

THE

SKIRMISHER

A Civil War Journal For Students

CIVIL WAR TRUST

FRACTURED FAMILIES

VOLUME 3

VOICES FROM THE STORM: THE TRAGEDY AT THE BATTLE OF MALVERN HILL

The Civil War divided a nation, fracturing families as the North and South broke apart. The following primary source details an incident in the Battle of Malvern Hill in which a Union officer, Sgt. Driscoll, faces a great tragedy. Captain D. P. Conyngham was an officer in the Irish Brigade, Driscoll's brigade, and described the incident shortly after the war.

"When charging at Malvern Hill, a company was posted in a clump of trees, who kept up a fierce fire on us...

Their officer seemed to be a daring, reckless boy, and I said to Sergeant Driscoll, 'if that officer is not taken down, many of us will fall before we pass that clump.'

'Leave that to me,' said Driscoll; so he raised his rifle, and the moment the officer exposed himself again bang went Driscoll, and over went the officer, his company at once breaking away.

As we passed the place I said, 'Driscoll, see if that officer is dead - he was a brave fellow.'
I stood looking on. Driscoll turned him over on his back. [The officer] opened his eyes for a moment, and faintly murmured 'Father,' and closed them forever.

I will forever recollect the frantic grief of Driscoll; it was harrowing to witness. [The dead officer] was his son, who had gone South before the war.

And what became of Driscoll afterwards? ... he rushed up, with his coat off, and, clutching his musket, charged right up at the enemy, calling on the men to follow. He soon fell, but jumped up again. We knew he was wounded. On he dashed, but he soon rolled over like a top. When we came up he was dead, riddled with bullets."



Image courtesy of the National Park Service

DIVIDING ISSUES

1. Are there any current social or political issues today that potentially could divide families as the Civil War did? What might those be?
2. Why do you think "hot button" topics can create a rift in families?

THE SAD CASE OF GEN. GEORGE H. THOMAS

One of the most unheralded general officers, despite well noted successes, of the Civil War is General George H. Thomas.

Part of the reason Thomas has, to some extent, been relegated to the dustbin of history is that he was a southerner, a Virginian specifically, who was often viewed by the Lincoln Administration as a sour element in the Union military command structure.

Thomas had taken an oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States and while other southern officers and fellow West Point classmates resigned their US Army commissions and cast their lot with the Confederacy, Thomas did not.

Still, Thomas was treated in some instances as a second class citizen by his fellow officers, despite being the only Union Army during the war to destroy a complete Confederate Army in the field, General John Bell Hood's Army of Tennessee at Nashville in late 1864.

His decision to remain loyal to the Union created a deep rift with his family, one that would not heal in his lifetime. Thomas's comrades and former students reacted no less vehemently: former star pupil and fellow Virginian J.E.B. Stuart wrote to his wife, "I would like to hang, hang him as a traitor to his native state."

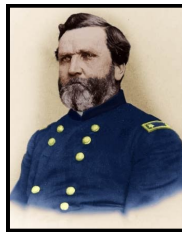


Image Courtesy of the Sons of Union Veterans

THE FRACTURED LINCOLN FAMILY

Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd were married in Springfield, Illinois in 1842. He was 33 and Mary 23. The Todd Family did not necessarily approve of the marriage. Both Abraham and Mary were born in Kentucky, but Lincoln found slavery to be repugnant, while the Todd's were slave owners.

When war broke out in 1861, five of Mary's brothers joined the Confederate Army. One, Samuel Todd, was killed at Shiloh and another, Benjamin Helm, at Chickamauga. The death of Benjamin Hardin Helm deeply saddened the President, who had tried to convince Benjamin to retain his services for the Union. Mary Lincoln never publicly mourned the deaths of her kin claiming that "they had made their own choices."



Image Courtesy of New Hampshire Historical Society

Mary was viewed with deep suspicion in Washington, DC due to her family background. This only added to the tension between the President and First Lady who did not enjoy a particularly happy marriage.

VOICES FROM THE STORM: THE CAMPBELL BROTHERS

The Campbell brothers, James and Alexander, arrived in the United States from their native Scotland in 1855. Alexander settled with his family in New York City, while James settled in Charleston, South Carolina. At the start of the secession crisis, each brother stood by their respective regions. The following is their correspondence following the Battle of Secessionville.

Dear Brother

I was astonished to hear from the prisoners that you were color Bearer of the regiment that assaulted the battery at this point the other day. When I first heard it, I looked over the field for you where I met one of the wounded of your regiment and he told me that he believed you was safe. I was in the breast work during the whole engagement doing my best to beat you but I hope that you and I will never again meet face to face, bitter enemies in the Battle field. But if such should be the case You have but to discharge your duty to your cause for I can assure you I will strive to discharge my duty to my country & my cause....

I am your brother,
James Campbell