

# FAMILY-BASED NOVEL SEEKS ATONEMENT, FINDS WAR

On a whirlwind trip to New York last week, I shoe-horned in a visit to Ulysses S. Grant's Tomb, on Manhattan's Upper West Side. The formidable monument was decked out in bunting

to mark the passing in late July, 134 years ago, of the man who led the Union Army to victory over the Confederacy in the Civil War, and later was elected president.

The visit to the monument had special resonance for me because I was in the midst of reading "No Common War," a novel about a pro-Union family that became embroiled in the Civil War.

Author Luke Salisbury bases his story on events from his own family history. The book cover features a photograph of one of his ancestors. Sgt. Moreau J. Salisbury "saw the elephant" (engaged in combat) multiple times during the Civil War.

Moreau figures as one of this novel's principal figures, as do his father, Mason Salisbury, and his cousin, Merrick Salisbury.

The opening pages indicate that these men come from a family with roots in early colonial history, and that their forebears helped to instigate King Philip's War, which is considered to be the bloodiest war, per capita, in American history.

This lurid family narrative has always haunted young



Moreau, who wishes to pursue a life of penance in the seminary.

But it is the early 1860s, and with Lincoln's election, the Union is breaking up. Mason Salisbury is impatient for his son to man up and go off to fight against those who are claiming the right to own slaves. When Moreau resists, Mason goads his son into action by staging an encounter with a runaway slave.

The scheme bears fruit: when Moreau comes face to face with someone who has suffered lifelong enslavement, and now is risking his life to flee, the empathetic young man at last is motivated to go off and fight for the cause.

Moreau and his cousin Merrick are given a heady send-off by the community. One young woman, Helen,

is so stirred by

Moreau's courage that in the excitement of the moment she promises her faithful love for him.

The cousins head to Washington City. At first, they see little action, but are witness to the rough conditions in the nation's capital.

## THIS WEEK'S BOOK

"No Common War" By Luke Salisbury

Black Heron Press – 312 pp – \$27.99

But by the summer of 1862, things heat up, and they are thrust into a series of battles, finally arriving at Antietam that September. The fight that ensues is the deadliest one-day battle in American history, and both cousins are gravely wounded.

When the family back home hears the news, the fathers of Moreau and Merrick set out to retrieve their sons.

"No Common War" is provocative and tough. This is a story of values, valor and the flaws of fathers. It graphically describes battlefield violence, and probes the trauma that can be perpetuated through generations.

As one character asks, "What do we owe the dead?"

*The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at [bkmonger@nwlink.com](mailto:bkmonger@nwlink.com)*



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