

# Overdue Work About Gaillard Family Members' War Letters

## Gen. Godfrey Weitzel

**A Young General and the Fall of Richmond: The Life and Career of Godfrey Weitzel.** By G. William Quatman. Illustrated, photos, maps, notes, glossary, bibliography, index, 358 pp., 2015, Ohio University,

It is hard to believe that no prior biography has been written of important Union Maj. Gen. Godfrey Weitzel, a German-born, West Point-educated engineer who served with distinction in Louisiana and Virginia. G. William Quatman has filled that void.

Despite routine antebellum service, including a fortuitous four years in New Orleans rebuilding that city's defenses, fortune seemed to smile on Weitzel once the Civil War started. He was one of those rare men who always seemed to be in the right place at the right time when promotions were handed out.

His familiarity with New Orleans resulted in being assigned chief engineer to Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler when the latter advanced against the Crescent City in early 1862. A close rapport developed between the diminutive Butler and the tall Weitzel, resulting in a warm professional relationship between the two men that lasted throughout the war.

Butler soon made his 26-year-old protégé temporary military mayor of New Orleans; a promotion to brigadier general followed. Weitzel proved himself quite capable in the field and was offered command of a larger Louisiana military district.

Believing black troops included in that district would not fight, he declined. Butler was incredulous at Weitzel's perceived racial prejudice, for, as Quatman aptly points out, no one ever said "no" to Ben Butler.

Following gallant service in the 1863 Port Hudson campaign, Weitzel rejoined Butler at Petersburg in 1864 as chief engineer for Butler's Army of the James. Promotions to major general and command of the 25th Corps followed. Weitzel had abandoned his earlier racial concerns, and this corps was the first to be comprised entirely of United States Colored Troops (USCTs).

Following Richmond's

Confederate evacuation, it was USCTs under Weitzel's command who were the first troops to enter Richmond the next day. When President Lincoln arrived in Richmond, he was petitioned by a leading Confederate to discuss the state of affairs. Lincoln agreed, though Weitzel was to be present as witness.

On April 6, Lincoln sent Weitzel a confidential letter outlining his directives based on their meeting. Following Lincoln's assassination, many doubted the president's purported orders and were ready to denounce Weitzel's subsequent follow-through. Only Lincoln's letter, which Weitzel never relinquished, saved him from political destruction.

Quatman crisply describes the important events in Weitzel's Louisiana and Virginia service, Richmond's fall and Weitzel's ensuing political meetings are covered in immense detail.

The author's analysis of white officers' concerns about using black troops and of the Butler-Weitzel relationship are particularly engaging.

One minor quibble is that Quatman gives short shrift to his subject's postwar life and career. Only 10 pages cover the last 19 years of Weitzel's life, much of which was spent performing vital civil engineering work in the Midwest and Great Lakes regions. Thus this book, strong as it is, is more a study of Godfrey Weitzel's four-year Civil War service, as opposed to an in-depth, life-spanning biography.

Quatman's family lore has long held that Godfrey Weitzel was a distant ancestor; however, he admits that link has never been fully confirmed. Nonetheless, the years spent by the author pursuing that connection have given Civil War students a very respectable history of an overlooked and unsung general officer.

**Paul Taylor**

**Paul Taylor is the author of six Civil War era books. His latest is the award-winning *Old Slow Town: Detroit during the Civil War*, published by Wayne State Univ. Press. Visit his website at [www.paultaylor.com](http://www.paultaylor.com).**

Both brothers edited newspapers

**Journey to the Wilderness: War, Memory, and a Southern Family's Civil War Letters.** By Frye Gaillard. Maps, photos, index, 128 pp., 2014, New South, [www.newsouthbooks.com](http://www.newsouthbooks.com), \$23.95.

Using letters that his family wrote during the Civil War, Frye Gaillard has written an introspective reflection on the war and the way that Southerners of his generation remember it.

In the preface, Gaillard tells us: "This is a story of the Civil War, as seen through the eyes of my own family." It is also an account of how the author, a native Alabamian now in his late 60s, came to question – and ultimately to reject – the glorious Lost Cause version of the Civil War that he had inherited from his elders.

Gaillard came to a more mature understanding of the war by viewing it through the double prism of his ancestors' letters and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

The Gaillard family letters presented in the book were written between 1844 and 1866, mostly by Thomas Gaillard and two of his sons, Richebourg and Franklin. The letters are arranged chronologically.

Frye Gaillard briefly introduces each letter by identifying the writer and recipient and when and where the letter was written. Mercifully, the letters lack the distracting cluster of pedantic footnotes that are common to many publications of Civil War letters.

The Gaillard family has deep roots in South Carolina (where the name is still pronounced gil-YAHD). The larger Gaillard family was part of the antebellum plantation aristocracy of South Carolina, though Thomas Gaillard's branch of the family did not fit neatly into that mold.

A native of South Carolina, Thomas Gaillard resettled in Alabama in the 1830s on an 8,000-acre plantation. But by the time the war erupted Thomas had lost his plantation and was living in Mobile, dependent upon the earnings of his few slaves.

Despite his business reverses, Thomas Gaillard educated his sons well. Richebourg was a law graduate of Yale, and Franklin graduated first in his class at what is today the University of South Carolina.

Both brothers edited newspapers

during the 1850s – Richebourg in Alabama, where he also practiced law, and Franklin in South Carolina. Both men were in their 30s when war erupted. And both were staunch states' rights advocates who volunteered early for Confederate service.

Franklin rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the 2nd South Carolina Infantry. He participated in all of the major battles in the Eastern Theater until he fell at the Battle of the Wilderness in May 1864. Richebourg was an officer in the 1st Alabama Infantry and served in the West. He was taken prisoner twice but survived the war and returned to Alabama.

Richebourg and Franklin Gaillard's letters are beautifully written and easy to read, reflecting the writers' education and their relative maturity.

Editor Frye Gaillard describes his ancestor Franklin as the "family firebrand," and Franklin definitely comes across in his letters as a true believer in the Confederate cause and the South's ultimate victory.

However, Franklin's Southern chauvinism did not blind him to the realities of war. Writing to his sister-in-law just after the Battle of Gettysburg, Franklin observed: "Our army went into it in magnificent style ... but the position defeated us. For this I blame our Generals. In a day by our injudicious attack they defeated the most brilliant prospects we have

ever had.... The greatest misfortune is that it destroyed the unbounded confidence reposed in Gen. Lee."

Too old for service, father Thomas Gaillard watched the war unfold from his retirement home in Mobile. In a letter written in the early months of the war Thomas foresaw a "sanguinary and merciless war."

Within a year his initial pessimism turned to downright despair. Shortly after the Battle of Shiloh Thomas lamented in a letter to a family member: "Oh this terrible war! Who can measure the troubles – the affliction – it has brought upon us all?"

*Journey to the Wilderness* contains photos of Thomas and Franklin Gaillard and several other family members. The single map identifies the places where the letters were composed.

This little book will appeal especially to readers who, like the author and me, are native Southerners who came of age during the Civil Rights era. I also recommend it to those with an interest in South Carolina soldiers.

**C. Michael Harrington**

**C. Michael Harrington is a member of the Houston Civil War Round Table and Civil War Aficionados. He has written several articles on South Carolina Confederates. A practicing lawyer, he has a degree in economics from Yale and Cambridge and a law degree from Harvard.**

## Recommended Spy Novel Humanizes The Civil War

**Spy of Richmond.** By Jocelyn Green. Historical fiction. Bibliography, discussion guide, 429 pp., 2015, River North, [www.rivernorthfiction.com](http://www.rivernorthfiction.com), \$14.99.

This is Jocelyn Green's fourth novel in her series Heroines Behind the Lines: Civil War. It is based on the exploits of Elizabeth Van Lew and her network of Union spies in Richmond. They passed strategic intelligence to Union authorities at Fort Monroe that helped defeat the Confederacy.

Sophie Kent, the central character, is the personification of Van Lew. Other main characters represent specific themes the author wishes to address. Daphne and Bella Jamison, slaves and sisters, assist Sophie in her quest to gain freedom for all slaves. Harrison Caldwell (alias Oliver Shaw) is a Philadelphia abolitionist, newspaperman and Sophie's future husband who sacrifices his own freedom to help the North.

Susan Kent, Sophie's half sister, is the mother of Analise, the daughter of Noah Becker from Jocelyn Green's previous book *Yankee in Atlanta*. Susan is the spiteful sister torn by jealousy and stigmatized by her affront to Southern womanhood. Preston Kent, Sophie and Susan's father, who joins the 21st Virginia Infantry, fights for everything Sophie opposes and is the embodiment of the Old South.

These characters are deftly woven into an exposé of Confederate Richmond life during the years 1859-1865. It changed from a slave-based patriarchal society, with grand

mansions and a bountiful social life, to a besieged city near starvation. As the city deteriorates, the terrified populace seeks spies and disloyal Unionists to blame for Confederate reverses.

Amid this chaos, Sophie faces the conflicting emotions of fighting for abolition and worrying about her lover fighting in the trenches of Petersburg against his will. Sophie must likewise keep her Union sentiments hidden from her father and allow Confederate Capt. Lawrence Russell to court her in order to gain valuable information for her cause.

The Underground Railroad, the horrors of Libby Prison and Castle Thunder, slavery's brutality, and widespread starvation are woven into this story of hope, sacrifice and honor in trying times and how one person can make a difference.

Jocelyn Green does an excellent job developing her characters and their conflicting emotions. She humanizes war and its cruelty. She instills courageous faith in those who pursue what they believe is right and just.


For readers who enjoy historical fiction, this book and the previous three in the series are highly recommended. They stay true to historical fact, yet allow readers to explore the raw emotions of a nation and social system turned upside down.

**Wayne L. Wolf**

**Wayne L. Wolf is Professor Emeritus at South Suburban College and the author of numerous Civil War books and articles including *The Last Civil War Scout*.**

## AN END TO INNOCENCE

Cheshire County Faces the Civil War



**WILLIAM MARVEL**

**AN END TO INNOCENCE** combines fine research and writing and uses captivating primary sources and photos to illustrate the experiences of men from Cheshire County, New Hampshire on the battlefield and residents on the home front during this poignant time in U.S. history.

Author William Marvel has been writing about Civil War history for more than three decades. Among his previous 19 books are *Mr. Lincoln Goes to War*, *A Place Called Appomattox*, and the award winning *Andersonville: The Last Depot*.

Paperback, 209 pages, 36 illustrations & maps  
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