



The Adventures of Jonathan Roberts: The Union's Quaker Scout in Northern Virginia, 1861-1865

Gregory P. Wilson

CreateSpace (Dec 27, 2017)

Softcover \$30.00 (526pp)

978-1-977693-96-9

The Adventures of Jonathan Roberts is a biography with an interesting, novel perspective on how the Civil War ravaged Northern Virginia.

Gregory P. Wilson's second biography of his ancestor, *The Adventures of Jonathan Roberts: The Union's Quaker Scout in Northern Virginia, 1861-1865*, paints a portrait of a "dangerous" abolitionist pacifist with a \$1,000 confederate bounty on his head.

This historical account of the author's great-great-grandfather's life focuses on Roberts as a peace-loving Quaker from Fairfax County, Virginia, who joined the Union because of his religious convictions. Roberts's passionate abolitionism pressed him into service despite his faith's injunction against taking up arms.

The book tells the tale of a farmer, surveyor, sheriff, and family man who became a scout and a guide in the Civil War. It dramatizes conflicts: that of a devout Religious Society of Friends practitioner who participated in America's bloodiest war, the pitched political discord just outside the nation's capitol, and some of the biggest battles of the Civil War. Roberts piloted troops to the First Battle of Manassas, or Bull Run, and scouted during the Second Battle of Manassas. He chased the Confederacy's "Gray Ghost," John Singleton Mosby, best known as the leader of Mosby's Raiders, and was injured during the pursuit.

This biography grew out of a standard genealogical inquiry. It boasts a great deal of research, on display in its full panoply of historical black-and-white photographs, maps, and primary sources. It extensively cites newspaper accounts, federal records, personal journals, and historical-society documents, among other things.

Impressive in its exhaustiveness, the book holds interest as a strategically trim account of the Civil War, as well. In Roberts's section of Northern Virginia, loyalties were divided between the Union and Confederacy, and tension ran high on both sides. Here, Roberts clashed with his neighbors on principle.

Roberts's experiences after the war are also extensively documented. The book does not stint on context. Its accounts are in-depth and realistic, bringing to life everything from the secession vote to the rise of the Union's Accotink Home Guard to the theft of a Confederate soldier's horses. It is filled with unique anecdotes, such as of Roberts's associates tricking a widow and a Southern spy into thinking they were fellow secessionists, though they failed to extract crucial information from her.

The Adventures of Jonathan Roberts is a biography with a novel and interesting perspective on how the Civil War ravaged Northern Virginia, shedding new insight on a well-trodden subject.

JOSEPH S. PETE (February 27, 2018)

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