



No Common War by Luke Salisbury
Black Heron Press, 2019 (blackheronpress.com/no-common-war-by-luke-salisbury/) and in hardcover or as an ebook on Amazon (www.amazon.com/No-Common-War-Luke-Salisbury/dp/1936364298)

Reviewed by Lawrence Kessenich

There are two things that Luke Salisbury does not shy away from in *No Common War*: the horrible reality of the battlefield in the Civil War and the deep love and pain experienced by those fought in the war and those who watched their loved ones depart and then return, dead or damaged. One of these things can easily crowd out the other in a novel about war. When they are both given equal weight, as they are by Salisbury, the combination is potent. I've read very few novels that I found it difficult to put down, but this is one of them.

Often using short, powerful sentences, Salisbury drives this narrative forward relentlessly, from beginning to end. I would compare this approach to Hemingway, but Salisbury has much more heart and soul than Hemingway, whose work I often find cold and distant. This is not to say that there aren't moments of peace in the novel, before the main protagonist, Moreau Salisbury, goes off to war, and even in the breaks between battles after he does. But overall, and especially after Moreau tastes battle, the story moves forward with increasing power and intensity. The reader simply must know how it turns out. I know one reader who stayed up all night to read the book, and it's easy to see what motivated him to take in the story without even stopping to sleep—it's that compelling!

It's quite possible that some of the story's intensity stems from the fact that Salisbury is writing fiction based on facts about his own family. The Salisburys have been involved in U.S. wars from the revolution through World War II, and *No Common War* is the first volume of three that imagines the experiences of his great grandfather Moreau in the Civil War and then his grandfather in World War I and his father in World War II. (After

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reading this first book, I can't wait for the next two.) Whatever the reason, the story has an unusually passionate quality, and, as I've indicated, it is as passionate about love as it is about war.

The loves involved include Moreau's love for his neighbor Helen, and hers for him when they find each other just before he leaves for the front; Moreau's love for his cousin Merrick, with whom he fights side-by-side in the war; Moreau's mother Mary's love for her son; the somewhat conditional love (which matures over time) of Moreau's father for his son. These loves grow and develop, and sometimes get shaky, over the course of novel, but it is clear by the end that real love—love that stands the test of time and difficult circumstances—is the only saving grace in a violent and unpredictable world.

No Common War is not an easy read. The violence and sexual encounters, when they occur, are graphic and sometimes disturbing. But none of this is gratuitous or carried on too long. Salisbury is brutally honest about human behavior, but he doesn't dwell on the horrible any more than necessary to create a true-to-life picture of this era in U.S. history. And, ultimately, the horror of war is at least partially redeemed by the love that makes it possible to overcome those horrors.

This is not a "beach read," by any means—unless you're ready to take the world seriously while you're on the beach and be compelled to not put your book down. If you're up for that, No Common War will deliver.