

Book Notices

Such Are the Trials: The Civil War Diaries of Jacob Gantz, edited by Kathleen Davis. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991. xiv, 122 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, appendix, index. \$17.95 cloth.

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Kathleen Davis was "privileged to come to know" (xi) her great-great-grandfather, Jacob S. Gantz, as a consequence of transcribing four diaries he kept while on active duty with the Fourth Iowa Cavalry from March 1863 to April 1865. She writes, "perhaps the reader of this book will develop . . . a deeper understanding of an ordinary man in the Civil War" (xi). An alert reading of this brief volume does contribute to an understanding of the experiences of a soldier on the periphery of the major actions of the Civil War. It shifts the focus on the war from grand strategy and ultimate goals to the reality of the struggle as experienced by those most closely involved.

The diaries provide access to, among other topics, the dullness and routine of camp life; the variety, and at times scarcity, of food, both supplied and "foraged," for the men and horses; the alarms of battle and the joy and pride of defeating the enemy; the prevalence of disease and the harshness of medical treatment; the personal scrounging and purchasing by soldiers to make their quarters and camps better; and the apparently matter-of-fact acceptance of dead and wounded comrades.

Gantz's diaries shed light on the level of education in mid-century Iowa and record his amazement at new things seen in distant places. The editor provides a brief account of Gantz's regiment before the diaries begin and of his life after the amputation of his right arm two weeks before the war ended. She supplies brief notes identifying sixty-seven individuals mentioned in the diaries, forty-nine of whom were also ordinary soldiers.

A little effort could have improved the two maps showing the movement of Gantz's regiment. Except for occasional brief explanatory notes, the editor lets the diaries effectively speak to the reader.

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