




Fall 2014

## “ALL inferiors are required to obey strictly...” Disciplinary Issues in the Army of the Potomac under Grant during the Overland Campaign

Robert W. Novak '15, Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: [http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\\_scholarship](http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship)

 Part of the [Military History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

**Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.**

---

Novak, Robert W., "“ALL inferiors are required to obey strictly...” Disciplinary Issues in the Army of the Potomac under Grant during the Overland Campaign" (2014). *Student Publications*. 285.  
[http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\\_scholarship/285](http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/285)

This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: [http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\\_scholarship/285](http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/285)

This open access student research paper is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

# “ALL inferiors are required to obey strictly ...” Disciplinary Issues in the Army of the Potomac under Grant during the Overland Campaign

## **Abstract**

Between May and June 1864, the Army of the Potomac conducted yet another push toward Richmond. The intense weather, extended time under fire, and unprecedented slaughter took its toll on the rank and file. For many of the army's best and most hardened veterans, this would be their last campaign. As their anticipation for home grew, however, their disdain for the new style of warfare grew with it. Fresh troops arrived almost daily from the cities across the north. Many of whom were conscripts or bounty men. Even the soldiers who chose not to reenlist expressed their low expectations for these men. Soon, soldiers began to become lax in their disciplinary efforts: straggling, shirking, skulking, insubordination and even the most heinous crime, desertion. This lack of discipline exasperated the army commanders, leading them to enact harsh penalties and make examples of their men. The citizens of the north saw a different and partisan picture of the army, images of Grant the Butcher, Meade the inept, and bloody losses took the place of the soldier's story of ill-discipline and hardship. The new style of warfare that began during the Overland Campaign led to a breakdown of military discipline that infused the Army of the Potomac and left a northern populace stunned with its effects. [excerpt]

## **Keywords**

Civil War, Military Discipline, Punishment, Army of the Potomac

## **Disciplines**

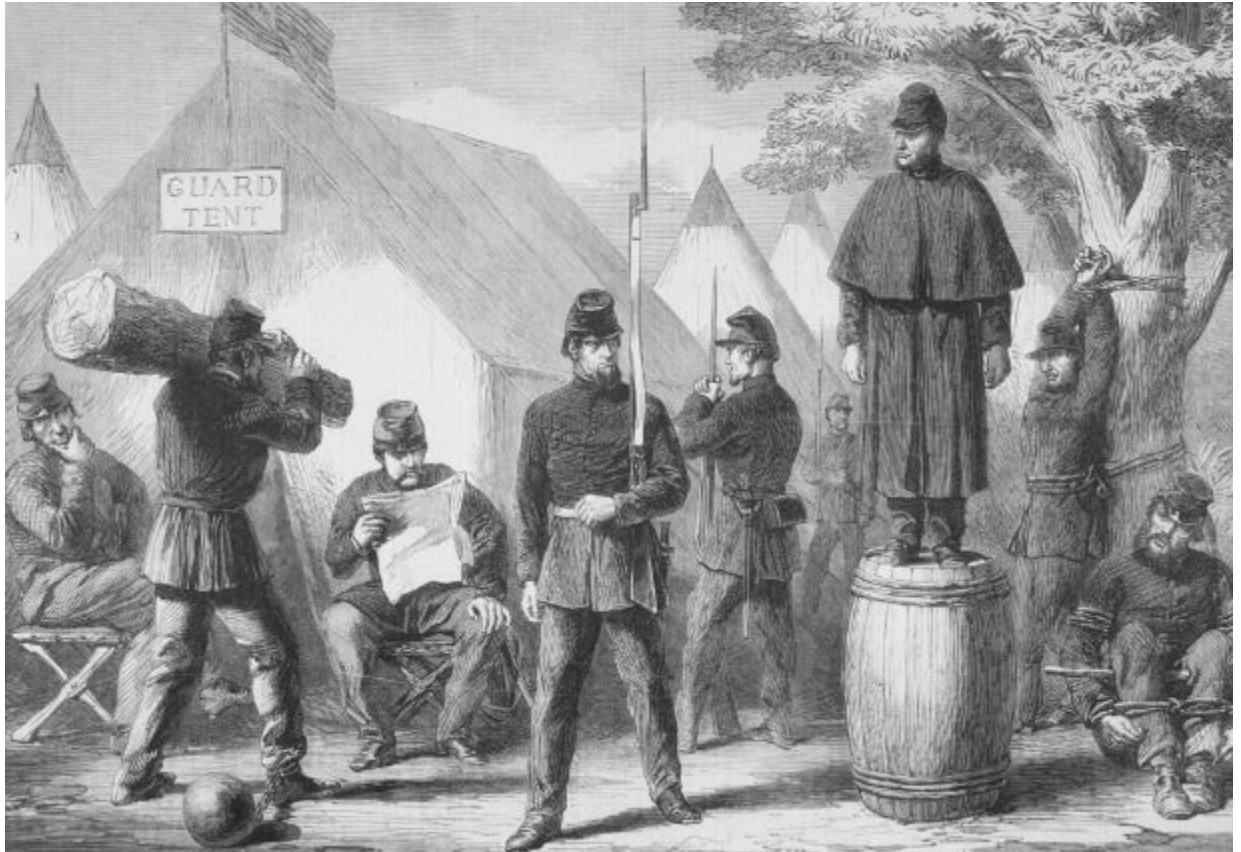
History | Military History | United States History

## **Comments**

History Thesis

“ALL inferiors are required to obey strictly...”

*Disciplinary Issues in the Army of the Potomac under Grant during the Overland Campaign*



Bobby Novak

December 12, 2014

HIST 425: The Civil War

In Hartford, Connecticut on Friday, May 21, 1864, many of that community undoubtedly glanced over that day's issue of the *Hartford Daily Courant*.<sup>1</sup> The front page was dotted with advertisements. The second was covered with brief accounts of local news with small stories about the local regiments placed sporadically between. Delegated to the third of five pages, however, stands "The Latest News," general information regarding the various campaigns being conducted by Federal forces. The details were scant, except for a dispatch from Secretary of War Edwin Stanton who reported that U. S. Grant's movements in central Virginia were "entirely satisfactory" and that the "the army is abundantly supplied." General Grant's dispatch of 4 pm on May 20, printed alongside Stanton's message, related a break in the fighting and that it had been "all quiet... up to that hour." This issue of the *Courant*, however, missed a story that reverberated through the ranks of the Army of the Potomac. From only what had been printed, readers could not have imagined the bloodshed and stalemate that had characterized the campaign thus far. They would never have known that discipline was cracking and that extreme measures were being used to keep the army together. On May 20, 1864, Private John D. Starbird of the 19<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry had been executed for deserting his colors twice in the course of this campaign. The readers of the *Courant* and other Northern newspapers remained ignorant of these extreme measures. They remained insulated from the dark side of war.<sup>2</sup> While soldiers throughout the army's Second Corps mentioned the execution, why had the Northern papers not published it? More popular and widely read papers make not mention of Starbird's fate, let alone the issues that had marked the Army of the Potomac's campaign. A rift had formed between the true experiences of the Army and those reported to the Northern populace. What caused the breakdown in discipline and why had Union commanders grown so exacerbated that they resorted to shooting their own men?

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Latest News." *The Hartford Daily Courant*, May 21, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> National Archives. RG 153, Case NN-1943.

Between May and June 1864, the Army of the Potomac conducted yet another push toward Richmond. The intense weather, extended time under fire, and unprecedented slaughter took its toll on the rank and file. For many of the army's best and most hardened veterans, this would be their last campaign. As their anticipation for home grew, however, their disdain for the new style of warfare grew with it. Fresh troops arrived almost daily from the cities across the north. Many of whom were conscripts or bounty men. Even the soldiers who chose not to reenlist expressed their low expectations for these men. Soon, soldiers began to become lax in their disciplinary efforts: straggling, shirking, skulking, insubordination and even the most heinous crime, desertion. This lack of discipline exasperated the army commanders, leading them to enact harsh penalties and make examples of their men. The citizens of the north saw a different and partisan picture of the army, images of Grant the Butcher, Meade the inept, and bloody losses took the place of the soldier's story of ill-discipline and hardship. The new style of warfare that began during the Overland Campaign led to a breakdown of military discipline that infused the Army of the Potomac and left a northern populace stunned with its effects.

Newspaper correspondents had always followed the Army of the Potomac's every move. When the army was not moving, though, the newspapers searched for any rumor they might print. As the winter drug on through the closing months of 1863 and into 1864, the Northern populace was searching for any news regarding their loved ones in their winter quarters. The ever-present danger of Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia loomed large in their minds. Two invasions north of the Potomac River led Northern civilians to incessantly question his whereabouts.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> "Rebel Prospects of the Spring Campaign," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 20, 1864.

March of 1864, however, brought welcome news in the promotion of Ulysses S. Grant to Lieutenant-General and the full command of all Federal forces. The country became enamored with their new commander. The Northern populace had heard countless reports of his successes in the west and his reputation preceded him on his trip to Washington to take formal command. Adam Gurowski, for one, penned in the February 3, 1864 entry to his diary his satisfaction in Congress' approval of Grant's promotion, "The house is awake and makes a decided step... A man and a soldier is woefully needed at the head of our armies."<sup>4</sup> Hundreds of other Northerners would echo these words. The series of defeats that had characterized the Army of the Potomac through its early years had created a home-front that begged for action and victory. A General as popular and as successful as Grant, then, brought cheer and great hopes to the hearts and minds of the North.

Northern correspondents, officials in Washington, and the general public craved news about Grant's movements. Newspapers documented every step. The *New York Herald*, for example, printed a section on its first page labeled "Lieutenant General Grant's Movements."<sup>5</sup> In it, the paper reminded the people of Washington that he would not be arriving until the following Tuesday and that he would be extremely busy with no time for congratulatory speeches being required to quickly move on to his headquarters "in the field," as he was wont to have them. Similar remarks were made the following month as General Grant made his way across to different forts and positions defending Washington. On April 4, the Herald again gave vivid remarks about his whereabouts and his doings, reporting that Grant had left Fortress Monroe and had arrived in Washington the previous day.<sup>6</sup> Nine days later, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* gives the

---

<sup>4</sup> Adam Gurowski, *Diary: 1863 - '64 - '65, Vol. III* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 91.

<sup>5</sup> "Lieutenant General Grant's Movements," *The New York Herald*, March 19, 1864.

<sup>6</sup> "The Situation," *The New York Herald*, April 4, 1864.

most detailed account yet, including the times of departure from Virginia and arrival in Washington on his “special train” as well as the number of staff he traveled with.<sup>7</sup> The Northern public had become enamored with Grant. He was different than the other commanders that the eastern theater had known and brought with him a promise to act. The promise to act, however, did not translate into a promise for movement. The people clamored for action. Their expectations demanded it and yet, at March turned into April, nothing was reported. Their pleadings for movement and an end to the war seemed to be ignored as no information was released throughout the winter and early spring. the Northern populace soon began to take every rumor at face value and their frustration is evident in private and public correspondence.

The fiery democrat Adam Gurowski, for example, noted in an April 4<sup>th</sup> entry that the lack of a public plan must be the work of Halleck and Lincoln, “Under the guidance of Halleck, Mr. Lincoln still continues to influence Grant’s military disposition... Of course, not by giving direct orders, but by friendly suggestions...”<sup>8</sup> Hatred for the Republican government aside, Gurowski’s frustration holds merit. the *Philadelphia Inquirer* had to put out stories to suppress the rumors and calm the frustrations evident throughout the North. One of the most interesting of these rumors was one where the Confederacy must have a plan to invade the North once more. The *Inquirer’s* column claimed that the Southern press is putting this out in order to bolster morale in their starving armies and to “draw attention from the dreary, doubtful present” of imminent Confederate defeat.<sup>9</sup> Only a week later, having undoubtedly heard more cries from their readers asking about the coming campaign, a short few paragraphs was printed to council and hush the exclamations, urging them to be patient. The public “grasp at every item of intelligence

---

<sup>7</sup> “The Army of the Potomac,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 13, 1864.

<sup>8</sup> Gurowski, *Diary*, 158.

<sup>9</sup> “Rebel Prospects of the Spring Campaign,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 20, 1864.

professing to give war news,” but, “the eagles are gathering and the old flag is unfurled in all her glory,” and the paper would, “council them to wait patiently,” the *Inquirer* wrote.<sup>10</sup> The public knew something was going to happen. Why else would “Unconditional Surrender” Grant be brought East? The drive for information led them to believe anything they read and frustrations ran high. All eyes were on the Army of the Potomac but no one knew quite what they were looking at.

Although no information was shared with the public before the high command gave permission, one theme is common in some of the most popular newspapers in the months leading up to the Overland Campaign. A feeling of hope and a drive for ultimate victory undoubtedly pervaded the public mind. Why would the newspapers be printing a few short sentences regarding the whereabouts of the Army of the Potomac’s new commander? Because every reader across the Union wants to know about the next victory. They want to know when it is going to happen and where. The one swift victory syndrome is nothing new, having been around in the public mind since the war began, but it still held firm in their hearts and minds. They longed for an end to the war, a rapid one, where one final push, one more great battle, would decide it all.<sup>11</sup> The expectations for Ulysses S. Grant were high. Of course he could defeat Lee, just as he had defeated Bragg out west. The rumors only fed this desire and in fact spread the great expectations to far flung audiences. The soldiers themselves read the newspapers and no doubt understood the message they were trying to convey: this time, you must win.

The Army of the Potomac, instead of advancing toward victory as winter approached in 1863, it reached stalemate once more along Mine Run when on November 30, 1863, the frontal

---

<sup>10</sup> “The Campaign,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 27, 1864.

<sup>11</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, “Ulysses S. Grant and the Problems of Command in 1864,” in *The Art of Command in the Civil War*, Steven E. Woodworth ed. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 142.



assaults against entrenched Confederates were called off.<sup>12</sup> When the Federal army fell back to the north side of the Rapidan, the men quickly set about building their winter quarters, clearing forests of timber and making as much of a home as the skill of the soldier allowed. Some were intricately made affairs, sporting brick chimney's and hammocks between the walls to provide extra comfort. Stools were furnished out of cracker boxes, pegs were placed above the door to create a secure position of muskets, knapsacks and personal belongings brought the comforts of the soldiers home far away just a little closer.<sup>13</sup> The men participated in any manner of physical activities, writing letters, attending services, reading, and the list goes on. Young, bored soldiers often played pranks on each other. One of the more popular was to toss paper bags full of caps and cartridges down an unsuspecting comrades chimney. The subsequent popping and banging was sure to be met by laughter by all but the hapless victims.<sup>14</sup> Sutlers made appearances throughout the different camps, selling the various creature comforts the men missed so much from home. Color Sergeant Daniel Crotty of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Michigan Infantry made special note of the "gingerbread, cakes, and canned fruit of all kinds" that were in high demand by the soldiers.<sup>15</sup> Some men, such as Daniel Chisholm, even claimed to have gained weight, "I also got weighed and pulled down 187 ½ #, 10# more than I ever weighed before." Chisholm went on to say that it must have been from the "Sutler Stuff."<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> John J. Hennessey, "I Dread the Spring: The Army of the Potomac Prepares for the Overland Campaign," in *The Wilderness Campaign* edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 66.

<sup>13</sup> John D. Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 74-76.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from George Myron Jones to his Mother, January 4, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park Archives Vol. 324.

<sup>15</sup> Crotty, *Four Years Campaigning*, 117.

<sup>16</sup> W. Springer Menge and J. August Shimrak, eds, *The Civil War Notebook of Daniel Chisholm: A Chronicle of Daily Life in the Union Army, 1864-1865* (New York: Orion Books, 1989), 68.

As a whole, the army can simply be called “content.”<sup>17</sup> The army was well supplied with food, shelter, and winter clothing and the men were often without want. Once the spring rains began to fall, however, the mood sometimes turned sour. One Federal field officer noted that the coming of spring meant the killing fields of Virginia would be saturated once again saying that “our annual Bull Run flogging” was near.<sup>18</sup> Many soldiers grew restless, wanting to start the campaign sooner rather than later. This sentiment gained more ground once the speculation around General Grant’s assumption of command in the East was confirmed. Like their families on the home front, the soldiers knew nothing of Grant except through his reputation in the west. Sergeant Crotty mentioned that “all think that he [Grant] will lead the Army of the Potomac in the next campaign... and all feel confident that if we have a good leader... then victory will surely be ours.”<sup>19</sup> Similar words were spoken by John W. Chase of the 1<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts Light Artillery in a letter from March 24, 1864. His reference to “useless” Grant coming to the front is an obvious affront to the man, but he hoped that “he may succeed and show himself what the papers try to make him out to be.”<sup>20</sup> Other soldiers lamented that the war would simply drag on forever if Washington continued meddling in the military affairs. “And so it will go on for years,” penned Charles Biddlecom in February, 1864, “unless some man of more penetration and better judgment is given charge of affairs at Washington.” He would name Grant in his next sentence as just such a man.<sup>21</sup> Not all men were so excited to see the new commander of all Federal forces. When Lieutenant-General Grant arrived to the Army of the Potomac for the first

---

<sup>17</sup> Hennessey, “The Army of the Potomac,” 72.

<sup>18</sup> Noah Andre Trudeau, *Bloody Roads South: The Wilderness to Cold Harbor, May-June 1864* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Crotty, *Four Years Campaigning*, 124-125.

<sup>20</sup> John S. and Bonnie B. Collier, eds., *Yours for the Union: The Civil War Letters of John W. Chase, First Massachusetts Light Artillery* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 322.

<sup>21</sup> Katherine M. Aldridge, trans. and ed., *No Freedom Shrieker: The Civil War Letters of Union Soldier Charles Biddlecom* (Ithaca, NY: Paramount Market Publishing Inc., 2012), 111.

time, E. W. Locke, a doctor attached to the army, noted that “a small fight between two negroes would call out twice as many” men than this occasion.<sup>22</sup>

All the good leadership in the world, however, would count for nothing without an army to be led. Aside from a new commander, the Army of the Potomac would also be reorganized due to the enlistments running out for the three-year volunteers. Great stress was placed on each and every veteran soldier in the ranks that winter as each man weighed his options for staying and going. In order to entice men to reenlist, the Federal Government initiated a system of bounty payments and furloughs to any man that would reenlist. For Sergeant Crotty and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Michigan, a reenlistment would grant them a thirty-day furlough and \$402.<sup>23</sup> Charles Francis Adams of the 1<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts Cavalry noted on January 16, 1864 that his company, the only one to reenlist, would soon be off to Boston for their thirty-five day furlough.<sup>24</sup> If a soldier reenlisted, families expected their speedy return on their furlough, most of whom had not seen their loved ones once since their initial enlistment. However, the entire army could not be gone at one time. Thus, the government instituted a tiered system of absenteeism where only 1,200 men from each corps were allowed to be gone at one time.<sup>25</sup> As could be suspected, though, the reasons each man chose to reenlist, or not, was often made for other reasons than a simple furlough and bounty. A man from the 19<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry wrote, “Well if new men won’t finish the job, old men must, and as long as Uncle Sam wants a man, here is Ben Falls.”<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Trudeau, *Bloody Roads South*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Crotty, *Four Years Campaigning*, 117-118.

<sup>24</sup> Worthington Chauncy Ford, ed., *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865, Vol. II* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 117.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Warner Thomas and Richard A. Sauers, eds., *The Civil War Letters of First Lieutenant James B. Thomas, Adjutant, 107<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Baltimore: Butternut and Blue, 1995), 176-177.

<sup>26</sup> Trudeau, *Bloody Roads South*, 11.

The reenlistment rates for different regiments were completely arbitrary. In some cases, the entire regiment would reenlist while in others only select groups. In situations of small groups, however, those men were often forced to find regiments that still needed to fill their quota, such as the case mentioned by John W. Chase where a man asked him if his regiment needed any more men, as he and his ten comrades still needed a unit.<sup>27</sup> Sergeant Crotty came to a similar fate when only three companies of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Michigan reenlisted. In his case, though, the three companies did not have enough men to constitute keeping their regimental designation and they were folded into the neighboring 5<sup>th</sup> Michigan.<sup>28</sup> This was the fortune for regiments where not enough men reenlisted. The government, however, eager to keep as many veteran soldiers in the field as possible, made the clarification that all regiments would stay with the Army until the three-year anniversary of their Federal service, rather than state designation.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, though, nearly 27,000 soldiers in the Army of the Potomac decided to reenlist for another term.<sup>30</sup>

The simplicity of numbers led to complications in comradery. Ties of community, occupations, and ethnicity bound units together. The insertion of strangers, however, would tip the balance of these regiments, providing the impetus for future problems of unit cohesion both on and off the battlefield.

In order to fill the void left by the disbanding veteran units, the Army of the Potomac turned to fresh recruits and garrison regiments. The institution of the draft in 1863 produced riots and protests throughout the North but the conscript lists were still printed and orders carried out.

---

<sup>27</sup> Colliers, *Yours for the Union*, 324.

<sup>28</sup> Crotty, *Four Years Campaigning*, 117-118.

<sup>29</sup> Carol Reardon, "A Hard Road to Travel: The Impact of Continuous Operations on the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia in May 1864," in *The Spotsylvania Campaign*, edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 175.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On: The Virginia Campaign, May-June 1864* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 21.

Even though enlistments continued to trickle in, many of the men who would fill the void for the Army of the Potomac would be drafted. Even the freshest recruits wrote home asking how their communities would furnish their quotas.

In February, 1864, George Myron Jones, a recruit of the 2<sup>nd</sup> United States Sharpshooters, asked home, “What is Waitsfield agoing to do about the other 200 men?” In order to entice more enlistments, some communities issued a system of bounties and again Jones explained that “some [towns] are now paying \$500. some \$600. & are very much troubled by that.”<sup>31</sup> Regardless of the feelings at home, though, new men arrived daily. One sentence of three penned by Charles Wellington Reed in his March 28, 1864 diary entry mentioned that troops are continuously arriving by train. Four days later he noted again that more had arrived and the final eight needed to fill their unit quota were mustered in.<sup>32</sup>

The constant stream of new recruits added to the heightened emotion of that winter. For veterans, their minds often drifted to the home they would soon see. Their reactions to new, untested, and, in their eyes, naïve additions to the army, then, were often unwelcome. Soldiers crowded the train stations to see if any of the recruits would forget the false name that they enlisted under.<sup>33</sup> The veterans often used their new comrades as the butt of many jokes. John Dunbar of the 37<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts wrote of a laughter-inducing instance in January of 1864. An officer, upon inspecting the recruits’ tents and equipment, deemed that their muskets were dirty, remarking that the “gun made the soldier and he should take as good care of it as he would his wife.” The laughter came from Dunbar’s response, “Now Susie, if I had a wife and didn’t think

---

<sup>31</sup> Letter from George Myron Jones to his Wife and Children, December 28, 1863 and to Friends at Home, February 7, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park Archives, Vol. 324.

<sup>32</sup> Eric A. Campbell, “A Grand Terrible Drama” *From Gettysburg to Petersburg: The Civil War Letters of Charles Wellington Reed, Illustrated by Reed’s Civil War Sketches* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 194-195.

<sup>33</sup> Trudeau, *Bloody Roads South*, 16.

any more of her than I do my gun, I am afraid she would clear out and leave me.”<sup>34</sup> Veterans also “required” recruits to do things for the company or regiment so that they could be accepted. Officers and men alike were annoyed by their constant misinterpretation of orders , turning right when they should have turned left, forgetting their file, and creating their own manual of arms.<sup>35</sup> However, not all the veterans were so unforgiving to their new comrades in arms. John Chase mentioned in February, 1864 that twenty-two of the recruits arrived on the 14th and described them as “a good lot but there is a few of them that I think are beats on the Government.”<sup>36</sup> Daniel Chisholm and his two brothers, Alex and Tom, all recruits, wrote in a letter on April 4, 1864 that in a torrential downpour which came before they could set up adequate shelter, they ran around to the veterans shelters and asked for a dry spot. All of them succeeded in being allowed in and Daniel’s group was especially nice, making “a rousing fire for me to dry by...and made me a cup of warm coffee to drink.” As was the norm, however, one of the brothers was treated poorly and, after only a brief respite out of the rain, was ordered to march back out into the rain.<sup>37</sup> The veterans seemed to forget that they too were once in the recruits’ situation. While they understood that they would soon be fighting alongside one another, none could comprehend the unprecedented struggle that lay ahead and their reliance upon one another.

As the weather began to get warmer and the roads dried, soldiers in the Army of the Potomac realized that their grim business would soon be at hand. The President and his cabinet denied General Grant’s initial plan. He then proposed a plan of direct attack of the Army of Northern Virginia, moving quickly and in great force. With the completion of the logistical plan for the army’s movements by Andrew Humphreys, General George Meade’s Chief of Staff, one

---

<sup>34</sup> Letter from John Dunbar to his Sister Susie, January 17, 1864, accessed from the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 369.

<sup>35</sup> Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee*, 202-209.

<sup>36</sup> Colliers, *Yours for the Union*, 314-315.

<sup>37</sup> Menge and Shimrak, *The Civil War Notebook of Daniel Chisholm*, 108.

could not help but marvel at the scale of the plan. The army boasted nearly 120,000 men and 4,300 supply wagons. This was a powerful show of force but it would also be unwieldy, because if it was stretched end-to-end, the two rank line would span nearly thirty miles.<sup>38</sup>

Soldiers began their preparations by sending any gear deemed a burden back to storage, only keeping the bare necessities. John Dunbar listed that he turned over his overcoat and his heavy wool blanket, saying that all he needed was a rubber blanket and a shelter half.<sup>39</sup> “Well I am ready,” wrote John Chase, “Got my knapsack all packed and a stock of tobacco on hand...”<sup>40</sup> Some men took the opportunity to console family members back home. Charles Biddlecom reassured his wife that he would not show himself to any unnecessary danger, or any that may be avoided, but reminded her that, if he were to fall, to teach their children that he died a glorious death.<sup>41</sup> Even with their cognizance of the bloody work to come, many men remained stalwart in their hopes of success and none said it better than John Chase once more. Virtually chomping at the bit to get moving he writes, “I hope when grant does move it ill be to some effect and I that if he does half what the papers say that he is going to that there will be H\_ \_ \_ to pay somewhere...”<sup>42</sup>

In the closing days of April, only a week before the spring campaign was to step off, General George Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac, published an order covering a wide variety of information specific to those men whose regiments term of service was expiring. Aside from making a few remarks on the true discharge date of veteran regiments, specifications and a call for any and all complaints to be submitted if there is any confusion, the point of the

---

<sup>38</sup> Trudeau, *Bloody Roads South*, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from John Dunbar to his Sister Mary, April 13, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 369.

<sup>40</sup> Colliers, *Yours for the Union*, 328.

<sup>41</sup> Aldridge, *No Freedom Shrieker*, 135.

<sup>42</sup> Colliers, *Yours for the Union*, 328.

published order comes in the final sentences. General Meade implored that the men of the regiments set to disband soon would accept the Government's decision to hold the regiments until their three-year anniversary of their muster into Federal service. In doing so he also asked that no bands of men tarnish the honorable reputation that they had achieved for themselves through their years of service and if any take place, the offending parties "will be promptly suppressed and can only terminate in speedy and certain punishment." There are a range of emotions brought forward by the proclamation. General Meade is practically begging the veteran soldiers to stay and is threatening them if they even think about disobeying orders. Meade knows the difficulty of the coming campaign and has plenty of anxiety about the new recruits that have been brought to the army. He is calling to their sense of duty, implying that only with the veteran's help can the coming campaign succeed. Unfortunately for General Meade and the rest of the army, the act of tarnishing their reputation had already begun and was set to continue throughout the coming months.<sup>43</sup>

Ill-discipline came in a variety of forms. The spectrum ran from simple disagreement, to refusal, culminating in insubordination through action and of course any number of combinations and niches can be found throughout. It was up to the individual officers at the company, regimental, and brigade level to determine what fell on the spectrum and then would make a judgment on the severity of the crime. If a crime was minor or could be dealt with through a simple reprimand, the commanding officer could then choose to handle it himself, also having the option to punish the individual himself by choosing from list of punishments that they were allowed to give. Only if a crime landed on the more severe end of the spectrum would a courts martial be established.

---

<sup>43</sup> "Discharge of Regiments whose Term of Service have Expired," *Hartford Daily Courant*, April 28, 1864 and "News of the Week. Army of the Potomac," *Weekly Patriot and Union*, May 5, 1864.



The first article listed in the 1861 Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States concerns military discipline and it only has three simple specifications. The first, “ALL inferiors are required to obey strictly...the lawful orders of the superiors appointed over them.” The second establishes that military authority must be implemented with firmness but also kindness. The third specifies that the superiors are not to hurt their inferiors through “tyrannical or capricious conduct, or by abusive language.”<sup>44</sup> That is it. These are the restrictions placed on officers and men as they pertain to the good conduct and discipline of the regiment. And though made law in 1861, these were still very much in effect throughout the winter and spring of 1864. Other manuals that were printed by the United States Government during the Civil War included reprinted sections of the Revised Regulations that pertained to certain duties of the soldier, such as General Daniel Butterfield’s 1862 *Camp and Outpost Duty for Infantry* that included excerpts that pertained directly with the soldiers duties in camp and on the picket line. The same applies to the 1863 *U.S. Infantry Tactics*, which would have been the training manual, all new recruits to the Army of the Potomac. It included all of the 101 Articles of War, many of which outlined what would happen to a soldier if he committed a certain offence.<sup>45</sup>

Because all of this was new to the fresh recruits in the winter of 1863-1864, a picture has been painted of their ill-discipline by veterans and historians that generally characterized them as a band of thieves, conscripts, bounty-jumpers, and all around poor soldiers.<sup>46</sup> Without any doubt,

---

<sup>44</sup> “Article 1: Military Discipline,” *Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861* (Harrisburg, PA: The National Historical Society, 1980), 9.

<sup>45</sup> Daniel Butterfield, *Camp and Outpost Duty for Infantry 1862* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 86-109. And “Appendix: Articles of War,” in *The 1863 U.S. Infantry Tactics: Infantry of the Line, Light Infantry, and Riflemen* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002), 395-415.

<sup>46</sup> See Trudeau, *Bloody Roads South*, 16. Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 21-22. Reardon, “The Impact of Continuous Operations,” in *The Spotsylvania Campaign*, 175-176. Gordon C. Rhea, *Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee May 26-June 3, 1864* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 13. Brooks D. Simpson, “Ulysses S. Grant and the Problems of Command in 1864,” in *The Art of Command in the Civil War*, edited by Steven E. Woodworth (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 144-145.

there were significant issues with discipline when it came to the new additions to the Army of the Potomac. Daniel Chisholm's brother Alex wrote his mother on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1864, about the "greatest way of punishing soldiers here I have ever seen." He continues to explain how a man is tied up by the thumbs so that their feet can only just touch the ground. He also throws in at the end that the army actually killed a man in this way the other day.<sup>47</sup> Nine days later, on March 13, 1864, Daniel wrote to his father providing the general updates to be expected. He mentions, however, that theft is an enormous problem in Alexandria where he and his comrades are being kept at that time. He says, "last night [March 12] one man had 42 dollars taken and another 59 and a few nights before one had 400 dollars stole from him and every night some one loses a cap, overcoat, or knapsack."<sup>48</sup> While Daniel does not give any information regarding whether a recruit, veteran, or civilian was stealing the money and equipment, his location of Alexandria would make the case for the culprit(s) to be fresh recruits to the army. If a man was caught stealing, a favorite and very common punishment was for the word "THIEF" to be written on a board, the board then hung around the man's neck, and he was meant to then march through camp.<sup>49</sup> Once he and his men had arrived at Brandy Station, Virginia with the rest of the army, it seems that the discipline was tightened up for Daniel Chisholm. On April 5, 1864 he mentions in his diary that after a division review, a man named Charles Yauger was "tied up for lip to the capt."<sup>50</sup> When referencing being tied up, the soldier often meant that the man was tied to a tree although it could also mean that he was "bucked-and-gagged," a gruesome punishment where a man's hands were tied together in front of his knees, with a stick or other long object placed underneath the knees but overtop of the elbows, all the while with something solid tied into the

---

<sup>47</sup> Menge and Shimrak, *The Civil War Notebook of Daniel Chisholm*, 104. An image of this punishment was sketched by Charles Wellington Reed and can be seen on page 156 of John D. Billings' *Hardtack and Coffee*.

<sup>48</sup> Menge and Shimrak, *The Civil War Notebook of Daniel Chisholm*, 106.

<sup>49</sup> Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee*, 147-148.

<sup>50</sup> Menge and Shimrak, *The Civil War Notebook of Daniel Chisholm*, 10.

man's mouth.<sup>51</sup> However, if such harsh punishment was enacted, the soldier generally mentioned it by name.

While crimes such as theft were not major, they still posed a threat to overall military discipline and unit cohesion. In a simple sense, because theft was illegal in civilian life, the officers wanted to make sure that the recruits understood that many of those same laws applied to the military world as well. More importantly, however, when small offenses are committed, the potential exists for the domino effect where the crime might spread throughout the unit. The threat also exists for small crimes to lead to big ones. Thus, punishments, especially for recruits, had to be severe enough to send a message. The letters and diary entries of recruits cite this phenomenon where the punishment, usually bucking-and-gagging, was severe enough that they would not want to commit that crime for fear of the punishment.

There were certainly instances of more serious crimes being committed by the recruits. The most heinous of these, in the eyes of the soldiers, officers, and of military law was desertion. New Yorker Charles Biddlecom, a draftee, wrote to his wife saying that he does not "blame any conscript for taking a French leave of this army and the country, too, if he can make an escape." Though he claims he would never desert himself, he has many friends who, throughout the month of April, have been scanning the Blue Ridge Mountains outside of Culpeper, Virginia, planning their route for their escape. All they were waiting for was the weather to clear. "I have not the least doubt that there will be 150 men lost from this regiment by the first day of May," Biddlecom wrote his wife on April 20, 1864. The men even had a plan for their Court Martial if they were caught: that three years was too long to be conscripted, nine months was as long as the

---

<sup>51</sup> Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee*, 146.

Government was lawfully allowed and now that their nine months was up, they would take their leave.<sup>52</sup>

When recruits were caught or captured for their offences, veterans rarely acted with surprise. A few men made mention of the same execution which occurred on December 18, 1864. Two men, one from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vermont and the other from the 5<sup>th</sup>, were sentenced to be executed by firing squad. George E. Blowers was a 23 year-old farmer from Washington, New York who joined Company A, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vermont Infantry on September 15, 1862 and deserted from a camp near Manchester, Massachusetts sometime in the first three days of July, 1863. He put up quite the fight when the provost martial caught him in Vermont and was said to be “grossly insulting to the people visiting the place.” A man by the name of William Blowers of the same company, who might have been a relation, was also arrested with George although he was never court-martialed. John Tauge was a 22 year-old farmer from Vermont who was listed as “absent without leave” from Company F, 5<sup>th</sup> Vermont Infantry beginning on June 28, 1862. He was arrested on September 21, 1863 at Woodsboro, Frederick County, Maryland.<sup>53</sup> Private Albert J. Reid of the 77<sup>th</sup> New York provided a vivid description of the execution, where the entire division was brought out to form a three sided square, the open end being where the prisoner was, and he claimed to be “nearly right in front of the prisoners.” Two chaplains provided a benediction for the accused while the sentence of the court martial was read aloud. The prisoners were then ordered to kneel on their coffins, one jumped with both feet on top of his, making it rattle loudly, and paper hearts were placed upon their chests, with one of the men insisting that he place it himself (the man that is attracting all the attention was probably George Blowers due

---

<sup>52</sup> Aldridge, *No Freedom Shrieker*, 125-132.

<sup>53</sup> Robert I. Alotta, *Civil War Justice: Union Army Executions Under Lincoln* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1989), 90.

to his history of acting out). A band played the dead march as the firing squad moved into position. Reid only remembered hearing “Ready!” and “Aim!” before the muskets cracked and the two bodies fell forward off their coffins to the ground, one dying instantly while the other made one final plea of “Oh Dear Me!,” and then all was still. “I never had such feelings in my life before as at the time the prayers were said by the chaplains,” Reid wrote, “But this occasion was so solemn that I can never forget it.”<sup>54</sup> The other man to witness the execution, Henry Houghton of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vermont and a member of the Vermont Brigade that the two deserters belonged, made a similar comment to Reid saying, “It was a scene I would never wish to witness again.” Writing from memory his only other comment on the matter was that, “They were recruits and those were more apt to desert than the old men as they enlisted for the big bounties and not from patriotism.”<sup>55</sup> However, these men were not the recruits that Houghton and his comrades were seeing around them in their winter quarters. These men had enlisted years ago and took their leave when the Army of the Potomac was very different. Why would they lump these men in with the current recruits? Is it because they saw them as inferiors and that they were lower than them? Houghton, as many others in the army would do throughout this campaign, was generalizing the recruit as a lowly conscript, a bounty jumper, but also as a scapegoat, a scapegoat for the problems being caused by veterans like him.

Whether the veterans would have wanted it or not, it would seem that they would, in fact, pose more of a threat to military authority than the fresh recruits. Theft was also very prevalent in the official winter quarters around Brandy Station. Private Joseph K. Taylor of the 37<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts wrote to his father on April 22, 1864 that Jerome E. King was arrested on the

---

<sup>54</sup> Diary of Albert J. Reid, entry of December 18, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 284.

<sup>55</sup> Henry H. Houghton, *Recollections Of The War: A Personal Account Of The Civil War*, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 400.

charge of robbing the regimental mailbox. King confessed after his arrest that he had “robbed the mail 3 times, and had taken some \$225.” Taylor writes that King had been suspected many times of stealing money but was only now caught. Not mentioning whether King was court martialed or not, though he probably was, Taylor says that he is to “forfeit 10 dollars per month the remainder of his term of service to help pay up the money taken.”<sup>56</sup> R.S. Robertson wrote to his parents in March, 1864 about another thief who was caught, this time though, an extremely harsh penalty was doled out. The entire division was marched to the parade grounds to witness the punishment. The thief had one side of his head shaved and a placard was placed on his back with the word “THIEF” written on it and was then paraded up and down the line to the tune of the rouge’s march. The severity of the man’s punishment, however, came when it was read that the man was to be dishonorably discharged and sent to the Albany Penitentiary to serve one year’s sentence.<sup>57</sup>

Daniel Mowen of the 7<sup>th</sup> Maryland mentioned how the men would often get packages from home that carried smuggles alcohol. Whiskey was forbidden to be brought through the army but any number of tricks and schemes were used in order to fool the inspectors: tin cans with false bottom or with double sides, jars of preserves with whiskey placed within, on top, or on the sides, and many others. But soldiers ran the risk of getting drunk and “for their unruly conduct, fighting, etc. would be consigned to the guard house, fatigue, etc.”<sup>58</sup>

Even minor infractions such as talking back were treated with great severity that winter.

Martin Sigman of the 64<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry remembered in the postwar publication of his diary

---

<sup>56</sup> Letter of Joseph K. Taylor to his Father, April 22, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 352.

<sup>57</sup> Letter of Robert S. Robertson to his Parents, March 20, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 219.

<sup>58</sup> Daniel H. Mowen, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 327.

the punishment of a man from Company D. The man was detailed to fatigue duty, tasked to clean the camp and get wood for the officers. The man retorted that “he would not do it and that the officers could wait on themselves, gather their own wood and clean around their own tents.” He was reported to the officer of the day and a sergeant was ordered to buck-and-gag him. The sergeant tied him to a tree, his hands tied together behind it, and a bayonet was tied in his mouth. “I think he had to stay there until he was wailing to go to work.”<sup>59</sup>

Absenteeism, however, remained a huge problem for the veteran troops and its prevalence places a black mark on their disciplinary record. John Dunbar in his December 28<sup>th</sup> letter mentions one Ed King, one that he had apparently written about before. He reminds his sister Julia that he was the man that had taken a furlough but the sheriff brought him back. King has been in the guard house for nine weeks serving time for his absence but while the regiment was on dress parade “a few days ago,” his sentence, probably from a court martial, was to “forfeit 10 dollars a month... for four months.” “So his furlough cost him quite a little money and more than that, the respect of the whole company. They don’t think much of a man that does like that,” Dunbar wrote.<sup>60</sup> In Dunbar’s April 13<sup>th</sup> letter to his sister also mentioned a man in trouble for his absence. One Lieutenant Harris was under arrest for drawing pay twice (theft) and telling a lie to Colonel so that he could get his furlough faster. What the lie was is not known, but once Harris was caught in his lie, most likely after he had visited home and come back, the rumors began to circulate that he would probably be discharged from the service, something Dunbar sincerely hoped would happen.<sup>61</sup> Daniel Crotty would remember an execution of a single

---

<sup>59</sup> Michael A Vasile, ed., *The Diary of Martin Sigman, 1861-1864: Company “C” 64<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment*, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 320, p.30.

<sup>60</sup> Letter of John Dunbar to his Sister Julia, December 28, 1863, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 369.

<sup>61</sup> Letter of John Dunbar to his Sister Mary, April 13, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 369.

deserter, not the same as the one mentioned by Houghton and Reid, and provides another vivid, multiple page long description of that execution. One of the more striking details regards the inspecting of the muskets, something the other accounts do not mention. The twelve men who are to be the firing squad turn their guns over to another party for loading. Eleven of the guns are loaded with bullets but the last is loaded with a blank cartridge. The firing squad knows this and “each man thinks probably that he had the gun containing the black,” as guns are mixed up and handed to new owners for the execution.<sup>62</sup>

The wide range of disciplinary issues in the Army of the Potomac understandably spurred General Meade to print his stern orders in Northern papers on the eve of the campaign. With the timetable and logistics prepared by Meade’s Chief of staff Andrew Humphreys, at 3 a.m. on May 4, 1864, dismounted members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indiana Cavalry splashed across the Rapidan River at the Germanna Ford.<sup>63</sup> These men would be the first of thousands to cross there that day and begin the Overland Campaign. In accordance with the plan, Federal columns rushed toward the Wilderness over the next few days, near the site of the old Chancellorsville battlefield, to break through the dense forest before Lee could trap them. Unfortunately, they were too slow and on the morning of May 6, dispatches began arriving, indicating that a small force of Rebels was ahead of them on the road. Meade, instead of ordering the men to keep pushing forward, halted his column in the Wilderness and ordered an attack.<sup>64</sup> What would follow would be the first encounter in what would become nearly continuous operations until the first of June. During this time soldiers on both sides remembered the fighting for its sheer brutality and bloodshed. Moments of glory were fleeting and rarely celebrated by the troops

---

<sup>62</sup> Crotty, *Four Years Campaigning*, 123-124.

<sup>63</sup> Trudeau, *Bloody Roads South*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 33.



The army's problems with discipline surfaced as soon as the fighting erupted, though. Meade's staff officer Theodore Lyman wrote in his diary on May 4<sup>th</sup> that his cook had been "spirited away by the provost guard of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps, as a straggler or spy."<sup>65</sup> General John Gibbon wrote at length about the disciplinary issues he encountered during the Battle of the Wilderness alone. During the battle, he found that "the roads behind our line of battle were literally filled with men, thus improperly absent from the ranks." He was so impressed, or perhaps the better word would be infuriated, by the spectacle that he wrote a note to the army headquarters, calling their attention to this issue. He recommended that patrols be formed to round these men up and have "one out of every hundred of them be summarily shot and the men informed that in all subsequent battles the percentage of executions would be increased."<sup>66</sup> Soldiers themselves had their own terms for these men, and Sergeant Crotty wrote, in the section of his memoirs about the Overland Campaign, that there was a progression to these men. "Shirks, bummers, sneaks and thieves, all called camp followers." A shirk is one who, right before the action is about to begin, waits for his opportunity and drops out of line, waiting in the rear. He then evolves into a bummer, a man that will try and do anything in order to stay away from the front. Evolving once more, the soldier becomes a sneak and "tries to get an ambulance to drive" or other such task that would take him even further way from the front. The thief, being the lowest of the low, will "steal from friend and foe alike" to keep his position.<sup>67</sup>

Having battled for multiple days in the flaming Wilderness, Grant made his famous maneuver, solidifying him in the hearts and minds of his men, when he gave the order to turn south. Lee, however, knew a move was coming when his patrols noted that Grant had pulled

---

<sup>65</sup> David W. Lowe, ed., *Meade's Army: The Private Notebooks of Lt. Col. Theodore Lyman* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007), 132.

<sup>66</sup> John Gibbon, *Personal Recollections of the Civil War* (Dayton, OH: Morningside Bookshop, 1977), 223.

<sup>67</sup> Crotty, *Four Years Campaigning*, 141.

back his defenses and the left the Germanna Plank Road unguarded. This meant one thing, Grant was going to move.<sup>68</sup> In the ensuing race, the Confederates barely made it to the crossroads around Spotsylvania Court House before the lead elements of the Army of the Potomac were nipping at their heels. The Confederates created a strong network of earthworks with its most prominent feature being a large salient built in the line. For nearly two weeks, successive frontal assaults battered and bashed the Confederate position.

The hard marching, intense heat, and nearly constant contact with the enemy, however, was taking a massive toll on the army. A rear guard was installed behind the attacking columns as to prevent the stragglers and shirks to reach their safe havens. Daniel Mowen recalled their presence when, while his regiment was assaulting the lines at Laurel Hill, he “received a whack from some missile just below the ribs and to the right of my stomach... and when in the act of firing got another in the left hand.” After some maneuvering, he was ordered to the rear by his Lieutenant to have his wounds dressed. On his way, he was stopped by the rearguard and “halted me as though I was skulking duty.” He returned to his Lieutenant who then escorted him through the guard. When he arrived at the field hospital, he saw one of his sergeants and, when asked what he was doing there, he replied that he had helped some of the wounded back. Mowen reminded him that “there was work in front for him to do.” He replied saying that “it was too poisonous there for him and he was satisfied to stay back as long as he could.”<sup>69</sup>

In this period of the campaign began the process of stopping the disciplinary issues, whatever the cost may be. Hearing reports of officers failing to do their duty, the Provost Guard set about rounding up many of them. Some of these “weak willed officers” were sent to

---

<sup>68</sup> Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 60-61.

<sup>69</sup> Mowen, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 327.

“Company Q,” which was attached to the 150<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania on May 13<sup>th</sup>. These officers were stripped of all rank and were handed a privates musket and the former officers were given an opportunity to “share the fortunes of the regiment and refurbish, if possible, their tarnished reputations.”<sup>70</sup> On May 12, Henry Halleck wired Grant, informing him that “one officer and some hundred men, deserters, have arrived here [Washington] with the wounded, under pretense of wounds, while upon examination is found to be false.” Halleck advised Grant to punish these men strictly and severely, making an example of them.<sup>71</sup> On May 19<sup>th</sup>, a flurry of orders came through. Another officer and about 100 men were rounded up in Fredericksburg after an order by General G.K. Warren was carried out, asking that all headquarters and other unauthorized guards be brought to the headquarters, as no guards were authorized.<sup>72</sup> A circular was also sent out for the third division of the second corps that a “field-officers court-martial will be convened in each regiment of this command for the trial of skulks and stragglers.” The order would go on to dictate that if the full extent of punishment was prescribed that it would have a beneficial effect.<sup>73</sup>

The engagements that took place around Spotsylvania were proving to be the worst yet for military discipline. Aside from the straggling, skulking, and taking refuge in the rear, soldiers began to disobey direct orders. In her piece on the effects of continuous operations, Carol Reardon makes the claim that it was the “Union Army’s short-timers” that were more prone to act in such a way but immediately cites several cases of veteran regiments refusing to move forward. For example, the 35<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts was ordered to advance at the double-quick to support another Massachusetts regiment in the face of heavy fire. In response, “the veterans

---

<sup>70</sup> Reardon, “A Hard Road to Travel,” 188.

<sup>71</sup> “Washington, May 12, 1864,” Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. 36, 652-653.

<sup>72</sup> “Near Fredericksburg, VA., May 19, 1864,” Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, Vol. 36, 874 and 922.

<sup>73</sup> “Circular] HDQRS Third Division, Second Corps,” Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, Vol. 36, 912.

simply about-faced and moved to a place of safety.”<sup>74</sup> The single mention of a new unit in Reardon’s section is of the 57<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, the regiment that the 35<sup>th</sup> was ordered to support. The 57<sup>th</sup> advanced into the teeth of the Confederate crossfire with no support and would never receive any in that advance. The actions of the 35<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts can be summed up by the words of a veteran in the II Corps who said that they “had no intention of dying when they knew that home was just a matter of days away.”<sup>75</sup> Soldiers were fed up. They refused to needlessly throw away their lives in what they believed to be fruitless charges.

Why would Reardon say that it was more likely that the Army of the Potomac’s newcomers would refuse to move forward? While many of the new additions to the army were conscripts or bounty men, a large number were also Heavy Artillery regiments, men who were trained to man the fortifications around Washington. With the heavy losses that had taken place at the Wilderness, Grant received permission to pull these regiments from their garrisons and convert them to infantry. The regiments, however, received a less than warm reception to the army. Many of the army’s veterans believed that the men of the Heavy Artillery regiments, or “heavies” as they became known, had enlisted in such regiments to stay away from the fighting. Some soldiers would call out to them as they passed by, “How are you heavies? Is this work heavy enough for you?”<sup>76</sup> If Reardon only looked at such sources, her image of the relationship between veterans and recruits would be contentious. However, countless accounts from the campaign point to the high regard that the veterans held the recruits once they had proven their worth on the field. At the Harris Farm on May 19, the 1<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts and 1<sup>st</sup> Maine Heavy Artillery Regiments were ordered into battle and fought as the soldiers of 1861 had, in long

---

<sup>74</sup> Reardon, “A Hard Road to Travel,” 189.

<sup>75</sup> Reardon, “A Hard Road to Travel,” 189.

<sup>76</sup> Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 132.

formations, not stopping to fire until they had advanced to the regulation distance, all the while stopping to dress the ranks when gaping holes were created.<sup>77</sup> The effect that this had on the veterans was tremendous. All accusations of soft duty or of wanting to sit out the war comfortably seem to have vanished and a new-found respect for the heavies emerged.

On May 20, 1864, just one day after the Heavy Artillery regiments had proven their worth, the full extent of punishment was sentenced and carried out when John D. Starbird of Company K, 19<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry. John Starbird enlisted in Company K on September 3, 1861. On the company muster rolls of March and April 1862, he was listed as “absent without leave since March 10, 1862” and suddenly reappears on the rolls for March and April 1864. He is brought to trial in the third division, second corps call for action. He is charged with two counts of deserting the colors in the face of the enemy, once “in the Wilderness at or near Chancellorsville, Va. on or about May 7, 1864, and the second “while the regiment was going into action at or near Spotsylvania Court House on or about the 10<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1864.” Although Starbird pleads not guilty, the court finds him not guilty in the first count but guilty in the second. He was then sentenced to be shot to death by musketry at 7 a.m. the following day.<sup>78</sup> Reactions to the execution followed a general pattern, spending little to no time on the matter. Daniel Chisholm mentions it in his May 20<sup>th</sup> letter to his Father, saying that there was a man shot today for deserting his colors. “It was a hard looking sight. But it don’t do to show the white feather here, and there must be some examples made.”<sup>79</sup> Theodore Lyman of Meade’s staff only delegates a few words, “A straggler was today shot in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps as an example.”<sup>80</sup> James Thomas only adds a few more remarks in a letter to his wife saying that, “Genl Meade is very

---

<sup>77</sup> Reardon, “A Hard Road to Travel,” 193.

<sup>78</sup> RG 153, Case NN-1943, National Archives.

<sup>79</sup> Menge and Shimrak, *The Civil War Notebook of Daniel Chisholm*, 115-116.

<sup>80</sup> Lowe, *Meade’s Army*, 166.

sever on skulkers.” He also mentions that there were many more that were to be immediately tried.<sup>81</sup> John Gibbon however, the division commander, had scathing words for both Starbird, his division as well as the army command. When the high command ordered the court martial of all men deliberately deserting the ranks, Gibbon remarked that it was “better than nothing,” but it still did not meet the demand for action. “Under the order, only the most flagrant cases would be taken notice of whilst the great mass of offences would still be disregarded and the evil would continue to deplete our ranks,” he later said.<sup>82</sup> But a flagrant one *was* brought before him, and in one of his best regiments.

Some controversy arose immediately after Starbird’s execution as the testimony of the five witnesses was not included in the transcript when it was sent to the Judge Advocate General. In response, General Meade wrote a very telling note that captures the punitive approach of the high command. In his response, Meade claimed that he thought himself completely justified “in ordering the immediate execution of prisoner without trial.” However, he then thought it better to go through the “ordinary modes of precedent” and the that was why the case was actually brought before a court. But what of the Judge Advocate General’s initial question? Meade responded saying that no record was made.<sup>83</sup> John Gibbon affirms this in his memoir, saying, “...his plea taken, and witnesses called to testify under oath, but no evidence recorded. The case was reported as a flagrant one and the evidence showed that the man was *in the habit of running away* (his emphasis) every time the regiment went into action.”<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Thomas and Sauers, *The Civil War Letters of First Lieutenant James B. Thomas*, 183.

<sup>82</sup> Gibbon, *Personal Recollections of the Civil War* (Dayton, OH: Morningside Bookshop, 1977), 223.

<sup>83</sup> RG 153, Case NN-1943, National Archives.

<sup>84</sup> Gibbon, *Personal Recollections of the Civil War* (Dayton, OH: Morningside Bookshop, 1977), 223-224.

The answers to two questions remain to be seen: was the process used in the case of John Starbird legal and what effect did his execution have on the Army of the Potomac?

There were many different forms of courts-martial: regimental, which was replaced in 1862 by the “field officer’s court martial,” garrison, and what was known as “general” courts martial.<sup>85</sup> The Regulations for the United States Army, 1861, calls for a body of five to thirteen officers to comprise the court and a President of the court will be chosen from that number. Of the twenty-one sections of Article XXXVIII, only a few are of particular relevance to this case. For example, section 891 states that a “complete and accurate record” will be kept by the Court and it will be signed by the President and Judge Advocate. Section 895 lists the punishments available to the Court Martial. Section 896 says that the Judge Advocate will present the case to the “officer having authority to confirm the sentence” who will then give his decision and his orders. Finally, section 899 gives “a superior military commander,” one that is of higher rank than the officer listed in section 896, the permission to stop the execution of the sentence if he feels that the case was “void upon the face of the proceedings.”<sup>86</sup> The Articles of War, printed at the end of *The 1863 U.S. Infantry Tactics* from the United States War Department, provide further insight into the actions taken by the court on May 20, 1864. Articles 20 and 21, for example, discuss the punishment for those who were “convicted of having deserted... shall suffer death” and that the punishment for one who would “absent himself, without leave” would be punished “according to the nature of a court-martial.” Similarly, Article 50 says that any man who would “quit his guard, platoon or division” would also be punished at the discretion of a court martial. Finally, Article 89 states that every officer that can call a court martial can also

---

<sup>85</sup> Joseph C. Fitzharris, “Field Officer Courts and U.S. Civil War Military Justice,” *The Journal of Military History* 68, no. 1 (2008): 48.

<sup>86</sup> “Article XXXVIII: Courts-Martial,” *Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861*, 124-127.

“pardon or mitigate” any sentence, besides the death penalty, in which case he can then send the case, along with all its documentation and decisions, to the President of the United States who can then pardon the accused at his discretion.<sup>87</sup>

While few mistakes were made in the court proceedings, the court took full advantage of the loopholes found in the Articles of war. The only mistake that is apparent is that a clear and accurate record of the court’s proceedings was not fully created as is required under Section 891 of the US Army Regulations. While the Assistant Judge Advocate General’s signature appears at the bottom of the page, the document does not record any of the testimony given by the witnesses, nor any of the information regarding the swearing-in of the participants.<sup>88</sup> The neglect of the witness testimony is of vital importance and the Judge Advocate General in his letter to General Meade raised this very question. Why would this information be omitted? Is it possible that no witnesses were called, either for the prosecution or for Starbird’s defense?

The Court also used very specific language in the charges and specifications brought against Starbird. In using the term deserted rather than fell back or refused to advance, the Court brought out social and legal implications that elevated the case to more than a petty offense.<sup>89</sup> Socially, the term deserter would be synonymous with the term coward, and thence cowardice, which was an ongoing problem in the Army of the Potomac at the time. In this way, the crime could then be applied to any man in the army. Legally, the term allowed the Court to apply Article 20 of the Articles of War, allowing them to consider the death penalty. Without the deserter label, Starbird could only be considered under Articles 21 and 50, which, even though

---

<sup>87</sup> “Appendix: Articles of War,” *The 1863 U.S. Infantry Tactics*, 395-415.

<sup>88</sup> RG 153, Case NN-1943, National Archives.

<sup>89</sup> RG 153, Case NN-1943, National Archives.



the punishment would have been left up to the discretion of the court, it would have been much more difficult to sentence Starbird to death.

It would seem that, if in every other way the Court followed regulation and protocol, no witnesses were ever called. The Court recorded everything else that took place in its brief proceedings and thus, if witnesses had been called, the record would show it. General Meade wrote that their sole reason for calling a Courts-Martial was to adhere to the regulations and the “normal modes of precedent.” What was the rationale behind not calling witnesses? Was the high command afraid that witnesses would go against their desired decision? There was obviously some doubt as to Private Starbird’s guilt because the court found him not guilty in the first specification and guilty in the second.<sup>90</sup> Thus, their fears would hold some merit.

Considering the case on its own, it is hard to imagine why the Court chose to sentence John Starbird to death. The record shows that the trial seemed to have been a sham with little to no evidence brought against him and no witnesses brought to testify in any capacity. Witnesses and evidence certainly could have been examined in the trial but the words of George Meade betray that idea with his statement that he felt completely justified in ordering Starbird’s immediate execution. Was it evidence that showed Starbird to be found not guilty in the first specification? Was it witness testimony? What can be gleaned, however, is that John Starbird’s execution was rather useful and fortuitous for the Army of the Potomac’s high command. The II Corps, of which Gibbon’s Division and the 19<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts were a part, had seen the brunt of the fighting up until the date of Starbird’s execution. Gibbon himself recorded the 19<sup>th</sup> Mass. as one of his best, most dependable regiments, and one that had proven its worth on countless

---

<sup>90</sup> RG 153, Case NN-1943, National Archives.

battlefields throughout the war. This deserter tarnished the regiment's, brigade's, division's, and corps' reputation. Was execution the correct punishment?

The Articles of War also allowed the commanding general to stay the execution. The second section of Starbird's court martial case file, however, shows the level of General Meade's commitment to strict discipline in the ranks. "The Major General Commanding is determined to Exercise the utmost rigor of the law in punishing those cowards who disgrace their colors by basely deserting them in the presence of the Enemy."<sup>91</sup> There was not a single movement towards stopping the execution of John Starbird. The Army of the Potomac had been pulling men out of the woods, from roadbeds, "rear guards," wagon trains, and supply bases. They were forced to enact abnormal penalties to force men to do their duty such as "Company Q" and the rear guard of battle lines. They felt that they had exhausted all available solutions to their growing problem and finally resorted to executions. In this way, they made examples of a few men to scare the rest into obeying orders.

General Grant's campaign toward Richmond, however, was far from over. After John Starbird's execution on May 20<sup>th</sup>, the Union and Confederate armies would remain around Spotsylvania Court House for a few more days only to move by the left flank once more. After nearly three weeks of constant contact, the men were completely exhausted. Cavalryman Charles Adams would write to his father, "it is very wearing and tiresome, this always moving in procession... Human patience cannot endure such wear and tear."<sup>92</sup> Provost Martial General of the Army of the Potomac Marsena Patrick wrote two or three times a week about the horrible straggling and looting that was taking place. Before the army even evacuated their positions

---

<sup>91</sup> RG 153, Case NN-1943, National Archives.

<sup>92</sup> Worthington Chauncy Ford, *A Cycle of Adams Letters*, 140.

around Spotsylvania on May 22, Patrick had to deal with the “many complaints” that had come to him regarding “marauders and house plunderers.” He was disgusted to find out, after inquiring to Generals Meade, Grant and their staffs, that they were involved in the practice as well! That they were “engaged in sheep stealing, fowl stealing and the like... I had quite a time capturing a party of Sheep Stealers, including those of Genl. Rawlins...” The following day, Patrick recorded that there was much straggling in the marches, especially from the IX Corps. In response, on May 28<sup>th</sup>, Patrick recorded giving a man “a good hiding” who belonged to one of the Heavy Artillery regiments of the IX Corps. He said that the heavies had been plundering and destroying everything they could find in houses along the march but knew that the whipping would do the army well as it was done in front of the man’s brigade as well as the V Corps supply trains.<sup>93</sup>

What is notably missing from Provost Martial General Patrick’s account of the final weeks of the Overland Campaign are mentions of desertion, refusal to move forward, or any executions. In fact, the next execution to take place in the Army of the Potomac would be of Private William Johnson, 23<sup>rd</sup> USCT who was convicted of rape and was hung on June 20, 1864 under a white flag of truce and in full view of both Union and Confederate lines.<sup>94</sup> What may have caused the lack of crimes, however, was that enlistments were finally running out for veteran regiments. The last weeks of the Overland Campaign saw more than two-dozen veteran regiments leave Federal service. Members of the famed 14<sup>th</sup> Brooklyn were allowed to leave May 22, 1864 and remembered that their “dreams in camp and prayers on bloody battlefields for

---

<sup>93</sup> David S. Sparks, ed. *Inside Lincoln’s Army: The Diary of Marsena Rudolph Patrick, Provost Martial General, Army of the Potomac* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1964), 375-379.

<sup>94</sup> Alotta, *Civil War Justice*, 116-117.

three long years [came true]... They were going home!.”<sup>95</sup> Daniel Crotty wrote in his memoirs that June 10, 1864 was his regiments chosen day. Because he and a small number of his comrades had reenlisted, they would not be returning home just yet but “we do not censure them or feel hard toward them for no re-enlisting, for we consider that they have done their share, at least for awhile, in this great struggle.”<sup>96</sup> The men that had caused so many issues throughout the last six months were finally leaving.

On the home front though, the war was viewed in a very different light. As war correspondents rushed to the army, the Northern populace anxiously awaited any news. Only on May 6, two full days after the campaign began, would the widely read *Philadelphia Inquirer* make their first reports. An article entitled “A Grand Advance on Richmond” did not include any information about the previous two days fighting but instead, they finally felt “authorized to state, since it cannot now afford information to the enemy,” that the campaign had begun.<sup>97</sup> In fact, President Lincoln did not even learn of the fighting in the Wilderness until the evening of May 6<sup>th</sup> when a reported from the *New York Tribune* finally made it to a telegraph station at Union Mills.<sup>98</sup> The reasons for this were twofold. First, it was extremely difficult for correspondents to send their stories via telegraph and second, the Federal high command was wearing of telegraphing their movements and actions to the enemy, something that had plagued the Army of the Potomac’s previous leaders.

Beginning with the *Inquirer’s* article, however, an air of positivity reigned supreme. One day later, May 7, 1864, the *New York Herald* published a column on the current campaigns that

---

<sup>95</sup> Reardon, “A Hard Road to Travel,” 195.

<sup>96</sup> Crotty, *Four Years Campaigning*, 138.

<sup>97</sup> “The Campaign in Virginia: A Grand Advance on Richmond,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 6, 1864.

<sup>98</sup> J. Cutler Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955), 532.

all Federal armies were engaged entitled “The Advance of Our Armies – The Great Struggle.” The column states that, even though Lee tends to take the offensive in situations like these, “his chance of success would be so infinitely little.” It goes on to say that if Lee did the unthinkable and struck at Grant, “we have full faith that the result will inevitably be a victory for our army.” Obviously, the writer was not well acquainted with the situation with the Army of the Potomac at that time. Lee had done the unthinkable and a horrific, two day battle in the Wilderness led only to stalemate, not victory. The most positive action to come out of the Wilderness for the army was that Grant ordered the columns to turn south, further continuing the campaign. More remarkably still, the Herald’s article ends with a reassuring note that the Army of the Potomac’s morale “was never so high... and that their discipline was never better.”<sup>99</sup> The positive nature of the column shows how disillusioned the Northern press, as well as the Northern populace who read the papers, were to the experiences of their sons and brothers on the battlefield. Nearly all of the soldiers in the army would not have a chance to send another letter to their loved ones for many weeks after the campaign began and the newspapers would be their only source of information for that time. In a sense, then, the positive nature of the articles served an important role in maintaining status quo on the home front. At the same time, however, the information disseminated by the presses fueled the idea that one more victory would end the war and with that idea in mind, the positive ignorance would continue.

On May 13, 1864, the *New York Herald* once again printed an overwhelmingly positive article entitled “Our Operations in Virginia – Absolute Victory Certain.” The article completely ignored the slaughter that had taken place in the previous six days and instead placed the majority of its focus, for the Army of the Potomac at least, on the “brilliant exploit of the Second

---

<sup>99</sup> “The Advance of Our Armies – The Great Struggle,” *New York Herald*, May 7, 1864.

corps of the Army of the Potomac,” or the breakthrough at the Mule Shoe at Spotsylvania. It further stated that, because of the overwhelming victory, Lee had to sever communications with Richmond as well as his supply lines, making his army all but used up.<sup>100</sup> Aside from its continuance of the positive disillusionment trope, this article also starts a trend of referencing the 1862 Peninsula Campaign that was headed by George B. McClellan. The article made note that after seven days of fighting in 1862, Lee was compelled to fall back to Richmond. “We believe that the seventh day has even more completely destroyed [the Army of Northern Virginia’s] power now than it did then,” the article claimed.<sup>101</sup>

There must have been some who did not believe the tales told by the newspapers because Charles Carleton Coffin of the *Boston Journal* interviewed General Grant on the night of May 10 after that day’s particularly gruesome fighting. He asked the General if he any comment to make about what had transpired that day. After providing a brief answer about the “hard fighting today,” but paused and added something with more of a personal touch. He said that fighting was the only way to quell this rebellion and “fighting means that men must be killed.” He went on to say that if the public thought that the war could be won in any other way, they had better find someone other than himself to lead the army.<sup>102</sup> If General Grant could understand the people were growing unhappy with the casualty figures, why were the papers still printing the positive hopeful-truth?

As the casualty numbers mounted and letters began to arrive from the front, the press began to shift their perspectives. In the days immediately preceding the army leaving Spotsylvania, the men finally had an opportunity to write letters home. They often began

---

<sup>100</sup> “Our Operations in Virginia – Absolute Victory Certain,” *New York Herald*, May 13, 1864.

<sup>101</sup> “Our Operations in Virginia – Absolute Victory Certain,” *New York Herald*, May 13, 1864.

<sup>102</sup> Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War*, 538.

similarly with promises that they were still alive but quickly devolved into confused sequences of words and sentences as they tried to describe what had happened. The Northern populace was stunned. What happened to grand victory? Certain victory? In response, newspapers such as the *New York Herald* began to publish the full accounts their correspondents sent rather than a summary. Their May 16, 1864 issue, for example, devoted an entire page to correspondent L. A. Hendrick's report. The structure of the article alone lends credence to the theory that the Northern populace began to demand more from their newspapers. Half of the page is devoted entirely to Hendrick's story, beginning with a "Retrospective" that led with his May 5<sup>th</sup> observations and moved chronologically from there.<sup>103</sup> In a similar vein, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania's *Weekly Patriot and Union* published an article entitled "The Southern Army – More Hard Fighting to be Done" on May 26, 1864, four days after the armies left Spotsylvania. The story is a reprint from the *Washington Chronicle* that means to caution the Northern populace against believing in the "single grand victory" trope anymore. "But until [the Army of Northern Virginia] is vanquished, they will fight with an energy and a desperation that must command the admiration of ever honorable spirit," and that, "such troops can be beaten only by a succession of desperate struggles." The article is not entirely a dour warning against the overzealousness of the previous month's journalism, however. The final two sentences are poised almost perfectly to encapsulate the aims of General Grant the Army of the Potomac in their campaign: "They will yield to an inevitable necessity only when they recognize it as inevitable. That they will be made to feel this we have not the slightest doubt."<sup>104</sup>

Much like the press before the campaign, however, the disciplinary issues of the Army of the Potomac are non-existent. Only one journalist reported anything negative about discipline in

---

<sup>103</sup> "Grant Lee's Army on the Right Bank of the Po," *New York Herald*, May 16, 1864.

<sup>104</sup> "The Southern Army – More Hard Fighting to be Done," *Weekly Patriot and Union*, May 26, 1864.

the Federal armies, George A Sala of the London *Daily Telegraph*. In his article printed the spring of 1864, he mentioned that there was a great deal of “quiet hanging and shooting of marauders” in the “outlying military commands” but never in the Army of the Potomac “where not even flogging was permitted.”<sup>105</sup> While Provost Martial General Marsena Patrick and the IX Corps man that was whipped would disagree with Sala’s remarks, could this be the only reporting of disciplinary issues during this campaign? Is it possible that the only way that the Northern populace would hear about it would be from their loved ones in the field? Confederate General E. Porter Alexander would write in his memoirs that Mr. John Swinton, a reporter for the *New York Times*, stated after the June 3, 1864 assaults at Cold Harbor that, once General Meade ordered the renewal of the attacks, the men refused to move forward because they believed the attacks to be futile. Alexander states that he flatly denied the claim because he never saw such defiance of orders.<sup>106</sup> It would seem that the Northern populace had no idea that such a breakdown in military discipline had occurred.

The Army of the Potomac was an army in flux. The veterans of such famous fields as Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg were on their way out of the army. In their place would come fresh recruits from across the North, many of whom were conscripted or were enticed to enlist because of a lucrative bounty. This awkward, constantly changing amalgamation of troops eventually forced Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia to do just as the *Harrisburg Weekly Patriot and Union* predicted that it would, “yield to an inevitable necessity.” This victorious outcome, however, came at a heavy cost in lives and set the precedent for future disciplinary action. Modern historians have, when mentioned, characterized the disciplinary breakdown of the Army of the Potomac as the fault of the new recruits that saturated the ranks

---

<sup>105</sup> Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War*, 523.

<sup>106</sup> Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War*, 545.



throughout the Overland Campaign. And why not? The conscripts were forced to be there, the bounty-men were greedy criminals, and the heavies were not used to the “real war.” Historical memory of this campaign has followed the trends of veteran’s post-war reminiscences and memoirs where the recruit became the scapegoat for the poor performance of the Army of the Potomac’s best soldiers. Furloughs home and bounties attracted some of those veterans to reenlist for the duration of the war but for those that chose not to, the prospect of being killed or wounded mere weeks before their discharge provided the impetus for ill-discipline and disorderly conduct. The grueling nature of the Overland Campaign added to the stresses where constant contact with the enemy provoked behavior not seen before in the ranks of the Army of the Potomac. The recruits, unlike their veteran comrades, moved forward, retaining their dress parade-like formations, and obeyed all orders strictly. For this, they gained the respect of the veteran initially but, as time wore on, the veterans placed themselves atop the lofty, manly pedestal. For their part, the Northern populace remained ignorant of the issues plaguing the army. Reports sent to newspapers across the North chose synthesis over providing the full story. The damage, however, had already been done. Because the Northern populace was searching for the single grand victory, one that was brought to them by the command of Ulysses S. Grant, the reality that they eventually learned shocked them. Yet, the disciplinary issues were still largely unknown.

The soldiers of the Army of the Potomac dealt with a new style of unrelenting warfare, loss of comrades and their best soldiers, and the infusion of new ones. The federal high command wracked their brains to fix the issues but eventually resorted to execution to make an example for the army. These disciplinary issues had huge ramifications for the campaign and caused longstanding issues that would last well into the next phase of the Civil War.

## Historiography

### Primary Sources

*The Civil War Notebook of Daniel Chisholm*, edited by W. Springer Menge and J August Shimrak, contains a tremendous amount of information through Chisholm's surviving letters and diary. The work provides a unique view into the mind of a new recruit to the Army of the Potomac, and, with the inclusion on some of the letters of his brother, a comparative view in how recruits to the same regiment responded differently. He includes many writings about the disciplinary issues that the army faced in the winter and early spring of 1864. Similarly, many of the sources taken from the bound volumes at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Battlefield include letters on new recruits to the army. Combined, these collections provide the researcher with a fresh look at the practices of the Army of the Potomac. Their emotions run more freely than their veteran counterparts and therefore are more apt to include the minutiae of particular events, creating a more vivid picture of particular situations. The letters of new recruits were of extreme importance in determining the crimes committed and punishments witnessed and received for such actions. They also provided ample examples of bravery in combat and again, because it is their first experience, were much more open with their dialogue of what was going on.

The counterparts to the recruit narratives were those of the veterans, which were often more cryptic and simple rather than open and vibrant. Again, the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania volumes provided many letters written by veterans to explain their experiences and rationales. Some of the published letter collections, such as *Yours for the Union: The Civil War Letters of John W. Chase* edited by John S. and Bonnie B. Collier, followed in the same lines.

What was particularly useful from Chase's was that he was an artilleryman and thus had a different experience throughout the campaign than did the other sources, most of which were infantrymen. *Four Years Campaigning in the Army of the Potomac*, which was the memoir of Daniel G. Crotty of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Michigan Infantry, provided a unique opportunity to understand the post-war memories of the common soldier as they related to the topic of discipline. Crotty's work was especially vivid in language toward different groups of people, especially the recruits, in his memoir.

### Secondary Sources

Within Gary Gallagher's anthology *The Spotsylvania Campaign* is an article written by Carol Reardon entitled, "A Hard Road to Travel: The Impact of Continuous Operations on the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia in May 1864." In it, Reardon argues that, just as the title would indicate, the continuous contact that both armies had took a large toll on the command, morale, and discipline. Her text poses a number of good questions throughout, leading to further discussion of particular topics. The way that she handles the disciplinary issue fits well with this paper until she reached the conclusion that it must have been the recruits causing the issues. As stated in the full paper, her argument says that recruits were more prone to act without discipline and goes on to cite three examples of veteran units and their issues with discipline. Thus, her article provided the springboard for further discussion and analysis of the role that veterans played in the breakdown of military discipline in the Army of the Potomac.

Within another of Gary Gallagher's anthologies, *The Wilderness Campaign*, John Hennessy is included with his article "I Dread the Spring: The Army of the Potomac Prepares for the Overland Campaign." His article covers the various ways that the army prepared for the

coming campaign, including a synopsis of George Meade's career up to that point. Hennessey includes many modes of preparation that might seem obvious but his analysis creates a more abstract way of looking at a particular occurrence. Probably most valuable piece to be found within the article, besides the modes of preparation itself, is the way that Hennessey claims that the Union Army is in a state of "cautious optimism." All too often the army is characterized as being apprehensive or confident, but the idea of cautious optimism sums up perfectly the many thoughts of the Army of the Potomac on the eve of the campaign.

Another article from an anthology, Brooks D. Simpson's "Ulysses S. Grant and the Problems of Command in 1864" in *The Art of Command in the Civil War* edited by Steven E. Woodworth, provides a good synthesis of the various expectations that the Northern people had for Grant. He also includes soldier's opinions in his piece and both characterizations were vital in the understanding of how the Northern press was reacting and how the soldiers were as well.

Robert I. Alotta's groundbreaking study, *Civil War Justice, Union Army Executions under Lincoln*, provided background and context for the executions cited. The book itself aimed to examine the rules and regulations for courts martial and then how they were interpreted and applied during the Civil War. What was most useful from this work was the ability to cross-reference dates and descriptions mentioned by soldiers in letters and diaries with the information found within the book and be able to provide a more vivid image of the scene. For example, soldiers could write an entry or letter discussing the execution of any man and just by using the date he soldier recorded, the names of those executed, what they did, what happened in their trial, and even what they did before the war were all available. Of course, some executions were privy to more information than others but the cross-reference ability of his work was undeniably useful in the execution of this paper.

The mammoth volume, *The North Reports the Civil War*, by J. Cutler Andrews follows the newspaper reporters from various presses across the Northern states. In more of a narrative form, Andrews tells the story of how these men got their stories. It is not always heavy on the actual war content but provides anecdotes for different situations that different reporters and correspondents were involved in. In that way, he is providing small micro-histories to tell the larger tale of how the Northern presses received their information. For the purposes of this paper, the work was vital in providing context to the stories that were taken from Northern newspapers. The questions of how and why could be answered rather than simply the what from what was printed in the paper. It also provided at least one anecdote to discuss the prevalence of military discipline issues found in the newspapers and helped to prove that it was simply not reported.

Finally, Mark Grimsley's *And Keep Moving On: The Virginia Campaign, May – June 1864*, served as the primary “overview text” for the project. His goal was to provide a brief synthesis of the entire Overland Campaign and he more than succeeds in this regard. It was the main text used in the paper for background information surrounding the campaign as well as providing minor anecdotes for the disciplinary issues facing the campaign. However, Grimsley, like Carol Reardon, claims that it was recruits that were causing the majority of the issues in the campaign. Thus, his work also serves as a springboard for the broader discussion of historical representation that Reardon's piece does.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

- Acken, J. Gregory ed. *Inside the Army of the Potomac: The Civil War Experience of Captain Francis Adams Donaldson*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1998.
- Billings, John D. *Hardtack and Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.
- Butterfield, Daniel. *Camp and Outpost Duty for Infantry 1862*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003.
- Campbell, Eric A. "A Grand Terrible Drama" *From Gettysburg to Petersburg: The Civil War Letters of Charles Weelington Reed, Illustrated by Reed's Civil War Sketches*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.
- Collier, John S. and Collier, Bonnie B. eds., *Yours for the Union: The Civil War Letters of John W. Chase, First Massachusetts Light Artillery*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004.
- Crotty, Daniel G. *Four Years Campaigning in the Army of the Potomac*. Kearny, NJ: Belle Grove Publishing Co., 1995.
- Diary of Albert J. Reid, entry of December 18, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 284.
- "Discharge of Regiments whose Term of Service have Expired," *Hartford Daily Courant*. April 28, 1864.
- Ford, Worthington Chauncey, ed. *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865, Vol. II*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920.
- Gibbon, John. *Personal Recollections of the Civil War*. Dayton, OH: Morningside Bookshop, 1977.
- "Grant Lee's Army on the Right Bank of the Po," *New York Herald*. May 16, 1864.
- Gurowski, Adam. *Diary: 1863 – '64 – '65, Vol. III*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968.
- Houghton, Henry H. *Recollections Of The War: A Personal Account Of The Civil War*, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 400.
- Letter from George Myron Jones to his Wife and Children, December 28, 1863 and to Friends a Home, February 7, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 324.

Letter from George Myron Jones to his Mother, January 4, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park Archives Vol. 324.

Letter of John Dunbar to his Sister Julia, December 28, 1863, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 369.

Letter from John Dunbar to his Sister Susie, January 17, 1864, accessed from the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 369.

Letter of John Dunbar to his Sister Mary, April 13, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 369.

Letter of Joseph K. Taylor to his Father, April 22, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 352.

Letter of Robert S. Robertson to his Parents, March 20, 1864, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 219.

“Lieutenant General Grant’s Movements,” *The New York Herald*. March 19, 1864.

Lowe, David W., ed. *Meade’s Army: The Private Notebooks of Lt. Col. Theodore Lyman*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007.

Menge, W. Springer and Shimrak, J. August, eds. *The Civil War Notebook of Daniel Chrisholm: A Chronicle of Daily Life in the Union Army, 1864-1865*. New York: Orion Books, 1989.

Mowen, Daniel H. *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 327.

“News of the Week. Army of the Potomac,” *Weekly Patriot and Union*. May 5, 1864.

“Our Operations in Virginia – Absolute Victory Certain,” *New York Herald*. May 13, 1864.

“Rebel Prospects of the Spring Campaign,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. April 20, 1864.

*Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861*. Harrisburg, PA: The National Historical Society, 1980.

RG 153, Case NN-1943, National Archives.

Sparks, David S., ed. *Inside Lincoln’s Army: The Diary of Marsena Rudolph Patrick, Provost Martial General, Army of the Potomac*. New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1964.

“The Advance of Our Armies – The Great Struggle,” *New York Herald*. May 7, 1864.

“The Army of the Potomac,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. April 13, 1864.

“The Campaign,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. April 27, 1864.

“The Campaign in Virginia: A Grand Advance on Richmond,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. May 6, 1864.

“The Latest News.” *The Hartford Daily Courant*. May 21, 1864.

“The Situation,” *The New York Herald*. April 4, 1864.

“The Southern Army – More Hard Fighting to be Done,” *Weekly Patriot and Union*. May 26, 1864.

Thomas, Mary Warner and Sauers, Richard A., eds., *The Civil War Letters of First Lieutenant James B. Thomas, Adjutant, 107<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers*. Baltimore: Butternut and Blue, 1995.

United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, 1-53*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901.

U.S. War Department, *The 1863 U.S. Infantry Tactics: Infantry of the Line, Light Infantry, and Riflemen*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002.

Vasile, Michael A. ed., *The Diary of Martin Sigman, 1861-1864: Company “C” 64<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment*, accessed at the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Vol. 320, p.30.

### **Secondary Sources**

Aldridge, Katherine M., trans. and ed., *No Freedom Shrieker: The Civil War Letters of Union Soldier Charles Biddlecom, 147<sup>th</sup> Regiment New York State Volunteer Infantry*. Ithaca, NY: Paramount Market Publishing Inc., 2012.

Andrews, J. Cutler. *The North Reports the Civil War*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955.

Alotta, Robert I. *Civil War Justice: Union Army Executions Under Lincoln*. Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1989.

Dunkelman, Mark H. *Brothers One and All: Esprit de Corps in a Civil War Regiment*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2004.

Fitzharris, Joseph C. “Field Officer Courts and U.S. Civil War Military Justice.” *The Journal of Military History* 68, no. 1 (2008): 47-72.

Furgurson, Ernest B. *Not War But Murder: Cold Harbor 1864*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.

Grimsley, Mark. *And Keep Moving On: The Virginia Campaign, May-June 1864*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002.



- Hennessey, John J. "I Dread the Spring: The Army of the Potomac Prepares for the Overland Campaign," in *The Wilderness Campaign*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Reardon, Carol. "A Hard Road to Travel: The Impact of Continuous Operations on the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia in May 1864," in *The Spotsylvania Campaign*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Rhea, Gordon C. *Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee May 26-June 3, 1864*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2002.
- Simpson, Brooks D. "Ulysses S. Grant and the Problems of Command in 1864," in *The Art of Command in the Civil War*, edited by Steven E. Woodworth. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.
- Trudeau, Noah Andre. *Bloody Roads South: The Wilderness to Cold Harbor, May-June 1864*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989.
- Wiley, Bell Irvin. *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union*. Indianapolis, MN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1952.