

POLITICAL
VIEWS OF A
UNION
SOLDIER

By Jonathan E. Helmreich

Levi Bird Duff was just more than 23-and-a-half years old when he enlisted in the Pittsburgh Rifles on May 1, 1861. Though the average age of an enlistee, he differed from his military companions in his education, reluctance to use alcohol or profanity, attentiveness to duty, and political views. An 1857 graduate of Allegheny College, Duff had already begun a legal career in Pittsburgh when his desire for justice for African Americans took him to the Union forces.

The handsome young man had made the acquaintance of Harriet Nixon, a young school teacher. They shared the same birth date, September 18, 1837, and in time much more. Absence, and many letters, made their hearts grow fonder. The two married while Levi was on leave recovering from what all feared was a mortal wound. In 1864 Duff was again wounded but survived despite the loss of a leg. He would return to Harriet, father several children, serve one term as Pittsburgh's district attorney, establish a reputation as a legal defender of the underdog, and unsuccessfully run for the post of Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania.¹

Duff served as a lieutenant colonel in the Pennsylvania Volunteers 105th.

Inset: An exemplar of the flowers and leaves that Levi sent to Harriet from the field of battle, which she in turn pressed in a large history volume.

All images courtesy Allegheny College.



Levi Bird Duff was 23-and-a-half years old when he enlisted to fight in the Civil War.

During his military service Duff rose from private to lieutenant colonel commanding the 105th regiment of the Pennsylvania Volunteers (the Wildcat regiment) and also the remnants of the 63rd regiment. The more than 200 letters that Levi and Harriet each wrote to the other during those years were recently donated by their heirs to Allegheny College. They tell a fascinating story and offer insight regarding the conditions in which the men fought, the nature of their leadership, and the intimacy of a developing romantic relationship. The exchanges also reveal the sharp, sometimes angry, political observations of a young idealist not at all happy with the political comportment of his country. The passion displayed on this topic by

the otherwise strongly self-disciplined young man demonstrates the complexity of the issues and the political climate of those days.

In this respect, the correspondence served a useful purpose, for it gave Duff a safe outlet to vent views that, had he expressed them so forthrightly within the army, might have stymied advancement. At first, he confessed that even to Harriet he

was not entirely open: “My thoughts & feelings are known to no one but myself” [Sept. 28, 1861]. When he finally did let criticisms of officers and army policy into his letters, he was careful to remind her, “These company matters are inter nos of course” [Nov. 13, 1861]. A year later he admonished, “You need not make public any of my remarks disparaging to the regt. or the Col.” [November 25, 1862].

The youth’s reason for enlistment, and what he considered to be the underlying evil that brought the punishment of war on America, was slavery and injustice to a minority race. Many enlistees, in both the North and South, entered army ranks in a surge of enthusiasm and excitement to undertake a great venture. Others, including Duff, took up arms because they saw the war as a crusade to preserve the country and liberty. Preservation of the Union was a key rallying point in the North.² Duff was concerned for his country, but not so much for the concept of the Union. His motivational cause was more than the abolition of slavery; it was justice for the Black race and for racial equality.³ Indeed, he was convinced that the war was a cathartic punishment laid upon the country by whatever Providential power there was to force a cleansing of its sins regarding the Black race. Such a strong sentiment on this issue was shared by

only a tiny number of Union troops. The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863 actually brought a brief decline of morale among numbers of Union troops and supporters. Not so for Levi, whose spirits rallied.

On September 21, 1861, Levi wrote Harriet that “I have



BULLET WHICH PASSED
THROUGH THE RIGHT
LUNG AND WAS REMOVED
BY SURGEON FROM UNDER
SKIN OF BACK OF
COL. LEVI BIRD DUFF.
AT BATTLE OF
SEVEN PINES VIRGINIA.

The bullet that wounded Duff.

taken my stand, years ago, upon the unchangeable principle of justice to all & I shall try to persevere in this cause until the end." A year later, after nearly dying of a bullet received in the chest at the Battle of Seven Pines, after the Union's failure on the peninsula, and after the Confederate victory at the Second Battle of Bull Run, Levi told Harriet:

We may marshal more men than ever were marshalled before, but without a cause to fight for they can do nothing. Men cannot fight without something to inspire them. War can not be carried on successfully without a cause.... We will have to wait with patience until God turns hearts & heads of our leaders before we shall see any successful termination of this war [September 9, 1862].

Only a few days later the better showing Union forces made in the mid-September battle at Antietam provided Union President Abraham Lincoln opportunity to announce his Preliminary Emancipation

Proclamation that all slaves in states that remained in rebellion on January 1, 1863, would be emancipated. This step was not enough for Levi; still it encouraged him. He wrote Harriet that he saw the "incubus of slavery" as serving "to degrade and brutalize the black man, & to curse with its blighting influence the white man. But one thing was needed ... to give us permanent & prosperous peace—to do justice to the black man, whose wrongs stand in our light." At times he thought, "I was almost committing a crime in exposing my life for a government which knew no law of action but wrong to a weak and despised race." He soldiered on, sustained by the reflection that the war "must prove more or less disastrous to slavery." The loss of life at Antietam was horrifying, yet the improved performance of Union forces led Duff to ruminate, "Whether I live or die the great result will be

Harriet Nixon Duff married Levi Bird Duff in 1864 and saved the many letters he sent while serving in the Union army.



1861
SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER

SEPTEMBER 14, 1861

As soon as the spirit of slavery which has taken hold of our people both north & south is thoroughly rooted out our difficulties will end, not sooner.

SEPTEMBER 17, 1861

The public sentiment of the country is so corrupt, that it is incapable of distinguishing between honesty & dishonesty, between heroism & cowardice.

SEPTEMBER 24, 1861

... the President cannot comprehend the troubles of the nation. It is a fight with slavery & with nothing else.

SEPTEMBER 25, 1861

Whenever the causes which produced this rebellion are thoroughly understood by the men in power & they have courage enough to act according to their convictions we may expect it to be crushed, not sooner.

SEPTEMBER 25, 1861

... the President does not wish to send an army into a border state, lest he may cause a few slaves to run away & thereby incur the wrath of a few slave holders.

SEPTEMBER 28, 1861

My thoughts & feelings are known to no one but myself.

OCTOBER 26, 1861

I thought when Lincoln was inaugurated that we had put the right man in the right place, but I do not believe so now. The war should now be closing & if we had had a President during the last three months it would be closing. But our men have pursued the do nothing policy while our enemies have acted vigorously.

1861
1862

DECEMBER - SEPTEMBER

DECEMBER 10, 1861

We have a history, slavery is a part of that, & President Lincoln should read it & learn that there are only two sides to the slavery question. If he can make a third, he will do what I think is not within his or any other man's power.

FEBRUARY 1, 1862

Never till I crossed the river did I comprehend the true character of this war. I never before knew how the war affected the people of the South.

MAY 16, 1862

You can never know the injurious effect of slavery upon a country until you have looked over this peninsula, now wild & desolate but only wanting the impulse of honest industry to make it one of the finest countries on the globe.

MAY 19, 1862

... the Democrats still incline to the belief that we cannot keep the South in submission to the laws.... These men do not care any thing about the country, they only regret that they are not in office.

SEPTEMBER 9, 1862

Men cannot fight without something to inspire them.

SEPTEMBER 18, 1862

... I can not but hope that this disastrous war may be terminated soon.

SEPTEMBER 26, 1862

Whether I live or die the great result will be attained—the rebellion will be conquered, slavery will be abolished.



attained—the rebellion will be conquered, slavery will be abolished, & we will have a government of which we may be proud—one which—freed from the foul blot of slavery—will give us dignity among the nations of the world” [September 26, 1862].

Aside from his philosophical views, Duff came to believe after marching through much of northern Virginia and the Peninsula that slavery actually undercut successful economic development. “You can never know the injurious effect of slavery upon a country until you have looked over this peninsula, now wild & desolate but only wanting the impulse of honest industry to make it one of the finest countries on the globe” [May 16, 1862].

Two months before Levi's severe wounding at Petersburg in 1864, he told Harriet that when he went to war he had felt that slavery was a crime and that before we could ask the favor of Heaven on our cause we must wash our hands of the

crime. So long as we upheld slavery we were committing the crime for which God was punishing us. Was the punishment likely to cease before the crime was repented of [?] [April 29, 1864].

Duff clearly thought not. And he thought not likely, either, that the retribution would halt until the political corruption he observed was also expunged.

Expiatory suffering would be required, Levi wrote after the first battle of Bull Run, July 1861:

Slavery has well nigh destroyed [this republic], & for a time I feared it was gone.... Still I am confident that two or three more disasters like that at Bull Run would do us more good than a hundred victories. The public sentiment of the country is so corrupt, that it is incapable of distinguishing between honesty & dishonesty, between heroism & cowardice [September 17, 1861].

A year later following the blood-letting at Antietam he noted: “If God is with us we are safe, if not we will receive further



Duff joined the Pittsburgh Rifles on May 1, 1861.

A photo of Duff as an Allegheny College student, c. 1857.



punishment. I can not feel that we have been sufficiently humbled, to asked [sic] for success yet I can not but hope that this disastrous war may be terminated soon" [September 18, 1862].

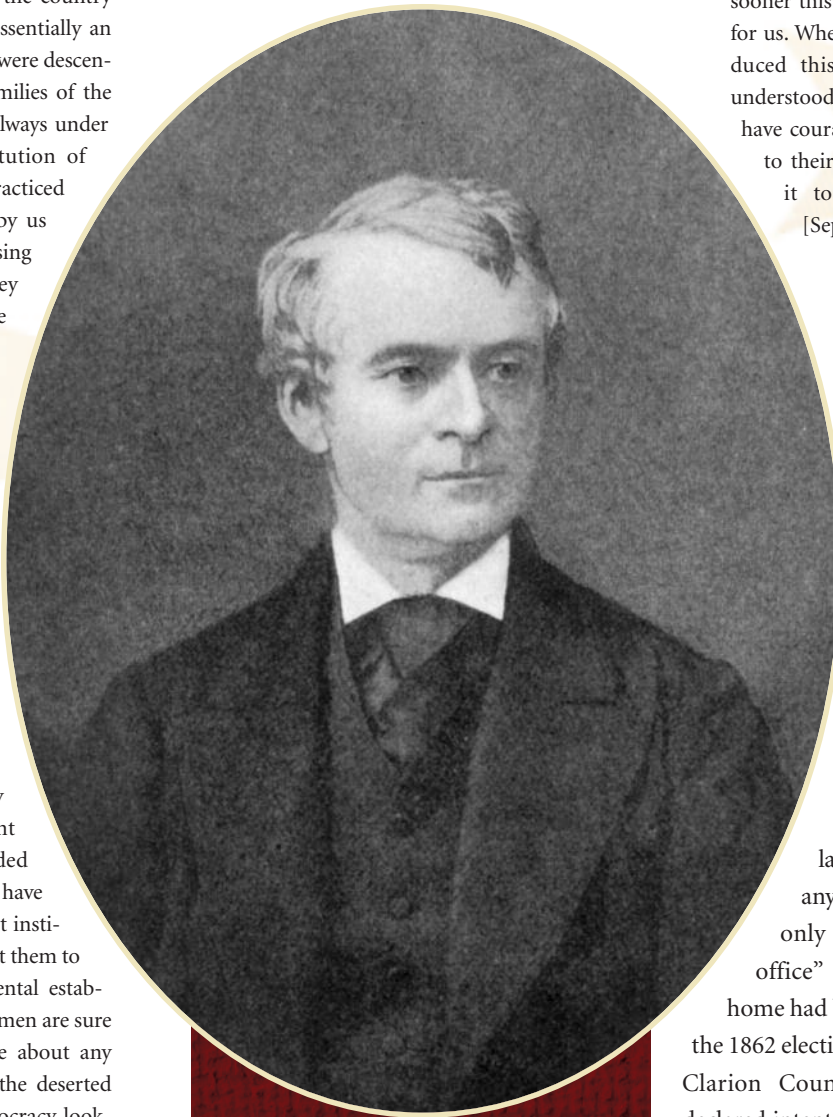
In December 1863 Duff regretted that "never yet has it been manfully said 'Slavery must die.'" He was critical of Henry Ward Beecher, pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York. Though the noted preacher thundered against slavery, Duff complained that Beecher "never plants himself on the firm ground that slavery is a sin, but is continually seeking some other excuse for fighting it" [December 30, 1863]. The soldier agreed more with Boston reformer, abolitionist writer, and anti-South orator Wendell Phillips: "I can see I think as clearly as he can that the war will not be ended until justice is done to the black race. The nation will never be out of trouble, although actual war may cease until the niger [sic] question

is permanently settled by giving him his right” [February 18, 1864].

Travel did bring Duff to greater appreciation of the difficulty of resolving the views of the North and the South on slavery and other issues. In the winter of 1862, after rambling through a Virginia plantation home ruined by Union soldiers, Levi had new realizations about Southern life and culture:

Call them rebels if you will—and they deserve to be called such to be treated as such—but the fact cannot be denied that they were a highly cultivated people. All the houses ... [show] that the country was inhabited only by ... essentially an aristocratic people.... They were descendants of the aristocratic families of the old world, & having lived always under the influence of the institution of slavery never knew nor practiced democracy as understood by us at the North. It is not surprising to me that they rebelled. They were jealous of the encroachments of the federal power and of the advancement of the lower classes, hence they had a double motive to rebel. Never till I crossed the river did I comprehend the true character of this war. I never before knew how the war affected the people of the South. I have now learned that the people of the South differ in many respects from the people of the North. They are controlled by different ideas, they were descended from a different ancestry & have always lived among different institutions, & one cannot expect them to agree with us in governmental establishment concerning which men are sure to disagree if they disagree about any thing. Standing in one of the deserted houses of the Virginia aristocracy looking at the rude characters & illiterate sentences scratched upon its finely polished walls by northern invaders, I said

to myself: [“]Here are the powerful vandals of the North again overrunning the country of the effeminate aristocracy of the South.” And so it is; & this war will never end until the whole Southern country is overrun. This is a war now, not for the political union of the people both North & South, but for the territorial unity of that portion of the country lying between the great lakes & the gulf. Whenever our rulers comprehend this & make war for the accomplishment of this object we will have begun to work to some purpose [February 1, 1862].



Duff believed Governor Andrew Curtin of Pennsylvania allowed politics to subvert proper management of Pennsylvania's military manpower.
HC L&A from *Under the Maltese Cross: Antietam to Appomattox* (1910).

What most annoyed Duff was the sympathy of many Northern Democrats toward the wishes of the Southern states to maintain the institution of slavery.

Under our laws through the influence which slaveholders have exercised on our congress, slavery has for the last half century been a sacred institution. Shall it be sacred still when it imperils the very existence of our government.... This reverence [of Northern men for slavery] it seems cannot be educated out of them. It is to be sincerely hoped that it will be whipped out of them, & the sooner this is done, the better it will be for us. Whenever the causes which produced this rebellion are thoroughly understood by the men in power & they have courage enough to act according to their convictions we may expect it to be crushed, not sooner [September 25, 1861].

Duff considered the “curse of our country and our cause” to be “pro-slavery unionism” [October 31, 1862]. “As soon as the spirit of slavery which has taken hold of our people both north & south is thoroughly rooted out our difficulties will end, not sooner” [September 14, 1861].

In the spring of 1862, the soldier noted that “the Democrats still incline to the belief that we cannot keep the South in submission to the laws.... These men do not care any thing about the country, they only regret that they are not in office” [May 19, 1862]. His family home had been in Clarion County, and as the 1862 elections approached, he fretted that Clarion County would vote against the declared intent of the President to pronounce the slaves in the rebelling states emancipated. “It seems to be the general opinion, among those who profess to know, that the democrats



A watch chain woven of Harriet's hair, with a red diamond Kearny medallion.

will carry the State. For the sake of our good name I hope not. It would give so much encouragement to the rebels" [October 10, 1862]. Duff was cheered by the electoral success of the administration yet feared the loss of Republican seats might cause problems in Congress. He wished Lincoln would have the courage to arrest the "traitors."

Duff's attitude toward his own state was made more critical by the warm reception Union troops received in Maryland in June 1863 as they hastened toward Gettysburg: "We have been cheered & feasted ever since we entered Maryland. Since our march through the state I am convinced that there are fewer disloyal people than in many parts of Penn" [June 29, 1863]. Later he noted: "In Maryland our army found much sympathy in Pennsylvania none.... It is very evident that Mason & Dixon's line is not the line between loyalty & disloyalty" [October 18, 1863]. The realities of the political situation within his country were becoming increasingly clear to the young man.

When Duff learned that New York had gone Democratic in its 1862 vote, his comment was "Ever the traitor blood is elected to Congress" [November 8, 1862]. He continued:

If Gen. [George B.] McClellan was not the willing, he was at least the unwilling tool of those Northern politicians who desire to prolong the war, until the nation is exhausted. There never was a more diabolical scheme devised and attempted to be executed, than has been devised by the Northern democracy & is attempted to be put into execution. They would destroy this army if they could, and if the administration is not careful they will so paralyze its efforts that it will fail of its object. The[y] have raised a great cry about the removal of McClellan because they knew he never would take Richmond [November 25, 1862].

Duff's anger at the Copperheads was such that he immoderately argued that "democracy is another name for treason." He thought Democrats should be suppressed: "Men who say aught against the government or president at the present time have no right to live" [November 25, 1862].

Anti-draft sentiment in Pennsylvania and especially New York offended him. New York Governor Horatio Seymour had briefly shown sympathy for the resisters. Duff was outraged: "I say to myself that a people who will elevate to a high public station a man like Seymour, &

1862

OCTOBER - DECEMBER

OCTOBER 8, 1862

I feel indignant that Gov. Curtin has not filled up our regiment and all of the old regiments.

OCTOBER 10, 1862

It seems to be the general opinion, among those who profess to know, that the democrats will carry the State. For the sake of our good name I hope not. It would give so much encouragement to the rebels.

NOVEMBER 8, 1862

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NOVEMBER 25, 1862

You need not make public any of my remarks disparaging to the regt. or the Col.

DECEMBER 8, 1862

What next will Gov. Curtin attempt in order to surround himself with office seekers. In this military business he has disgraced himself and the state.

DECEMBER 8, 1862

... it may be necessary for him in order to hold his seat to pander to the proslavery prejudices of the North.

1863

FEBRUARY - AUGUST

FEBRUARY 18, 1863

Though [Curtin's] successor be a traitor he cannot do us much more harm than he did.

JUNE 29, 1863

Since our march through the state I am convinced that there are fewer disloyal people than in many parts of Penn.

JULY 22, 1863

I say to myself that a people who will elevate to a high public station a man like Seymour, & sustain a sheet like the New York Herald are fit subjects for the most debasing slavery.

AUGUST 3, 1863

I have no faith in the virtue of the North & its rulers....[The Army of the Potomac has] triumphed over the misfortunes sent to us by the imbecility of the President.

AUGUST 17, 1863

The question which now arises is can we destroy slavery?

AUGUST 17, 1863

What a fine thing this war has been in many respects. It has taught us self reliance & from being self reliant in the stern contests of life we have come to consider every thing of our own the best. We are about being Americanized. We have a country, people & government that have a history.

sustain a sheet like the *New York Herald* are fit subjects for the most debasing slavery" [July 22, 1863]. When Seymour reluctantly came round to supporting the President's policy, Duff was disappointed. He would have liked the army to have taken over the state and hanged the governor [August 27, 1863].

A second object of Levi's wrath was Governor Andrew Curtin of Pennsylvania, who Duff believed allowed politics to subvert proper management of Pennsylvania's military manpower:

I feel indignant that Gov. Curtin has not filled up our regiment and all of the old regiments. Instead of filling them up & giving positions to officers & non-commissioned officers who have served faithfully for more than a year, he has made new organizations in order to make offices for many who remained at home until forced to come out. The government that refuses to recognize & reward the services of a faithful soldier, has no right to the services of any one [October 8, 1862].

Levi, although now a captain in the 105th regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers, was anxious for further promotion. He had no use for incompetent field officers with little experience who gained their posts through political connections and resumed his complaint two months later:

What next will Gov. Curtin attempt in order to surround himself with office seekers. In this military business he has disgraced himself and the state. First yielding to them the organization into companies, which prevent the old regiments from being filled, then appointing field officers from among the politicians that congregated at the capital, instead of taking them from the field, thereby making the regiments inefficient, and finally by permitting one of them to run away, he showed that he had but little patriotism and less sense [December 8, 1862].

When Curtin announced intention to run for re-election, Duff hoped that "he may be defeated let who will be his opponent." If the national government had to bear a

portion of odium for lack of military success, "a much greater portion must rest on the state Governments, for inefficiently organizing & improperly officering the bulk of the army. Gov. Curtin has been one of the most prominent offenders in this respect. Though his successor be a traitor he cannot do us much more harm than he did" [February 18, 1863]. Curtin did retain his post, even if Duff thought him and his militia "ludicrous" fellows and that Pennsylvania would soon fall into such anarchy that it would secede [June 22, 1863].

Duff's opposition to slavery shaped his attitudes toward the national government and especially Abraham Lincoln. The President's nuanced approach to the national crisis, his efforts to act within the terms of the constitution, and his endeavors to keep border states part of the Union did not coincide well with Duff's forthright desire to end slavery and crush the authors of what Duff termed the "Slaveholders' Rebellion." So it was that the soldier's opinion of his commander in chief varied according to developments. A century and a half later, it may seem that his initial criticisms of Lincoln were insufficiently founded—they were, given the political complexities that Duff only slowly came to understand. Yet at the time they seemed valid to many and demonstrate the errors of subsequent mythologies that suggest Lincoln's initial purpose was always abolition of slavery rather than a curbing of its spread and preservation of the Union and its constitution. As the president moved toward the Emancipation Proclamation and Duff reflected on his leader's course, the soldier became more appreciative.

After only a few months of service, Duff told Harriet:

I thought when Lincoln was inaugurated that we had put the right man in the right place, but I do not believe so now. The war should now be closing & if we had had a President during the last three months it would be closing. But

A photograph of Duff.
"Henceforth an American will be
the representative of something
besides a contemptible aristocracy,"
he wrote to Harriet in 1863.

our men have pursued the do nothing policy while our enemies have acted vigorously....

Generals were making blunders, and Duff thought Lincoln was either "too blind to see" or "too weak to remove those who make them" [October 26, 1861].

Particularly grating to Levi was that he perceived "that the President cannot comprehend the troubles of the nation. It is a fight with slavery & with nothing else" [September 24, 1861]. The problem, as Duff saw it, was that President Lincoln was playing the politician:

He is trying to straddle the slavery question, it will prove his ruin just as sure as it has proved the ruin of any man that has attempted it. We have a history, slavery is a part of that, & President Lincoln should read it & learn that there are only two sides to the slavery question. If he can make a third, he will do what I think is not within his or any other man's power [December 10, 1861].

Levi was dismayed by the sensitivity Lincoln showed toward such states as Kentucky:

It seems the President does not wish to send an army into a border state, lest he may cause a few slaves to run away & thereby incur the wrath of a few slave holders. I hope that he is not too old to learn. If he is not I think another months experience will teach him the fallacy of his present course. [September 25, 1861].

Lincoln's September 1862 Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation struck Duff, he told Harriet, "like a thunder-clap,"

for I thought that Lincoln was firmly chained to the fatal juggernaut of Border state influence. His long submission to the dictates of pro-slavery men, who are not heartily loyal & whose respect for and adherence to the constitution is

subservient to their love for slavery, his rejection of the advice of all the best men in the country, who long urged him to adopt the policy which he has finally proclaimed, led me to believe that little was to be hoped for from him [September 26, 1862].

Duff's enthusiasm for his service was renewed by "this last & righteous act of the President" [September 26, 1862]. He now thought the Union had a proper cause and had regained dignity. Yet he decried the boldness of the Copperheads and bewailed Lincoln's failure to arrest all the men who Duff considered traitors. Politicians, he thought, would not save the country. The only hope was the army. "How careful then

should be the president in whose hands he places it" [November 14, 1862]. As for Northern papers sympathetic to the Democrats, "the President should suppress every one of them" [November 25, 1862]. As weeks passed, he came to think Lincoln was not taking a firmer path toward abolition and the war because "it may be necessary for him in order to hold his seat to pander to the proslavery prejudices of the North" [December 8, 1862]. He strongly hoped for changes in the President's carefully balanced cabinet to "break down all hope of the traitors to use President Lincoln to subserve their purposes" [January 1, 1862(3)].

In July 1863 following the Union victory at Gettysburg Duff's hopes for a favorable outcome to the war rose, even though "I have no faith in the virtue of the North & its rulers." The Army of the Potomac had outlived the slander cast upon it, "and have [has] triumphed over the misfortunes sent to us by the imbecility of the President," apparently by the appointment of inadequate generals [August 3, 1863]. He thought the Confederacy on the brink of death. "The question which now arises is can we destroy slavery? If we can not the blood of this nation has been shed in vain. The President I think will stand firm & with [Secretary of War Edwin M.] Stanton to support him I do not fear the influence of the rest of the Cabinet" [August 17, 1863]. "Unlike the people, the army never doubted that the president would adhere to his present policy. We have settled down to war, and we do not hope much less desire that this struggle be ended in any other way" [September 5, 1863].



Yet the fear that Lincoln might compromise on slavery in order to preserve the Union remained in Duff's mind. He thus opposed the view of some conservative acquaintances that the Union would conquer "the rebels sooner by lenience than by vigor":

As things now look this will be the Lincoln platform before the Baltimore Convention. It is needless to tell you that I belong to the radical wing of the party. I believe in striking for the end at once and directly. Presuming that Lincoln holds the views above set forth I am for [Benjamin] Butler or [General John C.] Frémont [as candidates in the next presidential election] [March 6, 1864].

After reflection, Duff came to a friendlier view of Lincoln:

He is an anti-slavery man [who] believes that slavery is wrong yet he does not permit that belief to influence his conduct of public affairs. The President seems to have started on his official career with the conviction that the constitution acknowledged and protected slavery. He took an oath to preserve and protect the constitution therefore he must preserve slavery, and he did not feel it his duty to overthrow it until he felt that he could not save the constitution without overthrowing it.... It seems to me that the President made a great mistake in adopting the policy which he pursued and this very mistake has cost us thousands of lives & will cost us thousands more. I am glad that the President has seen that the crime is impolitic [April 29, 1864].

With the Army of the Potomac under the resolute leadership of General Ulysses S. Grant and the Union war effort moving forward, Duff found on June 11, 1864, that he could tell Harriet that he had heard that Lincoln and Andrew Johnson had been nominated. "This is undoubtedly a strong ticket, and if not interfered with by the radicals will carry the day by a large majority. The rebels seem to be very afraid of Lincoln and for this reason I have latterly desired his nomination.... The hopes of many rebels will be crushed" [June 11, 1864].

A week later Duff was felled by another bullet, this time in his right thigh. He miraculously survived the wound and the subsequent amputation of his leg, but his military career was over and with it the extended correspondence from the front. At the time of his wounding, he was convinced the tide of the war had turned in favor of the Union. Though saddened and angered by the carnage, Duff saw the war as having purged the country of evil influences and institutions, a price that had to be paid if the United States were to be a true nation and worthy of respect:


What a fine thing this war has been in many respects. It has taught us self reliance & from being self reliant in the stern contests of life we have come to consider every thing of our own the best. We are about being Americanized. We have a country, people & government that have a history. Henceforth an

American will be the representative of something besides a contemptible aristocracy [August 17, 1863].

A genuine war hero unconnected with party rivalries and scandals, Duff was the choice of Republican party bosses to run for district attorney in Pittsburgh. Though readily elected, Duff found his term unpleasant as he bridled against the efforts of the bosses to control his actions. Levi did not run for a second term and, disturbed by the economic problems experienced by the country during the Grant administration, turned his support to the Greenback-Labor party in 1872. Within Pennsylvania, the spoils-system run by Republican Chief Don Cameron was so blatant that Duff 10 years later allowed himself to be nominated for lieutenant governor on the reform ticket of the Independent Republican party. Not a good campaigner, he failed to



be elected and thereafter supported the Democratic party he had so despised during the Civil War. In 1893 he unsuccessfully ran for district judge on the Democratic ticket.

Harriet died in 1877. Five years later Duff married Agnes Feree Kaufman. Following her death in 1913 he retired at the age of 76. Levi passed away at the home of his son in Lansing, Michigan, on January 18, 1916. 

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¹ Information regarding Levi Bird Duff's youth and later life may be found in a "Family History" written by Levi's son Samuel Eckerberger Duff about 1934, unpublished typescript, Papers of Levi Bird Duff, Special Collections, Pelletier Library, Allegheny College, Meadville, Pa. The author and Allegheny College appreciate the generosity of the Duff family in donating his papers to his alma mater.

² James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 117.

³ In terms of motivation for fighting, Duff's views distinguished him from his cohort. According to McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 117, only a relatively small percentage of Union enlistees considered this cause to be their prime motivation.

The oil skin toilet case (made by Harriet) in which Levi kept her letters.



1863
1864
OCTOBER - JUNE

OCTOBER 18, 1863

It is very evident that Mason & Dixon's line is not the line between loyalty & disloyalty.

DECEMBER 30, 1863

Slavery must die.

FEBRUARY 18, 1864

I can see I think as clearly as [Wendell Phillips] can that the war will not be ended until justice is done to the Black race.

MARCH 6, 1864

It is needless to tell you that I belong to the radical wing of the party. I believe in striking for the end at once and directly.

APRIL 29, 1864

So long as we upheld slavery we were committing the crime for which God was punishing us.

APRIL 29, 1864

He is an anti-slavery man [who] believes that slavery is wrong yet he does not permit that belief to influence his conduct of public affairs.... I am glad that the President has seen that the crime is impolitic.

JUNE 11, 1864

The rebels seem to be very afraid of Lincoln and for this reason I have latterly desired his nomination.... The hopes of many rebels will be crushed.