



Two Million Steps

Tommy Anderson

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The historical novel Two Million Steps is set during the Civil War, and follows a farmer turned soldier as he serves, hoping to save his country.

In Tommy Anderson's historical novel *Two Million Steps*, a farmer becomes a Civil War soldier.

In Wisconsin, Hamon has a pregnant wife and a decent life, but he feels compelled to risk both to serve his country. He joins a volunteer infantry regiment, through which he experiences long marches, dire conditions, and the psychological toll of bloody battles. He and his fellow soldiers also fight disease, low morale, and Confederate soldiers.

Hamon is a good-hearted lead whose motivations for joining the war effort are sincere. He's also a good soldier; he obeys orders and always helps out those in need. While Hamon and his wife, Melissa, aren't often together in the narrative, his love for her is evident because of the letters he writes to her. Those letters do the dual duty of revealing his feelings about being a soldier, including about the fact that he's expected to destroy property as he marches, setting fire to farms and houses and making railroad tracks unusable. At first, Hamon expresses his guilt over, and distaste for, such activities, but he becomes numb as the narrative wears on across years, and the suffering is compounded.

Al, a fellow soldier, is with Hamon through the worst of the war. He's a force of positivity as he works to cheer Hamon up. When an unexpected situation leaves Hamon without Al, Hamon again faces psychological trauma, refusing to become friendly with any other soldiers. Beyond Melissa, Hamon, and Al, few characters stand out, though, and even that central trio is not developed beyond their wartime hardships.

Drawn from the story of Anderson's grandfather, the book's details and descriptions draw on research into the history of Wisconsin's Civil War involvement, particularly the campaigns of Wisconsin's 25th Regiment. But the narrative is too focused on the constant transitions of the war, with details about marching and changing orders. Its commentary about military strategies and environmental factors makes it repetitive and sluggish, though a few surprises punctuate its lengthy military accounts. Hamon's time at war comes to a tidy resolution that emphasizes his relationships at home.

The historical novel *Two Million Steps* is set during the Civil War, and follows a farmer turned soldier as he serves, hoping to save his country at the cost of his own physical and psychological well-being.

DELIA STANLEY (June 15, 2021)

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