination of primary and secondary sources makes this a highly recommended volume for anyone interested in the Civil War or German American immigrants in the Midwest.

With Malice toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era, by William A. Blair. The Littlefield History of the Civil War Era. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. 432 pp. Appendixes, graphs, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Victoria Bryant Stewart is a Ph.D. history student at Northern Illinois University and adjunct history professor at the College of DuPage.

The American Civil War fostered a sense of anxiety in the North that resulted in a desire to locate, detect, and eliminate treasonous activity. William Blair's monograph outlines the evolution of treason law and its prosecution. He explains that treason is the only crime specifically addressed in the U.S. Constitution. Despite that presence in America's foundational document, treason is difficult to prosecute.

Blair opens his discussion by addressing the treatment of treason under British rule, when treason was treated as a political and individual crime. In the United States, treason was seen as the attempt to levy war against the government of the United States or to provide aid to its enemies.

Blair focuses on the social and political ramifications of treason rather than on constitutional theory. He skillfully describes the understanding and interpretations of treason for President Abraham Lincoln's administration, the courts, and civilians and explains how the military was used to define treason and capture treasonous individuals. According to Blair, the military served as an "instigator" of the Lincoln administration's civil liberty policies. The Union's efforts, in Confederate regions and areas sympathetic to the Southern cause, consisted of maintaining loyalty as "a struggle over the security of households." Blair addresses the postwar treatment of Confederate officers and soldiers, who were granted clemency once their loyalty was certified.

For those interested in local and Iowa history, Blair addresses significant events and themes. Iowans responded enthusiastically to calls for troops, and Iowa had an extensive support network on the home front that secured supplies, operated farms in soldiers' absences, and treated sick and wounded soldiers. Blair recounts a particular event in February 1863 in Keokuk, Iowa, when approximately 75 wounded soldiers banded together to focus their displeasure on the *Keokuk Daily*