

Perspectives in Military History

50th Annual Lecture Series

Public Honor and Private Thoughts

Civil War Soldiers in Their Own Words

Dr. L. Bao Bui

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As each Soldier in the Civil War tramped for endless miles down dusty roads, maneuvered through soggy, slimy mud, or charged into the powder-streaked faces of their enemies on countless battlefields across the warring Nation, they each had an individual reason to continue fighting. Today, we can explore the innermost thoughts and feelings of these Soldiers through the letters they wrote home. On Wednesday, September 20, 2017, Dr. L. Bao Bui of Ball State University will present a lecture at the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center (USAHEC) in Carlisle, Pennsylvania to talk about Civil War letters and their impact on our understanding of Soldiers. This lecture marks a major milestone for the USAHEC and military history – the start of the 50th year conducting the Perspective in Military History Lecture Series.

The Civil War was the first major war in the Postal Age of mass communications and mass literacy. The war saw millions of Americans take to letter writing as the means of maintaining an informational and emotional link to loved ones at home. Through their letters, Civil War Soldiers articulated their feelings, opinions, and observations about their experiences. These letters made it clear that these men fought for more than cause, country, or their brothers in arms. In their hearts and on paper, they nurtured the desire to both win the war, and to perform honorably and known to the public as having done so. Yet in their private letters, these same Soldiers articulated their vulnerabilities, their admissions of doubt and despair, their innermost emotional life, and their revulsion at war and its horrors. For the men who penned these letters, sentimentality or lack of control was considered effeminate or a sign of masculine weakness. Behind the seal of closed envelopes, Civil War Soldiers lived a life they could not share publically, and Soldiers were left to their own devices to maintain the security of their private thoughts, and by extension, their social reputation and public standing.

Dr. L. Bao Bui received his doctorate in history in 2016 from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and his dissertation examined the culture of letter-writing during the Civil War. At the University of Illinois and at Ball State University, he has taught courses on American history, foreign policy, military history, human rights, film and social media, food politics, and gender studies. He is a past recipient of the USAHEC's General Matthew B. Ridgway Grant.

DATE: Wednesday, September 20, 2017

TIME: Doors open at 6:30 PM and the talk begins at 7:15 PM

PLACE: USAHEC, Visitor and Education Center, Multipurpose Room

For updates and any last-minute changes in "Perspectives" meeting times and places, please check www.USAHEC.org or call the Information Desk: (717) 245-3972.