

# Civil War Diary Keeping: Every Man Was His Own Historian

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

**CIVIL WAR DIARY KEEPING:**  
**EVERY MAN WAS HIS OWN HISTORIAN**

SENIOR THESIS

April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Let history tell of their glorious deeds!  
In poetry, prose, and in song!  
Let angels shout victory, as veterans pass  
Through the gates of the glorified throng.  
– **Corporal Charles E. Smith**

All quiet.  
– **Captain Richard Blackstone**

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## INTRODUCTION:

### *Every Man Was His Own Historian*

Official records and secondary sources provide an overview of historical events, but the substance of history is built on the aggregate output of human agency. Personal accounts of the Civil War offer a close-up view of the past. Captain Richard Blackstone and Corporal Charles E. Smith, both of whom served in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry, were two war diarists whose fresh accounts are more sensory and alive than the reductionist hindsight of historical analysis. Blackstone and Smith recorded honest accounts of their experiences. The differences in writing styles showcase their individuality while providing an intimate understanding of how Civil War soldiers lived and coped. The themes of religion, patriotism, and discipline elucidate each man's intent in keeping a diary, and provide reasons for enlistment, endurance of the war, and a desire to see it through. As autobiographers, common men like Blackstone and Smith bequeathed to us their personal stories across millennia. Their histories are invaluable contributions to a comprehensive study of the Civil War, as they help historians to better understand the motives and mentalities of average Civil War soldiers.

With advances in publishing technologies of the nineteenth century industrial era, diary keeping became a popular trend concurrent with a rise in literacy rates. The steam powered, roll-fed rotary printing press of 1843 could print millions of copies of a single page in a single day. Mass production of printed works flourished.<sup>1</sup> An increase in literacy yielded the United States' transition to the industrial age. As oil lamps gave over to gas lighting, and communication technologies improved, reading materials became readily available, and a fascination with

personal storytelling prompted individuals to record their own experiences, or “histories” as they were commonly called. The armies of the Civil War were the most literate soldiers up to that time. Over ninety percent of white Union soldiers and over eighty percent of Confederate soldiers could read and write. Many kept diaries and most wrote letters to loved ones.<sup>2</sup>

Through their intimacy, and therefore their truth, war diaries improve historians’ understanding of the past. Then, as now, those desirous of comparative Civil War chroniclers need no longer be entirely dependent on history written by the winners, the agenda makers and the owners of newspapers and magazines. Men with little more than an elementary education could purchase a diary and record their experiences. Given this abundance of soldiers’ stories, the experience of war becomes magnified and humanized. Compared to popular commercial memoirs and biographies of major historical players of the time, the diaries of common soldiers give us granularity. According to Randall C. Jimerson’s analysis in *The Private Civil War: Popular Thought During the Sectional Conflict*, “Historians have extensively studied the leaders, but the opinions of common soldiers and civilians have received inadequate attention.”<sup>3</sup> Jimerson makes an exceptional point here, as the opinions of plain people, an example of nineteenth century crowd sourcing, disclose a great deal of insight into American character and sectionalism, far more than studying a few florid biographies of a few famous Generals.

The American Civil War remains its deadliest: by the end of the war, 620,000 war-related deaths had been recorded, ten percent of all 20-45 year old Northern white males, and thirty percent of all 18-40 year old Southern white males.<sup>4</sup> Analysis of economic, political, and racial issues of the war has ossified what happened then, yet historians are continuously perplexed by observations and opinions of such issues in diaries and letters of the time, which may not neatly agree with their high-level hypotheses. Mosaics disappear up close.

Diaries composed during the Civil War varied in aesthetics and format depending on the diarist's preference, but most were pocket-sized for convenience, fitting into the interior breast pocket of a grey or blue jacket. Smith prolifically filled out the pages of twenty-one diaries. Blackstone laconically filled only one. Printed at the top of each page in Blackstone's diary, in twenty-point bold, is the day of the week, the date of the month and the year, first line, front and center. Smith's diary had no printed dates. It is as if time, to his artistic mien, was a seamless continuum. As dawn to Blackstone's dusk, Smith's once blank pages gave his creative impulse free rein to sketch whatever his mind conjured up. It is evident in the disparities of style, content, and frequency of entries that the diary represented itself differently to each man. Blackstone wrote a lot less than Smith, imparting little emotion even in his entries on what must have been horrific days in the field. Smith, on the other hand, was a religious poet who mindfully recorded the stale bread of breakfast to verbatim conversations with his best friend, the Chaplain. For both men, the diary was a tool to record details of the days: weather, food, expenditures, and battle movements. For Blackstone, the diary was a daily chore he usually completed with thoroughness, part of his gear to be tended. For Smith, the diary was time away from time, a safe haven for creative self-expression.

An apparatus for remembrance, the Civil War diary gave its author creative control and a sense of autonomy to soldiers, something unattainable to men at the low end of organizations, grunts whose job was to do and die. Colonel Charles Wainwright of New York mentions diaries in his own diary: "By books, I do not mean to read, but books to write in. We are making history, not studying it."<sup>5</sup> Wainwright used his diary as most soldiers did, keeping records of daily activities, observances and expectations. Aware of having participated in cataclysmic events, many soldiers kept journals to bring back the days of a pivotal period in their lives and

the life of their country, which they held as dearly. Historian Henry Steele Commager puts it well, “Surely no other chapter of modern history has been so faithfully or so elaborately recorded by ordinary men and women; in the American Civil War Everyman was, indeed, his own historian.”<sup>6</sup> In the words of Tennessean Sam Watkins, “I have as much right as any to create a history”<sup>7</sup>

Most soldiers who kept diaries reveled in the concept of legacy, memorializing their experience of redefining the country they loved. As they made history, they recorded their own histories. For some, journal writing was an activity to occupy the mind, a way to break away from the monotonous grind of camp life and ponder the latest noteworthy events. For others, the primary upside to keeping a diary was to vent frustrations, describe battles so as to process horror, and generally ease the pains of boredom, scribbling onto blank pages utterances too embarrassing or too recriminating to voice out loud. The diary was a friend to many who were disinclined to gossip.

Throughout the tumult of the Civil War, religion and faith were comfort and calm to combatants; they gave purpose to listless souls, and brought solace to insanity. Organizationally, faith was conducive to maintaining morale. The Civil War armies, according to historian James McPherson, were arguably the most religious in history.<sup>8</sup> Smith’s steady reference to God throughout his diaries gives truth to McPherson’s assertion.

In Robert J. Miller’s *Both Prayed to the Same God*, an intriguing observation is made in terms of the history of religion in the North and the South. At the taproot of American religion, harshness ruled the lives of Puritan colonists in New England. Their communities were tightly-knit. High moral standards were espoused, and everyone had civic responsibilities. Synonymous with community, religion in the North evolved because social issues were more apt to be



discussed, debated and acted upon, as unanimous opinion was never the result, and consensus was never coerced.<sup>9</sup>

Religion in the South was quite different from its neighbor north of the Mason-Dixon Line. With its confounding fundamentalist roots, the prevailing flavor of Christianity in southern territory was personal and private. To southerners, the un-interpretable Bible was the word of God and the cornerstone of their spirituality. Unlike in the North, Southern religion did not embody the spirit of social service, outside of sewing circles and charity balls. Their religious ideology centered on a personal relationship with God and not with other adherents, thus limiting social development. The seeds of schism between North and South were planted during the second epoch as “Southern ethos and self-consciousness began to emerge, with a slowly increasing antagonism and enmity towards...the North”<sup>10</sup> The divergence of organized religions paralleled a growing cultural divisiveness, informing, intensifying and imparting inevitable political and economic hostilities. This diversion appears in Blackstone and Smith as background for understanding soldiers’ motivations to fight.

Most soldiers held the religious beliefs of old school Christianity, but most were not as devout as Corporal Smith. He prayed, visited with the Chaplain, or left camp to visit a nearby church during his free time. His faith sustained him. Through the most horrendous circumstances, he could always lift his spirit through prayer. This puts a face on his story. Reading such religious fervor captured during times of the height of human abuse, one can vicariously experience the calming thought process of a devout Christian by following along with Corporal Smith.

Discipline was fundamental to the cohesiveness of the infantry, and for men like Blackstone, maintaining a daily record was a task in keeping with regimental regularity.

However, volunteer regiments in the Civil War were notoriously derelict in terms of discipline.

Cohorts of men from the same states, cities, and neighborhoods held stronger bonds than conscripted soldiers, and were less influenced by externally-imposed military rules.

Subordination was a foreign concept to many, and ramifications for not following orders were rarely enforced. Yet the armies of blue and grey were able to recruit three million men to fight the “Brother’s War.”<sup>11</sup> What motivated so many to volunteer for possible death? According to Abraham Lincoln, there were several motives: “patriotism, political bias, ambition, personal courage, love of adventure, want of employment.”<sup>12</sup> While there were plenty of motivational factors influencing men to fight, one prime motive was the war’s almost ad hominem attacks in the press. For example, in an article published in Harper’s Weekly, on April 13, 1861, the day after the war officially began, a journalist commented on Governor Pickens’s decision to secede:

We will not stop to question the merit of the “advance” which South Carolina is here said to have made. But we must say, in justice to the ancients, that Governor Pickens is stealing their laurels. If it be a credit to establish sep-arate governments... the glory is due to the men who lived a thousand years ago or thereabouts. Governor Pickens and his State are borrow-ing the scanty honors of the barons of the Middle Ages. For they it was who invented the system of small nationalities, and an end-less series of secessions.<sup>13</sup>

By belittling Governor Pickens, the article criticizes South Carolinians as well. Written in response to the Governor’s statement that South Carolina “made an advance in the science of government...to withdraw from any confederacy,”<sup>14</sup> the article in the popular northern publication argues that his claim to be original is untrue. Secession and warring between small states is the history of all civilizations, and it is a natural political tendency of minorities to rebel against their majorities.

By 1861, the country was in the midst of a messy divorce. According to Mary Chesnut, wife of a prominent Confederate lawyer and politician, “We are separated because of incompatibility of temper...We are divorced, North and South, because we hated each other

so.”<sup>15</sup> They called each other names, had affairs with foreign countries for supplemental aid and hired the best war strategists to scheme the other’s defeat. Those caught in the custody battle were the soldiers who courageously charged into the breach.

Although the word “diary” has connotations of privacy, many diarists intended their stories for a broader audience. Smith, unlike Blackstone, wrote with such precision and care because he hoped to share his remembrances with friends, family, and future generations. Along with sketches of panoramic scenery, battle fortifications and prayer circles, Smith mentions several times his hope for future remembrance. In comparison, Blackstone for the most part is vague, nonchalant and curt. With no intention of publishing, his thoughts and observances were singularly and intensely personal to him. There was no literary exertion on his part, he did not bear the burden of Smith in terms of polishing prose and he was not concerned with stately word play. Yet sometimes, less is more. Entries like “All quiet”<sup>16</sup> from Blackstone’s account carry more significance than many of Smith’s bombastic soliloquies. Given the context, such silence between the notes lends an eerie frankness to the imagination, bewildering the reader with possible scenarios. As Blackstone gave no explanation of the day’s events, Smith’s entry on the corresponding day shows that the Union had lost many lives in a battle at Fredricksburg. The war-weariness it expresses, in comparative context to his daily recordings, renders Blackstone with a contemplative and very human quality, making his experience come alive right off the page. Such brevity would not evoke the same effect if explained objectively by a secondary source document taken out of context.

Not every diarist was an outstanding chronicler of war. There is an abundance of information pertaining to what soldiers did and what daily life was like, but what stands out as significant are the vivid reflections and well-articulated opinions of why they fought. Such in-

depth honesty is rare, and elaborated in Smith's twenty-one diaries is his state of mind, his idea of the Union as a collective entity, his theology of God, and ideology of war. On the very first page he announces, "...the duty to serve his country in a time of need" as his reason for enlistment. Such stridency helps historians with the top facet of a many-sided conundrum of discovering the cause for enlistment and sustained fighting. Personal motivations are best extracted from the primary source.

In one day of battle, the Civil War made men from boys. Soldiers were trained, so to speak, how to die. Profuse and proximal death quickly numbed the senses of those brought close to it, and Civil War combatants quickly grew indifferent to suffering. With the acoustical blows of musket fire, the compassion was knocked right out of many young men as their comrades had life and limb ripped from them just an arm's distance away. According to Civil War veteran John W. De Forest, "Self-preservation is the first law of nature...The man who does not dread to die or to be mutilated is a lunatic. The man who, dreading these things still faces them for the sake of duty and honor is a hero."<sup>17</sup> One could contemplate forever what galvanized those young men to walk into the line of fire. Outliers, deserters, and drunks excluded, Civil War soldiers often denied the natural impulse of self-preservation in order to serve a higher good, whether it was God's will, personal honor or professional duty.

The list of motivational factors is a long one, each deserving of thought, yet in McPherson's *For Cause and Comrades*, he posits the words of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, that an officer becomes so "absorbed by the sense of responsibility for his men, for his cause, or for the fight that the...instinct to seek safety is overcome by the instinct of honor."<sup>18</sup> According to a framework borrowed from John A. Lynn, a historian of the French Revolution, McPherson cites the three categories for army's impetus: *initial* motivation to enlist; a *sustaining* motivation

to keep soldiers enlisted, and *combat* motivation, to keep them fighting in battle.<sup>19</sup> The diaries of Blackstone and Smith provide personal motivations from all three categories, more predominantly patriotism and duty. Whatever the motivation, Northerners and Southerners fervently believed in their collective mission, the South to champion states rights and the North to unite a nation in peril.

Until all but the end of it, Union and Confederate citizens embodied an unshakeable faith in the support of their homelands. The individual human beings who comprised the armies of opposing sides aligned their personal convictions with those of mass ideology, heightening their hatred for one another. They internalized the issues of slavery, sectionalism, and states' rights, pursuing a cause they deemed worth dying for. Divided by conflicting self-images, the two sub-nations of America inflamed their distaste for the enemy through ideological dissolutions, then physical ones. Jimerson highlights this argument about sectional divisions:

The war thus began amid sectional misunderstandings and prejudices. Northerners and southerners did not really know or understand each other, and the stereotypes with which each regarded the other served as counterimages (sic) in defining their own sectional identities.<sup>20</sup>

Here, Jimerson illustrates the naïveté of both sides. Neither Union nor Confederate made attempts to get along. Prejudices were propagandized and stoked like bonfires. The two sides determined their identities by saying they were the complete opposite of their enemies, each finding comfort in antagonizing the other.

Counterbalancing the grand opinions of politicians and major historical players who claimed to voice the beliefs of broad constituencies, the diaries of Blackstone and Smith represent the common soldier's story. At the time of enlistment in 1861, Blackstone was twenty years old. Smith was twenty-six. Having served in the same infantry, their personalities and writing styles could not have been more different from one another. Smith's poetic flow evokes

heartfelt emotion. Blackstone doles out the days. The disparities in style, the reasons they recorded their experiences, and the influence their diaries had on each man explain a great deal about soldiers' experiences during wartime. Separate but interrelated; the following analyses of each diary illustrate the diarist's individuality while providing a cohesive interpretation of a soldier's experience from 1861 to 1865.

## CHAPTER I

### **Richard Blackstone Keeps Track:**

#### *A Pocket-Sized Daily Remembrance*

In the fall of 1861, at the age of twenty, Richard Blackstone marched into war as a Private in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Mustered out as Captain and having survived the war's entirety, Blackstone left behind a personal record of events in a diary dated January through December of 1863, although he used the diary to account for some occurrences as early as 1861 and as late as August 1864. Blackstone's in situ account gives context to themes of discipline and order, as his list-like, colorless entries illustrate the heavy weight of war, and the compelling intent that guided people like him to pen their experiences. Blackstone's sparse renderings show that for some soldiers, a diary was simply a tool to keep track of life's little exigencies.

As backdrop to Blackstone's story, much of which is documented in 1863, the American Civil War was in the middle of its four-year death grip. Blackstone and the rest of his infantry were called to duty on January 29, 1863 as General Grant was placed in command of the Army of the West, with orders to capture Vicksburg. Amidst this campaign, on April 27, 1863 he wrote: "Heavy firing in the direction of the river...orders to march at six o'clock."<sup>21</sup> It was not until July 4<sup>th</sup>, after a six week siege, that the Confederates surrendered their last stronghold on the Mississippi River. The capture of Vicksburg was a triumph for the Union and was among many of Blackstone's campaigns. A political victory for the Union, the Emancipation Proclamation issued by Abraham Lincoln had come into effect for the second time, *passé* partout, on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1863, the same date printed on the first page of Blackstone's diary.<sup>22</sup> A

chessboard threat-line, the well-timed ordinance announced the fiat freedom of three million slaves.<sup>23</sup>

To confirm Blackstone's account, Whitelaw Reid's book *Ohio in the War: Her Statesmen, Her Generals and Soldiers* provides background information on the 32<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Infantry of which he was a part. Reid writes in Volume II of the two part collection:

The thirty-second entered the field September 15, 1861, nine hundred and fifty strong, and during the war received more than sixteen hundred recruits. Only five hundred remained at its muster out. It is believed that the regiment lost and recruited more men than any other from Ohio.<sup>24</sup>

Reid depicts Blackstone's infantry as one of the first volunteer organizations from the state on the basis of three years service, noting its rendezvous locations at Camp Bartley near Mansfield, Ohio and the unit's later transfer to Camp Dennison near Cincinnati. In addition, he even describes the infantry's reputation as less than disciplined: "The 32<sup>nd</sup> had been hurried to the field without discipline of any kind – in fact it was hardly organized."<sup>25</sup> Reid's *Ohio in the War* backs up Blackstone's diary by providing documented evidence putting the unit into place, and Blackstone's account into context.

Enlisted on July 20, 1861 and mustered out on June 6, 1865, Blackstone's experiences from volunteer Private to Captain are captured and remanded on three hundred and sixty five pages of his diary. Throughout his years, Blackstone participated in pivotal battles at Harper's Ferry, Va., Port Gibson, Miss., the siege of Vicksburg, among many others. These engagements were some of the most pivotal in the War's history, and yet he left little description behind. There is no drama in his diary, there are no poetics in his rhetoric. He leaves us with a firsthand, matter-of-fact account of the war. Ever the soldier, his prose is literal, spare and frank when describing his days in battle. Blackstone lived well beyond the War, to the age of 82, passing away in 1925 in South Dakota where he had worked as an engineer.<sup>26</sup>



Much space is given to calculations of money spent on postage stamps, socks, suspenders and life's little necessities. His daily entries included weather conditions, recording of letters from home and the dates of his response, and nonchalant notes on encounters with the enemy while marching into battle. For example, on February 26, 1863 he dealt with rainy weather: "This morning I got a raft out of the lake and made us a bed and floor in our tent to keep us out of the mud."<sup>27</sup> As Captain Blackstone wrote of his daily activities, he explained on a micro level what camp life and war life were really like for Civil War soldiers.

The discipline required of a soldier in the nineteenth century is evidenced in Blackstone's recording of the pitching of tents, tending to one's gear, eating rough, weathering poor conditions, and the falling of comrades in battle – all recorded factually, with little or no emotion. For example, on Sunday, January 25th 1863 he wrote:

Chris (sic) fell overboard early this morning and was drowned. Left the boat about noon. Went into town a mile south of the city. Before we got our tents up it began to rain. A hard night in the mud.<sup>28</sup>

Blackstone was not given to maudlin reverie or flowery prose. He had a leather bound diary with 365 pages for every day of the year, a pencil, a quill, some ink, and stationery upon which he made entries when his diary was left back at camp and later transcribed onto the corresponding days. As the once-blank diary was not printed until 1863, and judging from entries labeled in the years 1861-2, and 1864-5, it appears he kept track of some events on single pieces of paper and transcribed them at a later date. Like other diarists, Blackstone intended to use the diary as *memoire de guerre*, although when time or circumstance did not allow for reflective note-taking, he did not make it a priority. The words "A Daily Pocket Remembrance For 1863"<sup>29</sup>, printed on the inside cover, show the literal significance that the diary represented to him: a way to remember the days.

The diary is about eight by five inches. Bound by tattered black leather, the tea colored pages show their years in faded ink and crumbling corners. Overall, the entries were written in short, declarative sentences, many of which contain just a noun, a verb, and a noun.

Occasionally he graced some sentences with an adjective, and his descriptive departures shine like baubles in a box of pennies. For example, a typical entry reads, “Drew 2 days rations yesterday...Bought suspenders 60 cts”<sup>30</sup> By contrast, on Tuesday, May 12 he wrote of his experience in battle:

44<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved at 5 o’clock AM when we got within three miles of Raymond we heard the artillery in front and knew that we would have a fight. 32<sup>nd</sup> Ohio was on the extreme right of the line. We advance covered by a line of skirmishes. The (sic) drove the enemy from the hill but they rallied and drove the (sic) back.<sup>31</sup>

Here, an animated Blackstone was more detailed in his description of events. He notes the early time of day, the location, the sound, the battle position of his infantry, the anticipation of engaging the enemy, and the stand-and-fire act of fighting. This entry showcases a documented human sensory experience of war. He saw, he heard, he fought. At the time of composition, his intent was clearly to record an encounter with war, and by noting specifics like the time of day, he was no doubt able to revisit the past at a later time.

Although his entries are backed by historical fact, there are a few disparities in his disorganization of cataloging entries from a later date, as he transcribed accounts made in 1861. Prior to the entry on May 27, 1863, all significant skirmishes and camp relocations correspond to documented fact in *Ohio in the War*. For reasons unbeknownst to anyone but him, Blackstone had crossed out the majority of following dates and replaced them with ones from 1862 and 1864. By contrast, the entries with fixed dates read more smoothly and are written with better penmanship. Evidence of care suggests that those entries with altered dates were transcribed at a later time, from battlefield scraps.

With altered dates in no specific order, and pages cryptically numbered, Blackstone's diary is highly unorganized. On sequence 173 with the altered date of July, 1864, he began to number the top corners of every page, ending in "89" on the top left corner of September 17, 1863 and resuming the numbering on October 2, 1863 entry of which he changed to October, 1864. The number "89" is repeated, most likely an error as the numbering resumes fifteen pages later. As the last tallied page is numbered "91" and it is in uniform style with the rest of the apparently transcribed entries, it is discernable that Blackstone's numbering was a way for him to remember which days had been transplanted to the actual diary. The pages within the enumerated gap are filled with mathematical tables, bearing the titles of "Geometry", "Algebra" and "Examination," the dates of which read 1866, a year after the war ended. The tables are geometrically straight, undoubtedly drawn with a ruler or straight edge, and the penmanship is much neater than the time of original recording. With the noted year of 1866, these entries were made while Blackstone was working towards becoming an engineer. He continued to write in the diary after the war.

Blackstone's diary, with its mundane lists and blunt rhetoric, has glimpses of warmth, and overall, it illustrates the transient life of a young Union Civil War soldier. In the concluding pages he scribbled names of officers and listed the cities he traveled to with the distance in mileage them. For example, on sequence 365 he listed "Cairo", followed by "Columbus Ky" (sic) with the number "22" after it. The approximate mileage is twenty five miles. "New Madrid" is listed after "Columbus Ky" with the number "86" beside it, suggesting a distance of sixty four miles, which correlates with the actual distance of seventy miles. The numbers and corresponding cities are listed again on sequence 371, however the numbers are increased by one

thousand, reading “1022” instead of “22” and “1086” instead of “86,” suggesting the accumulation of miles traveled overall.

The final pages are covered in mathematical equations, random numbers and lists of rations ranging from candle sticks to bacon. In Blackstone's austere accounts of battle in his diary, it comes through that discipline and order were the driving forces behind his determination to beat the enemy, without consideration of politics. Without passion, he wrote of encounters with the enemy, shooting words at the diary: "About 8 o'clock we heard the cannons firing and we were soon on our way to the scene of action. Drove the enemy Reb. General. Rebels retracted in the night."<sup>32</sup> Nowhere in his diary did Blackstone vent any sorrow for what he had seen or remorse for what he had done during the fighting. He stated his army's movements and advances, calculated the enemy's reaction, and then on the same page recounted trivial activities like going to the theater or the number of sweet potatoes he had just eaten. He wrote of reaching a plantation near Port Gibson:

Very warm about noon we came to a plantation where there was about a thousand bushels of sweet potatoes. We filled our sacks. Camped on a levee four miles from the River opposite to the mouth of the Black River. Rebel fortification in full view from our position.<sup>33</sup>

The changeable nature of war is ostensible here. Like a butterfly on a howitzer, at one point he is filling a sack with sweet potatoes and setting up camp, the next he is gearing up to engage in kill-or-be-killed combat. The flurried and unpredictable life of a soldier is counterbalanced with the rigor of discipline. While Generals and war strategists were called upon to make calculated decisions affecting life and death, it was the job requirement of a soldier to always be ready to obey orders, and being ready meant being disciplined. Blackstone exemplified discipline. He enforced his personal sense of order by maintaining records of miles marched from city to city on the last few pages of his diary, and meticulously keeping track of expenditures, loans, and

rations: "Expended today 50 cts. Loaned Jack Sovereigns \$1.00. Drew 180 rations today."<sup>34</sup> A self-enforced, daily departure from the war, Blackstone's diary provided a bit of stability to look forward to in the late afternoons and evenings.

As Blackstone's daily regimen consistently manifests the thematic elements of discipline and order, his commentary on marching into battle is less than riveting: "On the march early. Did not go far until the rebel's rear guard threw a few shells toward us. We formed a line of battle and advanced but the rebs (sic) fled."<sup>35</sup> One can construe Blackstone's frank description of battle as an infestation of war in its host. His experience by then was jaded, and his guilelessness illustrates a mental stasis dizzied by war's carousel. Death was not a shock to him, nor even that interesting.

As death could come at any moment, soldiers like Blackstone learned to deal with such unpredictability. Although Blackstone never delved into the emotional aspects of pain, disease and death, he did write about the audible effects of gun fire: "Our division moved about 9 o'clock when we came near the scene of action. We heard the heaviest musketry (sic) firing I've ever heard which continued til about 3 o'clock."<sup>36</sup> He aridly included acts of war in his diary as just another day's work. This indifference provides an introspective view into the human condition of an American Civil War soldier. Blackstone was conditioned to fight. He saw death daily. His raw data and impassive demeanor serve as a lens through which some understanding of his day-to-day experiences and overall personality come through.

Based on Blackstone's lack of emotional expression and declarative writing style, it is inferred that his intent in diary keeping was not to make it available for public consumption. His diary was for personal use, to remember his days as a Union soldier, fighting to preserve a nation. With an absence of conscious self-exploration he demonstrated a practical use of diary

keeping by recording random occurrences and information that only affected him. Blackstone's modus operandi was honest, pure and true. His diary puts into context the themes of order, opinions about war, and the process of diary keeping. By simply recording his march into battle, the money he spent on postage stamps, and his indulgence of sweet potatoes, he left a life to be experienced by others, many years hence.

## CHAPTER II

### **Charles E. Smith Rhymes and Reasons:**

#### *Let History Tell of Their Glorious Deeds*

A farmer and part-time schoolteacher, Charles E. Smith took a brave step on September 9, 1861, enlisting in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry. He served a total of six years, the first three of which he enlisted for, the next three of which his nation demanded of him. Corporal Smith created his own history by building an arsenal of twenty-one small pocket diaries, recording his life in service from 1861-1865; they are compiled in one volume titled *A View from the Ranks: the Civil War Diaries of Charles E. Smith*, acquired from the Delaware County Ohio Historical Society. Smith's daily entries, poems and drawings showcase a man who kept his head while others about him were losing theirs. An introspective journey of a man driven to serve his country in a time of need, this first-hand account shows how a Civil War soldier sustained his motivation to fight on a daily basis. This is evident in the diary's themes of religious ideology, patriotic duty, and diligence in attention to detail. He calculated weather patterns, meals he ate, noises he heard, panoramic views he saw and profound feelings he felt. He did not neglect a single one of the five senses.

Smith's prose is evocative of a nineteenth century pastor, as he related battlefield experiences to biblical passages, sought meaning in the comparison, and diligently recorded spoken prayers. Smith was a strong willed, passionate and romantic man. His faith in God sustained him through the hardships of wartime. In many ways, it is clear from his church

rhetoric that theology was the one constant and unchangeable virtue he knew to be worth fighting for. He rhymed of his trust in God:

May those who have –fallen receive their reward  
And the blessings of Heaven from Jesus, our Lord.  
O save us, dear Father, if it be thy will;  
While fighting thy battles we’ll trust in Thee still.<sup>37</sup>

Through such poetics, he temporarily alleviated the burden and blood of warfare onto a platform of an idea of an omnipotent power well beyond the horror of shot and shell.

Religion was a strong motivational factor for Civil War soldiers. Thousands of soldiers in both the Union and Confederacy carried bibles, bringing comfort on the eve of battle. Like Smith, many associated God with their side and were determined to keep faith.<sup>38</sup> Those on the home front provided support through prayer as well. In an 1864 *Harper’s Weekly* article, a poem read: “God bless you, soldier!—when our light of hope grew dim and courage waned, When freedom veiled her face from sight, Your valor dashed away the night...”<sup>39</sup> Poems like this were read by soldiers in camp, and increased morale to many, knowing their efforts were appreciated.

When worship meetings could not be held, Smith attended church services held in the cities he marched through in a war pilgrimage of sorts:

I got a pass and N. Haycook and I went to town to meeting. We went to the Protestant Episcopal Church. The text was “What is man, that thou art mindful of him or the Son of Man that Thou visitest him”. The text was well handled... The boys went to town at night and came back about midnight, some of them pretty well zonked.<sup>40</sup>

The recording of the prayer’s title allowed him to later remember the religious message conveyed on that day. The passage is from Hebrews 2:6-9, and it places Jesus, “a little lower than the angels...that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”<sup>41</sup> Through the lens of Smith’s Christianity, when humanity is united with Jesus, who is the path to glory, they



too will be crowned with it. In wartime, a morale boosting passage like this emboldened men with a sense of purpose, to fight for God and country.

In addition to recording religious passages and daily occurrences, Smith's diary was also his vent. While younger soldiers drank whiskey and raised havoc, he prayed and composed his thoughts into a pocket diary. Smith's cadenced poetry reveals his desire for posterity. Through hardship and privation, Smith's innermost thoughts and feelings fought to see the good. One evening, after a hard day of skirmishing, he realized that his last blanket had been stolen. Below the entry, he wrote a tolerant and transcendent poem titled "The Christian Soldier":

I love to steal away from camp  
And breath the pure fresh air  
And spend my time when unemployed  
In humble grateful prayer...  
The Christian soldier has a friend<sup>42</sup>

These lines reveal his calm, wise and productive train of thought. Instead of exploding with anger and paying back in violence, which was the true currency of the day, he wrote of "stealing" away from the war and the world itself into peace and prayer.

Although his love of God was predominantly voiced through the polished thoughts of poetry, he chronicled much of his down time spent with the Chaplain. After a long, hot day of marching he described how the "boys" played along the way and that they "camped in a cornfield on the lakeshore...The Chaplain, Doctor and I slept in a barn."<sup>43</sup> To share sleeping quarters with two such distinguished persons, and not camp with men of his own rank, suggests that he had less of an interest to interact with his enlisted peers. The fact that he was a confidante to an ordained Chaplain shows he was a man of upstanding character. One such entry of times spent with the Chaplain illustrates a relationship galvanized by danger: "The Chaplain and I were lying in our tent reading papers at three p.m. and a Rebel bullet comes through our

tent and strikes the poles and falls down at our feet.”<sup>44</sup> He dodged a bullet with a man of God. This, along with other entries that account for their shared living arrangements, proves that the two men indeed shared a special bond. They traded Christian newspapers with one another and ate breakfast together. As from his faith, this friendship provided Smith with a sense of stability.

Although a righteous man, Smith did have his inner demons. Like many other soldiers, he indulged in tobacco. On November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1863 he sternly resolved not to smoke until the “30<sup>th</sup> day of December.”<sup>45</sup> Having used the drug for fourteen years, he wrote that the use of it was:

...a dirty and filthy practice...the use of it...destroy (sic) the powers of reason and render (sic) a persons mind incapable of comprehending the deep things of the Scriptures...it is unbecoming a gentleman or a soldier to use it in any form, much less in the house or church.<sup>46</sup>

He felt guilty for having given in to temptation for so long and he listed the unattractive qualities of tobacco to remind him of how a Christian man should behave. He signed his name to the resolution, vowing to abstain from tobacco. This hiatus did not last long, however. Two days later, on the 26<sup>th</sup>, he wrote of its enduring allure:

My appetite for tobacco was very strong, but I smoked very greedily all day...Came home about eleven o'clock and made a resolution not smoke any more tobacco. I went to bed but did not rest easy.<sup>47</sup>

His honesty in this struggle of addiction is timeless and humanizing, and his emotive details illustrate that he used the diary as a tool to vent repressed frustrations. His challenge of tobacco addiction is slightly hypocritical, as elsewhere in his account, Smith condemned other officers for smoking and drinking. On one occasion he described the “eggnog frolic” as the boys all danced around singing songs and getting dizzy on camp cocktails.

While comforted and sustained by religion, patriotism was an equally strong motivator for Smith, and other men like him, to fight. He was driven by the fervent urge to keep his

fractious country intact in its time of peril, and he ominously stated on the first page in the first volume of his twenty-one diaries:

I knew that I should have to undergo many hardships and be deprived of many privileges. But when I saw our great government, founded as it was by our noble ancestors, and our beautiful country, our free institutions under which we have lived, prospered and enjoyed the blessing of freedom and of God. When I saw it about to be torn down and destroyed, I felt it my duty to enlist in the cause of my country.<sup>48</sup>

He knowingly sacrificed his wellbeing to sustain a fragile government, an ideal he felt worth fighting for.

For many Union soldiers, Smith included, the patriotic conviction to combat Southern anarchy drove their motivation to fight and keep on fighting.<sup>49</sup> Lincoln called secession “the essence of anarchy” in his inaugural address of 1861. To men like Smith, it defied the Constitution and accosted the principles that the Founding Fathers championed for. If the Union were to be ruined on account of Southern “anarchists”, “the generation of 1861 would prove unworthy of the heritage of republican liberty.”<sup>50</sup> Unionists aware of this very real possibility were motivated by a fear of letting their ancestors down. This sense of duty to the past emboldened Smith.

Attention to political dialogue shows that Smith wanted to keep abreast of all governmental activity. Throughout his entries he commented on political issues, both of federal and state matter, making many references to the Governor of Ohio and President Lincoln. In one entry, he forecasted the election of a new Governor, acknowledging the Ohio soldiers’ voting-block power to boost John Brough’s majority lead by thirty percent over Clement L. Vallandigham. Brough’s victory in the fall of 1863 aided Ohio troops in many ways by “pledging his support to the union...bringing into effect a fair system of officer promotion...provided for inspection of field hospitals and better medical care.”<sup>51</sup> Emerging

from behind the shadows of historical data, Smith humanized the political event by providing an opinion of a man who knew the power of his vote.

Smith was not the only man in his family to be fighting in the name of political beliefs. His cousin, Ellis Reynolds, served in the Seventh Louisiana Regiment of the Army of the Confederacy, and Smith documented a letter from him verbatim. Ellis wrote, “We are fighting for the Constitution that our forefathers made, and not as old Abe would have it.”<sup>52</sup> This statement illustrates a commonly held disparity between the Union and the Confederacy, each quotient fighting for what they felt to be right and true. Both sides used the Constitution as a platform for argumentation, the South claiming Lincoln abused it and the North claiming that the South broke the law in seceding from the Union. In *For Cause and Comrades*, James McPherson highlights how families were torn apart by “The Brothers’ War” in a description of how two Virginian brothers took sides along party lines. They wrote political letters to each other voicing ad-hominem attacks pertaining to political views, and after their final correspondence they never spoke or wrote again. One was killed at Gettysburg and the other survived the war, having forged through Georgia in Sherman’s March.<sup>53</sup>

Smith had a strong distaste for the Confederacy, evident in his many digressions that cast in doubt the Rebel troop’s moral compass. In one entry, he emphatically stated, “Cast your eyes about you, and behold the graves of our patriots.”<sup>54</sup> Here he chastises the Confederates, telling them to look around in shame at the bodies of Union soldiers they have slain and to ask forgiveness from God on bended knee for fighting their own brethren.

Although Smith was as patriotic as could be, he naturally felt a blow of disappointment when the Union stop-lossed him for a month. Nearing discharge, he wrote in angst:

Can it be that we have been deceived, and lured into a snare, by a government for which we freely offered our services and our lives, and endured the hardships of the campaigns

which have resulted in the crushing of all its enemies and the establishment of the peace which civilians now enjoy?<sup>55</sup>

After venting some intense frustration, he quickly regrouped his emotions and wrote that he would regret saying anything more about it, and that he expects to remain with the regiment and obey orders, as long as they make good sense. Processing his pent up frustration, he ruminated in his digression and recognized the need to be sensible. The love he had for his country superseded the inconvenience of serving one month more than originally expected.

After the pivotal victory at Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, Smith documented his elation. He wrote: "...while the band made the air ring with sweet music; and the good old flag once more floated triumphantly to the breeze from the dome of the capitol.<sup>56</sup> Proud with the joy of victory, he sang "The Star Spangled Banner" and "The White, Red and Blue" with his comrades as the marching band played. Smith had no qualms about voicing his patriotism.

Smith spent much of his time alone, ruminative in his thoughts, and given the circumstances, it is remarkable that he was able to write in such detail and specificity. Not only did he write in his diaries, he drew in them. Left behind are penciled sketches of canned-sardine sleeping arrangements in tents, and illustrated maps of terrain with trees, rivers and stick-figure soldiers gearing up for battle. In one entry he composed an intricate two page illustration depicting the capture of a Mississippi Battery and one charge of many on the fort at Vicksburg. The second picture shows the Rebels lined up across enemy lines, and the brigade, about fifty little stick men with little stick rifles, readying for battle. Both sides are waving their colors, each a symbol of different flavors of freedom.

That Smith spent more time journal-writing than most other soldiers, and through the care invested, it figures that his diary was a necessary outlet to his expressive spirit, and he aimed at becoming published: "I sent a letter to the Gazette for publication."<sup>57</sup> Coming through long

entries and rhymed poems was a school teacher with a love of words, and he hoped his diary would be something that perhaps people would want to hear. His entries, of varying length, were written in mostly essay form. Rather than writing that the weather was simply hot or cold, he wrote as a troubadour: “The morning was cloudy and warmer than usual. The birds sang their morning praises, and their sweet notes filled the morning air with melody, and it seemed like spring.”<sup>58</sup> His words paint a landscape, allowing readers to step outside their current reality and position themselves to feel what it was like on that specific morning in January of 1864. Here we see his optimism in making the best of his trying situation as a mud-slogging foot soldier, in a blue uniform and tattered boots. During a tiresome march along the Mississippi, Smith found pleasure in the shocking, scary, and harmonious musicality of beasts of the bayou:

The old alligators were singing in the bayous along the levee. They bellow nearly like a bull, having a rough, harsh, hollow and rumbling voice, similar to a bullfrog only louder. Several of them were singing along the road which was very amusing to us all.<sup>59</sup>

Even though he was completely worn out and would rather have slept in the open than travel any longer, he made metaphysical use of scenery and sound to ease his suffering. Smith was not like the other, mostly younger, soldiers. He was more in tune to the natural world, and this is evident in his writings.

His entries kindle emotions. Smith spared nothing, from writing about the tears he cried when he learned that his cousin, who served as a Confederate soldier, passed away, to the joys he felt of seeing small children peddlers come through camp selling apples and newspapers. He wrote longingly for want of fresh food, and of the “slop” he digested to survive: “Breakfast consisted of cold boiled pork, vinegar bread and “coffee”, a slop unfit for the hogs to put their snouts in.”<sup>60</sup> One can almost inhale the malodorous mess hall. Some days had un-warlike battles:

The Chaplain having lost one of his socks last night, concluded to have a rat hunt, and recapture his sock...we took up the flow and found his sock in a rat hole well chewed to pieces...we made a grand charge on the rat's nest, and captured two of them and slew them. Several pieces of soap which I had missed were found.<sup>61</sup>

At the time, he was keen for a different kind of fight. Upon reading this entry years later, Smith likely returned with humor to that frenzied campaign, a search-and-destroy mission for a sock-and-soap thief.

Smith meticulously calculated the mileage between the cities he passed through, and listed every campaign in the diaries' appendices. He recorded the significant events in the following campaigns: "Stevenson's Expedition to Munroe, LA", "General Sherman's Great Expedition to Meridian, Miss", "The Atlanta Campaign", "The Campaign after General Hood", "The Great Campaign from Atlanta to Savannah on the Sea Coast", "The Great Campaign through the Carolinas", and "The Grand and Triumphant March of Sherman's Army to Richmond and Washington Homeward Bound." The particulars noted in the appendices play counterpart to the romantic poeticism and full verse of the actual text. Smith allows for not much interpretation of the significance behind the noted data as he labeled everything clearly, keeping track of engagement dates and times of day, casualties, and the movements of different divisions.

Smith's religious fervor, passionate patriotism and attention to detail provide an exemplary journey into the mind and daily routine of a Civil War soldier. At times, his words provoke the senses, thrusting the surrogate experientialist into a whirlwind. Given the passion of Smith's narrative prose, the meter of his poetry, the representational quality of his drawings, and the care of his descriptive accounts, it is evident that he not only hoped to remember past events, but also to share his experiences with others. After serving in the "War to Preserve the Union," he actively wrote and gave speeches for Civil War Memorial services, and his will included

specific instructions for the disposition of his diaries, expecting that his story would be told for years to come.<sup>62</sup> Smith was an artist, and his diary was a canvas on which was painted an inner landscape of the mind, still retaining its color down all the years.



### CHAPTER III

#### **Comparative Analysis of Blackstone and Smith:**

#### *Same Infantry, Similar Histories, Separate Intentions*

To understand the Civil War in an experiential sense, diaries as primary sources are critical. Eyewitness accounts are much closer to the immediacy of experience and while some were written for an “audience,” most were private and personal. They provide a comprehensive understanding of a soldier’s experience during the Civil War. The diaries of Captain Richard Blackstone and Corporal Charles E. Smith share commonalities of time and place and events, but not similar personalities. Both men served in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry and engaged in the same campaigns. Although they recorded corresponding experiences, the perspectives through which they voiced them are quite different. Taken together, these soldiers’ diaries are worlds apart from one another, and the disparities in their compositional styles showcase that each man kept diaries for different purposes.

The contrasting qualities of these two diaries highlight each man’s individual character. Although the war was a collaborative effort, each soldier was different from the next. Captain Blackstone’s sparse renderings and frank voice lay in diametric opposition to Smith’s detailed entries and poetic style, and this contrast explains how the soldiers understood their diaries. For both, the diary was a tool to create a personal history, to remember occurrences, expenditures, troop movements, and the particulars of their time in service. But for Smith, it was more than that. He used his twenty-one diaries to express himself artistically, composing flowery poetry, sometimes assiduously recording details of experiences, and documenting the feelings and

attitudes he had about the war as it progressed. In a poem drafted on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1863, he wrote in meter of war and death:

Let history tell of their glorious deeds!  
 In poetry, prose, and in song!  
 Let angels shout victory, as veterans pass  
 Through the gates of the glorified throng.<sup>63</sup>

Here Smith enthusiastically pays tribute to those who fought alongside him. This ability to lightheartedly rhyme about war distinguishes Smith as a man who had a positive outlook on life, a trust in a higher power, and an understanding of the importance of history. It was his aim to enshrine himself in it.

The difference in the two rhetorical styles is consistent and clear in each man's reference to weather on corresponding days. Blackstone's description of the weather as "Beautiful morning"<sup>64</sup> is artless when compared to Smith's account: "The rain was over, the clouds clear away and the sun arose clear and when I awoke, the songs of birds greeted my ear and reminded me that it was May Day"<sup>65</sup> Smith's words ignite the senses, placing the reader in that exact experience. Smith makes up for what Blackstone lacks in the firsthand accounts of several events. Smith wrote on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1864: "The weather today has been very unpleasant. It has rained nearly all day and made the mud very sticky."<sup>66</sup> Of the same day, Blackstone exclaimed in staccato, "Mud! Mud! Mud!"<sup>67</sup> Both entries note the muddy terrain, but Smith provided a more descriptive account, and when taken together, their combined stories give a gestalt experience.

They voiced different opinions on money and death. Both recorded expenditures and documented the dates they received pay, but Blackstone's monetary records are more detailed. He kept track of everything he purchased and loaned to friends. As he referred to money more often than Smith, it reveals that it was more of a concern for him. Blackstone never paused over death. He simply wrote down the names of combatants lost: "May 16<sup>th</sup> 1863. Nathaniel Shock

killed-...July Lucius F. Camp died. ...Jan 64 Josiah C. Bushfield shot through shoulder at Bakers Creek.”<sup>68</sup> Numbed to so much of it, death was everyday currency, a matter of getting and spending. The nonchalance in Blackstone’s voice is apparent in an entry he made on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1863 when noting the death of a comrade:

Paid \$4.00 for my bed...Christ. Stout fell overboard early this morning and was drowned...Left the boat about noon. Went into camp a mile south of the city. Before we got our tents up it began to rain...a hard night in the mud.<sup>69</sup>

A seemingly tragic occurrence, Blackstone paid the same mind to expenditures, pitching and striking camp, the weather, and the fighting. This indifference is put into relief when comparing Smith’s account of the same incident:

Weather cloudy and foggy in the morning. A Corporal of Company C, Christian Stout, fell overboard early this morning and was drowned. All efforts to save were in vain, as he was drawn under the boat by the water.<sup>70</sup>

Even though Smith was not in the same Company as Blackstone and Stout, he provided some pathos to a colleague’s off-battlefield death. Smith’s mention of the soldier’s full name, an explanation of the accident, and attempts to save the victim shows that, unlike Blackstone, he was still in possession of some sympathy, and he made more of a descriptive effort in his diary.

As men engaged in day to day warfare, Blackstone and Smith were not afforded with the seeming infinity of time afforded to people in peacetime. That Smith’s diaries were fleshed out in narrative emphasizes the effort he made to record events as being meaningful.

Correspondingly, the lack of description in Blackstone’s diary shows a mechanical mentality without the well-read compassion of Smith, who, when approached with the opportunity of a furlough for thirty days, reflected on his experience as a soldier thus far and remembered the joys of being home:

Home, how sweet that sounds to the soldier. Twenty-nine months spent in the service of our country, enduring hardships and deprivations, living out of doors for months exposed

to all kinds of weather, fighting battles, witnessing the death of many...brave comrades...gives us desire to see this wicked rebellion crushed and peace dawn again<sup>71</sup>

Here, Smith highlights his longing for the tranquility of home in contrast to what he has experienced while being away from it for two and a half years, hoping to return to civil life, away from civil war. The possibility of a furlough holds less importance to Blackstone: "Furlough came back through the channel to Regt's Hd Qrs"<sup>72</sup>

Smith ardently wrote about his faith. Theology was an anchor for Smith, it gave him stability and he felt productive when studying scriptures: "I improved my time in reading and studying the testament."<sup>73</sup> In 1864, Smith lost his brother George in the war. He used his diary as catharsis:

...when he could no longer dwell on the earth, he was relieved of the chains that bound him here and having made his peace with God, gave his spirit up to its maker...His last words are of comfort to me "I am willing to die. My sins are all washed away". Oh how heavenly the thought.<sup>74</sup>

His faith was fuel to sustain his endurance and remain positive through all turmoil the war brought to him.

A devoted and defensive Christian, his strong theology marginalized him from colleagues: "I had to defend religion against abuse by my comrades...My mess had fresh beef for breakfast and dinner, but would not even give me a small piece for breakfast after having been on picket all night."<sup>75</sup> His relationship with the Chaplain no doubt intensified his pariah status. Chaplains were expected to hold regular worship services, comfort homesick soldiers, counsel the sorrowful, teach reading and writing, carry equipment on marches, become postmaster, and maintain libraries.<sup>76</sup> As recorded by Smith, his Chaplain fulfilled many of these obligations, by sending money to his family for him, praying with him, and providing comfort to him. Religion was a motivator and source of comfort for Smith throughout the war.

Blackstone's motivation was more personal. He never delved into overall issues about the war; he simply recorded his experiences of it.

Although the two men were dawn and dusk on religion, both shared a strong sense of discipline. This is evident in their meticulous record keeping of expenditures and miles traveled. Attention to detail was a trait that both men possessed, however Smith gave more description, as in documenting a war-weary day:

Stragglers of our advance were lying in the fence corners asleep for miles, tired and worn out. I kept up with my regiment till we went into camp at eleven o'clock at night. Tired, wet, and weary, I laid (sic) down on my blanket and slept till four o'clock.<sup>77</sup>

He recounted his endurance through a long day in the field. Unlike Smith, Blackstone omitted exertion and just got on with the job, "This morning I got a raft out of the lake and made us a bed & floor in our tent to keep us out of the mud"<sup>78</sup>

The calculation of miles traveled shows that both men wanted to remember the extremes their bodies were pushed to. Unlike Blackstone, Smith rehashed every campaign in the diaries' appendices. He labeled things clearly, as Blackstone simply jotted down cities and coinciding numbers. To verify each mileage record's accuracy, both diaries have correlative data for corresponding dates. Smith's detailed observations craft a day to day account of an ordinary soldier's experience in the Civil War.

Patriotism was a crucial motivator for some, but irrelevant to others. Against Blackstone's vague narrative, Smith provided a more thorough understanding of the emotive journey a man takes during wartime. Blackstone did not reference politics, except the recognition of the Emancipation Proclamation's affect on the Union army's enlistment of blacks. Typical of Blackstone's ambiguousness, he refrained from opining on historical events. He simply stated that it gave provision for blacks to serve in the army. Smith's awareness and

attention to politics show his intense interest in political dialogue, and Blackstone's lack thereof asserts that not every Civil War soldier was passionate about understanding the War's critical causes or even wondering why they were fighting.

In *For Cause and Comrades*, Historian James McPherson analyzes the causes for which most men fought during the Civil War, patriotism uppermost among many. Smith stated his intent to serve his country, but Blackstone never addressed the issue in his diary. It is hard to determine exactly why Blackstone enlisted, as he never asserted a reason, but like many men his age from middleclass backgrounds, the war provided pay, leadership experience and bragging rights. Smith's intent is clear and concise. He was well aware of politics and eagerly read the news: "today's papers announce the President's call for one hundred thousand men (state militia), for the period of one hundred days to guard the frontier and repel invasion"<sup>79</sup> Patriotism was a driving force for Smith, but not necessarily for Blackstone.

Blackstone is mentioned twice in Smith's diaries. The references are only made when listing the shift of command. Smith wrote:

Lieutenant Blackstone of Company C, will take temporary command of Company I.<sup>80</sup>  
Adjutant Blackstone arrived with ninety-nine recruits for our regiment. He resumed his position...<sup>81</sup>

That Smith is referring to the same Blackstone is confirmed through *The National Park Service's Civil War Soldier Directory*. There were two Blackstones in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry, and only Richard Blackstone ranked as Lieutenant in Company C. It is unlikely that the two men were familiar with one another, as Blackstone never mentioned Smith and the two did not seem to have much in common.

The intent behind keeping a daily journal casts light on certain personality traits of the diarist. For Blackstone, the diary was deeply personal as there is no indication in his curt prose

and sporadic entries that he intended to publicize it. His diary was for personal use, not to be distributed to the masses. Smith's account is in-depth. He diligently recorded sensory experiences, investing more time in diary keeping than Blackstone, and had hopes to publish and share his story with a wider audience. It is difficult to discern much of what Blackstone's personality was like because he did not let any sensitivity or vulnerability come through like Smith did. He did not write about his desires, his weaknesses or his aggravations. His diary was a tool, an abacus, to remember the miles he walked, the cities he visited, and the rations he received. However different the diaries may be, each served a purpose to its diarist as a haven and a place as far removed from horror as their individual minds would allow. Although having served in the same infantry, they had similar histories but had separate intentions for keeping a diary.

## CONCLUSION:

### *A Source to be Reckoned With*

Composed from singular, unique perspectives, diaries as primary sources are crucial to understanding the past from different viewpoints. Secondary sources and edited memoirs provide valuable insight into the experience of war; however they do not carry the same significance as memories preserved immediately after a battle or cataclysmic event. Diaries showcase a fresh frame of mind impossible to fully revert back to. Those who documented their stories well after the fact had time to ruminate on their experiences, pre-editing presentations of what they went through. Such contemplation corrupts the fast and original rawness of experience. History is made by humans doing things, and it is literally less relevant without the personal stories people leave behind. The Civil War ignited a trend of diary keeping that changed historical research. By studying the stories of Smith and Blackstone, one can granularly grasp what soldiers experienced, how they felt, why they fought, and what they thought.

Blackstone's blunt and telegraphic style shows us that some men used their diaries as a tool to remember daily events and expenditures. Smith's colorful prose and balanced meter amp up the diary as a template for self-expression. By comparing the two accounts, their separate intents are evidenced through disparities in style, daily renderings, thematic content and the rhythm of rhetoric. On the surface, they were just two different personalities who served their country. Beneath the marquee, they were immortals. They created their own histories.



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