

### Buckeye Adventurer: He Lost A Finger To Gain A Brevet General's Star

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## Review

### BUCKEYE ADVENTURER

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**Castel, Albert** *Tom Taylor's Civil War*. University Press of Kansas, 2000-11-01. ISBN 700610499

Albert Castel has produced another fine book in **Tom Taylor's Civil War**, a close look at a field officer who served primarily with the 47th Ohio Volunteer Infantry in western Virginia and the Western Theater. Taylor would have remained obscure were it not for the hundreds of surviving letters that he and his wife Margaret, or "Netta," exchanged, as well as his field-written journal entries. Castel culled those writings, publishing the best passages in their entirety while adding interesting transitions of his own that further explain the documents and assist in placing the correspondence in context.

The portrait that emerges of soldier Taylor is fascinating. He left his wife and two children on April 24, 1861, to enlist, driven to gain the martial success that had eluded his father during the Texas Revolution. Taylor fairly lusted after rank and prominence, and schemed to gain attention, promotion, and select duties. His missives often contain references to fellow officers who he believed were out to cheat him of his just rewards.

As impatient as he was ambitious, the Ohioan often carped at Netta for not writing frequently enough, then expressed remorse when bundles of her delayed letters arrived. Though many of his letters indicate a deep passion for his wife, it is also possible that Taylor was unfaithful to Netta during a visit to Nashville's notorious "Smoky Row."

Despite his shortcomings, Taylor was redeemed by his fine performance as an officer; his abundant leadership qualities quickly led superiors to entrust him with responsibility. He considered the welfare of his troops, and they in turn showed their appreciation, welcoming him with rousing cheers when he returned

to the regiment from detached duty during the Vicksburg campaign. Taylor remained on duty when sick and fatigued, and was not afraid of the front line. He even lost a finger in an 1864 engagement.

The Buckeye gained the promotions he so coveted, rising from lieutenant to major and a staff position, and left the Union army in 1865 as a brevet brigadier general. He exemplified the high grade of citizen soldier that helped the North conquer the vast and rugged Western Theater.

Netta's writings also intrigue, as she often implores her husband to resign and return to Ohio, her sentiments echoing those of Southern women who bade their menfolk to quit the army for hearth and home. Taylor rebutted her arguments by citing a mix of personal and patriotic motivations for staying in the military. Netta's rare responses provide a glimpse into her struggles to maintain the family without her husband, and indicate the need for more study on the complexities of the northern home front.

The innovative Castel calls this book a "biography," an apt term, for **Tom Taylor** tells us much more about its protagonist than do many compilations of period sources with a more traditional format. The Taylors' literate correspondence and their biographer's informative material combine to allow readers to gain an intimate portrait of what made one Union officer tick and the effect of his service on his family, as well as the internal workings of a regiment's command structure.

*Dana B. Shoaf is the associate editor of America's Civil War magazine. With Robert G. Carroon, he is co-author of Union Blue: The History of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (2000).*