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“Home Again”: The Contrasting Experiences of Richard D. Dunphy and Lewis A. Horton

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Abstract

Union veterans returning home from the war in 1865 faced a myriad of experiences and reacted to the return to civilian life in a variety of ways. Richard D. Dunphy and Lewis A. Horton, both double-arm amputee veterans of the Navy, ably demonstrate the differences in experience and reaction to the war and life afterwards. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

The Gettysburg Compiler, Civil War, Medal of Honor, Richard Dunphy, Lewis Horton, Union veterans, amputation, Battle of Mobile Bay

Disciplines

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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

“Home Again:” The Contrasting Experiences of Richard D. Dunphy and Lewis A. Horton

DECEMBER 11, 2013

By: Sarah Johnson, '15 and Kevin Lavery, '16

Union veterans returning home from the war in 1865 faced a myriad of experiences and reacted to the return to civilian life in a variety of ways. Richard D. Dunphy and Lewis A. Horton, both double-arm amputee veterans of the Navy, ably demonstrate the differences in experience and reaction to the war and life afterwards.

It is estimated that about 45,000 men survived amputations, causing the first widespread demand for artificial limbs in American History. The post-war period saw the first government subsidized limbs for qualifying soldiers. Experiences with these early models of artificial limb varied, however.

Kevin: Although Dunphy reported that one model of prosthetic arm allowed him to write and eat without assistance, he did not frequently use them later in life. His wife lamented this fact, saying that instead he was content allowing strangers to transact his business for him. In another deposition, an acquaintance describes how Dunphy could “take up a glass of soda off the counter between his teeth and hold his head up and drink it down,” depicting how he had adapted to his disability.

Sarah: Horton tried to use prosthetic arms, but found them to be “tiresome, of no use.” Noting that he had no control over his six-inch stumps, it makes sense that he would not like prosthetic arms if he could not manipulate them. Horton rehabilitated in a different way, learning to write with the pen in his mouth and re-teaching himself how to sail his beloved yacht.

Gerald Linderman has argued in *Embattled Courage* that Union veterans suffered intense disillusionment and, unable to return to civilian life, entered into a hibernation period.

Kevin: Dunphy is an odd contradiction who proves that Linderman grossly oversimplifies the challenges faced by Civil War veterans. “Hibernation” is the wrong term to use when describing Dunphy’s life because he remained a functioning member of his community, both as patriarch of his family and as a deliveryman at the Mare Island Naval Shipyard. However, his erratic and violent behavior suggests that although he seemed to have assimilated back into society, he nonetheless faced lingering challenges from his trauma, possibly including a mild form of PTSD. He was well-known in his community, though in a way that simultaneously brought him special attention and emotionally isolated him from others.

Sarah: This is completely untrue for Horton. His post-war years found him ably working in a customs house, racing his yacht, getting married, and raising a family. Although he would not consent to public interview until 1893, it appears this stemmed from a desire to remain out of the public eye rather than a result of a traumatic hibernation.



Both Dunphy and Horton won the Medal of Honor, yet their reactions are quite different.

Kevin: Dunphy, who doctors expected to die of his wounds, was not issued a Medal of Honor at the same time as the others who earned theirs during the Battle of Mobile Bay. After the war, maybe at Dunphy’s urging or perhaps independently, Admiral Farragut reexamined Dunphy’s service and decided that it was deserving of a medal. He wrote his

approval to Gideon Welles, to whom Dunphy eventually had to write directly when he still did not receive his medal.

Sarah: While Dunphy was petitioning Secretary Welles, Horton responded humorously oppositely. Although cited in 1865, Horton was unaware he had won the medal until 1893. After being told by his local newspaperman that a Washington dispatch had been published looking for a Lewis Horton to accept his Medal of Honor, Horton seems to have replied in genuine shock. Encouraged by the newspaperman to write to Washington and inquire, Horton replied that if the government wanted to send him a medal he figured they would find him. He received the medal shortly after and commented only that he was glad to have it after so long a time period.

Union soldiers came from a variety of backgrounds and experienced the war very differently.

Kevin: Dunphy was born in Ireland during the early 1840s and likely immigrated to New York during the 1850s. It is difficult to track his early life because of poor record keeping, but it is certain that the Irish Famine was a formative event in his life. He lived in New York during the Draft Riots of 1863 and enlisted only after conscription was enacted. Unlike Horton, he did likely not fight out of patriotic duty and instead was simply another Irish immigrant dragged reluctantly into the war by conscription. He joined the Navy, perhaps assuming that it would be less grueling than the Army, and served aboard five ships before being wounded aboard Farragut's flagship at Mobile Bay.

Sarah: Horton appears to have been born in Boston, but little else of his early life is known. He enlisted in May of 1861 at the age of nineteen. After being captured in late summer and spending a terrible winter in prison being mistreated by the commandant of the prison, none other than Mary Todd Lincoln's brother David Todd, Horton was paroled the next spring and immediately re-enlisted, where he served until November 3, 1863, when his arms were blown off by a gunnery accident during a ship salute. Horton's interviews give the reader the sense that he felt there was a job to do and he had a duty to fulfill it to the best of his ability.

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