

### From Sherman's Army, With Love: Illinois Soldier's Field Letters Address Things Back Home

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#### Recommended Citation

Ligget, Larry G. (2001) "From Sherman's Army, With Love: Illinois Soldier's Field Letters Address Things Back Home," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.3.1.15

Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol3/iss1/15>

## Review

### FROM SHERMAN'S ARMY, WITH LOVE

#### Illinois soldier's field letters address things back home

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Winter 2001

**More, Betty E.** *Soldier Boy: Letters and History of an Illinois Union Soldier.* Heritage Books, ISBN 788415514

Colonel Smith D. Atkins loathed General Gordon Granger and sought to persuade William Rosecrans to attach Atkins's 92nd Illinois Infantry to active duty at the front. Relief came after Colonel John Wilder observed the regiment building a bridge across the Duck River, liked what he saw, and had it assigned to his brigade of mounted in-fantry. The "Ninety-twosters" were overjoyed, none more so than Eugene McBride Swaggart.

Eleven months earlier, in August 1862, Eugene enlisted in the 92nd Illinois at Camp Fuller, in Rockford. Letters written from the field to his wife, Elvira, are the essence of **Soldier Boy**. The regiment joined the Army of Kentucky under Granger, and Eugene's correspondence expressed concern for his wife and much description of "solger" life.

Eugene and his comrades became known as the "Abolition Regiment" because the officers took in several contraband slaves as personal servants. Superiors ordered Atkins to return the fugitives, but he refused. Indictment for "stealing chattel" was his reward. Difficult marches and failed attempts to capture John Hunt Morgan were also part of the early history of the regiment.

February 1863 found the men near Nashville, Tennessee, where they helped to drive Earl Van Dorn south of Columbia. In June, Eugene became ill and was in the hospital until the end of July. Unable to be with the regiment when it joined Wilder's brigade, he soon caught up. During the battle of Chickamauga, Eugene was on detached service to Lilly's battery and found himself responsible for carrying "ammunition to the gun." The regiment was in all the movements of Hugh Judson Kilpatrick's cavalry during the Atlanta campaign, covering the left

of Sherman's army as it withdrew from Jonesboro. It participated in the cavalry fighting while marching through the Carolinas.

In his letters, Eugene's concern is mostly for things back home. When writing of campaigns and battles, he is often disappointingly brief. A scattering of letters from Eugene's family and friends are also included, adding to the personal view of the War. Betty E. More, the editor of **Soldier Boy** and great-granddaughter of Eugene and Elvira, bolsters Eugene's letters with details about the regiment. This helps greatly, but the editor acknowledges she is not an historian. The supporting information is from only a handful of sources, particularly *The Civil War Almanac* (1983) and the *Supplement to the Official Records* (Broadfoot, ISBN 1568372752, \$5000.00 set).

Some errors exist; for example, Thomas Crittenden commanded the XXI Corps, not the XX Corps, and William S. Rosecrans's middle name is "Starke," not "Starkie." The two indices and glossary are quite helpful, but unfortunately there are no maps. Even with these shortcomings, Betty E. More has done a yeoman's job with **Soldier Boy**. This book, though primarily a family history, would be enjoyable reading for anyone with a special interest in the 92nd Illinois Infantry.

*Larry G. Liggett is the co-author, with the late Frank J. Welcher, of Coburn's Brigade: 85th Indiana, 33rd Indiana, 19th Michigan, and 22nd Wisconsin in the Western Civil War (1999). He has devoted 25 years to the study of the Civil War, and is the managing editor of a scholarly journal.*