



## **Double Duty in the Civil War: The Letters of Sailor and Soldier Edward W. Bacon**

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In 1861 at the age of eighteen, Edward Woolsey Bacon, a Yale student and son of well-known abolitionist minister Leonard Bacon, left his home in New Haven, Connecticut, to fight for the United States. Over the next four years Bacon served in both the Union navy and army, which gave him a sweeping view of the Civil War. His postings included being a captain's clerk on the USS *Iroquois*, a hospital clerk in his hometown, a captain in the 29th Connecticut Infantry (Colored), and a major in the 117th U.S. Colored Infantry, and he described these experiences in vibrant letters to his friends and family. Historian George S. Burkhardt has compiled these letters, as well as Bacon's diary in the impressive *Double Duty in the Civil War: The Letters of Sailor and Soldier Edward W. Bacon*.

Bacon tells of hunting Confederate commerce raiders on the high seas, enduring the tedium of blockade duty, and taking part in riverine warfare on the Mississippi. He recalls sweating in South Carolina as an infantry officer during drill and picket duty, suffering constant danger in the battlefield trenches of Virginia, marching victoriously on fallen Richmond, and tolerating the boredom of occupation duty in Texas.

His highly entertaining letters shed new light on naval affairs and reveal a close-knit family life. The narrative of his duty with black troops is especially valuable, since few first-hand accounts from white officers of the U.S. Colored Troops exist. Furthermore, his beliefs about race, slavery, and the Union cause were unconventional for the time and stand in contrast to those held by many of his contemporaries.

*Double Duty in the Civil War* is filled with lively descriptions of the men Bacon met and the events he experienced. With Burkhardt's careful editing and useful annotations, Bacon's letters and diary excerpts give rare insight into areas of the Civil War that have been neglected because of a lack of available sources. Given the scarcity of eyewitness testimonies to navy life and life in African American regiments, this book is a rarity indeed.

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