Part-time writing pays off for West Bloomfield author

By CORRINNE ABATT

As a part-time writer, Wiley Sword of West Bloomfield is batting a thousand. The businessman-literary historian spends about 12 evening hours a week at the typewriter and his first effort, "Shiloh, Bloody April," published last fall, has met with surprising success.

The hard cover story of the battle of Shiloh, published by William Morrow, sold better than either author or publisher anticipated.

The story of the battle, or at least a part of it, will be told in Farmington this fall when Sword gives a program for the Regimental Roundtable , a group of Civil War historians and collectors.

THIS PARTICULAR BATTLE is historically significant for several reasons. It could have easily gone the other way. As it was, the Union forces were victorious, but there was a period when the Confederates definitely had the upper hand.

Had they succeeded in maintaining their advantage, the whole thrust of the war could have been changed, says Sword.

Confederate Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston was killed in the battle. He was the highest ranking American officer ever to fall on the battlefield. At the time he outranked Robert E. Lee. The southern fortunes declined rapidly without his leadership.

Gen. Ulysses S. Grant led his Union forces into Tennessee to capture the Confederate fort at Corinth. With this in their hands, they figured southern resistance would crumble.

"They camped, virtually as if they were on a picnic," says Sword. "Johnston led a surprise attack and marched to within a mile of the Union encampment before being discovered."

Another army was marching to join Grant and arrived in time to rescue Grant.

"It was probably the most critical battle in the western campaign," says Sword. "The Southlost a great opportunity and a great commander."

Not one to rest on first success laurels, the 34-year-old Sword is industriously researching and writing on the Indian Wars right after the American Revolution.

Choosing this period because of his personal interest and the fact that very little has been written on these frontier battles from contemporary (firsthand) sources, the author says, "I had no idea of the depth of the story. It is fascination—just compelling."

WHILE THE SHILOH story took about three years from beginning to publication, Sword estimates two years on the new book. Because of limited time, he researches as he goes along following a rough preliminary story plan. For the present work, his contemporary sources include the Luman C. Draper collection on microfilm at the Wayne State Library.

Draper, who died in 1870, did exhaustive research for a massive history of the Revolution, which he never put together. However, his research, much of it testimony from persons who lived through the frontier war years has proved to be an invaluable reference source, he says.

The U. S. territorial papers are another contemporary source which sometimes include the stated Indian point of view in the treaty matters. Letters and diaries convey some of the emotional impact of the troubled years.

Sword, born in Mexico, Mo., credits his maternal grandparents with his interest and love of American history. His grandfather, a cattle broker, saw what was happening to the elk and buffalo herds and, in a preservation effort, transported many of them east of the Mississippi to private parks. The couple collected frontiermemorabilia and knew many stories of frontier life.

That's where it began. Where it will end, Sword isn't sure, but as he explores the Indian War period, he finds a bigger, more moving and tragic story than he anticipated.

Sword says his wife, Marianne, is more involved in this story than the former story which was highly analytical in the treatment of battle scenes and military strategy. She helps proof pageswhen she isn't chasing two energetic four and five-year-old sons.

Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois and Ohio, the old Northwest Territory, were the locale of the conflict.

For a long time the British maintained relations with the Indians through an established governmental bureau. The British were interested solely in protecting their highly lucrative fur trade.

During the Revolution most of the Indians were loyal to the British and fought on their side.

Wiley Sword

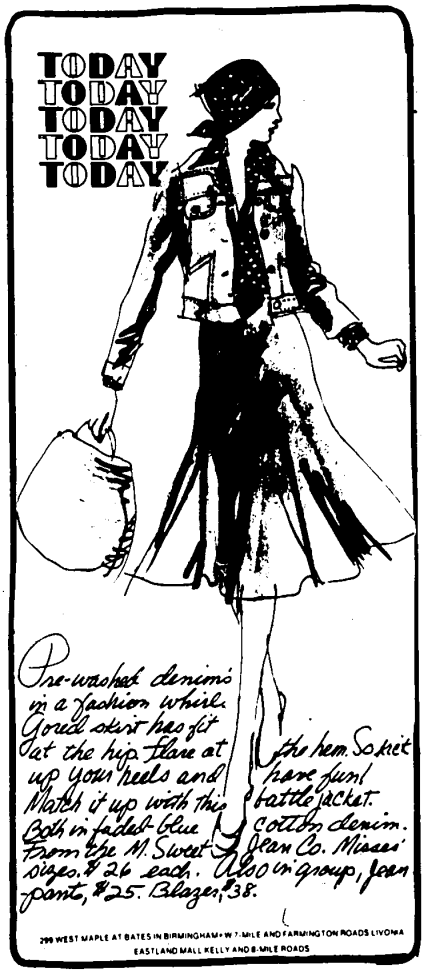
When the British and Americans signed peace treaties at the end of the war, the Indians were excluded.

"The British abandoned them," Sword says.

Then, after the war, the American government gave land grants in the Northwest Territory to veterans on land the Indians thought they owned. The Indians knew nothing of titles or paper grants. They considered the land theirs because they lived there.

ATTEMPTS AT PEACE negotiations were made between 1783 and 1790. Warfare broke out in 1790 on the western lands east of the Mississippi as the Shawnees, Miamis, Kickaboos, Cherokees and Delawares fought off the settlers invading their homelands.

For a while the British furnished munitions and acted as advisorsto the Indians, much as the United States did for the Vietnamese a few years back.



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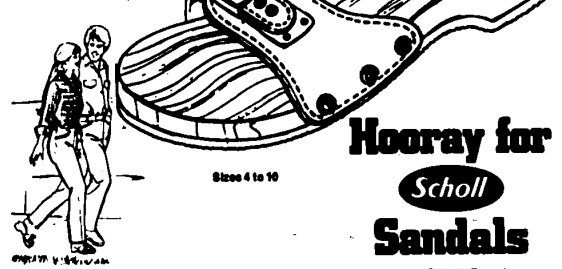

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