



## What the Private Saw: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Oney Foster Sweet

By Oney Foster Sweet, Larry M. Edwards

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His previously unpublished letters, diaries, and retrospective pieces offer a unique glimpse of the war from the view of a private simply trying to survive a deadly conflagration in which one in five combatants perished.

This first-hand account of what the private saw is a distinctive addition to the many existing volumes on the American Civil War.

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**What the Private Saw: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Oney Foster Sweet** By Oney Foster Sweet, Larry M. Edwards **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"What the Private Saw" is definitely one of the very best of the many published collections of Civil War letters and diaries. . . .

Numerous period photographs supplement the account. "What the Private Saw" does just that-- provide a very clear picture of the Civil War as seen and experienced by a private soldier of the Union.

--Gene C. Armistead, author

Horses and Mules in the Civil War

Edwards' new book is a useful and welcome addition to the historiography of Pennsylvania soldiers and military units in the Civil War, as well as to the documentation of the battle of Gettysburg. . . . pick up a copy of *What the Private Saw*. It will be well worth your time.

-- Scott Mingus, author

The Louisiana Tigers

in the Gettysburg Campaign

#### From the Inside Flap

Private Oney Foster Sweet's previously unpublished letters, diaries, and retrospective writings offer a unique glimpse of the U.S. Civil War from the bottom looking up; that is, from the view of a private simply trying to survive a deadly conflagration in which one in five combatants perished. He wrote:

"The generals did not see what the privates saw."

Nor can we as readers looking back 150 years later see what the privates saw. Blessed with the comforts and conveniences of 21st century life, we can easily glorify the war, but for those who were there, engaged in life-or-death struggles, the realities struck them at their core. Following the Battle of Antietam in 1862, Sweet told his mother:

"I went over the field after the fight and the dead and wounded lay so thick you could hardly step. Some had legs, arms, and heads torn off. Some groaning and breathing their last. . . . I never want to see such a sight again. . . . I have seen enough of war."

Yet, he saw much more at the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, Cold Harbor, Spotsylvania, Appomattox, and, the bloodiest of them all, Gettysburg.

Oney Foster Sweet's personal account offers a distinct addition to the existing volumes on the U.S. Civil War.

WhatThePrivateSaw.com

#### From the Back Cover

Looking back, after the war, Oney Sweet wrote:

***The unwritten part of our war is greater than all that has been written. Two soldiers side by side in a hot place in our battles did not see the same things. The generals did not see what the privates saw.***

His descriptions of the battles of **Second Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg**--among others--captivate the reader.

Yet, his missives relate more than just the hard, brutal times with "**minnie balls . . . whizzing by our ears.**" They spent more time in camp--especially during the winter--than in combat, and they entertained themselves.

*A soldier's delight: the mail, the paymaster and tobacco.*

Occasionally, they received "**a Quota of whiskey issued out to us**" and at other times "**Some licuor**" found its way into their hands, resulting in "**Some fun in camp.**"

Not a few soldiers, including Sweet, spent time standing extra guard duty for fighting among themselves or other infractions. (Surely the whiskey and "licour" had nothing to do with that.)

Weather permitting, they "**played ball**" as well as cards, held boxing matches, attended dances, gambled, read newspapers, and wrote letters, in addition to the drills, inspections, washing and mending clothes, building shelters, and foraging for food when their rations ran out.

This first-hand account of *what the private saw* is a delightful and informative addition to the many existing volumes on the American Civil War. It also serves as a companion to *Trumpets of the Morning*, written by **Marian Julia Sweet**, Oney Sweet's daughter. Her book offers a fictionalized account of the loneliness, anxiety and difficulties she believed her parents endured. It was recently published (2014) by three of her grandchildren: William Ketchum, Joan Ketchum Reamer, and James Grant.

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