

America, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, University of Maryland in Baltimore County, and University of Minnesota.¹⁰⁸

Unfortunately, the Library of Congress has lost a great many comic books from its collection either through poor maintenance or theft, but, “they claim to own 45,000 titles and now have a program for their preservation.”¹⁰⁹

As comic books continue to be published and seen less and less as just for children, books such as *The Ten-Cent Plague and Comic Book Nation* will continue to be written, arguing how comic books have influenced and been influenced by the world we live in. Comic books are a rich part of that world, and the debate about what role they play will continue. Hopefully this will lead to even more scholarly research into this art form that has been part of American culture, and has arguably created a culture of its own. If that is the case, and the debate regarding comic books in relation to history continues, a greater understanding of how comics, their creators, and their readers interacted with the world will be attained.

Boys to Men: The Coming of Age of Illinois Farm Boys in the Civil War

Patrick Doggett

Patrick Doggett, from Crescent City, Illinois, is a candidate for a bachelor's degree in History with a Political Science Minor, and will graduate in May 2011. His paper was written for Dr. Sace Elder's class, History 2500, Historical Research and Writing, in the fall of 2009. He is a member of Phi Alpha Theta, and this paper won the Alexander Hamilton Paper Award in American History in the spring of 2010.

During the Civil War 360,222 Union soldiers perished in the conflict and would never return home; 34,834 of them were from and fought for the State of Illinois.¹ The American Civil War came about during a time when multiple issues troubled the Prairie State. The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of the US Senate race of 1858 influenced and inspired Illinois men and boys to enlist in the U.S. Army to defend and preserve their Union. The state of Illinois played a major role in the Union's victory, and it is vital that we recall not only the happenings and sacrifices of the famous Illinois generals, officers, and other high profile soldiers, but also the forgotten boy soldiers of rural Illinois. Examining these soldiers' accounts presents a perspective of the war through their eyes, and how the Civil War shaped and controlled their overall personal growth and development. The pressures of their country and friends played a heavy role in the enlistment of these boys. These youth, as young as seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen at the time, could never have been prepared for, or imagined, the sights and sounds of the war that only a number of them would live to tell about. These small-town, rural farm boys from Illinois left their homes and families envisioning excitement, a pursuit of glory, and a sense of adventure fighting for their country. Through their experiences in battles, army life, and campaigning from Illinois into the South they were forced to undergo an incredible personal transformation from youth to manhood. Their journals, letters, and diary accounts written during or after the Civil War were written by Illinois farm boys who had never before ventured outside their state or even county. These soldiers were truly still boys at the start of the war, and it is this small and specific group of soldiers that are represented herein and show the process of growing into men through their Civil War experiences. There are only seven accounts remaining of the Civil War in regards to Illinois farm boys who served in the infantry and were transformed through their experiences into men.

All of the boys on this journey started off by enlisting in the U.S. Army. The 18-year-old age requirement placed by the Union should have turned away these boys. They were underage and should have stayed home to help out on the farm until they were legally old enough to go and fight for Uncle Sam.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹ Burke Davis, *The Civil War, Strange and Fascinating Facts*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fairfax Press, 1982), 215. Victor Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1991), xxi.

On April 15, 1861, after the attack on Fort Sumter, Abraham Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 men² and the governor of Illinois Richard Yates, called for an additional 6,000 more volunteers.³ Among these volunteers who answered the call to serve their state and country were two young farm boys; seventeen-year-old Benjamin T. Smith of Kankakee, Illinois, sixty miles south of Chicago,⁴ and twenty-one year-old Charles W. Wills of Canton, southwest of Peoria.⁵ Later, they were joined by fellow Illinois farm boys Leander Stillwell of Jersey County, who enlisted into company D of the 61st Infantry from Jersey County,⁶ at the age of eighteen, George Drake who enlisted on July 18, 1862 at the age of 16,⁷ and William B. Smith, who enlisted at the age of fifteen in December of 1863 into the 14th Regiment of the Illinois Volunteers,⁸ and Robert Hale Strong who was nineteen at enlistment on September 2, 1862.⁹ Most of these boys filled the Union army's enlistment rolls after the first year of the war when the boys were the only ones left to volunteer; everyone else was already at war.¹⁰

How could these soldiers who enlisted at the ages of eighteen, nineteen, and even twenty-one be called boys? The reference of these soldiers as boys is two sided: at this time in American history males of these ages were still looked at as boys, especially those that were still on the farm and helping out their families, and also because throughout these diaries, journals, and letters, they referred to themselves as boys. The older men also referred to each other as boy or boys, but that was meant as a term for camaraderie, not for a sign of youth and boyhood. After these experiences in this awful war they had finally completed the transformation to manhood. According to historian Bruce Tap, "Historians note that the self-made man of the nineteenth century emerged into adulthood from a distinctive "boy culture" that developed in the antebellum period."¹¹ This was the "boy culture" that these soldiers lived in and then made their way through to adulthood.

² Leander Stillwell, *The Story of a Common Soldier of Army Life in the Civil War 1861-1865*, (Kansas City, Missouri: Franklin Hudson, Company, 1920), 9.

³ Hicken, 1.

⁴ Benjamin T. Smith, *Private Smith's Journal: Recollections of the late war*, ed. Clyde C. Walton (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1963), v, ix.

⁵ Charles Wright Wills, *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier: Including a day-by-day record of Sherman's March to the Sea: Letters and Diary of Charles W. Wills*, (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), vii.

⁶ Stillwell, 9.

⁷ George Drake, *The Mail Goes Through: The Civil War letters of George Drake, 1846-1918; over eighty letters written from August 9, 1862 to May 29, 1865*, ed. Julia A. Drake (San Angelo, Texas: Anchor Publishing Company, 1964), 11.

⁸ William B. Smith, *On Wheels and How I Came Here: A Real Story for Real Boys and Girls: Giving the Personal Experiences and Observations of a Fifteen year-old Yankee Boy as Soldier and Prisoner in the American Civil War*, ed. Rev. Joseph G. Bonnell (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1892), 19.

⁹ Robert Hale Strong, *A Yankee Private's Civil War*, ed. Ashley Halsey (Chicago: H Regnery Company, 1961), 5.

¹⁰ Emmy E. Werner, *Reluctant Witnesses: Children's Voices from the Civil War*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 24.

¹¹ Bruce Tap, "Inevitability, Masculinity, and the American Military Tradition: The Committee on the Conduct of the War Investigates the American Civil War," *American Nineteenth Century History* 5, no. 2 (2004): 25,

Many of these farm boys like Charles Wills admitted in their writings that they were still boys.¹² All of the experiences that these Illinois boys had in camps throughout the north and south, some harsher than others, all played a role in slowly changing and preparing them for their total transformation into manhood. They would soon realize that innocence is the first casualty of war.

Some of these boys who endured the Civil War were aware of their transformation towards the end of the war and communicated these feelings through their writings. George Drake wrote that if he were not a man and used to the "privations of war", then he would have had no chance to survive throughout the entire War of the Rebellion.¹³ Leander Stillwell makes a claim towards the end of the war, that "there is nothing which, in my opinion, will so soon make a man out of a boy as actual service in time of war."¹⁴ This is a clear statement of Stillwell acknowledging the fact that it was the Civil War which transformed him from a boy to a man. This is exactly what these rural Illinois farm boys went through, along with many throughout the Confederate and Union ranks. Stillwell goes on to describe the changes that he, and others, have undergone, "our faces had insensibly taken on a stern and determined look, and soldiers who a little over a year ago were mere laughing, foolish boys, were now sober, steady, self-relying men."¹⁵

There were many reasons why these boys and other volunteers enlisted. According to Reid Mitchell, author of *Civil War Soldiers*, "men had valued their autonomy so much that they went to war when they felt it was threatened."¹⁶ Mitchell claims here that the Northern boys that went off to fight did so to uphold their rights to the kind of lives they had, and wanted to keep. They felt that this war threatened their very livelihood and so were compelled to enlist to protect it. This was a common claim of many of the men and boys in the North and South. Adventure and duty to country were compelling drives among boy soldiers of either side. Historian Bruce Tap, author of "Inevitability, Masculinity, and the American Military Tradition", quotes Historian Douglas L. Wilson in his article saying, "but we miss an important point if we do not recognize that the combatants were in deadly earnest, that they were willing to risk their lives for something presumably more important: their honor."¹⁷ Tap alludes to the general mental state of men when he explains, "Men were still expected to defend their honor, and the world of the nineteenth century."¹⁸

Benjamin T. Smith's reasoning to join the fight may have been to escape the boredom of farm life in Kankakee, Illinois.¹⁹ Smith, like many other farm boys at this time, was tired of the mundane and predictable life on the farm, and saw the army as an opportunity for adventure and excitement. Enlisting would also allow them to see new lands and have experiences that they would have never had a chance to see

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ahl&AN=A000567605.01&site=ehost-live> (accessed December 5, 2009).

¹² Wills, *Army*, 60.

¹³ Drake, , 120

¹⁴ Stillwell, 135.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁶ Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1988),

57.

¹⁷ Tap, 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁹ Smith, *Private Smith's Journal*, 3.

otherwise. It was also a way to escape the teasing of girls who would call the boys that did not enlist “stay-at-home cowards.”²⁰

Many joined for the glory they envisioned they would win from going to war and returning home as heroes. William B. Smith remembered thinking that he was “on my way to the enticing fields of military glory.”²¹ According to Otto Eisenschiml and Ralph Newman, authors of *American Iliad*, these farm boys were encouraged to fight by pure patriotism, the idea of great personal sacrifice, and the pressure from public opinion to enlist in service for their country.²² This ideal was best embodied by Civil War soldier Leander Stillwell, who after the war commented, “I was then only a boy, but somehow I felt that the war was going on to be a long one, and that it was the duty of every young fellow of the requisite physical ability to ‘go for a soldier’ and help save the nation.”²³ It is plain to see that Leander knew he was still a boy and recognizes that he had undergone changes due to his service to his country. Yet, many of these boys did not understand the personal transformation that they were to experience.

Camp life was the next step that the soldiers took on their journey. Like Benjamin T. Smith, many of these farm boys from Illinois were stationed at Camp Douglas in Chicago. He recalled playing mental scenarios of what he would encounter in war, which was done by many of the new volunteer soldiers.²⁴ Leander Stillwell comments that he did the same before he was in combat. Stillwell said that he and others would think that each would “return home at the end of a victorious war, a military hero.”²⁵ All of these childish and youthful dreams and wishes show the extent to which these boys were unprepared for the realities of war.

Eisenschiml and Newman describe the soldiers in camp to be from all types of backgrounds such as “peaceful citizens, farmers, clerks, mechanics, and professional men (who) had to be laboriously transformed into soldiers.”²⁶ Camp was also a place for drilling, marching, and spending time with your company with which you would be with for the duration of your enlisted service. According to Robert Hale Strong, regular camp while heading south and fighting there, their duties also included cleaning camp, sweeping the streets in camp, and picket duty.²⁷

Many of these youthful farm boys grew homesick and lonely while being away from home and separated from friends and family. These bouts of homesickness and loneliness helped these Illinois farm boys to start to mature and become independent and able to look out for themselves. George Drake tells of how he became very lonely, and would love to hear from his family and town through letters.²⁸ Seeing familiar faces from home also helped these feelings of longing for the family, farm, and friends subside. William B. Smith was one of the lucky ones

²⁰ Stillwell, 10.

²¹ Smith, *On Wheels and How I Came Here*, 21.

²² Otto Eisenschiml and Ralph Newman, *American Iliad: The Epic Story of the Civil War as narrated by Eyewitnesses and Contemporaries*, (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947), 34.

²³ Stillwell, 10.

²⁴ Smith, *Private Smith’s Journal*, 9.

²⁵ Stillwell, 32-33.

²⁶ Eisenschiml and Newman, 38.

²⁷ Strong, 9.

²⁸ Drake, 33.

who was able to find acquaintances from back home that he could relate to.²⁹ Meeting boys the same age definitely made the process of going off to war and adjusting to army life in the camps a little bit easier. These farm boys had to become acclimated to the harsh conditions of the Army like hard sleeping conditions, camp wide bouts of diarrhea, and rheumatism which some of the soldiers like Robert Hale Strong and William B. Smith encountered from sleeping in wet and muddy conditions.³⁰

Battles were the most influential experience that the war had to offer to these young farm boys. Many of them could never have imagined the brutal and violent scenes that would become just another sight, sound, or happening throughout the war. One example of the ferocity of war comes from Private Benjamin Smith who saw one of his fellow riders “riddled” with seven buck shots.³¹ This was quite a sight to see at such a young age. William B. Smith of the 14th Illinois Regiment made the point that no one was immune to being scared in battle, especially young farm boys like him. He commented in his book, “On Wheels and How I Came Here” that rank doesn’t matter; everyone in battle is able to soil themselves because of the horrors and fear it brings.³² Charles Wills explains that as he was running to attack the rebels, he saw a man on the ground in a pool of blood whose head looked, “as if it had been taken off with a cleaver.”³³ Wills also conveys how frightening of an experience a Civil War battle was when he claimed that the cannons discharging “was enough to terrify the bravest hearted, and the intense nervous strain of the instant was enough to age one by years.”³⁴ George Drake also tells his view of a battle to his family back home by saying, “I tell you the men were mowed down like grass but fortunately I was spared.”³⁵ He also mentions that “the way the rebels shot men down out of their breastworks. It was awful. I never want to see the like again.”³⁶ All of these ordeals of battle give the reader a glimpse of the violence and terror of combat, and an understanding of how these unsophisticated and sheltered boys from Illinois farms were emotionally impacted by the war.

All of these boys recalled and wrote about their first battle because of the great impact it had on them. This significant event would be followed by many more gruesome and nightmarish battles. Private Benjamin Smith of the 51st Regiment³⁷ recalled his first battle by explaining how bullets were flying over him in a hostile, war-like environment, and how it affected him emotionally by saying, “this being our first experience gave us a queer feeling, to state a fact.”³⁸ Private Smith is a prime example of the confusion and the state of shock that most of these boys felt when being thrown into their first battle. Robert Hale Strong states a

²⁹ Smith, 46-47.

³⁰ Strong, *A Yankee Private’s Civil War*, 27.

³¹ Smith, *Private Smith’s Journal*, 63.

³² Smith, *On Wheels and How I Came Here* 94.

³³ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

³⁵ Drake, 89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁷ The 51st Illinois Volunteer Infantry was known as either the Chicago Legion, or the Ryan Life Guard during the war. Civil War Centennial Commission of Illinois, *Illinois Military Units in the Civil War*, (Springfield, Illinois: Civil War Centennial Commission of Illinois, 1962), 26.

³⁸ Smith, *Private Smith’s Journal*, 26.

similar situation in his first battle. "The bullets were flying around us as thick, seemingly, as hail."³⁹ William B. Smith mentions how he watched a cannon ball bounce through a Wisconsin regiment and obliterating them, and also coming very close to taking out himself as well.⁴⁰ Leander Stillwell recants his first experiences in battle by explaining, "it was there where I first saw a gun fired in anger, heard the whistle of a bullet, or saw a man die a violent death, and my experiences, thoughts, expressions, and sensations on that bloody Sunday will abide with me as long as I live."⁴¹ Stillwell wrote about his struggles in this war a while after the war, giving him the advantage of hindsight, and reflecting on everything that surrounded him at this time in his life. He captures the idea that after his first battle, he was changed forever, his innocence taken away and he would never be able to forget what he saw on that day and many others throughout the war. This idea rang true for many of the other soldiers from Illinois that went into the war as boys and were absolutely changed by what they saw, felt, heard, and did in this War of the Rebellion. The first battle for these Illinois farm boys was the first of many steps in their maturation process catalyzed by the war.

All of these farm boys fought in either the Western campaigns, or the Chattanooga and Atlanta campaigns. Some of the most famous battles that involved the boys from Illinois were Shiloh and Chickamauga. These were two of the bloodiest battles during the entire Civil War, with the two-day battle at Chickamauga being the third worst battle in the Civil War, resulting in 16,170 Union casualties with even more losses for the Confederates.⁴² George Drake and Benjamin T. Smith were some of the soldiers that saw the horrors of the Chickamauga battlefield after the battle.⁴³ Drake talks about the battlefield being full of unburied bodies that were all decayed: "I tell you it is a horrible sight. You never would want to see any more battle fields[.] The men lay vary thick (sic)."⁴⁴ This literal picture that Drake presents shows the repulsive scene that these boys would never be able to forget.

Stillwell has the misfortune of his first battle occurring at Shiloh, where the Union suffered 13,047 casualties.⁴⁵ Charles W. Wills was a participant at the battle of Chattanooga. Illinois was represented bravely by their farm boys in the famous battle of Vicksburg, the storming of Atlanta, and the taking of Savannah. All of these battles were key parts in the maturing process of these farm boys.

As can be imagined, the views and ideas of these boys changed as the war waged on. It is evident that these boys began to take on a hardness towards war and the ability to deal with the sight of dead bodies littering the fields. Leander Stillwell, Charles Wills, Benjamin Smith, and Robert Strong all show this hardness, which is a major part of the process of becoming a good soldier, and losing the youthful innocence while becoming a man. George Drake and Benjamin Smith both were shot and wounded in battles, but both shrugged it off in their writings, and made light of the wounds, a characteristic of a veteran soldier and a strong man.^{46 47}

³⁹ Strong, 17.

⁴⁰ Smith, *On Wheels and How I came Here*, 98-99.

⁴¹ Stillwell, 53.

⁴² Davis, 216.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁵ Davis, 217.

⁴⁶ Drake, 102.

Robert Strong gives an example of this hardness, acquired during war, when he comments about a happening in a battle, "he (Elias Burns, one of Strong's close friends) fell across my lap—I was still sitting—and his brains and blood ran into my haversack, spoiling my rations. So I took his."⁴⁸ Strong's hardness and growth as a soldier shows when, after seeing something so horrific, he has the sense to just take the man's food. What is most striking is the way he writes this passage. He writes as though he had a calm demeanor during a heated battle as he commits this natural, yet cold act. Leander Stillwell explains the transformation he underwent in his fighting styles. He talks of the war-hungry spirit that takes over a soldier in the heat of battle. "The soldier on the fighting line is possessed by the demon of destruction" and that all he wants to do is kill for more gratification.⁴⁹ This statement by Stillwell gives a glimpse of how much these soldiers were desensitized to violence. Stillwell's portrayal of a soldier in the war shows the transformation that takes place from the young Illinois farm boy who is out for adventure and excitement to the crazed man that is possessed by a need to kill. These two different psyches show the great contrasts and changes these boys underwent because of their experiences in this war. William B. Smith also talks about this craze that came over him when he had been in a few more battles and later on in the war. He explained that he "was in a feverish state of excitement," ready to shoot the first "johnnie" he saw."⁵⁰ The excitement that he speaks of is not the same excitement that occurred at the beginning of the war when these farm boys were enlisting, but a different feeling, only produced by the situations found in the heat of battle that make men do unthinkable things to other men.

Death was also a daily occurrence for the soldiers. For some of these young boys it was hard to come to grips with death; on the other hand, some found it too easy because of the incredible amount of death and dying that they had become accustomed to. These boys saw death on a daily basis, whether it was a fellow soldier dying in camp from a disease, injury, or fever, or in battle, death surrounded their lives while in the service of the Union. Leander Stillwell exemplifies this when after seeing a father weeping over his son, whom Stillwell had fought alongside of, who had just passed away, he thought "A common soldier was dying—that was all, nothing but 'a leaf in a storm'."⁵¹ This statement by Stillwell shows the effect that being around all of this death has had on him and that it would be impossible for him to be the farm boy that he once was. Understanding how frail life is and coming to terms with death is a step that men take, not boys.

Stillwell's first encounter with death was when he came past a field that was recently fought over and was full of rotting corpses. He described it as "some doubled up face downward, others with their white faces upturned to the sky, brave boys who had been shot to death in 'holding the line'."⁵² Benjamin Smith dealt with the bloody scene of the aftermath of a Civil War battle when he wrote "resting in peace up there in the blue vault, of Heave (sic), while its light reflects down upon the upturned white cold faces, of hundreds of the dead, motionless they lay all over on

⁴⁷ Smith, *Private Smith's Journal*, 171.

⁴⁸ Strong, 20.

⁴⁹ Stillwell, 62.

⁵⁰ Smith, *On Wheels and How I Came Here*, 190.

⁵¹ Stillwell, 135.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 48.

the field; they are at peace.”⁵³ This description of the battlefield and Smith’s eloquent prose give the idea that Smith may be jealous of the dead in some regards. He might wish that he could be at peace, although he knows that he can never be at peace while he is fighting in the war. Charles Wills is grief-stricken over the loss of his two fellow soldiers when he writes, “we buried our two boys yesterday morning...I never felt sadder in my life.”⁵⁴ Through this situation, Willis is further away from the boy he used to be, and turning into the man that he will become. Many of these boys who were becoming men were afraid of an anonymous death, especially to those boys who enlisted looking for glory and bravery.⁵⁵ This was their biggest fear.

These sights of the dead and the horrific battlefields made these farm boys think of things that they had never pondered before, ask questions that they never would have before the war, and learn more than they could have in any school back home in the corn fields of Illinois. This sentiment is seconded by Leander Stillwell who boasts that the 61st Illinois Infantry was the best school he ever attended.⁵⁶ These boys, like Stillwell, realize the growth and education that they have absorbed and taken in while being involved in this war, and know that these experiences have made them grow into men from the boys that they were back in the Prairie State. These occurrences were not the only exceptions to impact the maturation process.

Promotions were also a key happening that changed some of these soldiers throughout the war. Promotions were very common in the war as lower-ranking officers led their troops onto the field of battle, putting them at high risk of becoming a casualty. In August of 1862, Charles Wills received a promotion to lead the regiment from his hometown, the 103rd Illinois Infantry.⁵⁷ On taking this new position, Wills had to force himself to become more mature for he had to take care of all the men in his newly-formed regiment. He accepts this new commission, and shows his maturing attitude and spirit when writes, “as soldiers, of my company, for whose actions, and in a measure, health, I am responsible.”⁵⁸ This statement by Wills is an easy indication of his maturation throughout the war. He came into it as a twenty-one year-old boy that had been on the farm his whole life. After one year of service he became a leader of a regiment to which he identifies as his sole responsibility.

Confederate prisons were another experience that the most unfortunate of Union soldiers endured, most of them not surviving. The Union listed that it had a total of 24,866 soldiers who die in Confederate prisons during the War of the Rebellion.⁵⁹ If the camps and battles were not enough to turn you into a man, and you were unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of the Confederates, then prison would surely test your manhood. Only a man who had learned how to adapt and survive would get out alive. One Illinois farm boy that found himself captured and sent to an assortment of Confederate prisons was William B. Smith. Smith and the remainder of his battered and beaten regiment surrendered at the battle of Moon

⁵³ Smith, *Private Smith’s Journal*, 91-92.

⁵⁴ Wills, 75.

⁵⁵ Mitchell, 60.

⁵⁶ Stillwell, 267.

⁵⁷ Wills, 128.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁹ Davis, 220.

Station, and were taken to the infamous Andersonville Prison.⁶⁰ Smith writes about the moment when he decided to put boyish ideals behind him, and be a man. About the night he was captured he wrote, “I gave way to boyish grief, and a heavy gloom deeper than that of the night, settled down upon me. I however gave way to this despair but for a moment when hope and determination came to my relief...I firmly resolved to make the best of my sad situation and not again give way to emotions of despondency and grief.”⁶¹ Smith shows the instant maturation of a boy who decided that the only way that he is going to survive this terrible ordeal was to become a man and face the music.

At Andersonville, Smith witnessed unimaginable horrors and terrible treatments of the prisoners. He mentions some of the tortures and punishments that were inflicted on prisoners in Andersonville.⁶² He spent sleepless nights in the cold and wet mud, and found himself huddling in a group of soldiers who found, when they woke in the morning, that some of the soldiers on the outsides of the group had frozen to death.⁶³ There were certainly many days and nights in these prison camps where he had to cling to his last ounce of hope to stay alive and make it through. No one would discredit Private Smith as not being a man after going through that kind of an experience.

Surviving a Civil War hospital was another test of a man, not only because of the poor and sometimes barbaric practices surgeons and doctors used, but also because of the sheer dehumanizing displays around these hospitals. Robert Hale Strong was one of the Illinois farm boys who had to spend time in a hospital. An account that he gives shows the dreadful situations the patients found themselves in and the sights that they saw. Strong reveals, “I had seen men killed by the hundred and cut to pieces by shells. But I had never seen a doctor cut a man up. I surely did while I was there.”⁶⁴ Having to see these doctors operate first hand had to be a traumatizing experience. Strong asserts that this was almost as bad as being on the battlefield. Being constantly around death bothered Leander Stillwell when he was wounded and forced to stay in the hospital.⁶⁵ No one wanted to be in these hospitals, but being there was another way that these boys were forced to come to terms with themselves and death while maturing into men.

Illinois boys like Robert Hale Strong and Benjamin T. Smith had to see the dehumanization of men as piles of arms, hands, feet, legs, and other human body parts amputated in the hospitals were thrown outside into the open because there was no time to bury the limbs. How the pile of appendages grew throughout the night, and how the surgeons and assistants took limbs off of “courageous” soldiers who have given up their sound body for the honorable cause of the preservation of the Union.⁶⁶

Benjamin T. Smith had his first meeting with the death of a comrade when his friend Charley Miller died of a camp sickness.⁶⁷ The death of someone so close to Smith, even before his first battle, gave him an early dosage of what was to come. It

⁶⁰ Smith, *On Wheels and How I Came Here*, 196 and 223.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Ch. 24.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 272-274.

⁶⁴ Strong, 74.

⁶⁵ Stillwell, 151.

⁶⁶ Smith, *Private Smith’s Journal*, 192-193.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

also gave him an opportunity to see death early, helping him to mature and grow emotionally before the death and destruction he would witness. Leander Stillwell saw into the future on a trip down to the south where he came across a Confederate prisoner who told him and his fellow soldiers, "You-all will sing a different tune by next summah (sic)." A year or two after, Leander wrote that, "later we found out that the young Confederate soldier was a true prophet," as their views did surely change.⁶⁸

Not all of the farm boys from Illinois shared the same experiences. Chesley A. Mosman from Marine Prairie, just East of St. Louis⁶⁹ enlisted at the age of eighteen with the 9th Missouri Infantry Regiment, which in 1861 became the 59th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment on July 27, 1861.⁷⁰ In Mosman's account of the war, which he kept from 1861-1865, the first two entries of his Civil War experiences are unfortunately missing; which has a great impact on the analysis information that can be taken from Mosman's account. These missing entries make it difficult to track Chesley Mosman's experience and transformation to manhood throughout the war, and he strays from the pack with how he writes and describes the war. In his case, he does not conform to the idea of transformation from boyhood to manhood throughout the war like the others. In most of his writings he states what he saw in camp, some battle scenes, adding military strategy with precise detail, and mostly just everyday occurrences. Mosman doesn't seem to show much emotion or profound change throughout the Civil War according to his journal. One reason for this might be that he had struggled with, and been through, adversity before he entered the war, at least much more than the others have seem to have been through.

When Mosman was a young child his mother passed and at about ten his father, overtaken by gold fever, took off to strike it rich in California leaving Mosman to be shipped between two aunts who raised him.⁷¹ These events can be very rough on a child and help to explain the lack of ability to identify a maturing process in Mosman's writing throughout the Civil War. Another option that could explain the differences between Mosman and the other six accounts of Illinois farm boys and their transformation throughout the Civil War could be that we cannot tell for sure because the first two missing entries of his journal accounts could hold a major event he underwent early in the war.

It is easy to notice in these letters, novels, and journals the differences in how they wrote about and portrayed battles from their first experiences, to the accounts towards the end of the war when they were embattled veterans. They talk more about the horrific scenes and sensory descriptions in the portrayals of earlier battles, while in the later years of the war the authors usually give a few brief statements of the battle focusing on strategic purposes, not spending much time as in previous battles with the terrors of war. The uncertainty in their voices at the beginning of the war, changes to the assertive tone of a distinguished and seasoned soldier and shows the completion of their growth into men. These changes were

⁶⁸ Stillwell, 33-34.

⁶⁹ Chesley A. Mosman, *The Rough Side of War: The Civil War Journal of Chesley A. Mosman 1st Lieutenant, Company D 59th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment*, ed. Arnold Gates (Garden City, New York: The Basin Publishing Company, 1987), vii.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vii-viii.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, ix-x.

determined by the hardships that they had to endure through enlistment and training in the camps, seeing battle for the first time and then growing used to the sights and sounds of war. The experiences of these boys in four short years produced men that themselves, their family, and their country could be proud of.