

Watkins civil war



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U. S. History to 1865 Company Aytch Maury Grays, First Tennessee Regiment
or, A Side Show of the Big Show, 1882

By Author: Sam R. Watkins of Columbia, Tennessee (Maury County)

New York: Macmillan, 1962.

This book is written as a memoir to the soldiers of the First Tennessee Regiment and many other soldiers that fought in the Civil War. Since Sam Watkins was a citizen soldier and a High Private, CSA, the perspective of this book is distinctively different than other books that tell of this historical period in time. Sam Watkins received the notion to writing about this experience several years after the war. Sam Watkins wrote from his consciousness of visits to the “ Murfreesboro and Chattanooga battlefields”. During his time as confederate soldier in the “ Maury Grays, Company H, First Tennessee Volunteer Regiment” while fighting in the “ American Civil War.” Sam Watkins fought four years in the civil war battles in four states and was only one of seven that survived the war from this regiment.

The lively terminology that Sam Watkins uses makes the stories of ordinary soldiers humorous and moving at times while still incorporating the realities from a bloody war. Being written years after the war, there are going to be mistakes in the accuracy of the actual accounts, but Sam Watkins used his personal experiences in sharing these stories with the reader. This book will intrigue the reader with the tales describing the everyday undertakings from the men of the Civil War time period. The satirical and unpretentious writing from Sam Watkins gives us the reader an intimate sense of being from the way he seems to be directly talking to his fellow soldiers.

The book gives an insight as to what life was like to be a confederate soldier in a way that was practical and realistic. There is no real history of military issues discussed, as with other books from this time period, just the thoughts from a “foot soldier’s” perspective on the war. This book is written as a way for all those lives that were lost, in a war that divided the country, to always be heard. The book is written as a way of remembering those that served in battle for their country.

This book is an extremely valuable piece of history, telling the reader what this time period was like to be at war with your own country. There is a sense of irony depicted with the story, slaves fighting for slavery in a “rich man’s, poor man’s war.” In the words of Sam Watkins “The glory of war is but the glory of battle, the shouts, and cheers, and victory.” This book gives you an excellent way to comprehend how chaotic this time period was, the cost of war, and the faith we put into our soldiers.

In summary this is a way of writing as to the insight of the psyche of the soldier’s account of war. Everything becomes prevalent on how the human life is affected by war. The deprivation and suffering of those who fought and died in war is well written in this civil war epoch. The book delivered the message clearly that these men died for their faith that “each state was a separate and sovereign government.”

Sam Watkins is what could be called a simple writer. He actually started these stories as excerpts in a newspaper back home, wanting to make sure that his fellow soldiers would not be forgotten. The analogy for this book becomes clear as the author writes about his point of view as a private in “

the side show”, creating a depiction of the officer’s in the “ big show”. The honesty about the circle of insanity in the military was summed up very well as that “ long and unholy and uncalled for war”.

As written by John Notgrass “ Sam includes many humorous and touching episodes, along with the bloody violence. He points out frustrations with and failings of the Confederate cause. He also quotes some martial curses. This is not a book for young readers, but older readers will gain great insight into the life of the average Johnny Reb”.

“ I’ve read Co. Aytch four times, I think. I have developed a one-man impersonation of Sam to honor his memory and share his powerful story. I want to help others understand that stormy time, see the tragic consequences of war, and appreciate the faith of our fathers.” As reviewed by John Notgrass

Personal realization of there being more to live for in this war while religion undermines the seriousness of fighting and dying in a war with your own country seems to start a personal retreat from the war. “ There was a rebellion of a different meaning, with every soldier attending sick call every morning.” This was an important statement because it was showing a turn of events with the war, even the soldiers were tired of fighting another mans war. We see we Sam Watkins is deeply affected by the death of Billy Webster; this becomes an extremely somber period of his writing, yet an insightful look into the hardships going on in a civil war. There are several events throughout these stories that show us the very human side of war, which when put into perspective that these stories are coming from the losing

side of the war. The effects on human life become prevalent in the description of the Octagon House. The fine furnishings of the house being made the death-bed of the thirty wounded or dead brave and noble soldiers is a deep introspect into the war. The romance between Sam and his beloved Jennie (and four or five other girls) signifies that of a reality check, a way of normalcy in an insane world. “ I shrink from butchery.” Watkins gave a truly unique perspective to one battle in particular, the Dead Angle on Kenesaw. He made it sound even more indestructible than any place in history.

The author allows for the imagination to make the situation as oppose to drilling in what the situation was. The personal realization and culture shock seems to change the aspect of the book and how the author is telling his story. The depictions of how unjust it was in this mans military come to light, who truly should be receiving praise in this war, the soldiers or the officers?

The same faith that these men had in God, the heavens, and home, stronger than anything the war would ever be able to depict. Sam Watkins looks back at his faith when writing these memoirs realizing he was not a Christian at the time of war, but still believed in the reasons for secession.

In the chapter 1 he stated the usefulness of this book and the purpose to the readers “ These are all with the past now, and the North and South have long ago “ shaken hands across the bloody chasm.” The flag of the Southern cause has been furled never to be again unfurled; gone like a dream of yesterday, and lives only in the memory of those who lived through those bloody days and times. This book is the view of why they fought.

I liked the book because it was a way of experience the civil war, not just from the perspective of a soldier but one that was on the side of the south and could actually see humor as a survival technique. He never gave up on his faith in what was at home waiting for him, even though he was not a religious man, he still believed in what he was fighting for. The way that he properly addresses everyone in the field of battle was mind blowing; I have a difficult time remembering names of my coworkers. He ultimately shows the utmost respect for everyone soul that was part of this nation divided like no other depiction in history books. The perspective that is written of everyday things being beautiful and ugly at the same time had to come from a place within himself that we all should be able to reflect from. The sincerity he shows for his fellow men is one that should be shared around the world, look at his comparisons between Jackson and Field and they way he speaks about Joe P. Lee. We should all be able to that kind of good in people, without prejudging them.