

The Story of My Campaign: The Civil War Memoir of Captain Francis T. Moore, Second Illinois Cavalry

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Review

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Bahde, Thomas (ed.) *The Story of my Campaign: The Civil War Memoir of Captain Francis T. Moore, Second Illinois Cavalry*. Northern Illinois University Press, \$35.00 ISBN 978-0-87580-441-5

Remembering the Experience from the Ground Up

In the vast literature concerning the American Civil War, there are hundreds of books to be found that are the memoirs of combatants on both sides. Hundreds more are comprised of letters and diaries composed during the conflict by those who gave service to their respective sides. Each genre has its merits for those who seek a better understanding of our nation's bloodiest military encounter. Diaries and letters from the war have a powerful impact from their recording immediate impressions, for example, while memoirs allowed the authors to put the chaotic events in which they participated into perspective. It should also be noted that both genres have significant drawbacks. A soldier hastily scribbling a letter to reassure his parents that he survived a battle had no chance to fact check, while in composing memoirs the passage of time often played tricks with the memories of veterans. In most instances, then, those interested in reading personal accounts left by Johnny Reb and Billy Yank must settle for a story that is at best incomplete.

An exception to this rule, however, comes in the form of *The Story of My Campaign: The Civil War Memoir of Captain Francis T. Moore, Second Illinois Cavalry*. During his four years of military service, Moore kept a diary and wrote letters to his family back in Quincy, Illinois. Years after the war, Moore used his writings to create a detailed account of his life during the conflict. He also included sketches that he had made while in the service. His memoir eventually made its way into the archives at San Diego State University, where historian Thomas Bahde discovered it. Recognizing its value, Bahde edited the work, and has provided the reader with a fascinating book that embodies the best of both worlds offered by personal accounts of the American Civil War.

Bahde begins his work with a foreword provided by the noted American Civil War historian Michael Fellman. This was an inspired choice, as Fellman's work on the guerrilla war in Missouri covered the type of campaign that the Second Illinois Cavalry frequently participated in. He is therefore well qualified to briefly introduce Francis T. Moore to the reader, and give his thoughts on what the memoir can do for our understanding of the conflict. Bahde follows with an introduction of his own that amplifies the message conveyed by Fellman. In the introduction, Bahde discusses how writing a memoir allowed an American Civil War veteran to not simply recount the past, but to make sense of it as well. He notes the minor editorial and stylistic changes that he has made, and then allows Moore to tell his story.

Francis T. Moore, like thousands of other young men, volunteered his services to the Union in the first year of the American Civil War. Rather than rush to enlist after the firing on Ft. Sumter, however, Moore bided his time, waiting for the call to form an Illinois cavalry regiment. He based this decision on both his pre-war militia service in a cavalry unit and his belief that his physical condition would not stand up to the demands placed on an infantryman. His hopes were rewarded when in July of 1861 he learned that a company of cavalry was to be raised in his home town of Quincy. He volunteered, and in August of 1861 was mustered into service.

Strikingly absent from the account of his enlistment is any serious discussion of what Moore thought the war was about. To him, the war seemingly was simply about retribution for the decision by the Confederates to fire on the American flag at Ft. Sumter. Moreover, unlike many Union veterans, Moore spends little time discussing either the righteousness of the cause he was fighting for or criticizing the motivation of his enemies. Moore, for example, states on page 99 that he "took up arms to put down rebellion," and then declines the opportunity to develop that assertion in greater depth. This reticence to discuss any overarching themes connected to the conflict continues throughout his memoir. Perhaps this was indeed the view of the conflict held by Moore, or it could reflect a belief that an over-sentimentalizing of the American Civil War would lessen the authenticity of the story he was relating.

To be sure, Moore did have attitudes and beliefs that occasionally make their way into his narrative. Moore wrote that he felt blacks might not be equal to the responsibilities inherent in being free, for example; he later expressed his

conviction that emancipation should nonetheless be an objective of the Union. In a similar fashion, Moore is capable of commending Confederate soldiers for fighting bravely on occasion, but much more often suggests that the men in grey lacked the resolve to defend positions at all hazards. While striving to maintain an outwardly neutral stance, then, Moore clearly gives the reader indications of where his true sentiments lie.

As previously noted, Moore felt that he might not be physically capable of withstanding the rigors that infantrymen would face during the American Civil War. He describes himself as “being only about five feet five or six inches tall and weighing not over 125 pounds” (18). While small in stature, Moore must have had a commanding presence in terms of personality and character, because when a lieutenant’s position opened in his company in November of 1861 he was elected by his comrades to fill the vacancy. A few months later the company’s captain died, and Moore once again was elevated to a higher rank by a popular vote. Although the members of his company obviously believed that Moore was good officer material, the same confidence was not always held by Moore’s superiors. In November of 1863 Moore received an arrest order issued by a colonel he had served under, and was instructed to await a summons to a court martial. That incident passed without any disciplinary action being taken against him, but in May of 1864 he was again arrested on charges brought by a superior officer. This time Moore did receive a punishment, but was allowed to return to his duties. During this time period he tried to resign his commission, only to have his request denied. Moore would wind up retaining his position until he was honorably discharged in June of 1865.

When he returned to Quincy, Moore could look back over four years of service that had run the gamut from intense moments of danger in combat to long, monotonous stretches of inactivity. Much of Moore’s time was actually spent away from his unit, either through receiving orders to report for detached duty or as the result of the myriad illnesses that he suffered from. This, of course, will be a familiar tale to students of the American Civil War who realize that disease was a bigger threat to the well-being of the soldiers than enemy bullets were. To be sure, Moore had numerous projectiles fired in his direction; his account of a running battle with Confederate forces in October of 1862 conveys in no uncertain terms how perilous combat at close range could be. Moore could also boast upon his return to civilian life of having served the Union cause over a vast expanse of terrain. From the attle of Belmont in Missouri in 1861 to his last detail in East Pascagoula, Mississippi, Moore had experienced regular and

irregular warfare throughout much of the Confederacy.

Moore ended his memoir with his return to his father's store in Quincy. He recounts in a poignant moment how after four years of service, his father did not recognize him until he spoke. Clearly, the man who walked across the store's threshold was a much different person in many ways than the one who had left a mere four years before.

Moore's memoir ends in 1865, but Bahde provides us with an epilogue in which he discusses what happened to Moore in the post-war years. He also suggests what the value of this, or any, memoir written by an American Civil War veteran is. Bahde asserts that the memoir's "purpose is best viewed through the eyes of a rheumatic old man trying to make some sense of a life that must have passed all too quickly" (264). This resonates nicely with the work of oral and public historians, one of which has suggested that "there is only one objective history, but many collective memories" (Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 1992) For this reason *The Story of My Campaign*, an interesting story superbly edited by a gifted historian, represents an important stepping stone on the path to discerning what the American Civil War meant to those who fought in it.

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