

I, Soldier

A VOICE FROM THE
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Drew W. Allbritten

HELLGATE PRESS



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I, Soldier

I, SOLDIER

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A Soldier's Creed

I am an American Soldier.

I am a Warrior and member of a team.

I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.

I always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

*I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough,
trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.*

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and I am a professional.

*I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies
of the United States of America, in close combat.*

I am the guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

I am an American Soldier.

(Written by Members of the Task Force Soldier's Warrior Ethos Team, 2003)

I, Soldier

An Infantryman's Creed

*I am the infantry.
I am my country's strength in war, her deterrence in peace.
I am the heart of the fight...wherever, whenever.
I carry America's faith against her enemies.
I am the Queen of Battle.
I am what my country expects me to be, the best trained
Soldier in the world.
In the race for victory, I am swift, determined, and
courageous, armed with a fierce will to win.
Never will I fail my country's trust.
Always I fight on...through the foe,
to the objective, to triumph overall.
If necessary, I will fight to the death.
By my steadfast courage, I have won more
than 200 years of freedom.
I yield not to weakness, to hunger, to cowardice,
to fatigue, to superior odds,
for I am mentally tough, physically strong,
and morally straight.
I forsake not my country, my mission,
my comrades, my sacred duty.
I am relentless.
I am always there, now and forever.
I am the infantry!
Follow me!.*

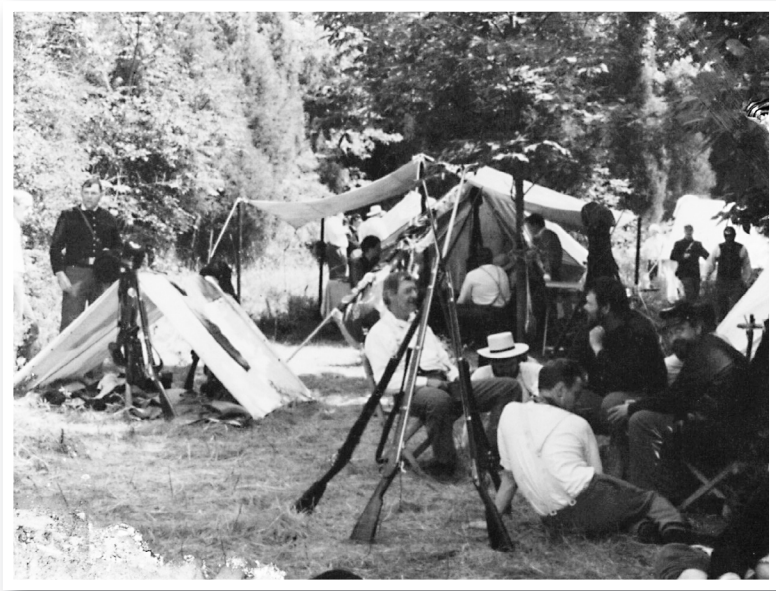
(Written by Lt Col Stephen H. White in 1955. Adapted from a poem titled *I am the Guard* by an unknown author which was discovered in the Nation Guard Archives.)

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Foreword

Drew W. Allbritten was an American Civil War reenactor for nearly two decades. He creatively portrayed a young, semi-literate man from a small northern town who enlisted in the Union Army at the beginning of the Civil War.

Drew was involved in dozens of battle scenarios and in scores of living history events; and this collection of writings realistically describes the emotions, fears, tensions, and friendships of a soldier then (and perhaps even now).

While no reenactments can truly demonstrate the brutalities of war, this collection provides a unique glimpse into the perspectives and challenges of a typical Civil War private.

I, Soldier covers each year of the nation's Civil War with some reflections on the impact of those involved. Using authentic 1860's language and numerous photographs from the period, it seeks to take the reader into the 1860s by dramatically re-acquainting them with the American Civil War.

Decades ago, when the author was a young adolescent, his elderly great-grandfather told him about his own father who had fought in the Civil War and about some of his exploits.

So now, in these timeless and emphatic writings, one can truly visualize a homesick soldier leaning into flickering candlelight, and with an ink-stained pen nib or a shaven pencil stub, scrawling down recollections of his survival in dire circumstances. And as the late evening winds howled outside his smoke-filled tent, this anguished soldier could not sleep.

— Richard L. Anderson,
*Academy Award recipient (sound effects),
movie producer & screenwriter*

I, Soldier

On March 4, 1861, Abraham Lincoln was sworn in as the 16th President of the United States:

I, Abraham Lincoln, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will do the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States as registered in Heaven.

[In Article I, Section 2, Clause 1, The Constitution provides: "The President shall be Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual service of the United States...."]

On March 4, 1865, Abraham Lincoln was sworn in for a second term as President:

I, Abraham Lincoln, do solemnly swear that I have never voluntarily borne arms against the United States since I have been a citizen thereof; that I have voluntarily given no aid, countenance, council, or encouragement to persons engaged in armed hostility thereto; that I have neither sought nor accepted nor attempted to exercise the functions of any office whatever, under any authority or pretended authority in hostility to the United States, hostile or inimical thereto. And I do further swear that, to the best of my knowledge and ability, I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter, so help me God.

[Amended in 1862 by Congressional Statute to include an "Ironclad Test Oath" requiring all civilian and military officials to swear they had never aided or encouraged persons engaged in armed hostility against the United States.]

Dedication & Acknowledgments

This creative work is dedicated to all servicemembers of the United States Armed Forces who daily and faithfully keep their oath to solemnly swear to defend the American Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic – and to their families. It is also dedicated to those historians, authors, and teachers of the American Civil War who continue to pursue the truth, and who relentlessly convey the reality of this terrible era accurately and forthrightly against the forces who would like to suppress their voices.

Creative writing is in many ways a team effort. I appreciate having the use of the public domain photographs that are held in the National Archives' Mathew Brady's Collection of Photographs of Civil War-Era Personalities and Scenes. I am indebted to the many people who offered encouragement, advice, expertise, and ideas on content and style. I sincerely thank the late William Allbritten, Richard L. Anderson, Alan Greenwald, Larry Harris Jr., Gregory Hawkins, Amalie Hill, Jacqueline Keefe, the late Michael Kelly, the late Robert Krueger, Christian Laine, Mark Lyles, George McKellar, Larrell Rittenhouse, Ronnie Smith, the late Matthew Urbanowicz, and Arthur Visser. I also acknowledge Harley B. Patrick, Owner and Publisher of L&R Publishing LLC and his team at Hellgate Press, who made this project a reality. And, first and foremost, my wife, Professor Susan Anne Kelly, who encouraged, pushed, and badgered me for years to be creative outside my professional bubble, thank you. Your practical and morale support kept me going.



Prologue

2021-2025 is the 160th anniversary of the American Civil War. Two years ago, as a reenactor, I portrayed a typical Union soldier. I participated in over twenty-five different battlefield simulations and in scores of living history activities from 1981-1998 for the 125th, 130th, and 135th anniversary engagements of this tragic conflict.

As someone who worked in and around the nation's Capital for twenty-five years, and during that time, I served as a presidential appointee for seven years. I studied the history of this American tragedy and its personalities, primarily from the perspective of the everyday regular army soldier.

Like most other dedicated reenactors, I read numerous biographies of both Union and Confederate survivors. During these living history events, I made diary entries, and wrote letters and poems to loved ones as if I were living during that time: putting my thoughts into 1860s words about the emotions, fears, tensions, and friendships of a typical Civil War soldier. I took on the voice of a young, semi-literate man from a small northern farming community. In all, I wrote sixty-eight verses and vignettes.

I was motivated to go back to these writings when I watched on television the failed insurrection attempt at the nation's Capital on January 6, 2021. As Confederate flags flew in the Capitol building, and on its grounds, I was heart-broken. But not my spirit. Almost 160 years earlier, another insurrection surfaced when the Confederate artillery fired on Union soldiers at Fort Sumpter in Charlestown Harbor in South Carolina. And with the intense political polarization in U.S., now is the right time to publish this collection.

In the northern states, the Civil War was fought to preserve the Union and to end slavery. And it did. But not without great sacrifice and suffering, some of which continues today. In the southern states, this was a war to secede from the Union to preserve its way of life, its slavery, states' rights, and white male privilege. The Union won this bloody Civil War, but many others in these once-confederated states still seek to glorify their traitorous past.

To this day, American democracy is being challenged again, from the inside. My collection of verses and vignettes seeks to honor and to remember the pain of those soldiers and civilians, then and now. My hope is that this work will be a reminder to those fomenting rebellion in the nation today. We only need to look at the Ukraine and Gaza to understand better the impact of modern warfare on a nation and its people.

Author's Notes

I, Soldier is a collection of verses and vignettes on one man's soldiering experience and insights, the experiences of his Union comrades, and the conversations overheard between Yankee and Rebel soldiers.

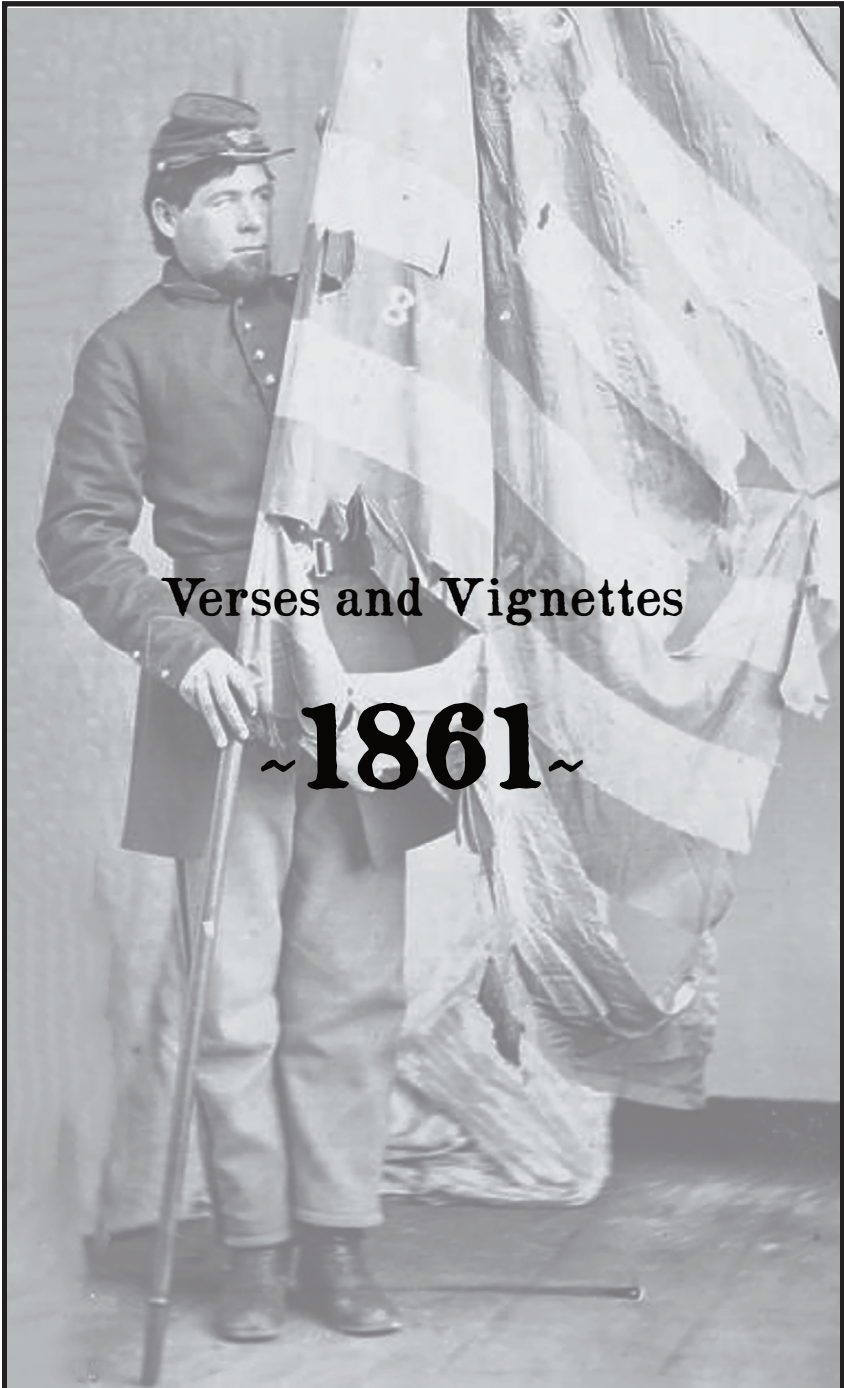
On cadence and rhyme: In the period around the Civil War, soldiers and civilians were familiar with what were known as *Parlor Ballads*, especially with the works of Stephen Foster. The stock in trade of a Parlor Balladeer was the rhyming couplet, or the rhyming of every line. This form of rhyme can sound sing-songy to the modern ear. In the interest of fidelity to the parlance and style of the era, I have used rhyming couplets in many of the verses in this work. *For greater effect, you can be the storyteller by reading the verses aloud.*

On grammar and punctuation: During the Civil War era, there was a wide range of oral and written language skills among the soldiers. Nearly all officers were much better educated than the soldiers they led. As a result, soldiers would often ask their literate comrades, officers included, to help them write their letters home.

The author chose to write in the voice of a semi-literate, but insightful private: informal and colloquial with poor and inconsistent phonetic spelling. Why? Because the vast majority of the Civil War soldiers – on both sides – were under-educated privates. Their stories, in their own words, have too often been lost, supplanted by reports of officers, journalists at the time, and historians later.

Photographs: Most of the photographs in this work were all in the public domain and many can be found in the National Archives' Collection of Mathew Brady's Photographs of Civil War-Era Personalities and Scenes. Other photos are from the Library of Congress or the author's private collection and all have received the necessary permissions.





Verses and Vignettes

~1861~

I, Soldier



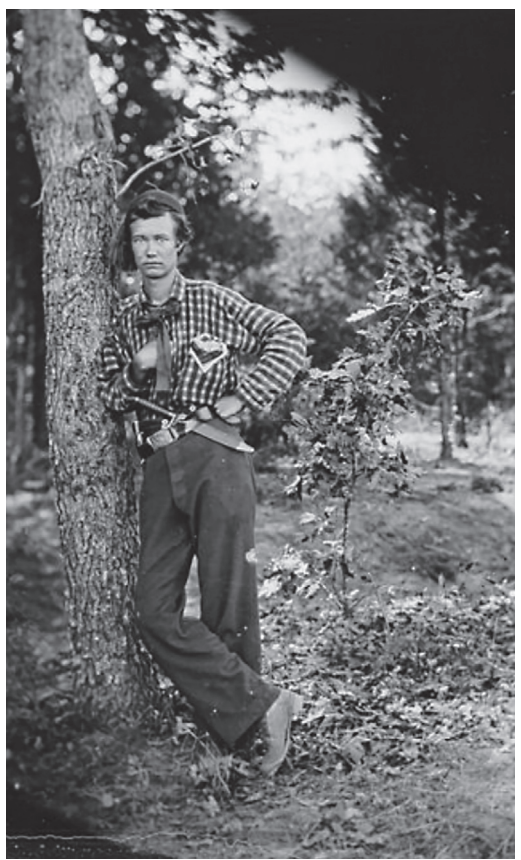
1. GOOD-BY MAW

(Adapted from a WW1 enlistment song, "Long Boy," written by William Herschel.)

Good-by Maw, good-by Paw, and
good-by mule wit yur ole hee-haw.
I may not be knowin wot dis war za bout,
but I be sure I be soon findin out.
So, I be walkin on down to da town hall square,
and be gettin in line wit de otha boys ther.

Yawl, don't be a fearin or be a frettin,
I soon enuff be a homeward boundin.
S'pose I be shootin me som Rebs and ole Davis too,
and dats bout all one fellar can do.
So, good-by Maw, good-by Paw, and
good-by mule wit yur ole hee-haw.





2. PRIVATES

Fur a Private, tiz jest a fightin man's wurld,
and be followin orders unda doze colors unfurled.
To fight dat able foe widout a given name,
and bein courageous, widout acquirin ainy fame.

Fur a Private, da dirt twas hiz only bed.
Not so great, but tiz bedder dan bein shot dead.
We recruits be dreamin of many a gloryus battle,
but dem vetrans jest hope fur dry ground, all

Fur a Private, he not yet be knowin true sorrow,
and doze vets ar jest thankful fur anotha morrow.
Daily, he be findin anotha place to bivouac,
az days blend togetter, tiz harder keepin track.

Fur a Private, derz no chance fur a brevet.
jest to march, eat, sleep, fight and sweat.
Da soldier mostlee be prayin fur dreams undashed.
ev'n afta doze Blue 'n Grey ranks brutlee clashed.

Fur a Private, he oft be hearin doze words 'at all costs.'
witch meanz dis battle will soon be lost.
Dis soldier caint ne'r be well-prepard to die.
he jest be hopin to be one day mor unda de uncarin sky.

Fur a Private, at da cemetery, hiz family shall soon weep,
whence dare son be takin hiz too early f'urev'r sleep.
Der be no medal fur valor on hiz sunken chest,
only da patriotism buried deep widin hiz breast.

3. OFFICERS

Fur de Officer, derz only command and a yearnin fur gallantry.

Perhaps whilst revivin an ole West Point rivalry.

Da officer hopes each bloody battle be not in vain.

In battle dare iz so lil time fur ainy pleazur or pain.

Fur de Officer, derz many portant battlefront liaizons.

Whilst hiz men follow hiz orders wit laden caissons.

Da officer oft longs fur hiz wife's lovin embrace.

Den, off to a hero be, or to die wit God's grace.

Fur de Officer, he always tryin to be actin so brave.

Hopin to be earnin a brevet, whilst avoidin da grave.

Da officer's men do be loyalee followin da flag, bugle and drum.

Let dare be glory fur dem soldiers or be seein kingdom com.

Fur de Officer, dare must jest be victory afta victory.

Since he be hopin to be footnoted in de writen history.

Dare will ne'r be peace unda dem American stars.

Till doze 'Bars' and 'Old Glory' be mendin dare scars.



4. INFANTRY SLANG

(A conversation between a sargent and a new Union recruit.)

Private! Ar you a fresh fish recruit? And frum whence you com?

Yessah, Furst Sargent! Sorry I dint salute ya fast nuff. I jest be comin frum Ohio.

I hope ya aint goin to be no shoddy, pie-eatin soldier. So wot ya doin rite now?

I jest be learnin som new army words, like tar bucket, horse collar, and pepperbox. So wots da difrence tween a pie-eater or fresh fish? A new recruit, I spoze. So wots a copperhead or a scallywag? Wots a slebag or a satterlee? Sarge, wots da difrence tween quick-steppin or quick-marchin? Wots da difrence tween da abatis and da palisade? Or tween da barbette and da berm? I jest be gittin confused too easy. I be tryin not to be a contumacious miscreant at da van. Iz dat da frontlines? Wot do 'we be seein da elephant' mean? Som say it be meanin 'battle.' Dat right? I jest be learnin dat possum be meanin a good friend or comrade, and dat skunk be meanin a foe or jest ainy officer?

I be heppin ya later wit dat, Private. Wot you be gittin fur me now?

Well, here goes. Be lookin like ar skirmishers jest be beatin dem begrimed grey lice. Doze yella skunk-led vermins sur be skedaddlin fast. In da van, I jest be losin my brogan, beehive, and Bowie toothpick. Will dat be costin me plenty greenbacks in my pay. Well, I gotta bit bloodied and soon be seein de ole sawbones. Glad, I be not soon lyin in no wooden casket. So, I be grabin me a root and be eatin som goobers too, jest to be fillin up my growlin breadbasket. Dis better dan eatin doze moledee sheet iron crackers. But dey be hurtin my bedraggled choppers. I be hopin I wont be needin to be quick-steppin to dat smelly latrine. Now, fur som shut-eye capers. Dats it, Sarge!

Not bad, Private. You be makin me grin. Now, you jest be stayin alive. Yur dismissed.

5. WAGON RIDE

Death twas not som silent thief in de darkest of night,
 but ratter a voracious predator in broad daylight.
 Why do Death be stealin de last breath of ainy single soul,
 whence it can be swallowin doze battalions whole?
 Wot do a soldier be thinkin durin hiz very last breath?
 Will he soon be ridin on dis woeful wagon of death?
 Jest God alone will ventualee be decidin
 wich soldiers be live-marchin or be dead-ridin.

6. VIOLETS AND VIOLENCE

Abuv doze violets purple derz som violence so vivid.
 De armies be clashin and twill later be honorin dare dead.
 In dis once lush green valley of lilacs and clover,
 where doze valiant boys be vanishin in each manœuvre.

Abuv doze violets purple derz som violence so vivid.
 Dem fearless warriors bein filled wit uncertin dread.
 Soon doze meadows wer littered wit mud-caked kepis,
 and neath doze fallen wer dem much-trampled pansies.

Abuv doze violets purple derz som violence so vivid.
 Mayhem's sad wake be now lookin like an unkept bed.
 Az doze flattened violets becom da warriors final pillows,
 dis violence be now searchin fur mor floral hollows.

7. FORGIVE ME

I be havin da deepest pain fur dis proud soldier I be killin.
 Twas to be him or be me. I be havin no choice. Lord, do be forgivin.
 Thee be knowin dis fearless foe-man be havin a well-loved womin.
 She den be alone behin hur plough. Lord, do hepp hur somhow.

8. DEM DARKIES

(A conversation between two young Union army soldiers.)

Wotta bout dem darkies?

Wotta bout wot?

Most caint even reed or rite.

Cood you reed or rite if you aint been teached?

Dem darkies smell bad too.

Wooden ya if youd be werkin all day, aint gittin no soap, and den be gittin a whippin wit a rope?

Wotta bout dat curly hair?

Yur hair too wood be lookin difrent if youd be comin frum whar dey comed frum.

Wotta bout dat darkie skin?

Yur skin wood be dark too if you be workin all day long in da hot sun.

Wot if dey all git guns?

Den dey cood be fighten fo da Union too, jest like we be. And den dey be savin dare youngins and jest bein free.

Wot if dey git freed?

Well, wood ya den be less free? Youd be okay, and I be okay too.

Wot if Lincoln free'm sometime?

I be hopin he will somday soon. Why do ya fear dem darkies so much?

Dem darkies aint like you and me.

Well, no possum be like you and me. Wez all be difrent. Wot be happenin whence ya left home?

I dunno, I jest be leavin home to be joinin dis fedral army.

And you had nun tryin to hunt ya down or to be killin ya? Dats becuz yur white'n free.

So, dey jest wants to be free, like you and me?

Dats right. Let'm be gittin a mule and som land, and jest be seein wot happens. You okay wit dat?

I still dunno.

Spoze I be now knowin wots in yur troubled soul, wit its huge and hateful hole. Whence in battle, you be runnin whilst dem darkie soldiers will be soon dyin. Dey be brave, aint like you be.

You be lazy, dem darkies ar not. Whence you be dead, I be hopin in Hell you be rottin. Yur jest a godly deceiver, whilst each Darkie I be knowin seemz a true believer.

You caint no longer be my possum, dats true. I will be no longer defendin you. Whilst you be keepin on chidin dem darkies, I shalt not be agin abidin you.

9. OVER TIME

Twas once a civie enlistin. Den a recruit in trainin, to be soon enuff a soldier killin. Twas later a proud wounded vetran healin wit no future to be revealin.

Twas once too young to be afraid, and den too painfulee old to proudlee parade. Twas later not much respected; except jest by da survivin men of my brigade.