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# Tenting on the Old Campground: A Social History of the U.S. Regular and State Volunteer Troops in the 5th Corps, Army of the Potomac, 1862-1865

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A social history of the U.S. Regular and State Volunteer troops in the  
5<sup>th</sup> Corps, Army of the Potomac.  
1862-1865©

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## Introduction

In the annals of the American Civil War, the regular U.S. Army has not been the focus of historical works until very recently, which is surprising in light of the noble and honorable service it rendered during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, without thanks or praise from the society it protected and served. After being scattered across the American frontiers for decades, the U.S. Army's infantry, by far the largest branch, was consolidated into one solid division within the 5<sup>th</sup> corps in 1862. Instead of being separated from each other and having to rely on themselves for support, they now fought as never before, with approximately 10,000 men of the regulars fighting as one, providing a dramatic contrast to the 90,000 volunteers enrolled in the Army of the Potomac. Professional soldiers fighting and dying together, a solid core and reserve for the rest of the army to form around and take inspiration from, an inspiration that would give us an apocryphal quote from a 5<sup>th</sup> corps volunteer: "For two years the regulars showed us how to fight like soldiers, in the Wheatfield at Gettysburg they showed us how to die like soldiers."<sup>1</sup>

Compared to the story of the volunteer troops in the Civil War, there has not been much written about the U.S. Regulars in this conflict, possibly due to the fact that they were not as large a body of troops as their volunteer comrades. In recent years, more historians have focused on "the old army", notably including Gregory Urwin's history of the U.S. Infantry, and Clayton R. Newell & Charles R. Shrader's *Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*. These authors, and others like them, provide new insights into the sacrifice and courage of the U.S. Regulars during this conflict. Most useful, however, are the journals, letters, and memoirs of the U.S. Regulars themselves, such as Augustus Meyers' *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, Charles T. Bowen's *Dear Friends at Home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen*, and Ira Petit's *The Diary of a Dead Man, 1862-1864*. These offer

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<sup>1</sup> Clayton R. Newell and Charles R. Shrader, *Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pg 235

insight and expertise about the experience of the regulars in the 5<sup>th</sup> corps. In comparing these regular army experiences with the journals, letters, and diaries of volunteer soldiers. The present study explores the interactions of the volunteer soldiers with the regulars in the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps as well as the Army of the Potomac, and the mutual experience of the Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

All of these journals and letters show how the experiences of regulars compared to the adventures of the volunteers within the Army of the Potomac and the 5<sup>th</sup> corps in particular. These primary sources include observations ranging from private soldiers at the lowest ranks of the army to brigade commanders such as St. Clair A. Mulholland of the 116<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania volunteers and Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine volunteers, and other soldiers at various ranks in between.

The soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> corps experienced a significant social transition within the Army of the Potomac that, until recently, has been largely ignored by Civil War historians, particularly by those who only cover the broad history of the conflict. The regulars themselves have only been studied in great detail and effort within the last two decades, and their relations with their volunteer counterparts have received even less attention, particularly how attitudes of one for the other began in 1862 and changed throughout the war until the break up of the 5<sup>th</sup> corps in 1865. Most of the focus of Civil War social histories has been on volunteer regiments, examining why those soldiers left their farms, homes, businesses, families, and friends to go fight their own countrymen in places farther from home than they had ever been before, as well as examining how their social movements endured and changed throughout the process of the war. But the question to be asked here is “what about the regulars?” Until recently, this question has not been asked, and comparing the experiences of the regular soldiers to their volunteer comrades is a newer practice among Civil War historians.

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<sup>2</sup> These monographs written by volunteers include: *All for the Union: the Civil War Diary and Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes*, edited by Robert Hunt Rhodes, *Letters to Eliza from a Union soldier, 1862-1865*, edited by Margery Greenleaf, *Letters from a Drummer Boy: 'Dear Mother'*, edited by Jean Mills Ballinger, *The story of the 116<sup>th</sup> Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers in the War of the Rebellion*, by St. Clair A. Mulholland, and Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain's *The Passing of the Armies*.

It can be assumed that this question is left unanswered due to the societal fascination with the volunteers from state militia units, stemming from the 19<sup>th</sup> century when most Americans were satisfied with the mystique of the Minute-Men of 1776, despite the fact that these militia drills and gatherings resulted in little more than social occasions.<sup>3</sup> For historians, it is also a matter of convenience, in that the number of volunteer soldiers involved in the Civil War far exceeded the number of regulars in the Union armies, and there is also a preponderance of information and resources on the state troops as opposed to their national counterparts, due to the fact that cities, counties, and states kept good records of the units they sent away to war out of pride in the sacrifices that they had made for the country. Where one would have to go to the national archives, acquire a limited number of books, or find comparatively rare records to be able to document the regular's Civil War, a historian could go to the state or county archives or historical societies to find records and information about a local state regiment.

### **Background**

The change that was transpiring was likely imperceptible to the men in the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, particularly in the beginning stages of their part in the war in 1862. The change to be discussed was not the massive social adjustments that emancipation, secession, and increased federal power brought to the United States, but a change in the attitude of American citizens towards their standing military which until the Civil War, was an attitude of suspicion and hostility.

Since its creation, the regular United States Army had been a governmental tool both under appreciated by the people that it served, and denied the full support by its own government for uniforms, pay, or even to maintain its size. Between 1821 and 1861, the army's size rose and fell at least seven different times due to Congressional actions, varying on the state that the Union

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffry D. Wert, *The Sword of Lincoln: The Army of the Potomac*. (New York: Simon & Schuster paperbacks, 2005), pg 4.

was in, and how much Congress wished to spend on a military force.<sup>4</sup> The reason for this was due to the experience of the American Revolution where the British Army was quartered among the civilians of Boston and other places, and was seen as a force only existing to remove the freedoms of Americans and subject them to a powerful national government and monarchy. That feeling carried over into the 19<sup>th</sup> century with American views of the regulars, where in any time but one of great need such as the Civil War, the army was something that made the idealistic and free spirited American citizens nervous. More than this, soldiers were also seen as lazy, ignorant, or second-class to the average American citizen during this period.

But an interesting twist towards this anti-military attitude is that the officers leading these soldiers had a disdain and prejudice for them as well, that nearly matched if not perfectly imitated the attitude held by American society towards their own soldiers. Captain George McCall wrote in 1837 about the new recruits in his company: “The recruits I made were almost without exception of the unsophisticated, untutored, and intractable sons of Erin [Irishmen]... It had become too plain that the ranks of our army could not be filled with men whose intelligence and industry enabled them to fill higher places in the walks of life. It was there fore imperative not only to accept foreigners, but to reduce the standard of height.”<sup>5</sup> Regulars such as Augustus Meyers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Infantry were well aware of this feeling of them being the lazy dregs of society, men who were unable to make anything of themselves in civilian life, as Meyers records in his memoirs *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, “I was anxious to see my mother from whom I had only heard by letter since my departure. I had not gone far when I was jeered at by boys and larger hoodlums and saluted with such questions as ‘Soger will ye work?’ and their replies of ‘No! First I’d sell me shirt.’ I flushed with anger but could do nothing except to hasten my steps and get away from my tormentors, only to encounter others on my way home. Even respectable

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<sup>4</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988),

<sup>5,6,7</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 60

people looked me over as though I was a freak or a curiosity of some kind.”<sup>6</sup> Army historian Gregory Urwin describes the Army of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in this manner: “By the 1840s, nearly half of the Army’s enlistees were immigrants, with Irishmen and Germans predominant among them. The presence of so many foreigners in the ranks, especially those reared in countries where English was not spoken, further complicated the Army’s training problems.”<sup>7</sup> A British visitor to the United States in 1833 observed, “The most worthless characters enter the army, which consists of a mélange of English deserters, Dutch, French, Americans &c... There is no great inducement to belong to an army which is held in no great estimation by the citizens generally.”<sup>8</sup> Prejudice, alienation, and nativism divided Protestants from these new recruits. In a nation where the entire African American race was denied equality, even in the northern states, Irish and Germans ethnics were regarded as only slightly higher on the food chain than the African Americans. These social movements and feelings were also common in the Army. These feelings came to a head in 1863 with the New York draft riots, where military units including the 5<sup>th</sup> corps regulars used military force and control to put an end to the chaos.

Americans also despised the newcomers on a spiritual level. The vast majority of the recent immigrants were Catholics, which upset the delicate and utopian vision that native-born Americans had for their society in ethnic and religious circles. James McPherson:

“Before 1840 three quarters of the immigrants were Protestants, mainly from Britain. ... Two thirds of the new immigrants were Catholics from Ireland and Germany. ... The poverty, religion, and cultural alienation of the Irish made them triple outsiders. Anti-Catholic and ethnic riots occurred in several northeastern cities during the 1830s and 1840s... ‘Nativist political parties sprang up in various cities with the goals of lengthening the period of naturalization before immigrants could become citizens and voters, and of restricting office holding to natives. This nativism was actually more anti-Catholic than anti-immigrant... Indeed, protestant immigrants (especially from northern Ireland) were among the most violent ‘nativists’.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 22.

<sup>9</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pg 32.

The U.S. Army was one of the best employment options for the nation's most marginalized immigrants, and their prevalence in the ranks increased popular disdain for and mistrust of the regular army. In 1835, author Charles J. Latrobe termed the regular army as "the rag-tag-and-bob-tailed herd drafted into the ranks of the regular army", and "the worthless German, English, or Irish emigrants." In 1825, the General Regulations forbade enlisting foreigners, but there was such a drop in enlistments that by 1828, the order was countermanded.<sup>10</sup>

### **Mexico: The Grand Dress Rehearsal**

To properly understand the anomaly of the Civil War and the social adjustments that occurred between regulars and volunteers within the 5<sup>th</sup> corps requires an understanding of how the War against Mexico shaped popular attitudes about the military. In a way, the war with Mexico was a dress rehearsal for the nightmare that came later in 1861, in that the officers who commanded divisions, corps, and armies in the war between the states gained combat experience military leaders south of the border. The roll call of these leaders includes remarkable names, notably, Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, James Longstreet, Winfield S. Hancock, and George Pickett, among many others.

The war with Mexico, however, provided the regular army with an immense logistical problem, in that the force was concentrated for the first time since the War of 1812. It was an exhilarating sight that led Lieutenant John P. Hale of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry to write "I consider myself very fortunate in being sent here [Corpus Christi], for it is probably that I may not see so many regulars together in twenty years. Many old officers have never seen so many troops at one time."<sup>11</sup> However exciting this mustering may have seemed to soldiers who had been posted to the frontier in garrisons no larger than 100 men in size, it also brought to light the woefully unprepared nature of the standing army in a way that simply could not be ignored, as Lieutenant

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<sup>10</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 60.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 64.



Hale observed: “The different parts of the Army vary much in the state of discipline. Some of them have not been together for many years. The Fifth Infantry, for instance,.. is all together for the first time in nine years; this of course has prevented from learning the battalion drill and as the officers had no occasion to practice they had forgotten all their tactics.”<sup>12</sup> Ulysses S. Grant himself, a lieutenant in the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry during the conflict, saw the lack of training and preparation of the army as it was attempting to march south to engage a very respectable military force that had driven the French empire from its borders only a short time before. “On the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup>... Col Vose, for the first time since I have been in the Army, undertook to drill his Regiment. He was... probably some what embarrassed and gave his commands in a loud tone of voice; before the drill was over I discovered that he put his hand to his breast whenever he commenced to give any command, and before he was through with the parade he was compelled to leave the field and start for his quarters, which were hardly fifty paces off, and just upon... arriving there he fell dead upon the parch.”<sup>13</sup>

If the professional U.S. Army was in such shambles, it is not hard to extrapolate as to how woefully unprepared the state militia and volunteer regiments were at the start of the conflict. For decades, Americans had disparaged the standing regular army, but idealized the militia system. Units like the ‘Palmetto Regiment’ of South Carolina, or the ‘Arsenal Guards’ of Virginia, were more social groups than military forces that guarded their communities. Urwin describes the absence of discipline among the volunteers: “Opinions of the volunteers’ soldierly qualities were mixed. As might be expected, regular officers, speaking with the professional’s haughty disdain for amateurs, were harsh judges. Lack of discipline, slovenliness in dress and drill, inattention to sanitation, and mistreatment of government property ranked among the most

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<sup>12</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 64.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 65.

frequent complaints.” George Meade, an eventual leader of both the 5<sup>th</sup> corps and the Army of the Potomac in the Civil War wrote to his wife that “Their own officers have no command or control over them, and the General [Taylor] has given up in despair.”<sup>14</sup> But even more disturbing was the feeling of prejudice and hatred directed towards Mexican Catholics by the Protestant volunteers, which led to a brutalization of the civilian population in Mexico, which was almost entirely Catholic. “Looting, rape, murder, and the desecration of churches were common offenses”, writes Urwin.<sup>15</sup> In an interesting turn of events, it was quickly determined that the regulars were a gentler body of troops to occupy Mexico, having a large number of Catholics within its ranks, despite its reputation in American society as the new version of overpowering ‘redcoats’ of the previous century.

As the war against Mexico progressed, the volunteers began to develop into more seasoned veterans and performed very well with their regular counterparts at engagements such as Monterrey, Buena Vista, Vera Cruz, Churubusco, Molino del Rey, Chapultepec, and eventually Mexico City itself, contributing greatly to the American victory that resulted in the formal end of the war in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Some of the most effective volunteer regiments included the 1<sup>st</sup> Mississippi infantry, among others, commanded by Jefferson Davis. At the battle of Buena Vista, this unit stopped two Mexican attack columns with repeated counter-attacks.<sup>16</sup> As the dust settled and the smoke cleared at war’s end, the volunteers were sent home, and the regulars were reassigned and redistributed to scattered outposts spread across the greatly enlarged nation and along its extended borders. The newly acquired territory meant that the U.S. Army immediately had even more land to cover and a much larger population to protect. In addition to previous citizens of Mexico who became American citizens under the 1848 treaty, the

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<sup>14,12</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 72.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 73-74.

newly acquired territories of the Pacific Northwest and California also attracted pioneers and settlers in droves. Further east, the Midwest was rapidly filling up with farmers and new towns. To meet this new challenge of covering more territory with only a certain number of men, most regular regiments were deployed to the western territories and the new state of California to keep the peace between the native tribes and the white settlers, and to keep the British on their side of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. However, the Army had to accomplish its new mission with fewer men than it previously had in Mexico. The U.S. government and American society failed or refused to see the need for a large army to defend a land over three million square miles in size. Counting only the volunteers, the United States fielded over 73,000 men in the Mexican war. After the war, their regular army was assigned the task of national defense with fewer than 10,000 men within its ranks, four-fifths of which were in the infantry or the artillery, and only two regiments of dragoons and one of mounted riflemen to contend with any issues that would arise in the territories.<sup>17</sup>

### **The 1850s: the inter-war years**

To cover the territory newly gained from Mexico under the terms of the 1848 treaty, nearly all of the regular army units were sent to the west to watch over and keep the peace between native tribes and encroaching settlers in the new territories and states. On one occasion in early 1859, two companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry led by Captain J. B. Plummer shielded the inhabitants of the Brazos Indian Agency from 250 white vigilantes who were out for blood.<sup>18</sup> Augustus Meyers' 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry was sent from Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania to the Minnesota, Nebraska and South Dakota frontiers to calm tensions stemming from the Sioux tribes.<sup>19</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 73-76.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 84.

<sup>19</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York: The Stirling Press, 1918), pg 47.

Infantry was sent to the Pacific Northwest by way of the Isthmus of Panama, losing more than 100 soldiers and camp followers to Yellow fever<sup>20</sup>, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry was given the job of chasing mounted natives on foot in the New Mexico desert. With only one regiment of mounted soldiers within the entire U.S. Army until 1855, with the creation of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Cavalry regiments, it was left to the infantry regiments and converted artillery regiments, “red legged infantry”, to perform mounted duty on the frontier.

The frontier military experience can be best described by Eugene Bandel, a Prussian immigrant and a sergeant in the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry who wrote: “Our sufferings have been sever, sometimes because of scarcity of water and sometimes on account of too much moisture... Our shoes are absolutely worn out, and the best of mending will do no good. Some of the men are barefoot, which is no pleasure where rattlesnakes are numerous, and scorpions and tarantulas abound, and where the cactus and Spanish bayonet often grow ranker than the grass, and where we often have to march for miles over solid rock.”<sup>21</sup>

The hardships and deprivations of a soldier’s life discouraged anyone seeking to enlist when there were better paying and easier jobs that could be done in civilian society. Sergeant Bandel of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry stated “It is either a very lazy, tedious sort of life, or else one that demands the last ounce of physical strength and such as only an iron constitution can stand. The hardships in the United States army are greater than any other... Moreover, a soldier here is always in places where civilization has not yet arrived, and everything therefore very expensive.”<sup>22</sup> Since the patriotic fervor of the War against Mexico had worn off after the treaty was signed, the army was once again reliant on the same type of individuals that had filled its ranks before the addition of thousands of volunteers and new enlistees in 1846. During the inter-

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<sup>20</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *Grant*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), pg 77.

<sup>21</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 77.

<sup>22, 19</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 78-80.

war years, twice as many immigrants enlisted as native-born Americans, with that majority being Irish or German, due to the great availability of these individuals, as well as the utter lack of will to join the regular army by native born Americans. On his way to join his regiment, Augustus Meyers would overhear a dock worker say that he'd "be damned before he'd make a pack horse of himself for Uncle Sam", referring to the heavy knapsacks that Meyers and his comrades carried on their backs.<sup>23</sup>

Further complicating matters, the soldiers now entering the ranks of the Army were arriving with less training or preparation than ever before, a concern that had the Inspector General scratching his head, resulting in Colonel Joseph Mansfield being sent to the west to investigate. He complained of soldiers being enlisted that "cannot understand English", and that "there has been too few officers at their companies to secure instruction to the rank and file", particularly in the case of simply firing their weapons with any resemblance of accuracy: "My impressions are that the practice of firing at the target with ball and buck is not sufficient. The mere discharge of the guard of the previous day at the target to get rid of the load [in each sentry's muskets] is not sufficient practice, and there is not interest enough taken in it by the men to produce any real improvement."<sup>24</sup>

Beginning in 1853, the U.S. Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis began to aid the struggling American army, increase its wages, and raise the number of men that the army was legally allowed to have. One of the biggest changes brought about by Secretary Davis was the new weaponry in the form of new rifled muskets, using an American version of the French "Cylindro Conoidal Ball", more commonly known as the Minie' ball. These weapons were greatly appreciated by soldiers on the frontier for the fact that they could hit their targets at up to three

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<sup>23</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 30.

<sup>24</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 78.

times the range of their old weapons, a trait that was praised by the soldiers and feared by the natives that frontier regiments were combating.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the regular army's critical role in internal conflicts with Native Americans and the international tensions occurring in the San Juan islands with the British empire, American citizens living outside the conflict areas remained largely ignorant of their military's efforts.

Augustus Meyers eloquently describes the attitude towards soldiers in the 1850s:

“A soldier at that period was but little respected by civilians in the east. Only the people on the western frontiers appreciated him and understood how much he did toward making the new country a safe place for them to acquire homes and develop the land. It required the lesson of the Civil War to teach the east the value of soldiers and sailors. The soldier particularly was looked upon as an individual too lazy to work for a living. He had not been much in evidence since the Mexican War. The entire U.S. Army contained less than twelve thousand men scattered over a large territory.”<sup>26</sup>

This statement speaks true of the nation's attitude towards its military, as one of appreciation only when native tribes threatened settlers in a localized region, but once the threat had passed, the gratitude faded. As Meyers mentions, this sense of gratitude was only felt in the west, whereas citizens of the eastern United States only saw small, company sized garrisons along the coast at the most important sea ports such as New York, Boston, Baltimore, and Charleston. It is at the seaport of Charleston, South Carolina that the regulars responded to the first assault on their nation's flag. With 73 men defending Fort Sumter, the army was hardly ready for the costliest conflict in American history. In the words of historian Bruce Catton, Fort Sumter “had been built in a routine way to adorn the coast of a country that expected never to go to war, [but] stood at the precise spot where the hurricane was going to break.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 85.

<sup>26</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 22

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Catton, *This Hallowed Ground: The story of the Union Side of the Civil War*, (Garden City, Doubleday & Company, 1956), pg 14

## The Civil War

As the first shell exploded against Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, there could hardly have been a more ill prepared military force that suddenly had to face open rebellion within its own nation. With only small coastal garrisons like Fort Sumter near the initial unrest, with the exception of installations in Missouri, Kentucky and Texas, the rest of the army was deployed to the Midwest or the Pacific Coast, or else on the national borders with Mexico and Canada. For Augustus Meyers who had reenlisted with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry in 1860, the attack on Fort Sumter caused him to “Wonder whether we were likely to take part in putting down the rebellion before it was over, or whether we were to remain here in the Indian country [South Dakota]”<sup>28</sup> For many in the regular army, the new-born conflict brought a crisis of conscience of whether or not they should remain with their unit and loyal to the Federal government, or whether to resign their commission and throw their lot in with their state after it seceded. Robert E. Lee, Joseph E. Johnston, George Pickett, J.E.B. Stuart are all examples of notable Army officers who followed this path into the Confederacy.

Of approximately 1,100 officers actively serving in the army in 1861, little more than 300 resigned their commissions to serve their state rather than their nation. In a dramatic contrast, a very precious few of the enlisted soldiers within the army deserted their unit and comrades to fight for the south.<sup>29</sup> Meyers, for example, later recalled: “In the meantime hundreds of the officers of the regular army had resigned their commissions and nearly all joined the Confederacy, among them my captain and some other officers of my regiment. To the credit of the rank and file be it said that, with very few exceptions, they remained loyal to the Government in the hour of its need.<sup>30</sup> To quote precise numbers, of 15,259 enlisted soldiers at the end of 1861, only 26 soldiers deserted their unit and their comrades to fight for the south. In spite of a good

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<sup>27, 28, 30</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 170.

<sup>29</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *Grant*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), pg 103.

amount of soldiers who had enlisted from southern states, their loyalty lay with the Army, and with their regiment in particular. Also contributing to this amazing faithfulness was their status as immigrants, and as such were not as deeply involved in the debate of slavery or states rights as their native born counterparts were.<sup>31</sup>

Regardless of the loyalties individual enlistees in the regular army, members of that dispersed force faced the logistical question of where they would be involved in the conflict, and how they would get there. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, they marched to Washington D.C. from the Dakotas at a rate of 20 to 30 miles per day, in the blazing heat of the great plains.<sup>32</sup> However, the process of mustering the regular army took time. The forts that the regulars left still had to be occupied by other troops, and the regulars impatiently waited for new volunteer regiments to come and relieve them, such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Minnesota Volunteers that relieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Infantry regiment from its frontier duties so it could march to Washington D.C. to join the Army of the Potomac.

To give more bulk to the regular army regiments arriving from their posts across the nation, new regular regiments formed around the northern states as part of the additional regular soldiers that were permitted by Congress when it allowed the strength of the regular army to grow to 42,000 soldiers, from the approximately 15,000 that had filled its ranks before 1861.<sup>33</sup> This new allowance for more regular soldiers included units such as Charles Bowen's 12<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry and Ira Petit's 11<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry, both of which were formed in New York. These regular regiments were raised at the same time as the massive numbers of Volunteers were being mustered, and of the same stock of men as well, meaning that the soldiers enlisting in the new U.S. regiments were the same types of citizens who enlisted in state volunteer regiments; not limited to ostracized immigrants from Ireland or Germany, but patriotic American born citizens

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<sup>31</sup> Clayton R. Newell and Charles R.B. Shrader, *Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pg 47.

<sup>32</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 171

<sup>33</sup> Gregory J. W. Urwin, *The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775-1918*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pg 93.



as well. Instead of choosing their state affiliation, these men chose to be affiliated with the federal government under the title of “U.S. Infantry”.

Most of these regular regiments, new and old, would form the ‘regulars division’ of the Army of the Potomac, later designated the ‘Second Division, Fifth Army Corps, Army of the Potomac’, in 1862. Initially, the older regular regiments such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Infantry looked down upon the “New Army” regiments within this division. However, even those these new regiments, though they had not served on the frontier or in any previous engagement, were considered to be better quality than their volunteer counterparts. In the words of editor Edward Cassedy, the “‘New Army’, or ‘Irregular’ regiments were looked upon as inferior by the veterans in the ‘Old Army’ regiments... [but still] thought of themselves as one member put it, ‘to be rather more beans to the bushel than the volunteers.’”<sup>34</sup>

As regiments of regulars and volunteers formed across the nation, all of the men were caught up in a militaristic fever that had swept the nation. Young men were encouraged to enlist by friends and family, or by posters advertising rallies to support troops and enlist young men of the community, such as one from Woburn, Massachusetts that said: “TONIGHT! RALLY! BE ON HAND, EVERYBODY! Young ladies, can you not induce some gentleman of your acquaintance to enlist? TRY IT!” Young men who were slow to enlist or chose not to were mocked by media or community outlets, such as this announcement from the same Massachusetts community: “*Stay-at-home Guards* are to have a new uniform the most striking features of which will be a fringe of apron strings around the shirt and a baby’s rattle suspended around the neck. They will be armed with wooden swords and quill pop guns.”<sup>35</sup> Many newly enlisted soldiers, regardless of what unit they joined, felt a higher calling to defend their nation, and spoke of it often. However, some potential soldiers hesitated to join, often because of duties at home, such as

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<sup>34</sup> Edward K. Cassedy, *Dear Friends at Home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Telfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*, (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), pg 1

<sup>35</sup> George Fowle, *Letters to Eliza from a Union soldier, 1862-1865*, ed. Margery Greenleaf, (Chicago, Follett Publishing Company, 1970), pg 8-9.

Elisha Hunt Rhodes, who felt that it was “my duty to serve in the field”, was detained by his widowed mother and two younger brothers that he had to support, and could only bring himself to enlist in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rhode Island Infantry until after his mother had given permission, pointing out that “other mothers must make sacrifices and why should not I?”<sup>36</sup>

Capturing this patriotic spirit that affected even the professional regulars, Charles Bowen of the 12<sup>th</sup> United States Infantry wrote to his wife:

“My country is in danger, & her human liberty at stake, shall I therefore falter in the discharge of my plainly laid outline of duty- No! So help me heaven as long as a hostile army is raised against my native land, so long will I stand in the ranks & all my feeble arm can do to ward off the blow shall be done. A man, or I should say, -a thing made in the form of a man who will not do this, should be obliged to go & stand in the front ranks to cover better men. They are nothing more or less than paltry cowards, if not traitors.”<sup>37</sup>

The civic excitement and support of militarization evident in Bowen’s letter is also apparent in primary accounts that describe how local residents responded to regulars who arrived in their communities from their pre-war postings further west. Members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Infantry, for example, reported they were greeted at train stops with bands, coffee and sandwiches, and the support and enthusiasm of the people while traveling through Indiana, Chicago, and finally ending their train ride in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where they were greeted with fruit baskets and “provisions enough for a feast”, in the words of Augustus Meyers.<sup>38</sup>

The initial defeat at Manassas, Virginia where elements of three different U.S. Infantry Regiments and a battalion of U.S. Marines formed a protective shield behind the retreating volunteer force taught the northern leaders several things, but one in particular: The volunteers had much to learn in the way of soldiering. These volunteer soldiers would greatly improve after their dismal opening act, but their education would take time and capable instructors that most

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<sup>36</sup> Elisha Hunt Rhodes, *All for the Union: The Civil War Diary and Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes*, ed. Robert Hunt Rhodes, (New York, Vintage Books, 1992), pg 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> Edward K. Cassedy, *Dear Friends at Home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Telfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*, (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), pg 13

<sup>38</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 174-175.

often came in the form of regular soldiers or officers, such as Silas Casey, who had written a manual of infantry tactics while in the Pacific Northwest, and was thus appointed by George B. McClellan to command a provisional division that would train all new arrivals to the army in all ways of being a soldier. Further assisting their volunteer comrades, regular army regiments took charge of Washington D. C., creating order out of what had been chaos after first Manassas. Regular infantry stood watch over roads and bridges in the city, and formed Provost Marshal details (the 19<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of military police) to purge saloons, game houses, and other similar establishments.<sup>39</sup>

Even the regular soldiers' care of their uniforms and accoutrements were of a better care and quality than their volunteer comrades who doubtless were unused to the care of military equipment and had no experience with the practice in their civilian life. This issue that lead to an exchange between Meyers and a volunteer officer:

“The neatness of the uniforms, the polished buttons and the bright looking arms of the regular soldiers was often a matter of interest to the volunteer officers. One day while on guard an elderly captain, who unquestionably hailed from one of the New England states, said to me, ‘Where be you men from? I see you all got brand new guns!’ I explained to him that we were regular soldiers and had used these guns on the frontiers for years. He exclaimed, ‘Dew tell! Our boys got new guns but they’re all rusty. What do you clean yours with?’”<sup>40</sup>

This attention to drill and care of combat equipment would eventually be proven in the lime-light of the battlefield, but first served as an example to the fresh volunteer soldiers coming into the nation's capitol to join its largest army. Regular army cavalry patrolled the streets as well, directing traffic and keeping order in the movement on the streets. With order restored and instruction bestowed upon them, the volunteers improved considerably with the regular army as their guide, and made the preparations that would prove necessary during the coming campaigns. 50 years after his military service, Augustus Meyers wrote of these volunteers that, “They were young men who enlisted for three years or the duration of the war; they were patriotic and earnest

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<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey D. Wert, *The Sword of Lincoln: The Army of the Potomac*. (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005), pg 33.

<sup>40</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 189).

and were not tempted to enlist by the payment of bounties. These soldiers became the flower of the Army of the Potomac and, I think, were not equaled by any subsequent levies.”<sup>41</sup>

With the exception of a few smaller skirmishes and battles, the winter and spring of 1861-1862 passed without great incident, with the training and preparation of the Army continuing, and the professionalism of the soldiers within it growing as well. Under political pressure, McClellan readied his massive force for a move into Virginia, a move that brought the Army up the James River in Virginia, beginning with successes at Yorktown and Williamsburg, but finally settling into a siege-like state around Richmond. This impasse resulted in one of the more brutal campaigns of the war, similar to the Overland campaign undertaken by General Grant in 1864.

#### *The regulars in the Peninsula Campaign*

Beginning at Mechanicsville and ending at Malvern Hill, the Army of the Potomac fought a major battle every day for seven days, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps was involved in the worst actions, often without support from other units in the army, or at least very minimal support, being forced to rely on the unique mixed community of volunteers and regulars. The battles of Mechanicsville and Gaines’ Mills are prime examples of this. Beginning on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, Robert E. Lee attacked the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps under Major General Fitz-John Porter at its defensive positions along Beaver Dam Creek, resulting in catastrophic losses for the Confederates, as the Union soldiers were dug in behind a swamp with artillery supporting the line. Bearing the brunt of the assault was the Pennsylvania Reserve Division under General George McCall, a unit comprised entirely of Pennsylvania Volunteer regiments. Fortunately for the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps and its Pennsylvanians, Lee’s attack did not come together the way he had hoped, and the assaults came in piecemeal form,

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<sup>41</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 178)

allowing the Pennsylvanians to refill their cartridge boxes and fill any gaps with reinforcements from the two divisions behind them, including the regulars division under George Sykes.<sup>42</sup>

This division was arguably the back bone of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, perhaps the army, throughout much of the war, for within its ranks were two brigades of solid regular infantry regiments. Only two volunteer regiments from New York, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, had the honor of wearing the White Maltese Cross, the symbol of their division. Upon their arrival in the division, General Sykes stated, “You have heard what our commander in chief General McClellan says. I only add that if there is any hard work to be done you have got to do it.” However, the regulars would grow fond of their New York comrades, leading Charles Bowen to remark: “The rebel prisoners say they [5<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteers] are perfect devils on the charge, & they had rather face a regiment of regulars than them, & regulars are their perfect horror.”<sup>43</sup> This division developed the *esprit de corps*, or perhaps the arrogance, to yell “get out of the way, straw feet (the term for green soldiers), we’re going to go up to show you how to fight.”<sup>44</sup>

After the battle of Mechanicsville, the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps withdrew to be nearer to the crucial river landings on the Chickahominy river at Gaines’ Mills, located on a rise protected by Boatswain’s Creek, which is more of a swamp during the early summer months, a good defensive position if ever there was one. Sykes’ division was located on the far right, the position of honor as well as the most exposed position, and dug in to await the next assault without any support from the rest of the army located merely across the river until later the next day, while the battle was going full force.

If the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps was a catalyst for the relations between regulars and volunteers and how they interacted with each other on social or political levels within their military community, then

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<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey D. Wert, *The Sword of Lincoln: The Army of the Potomac*. (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005), pg 98-103.

<sup>43</sup> Charles T. Bowen, *Dear friends at home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*, (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), 93.

<sup>44</sup> Bruce Catton, *The Army of the Potomac: Mr. Lincoln’s Army*, (Garden City, Doubleday & Company, 1951), pg 25-38.

the battle of Gaines' Mills is one of the finest catalysts for how the two groups interacted while in combat. Volunteers who had been introduced to the alien world of military life and order fought alongside soldiers who had made warfare and the security of their country their profession. Whatever these volunteers from the states may have felt about the regular army before the war, they relied on each other for survival on the battlefield, and supported each other in their time of need and peril.

As the bulk of the Confederate army stormed up the ridge time and again, the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps regulars and volunteers worked together in an impressive defense of their positions and each other. Holding onto the low but steep rise, the Union troops made repeated counterattacks to throw the rebels off balance and break up their assaults. The two volunteers units within the 2<sup>nd</sup> division, among the 10 regular army regiments were also heavily involved in this action, gaining the respect of their regular comrades who watched them execute a bloody counterattack that haunted soldiers in their sleep for nights to come, due to the savagery and loss of life. Even General Sykes remarked, "I have always maintained it [the 5<sup>th</sup> New York] to be the best volunteer organization I ever knew."<sup>45</sup>

For the men of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, this struggle was larger and more desperate than any they had ever previously faced. As evening began to fall, elements of the line cracked and broke under the pressure and building assaults that Lee launched against their positions. Lee sent coordinated attacks against the line instead of ordering piecemeal assaults as he had done at Mechanicsville. The Union soldiers did not break out of fear or of loss of command, they simply broke due to the enormous pressure placed on their line, battle fatigue, and the lack of ammunition coming forward to supply their line. But when their line broke, it did not flee pell mell to the river crossings or to some protective fort to regroup, but in the words of Charles Bowen, "Along toward night the enemy burst out on the devoted 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, & 4<sup>th</sup> with at least 20 men to our one,

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<sup>45</sup> Jeffrey D. Wert, *The Sword of Lincoln: The Army of the Potomac*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005), pg 104.

and then the slaughter began. We gave them one volley at close quarters & then the 14<sup>th</sup> & 2 companies 12<sup>th</sup>, broke & ran... We broke & ran about a hundred yards back & formed again on the road...<sup>46</sup>

Arguably, the bloody confrontation at Gaines' Mills was the greatest tribute to the bravery and sacrifice, with only the wheat-field at Gettysburg coming close in comparison. It is one thing to ask men to march shoulder to shoulder into battle with no cover or entrenchment, but it is entirely another to ask them to form again and go back into the hell that they had just fled, as the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Infantry and other regiments were asked to do. They were issued only 20 rounds of fresh ammunition and then sent in with reinforcing brigades sent from across the Chickahominy River where the rest of the army was located.<sup>47</sup> As the sun went down and the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps crossed to safety on the other side of the river, one of the bloodiest days of the Civil War finally ended, and while battered and bloodied, the men of the 5<sup>th</sup> could hold some pride to their hearts and honor to their banners, due to the simple fact that they had fought outnumbered for two days and inflicted substantial casualties on their opponent, all without any substantial support until very late in the day at Gaines' Mill. Meyers, whose 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry was in the middle of the regulars division, described the battle of Gaines' Mill:

”although not ranking as one of the great battles of the war, was remarkable, being the one with the greatest disparity in numbers. When the battle commenced General Porter had only the Fifth Army Corps, consisting of less than twenty thousand men, to oppose double their number, and it was not until late in the afternoon that Slocum's division of seven thousand reinforced him. For four hoarse the powerful enemy tried in vain to break our lines and it was not until near sundown that, reinforced by General Jackson's troops augmenting their numbers to more than sixty-five thousand, against our less than thirty thousand actually engaged, they succeeded in breaking our line in the center; and when darkness ended the battle they had only advanced as far as the ground previously occupied our reserves.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Edward K. Cassedy, *Dear friends at home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*. (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), pg 112.

<sup>47</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 235-236.

<sup>48</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 255-256.

Fitz-John Porter had led his corps very ably, his division and brigade commanders had deployed and used their units in a way that provided fresh regiments at the main line at all times during the battle, and rotated embattled and worn regiments to the rear to rest and refit, at least for a time, before bringing them back on line. Even the General in Chief and commander of the Army, George B. McClellan, was impressed by the regulars' performance, summing up his views of them in a line to the secretary of war: "My regulars were superb."<sup>49</sup>

In the history of the Civil War, much has been written about the volunteer soldiers who were the "flower of the army" according to Augustus Meyers, but comparatively few volunteer regiments withstood as many consecutive campaigns and battles as the regular soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> corps, Army of the Potomac. Present at the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of Manassas, and present at Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, the regulars saw action at every major battle in the eastern theatre with the Army of the Potomac, winning both glory and casualties for their efforts. Within this humble project, their entire story simply cannot be told in full in any way that would do them honor, so it will focus on the major engagements of Gaines' Mills and Gettysburg, where their courage and sacrifice are most dramatically evident and best documented by the soldiers of the period. Between these two engagements, the regulars played fascinating roles in the battles of 2<sup>nd</sup> Manassas and Antietam, being utilized in a way that stood between the army and certain destruction in the former, and in a position of potential but unexploited victory in the latter.

After the failure of McClellan's peninsula campaign in early 1862, the third and fifth corps were sent to Alexandria Virginia and placed under the command of General John Pope, preparing for another thrust into Northern Virginia from the Potomac river. Departing the Army of the Potomac on August 20, 1862, the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps regulars found combat with their Confederate enemies nine days later.<sup>50</sup> Through a variety of mistakes on the part of Union commanders and

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<sup>49</sup> Clayton R. Newell and Charles R. Shrader, *Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pg 232.

<sup>50</sup> Jeffrey D. Wert, *The Sword of Lincoln: The Army of the Potomac*. (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005), pg 133-134.



the well timed and well entrenched attacks and movements of the Confederate troops, all assaults made by Union troops were foiled and beaten back with considerable loss, and a smashing counter-attack by General James Longstreet's confederate force caused the army to flee in confusion, save for the soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> corps, who stood as a shield to allow the army to escape.

In a bloody and catastrophic stand, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> New York regiments stood between Longstreet's corps and several batteries of regular army artillery on Henry House Hill just long enough for the guns to escape before they were overwhelmed and driven back with heavy loss. Meyers, who watched their stand remembered that "In less than fifteen minutes this small brigade sustained a loss of more than four hundred killed and wounded, the Duryee Zouaves [5<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteers] alone losing two hundred and ninety-seven men, a greater loss than that of any other regiment in this battle."<sup>51</sup> But the regulars did not forsake their volunteer comrades, but swung out of column and into line of battle, supporting their New Yorkers and protecting the fleeing army leaving the field and passing behind them. The ability of the regulars prevented the army from dissolving into chaos and panic in the way that had happened a year before on the same ground, as Sergeant Thomas Evans stated, "the Federal right was already in full retreat. The left was completely turned, and nothing but the bold front of those batteries on the crest and our little division of Regulars prevented another stampede, and the carnage of a victorious pursuit."<sup>52</sup>

As darkness fell, the violence subsided, resulting in a relatively quiet withdrawal of the army towards Centreville by the army. While marching in the dark, the regulars received a lasting compliment from a leader of the all-volunteer 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps. Authors Newell and Shrader document an interesting exchange in the darkness: "One of the officers [standing on the side of the road]

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<sup>51</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 265.

<sup>52</sup> Clayton R. Newell and Charles R. Shrader, *Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pg 233.

wearing a dark hat called out: ‘What troops are these?’ ‘The regulars,’ came the answer from the ranks. ‘Second Division, V Corps,’ was another reply. ‘God bless them! They saved the army,’ said the officer.”<sup>53</sup> The regulars discovered that their creditor was Major General Irvin McDowell of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, who a year earlier had watched a much smaller body of regulars protect his retreating army at 1<sup>st</sup> Manassas.

Less than a month later, the regulars were again involved in combat near Sharpsburg, Maryland, when General McClellan halted Lee’s Maryland campaign along Antietam Creek. This battle has been considered a military stalemate, but a political victory with consequences beyond the scope of this project. The 5<sup>th</sup> corps in general played but a small role in the battle compared to their other comrades in the army, being held reserve for the entire battle, with the exception of one regular brigade who went forward on a reconnaissance into the middle of Confederate lines. Of all chances for the Union to destroy the Confederacy’s largest army, this was the first and perhaps the most readily available. Skirmishers of the 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry moved forward and engaged rebel artillery units while being supported by elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiments and three artillery batteries. The skirmishers of the 4<sup>th</sup> saw that the middle of Lee’s lines had few men on line, and their commanders begged for the chance to go forward and smash through the thin Confederate lines, but it was not to be, due to the over-cautiousness of McClellan, and the attack was not ordered.<sup>54</sup>

#### *The Regulars at Gettysburg*

The regulars were present at every major movement or engagement of the Army of the Potomac throughout its history, from 1<sup>st</sup> Manassas to Appomattox, and they suffered the same hardships and deprivations as their volunteer comrades through the brutal winter of 1862-1863. They performed well at the debacle of Fredericksburg and carried out their duty admirably

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<sup>53</sup> Clayton R. Newell and Charles R. Shrader, *Of Duty Well and Faithfull Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pg 233.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce Catton, *The Army of the Potomac: Mr. Lincoln’s Army*. (Garden City, Doubleday & Company, 1951), 313-314.

during the battle of Chancellorsville, but their largest and most sacrificial role occurred near a heretofore unknown village of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

When the 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> corps broke on July first after a valiant but bloody stand against the bulk of the Confederate Army, their comrades in the Army of the Potomac had assembled rapidly through the night and into the morning of July 2<sup>nd</sup>, forming on the hills east and south of Gettysburg. Through a tactical mistake, the 3<sup>rd</sup> corps under Daniel Sickles had taken lower and more exposed ground that was closer to Longstreet's Confederate lines. The Confederate forces cracked Sickles' lines, creating massive chaos, forcing hand to hand combat, and resulting in counter charges through places that were later immortalized as code words for hellish experiences under withering fire: the Peach Orchard, Devils Den, Little Round Top, and the Wheatfield.

In the Wheatfield, regulars taught volunteers how to "fight like soldiers". The first and second brigades of the division, every man jack of them regulars, deployed into the fray about 5:30 pm, driving sharpshooters from the Devils Den before going headlong into the Wheatfield to support retiring bodies of troops that had been shattered by another Confederate attack. In supporting the retreating volunteers, the regulars incurred horrible casualties in a relatively short period of time, including rates that exceeded 50 percent in some regiments. Sergeant Bowen described the action: "We charged & drove them back about a mile where we held them for an hour or more when they put on a fresh force and drove us back. As soon as we reached our first ground we rallied & were going in on another charge when the 6<sup>th</sup> corps came up at a double quick & charged."<sup>55</sup> Descriptions of the regulars' actions included one provided by Lieutenant Colonel William Fox of the 107<sup>th</sup> New York: "In this action the regulars sustained severe losses, but gave ample evidence of the fighting qualities, discipline, and steadiness under fire which made them the pattern and admiration of the entire army."<sup>56</sup> Corporal Henry F. Weaver of the

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<sup>55</sup> Charles T. Bowen, *Dear friends at home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*, (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), pg 289.

<sup>56</sup> Clayton R. Newell and Charles R. Shrader, *Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pg 234.

155<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania volunteers watched the action from the nearby hill of Little Round top, and rendered his praise for his regular army comrades by saying

“The regulars fought with determined skill and bravery for nearly an hour, and then reluctantly fell back as if on drill, but sharply and bravely contesting every foot of the ground. These things I saw, and I am glad, as a Volunteer, to bear tribute to the United States Regulars.”<sup>57</sup>

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, an intellectual professor from Bowdoin College in Maine who ultimately rose to the rank of Major General, wrote about the regulars in his memoirs, and especially highlighted the social views of the regulars, and instead of affirming those beliefs, he discounted them and spoke of the esteem that the regulars gained from the volunteers as the war progressed: “We certainly held our regulars dear, from long association, and could only speak their name with honor when we thought of the desperate charge down from the Round Tops of Gettysburg into the maelstrom of death swirling around the ‘Devils Den’, from which but half of their numbers emerged, and these so wrought upon that they were soon after released from service in the field to recover strength.”<sup>58</sup>

The regulars paid a massive price for the newly gained esteem from their comrades, in the form of 829 officers and men killed out of both brigades, in a 42% casualty rate in little more than an hour of fighting. The 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiments suffered casualties of more than 50% within that time frame.<sup>59</sup> The Battle of Gettysburg was one of incredible rates of sacrifice and death, not only of the regulars but of the volunteers as well. The 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota Volunteers suffered a casualty rate of roughly 82% in just a few minutes with a roster of little more than 250 soldiers before their desperate counter charge on the second day of fighting.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57, 59</sup> Clayton R. Newell and Charles R. Shrader, *Of Duty Well and Faithfull Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pg 234-235.

<sup>58</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *The Passing of the Armies*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), pg 11)

<sup>60</sup> Noah Andre Trudeau, *Gettysburg: A testing of courage*, (New York: HarperCollins books, 2002), pg 393.

*The Regulars in New York City*

When the smoke cleared away from the once quiet fields around Gettysburg, the 5<sup>th</sup> corps regulars and their comrades in the Army of the Potomac cautiously followed Lee's army south, failing to destroy the Confederate force due to its battle exhaustion and the formidable earth works in which their enemy sat waiting for them. Shortly after the Gettysburg campaign, the regulars received a small bit of mercy in the form of being sent to New York city to quell the draft riots occurring there, and were taken off the battle lines for a few months, and some regiments were never returned to their comrades of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps. Charles Bowen of the 12<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry wrote about the relief that the regulars received, and the joy expressed at the announcement: "We now know our destination is Fort Hamilton [New York] & a happier set of fellows would be hard to find. After the privations, danger & hardships of nearly 18 months active service we feel very glad to know that the government intends to give us a rest & I saw some stout rugged men even shed tears when they heard the news."<sup>61</sup>

For soldiers who had seen the worst of war, New York city seemed like heaven, and they allowed themselves some extra splurges and 'high times' at this change of pace. Augustus Meyers went to his home for the first time since reenlisting in 1860,<sup>62</sup> Ira Petit spent his "money for the good things. Spent \$4,00 foolishly for a hat and fixings",<sup>63</sup> Charles Bowen described an incident in which "three of us Sergts. Donnelly, Owen Flannigan & myself got into a little muss & after considerable of a fight the police succeeded in capturing us. We stop in the Essex Station house tonight. Donnelly rec'd some severe cuts on the head from the police clubs."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Charles T. Bowen, *Dear friends at home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*, (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), pg 318.

<sup>62</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 299.

<sup>63</sup> Ira Petit, *The Diary of a Dead Man, 1862-1864*, (New York, Eastern National, 1999), pg 155.

<sup>64</sup> Charles T. Bowen, *Dear friends at home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*, (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), pg 320.

Augustus Meyers has recorded the social issues and tensions in New York as well as other northern cities about the draft proclaimed by President Lincoln, and how it was enforced:

“Congress had passed an act to enroll all available citizens of the loyal states for military duty, to enable the states to furnish their quota, when called upon for additional troops by the Government. Names were to be drawn by lottery, and each man so drawn was to serve in the army or furnish an acceptable substitute. This had to be done; all the two-year volunteers had been discharged and, after the defeats at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, there were few voluntary enlistments... The riots in New York had been controlled for the time being, but there was much uneasiness in the city as to what would occur when the actual drawing of names began, for the Government needed soldiers and was bound to enforce the draft.”<sup>65</sup>

The regulars now experienced yet another shift in their standing in American society, from a government institution that could potentially dominate its citizens, to a fighting force that had taught their citizen soldiers how to fight, to a standing military unit that prevented civic unrest the nation’s largest city. Since 1862, newspapers carried the story of the 5<sup>th</sup> corps, volunteer soldiers wrote home and spoke of the regulars’ courage and sacrifice, and it seemed that the feeling of mistrust had thawed within American society. Luckily for the citizens of New York and their regular army guests, no violence occurred, as Charles Bowen wrote in a diary entry: “Everything is quiet around the city. No riot apprehended as the force of military is too strong.”<sup>66</sup> as Meyers continues to describe: “The arrival of the soldiers from the Army of the Potomac restored peace of mind to many people in New York and allayed their fears of rioting and destruction of property, while enforcing the draft. No disturbance occurred while that went on; if there had been, the rioters would have received a severe lesson, for we had no sympathy for them.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 297.

<sup>66</sup> Charles T. Bowen, *Dear friends at home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*, (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), pg 320.

<sup>67</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 300.

*The Regulars in the Overland Campaign*

However, this form of heaven would not last for long before the regulars received orders to return to the army for the campaigns of 1864. In September, after roughly three weeks of duty in New York, the regulars received orders to return to the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps to take part in Ulysses S. Grant's overland campaign, one that ultimately decimated the ranks of the entire Army of the Potomac, and spelled the end of the war for many of the regulars. However, some regiments remained in New York for a time, and some never returned to the field of battle, but remained in the New York Harbor forts to read of their comrades exploits through the news papers. These regiments included the Third, Fourth, Sixth, Seventh, and Tenth Infantry regiments, all of them from the 'old army' of the antebellum period. But some old army regiments continued in the field, such as Meyers' 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, as well as the 'new army' regiments like the 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiments.<sup>68</sup>

Within the first engagement of this campaign, the regulars would incur losses of over 14 percent, when volunteers of a different corps failed to protect their left flank, an advantage that Confederate forces took full advantage of.<sup>69</sup> Moving forward through some of the densest forest in Virginia, units lost contact with each other, and lost the cohesion of a battle line's movement, resulting in uncoordinated attacks save for the open ground such as Saunders field, where the regulars were flanked badly. The 12<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry took part in this slaughter, and in the heat of a deadly crossfire appreciated the ability of their volunteer comrades, as Charles Bowen describes:

In the fight on the 5<sup>th</sup> we were very badly handled. Being sent in battle through a perfect thicket of stunted pines, we got mixed up together. Then a space was left between the 14<sup>th</sup> regulars and us which the rebels penetrated. Our officers would not allow us to fire supposing them our own men until they were upon us. At the same time a strong force came in front & thus we were exposed to a terrific cross fire which mowed down men by scores. No troops could stand this and our left broke & ran. This of course made bad worse & the entire line

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<sup>68</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 302.

<sup>69</sup> Clayton R. Newell and Charles R. Shrader, *Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pg 235.

broke. Getting back to a more open shot we rallied & tried to check the tide but were forced back by more than twice our numbers until just as the line was on the point of running, the gallant 6<sup>th</sup> corps bore down cheering as they came. This gave us fresh courage and we stood to the work & held the ground until the 6<sup>th</sup> corps came up when we lay down and they charged over us driving the rebs back with nearly as much speed as they had advanced. We then fell back to our first position leaving the 6<sup>th</sup> corps to hold the ground.”<sup>70</sup>

Here in the wilderness, the regulars division was effectively dissolved due to the casualties that had decimated their already thin ranks, and finally realized by their officers and their government. Having been under fire every day since May 5<sup>th</sup> on the battle of the wilderness, and in sixteen days they had lost more than four hundred men, and together numbered less than one full sized regiment.<sup>71</sup> Meyers’ 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry had less than 100 enlisted men present for duty, and it was then consolidated into one company and placed as the provost guard for the 2<sup>nd</sup> division, 5<sup>th</sup> corps, what had been called “Sykes’ regulars division.” The 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments rejoined the army, but instead were assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps, and not permitted to march with the 5<sup>th</sup> corps of which they had been a part of for so long. In October the 10<sup>th</sup> would return to New York and never again see combat during the Civil War, and the 4<sup>th</sup> would be assigned to guard Ulysses S. Grant’s Headquarters, since the commanding general had first served within its ranks many years before. The 17<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiments returned to New York and never returned to battle duty, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry returned to be the guards for George Meade’s headquarters. For the soldiers who were assigned duty in New York, away from their army, they felt let down by their superiors. They wanted to return to the field and finish the fight that they had taken such a noble part in for the past three years, in which so many of their friends, ‘mess-mates’, and ‘bunkies’ had perished. Augustus Meyers, whose unit was ordered to guard the prison camp in Elmira, New York wrote of the general feeling of his comrades when they discovered that they would not return to the field of battle.

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<sup>70</sup> Charles T. Bowen, *Dear friends at home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*, (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), pg 458.

<sup>71, 72</sup> Clayton R. Newell and Charles R. Shrader, *Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pg 326.



“Next morning we were vexed and disgusted at learning that we were not to go back to New York, but were to remain at Elmira to guard prisoners. The general desire was to go back to the field and see the close of the war, of which a part of the Second Infantry had seen the beginning. We had made up our minds that the end was near; prisoners at the front had told us of the dire straits of General Lee’s army for food and clothing and the rapidly diminishing forces. We felt angry with the authorities who had condemned us to such an inglorious duty, after our long and faithful service in the field, where we had lost more than a third of our number. But there was no help for it. As soldiers, we had to obey orders.”<sup>72</sup>

In the words of Newell and Shrader, “The Regular Infantry Division started the war as a battalion at Bull Run in 1861, grew to be a formidable fighting force during 1862, but was reduced to a mere shell of a division by 1863.”<sup>73</sup> The backbone of the Army of the Potomac, the soldiers who taught volunteers how to fight and die like soldiers, were no longer a part of the institution that they had helped create.

### Epilogue

The 5<sup>th</sup> Corps regulars have a unique story in the annals of the Civil War. Compared to their volunteer counterparts in the 5<sup>th</sup> corps or in any other army unit of the Union forces, no other unit had entered the service so despised by its own countrymen. The old army regiments of the regulars division had served their nation for decades on the frontier and once again served together with distinction and honor in the Army of the Potomac. They withstood massive assaults at Gaines’ Mills, shielded the army from destruction at 2<sup>nd</sup> Manassas, were held back from almost certain victory at Antietam, were butchered in the Wheatfield at Gettysburg, and effectively ceased to exist after the battle of the Wilderness. After this later battle, only a few selected regiments of pre war regular troops survived in the army and in the 5<sup>th</sup> corps.

Unlike their volunteer counterparts, the military lives of the regulars continued beyond the Civil War. These soldiers would rest, refit, and reorganize as units before being dispatched to new duties in the nation. But even with reorganization of the regiments, the ten ‘old army’

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<sup>72</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 344.

regiments that had assembled into the 5<sup>th</sup> corps from their frontier service would never be the same. For Meyers, only ten men who had served on the frontiers with him were still alive, the rest having joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry during the war. Where these men lived, and what they did in their lives after the Civil War, we know only a little. Augustus Meyers retired permanently from military service on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1865, and turned down a lieutenant's commission in a New York volunteer regiment.<sup>74</sup> Charles Bowen left the army at war's end and fathered six children, but only lived nine years after the war before dying of consumption in 1874.<sup>75</sup> Ira Petit was captured in the Battle of the Wilderness, and died in the infamous Andersonville prison camp in Georgia.<sup>76</sup>

The volunteers took part in the grand review, marching through Washington D.C. accompanied by all their comrades from all of the Union forces throughout the war, receiving the thanks, praise, and adulation of their countrymen who had seen their finest generation fight a conflict at a scale and cost that had never been seen before in the modern age. Not so the regulars division of the 5<sup>th</sup> corps, whose shattered ranks were sent to the forts of New York harbor to recover from the shocking loss of life that they had endured. Despite of the shocking price that the regulars had paid for their country, the training, protection, and support that they had shown to the volunteers who marched in this parade, only one of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps regular regiments appeared in this parade, the 3<sup>rd</sup> United States Infantry. For the 3<sup>rd</sup>, who since the days of Winfield Scott during the Mexican War had bourn the name of "The Old Guard of the Army", it was assigned to be General George Meade's headquarters guard, and as such led the grand procession through Washington D.C. with the rest of the Army of the Potomac following behind. Today, the "Old Guard" stands watch over Washington D.C. and is most visible at Arlington National Cemetery, the cemetery itself a relic of the Civil War. They stand sentry duty at the Tomb of the

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<sup>74</sup> Augustus Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks, U.S. Army*, (New York, the Stirling Press, 1914), pg 349.

<sup>75</sup> Charles T. Bowen, *Dear friends at home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*, (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), pg 578.

<sup>76</sup> Ira Petit, *The Diary of a Dead Man, 1862-1864*, (New York, Eastern National, 1999), pg 200.

Unknown soldier. It is fitting perhaps that this is their duty, guarding the unknown, for the regulars themselves were the unknown soldiers of the U.S. Army during the Civil War.

On the happiest of days for the north, the day to honor their fathers, husbands, and brothers, the men that ‘taught us how to fight like soldiers’ received no flowers, no accolades, and no playing bands. They went about their normal duties, and simply remembered where they had fought and bled, and their comrades who would never march to the drums again. In years to come, silent stones with brass plaques would bear them silent tribute, standing stoic above quiet and peaceful fields where once men bled in agony for their nation, and causes that were bigger than they.

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, an intellectual and one of the officers of the 5<sup>th</sup> corps would write of this parade, describing the passing of the noble army on its last march together before being broken up. He wrote with especial fondness for his 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, and had these compassionate and poetic words to say of the regulars who served with the volunteers he lead:

“Where are the regulars, who since 1862 had been ever at our side,-the ten iron-hearted regiments that made that terrible charge down the north spur of Little Round Top into the seething furies at its base, and brought back not one half of its deathless offering? Like Ayers it was-in spirit and in truth,-when asked at the Warren Court, years after, then reviewing the Five Forks battle, ‘Where were your regulars then?’ to answer with bold lip quivering, ‘Buried, sir, at Gettysburg!’ Whereat there was silence,-and something more. And of what were not then buried, fifteen hundred more were laid low beneath the flaming scythes of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and the other bloody fields of that campaign. And the Government, out of pride and pity, sent the shredded fragments of them to the peaceful forts in the islands of New York harbor,-left there to their thoughts of glory.”<sup>77</sup>

Chamberlain alludes to possibly the most moving statement made of the regulars, made by General Ayers at his court of inquiry as to his actions at the battle of Five Forks. “I had regulars-what were known as the Regular Division-before I went into the battle of Gettysburg. I left half of them there, and buried the rest in the Wilderness. There were no regulars left.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *The Passing of the Armies*, (New York, Bantam Books, 1993), pg 262.

<sup>78</sup> Clayton R. Newell and Charles R. Shrader, *Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pg 237.

Today, these soldiers have been all but forgotten by Civil War historians and enthusiasts. Few books have been written exclusively about them, and most books make passing or insignificant references to these soldiers, many of whom had no home but the army. No mention is made of what happened to these soldiers after the war. Many returning volunteers were immortalized in song, art, and poetry of the period. Visitors rarely come to the Gaines Mill National battlefield, where so many regulars fought and died, and visitors often pass by the ten regimental markers commemorating the role of regulars at Gettysburg. In the popular culture of today, it is the volunteers were memorialized in movies, art, and music. The regulars are forgotten. Most if not all of their old posts on the frontiers are abandoned, reduced to tourist curiosities on roadsides, with only a few plaques or interpretive signs to tell the story of those men who had built and serviced these installations.

Charles Bowen wrote a fitting tribute to the men of the Army of the Potomac in a letter to his wife in October of 1863 that seems an excellent way to end this project on. It describes the feeling of pride at being part of the Army of the Potomac that only a veteran could do. It speaks from a man who has been involved in a cause bigger than himself, and of a community of thousands of men from thousands of different backgrounds, who settled into a social and military life that brought out the best and the worst in mankind. It comes from a man who took up his nation's cause for no benefit to himself, and bore the battle for those who could not do it themselves. It speaks with a patriotism that we can all aspire to:

“It is actually wonderful how the Army of the Potomac stand the deprivations, trials, & reverses that have been heaped on them without stint or mercy to meet the foe with undaunted spirits. I do not believe there ever was an army in any country that would endure the same treatment this army has & yet be ready to fight as good a battle, & perhaps a better one than they could when they first came out. Although we have been deprived of the privilege of winning any lasting victories, it has not been our fault, as history in future days will show. I slook forward to the time when a man can say with pride, ‘I belonged to the *Army of the Potomac.*’”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Charles T. Bowen, *Dear friends at home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry, 1861-1864*, (Baltimore, Butternut & Blue, 2001), pg 344.

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