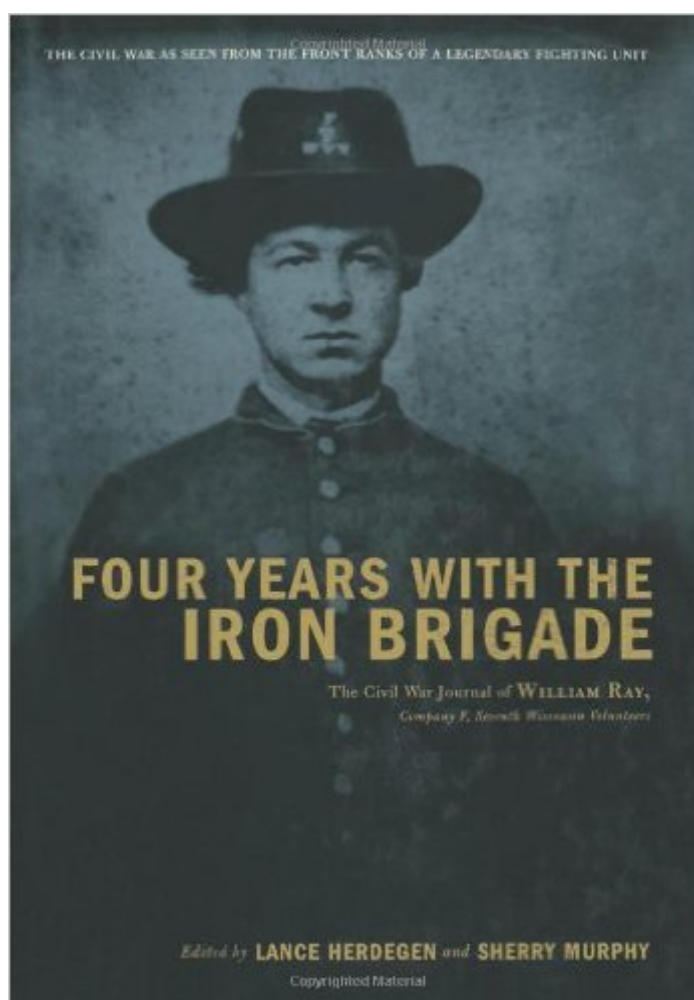


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Four Years With The Iron Brigade: The Civil War Journals Of William R Ray, Co. F, Seventh Wisconsin Infantry



Synopsis

The recently discovered journal of William Ray of the Seventh Wisconsin is the most important primary source ever of soldier life in one of the war's most famous fighting organizations. No other collection of letters or diaries comes close to it. Two days before his regiment left Wisconsin in 1861, the twenty-three-year-old blacksmith began, as he described it, "to keep account" of his life in what became the "Iron Brigade of the West." Ray's journal encompasses all aspects of the enlisted man's life—the battles, the hardships, the comradeship. And Ray saw most of the war from the front rank. He was wounded at Second Bull Run, again at Gettysburg, and yet a third time in the hell of the Wilderness. He penned something in his journal almost every day—occasionally just a few lines, at other times thousands of words. Ray's candid assessments of officers and strategy, his vivid descriptions of marches and the fighting, and his evocative tales of foraging and daily army life fill a large gap in the historical record and give an unforgettable soldier's-eye view of the Civil War.

Book Information

Hardcover: 446 pages

Publisher: Da Capo Press; First Edition edition (2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0306811197

ISBN-13: 978-0306811197

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.2 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (16 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #423,583 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #19 in [Books > History >](#)

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Customer Reviews

The story of William Ray's is not entirely unique to Civil War history although his personal account brought forth by four years of great diary keeping brings the soldier daily grind to the forefront. Ray's story is seldom full of action and captures the daily life of a young man of Wisconsin heritage fighting for the Union in the Army of the Potomac. What flavors this monotonous story is that it truly brings the hard lifestyle of 19th Century soldiering to 21st Century readers. This is an excellent book for historians looking to understand soldier thinking. Ray writes about camp life, rumors, gossip,

money, family, drill, picket duty, sickness, friends and the "hurry up and wait" philosophy of being an infantry soldier for the Union during the Civil War. Ray's coverage of his fighting is brisk although many times his writing may have been tamed by the fact that he may have been writing with family in mind. He may have not wanted his family to know the hard battle details in the event of his death where his diary could be discovered and sent home with his belongings. Injured on several occasions such as the Battle of Gettysburg and The Wilderness, Ray enhances his story to give this book added information. He writes about his wounds, healing, being sick and helping his fellow soldiers. We are lucky to have such a large diary written which covers four years of the war. From his enlisting, re-enlisting and final discharge Ray offers us a priceless look at a common infantry soldier. His diary notes of the Siege of Petersburg and the mine explosion was very interesting. The ugly daily life of trench warfare certainly painted the struggle at hand.

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