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The Kimberlins Go to War: A Union Family in Copperhead Country

Michael B. Murphy

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As July 7, 1861, dawned, war was in the air in Lexington, Indiana. The county seat of Scott County was abuzz with the latest news of the Southern rebellion. The *Madison Daily and Evening Courier* told of skirmishes between Federal troops and secesh forces at Harpers Ferry and Falling Waters, Virginia. Closer to home, word had come that William A. Sanderson had organized a new outfit, the Twenty-Third Indiana, and was recruiting throughout the Second Congressional District for men to join the regiment.

Although Scott County had been rife with sympathy and support for the South, answering the call to serve the Union cause from the county were Jacob T. Kimberlin, a twenty-one-year-old farmhand; his older brother, John J.; and his cousins, William H.H. Kimberlin, Benjamin F. Kimberlin, and James Stark. These five young men could not have known at the time that none of them would ever again see their homes. They only knew that the Kimberlins were going to war.

This is the story of the Kimberlin Family that sent thirty-three fathers and sons, brothers and cousins, to fight for the Union during the Civil War. Ten family members were killed, wounded, or died of battlefield disease, a 30 percent casualty rate that is unmatched in recorded Scott County history. Of the 134 known deaths of Scott County soldiers, ten were members of the Kimberlin clan. Their feelings about the war come from forty letters to and from the battlefield that have survived. The book examines such questions as: Were they fighting to save the Union or to free the slaves? How did they express grief over the loss of a brother? Did they keep up with their business and the women at home? And what did they think about secesh neighbors in southern Indiana who tried to undermine the Union?

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