

State University of New York College at Buffalo - Buffalo State College

Digital Commons at Buffalo State

History Theses

History and Social Studies Education

8-2012

Motivations of Civil War Soldiers from Western New York

Justin T. Howell

State University of New York, Buffalo State College, jhowell1926@yahoo.com

Advisor

Dr. Gary Marotta, Professor of History

First Reader

Dr. Gary Marotta, Professor of History

Second Reader

Dr. Kenneth S. Mernitz, Associate Professor of History

Department Chair

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D., Professor of History

To learn more about the History and Social Studies Education Department and its educational programs, research, and resources, go to <http://history.buffalostate.edu/>.

Recommended Citation

Howell, Justin T., "Motivations of Civil War Soldiers from Western New York" (2012). *History Theses*. 11. https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/history_theses/11

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/history_theses



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

Abstract:

The American Civil War was the bloodiest conflict in the history of the United States. Over 620,000 lives were lost during this war. Yet, what motivated volunteer soldiers to fight so valiantly for so long is the focus of this paper. After reading over 100 individual diaries and letters from volunteer Civil War soldiers from Western New York, who fought on the Union side, I have concluded that certain motivations influenced soldiers more than others to keep fighting. Motivations of the thrill of combat, adventure, and hatred of the enemy served as the initial motivations for Western New York Civil War soldiers to go to war. While the motivations of duty, honor, patriotism, and ideology/religion functioned as both initial and sustaining motivations, the impulses of courage, self-respect and group cohesion were the main sources of combat motivation. This paper focuses on volunteer soldiers specifically from Western New York and looks at their initial motivations, along with their sustaining motivations. I focused my research specifically on Western New York because of its heterogeneous population makeup and the large role it played with the Underground Railroad due to its close proximity to Canada. This paper keeps in mind the time period in which the Civil War took place and society's values in antebellum America. This paper also looks at the technological innovations which took place during the Civil War and how they changed the battlefield for the volunteer soldier. This paper does not ignore the draft which occurred later in the war, and the draft riots associated with it. Finally, it looks at how the soldiers survived after the war was over.

History changes over time. This was no different in Western New York during the Civil War. What motivated soldiers to initially volunteer into military service was

different from what motivated them when they experienced combat. My research will help support James McPherson's groundbreaking study in which he makes a number of generalizations on what motivated Civil War soldiers to fight. The goal of my research was to perform a test of McPherson's general hypotheses and see if they were supported by soldiers from Western New York. From my research, McPherson's generalizations are clearly supported by Western New York soldiers.

State University of New York
College at Buffalo
Department of History

“Motivations of Civil War Soldiers from Western New York”

By

Justin T. Howell

Submitted in Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of
History
Master of Arts
August 2012

Approved by:

Gary Marotta, Ph.D.
Professor of History
Chairperson of the Committee
Thesis Advisor

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D.
Chair and Professor, History and Social Studies Education

Kevin J. Railey, Ph.D.
Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

Table of Contents

Introduction: 1

- Historiography
- Thesis
- Note on sources used

Chapter I Initial Motivations: 13

- Patriotism as an initial motivation
- The “Thrill” of battle as an initial motivation
- Hatred of the enemy helps to modify the war by the larger concept of “duty”
- Antebellum secondhand sources give inaccurate view of war
- Northerners believed the American Civil War would be short
- Role of technological innovations affecting soldiers perceived bravery

Chapter II Sustaining Motivations: 30

- Battlefield Experience; Proof that “Sense of Adventure” was not a sustaining motivation for Western New York Soldiers
- Patriotism as a sustaining motivation
- Role of religion as a sustaining motivator
- Emancipation Proclamation: How it motivated the North
- Role of discipline and respect for officers as a sustaining motivation
- Role of “Pride” and “Honor” as sustaining motivations
- Primary group cohesion as a sustaining motivator
- Hatred of the enemy as a sustaining motivation
- Letters from home as sustaining motivators

Chapter III Changes in the American Civil War: 69

- Changes in recruitment policies later in the Civil War lead to draft riots in Buffalo, New York
- Changes in battle strategies later in the Civil War

Chapter IV Postwar Memory/Conclusion: 78

Images cited in paper: 82

Bibliography: 83

Introduction

The American Civil War was the bloodiest conflict in United States history. Over 620,000 lives were lost during this war, which spanned a five year period, while millions were wounded. Engagements such as Gettysburg, Shiloh, the Wilderness, and Chickamauga are ranked among the great battles of American history. They bear witness to the courage and tenacity with which the Union and the Confederate soldiers fought for their beliefs. In the spring of 1861 a nation of innocents went to war. Few of the young men who so boldly offered their lives to the cause of the Union had an accurate conception of what combat was like. Only thirteen years had passed since the nation's last major military conflict in the Mexican War, but that had been a foreign affair, conducted many hundreds of miles from northern territory. The War of 1812 had witnessed the invasion of American soil by columns of British regulars, but that conflict was a half-century in the past and had largely been fought on the margins of a vast and sparsely populated country. Northerners had to reach back to the War of Independence to find a conflict that had racked the heartland of the nation and involved so great a proportion of its young men. That bitter struggle had much to offer an innocent people yearning to know war's lessons. It had killed a large percentage of the American population, laid waste to farms and businesses, and embittered a generation of Americans. But few Northerners realized or remembered these things in 1861. Already more than eighty years past, the War of Independence had become more legendary than real in the minds of most citizens of the Republic.¹

¹ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 1-2.

The American Civil War was perhaps the central crisis, the crossroads of our nation's destiny; it determined whether we would be split apart and form various nations much like the fate South America experienced, or remain a united nation with the advantages of combined resources and population. It also essentially resolved for this nation the age-old question of where ultimate authority rested: at the state or national level. It brought into full perspective a defining crisis of the soul, of whether any people so dominant, so advantaged, could "own" the lives of other human beings.² With death so much a part of everyday life during the American Civil War, the gruesome lottery of personal demise affected over six hundred thousand Americans, North and South. In four years of warfare the grim toll of military-related deaths accounted for about 2 percent of the nation's population, nearly all of whom were young.³ One would need a loss of life equal to that sustained on September 11, 2001 every single day for four years to recreate that scale today.⁴

The final military triumph of Union arms was preceded by years of inefficient and costly handling of troops on the battlefield, which produced defeats of stunning proportion and victories of dubious value. Within each major battle of the American Civil War were dozens of case studies which proved that the conflict was so long and so bloody in large part because of commanders' inability to handle their men, compensate

² Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), xiii.

³ Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007), 65.

⁴ Chandra Manning, "All For The Union...and Emancipation, too" *Dissent* Winter 2012: 91. Retrieved on March 30, 2012 from <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=4111>.

for the difficulties of the terrain, and find a solution to the devastating power of massed rifle musketry.⁵

This study will focus specifically on Civil War regiments from Western New York. Western New York is approximately the size of Massachusetts and Connecticut combined. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, this area was called the “Western Door” by the Seneca Indians who were the westernmost of the five nations of the Iroquois Confederation. Therefore, they were known as the “Keepers of the Western Door”. Western New York includes seventeen counties divided into six regions.⁶ While other historians have looked at this topic, I am contributing a study which focuses on a much narrower location of regiments as opposed to looking at all of the Union States or even all of New York State. By doing this, my results will be more accurate since I will not have to place soldiers from different states with different lifestyles in the same category.

Historiography

What motivated these men to fight for so long and cause massive amounts of casualties is a question that has been asked numerous times. Many historians have written social histories about the American Civil War and the soldiers who fought in it. James McPherson has written a number of books on this topic and is well known in the field of American Civil War history. In his book, *For Cause and Comrades*, he analyzes more than 25,000 letters and nearly 250 private diaries from men on both sides. McPherson believes the soldiers of the American Civil War remained powerfully convinced of the ideals for which they fought throughout the conflict. This is contrary to what many other scholars believe. Motivated by duty and honor, and often by religious faith, these men

⁵ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 60.

⁶ See map of Western New York on page 86, Figure 1.

wrote frequently of their firm belief in the cause for which they fought: the principles of liberty, freedom, justice, and patriotism.⁷

Another historian who has written about this topic is John Robertson. In his work, “Re-enlistment Patterns of Civil War Soldiers”, he focuses on Civil War soldiers re-enlistment patterns throughout the war. Robertson attempts to find out if soldiers with similar characteristics re-enlisted more than others and if this could possibly have played a role in the outcome of the Civil War. Robertson concludes that the problem with crediting victory with re-enlistment of certain occupational groups is the lack of information about the social characteristics of the soldiers who re-enlisted.⁸ In other words, Robertson discovered that there was not enough information on the soldiers who re-enlisted to credit victory with the re-enlistment of certain groups.

A third historian who has written about this topic is Richard Kohn. In his work titled, “The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research” he concludes that the truth of the matter is that the “American Soldier” never existed: “The most pernicious myth of all is that there has ever been a prototypical American in uniform.”⁹ The fact that battle has varied over hundreds of years, no single phenomenon could possibly explain the motives of soldiers. Thus, the American Soldier has been a symbol, a political and cultural artifact for a nation diverse in culture, uncertain in unity, and concerned through much of its history with proving its superiority to the rest of the world. Rarely have our armed forces constituted an economic or social

⁷ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 114.

⁸ John Robertson, “Re-enlistment Patterns of Civil War Soldiers” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 32, no. 1 (2001): 34. Retrieved on March 5, 2012 from Bengal Central Search, <http://proxy.buffalostate.edu.2090/stable/3656484>.

⁹ Richard Kohn. “The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research” *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (June 1981) 560. Retrieved on March 8, 2012 from Bengal Central Search, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1860370>.

profile of the majority of the general population. By this, Kohn is referring to the fact that our armed forces come from all different economic and social backgrounds. They do not all have the same social or economic status as one another. In his work, Kohn concludes that, “Nor does the evidence support the belief that Americans enlist or fight purely out of patriotism.”¹⁰ I disagree with this conclusion and will show in my work that in some cases Americans did in fact enlist and fight purely out of patriotism.

A fourth historian who has written about this topic is Peter Karsten. In his work, “The ‘New’ American Military History: A Map of the Territory Explored and Unexplored,” he concludes, “After the first surge of voluntary enlistments prompted by pure enthusiasm, social pressures and ideological commitments, the government did not expect to find men willing to serve out of a sense of political obligation.”¹¹ Karsten suggests that the elite support for the cause stemmed from a general appreciation for the North’s war aims. This support included a general sense of how secession might adversely affect one’s personal opportunities and ambitions from the genuine religious concerns with “the sin of slavery” and from the more cosmopolitan and politically informed citizen’s sense of duty.¹²

“Who Fought for the North in the Civil War” by W.J. Rorabaugh concludes that military participation measured by ethnicity, property holding age, and occupation as interrelated variables reveals striking variations in rates of participation according to

¹⁰ Richard Kohn. “The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research” *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (June 1981), 565. Retrieved on March 8, 2012 from Bengal Central Search, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1860370>.

¹¹ Peter Karsten. “The ‘New’ American Military History: A Map of the Territory. Explored and Unexplored” *American Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1984), 394. Retrieved on March 10, 2012 from Bengal Central Search, <http://proxy.buffalostate.edu:2104/stable/10.23007/2712740?origin=api&>

¹² *Ibid.*, 394. Retrieved on March 10, 2012 from Bengal Central Search, <http://proxy.buffalostate.edu:2104/stable/10.23007/2712740?origin=api&>

socioeconomic traits. Rorabaugh focuses on soldiers from Concord Massachusetts, whereas my focus is on soldiers from Western New York. In 1861 when the American Civil War broke out and so many youthful Northerners, much to the surprise of Southern planters, rushed to enlist, patriotic sentiment was no doubt paramount. Rorabaugh also writes that “Northern patriotism was based in part, on a dark belief that Southern domination of the federal government had hindered northern and western development.”¹³

In *The Union Soldier in Battle*, Earl J. Hess attempts to understand how the Northern soldier dealt with combat in the American Civil War. It is not a fully developed study of soldier morale, but an interpretive essay about the experience of battle in the American Civil War and the mechanisms whereby the Northern soldier was able to face emotionally the shock of battle, master his reactions to it, and continue to effectively serve the cause. Unlike many other authors, Hess believes that the soldiers of the Union were not victims, but were victors over the horrors of combat.¹⁴

Wiley Sword’s work, entitled *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War*, focuses on the diaries and letters of Civil War soldiers written on the battlefields, in camps, and even the deathbeds of soldiers from both the North and the South. He focuses a lot on the concept of “courage” and shows that Civil War soldiers exhibited different forms of courage.¹⁵

¹³ W.J. Rorabaugh. “Who Fought for the North in the Civil War? Concord, Massachusetts, Enlistments.” *The Journal of American History* 73, no.3 (1986), 701. Retrieved on February 15, 2012 from <http://proxy.buffalostate.edu:2104/stable/10.2307/1902983?origin=api>

¹⁴ Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), ix.

¹⁵ Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), xiv.

Thesis

Civil War soldiers were literate soldiers, and most of them wrote home frequently, as it was the only way for them to keep in touch with the homes and families that many of them had left for the first time in their lives. “There never was an army like this for correspondence. Go through the camp at any time, at any hour of the day, and you will see hundreds of soldiers writing letters.”¹⁶ These words were written in an article that appeared in the Waterville Times on October 11, 1861. In addition, their letters were uncensored by military authorities and are uniquely frank in their criticism and detailed in their reports on marches and battles, relations between officers and men, political debates, and regiment morale.

After analyzing over one hundred diaries and letters from voluntary Civil War Union soldiers from Western New York, I have concluded that these soldiers clearly fought for a number of reasons. Convictions of duty, honor, patriotism, and ideology and/or religion functioned as the initial and sustaining motivations of Civil War soldiers. The impulse of courage, self-respect, and group cohesion were the main sources of combat¹⁷ motivation.

My work on volunteer Civil War soldiers from Western New York supports James McPherson’s arguments in *For Cause and Comrades*. McPherson argues that Civil War soldiers remained powerfully convinced of the ideals for which they fought for throughout the conflict, which is contrary to what many other scholars believe.¹⁸

¹⁶ “Letter Writing in the Army,” *Waterville Times*, October 11, 1861. Retrieved on April 2, 2012 from <http://localhistory.morrisville.edu/sites/letters/writing.html>.

¹⁷ By “combat motivation”, I am referring to motivations that helped soldiers when they were actually fighting the enemy.

¹⁸ McPherson’s primary sources seem far more grounded regarding his conclusions about the American Civil War as opposed to other scholars work in this period of United States history.

“Motivated by duty and honor, and often by religious faith, these men wrote frequently of their firm belief in the cause for which they fought: the principles of liberty, freedom, justice, and patriotism.”¹⁹ My work does not support Richard Kohn’s conclusions²⁰ in his work titled, “The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research,” in which he concludes the evidence does not support the belief that Americans enlist or fight purely out of patriotism.²¹

It must be noted that the conclusions I have come to in this paper are, so to speak just the tip of the iceberg. Although I have analyzed over one hundred diaries/letters from volunteer Western New York Civil War soldiers, by no means am I attempting to say that they are all representative of all the Union soldiers who fought in the Civil War. Their fascinating diary entries have, however, shed light on what motivated these soldiers to go off and fight voluntarily. These diary entries also help to explain the motives of the Western New York region as a whole, which were often different than motivations for individual soldiers.

During the middle of the nineteenth century Western New York was among the leaders in the revolutions in transportation, agriculture and industry. Turnpikes, canals (notably the Erie Canal), and railroads connected eastern cities with western markets. In addition, Western New York’s farmland was some of the most productive in the nation. Rapid-flowing rivers offered power for major industrial sites. Following these expanding economic opportunities, people (including African Americans as well as European

¹⁹ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 114.

²⁰ Richard Kohn writes about United States soldiers in all of the wars the United States have been involved in. This helps to explain why I do not support his findings. Kohn also does not use soldier’s diaries as the basis for his methodology. He uses second hand sources written by others.

²¹ Richard Kohn, “The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research” *The American Historical Review* 86, no.3 (June 1981) 560. Retrieved on March 8, 2012 from Bengal Central Search, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1860370>.

Americans of many different backgrounds) poured into Western New York. They came from several different cultures, New England Yankees, Dutch and Yorkers from eastern New York, Germans and Scots from Pennsylvania, and immigrants from England and Ireland.²² These new immigrants brought with them social and moral reforms which blossomed in Western New York. Knowing this situation, it is easy to understand the motives of Western New York soldiers as a whole. It was a typical “burned over” district, activated by religion and abolition. However, the focus of this study is motivations for individual volunteer soldiers from Western New York.

Note on Sources

The primary sources I used are letters, journals, and diaries written contemporaneously to the dramatic events depicted. Due to a general lack of censoring (except for letters by prisoners of war), there was a positive freedom of expression that enabled what often became a purging of emotions, following a particularly traumatic or significant event. To tell the family or a close friend of one’s experiences and inner most thoughts was, to some, a way to sustain rational equilibrium--the reality confronted, survived, and reported. The experience of combat was not entirely conveyable, but the emotions were. To describe the horror, and admit one’s fright, served perhaps as a catharsis of the soul, not only relieving pent-up emotions, but in some cases helping steel the psyche of the next coming fury.²³

When the war first ended, most Northern soldiers had no interest in telling about the war. For many, it was too hard to think about for several years after its conclusion.

²² Martin Bruegel. *Farm, Shop, Landing: The Rise of a Market Society in the Hudson Valley, 1780-1860*, 2002, 28.

²³ Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 182.

However, as time went on, these attitudes changed. Hard memories softened and distance gave the veteran soldier a new perspective. This allowed him to be able to write about his experiences. By the 1880's, more and more Northern veterans were writing about their experiences. By the 1890's, the number of veterans writing about their wartime experiences multiplied exponentially. Many of these writings were not published, but just kept in family papers, while others chose just to speak about the war with relatives.

Whichever way the Union soldier chose, he broke his silence, and after nearly a generation, the war became real again. These Civil War veterans created one of the most remarkable bodies of literature in American history. No other event inspired so many books, articles, and unpublished texts as did the American Civil War.²⁴ William T.

Sherman had this to say about the accurateness and descriptiveness of Civil War soldier's writings:

Who but a living witness can adequately portray those scene's on Shiloh's field, when our wounded men, mingled with rebels, charred and blackened by the burning tents and underbrush, were crawling about, begging for someone to end their misery? Who can describe the plunging shot shattering the strong oak as with a thunderbolt, and beating down horse and rider to the ground? Who but one {who} has heard them can describe the peculiar sizzling of the minie ball, or the crash and roar of a volley fire? Who can describe the last look of the stricken soldier as he appeals for help that no man can give or describe the dread scene of the surgeon's work, or the burial trench?²⁵

It must be noted that not all of the writings by Civil War soldiers were alike. Their writings can be categorized into four broad categories. The first group of writers, known as the ideological veterans, vigorously reasserted their faith in the cause. This group was the most prominent among Civil War soldier's writings.

The second group, unlike the ideological veteran, could find no self-assurances of any kind about the war. These men were known as "lost soldiers" and were unique

²⁴ Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 160-161.

²⁵ Quote by William T. Sherman. Retrieved on March 8, 2012 from, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 1.

among Civil War veterans. They refused to attend reunions or to dwell on the adventure of military life or the value of the cause. The third group, a larger group of veterans, did not look to the past as the ideological soldier, or into nothingness as did the “lost soldier”. They looked into the future. They were ultimately pragmatic realists, who accepted the necessity for war and made the best of a hard reality.

The final group of soldiers was known as “Silent Witnesses”. Unlike the “Ideological Soldier”, the “Lost Soldier” or the “Pragmatic Soldier”, who all gave full evidence of the horrors of battle, this final group did not dwell on the nature of battle. Instead, they concentrated on memories of comradeship, camp life, amusing incidents, foraging, marching, and a variety of other non-lethal experiences that were a large part of being a soldier in the 1860’s.²⁶ It must also be noted that the literary standards and the dictates of polite Victorian society convinced many soldiers to soften or avoid certain issues in their writing.

Many of the soldier’s diaries whom I read from Western New York were not from the same regiment. There were many regiments²⁷ located within Western New York. Given the widespread practice of recruiting regiments from the same locality, the cost of a single, fierce engagement to a community might be appalling. When Francis E. Pierce of the 108th New York described the Battle of Fredericksburg to his brother, his account read like a town registry.

²⁶ Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 181-182.

²⁷ The following website gives a very detailed list of the many Civil War Infantry units from New York State; http://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/civil_infIndex.htm

Bob Collins had his left leg taken off close to his body and it was cut into four times besides and the foot was cut into. It made a ghastly looking wound. Charles Clark had his left arm knocked to pieces, also his left thigh and knee. Frank Downing struck in the hip; John Sanders struck in about four or five places. It was awful.²⁸

²⁸ Francis E. Pierce, "I Have With the Regiment Been Through a Terrible Battle", *Civil War Times Illustrated* 1, no. 8 (December 1962): 6. Retrieved on March 8, 2012 from Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 27-28.

Chapter 1 Initial Motivations

Patriotism as an initial motivation

As awful as this sounds, it unfortunately was not uncommon. At the beginning of the war there was no shortage of Union volunteers. All of the volunteers had their own motives for joining the cause, however; there were a number of similar initial motivations that most soldiers professed when they first enlisted. Many of the Union soldiers' diary entries I analyzed explained in detail their reasons for enlisting. On March 4, 1861 Abraham Lincoln said the following in his first inaugural address, "The central idea of secession was the essence of anarchy, and it defied the Constitution and the rule of law."²⁹ Union volunteers from Western New York echoed this. According to a letter from Henry S. Gansevoort, a New York Lieutenant to his father, "Constitutional liberty cannot survive the loss of unity in the government...If {secession} can prosper under such auspices surely the downfall of civilization like that which devastated Rome has returned to the desolate world."³⁰

In order to understand why the concept of patriotism was such an influential motivation for volunteer Union soldiers from Western New York, one needs to understand the characteristics of Union soldiers from New York, specifically Western New York. Most Yankees made a living with calloused hands and strong backs rather than with professional training or intellectual finesse. Nearly half of all Federal soldiers were farmers, and about a tenth of them were common laborers. Most of the rest were skilled artisans. The percentages could vary from one unit to the next. The 154th New

²⁹ Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address" March 4, 1861. Retrieved on March 8, 2012 from, <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/1inaug.htm>

³⁰ Letter from Henry S. Gansevoort to his father, August 4, 1861 in Memorial of Henry Sanford Gansevoort, ed. John D. Hoadley (Boston, 1875). Retrieved on March 11, 2012 from, James M. McPherson, *What They Fought For*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 32.

York³¹ Infantry had a much higher proportion of farmers, 73 percent, than the national average. The educational level of Union soldiers reflected their working class origins. In a massive study of over ten thousand Federal soldiers, Benjamin Gould found only that 47 out of 1000 had any education or professional training beyond grammar school. The impressively high literacy rate, over 90 percent, also meant that the average Union soldier was adept at describing his war experiences. These soldiers approached battle with a model based on hard work and determination.³²

One major characteristic of working class culture which played a major role in the soldier's ability to face combat was a dedication to the ideal of patriotism. This arose from the political and social conservatism that was typical of working-class Northerners. Many soldiers took patriotic jargon and ideals seriously, readily identified with the symbols of American nationalism, and easily made the connection between self-sacrifice and love of country. They were genuinely ready to die for the cause.³³

Young men were better equipped to handle combat than older men, because they were more pliable and could be molded more easily. The Federal Army was filled with young men. By 1863, three-fourths of all Union soldiers were under thirty years of age; more than half of them were less than twenty five years old. Historian Bell Wiley noted in his social history of the Union soldier that morale was much stronger, more vibrant, and more persistent among the young than among the old. Men who were in their middle twenties or younger tended to be unmarried and thus less worried about families at home.

³¹ The 154th Regiment, New York Volunteers was recruited from the counties of Chautauqua and Cattaraugus. It was organized at Jamestown, New York, where it was mustered into the United States service on September 24, 1862.

³² Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 133-134.

³³ *Ibid.*, 141.

Physically, they endured the stress of campaigning more successfully than their older counterparts and “recovered more quickly from the shock of combat.”³⁴

Based on my own research, most Union soldiers from Western New York professed patriotic³⁵ motives for initially enlisting. Abstract symbols or concepts such as country, flag, the Constitution, liberty, and the legacy of the American Revolution figured prominently in their explanations for why they enlisted. Many men from the North found the language of duty essential to persuade their reluctant parents or wives to sanction their decision to enlist. The English born son of a farmer in Western New York writes that he was “Sorry that he [his father] was so opposed to my going to do my duty towards putting down this awful rebellion.”³⁶

To fully understand this idea of duty, one needs to understand how the Victorians defined the term “duty”. They understood it to be a binding moral obligation involving reciprocity. In other words, one had a duty to defend the flag under whose protection one had lived.³⁷ It must also be noted that this concept of duty was also cited by a number of Confederate soldiers. However, they were more likely to speak of honor: one’s public reputation, one’s image in the eyes of his peers.³⁸

Patriotism and nationalism were powerful sustaining motivations for Union soldiers. These abstract concepts have often times been difficult to understand. Southern motives were easier to understand. Confederates fought for independence, for a way of

³⁴ Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge, 1952), 292, 303.

³⁵ To define the term “Patriotism” in this paper, I simply mean love and loyalty to one’s country.

³⁶ Letter from John Pellet to parents, Aug 4, 1861. Retrieved on March 12, 2011 from, James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23.

³⁷ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23.

³⁸ Aaron Sheehan-Dean. “Everyman’s War: Confederate Enlistment in Civil War Virginia.” *Civil War History* 50, no.1 (2004). Retrieved on February 23, 2012 from Bengal Central Search, http://proxy.buffalostate.edu:2181/journals/civil_war_history/v050/50.1sheehan-dean.html

life, for their homes, ultimately for their survival as a nation.³⁹ Then, it is perhaps true that Northern nationalism was more abstract and intangible than its Southern counterpart. A New York captain in 1863 wrote, “If we lose this war, the country is lost and if we win, it will be saved.”⁴⁰ These ideas of patriotism and nationalism can also be seen in Captain Oscar C. Fox’s story. Captain Oscar C. Fox was a Principal at Nelson Academy in Portage County, a town located in the southwest corner of Livingston County, New York. In 1860, he left the Academy and returned home to make arrangements for a tour of Europe, but before his departure the bombardment of Fort Sumter changed his whole plan. He determined to remain and serve his country. In May, he proceeded to Binghamton and enlisted. He remained there about a month, but as there was little prospect of being mustered into service, he moved to Cortland and entered a law service temporarily. However, on September 26, 1861 when a regiment was finally instituted at Cortland County, he entered whole heartedly into it.⁴¹

The concept of patriotism is mentioned throughout numerous letters as a strong initial motivation for Civil War soldiers from Western New York. Initially, this motivation seemed very abstract and almost unrealistic. Words such as, “Glorious,” “Sacrifice,” “Hearts bleeding for the welfare of the country,” would be mocked if spoken today as they were in Ernest Hemingway’s work *A Farewell to Arms*. Even in the 1860’s such phrases in a Fourth of July speech or at a recruiting rally might evoke a cynical response.

³⁹ Aaron Sheehan-Dean. “Everyman’s War: Confederate Enlistment in Civil War Virginia.” *Civil War History* 50, no.1 (2004). Retrieved on February 23, 2012 from Bengal Central Search, http://proxy.buffalostate.edu:2181/journals/civil_war_history/v050/50.1sheehan-dean.html

⁴⁰ Letter from Paul A. Oliver to Sam Oliver, January 2, 1863. Retrieved on March 15, 2011 from, James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 99.

⁴¹ Biography of Captain Oscar C. Fox. Retrieved from the Regimental history of the 76th New York, on March 2, 2011 from, <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76foxo.html>.

However, these words occurred in letters to loved ones from men on the front lines who did give their lives. Therefore, they must be taken seriously. I must admit, I still remained skeptical until I encountered the letters of two Quaker brothers, Edward and David Ketcham, farmers from Western New York, whose ideological convictions overcame their pacifism and caused them to enlist into the 120th New York Infantry regiment under the command of Colonel Sharpe, leaving behind a widowed mother. As Edward was leaving, his mother wept; but the brave boy could only answer from his earnest soul, “No man is too good to die for his country.”⁴² While Edward was enduring, with cheerful spirit, the discomforts and fatigues inseparable from military life on the march, David the younger brother became more dissatisfied with his inaction at home every day. Every letter from camp was to him a fresh excitement. The desire to join his brother, and participate in the glories and dangers of their country’s service grew upon him constantly. The spirit of piety and patriotism combined to urge them both.⁴³

Unfortunately, Edward Ketcham was killed at the Battle of Gettysburg. Three months later, Lieutenant David Ketcham was captured in a skirmish and taken to “Libby Prison”⁴⁴ where he was placed in horrendous conditions. It is here that he succumbed to a

⁴² Letter from David Ketcham to his Mother, August 19, 1862. Retrieved on February 23, 2012 from, A. J. H. Duganne *Fighting Quakers: A True Story of the War For Our Union* (New York: J.P. Robens, 1866), 29.

⁴³ A. J. H. Duganne “Fighting Quakers: A True Story of the War For Our Union” (New York: J.P. Robens, 1866), 55.

⁴⁴ Libby prison consisted of a three-storied stack of brick buildings, formerly used as a tobacco-warehouse, and overlooked the Canal and James River in Richmond, Virginia. Ten feet by two feet was the average space of floor allowed each man, little more than the dimensions of a grave; where they were constrained to sleep, work, cook, eat, and exercise. They were not allowed the use of benches, chairs and stools, nor even to fold their blankets and sit upon them. The prison was overrun with vermin. The floors were recklessly washed, late in the afternoon and were therefore damp and dangerous to sleep upon. Almost everyone had a cough in consequence. There were seventy five windows in these rooms, all more or less broken, and in the winter the cold was intense. *Ibid.*, 98-99.

fever. Even while he was dying, his faith remained firm in the cause of his country and he died at last, “To make men free.”⁴⁵

Nelson Chapin, an upstate farmer, is another fine example of a soldier from Western New York who wrote about patriotic motives for fighting. In a letter to his wife on October 19, 1863, Chapin writes, “My country, glorious country, if we have only made it truly the land of the free....I count not my life dear unto me if only I can help that glorious cause along.”⁴⁶

To reiterate, patriotism and nationalism were powerful sustaining motivations for Union soldiers from Western New York throughout the war. This is evident in Adjutant Hubert Carpenter’s life. When the war began, Carpenter was pursuing his studies at Ithaca Academy. He would have become a world class scholar and occupied a prominent place among literary men. His love of country led him to share the toils and perils of a soldier. He resolved that his country should first be saved; then if he survived the conflict, he would again return to his favorite studies-Greek, Latin, French and German. He enlisted on September 16, 1861. He quickly moved up the ranks over the years. However, unfortunately on May 7, 1864 in the Battle of the Wilderness, he was killed.⁴⁷ In his letters, although he made no public profession of religion, he had faith in God and the patriotic cause for which he freely gave his life.

At the start of the American Civil War, it was not uncommon for soldiers to enlist solely for the adventure and excitement it would bring them. However, this does not

⁴⁵ A. J. H. Duganne “Fighting Quakers: A True Story of the War for Our Union” (New York: J.P. Robens, 1866), 101.

⁴⁶ Letter from Nelson Chapin to his wife, October 19, 1863, in Chapin Papers. Retrieved on March 10, 2012 from James M. McPherson, *What They Fought For 1861-1865*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 34.

⁴⁷ Biography of Adjutant Hubert Carpenter. Retrieved from the Regimental history of the 76th New York, on March 2, 2012. <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76Carpenterh.html>

explain how the huge volunteer armies of the American Civil War could have come into existence and sustained such heavy casualties over four years unless many of these volunteers really meant what they said about a patriotic willingness to die for the cause. According to a chart taken from “New York in the War of the Rebellion” by Frederick Phisterer, from the year 1862, to the end of the war in 1865, 341 men out of 1,012⁴⁸ from the 76th voluntary regiment from New York State were killed, of whom 56 died in the hands of the enemy.⁴⁹

A genuinely committed abolitionist farmer in his late thirties who enlisted in the 20th New York, and whose son later joined the 120th New York and was killed in action, wrote, “If anyone enlists to be a soldier with any less motive than a pure sense of duty my humble opinion is that he will be disappointed. Let all come in welcome, but let them know what is before them.”⁵⁰ Another example in which volunteer soldiers from Western New York show a willingness to die for a patriotic cause occurred during the siege of Port Hudson. In a diary entry by Henry Warren Howe a sergeant, written to his parents he explains why he volunteered to take part in a dangerous mission. “You may wonder why I volunteered to undertake a work of such danger. I thought of the mighty interests at stake....and I concluded that the great assaults which it promised were worth the sacrifice.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Statistic was retrieved on March 2, 2012 from, <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76bycounty.html>

⁴⁹ Frederick Phisterer, *New York in the War of the Rebellion*, 3rd ed. Albany: J.B Lyon Company 1912. Retrieved on March 5, 2011 from <http://dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/76thInf/76thInfTable.htm>

⁵⁰ Letter from Jacob Heffelfinger to Jennie Heffelfinger, August 11, 1862. Retrieved on March 7, 2012 from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 29.

⁵¹ Diary entry from Henry Warren Howe, May 26, 1863. Retrieved on March 7, 2012 from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 115.

It is important to keep in mind what Howe's social and educational background consisted of prior to enlisting to help understand some of his possible motivations for enlisting. Howe was born in New Hampton, New Hampshire on January 12, 1841. He resided in New Hampshire until he was six years old when his family moved to Lowell, Massachusetts. He attended public school in Lowell and graduated from Lowell High School in 1857. He attended one season at the New Hampton Seminary in New Hampshire and then returned to Lowell. He then entered the office of A.L. Brooks and Company, lumber dealers where he remained for three years. In April 1861, Howe was in Ogdensburg, New York with Skillings, Whitney, and Barnes, dealers in lumber when the war began shortly thereafter. According to Howe, "I felt it a duty to enlist, and a duty to my country and flag to defend the same against a rebellious people living in the Southern states, whose aim it was to overthrow the government and dissolve the Union, unless they were allowed to extend their institution of slavery."⁵²

The "Thrill" of Battle as an Initial Motivation

When looking at volunteer soldiers from Western New York, it appears that at first these soldiers would rather go into battle than perform mundane tasks off the battlefield. This makes sense since many of these young men enlisted solely for the adventure associated with war. Lieutenant Ralph W. Carrier is a great example of this. In the summer of 1861, Carrier's division was summoned for active service on ten days notice. However, waiting until November with no prospect of the regiment seeing active service, Lieutenant Carrier with M.B. Cleveland, a Methodist minister attempted to raise

⁵² *Life of Henry Warren Howe: Diary and Letters Written during the Civil War 1861-1865* (Lowell, Massachusetts: Courier Citizen Company Printers, 1899) 5. Retrieved on February 17, 2012, from <http://www.archive.org/texts/flipbook/flippy.php?id=passagesfromlife00howe>.

a company for the 39th Regiment. They had gathered thirty nine men when they were ordered to join another regiment heading to Albany.⁵³

The “thrill” of combat was perceived as an incentive by many, at least at the onset. To boldly fight the enemy, make him flee, and to taste victory seemed indelible as a perception of combat glory. Further, who could resist the inspiring martial pageantry and the campfire talk about battle’s fierce ardor? Twenty one year old Horace B. Ensworth of Oswego, New York, was one of those caught up in the furor when he wrote home in the spring of 1862, a few days before going into battle for the first time. He was a private in Company B, of the 81ST New York Infantry. From his letter, one can see he is excited and cannot wait to see battle for the first time. “We are at Fairfack [actually Warwick] Court House now. That is ten miles from the place called Yorktown, where the Rebel troops are. We shall see fun before long. We all want to see it badly. That will tell what the 81[st] is [made of].”⁵⁴

Before it was experienced, combat often seemed compelling and dangerous. “Seeing the elephant” was a popular expression of the time meaning enduring combat. The term had derived from the traveling circus, at each new town it visited; local boys would be hired to water that awesome and often mean-tempered elephant. There seemed to be a compelling spirit of adventure and fascination with “the creature”, but when in close proximity to those trampling feet and probing trunks, said one experienced water

⁵³ A.P. Smith “Lieutenant Ralph W. Carrier” Regimental History of the 76th New York, 1867. Retrieved on March 5, 2012 from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76carrier.html>.

⁵⁴ Letter from Horace B. Ensworth to his father and sister at home, April 20, 1862. Retrieved on March 10, 2012 from, Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 11.

boy, “you won’t like it a damn bit.”⁵⁵

Hatred of the Enemy helps to modify the war by the larger concept of duty

Many soldiers repeatedly expressed a hatred of the enemy in letters home, especially early in the war by those whose experience in warfare was limited. Much of the indignation stemmed from newspaper or secondhand accounts of atrocities and inspired ruthlessness that as the war often became modified by personal honor and the larger perspective of duty. For instance, in an article which appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* in New York on Saturday February 22, 1862, a graphic unpleasant description of the capture of Fort Henry, Tennessee is published.

She [The Ship] got thirty-one shots, some of them going completely through her. A ball went into her side forward port, through her heavy bulkheads, and squarely through one of her boilers, the escaping steam scalding and killing several of the crew. Captain Porter, his aid, his aid, C. P. Britton, and Paymaster Lewis, were standing in direct line of the balls passing, Mr. Britton being in the centre of the group. A shot struck Mr. Britton on the top of his head, scattering his brains in every direction. The escaping steam went into the pilot house, instantly killing the pilots. Many soldiers at the rush of steam jumped overboard and were drowned.⁵⁶

It was from accounts like this that the war for many Western New York soldiers was modified by the larger concept of duty. The consciousness of duty was pervasive in Victorian America. Many Northern men found the language of duty essential to persuade reluctant parents or wives to accept their decision to enlist. John Pellet, the English-born son of a farmer in Western New York was sorry to hear that his father “was so opposed to my going to do my duty towards putting down this awful rebellion,” but “I ought to and I

⁵⁵ Excerpt from Byron R. Abernathy, ed., *Private Elisha Stockwell, Jr., Sees the Civil War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958) 8ff. Retrieved on March 10, 2012 from, Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 38.

⁵⁶ “The Capture of Fort Henry 1862”, *Harper’s Weekly Journal of Civilization* Vol. 6 no. 269. February 22, 1862. Retrieved on April 3, 2012 from <http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/civil-war/1862/battle-fort-henry.htm>

must” fight for the “rights & freedom” of “our adopted country.”⁵⁷ The impersonal task of winning for the cause often dominated one’s thoughts while in combat, transcending in one’s mind the personal motives contemplated beforehand. Thus, in the heat of battle many would fight with intense aggression and kill enemy soldiers without hesitation. Yet, in the aftermath, a sense of propriety, of finding some human dignity, let many reconsider their behavior and show instances of compassion towards the enemy.

A great example of this was played out in the Battle of the Wilderness when Confederate Private Henry Webb of the 50th Virginia Infantry found himself confronted by Private Jacob Smiley of the 1st New York Sharpshooter’s on May 5, 1864. Smiley had shot one of Webb’s comrades only a few feet distant when Webb raised his rifle musket and fired at Smiley. The big minie ball struck Smiley in the chest and he went down with a mortal wound. Webb rushed past; then, after the firing halted, he had an opportunity to return to view Smiley’s body. Here he saw that the Yankee’s pockets had already been rifled, but he found and took a small memorandum book that contained family pictures and was inscribed with Smiley’s name. He thought about the circumstances, and began to consider the awful trauma of it all. The victim could just as easily have been himself rather than Smiley. Webb realized this, and he considered the anguish that his death would cause within his own family. His compassion was profound. Webb found the moral courage to write to the mother of the man he had killed: “Mrs. Smiley, Madam, in the providence of God I deprived you of your husband [son]. I hope you will not blame me for making you this announcement. It seems from his journal that he was not out as [a] volunteer, but was drafted and as such I heartily sympathize with you. He acted the

⁵⁷ Letter from John Pellet to parents, August 4, 1861. Retrieved on March 6, 2012 from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 22-23.

part of a great man.”⁵⁸ Webb’s awkwardness in addressing a woman who in his mind had every reason to hate him masked the profound sense of moral responsibility he felt in explaining that the battlefield incident was not the result of personal hatred, but rather of the grim and impersonal vicissitudes of a horrible war. For Webb, this was his way of cleaning his conscience and being able to make peace with himself for the acts he committed during a time of war.

Antebellum Secondhand Sources Give Inaccurate View of War

Since few Northerners had any personal experience with war, they relied on a number of secondhand sources for information. The most influential was the array of history textbooks read by schoolchildren. These textbooks paid lip service to pacifism, declaring war to be a terrible waste of life that should be avoided if possible. Nevertheless, they made it clear that Americans had never hesitated to fight for the right cause. The authors of these texts seriously undermined their peaceful veneer, by devoting much space to the colorful and dramatic descriptions of battle. One widely used textbook published in 1839, devoted no fewer than 144 of its 432 pages to military operations in the War of Independence and the War of 1812.⁵⁹

Conflict was the overwhelming image of America’s past presented to students in the Antebellum Period, but this image of conflict was unrealistic. The excitement, drama, color and heroism of war were stressed; its darker aspects were downplayed or overlooked. Impressionable boys and young men were easily seduced by this romanticized view of history. Soldiering was an adventure; death in battle was a glorious

⁵⁸ Letter from Henry Webb to Mrs. Smiley. Retrieved on March 15, 2012 from *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 168-169.

⁵⁹ Ruth Miller Elson, *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) 324-327.

sacrifice for your country and a good cause. Antebellum schoolbooks therefore, inadvertently prepared young men to accept and even to embrace the idea of going to war. The foremost historian of public education in the nineteenth century noted that textbook descriptions of armed conflict gave the impression that “War is natural and normal relationships between nations; it is dreadful, but inevitable. And its horror is full of interest.”⁶⁰

Illustrated media such as newspapers, prints, and broadsides were another source of information about war. These publications also failed to provide an accurate description of combat. According to a Union soldier from Western New York, “In all the pictures of battles I had seen before I ever saw a [real] battle, the officers were leading their followers to the charge.”⁶¹ This Union soldier was surprised to learn that most officers remained in the rear of their commands. In summary, the vast majority of Union soldiers from Western New York were to learn that combat bore little resemblance to their rather childish conceptions of it. A gigantic gulf existed between those men who had been in combat and those who had not. Battle was such a unique experience that only those who had personal experience to it could know what it was like.⁶²

Northerners Believed the American Civil War Would be Short

Another initial motivation for many Union soldiers to enlist from Western New York was the belief that the American Civil War would be short. Northerners had the precedents of earlier conflicts to bolster their belief that the war against the rebellion

⁶⁰ Ruth Miller Elson, *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 329-334.

⁶¹ Excerpt from Warren Lee Goss, *Recollections of a Private* (New York, 1890), 40-41. Retrieved on March 15, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 3.

⁶² Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 4.

would be short. The war with Mexico had lasted only a year and a half and had resulted in only 13,780 casualties, and the American armies had driven deep into the heartland of Mexico. An even more encouraging historical precedent was the series of wars between France and a host of European allies from 1792-1815. Napoleon's wars in particular, demonstrated that massed armies with superior equipment could still win quick battlefield victories that convinced their opponents to negotiate peace.⁶³

However, Northern volunteers did not appreciate the unique situation they faced. The army had an unprecedented task; to eradicate a government and subdue a large, hostile population scattered over a vast geographic area. In other words, they had to reclaim half of the United States. No previous American war had been like this one. It was a twentieth century conflict being fought by an eighteenth century military force. American politicians had crafted an army designed for wars of short duration and limited goals, consisting largely of green troops who had been mobilized, armed, and trained after the war began and before any significant fighting took place. Long delays and bitter setbacks were inevitable. These strategic and policy factors greatly lengthened the American Civil War, but tactical factors were just as important in frustrating Northern hopes for a quick victory.

The defining characteristic of Civil War combat was the indecisive nature of battle. During the Revolutionary War, it had been possible for one army to annihilate another in only one hour of fighting, as at the Battle of Cowpens. During the Napoleonic conflicts, much larger armies had fought much longer, yet one of them could break up,

⁶³ Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 54.

scatter, and render its opponent militarily ineffective. The latter scenario was uncommon during the American Civil War; the former was impossible.⁶⁴

Role of Technological Innovations Affecting Soldiers Perceived Bravery

While many volunteer soldiers from Western New York displayed uncommon valor on the battlefield, this was often counterbalanced by those who did not. There was a practical explanation for much of this. War had now become so deadly, owing to the technological innovations which occurred following the Industrial Revolution, that what was once routine battlefield exposure was now virtually suicidal. The stand-up-ranks, shoulder to shoulder, in-the-open method of confronting the enemy was severely outmoded. Tactics that had been practiced with success as late as the Mexican War of 1846-1848 were suddenly impractical and highly dangerous. The great killing fields of the American Civil War in 1862 not only shocked the nation but produced a glaring paradigm shift in attitudes. The risks one might take and expect to survive altered both tactics and the conception of courage. What once had been regarded as manly courage was now considered reckless, foolish behavior. In the American Civil War the widespread use of the rifle-musket, firing a more accurate high-velocity minie ball⁶⁵,

⁶⁴ Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 54-55.

⁶⁵ This bullet was comparatively new 1850's technology, adopted in 1855 by the United States army, but originally devised by Captains Claude-Etienne Minie and Henri-Gustave Delvigne of the French army. Rather than a round ball, it used a cylindro-conoidal-shaped lead bullet with a large hollowed base to provide for expansion into the rifling grooves upon firing. This prevented the propelling gas from escaping around the circumference of the projectile, increasing velocity and adding to the accuracy by forcing the relatively soft lead bullet's base into the rifling grooves. The result was a tight, straight spin. Retrieved from Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007), 40.

improved artillery projectiles, and even repeating rifles had ensured that a deadly “fire zone” would be faced at extended ranges during the often utilized frontal assaults.⁶⁶

The human-cannon-fodder concept of shock tactics, consisting of columns attacking en masse to breach a critical point, had ultimately been proved to be not only extremely bloody but largely ineffectual.⁶⁷ The attacking lines could not often get to within close range of the defensive positions without incurring devastating and unacceptable casualties. Soldiers were demoralized by the failed results, and lost confidence. In turn, the lack of confidence often resulted in future lackluster performances due to a conservation or modification of personal effort. At the heart of the matter was the changed battlefield, not a fundamental absence of courage or discipline. Many soldiers would agree with Wiley Sword’s belief that, ‘If a man was to risk his life in battle, the circumstances had to allow for at least a fair prospect of survival.’⁶⁸

The American Civil War was really two wars within one in the manner it was fought. During the initial years, the tried-and-true tactics of prior wars including Napoleonic ‘linear’ concepts were often used. This was usually in strong contrast to the methods and results of the last two years.⁶⁹ In order to survive, one needed to adapt the way they approached battle.

⁶⁶ Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 39-40.

⁶⁷ There are a few analysts who assert that shock tactics were not outmoded in the American Civil War, and that the rifle musket did not revolutionize tactics (because of the alleged short range and long duration of many firefights.) See Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* (1987). As in any perspective this matter is open to interpretation of evidence and judgment. “Close-range” combat in 1864-1865 seems not to be due to a lack of weapon effectiveness, but rather a resort to altered tactics, especially in heavily wooded terrain so as to deal with the deadly new firepower, such as going prone behind natural ground cover and fighting further “protected” by quickly improvising breastworks whenever possible.

⁶⁸ Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 40.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

In the last few years of the American Civil War, the ability to win on a battlefield in combat was far more complex than physically confronting the enemy with superior bravery and manpower. One had to understand the new essential technical components and assess the merits and liabilities of a tactical situation in terms of employing the proper methods. This meant relying more on technology than on physical prowess to achieve success. This was an alien concept in 1861. Combat had always been personal, close and up front. Disciplined valor had provided the means and method of victory. Now there were new technologies that refined killing to such an extent that reason, rather than physical effort was often the key. The battlefield was a far more dangerous place. The means had altered the methods, and fighting smart meant coping amid all factors. Physical courage was no longer just enough. The perspectives of a combat commander were never more crucial. Success revolved around the use of common sense and intelligent reason more than textbook doctrine.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007), 270.

Chapter 2 Sustaining Motivations

Battlefield Experience; Proof that “Sense of Adventure” Was Not a Sustaining Motivation for Western New York Soldiers

Few Western New York soldiers truly enjoyed combat; the terrors were too grim, and the immediacy of danger was too contrary to the desire for survival. War’s visage was perhaps grand to behold, but when it came to personal exposure, the awareness of one’s mortality was usually self-effacing. A nameless grave in the dirt of some godforsaken field, flesh rotting away, and one’s existence completely obliterated; it was a hard fate to ponder. No matter what the circumstances, good or bad, the result was grotesque. What enduring honor was there in an ignominious death and a hasty burial, a fleeting death notice to the family, then one’s name all but vanished and soon forgotten forever?⁷¹

Nearly every battle of the American Civil War was fought on ground that was partly open and partly covered with dense woods. Typical European battlefields--level expanses of cropland or pasturage where small armies could be drawn up in full view of each other--were rare in America. The huge field armies of poorly trained men that fought the American Civil War were forced to deal with difficult, cluttered terrain. Because of the dense foliage, their movement toward the enemy could be nerve wracking. Troops might approach the battlefield on a narrow lane that meandered inside a tunnel of vegetation. Visibility was often limited to only a few hundred yards. Soldiers could hear the rumble of artillery and the crackle of rifle fire and sometimes smell the

⁷¹ Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 38.

acrid smell of black powder before they could see anything but the backs of their comrades. Nowhere was the foliage more tangled or impenetrable than in a second-growth forest in Northern Virginia, the location of the Battles of Chancellorsville and the Wilderness. Rice C. Bull, a volunteer soldier of the 123rd New York, had this to say of his first encounter with southern vegetation; “We at once entered the forest, but found the scrub pine so closely grown together with their branches extended out from the ground up and so interlocked we could not advance in company front. It was even difficult for a single man to move ahead in the thicket.”⁷²

In addition to the harsh terrain, for most Union soldiers from Western New York, the first visual evidence of a battle was often the casualties, usually individuals struck down in the early stages of the engagement. Samuel C. Day of the 3rd New York Light Artillery saw a Confederate Soldier as he put it,

Lying close to the road, just alive, with a sabre cut in the side of his head four inches long, and his brains were running on to his coat. O! How sick I felt, though I did not show it, but I could have been on the out side of my dinner very easily. I thought to myself, if I get sick at the sight of one dead man, what would I do on a battlefield?⁷³

When Union troops moved from the periphery toward the center of the battlefield, they often had to advance directly over the fallen bodies of other Northerners. Major Francis E. Pierce of the 108th New York had to take care to avoid stepping on mangled blue-clad forms as his regiment marched toward the blazing Confederate position at

⁷² Excerpt from K. Jack Bauer, ed., *Soldiering: The Civil War Diary of Rice C. Bull, 123rd New York Volunteer Infantry* (San Rafael, 1977) 44. Retrieved on March 16, 2012 from Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 6.

⁷³ Letter from Samuel C. Day to Irving Greenwood, December 28, 1862, Samuel C. Day Papers, Minnesota Historical Society. Retrieved on March 16, 2012 from Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 7.

Fredericksburg. It struck him that, “Their ghastly gaping death wounds [were a prediction] of what would be in store for us.”⁷⁴

As mentioned earlier, antebellum second hand sources were often inaccurate in their depictions of battle. Paintings and prints familiar to Antebellum Americans also did not portray the battlefield accurately. They usually portrayed military engagements as relatively smokeless encounters with cloudlike billows hovering high in the background. Consequently, few soldiers were prepared for the reality of an American Civil War battlefield where visibility was often severely limited. When opposing lines met each other, the smoke produced by thousands of rapidly firing muskets and cannons often obscured soldiers who were only a few yards apart. At Peach Tree Creek, visibility was effectively nil on a fine summer day. “During the afternoon, the enemy made five charges on our line, coming at times within one hundred feet,” reported Rice C. Bull 123rd New York Volunteer, “yet I did not see a single Johnnie. The clouds of smoke from the muskets of both sides....poured down on us to hide everything but the flash of the enemy’s guns that gave us their position.”⁷⁵

Problems of visibility were more than just annoyances. Combatants became disoriented and confused. This was an especially acute problem for artillerymen, whose relatively distant targets often were only vaguely seen through the haze. Combatants also had to deal with all of the noise associated with a Civil War battle. From a considerable distance, a clash of Civil War armies did not sound particularly ominous. The muffled boom of artillery fire was almost indistinguishable from thunder, and the irregular crackle

⁷⁴ Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 7.

⁷⁵ Excerpt from K. Jack Bauer, ed., *Soldiering: The Civil War Diary of Rice C. Bull, 123rd New York Volunteer Infantry* (San Rafael, 1977) 149. Retrieved on March 16, 2012 from Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 10.

of musketry hardly seemed threatening. Participants in battle, however, found the noise of battle to be much more impressive. “Many of our Company were affected by the continuous roar of the artillery only twenty feet from where we were,” recalled a Western New York soldier after one of the battles outside of Atlanta. “For two days our hearing was almost gone; it was several days before it was normal again.”⁷⁶

There are many vivid descriptions of battle found in the diaries of Civil War soldiers from Western New York. Many of these soldiers who experienced battle first hand felt that those who were not there and did not experience battle could not relate and would not be able to fully understand the nature of the battlefield. Daniel Holt, a surgeon of the 121st New York wrote to his wife about his wartime experiences at Chancellorsville and grew impassioned as he struggled to make her understand.

You have asked me to give you a description of a [battle] field after the Angel of Death has passed over it; but I can no more do so than I can give you an idea of anything indescribable. You must stand as I have stood, and hear the report of battery upon batter, witness the effect of shell, grape and canister. You must hear the incessant discharge of musketry, see men leaping high in the air and falling dead upon the ground, others without a groan or a sign yielding up their life from loss of blood, see the wounded covered with dirt and blackened by powder, hear their groans, witness their agonies, see the eye grow dim in death, before you can realize or be impressed with its horrors. Notwithstanding all this, you do not see it in its true light.⁷⁷

For many soldiers, dealing with battle and the death and horror associated with it was extremely difficult. They needed to find ways to motivate themselves while on the battlefield since the sense of adventure was clearly not a sustaining motivation for them. For many Western New York soldiers, instinct right before battle led them to perform exercises. Instinct led George P. Metcalf of the 136th New York to perform some rather jumpy exercises while skirmishing on the wet morning of July 4 at Gettysburg. His

⁷⁶ Excerpt from K. Jack Bauer, ed., *Soldiering: The Civil War Diary of Rice C. Bull, 123rd New York Volunteer Infantry* (San Rafael, 1977) 151. Retrieved on March 16, 2012 from Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 15.

⁷⁷ Excerpt from Daniel Holt, “In Captivity,” *Civil War Times Illustrated* 18 (August 1979): 38. Retrieved on March 17, 2012 from Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 20.

company received orders to advance. Stiff and chilled from spending the night in a rain-filled rifle pit, Metcalf crawled out, stood up, and immediately felt a Rebel bullet whistle by his head. Without “any second thought, I was back in my pit of water,” wrote Metcalf in his diary. He looked about and was relieved to see that everyone else had done the same. Orders were shouted to try again. The New Yorkers of the 136th mustered up their courage and gathered their nerves, and they all jumped out at the same time, yelling like demons to steady themselves. Metcalf found comfort in using his “trusty old frying-pan and knapsack” as a shield for his face; he somehow convinced himself that they would “stop any unfriendly bullet.” It was illogical, but effective; Metcalf and his comrades advanced as ordered.⁷⁸

This sense of adventure which initially invited soldiers to volunteer seems to have faded after they experience their first battle, which shows that this was not a sustaining motivation for volunteer Union soldiers from Western New York. When the 7th New York heavy artillery, which had spent more than two years in the Washington defenses without firing a shot in anger, received orders in May 1864 to move to the front as an infantry regiment, a sergeant in this unit “was awakened by the hilarious cheer of men.” These men wanted to experience battle, and get away from the everyday routine in their Washington defenses. Ironically, nine brutal months later, after an astounding 291 men were killed and more than 500 were wounded in action, the shattered remnant of this

⁷⁸ Excerpt from George P. Metcalf “Recollections of boyhood days, including reminiscences of soldier-life, and incidents and experiences shortly after the Civil War, as remembered by George P. Metcalf” (1866) 99. Retrieved on March 17, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 79.

regiment indulged in “general noisy hilarity” when ordered to full garrison in Baltimore.⁷⁹

In another instance, eight days⁸⁰ after the Battle of Fredericksburg had ended, a battle in which the 10th New York suffered a casualty rate of thirty six percent including most of its officers, the junior captain George Harper left in command of the regiment wrote home that, “It was a perfect slaughterhouse, you would have been astonished to see the men come up and face death, line after line, but it was no use...I don’t think I could get twenty five to the front again.”⁸¹ These are just two examples of many which show that after these Union soldiers from Western New York experienced battle, it was not something they wished to experience again.

As to be expected, many of these Western New York soldiers in letters and diaries describe that right before a battle they are nervous and would consider avoiding it at all costs, however as battle begins they become fierce athletes. Reflexive action could bring the soldier to rather odd and unpredictable actions on the battlefield. At the Battle of Gettysburg, Theodore Dodge of the 119th New York Infantry, saw a young man who, although shot in the leg, “sat there loading and firing with as much regularity and coolness as if untouched, now and then shouting to some comrade in front of him to make room for his shot.”⁸²

⁷⁹ Letter from William H Murray to sister, early 1863, Murray Papers. Retrieved on March 3, 2011 from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 34.

⁸⁰ The Battle of Fredericksburg took place from December 11, 1862-December 13, 1862. This letter was written on December 21, 1862, eight days after the battle.

⁸¹ Letter from George Harper to James Harper, December 21, 1862, Hopper Papers. Retrieved on March 3, 2011 from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44.

⁸² Excerpt from Theodore A. Dodge, “Left Wounded on the Field,” Putnam Magazine 4 (September 1869): 320-321. Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 80-81.

Another example showing that right before battle, many volunteer Civil War Soldiers from Western New York were nervous occurred at Chancellorsville. The men of the green 123rd New York waited uneasily as the fighting slowly approached their position in the woods. “We continued standing unengaged in line, a trying time for even veteran soldiers, almost unendurable for us new recruits,” recalled Rice C. Bull. He continues by writing,

Looking down the line of our Company as the yelling of the enemy came nearer and nearer to us, I judged that everyone felt about as I did; there was no levity now, the usual joking had ceased and a great quiet prevailed. I could see pallor on every face as we brought hammer to full cock. I believe every arm trembled as we raised our guns to our shoulders to fire but all eyes were to the front, no one looked back.⁸³

As the Confederates approach and fired upon them:

We were warned not to fire before ordered to do so but as soon as the Johnnies opened on us some of the men commenced. Most of us, however, held our fire until we saw the line of smoke that showed that they were on the ridge; then every gun fired. It was then load and fire at will as fast as we could. Soon the nervousness and fear we had when we began to fight passed away and a feeling of fearlessness and rage took its place.⁸⁴

This feeling of nervousness can be equated to the feeling before playing in a very important sporting event. A captain the 108th New York admitted to shaky knees before the attack on bloody lane at Antietam, but “once over the fence at the top of the hill, I was never more cool in my life.”⁸⁵ It must be noted that Civil War soldiers knew nothing

⁸³ Excerpt from Jack Bauer, ed., *Soldiering: The Civil War Diary of Rice C. Bull, 123rd New York Volunteer Infantry* (San Rafael, 1977) 44. Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 23-24.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 23-24.

⁸⁵ Letter from Francis E. Pierce to Edward Chapin, September 25, 1862, “Civil War Letters of Pierce” Retrieved on March 5, 2011 from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 39.

about the chemical changes in their bodies during combat, for adrenalin was not identified and named until 1901.⁸⁶

The random fall of bullets meant that getting hit was largely a matter of chance. Near misses were much more common than deadly hits; soldiers often spoke of projectiles cutting their clothing, denting or puncturing their equipment, and knocking weapons out of their hands. George P. Metcalf a member of the 136th New York had this to say about his experience in the Battle of Gettysburg, “The bullets from ten thousand rifles went whizzing through the air over our heads, [along] side of our heads, and striking the ground all around.”⁸⁷

A single projectile, a solid shot or shell that failed to explode, often caused a multiple of casualties. However canister, an antipersonnel round that spewed several iron balls in a shotgun pattern at short range, was even more devastating. The 7th New York Infantry was hit by a round of canister at Antietam at the short range of seventy-five feet. It killed and injured nine men. The concussion of the discharge at that range blew Harry Gerrish, a German native, some thirty-five feet to the rear before he fell unconscious. After he recovered, and had an opportunity to recall this terrifying incident, Gerrish believed that he had been close enough to “see half way into the bore of the gun.”⁸⁸

As bodies tore apart under the impact of artillery fire, they added further to the sounds of battle. Captain William Wheeler of the 13th New York Battery watched an

⁸⁶ Emile Boulpaep, Walter F. Boron, “Medical Physiology: A Cellular and Molecular Approach” Philadelphia: Elsevier/Saunders. Retrieved on March 7, 2011 from <http://www.worldofmolecules.com/drugs/adrenaline.htm>

⁸⁷ Excerpt from “Recollections of boyhood days, including reminiscences of soldier-life, and incidents and experiences shortly after the Civil War, as remembered by George P. Metcalf” (1886) 62. Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 23-24.

⁸⁸ Excerpt from “Henry Gerrish Memoir”, *Civil War Times Illustrated* Collection, U.S. Army Military History Institute, 28. Retrieved on March 21, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 27.

infantryman's leg ripped off by a solid shot at Gettysburg. The limb "whirled like a stone through the air, until it came against a caisson with a loud whack."⁸⁹ Unfortunately, less than a year later, Captain Wheeler lost his own life on the battlefield on June 23, 1864 by a sharpshooter while he stood partially behind a tree, making observations and giving orders.⁹⁰

Once in battle, a Western New York soldier's greatest fear, beyond watching others fall, was that he might become a casualty himself. No matter how optimistic the youthful volunteer, he could hardly see hundreds of men fall in successive battles and still assume that he was invulnerable. For thousands of Union soldiers from Western New York, the possibility of a serious or fatal wound became a horrible reality. The experience of getting hit by enemy fire was particularly vivid for James Tanner of the 87th New York, who lay on the ground at the Second Bull Run with the rest of his regiment taking Confederate artillery rounds. Tanner saw a shell explode in front of him and ducked his head so hard that it "struck the sod sharply." Unfortunately for Tanner, this was the least of his concerns. He knew that a fragment of the shell had hit him but he had no idea how badly he was injured until someone nearby screamed, "My God! Look at that poor boy with both feet gone!" Tanner's comrades were shocked by this news and did nothing to help him until Tanner shouted, "Don't let a fellow lie here until another one comes and takes his head off." This brought the soldiers back to reality and they carried him off to a field hospital where surgeons discovered that the fragment had severed his right leg

⁸⁹ William Wheeler, *Letters of William Wheeler of the Class of 1855* (Cambridge, 1875), 409. Retrieved on March 19, 2012 from http://archive.org/stream/lettersofwilliam00wheeiala/lettersofwilliam00wheeiala_djvu.txt

⁹⁰ William Wheeler, *Letters of William Wheeler of the Class of 1855* (Cambridge, 1875), 467-468. Retrieved on March 19, 2012 from http://archive.org/stream/lettersofwilliam00wheeiala/lettersofwilliam00wheeiala_djvu.txt

except for “a bit of skin and flesh and had so cut up his left leg as to force its amputation.”⁹¹

Recent studies have shown that the mind of most of us becomes more nearly numbed than inspired by the sudden, unexpected encounter with mortal danger. For many people, when encountering an unfamiliar deadly circumstance, are overwhelmed by the processing of situation-related information. Our mind’s reflex is often disbelief, as opposed to a reliance on reflex itself. When struck by a bullet, the body may feel at first only a stunning blow, but the mental process is quickly stress-reactive. An immediate awareness of what has happened often infuses mental shock and unless the individual has been mentally prepared or “stress-oriented”, the tendency is to “shift into low gear” in an attempt to process unfamiliar problem-solving criteria. Not knowing what to expect, stunned and bewildered, many rely on an animal instinct of involuntary paralysis in an attempt to survive. In the face of predatory attack, many animals freeze, which is a survival mode, for some predators will not eat non-struggling prey. Stillness is evidence that something is wrong with the victim, a sickness that might harm the predator. The result of such paralysis is a slowing down of the reactive process⁹², physical lethargy, and a mental evasiveness that dulls the awareness needed.

Knowing this, it was hardly surprising that untried soldiers were particularly vulnerable in their first battle. Taken beyond the naïve conceptions of what combat was

⁹¹ Excerpt from James Tanner. “Experiences of a Wounded Soldier at the Second Bull Run” (1927) 123. Retrieved on March 21, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 30-31.

⁹² “Perhaps 75 percent of the survivors of the attack on the World Trade Center Towers were at first utterly bewildered. Research on how the mind processes information helps to explain this statistic by suggesting that even when we are calm, our brains require eight to ten seconds to handle each novel piece of complex information. The more stress, the lower the process. When our brains are bombarded with new information, they shift into low gear just when we need it to move fast.” Amanda Ripley, “How to Get Out Alive”, *Time*, May 2, 2005, 59-62.

like, stripped bare of smug patriotism and ideals of glory, many of them reacted to the first shock purely by instinct. Self-survival, that marvelous natural imperative, often moved them. They had no control over their reactions but acted as if in a trance, conscious of their movements but not thinking of them. Captain James Franklin Fitts of the 114th New York explains this very nicely; “[A soldier was] a creature of habit quite as much as of reflection, and what he does in the moment of danger is often the impulse of instinct.”⁹³

Although Tanner lost both of his legs, he fared much better than many other Western New York soldiers. For many, rescue from the battlefield did not mean an end to suffering, despair and death. Nowhere was the horrible cost of battle more apparent than in the primitive field hospitals hastily established behind the lines. They usually were located in farmhouses, barns, and other outbuildings, where sanitary conditions were poor. The administration of field medical care was woefully inadequate, as was the general state of medical, especially surgical knowledge in the 1860's. A regiment could suffer hundreds of casualties in a single morning with only one surgeon, an assistant surgeon, and a handful of untrained medical orderlies available to deal with the emergency.⁹⁴ Perhaps the most terrible tragedy of the American Civil War was that it took place less than two decades before medicine was revolutionized by a series of major biological and technical advances.⁹⁵

⁹³ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 78.

⁹⁴ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 33.

⁹⁵ The assembling of large numbers of raw troops for the American Civil War was accompanied by inevitable outbreaks of communicable diseases. On both sides little attention was paid to camp sanitation, housing and food were atrocious, and confusion was rampant. No one anticipated the enormous casualties in the first few battles, and seriously wounded men often lay where they had fallen for several days. Many

Burying the dead, as one can imagine, was a gruesome task, unpleasant under the best conditions. The process of decay was relentless. Bodies often rotted so badly that they could hardly be moved without disintegrating and the living had to exercise great care. Several thousand men perished in the Battle of Gettysburg, and hundreds of them lay exposed to the warm summer temperatures for four or five days before being interred. Burial parties found many corpses so badly decomposed that they had to be lifted and moved with fence rails. When these bodies were dropped into a burial trench, they often ruptured and emitted a horrible stench that nauseated the living.⁹⁶

Battlefields were not merely scenes of desperate conflict, they were also huge graveyards. The hastily interred remains of once vibrant men all too often resurfaced after a few hard rains had fallen, turning the landscape of battle into a macabre place where the reminders of death were everywhere.⁹⁷ Death on the battlefield was the final and most intense manifestation of the effect of combat on the men who had volunteered to save the Union. Of the more than 364,000 Northern men who died in the conflict, 110,000 lost their lives in combat. Another 275,175 Northern soldiers were wounded but survived, many of them crippled and disfigured.⁹⁸ It must be noted that after years of fighting, it becomes evident that Union soldiers from Western New York do eventually become comfortable with war, or at the very least, used to it. An example of this took place with

wounded died for want of immediate care. Gradually, the North and the South evolved effective ambulance systems and hospitals, procured adequate medical supplies, and developed well-trained surgeons. Yet, it was not until the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1863) that the Union forces were able to remove their wounded from the field at the end of each day's fighting. It had taken two years of bloodshed and suffering to develop a good medical corps. "Albert S. Lyons, "The Nineteenth Century-The Beginnings of Modern Medicine Part 1". Retrieved on March 5, 2012 from <http://www.healthguidance.org/entry/6352/1/The-Nineteenth-Century--The-Beginnings-of-Modern-Medicine-Pat-1.html>

⁹⁶ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 41.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹⁸ Frank E. Vandiver, *Blood Brothers: A Short History of the Civil War* (College Station, 1992), 178. Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from the Buffalo and Erie County Central Library.

the 136th New York regiment during the battle of Lookout Mountain. Some members of this regiment teased their comrades while the regiment took shelter in a depression; with enemy fire overhead they tossed pebbles onto those men who were too frightened to look up, trying to make them think the balls were falling much closer than they expected.⁹⁹ Clearly, some of the members of this regiment felt comfortable enough to joke around even during battle.

To reiterate, the “thrill of combat” was perceived by many as an initial motivation to go to battle, however it was clearly not a sustaining motive for Western New York soldiers. Horace B. Ensworth, a 21-year old-from Oswego, New York highlights this transformation in the letters he wrote to his family. On April 20, 1862 in a letter to his father and sister, Ensworth cannot wait to see battle.¹⁰⁰ However, roughly one month later, on May 31, 1862, the 81st New York suffered heavy casualties at Fair Oaks and Seven Pines, Virginia. It is at that time that Private Ensworth began to comprehend the implications of battle. Two years later, Ensworth had the misfortune of being in the disastrous charge at Cold Harbor, Virginia on June 2 and 3, 1864. Here the 81st New York suffered 215 casualties, and the effect of this and the past two years on Ensworth was dramatic. In a letter written to his father on December 1, 1864, Private Ensworth had this to say about battle, “I begin to think that they are not a going to leave a man [alive], for that old [Gen. Ulysses S.] Grant has got to charge from here to Richmond, and

⁹⁹ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 147.

¹⁰⁰ See page 21 for quote from Horace B. Ensworth wanting to see battle.

charging is played out with me. I will never make another one as long as I belong to the 81st Regt.”¹⁰¹

George P. Metcalf of the 136th New York does an excellent job of describing his experience in battle:

I care not what others may say about having no fear while in danger. I knew enough to know that there was danger on every hand. I could hear men cry out in pain as they were shot, and appreciated the situation I was in. I placed my knapsack, frying-pan, canteen and the butt of my gun between me and the flying bullets and tried in every way to lie as flat on the ground as I possibly could. I remember as I lay there, with death being dealt out on every side, of saying to myself, “What a fool you were to enlist. You need not have come. You were only eighteen years old and could not have been drafted.”¹⁰²

From this description it makes logical sense that for most Civil War soldiers from Western New York going to war for the adventure was not a sustaining motivation. It becomes difficult to justify going off to battle in the Civil War solely for the adventure. Even the most enthusiastic, physically toughest soldiers often were not prepared for what battle was to offer them. A gunner who served with William A. Moore in the 3rd New York Light Battery had previously been a professional boxer before the war and was full of enthusiasm for a fight. He constantly bragged about his willingness to take on any man in the battery. But when he first heard Rebel artillery, he went into convulsions through fear. The deflated fighter was assigned to company cook. In his own way, he aided the Union cause without having to deal with battle.¹⁰³

Patriotism as a Sustaining Motivation

“It was just that stark. All the fighting and dying was reduced to a common understanding, that glory wasn’t the answer; neither was the adventure or spirit of this endeavor. It was the prospect of

¹⁰¹ Letter from Horace B. Ensworth, Company B 81st New York Infantry to his father, December 1, 1864. Retrieved on February 15, 2012 from Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 12-13.

¹⁰² Quote by George P. Metcalf 136th New York. Retrieved on March 15, 2012 from, Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 73.

¹⁰³ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 75-76.

a better future, of the mundane and uneventful-peace in a quiet time frame. It is to save their country and get home to their family again that motivates the soldier to do his duty.”¹⁰⁴

This motivation was echoed by Private Erastus Gregory of the 114th New York Infantry. Many soldiers saw it as their patriotic duty to save the country. This helps to explain why patriotism was an important sustaining motivation for Western New York Civil War soldiers. This dedication to the ideal of patriotism was a clear aspect of the working-class culture that played a role in the soldier’s ability to face combat. This arose from the political and social conservatism that was typical of working class Northerners. Many Union soldiers from Western New York took patriotic jargon and ideals seriously, readily identified with the symbols of American nationalism, and easily made the connection between self-sacrifice and love of country. They were genuinely ready to die for the cause.¹⁰⁵ Private Erastus Gregory of the 114th New York Infantry, a grizzled veteran noted that, “The men are fighting with a will on both sides....fighting like tigers today.” Amid the horrific scenes of an assault, Gregory observed that “A musket ball hits a man on the head, and he is carried from the field in an expiring condition; another has his leg or arm shot off by a cannon or grape shot”. Nevertheless, wrote Gregory, “[it was] not very often that one word of complaint is heard from these brave men, so eager are they to save their own country from ruin.”¹⁰⁶

Gregory’s intense feelings reflected the typical grit of many Western New York veteran Union soldiers forging on to the save the country. Unfortunately, that grit failed

¹⁰⁴ Private James Perry Campbell, Company D, 79th Illinois Infantry, Letter October 17, 1863. Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 27

¹⁰⁵ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 141.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Private Erastus Gregory, Company C, 114th New York Infantry, May 31 to June 13, 1863. Wiley Sword Collection. Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 165-166.

to save him. The day after finishing his letter, he was sitting by a tree reading his Bible and was shot through the head by a sharpshooter and instantly killed.¹⁰⁷ For many Western New York Union soldiers, this patriotic cause was the supreme motivation impervious to setbacks and depression. Their minds and emotions were resilient enough to deal with physical pain, trauma, and the mixture of factors that resulted in victory or defeat on the battlefield. Patriotic ideology therefore, became the most lasting justification for continuing the conflict despite the apparent lack of success.¹⁰⁸

Daniel Holt, a surgeon for the 121st New York Infantry demonstrates how patriotic ideology had become the most powerful sustaining motivation for Western New York soldiers. He was drained by the broken bodies, dying men, and suppurating wounds that continued to fester for days after the battle. “I am satisfied with human gore; and no one would be more willing than I to leave this spot if I could be done with honor to ourselves and justice to the nation.” However, Holt was able to continue asserting his faith, refusing to let his disgust overrule his patriotism. “Sooner than recede an inch from [the] God inspired principle of freedom which incites to action this noble army of men, or compromise the weight of a feather with rebels in arms I would still see the same scenes of bloodshed re-enacted everyday, until a perpetual and honorable peace is secured.”¹⁰⁹

At this point in the war, patriotism was becoming such an important motivator for Union soldiers that it assumed a religious aspect. It compelled even more intense devotion and self-sacrifice than a mere political ideology could command. Lieutenant

¹⁰⁷ Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007), 166.

¹⁰⁸ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 101.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Daniel Holt to his wife, May 15, 1863. Daniel Holt Papers, New York State Historical Association. Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 100.

William Wheeler, a Yale graduate and New York Artillerist, called the war “the religion of very many of our lives.” He believed that when soldiers thought deep enough about the issues of the conflict they came to “identify this cause for which we are fighting, with all of good and religion in our previous lives, and so it must be if we are to win the victory we must have an impulse, made of patriotic fire and a deeper feeling, which takes rise in the thinking of the soul.”¹¹⁰ Wheeler combined intellectualism with a passion for prosecuting conflict.

Similarly, Walter Stone Poor, a twenty-six-year-old infantryman from Western New York who admitted to being “naturally tenderhearted, almost to being womanish” about the thought of killing another man, was able to bring himself to do it for the patriotic cause. “I confess...it seems impossible for me to kill, or wound any one even in self defense. It seems that I would rather die than do it.” Yet Poor believed that a good goal had to be attained by paying a price, and the loss of his innocence was a fitting sacrifice for the Union.¹¹¹

Northern soldiers had to craft a meaning for their war. With a variety of cultural tools at their disposal, ranging from the ideals of courage, honor, and self control to the ideology of the cause and to religion, many men became convinced of the transcendent significance of the American Civil War. The Western New York Union soldier believed that he was fighting for a universal cause, and this enabled him to hold on.¹¹²

Role of Religion as a Sustaining Motivator

¹¹⁰ William Wheeler, *Letters of William Wheeler of the Class of 1855*, (Cambridge, 1875), 417. Retrieved on March 21, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 102.

¹¹¹ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 106.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 109.

One way in which the Union soldier was able to hold on was through religion. War can often intensify religious convictions. This was no different for the volunteer Union soldiers from Western New York. After coming out of the Seven Days Battle unscathed, an American-Irish Corporal in the high casualty regiment, the 74th New York wrote that, “All of our lives are in the hands of God and he can save those from danger who put their trust in him, tho’ encompassed by a host of enemies.”¹¹³ The conclusion drawn by a study of G.I.’s holds true for Civil War soldiers from Western New York as well; religious faith did not impel the individual toward combat, but it did serve the important function of increasing his resources for enduring the conflict ridden situation of combat stress.¹¹⁴

Many soldiers had to find ways to justify their actions to God during battle. This was imperative regarding the Ten Commandments, especially the Seventh Commandment, “Thou Shall Not Kill”. A private in the 77th New York does just this when he writes after his first skirmish that, “I never thought I would like to shoot at a man, but I do like to shoot at a ‘secesh’¹¹⁵....and I either killed or wounded one of them.”¹¹⁶ Justifications such as this were quite common in order for Union soldiers from Western New York to be able to cope with battle and all of its horrible characteristics.

Other soldiers had to find ways to justify their decisions to set their personal lives to the side in order to volunteer to fight for a cause they truly believed in. When the

¹¹³ Letter from Felix Brannigan to sister, July 26, 1862, *Brannigan Papers*, Retrieved on March 24, 2012 from James McPherson *For Causes and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 66.

¹¹⁴ Samuel A. Stouffer, *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath (Studies in Social Psychology in World War II)* (Princeton University Press, 1949), 175.

¹¹⁵ The term “Secesh” is another nickname and in this case an insult for the Confederate soldiers who fought for the South during the American Civil War from 1861-1865.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Martin Lennon to sister, April 9, 1862, in “Letters and Extracts from the Diary of Captain Martin Lennon”. Retrieved on March 15, 2012 from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 72.

American Civil War commenced, Lieutenant Chauncey D. Crandall was pursuing his studies at the Cortland Academy. However, he could not confine his mind to study, while his country so much needed his services. He believed that God would approve his motives and accept the act of service to him. His dedication and selflessness in battle can be seen when he was assigned duty to remain on the North side of the river and care for the wounded at the hospital. On hearing of this and knowing that his company was going into battle, he requested that if his men were to go into battle that he might accompany them. It was at this battle that he was killed. It appears that religion was the main factor Lieutenant Crandall decided to go off and fight, since he was leaving behind a lucrative business, and a young beautiful wife to whom he was just married. A species of courage is sometimes found in bad men, but here is an instance of that genuine moral courage found in someone who was willing to do everything and anything for his country, because by so doing he believed he was aiding the morally right.¹¹⁷

Emancipation Proclamation: How it motivated the North

Another very strong sustaining motivation for many Western New York Civil War soldiers once they arrived in the Southern states was the idea of ending the institution of slavery. Northerners deeply believed that the government founded by the revolutionary generation had to survive in order to prove it to the world that republican self-government could work. So where does slavery fit in? The Confederate States seceded in response to Abraham Lincoln's election to the presidency on a platform to halt the westward expansion of slavery in new U.S. territories, which made the war about slavery, whether white Western New York Union soldiers liked it or not. White Union

¹¹⁷ A.P Smith "Lieutenant Chauncey D. Crandall" Regimental History of the 76th New York, 1867. Retrieved on March 5, 2011 from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76crandalld.html>

troops drew similar conclusions once they actually arrived in the South. Soldier after soldier reasoned that since slavery caused the war, only the removal of slavery could end the war and thereby preclude it from happening again.

The timing of the Emancipation Proclamation¹¹⁸ was important. Before the war, the white men who became Union soldiers held widely divergent views on slavery and emancipation, but whatever they had once thought; their first few months in the South did “abolitionize” them. Between August and December of 1861, the year before the Emancipation Proclamation, a massive shift took place in the Union Army, and regular enlisted soldiers became the first major population group in the North, after African Americans and radical abolitionists to demand that the war end slavery. It had to, or else the Union would never win for strategic reasons, but also for moral ones, since soldiers’ saw firsthand observations of slavery. Its impact on African Americans, especially women and children and their families, convinced them that God would never allow the war to end until slavery was gone. That being said, there is little doubt that if most white Northerners had to choose between saving the Union and ending slavery at the war’s outset, they would have opted for the Union. However, as the war unfolded, most of them realized that no such choice existed, and that the two goals were really of

¹¹⁸ President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, as the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war. The Proclamation declared, “That all persons held as slaves” within the rebellious states “are, and henceforward shall be free.” It must be noted that despite that expansive wording the Emancipation Proclamation was limited in many ways. It applied only to states that had seceded from the Union, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal Border States. It also expressly exempted parts of the Confederacy that had already come under Northern control. Most important, the freedom it promised depended upon a Union military victory. Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not immediately free a single slave, it fundamentally transformed the character of the war. After January 1, 1863, every advance of Federal troops expanded the domain of freedom. Moreover, the Proclamation announced the acceptance of black men into the Union Army and Navy. By the end of the war, almost 200,000 African American soldiers and sailors had fought for the Union and freedom. Their contributions gave the North additional manpower that was significant in winning the war.

one piece.¹¹⁹

Henry Crydenwise, a Sergeant in the 90th New York stationed on the South Atlantic Coast in 1862 supported this conclusion when he arrived in the South and vented about the horrors of the institution of slavery. “This cursed slavery gives one man power over another to whip or to do as he pleases with him.”¹²⁰

It was no accident that heated discussions began to take place during the winter of 1862-1863 on the issue of slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation¹²¹ had given a

¹¹⁹ Western New York was a hotbed for abolitionism. Buffalo, New York was a terminus point of the Underground Railroad with many fugitives crossing the Niagara River from Buffalo to Fort Erie, Ontario and freedom. This ultimately affected the way many soldiers from Western New York viewed slavery. Western New York was also a hotbed for immigration, especially the Irish. Almost one million Irish came to North America, mostly the United States between the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and the beginning of the great potato famine in 1845. For the Irish, the reasons for emigrating were also to escape economic hardship and religious persecution. This rising Irish emigrant population triggered anti-Irish Nativist reactions. Many of the Irish were Roman Catholic and joined the Democratic Party. As the abolitionist movement grew in Western New York, the Irish were not attracted to it for a number of reasons. Many distrusted its largely protestant leadership and with most Irish immigrants employed in low-paying, unskilled jobs, they feared competition from freed slaves in the same economic class.

¹²⁰ Letter Henry M. Crydenwise to Parents, August 19, 1862. *Crydenwise Papers*. Retrieved on March 22, 2012 from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 118.

¹²¹ The Emancipation Proclamation also had an effect on the South. One of the best combat generals in the Confederacy, Division Commander and Congressional Honoree Major General Patrick R. Cleburne had this to say about the war in 1864. “The War was being lost! The South’s best blood had been spilled. [In early 1864] after nearly three years of fighting, nothing had been gained but long lists of dead and mangled.” At this time, Confederate-controlled territory had been reduced to about two-thirds. The Union army was poised with superior forces to subjugate the remaining portion. In this time of emergency for the Confederacy, Cleburne and other prominent signers of a special petition urged the responsible authorities to act with “common sense” to alter the old, failed ways and make “extraordinary change” to prevent losing the war and to prevent the South from being placed under oppressive enemy control. According to Cleburne, the way to do this was to change slavery from an inherent weakness to a strength by enlisting African Americans in the army as combatant soldiers. They should be given an incentive to fight by emancipating them and their families. According to Cleburne, there were three basic reasons for the impending Southern defeat. They included, “The Confederacy’s armies were far outnumbered by those of the enemy, there was not enough remaining unused white manpower to replenish the army’s great losses and finally slaves were a source of troops, information, and cooperation to the enemy, thus being a military liability rather than a strength to the South. Cleburne’s proposal was astounding, probably one of the most important if controversial of the war. The overt issue was the military success of the Confederacy, a paramount objective. The deeper issue was a test of the soul: The sacrifice of a traditional Southern institution. Cleburne’s proposal would replenish the tremendous loss in manpower the Confederate armies had sustained over nearly three years of warfare. It would further deny the enemy much of that very same source of manpower, which it was exploiting. Most substantially, however, it would be a “concession to common sense.” It must be noted that to many Southerners, this proposal was unthinkable, an outrage against Southern culture and principles that provoked an emotional firestorm. The idea that blacks would be armed and placed on equal combat status with white soldiers was treasonable to some. However, at this

sharper edge to the controversy. Soldiers who had advocated an anti-slavery war from the beginning welcomed the Proclamation. Constant Hanks, a private from Western New York, had this to say about the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863: “Thank God. The contest is now between slavery and freedom, and every honest man knows what he is fighting for.”¹²²

Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation there were a number of Western New York soldiers who were against the whole idea of freeing the slaves. In a letter from E. Cook 100th New York State Regiment to his parents in 1862, one year before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued; he expresses his disgust with this idea. “It is a common saying among the soldiers that a man might as well strike an officer as to strike a nigger. We are willing to fight for our flag, our country, and our constitution but we are not willing to spill our blood for the lazy and ungrateful nigger.”¹²³ Clearly, this soldier supported the war to save the Union, but was against turning it into a war against slavery.

After the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, not every soldier supported it. However, after the low point in 1863 right after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, a good number of Western New York soldiers began to support it. By the war’s last year, the example of black soldiers fighting for the Union as well as liberty had helped convince most white soldiers that they should fight for black liberty as well as the

time the handwriting was on the wall for the defeat of the Confederacy. Robert E. Lee’s defeat at Gettysburg, and the loss of Vicksburg and control of the entire Mississippi River, foretold the beginning of the end, the coming of total defeat. The best answer seemed to be African American Southerners. The black population of the South numbered about four million in 1860 and perhaps one million might be regarded as males of military age, representing a potential addition of perhaps 500,000 soldiers to the Confederacy’s armies. Cleburne’s logic of emancipating the slaves thus gave them a motive to fight for the Confederacy. This reflected his keen innovative and practical reasoning, even while his proposal ignored the deeper ordeal of social tragedy engulfing the South. Patrick Cleburne, “Negro Enlistment Proposal”. January 2, 1864. Retrieved on March 22, 2012 from <http://www.civilwarhome.com/cleburneproposal.htm>

¹²² Letter Constant Hanks to Mother, April 20, 1863. *Hank Papers*. Retrieved on March 25, 2012 from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 121.

¹²³ Letter from E.Cook to his parents, November, 1862. Retrieved on March 2, 2012 from Neal E. Wixson, *Echoes from the Boys of Company ‘H’* (New York: iUniverse, 2008), 45.

Union. This is evident in 1864 when Abraham Lincoln ran for re-election on a platform pledging a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery; he received almost 80 percent of the soldier vote, a fair indication of army sentiment on slavery by that time.¹²⁴

Role of Discipline and Respect for Officers as a Sustaining Motivation

These volunteer units were not “undisciplined mobs”. They could not have inflicted and endured such carnage had they remained undisciplined. Good volunteer regiments learned from experience the value of discipline. Soldiers came to see the benefit of the much-derided drill, which instilled a sense of cohesion and order, enabling them to maneuver as a unit in battle. The American Civil War furnished numerous examples of officers who put their panicky men through a drill routine while waiting under fire to go into action in order to steady their nerves. A New York Corporal in 1864 wrote, “In the midst of this tempest of bullets...while men were falling all around us, Lieutenant Bates put our regiment through the manual of Arms...It was a good thing for our men, it kept them cool and collected.”¹²⁵

Another factor that contributed to the excellent organization of troops containing Union soldiers from Western New York was the respect they had for their officers. There are numerous examples of officers throughout the American Civil War who were willing to share the soldiers’ burdens while on the march. In the 97th New York, Edwin Brookfield had this to say about his Colonel in a letter written to his mother, “Our Colonel is as good a man as ever came on the field, he is a regular old New York farmer, he is a father to his men, if you were here, you would see him with two men on his horse

¹²⁴ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 129.

¹²⁵ Letter of John J. Sherman, undated, in George E. and William D. Murphy, “The Eighth New York Heavy Artillery” Retrieved on March 5, 2011 from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 48.

and him afoot carrying a knapsack and a gun.¹²⁶ It is worth noting that the 97th New York was one of the best regiments in the Army of the Potomac. Acts like this by army officers had a trickle down effect; they gained the respect of their soldiers which at the same time helped to keep the units organized in times of battle.

The quality of officers has always been recognized as important in the general morale of troops. Officers could reinforce the attachment the men felt for them, or begin to develop it through conspicuous acts of bravery in battle. One significant example of this is through the eyes of James Franklin Fitts, of the 114th New York, when he saw Major General Philip Sheridan on the battlefield at Cedar Creek on October 19, 1864. Major General Sheridan almost single-handedly turned an embarrassing defeat into a major Union victory. He had been absent from the army of the Shenandoah when a Confederate force under Jubal Early struck it, took the Federals by surprise, and sent the entire army fleeing. Some Union units retired in good order, but others dissolved into confused masses of disoriented men. Regimental officers tried to re-form them, but among others, James Franklin Fitts of the 114th New York believed that it was impossible. “The face of every man in the ranks was clouded with disaster. The [fact that] we had been beaten, and severely beaten, nobody could deny; and I think the prevalent idea of the situation was that there was a long and a quick march down the valley before us.”¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Letter from Edwin Brookfield to mother, December 7, 1863, *Brookfield Papers*. Retrieved on March 6, 2011 from James M. McPherson *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 55.

¹²⁷ Excerpt from James Franklin Fitts, “In the Ranks at Cedar Creek”, *Galaxy* 1 (1866):540. Retrieved on March 16, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 121.

Then Major General Philip Sheridan came. He had started from Winchester that morning on his return from Washington D.C. Learning that a battle was on, he spurred his horse and reached the field by midmorning. He rode among as many of the scattered men as possible, telling them not to worry, that he would turn everything around, and they believed him. The news that Sheridan was back ran “like an electric shock” among the men. “I heard no more talk of retreating to Harper’s Ferry,” recalled Fitts. “Every man understood that the presence of Sheridan meant fighting, and with another result than that of the morning.”¹²⁸ Staff officers found it easier to manage their men with Sheridan in their presence and soon a battle line was formed. Sheridan was advised to show himself again to this line since many men had been unable to see him earlier, so he rode up in front of it, flamboyantly waving his hat. The Army of the Shenandoah counterattacked and drove Jubal Early’s regiments off of the battlefield. The effects of this Union victory at Cedar Creek reverberated throughout the North and helped to ensure Abraham Lincoln’s re-election to the presidency some two weeks later.¹²⁹

The Civil War battlefield was unlike any battlefield the Americans had previously experienced due to among other things the terrain and the recent improvement in weapons technology. This latter characteristic was a factor far too many generals ignored, and had vastly changed the situation on the battlefield since the Mexican War. The new minie ball-firing musket was more accurate, more powerful and effective at extended range and had ultimately made an enormous difference in fighting battles.¹³⁰ Generals

¹²⁸ Excerpt from James Franklin Fitts, “In the Ranks at Cedar Creek”, *Galaxy* 1 (1866):540. Retrieved on March 16, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 121.

¹²⁹ Ibid., Retrieved on March 16, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 122.

¹³⁰ Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 166.

and army leaders needed to be creative and brave in order to prevent their troops from being slaughtered and to help keep morale up. The story of a youthful, Union officer from Buffalo, New York, William Ellis is a vivid example.

Ellis was smart, energetic and committed. He had risen rapidly from Second Lieutenant to Major for valor in combat. He was known for his dashing appearance and furious-paced riding of his horse about camp. His boldness was especially evident at the Battle of Spotsylvania, Virginia on May 12, 1864. Ordered with his regiment, the 49th New York Infantry to attack the infamous “Mule-Shoe Salient,” Major Ellis was among his men, shouting encouragement and all in his power to get them over the defiant earthworks. Fighting was hand to hand, especially at the very parapet walls, and according to an eyewitness, Ellis excited everyone’s admiration with his conspicuous bravery. He was everywhere amid the swirling smoke and intense confusion, pushing, and shoving, flailing with his sword, and boosting men over the rails. He even drew the attention of the enemy.¹³¹

One Confederate soldier, in his haste to fire at Ellis did not remove his ramrod from his rifle musket. His rifle musket was aimed at Ellis only a few paces away. The ramrod struck Ellis end-on squarely in the left arm, sliced through the arm into his torso, and struck a rib. With the ramrod protruding from his body like some grotesque elongated metal thorn, Ellis was dragged from the scene in intense pain. When the ramrod was removed and the wound was examined by Surgeon George T. Stevens, it was discovered that the ramrod projectile had missed the bone in his arm, but had severely torn and bruised his left side below the heart. Dr. Stevens was worried that it might have

¹³¹ Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 99-100.

injured the heart, but despite Ellis's great agony while in the hospital at Fredericksburg, his wound seemed to heal.

Soon his strength returned, and he was discharged from the hospital in early July, after about seven weeks' convalescence. Instead of going home on furlough, Ellis opted to return to duty and was given an assignment on the staff of Major General David A. Russell, commanding the 1st Division of the VI Corps. As inspector General, Ellis was responsible for checking the condition of each regiment in the division. This was an active-duty assignment that required extensive travel by horseback to and from various camps. When other circumstances necessitated his duty as Provost Marshall, Ellis performed this task very well. For a full month, Ellis served on active duty, complaining little, but at times suffering in obvious pain.

On the morning of August 4, 1864 almost three months after the injury occurred, Major William Ellis died. After an initial autopsy, Dr. Stevens discovered what he had not known following the initial wounding. The ramrod had struck the rib cage with such force that a splinter, "as sharp as a needle" had broken off. This gradually worked its way forward through the torso, "piercing and irritating the internal organs," so that "abscesses had formed and broken in the spleen," and "finally the splinter had pierced the lung" and killed him. Dr. Stevens and the others could not believe it. Ellis had endured what they supposed others could not, and continued to do hard active duty. Given a hero's funeral in which the entire division participated, Ellis was laid to rest in New York, the victim of a bizarre wound and fate, but one of the nation's most profound if unheralded heroes-a

man whose courage extended far beyond the ordinary, through the threshold of pain to a level that few could even imagine.¹³²

It must be noted that not every general had the leadership and command abilities of the previous men discussed. It is important to look at the other side of the spectrum with generals who did not possess those leadership abilities and the effects which were a direct result of mistakes made by generals on the battlefield.

At the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, the Union Army under Ambrose Burnside again attempted massive assaults in linear formation across mostly open ground in the face of major enemy forces whose center was protected behind a stone wall. The men who fought at Antietam and other major slaughter grounds knew the dire prospects involved. But they were the survivors who still relied upon what they had been taught for countless hours on the drill ground. Battle-line discipline was used to fortify their mind-set of strength and numbers. The touch of the comrade's elbow, the collective confidence of togetherness, an electric current of being united in a common tactical effort with irresistible ardor and physical fellowship were supposed to inspire steadiness.¹³³

However, this did not happen at Fredericksburg as everything went awry. In the words of one New York Captain, "The way they pitched shot and shell at us was horrid. The air was filled with shrieking, bursting shells." Ordered to lie down to escape the slaughter, he saw the enemy run forward a section of artillery, which soon blasted the prone Federals with twenty to thirty rounds of canister. "It was like sowing bullets

¹³² Letter from Surgeon George T. Stevens, 77th New York Infantry, August 4, 1863. Wiley Sword Collection. Retrieved on March 7, 2012 from, Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007), 99-101.

¹³³ Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007), 33.

broadcast”, noted the captain. “How any of our regiment escaped was miraculous.”¹³⁴ Trapped beneath the enemy’s guns and compelled to wait out the fighting until the army withdrew after horrendous casualties, Burnside’s men were devastated. Once they reached safety the sickened Union Captain wrote, “Words cannot express how intensely disgusted I am with this show. It is the damndest humbug that ever was carried on.”¹³⁵

Poor leadership could help break apart the unity of Western New York regiments. Such occurred with the 82nd New York Infantry. After helplessly watching his regiment get decimated by rebel fire during their exposed assault up Marye’s Heights, Private Emmet Irwin of the 82nd New York Infantry wrote that “Antietam was but ‘child’s play’ compared to the naked helplessness he felt at Fredericksburg. Burnside’s massed assaults resulted he said, in ‘a human slaughterhouse.’ He proclaimed it ‘one of the most foolhardy movements of the war.’”¹³⁶ As a result, he considered seeking a discharge, for he did not feel like fighting again. “I feel as if I had gone through all these hardships and dangers, witnessed scenes too direful for the pen to tell, all for what—naught!”¹³⁷ Irwin’s estimate of ‘the incapacity’ of the army’s numerous commanders made him believe that he should follow the advice of a comrade’s wife; be sick once in a while, especially at

¹³⁴ Letter from Captain Fred E. Ranger, Company F, 22nd New York Infantry, December 17, 1862, Wiley Sword Collection. Retrieved on March 17, 2012 from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 33-34.

¹³⁵ Ibid., Retrieved on March 17, 2012 from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 33-34.

¹³⁶ Letter from Private Emmet M Irwin, Company C, 82nd New York Infantry, December 15, 1862. Wiley Sword Collection. Retrieved on March 17, 2012 from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 34.

¹³⁷ Ibid., Retrieved on March 17, 2012 from Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 34.

about the time there was to be another fight. This would be a good plan, he considered, “particularly if I thought we were to be led into another Fredericksburg affair.”¹³⁸

Private Irwin of the 82nd New York Infantry was not alone in his mounting disrespect for traditional methods and inexperienced commanders. The frequent lack of innovative approaches to fighting had resulted in a shocking number of casualties in the manner of stand-up, compact-battle-formation fighting. Management of men on an unprecedented huge scale of combat involved learning the lessons of a new, relatively sophisticated manner of fighting. Simplistic approaches to combat led increasingly to failure; to inspire men to perform under fire; the commander had to understand their minds. The natural fear of a man educated to know and envision the consequences of danger was paramount. Dealing with a reluctance to deliberately expose one’s self to death or severe injury was crucial in achieving victory in battle.¹³⁹

The linear tactical formations used in the American Civil War have been blamed for some of the indecision on the battlefield. They presented massed targets for men firing modern weapons at short ranges. The battle line was effective against short-range smoothbore muskets. The only way to deliver a significant volume of fire onto an attacker was to mass men in rowed, shallow formations and fire in unison. It has long been portrayed however, that as a tactical formation whose day had passed.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Letter from Private Emmet M Irwin, Company C, 82nd New York Infantry, December 15, 1862. Wiley Sword Collection. Retrieved on March 17, 2012 from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 34.

¹³⁹ Letter from Private Emmet M Irwin, Company C, 82nd New York Infantry, December 15, 1862. Wiley Sword Collection. Retrieved on March 17, 2012 from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 34.

¹⁴⁰ Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (Tuscaloosa, 1982), 31-32. Retrieved on March 18, 2012 from the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

The most important reason that battle during the American Civil War was indecisive was due to the lack of training among field commanders, who found it difficult to effectively manage huge armies that sprawled across the rugged landscape of the battlefield. This was the fault of the military system of the country and was felt on both strategic and tactical levels. It was not surprising that the tiny professional army was incapable of adequately training the enormous volunteer force, for it was dwarfed by the sheer size of it. With only 16,000 officers and men, the regular army could not mold a force that would number nearly 300,000 by the summer of 1862. At best, it could only try to ensure that soldiers were properly uniformed, armed, and drilled in the intricate maneuvers of linear formations. Far too often, volunteer officers had no regular officers to serve as mentors. Most of them had to study on their own, reading drill manuals the night before trying out the next maneuver on their unsuspecting men. No matter how inspired by ideology or adventure, no army of this type could be expected to win a large, complicated war quickly.¹⁴¹

Far worse than the regular army's inability to thoroughly train the volunteers was its failure to properly train its own personnel. West Point was not a true military school at this time. Rather than rounding out the cadets' knowledge with intensive study of strategy, tactics, logistics, administration, and planning, the curriculum focused on subjects its graduates could use in civilian society such as engineering. Given the country's traditional distrust of a large professional army, a holdover from the days of the American Revolution, West Point could not get the support to turn out well-trained generals. Many West Point graduates in the Union army rose above their training, but

¹⁴¹ Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge, 1952), 17-30. Retrieved on March 18, 2012 from the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

none could claim to have been adequately prepared for commanding larger forces in the field.¹⁴²

The most serious deficiency in academy training lay in administration. The army had no general staff to plan strategy or properly coordinate logistics. Although the administrators generally worked wonders in the areas of supply and communications, it was done without the aid of a modern administrative apparatus, similar to the kind being perfected in Prussia.¹⁴³

The institutional structure of the Union army could train and discipline these volunteer Civil War soldiers from Western New York and could often times furnish courageous leaders. However, these soldiers were by no means British Redcoats, or Frederick the Great's professional soldiers. One needs to keep in mind that these volunteer soldiers came from an American society that prized individualism, self-reliance, and freedom from coercive authority. As with the twenty-first century United States Army, the Civil War volunteer regiments broke down some of the individualism, or at least tried to, but could never turn these volunteer soldiers into machines. Deeper sources of combat motivation had to come from inside themselves.

Role of "Pride" and "Honor" as Sustaining Motivations

Pride and honor were of the utmost importance for Union soldiers from Western New York during the American Civil War. The pride and honor of an individual was bound up with the pride and honor of his regiment, his state, and the nation for which he fought. Individual soldiers whose courage nobody questioned, nonetheless shared the humiliation of units with which they were identified, company, regiment, and state. A

¹⁴² Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones. *How The North Won: A Military History of the Civil War*, University of Illinois Press, Illinois, 11-14.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 102-107.

Lieutenant in the 75th New York, a veteran of many battles in which his regiment had performed well, was deeply ashamed when the regiment broke at Third Winchester. “This was the first time the 75th had ever run and I felt the disgrace. I never felt so bad in my life... and I cared little whether I was shot.”¹⁴⁴

The most meaningful symbols of regimental pride were the colors of the regiment and the national flag which bonded the men’s loyalty to unit, state, and the nation for which they fought. Perhaps the only achievement that could surpass the honor of taking enemy colors or retaking one’s own would be to plant the national flag on a captured enemy position. Regimental rivalries to be the first to do so helped to explain the reckless courage of many Civil War assaults. In 1864, an officer of the 12th New York described a successful attack on the Confederate lines defending the Weldon Railroad near Petersburg. When the American flag appeared above the battle smoke on the enemy works, “It is quite impossible to describe the feelings one experiences at such a moment.”¹⁴⁵

As noted in the previous example, the flag had a very special way of uniting and bringing up the morale of Union troops from Western New York. The influence the flag had on soldiers is also evident with the Cortland Boys of 76th Regiment. This regiment did include a number of Buffalo natives, including Peter Brady, Philip Brady, George Brumagen, and William Bushart.¹⁴⁶ This regiment wrote a letter to the Adjutant General John T. Sprague asking him for a new flag, one with the names of the Civil War battles in

¹⁴⁴ Willie Root, Diary, entry of Sept. 25, 1864. Retrieved on March 21, 2012 from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 83.

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Paul Oliver to “Quita”, November 8, 1864, *Oliver Papers*, Retrieved on March 15, 2012 from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 85.

¹⁴⁶ Mike Brown, “76th NY Roster-B” Regimental History of the 76th New York, 1867. Retrieved on March 5, 2012, from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/roster-b.html>

which they fought stitched onto it. “For want of knowing where else to address my enquiries, I send you what I suppose are some very un-official questions, Our Cortland boys of the 76th Regt. N.Y. Vols. want a new stand of colors.”¹⁴⁷ The flag being a symbol of patriotism was necessary for this regiment to help them get through some of the tough battles they encountered.

Primary Group Cohesion as a Sustaining Motivator

This identification with regiment, state, country, and flag has a direct correlation to the idea of “primary group cohesion” which has been the focus of many writings based on combat motivation since World War II. The soldier’s primary group consists of the men closest to him whom he interacts with everyday in camp and in battle. Bonded by the common danger they face in battle, this primary group becomes a sort of “band of brothers”¹⁴⁸ whose mutual dependence and mutual support create the cohesion necessary to function as a fighting unit. The survival of each member of the group depends on the others doing their jobs. It is this group that enforces peer pressure against cowardice.

Much of what kept men going in the challenging environment on the battlefield was the mutually supportive interaction among the members of the small, tight, intimate community of the regiment. Its members were often residents of the same town or county who had joined as a community response to the war effort. Once in uniform, they forged

¹⁴⁷ Letter from Henry S. Randall to the State’s Adjutant General, November 3, 1863. Retrieved on March 10, 2012 from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/flagletter.html>.

¹⁴⁸ The term “Band of Brothers” was coined in relation to EASY Company by the author Stephen Ambrose in his book of the same name. The term comes from the speech by King Henry in William Shakespeare’s *Henry V* just before the Battle of Agincourt. EASY Company refers to E. Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. This company saw their first combat the night before the D-Day landings of June 6th. They were to Parachute into Normandy with the sole purpose of softening up the German defenses, and making the impending Allied invasion of the following morning less costly in terms of Allied soldiers’ lives. Unfortunately this softening up process failed badly in the area of Omaha Beach for various reasons. What impacted and inspired the bond that grew between these men, not only willing to fight and die for their country, but also for each other is what this term has come to represent.

bonds of trust and affection that went far beyond civilian acquaintanceships. Developed during hard marches in all types of weather and long nights spent in tented camps under the stars, these bonds knitted the regiment into a military family and endured the ultimate test of the soldier on the battlefield. The regiments were a “band of brothers”; enjoying nearly inexpressible ties of comradeship and respect that enabled the individual members to function during the worst trials combat had to offer.¹⁴⁹

Every group of soldiers in every war develops a special relationship that transcends explanation. It ties the individuals together with visible cords forged by their common experiences under extreme conditions of death and suffering. The near presence of these special companions enabled soldiers to endure a lot. The linear tactical formations used in the American Civil War grouped these soldiers together on the battlefield in intimate ways. They stood next to their comrades, shoulder touching shoulder, forming an unbroken chain across the deadly battlefield. They shared the same dangers, stood the same chances of getting hit, and fired their muskets in unison.¹⁵⁰

In a more modern era, the progressive thinking [concern about injury] of the common soldier was self-evident with the evolution in battle tactics. Teachings based upon the Napoleonic models said that soldiers marching to attack in line, shoulder to shoulder with others, derived and provided mutual support in the feeling of “togetherness” in coping with a common danger. The massed union of bodies moving together across a battlefield in a drill-practiced, disciplined maneuver would negate the primitive instincts of flight, reasoned the analysts. Knowing that the man next to you was undergoing [and surviving] the same dangerous circumstances, and feeling his physical

¹⁴⁹ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 106.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

presence there with you, was a powerful source of mental strength to steel the mind against fear.¹⁵¹

For many Western New York soldiers, this was a very good incentive to stay and fight. For often, this could lead to a fate worse than death. Nathan Buck, a veteran in the 122nd New York explains this concept in a letter to his sister on July 9, 1864 when she asked him what kept him going through the carnage he experienced at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg. “You ask me if the thought of death does not alarm me, I will say I do not wish to die, I myself am as big a coward as any could be, but give me the ball before the coward when all my friends and companions are going forward.”¹⁵² He goes on to say, “Once and once only, was I behind when the regiment was under fire, and I can’t describe my feelings at that time, none can tell them only a soldier. I was unable to walk...but as soon as the rattle of musketry was heard and I knew my Regt. was engaged I hobbled on the field and went to them.”¹⁵³

The military family was a vessel in which hundreds of thousands of Northern men survived the storm of war. For those whose intellectual devotion to the cause was weak or who could not figure out what had motivated them to join the army, there was the devotion to beloved comrades to give them a reason to fight. This was probably the most pervasive and most deeply felt source of battlefield morale for the Western New York Union soldier.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), 32.

¹⁵² Letter from Nathan Buck to his sister, July 9, 1864. Retrieved on March 12, 2011 from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 87.

¹⁵³ Ibid. Retrieved on March 23, 2012 from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 87.

¹⁵⁴ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 122.

Hatred of the Enemy as a Sustaining Motivation:

Another motivation that helped the volunteer soldiers from Western New York was their determination to “clean out” the rebels whom they held responsible for starting the war. A captain in the 91st New York believed that “A rebel against the best government the world ever saw is worthy only one of two things to wit a bullet or a halter...If I hated a rebel before I left home, I hate him double now.”¹⁵⁵

As the American Civil War went on, in a few instances this sustaining motivation for Western New York Union soldiers of hatred against the enemy conjured up the want of revenge against the enemy. Often times, this was taken to the extreme. William P. Barker of the 6th New York Heavy Artillery did just that, although he had good reason for wanting revenge. His son, who served in a different unit, had been killed. In February, 1865, Barker was recovering from a wound and had just received the news that he would soon be sent back to his regiment. He was upset however, that the war seemed about to end. “I ache for a little more revenge for my poor son and also four times wounded myself. I hate to give it up so.”¹⁵⁶

Letters from home as sustaining motivators

Another incentive which Union soldiers from Western New York used to help give them the strength and courage to keep fighting through the difficult aspects of war and battle was receiving mail from back home. Letters from home helped remind the soldiers of their duty and what they were fighting for. These letters have been of crucial importance in sustaining morale in all literate armies. Richard W. Little in his work

¹⁵⁵ Letter from John G McDermott to Isabella McDermott, March 14, 1862. Retrieved on March 14, 2012 from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 154.

¹⁵⁶ Letter from William P. Barker to daughter, February 23, 1865. *William P. Barker Papers*. New York State Historical Association. Retrieved on March 17, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 120.

“Buddy Relations and Combat Performance” believes that, “Letters represent the soldier’s major contact with the social unit that reinforces his desire to serve faithfully under great hardship.”¹⁵⁷

This idea of letters from home sustaining morale is evident in a number of letters from Civil War soldiers from Western New York. In a letter written by Private Henry Ferguson on December 24, 1863 from Buffalo, New York, he writes, “I have just received your kind and loving letter and was glad to hear that you were all well at home as this leaves me at present. But I have Ben Sick for the last week with the Fever and Ague. Thank god I have got well again.”¹⁵⁸ Clearly, for this soldier, being able to hear that his family was doing well made his morale improve. This idea is also evident in another letter written by Private William Galpin to his father on January 26, 1863. Galpin writes, “I received your Kind letter last night and I Was glad to hear from you and hearing that you was well.”¹⁵⁹ For the volunteer regiments of the American Civil War, including those from Western New York composed of community based companies, the point is doubly relevant.

Letters from home also helped soldiers become civilians again when they returned home from fighting. The military experience took the soldier out of his domestic environment, which Victorian culture believed was essential for moralistic education and civic indoctrination. The environment of the home, with mother or wife as influence, civilized men and made them productive members of society. In many people’s minds,

¹⁵⁷ Roger W. Little, “Buddy Relations and Combat Performance,” in M. Janowitz (ed), *The New Military: Changing Patterns of Organization*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964), 219.

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Private Henry Ferguson to his Mother, December 24, 1863. Retrieved on April 25, 2011, from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76fergusonh.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from Private William Galpin to his Father, January 26, 1863. Retrieved on April 25, 2011, from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76galponw.html>.

the military family threatened these virtues that were so slowly created in the hearts of civilians. Americans had always distrusted military service, partly because of the potential threat that a professional army posed to a democratic government. But just as important, they distrusted military service because it took impressionable young men into a world without women, at least not the right kind of women. It was an environment where harsh discipline and rough manners were the norm and learning to kill was the ultimate lesson.

The vast majority of Northern men who fought in the American Civil War were volunteers, separated from the regulars and enlisting only for the war. Yet they were in many cases commanded by regular officers and were under similar constraints as those who served in the professional army. The separation of hundreds of thousands of men from their civilian families was no small matter, and it became important that the volunteer not be lost to the military family. Maintaining contact with the domestic family and its values made it easier for the volunteer Civil War soldier from Western New York to become a civilian again after the war.¹⁶⁰ In addition, thinking of family members seemed to create a feeling of peace and composure amid the noise and chaos of battle. Captain Nelson Chapin of the 85th New York described this feeling of peace as an “Almost entirely dreamlike state-without any realization of fear.”¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York, 1993) 19-37, 71-87. Retrieved on March 20, 2012, from the Buffalo and Erie County Central Library.

¹⁶¹ Letter from Nelson Chapin to his wife, April 26, 1862. Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 123.

Chapter 3 Changes in the American Civil War

Changes in recruitment policies later in the Civil War lead to draft riots in

Buffalo, New York

As the war went on, it became harder to find men willing to enlist. Men heard of the horrible battles and harsh conditions and were not volunteering anymore. By the year 1864, many men were leaving the army. About one hundred thousand hardened Union veterans legally left the army in 1864 at the end of their three-year terms of enlistment. These men represented a valuable resource that was lost to the Northern cause. The men who refused to re-enlist in 1864 symbolized a major problem for those in charge of mobilizing manpower for this long, bitter war. Recruiting had been relatively easy in 1861, with young, largely property-less men flocking to the colors to experience adventure or to act on patriotic impulses.

By 1863, it was harder for local communities to fill enlistment quotas. This was partly due to the fact that the war demanded so many men and communities had a finite supply of able-bodied recruits. It was also due to a growing awareness of the war's true cost in money and blood. Returning veterans and wounded and sick men told of the horrible bloodbaths that resulted in little strategic gain, beginning a trend toward war-weariness that would take its toll on recruiting efforts. It is at this time the Northern draft¹⁶² comes into play.

In the summer of 1862, the Thirty Seventh Congress passed the first of two conscription laws. The Militia Act of July 17, 1862, a weak and ineffective measure, was

¹⁶² It must be noted that the Northern war effort was carried by the core of highly motivated men who had enlisted in 1861-1862, not by those questionable patriots who were brought into the army from 1863-1865.

replaced by the Enrollment Act which was signed into law on March 3, 1863 by Abraham Lincoln.¹⁶³

According to some scholars, this single act reduced states rights' severely, while others felt it represented class legislation that gave credence to the phrase "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight."¹⁶⁴ Many citizens agreed with the latter accusation and because of it, the infamous Draft Riots of 1863 occurred in Buffalo, New York. An article in the Herald says, "The riot was caused not only by an unjust enrollment, but by the way the draft was made."¹⁶⁵

Another cause of the Draft Riots which occurred in Buffalo was the conflict between the Irish immigrants and the African Americans. In order to understand how this conflict came to fruition, it is necessary to understand mid-nineteenth century immigration to the United States and where many of these immigrants were coming from. During the 1840's in Ireland, three quarters of the rural Irish were dependent on the potato for sustenance. When the Irish potato famine hit in 1845, Ireland became the sight of tragedy of epic proportions. Three million farmers and laborers would be left destitute by the end of the famine. Most were living in squalor and were ravaged by hunger and disease. Too poor to pay their rents, over a half-million Irish were evicted from their

¹⁶³ In final form, the Enrollment Act consisted of thirty eight sections. Most significantly, it authorized the president to draft Northern citizens for a period of up to three years. It also created the bureaucracy necessary to implement the federal draft.

¹⁶⁴ The reason the Enrollment Act created a conflict between different social classes was due to a number of exemptions, the most controversial being the extension of the dual privilege of commutation and substitution to all drafted men. In other words, a conscript who possessed the means could either pay a \$300 exemption fee or provide a substitute. Congress deliberately inserted these provisions in order to soften the impact of a potentially very unpopular law on a war-weary public. It was these exemptions that gave rise to a belief to some that the American Civil War was now a "Rich man's war and poor man's fight".

¹⁶⁵ James B. Fry, *New York and the Conscription of 1863; A chapter in history of the Civil War* (New York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knicker Bocker Press, 1885) 32.

homes. For many, to stay in Ireland meant starvation, disease and death. Emigration seemed their only chance at survival.

While America was the land of promise for many immigrants, the Famine Irish were at a disadvantage. Many were illiterate and arrived with few skills and no money. This forced many of the newly arrived Irish into America's lowest economic levels. Americans were appalled by the influx of Irish to their shores following the Famine. These newly arrived immigrants were not the same Irish who arrived before. They were poor, dirty, and uneducated. To the nineteenth century mind, poverty was a moral failing, a sign of laziness. However, the most horrifying aspect was that the majority of these immigrants were Catholic.¹⁶⁶ While Catholics had immigrated to the United States before, they quietly blended into American society. This would not be the case with the new Irish Catholics.

Prior to the arrival of the Irish, African-Americans had resided in New York State as both freemen and slaves. Former slaves and freemen worked mostly as dock workers and domestic servants. For the most part, former slaves and freemen were poorly educated and had little job skills useful to the Northern economy. The Famine Irish were no better off. The lack of skills and education put both groups into direct competition for the same jobs, creating resentment among both groups. On January 1, 1863 the Emancipation Proclamation freed all slaves in the Confederate states. Understandably, at this time African Americans were openly supportive of the Republican Party, while the

¹⁶⁶ To be Irish Catholic was a stigma in American society. The new immigrants were viewed as dirty, violent, unskilled, uneducated drunks. It was this wave of anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant feeling that the Know-Nothings rode to popularity. The American Republic Party was formed in New York State in 1843. Its central theme was to keep America American. Following the arrival of the Famine Irish, the party quickly spread into neighboring states under the new name, the Native American Party. They came to be called the Know-Nothing Party due to the reply of members when quizzed about the party: "I know nothing."

Democrats went after the new immigrants – the Irish and the Germans. The Irish were already in intense labor competition with African Americans in Western New York. To make matters worse, by the end of 1862, the Union was in desperate need of more soldiers. In order to fulfill this need, the draft was instituted.

In order to understand this, it is necessary to recall the state of affairs in the spring and summer of 1862. In the Adjutant-General of New York's report to the Governor dated December 31, 1862, he says:

Without any general or formal call your Excellency was advised in a dispatch from the Adjutant General of the Army of May 21st that an additional force of three years volunteer would be accepted...Owing however, to the great demand for labor in the field and workshop no great progress was made, and on the 1st of July more than a month after, although one hundred and fifty authorizations to raise companies had been issued, the aggregate of enlistments did not exceed three thousand men.¹⁶⁷

The eagerness to enter the service which had been manifested at previous periods had disappeared at this time, and it appeared as if the people had fallen into apathy from which only an extraordinary effort could arouse them. Meanwhile, the most important events in the American Civil War were transpiring. The losses sustained by the Union Army in Virginia from sickness, and in the engagements which had taken place on the Peninsula had reduced it to a defensive attitude and rendered its reinforcement or withdrawal a matter of necessity. In the West, the waste from disease and battle and the necessity of occupying strategic points had so much reduced the forces available for field operations, that the Confederates with numbers greatly augmented through a vigorous conscription policy were preparing to assume the offensive in a series of movements which subsequently brought them to the banks of the Ohio and the Potomac.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ James B. Fry, *New York and the Conscription of 1863; A chapter in history of the Civil War* (New York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knicker Bocker Press, 1885) 5.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

Therefore, on July 2, 1862 President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for 300,000 volunteers. This was known to be the final effort to suppress the rebellion by voluntary military service. Every possible form of encouragement was adopted for the purpose of stimulating enlistments. However, the demand for troops during the summer increased more rapidly than the supply so that on August 4, 1862 the President issued his proclamation for 300,000 nine months militia and the war department followed the proclamation with orders and instructions under which the Governor's of some of the states commenced a draft as ordered by the General Governor on the 3rd of September.¹⁶⁹

The desire to enter service, prompted by the first ebullition of military ardor, had subsided and was replaced by the popular demand that the different states should furnish proportional numbers of men for the army.¹⁷⁰ The Act of March 3, 1863 entitled, "An act for enrolling and calling out the national forces for other purposes" required the enrollment and the draft of the national forces and the arrest of deserters.¹⁷¹ On March 17, 1866, one year after the American Civil War ended, the Provost Marshall General had this to say regarding the Act of March 3, 1863:

The public safety would have been risked by longer delay in the enactment of the law. A general apathy prevailed throughout the country on the subject of volunteering. Recruiting had subsided, while desertion had greatly increased. The result of the important military operations during the first months of 1863 had been unfavorable and exercised a depressing effect upon the public mind. The Battle of Stones River left the Army of the Cumberland crippled upon the field, and forced it to inactivity for months. Our advance on Vicksburg by way of Hane's Bluff had been repulsed with serious loss. Knowledge of the extent of the disaster at Fredericksburg had reached and dispirited the loyal people. The first attack on Fort Sumter by the Navy had failed. The short but bloody and disastrous campaign of Chancellorsville was made, and the army of the Potomac once more confined to the defensive. The rebel army was stronger in numbers than at any other period of the war. The party in the North, encouraged by these events opposed the raising of the new levies and especially the enforcement of the conscription law. It was a palpable fact that our success at the period referred to depended on raising more troops, and that more troops could be raised only by carrying out the Enrollment Act. The Enrollment Act was approved March 3, 1863 under extreme pressure. The law made it the duty of the President to draft into the army as many

¹⁶⁹ James B. Fry, *New York and the Conscription of 1863; A chapter in history of the Civil War* (New York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knicker Bocker Press, 1885) 8.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

of the men liable to service, {based} on the enrollment, as he might from time to time find necessary, coupled with the condition, that in assigning quotas the number of volunteers and militia, and the periods of their service, previously furnished by the several states, should be duly credited. The first order for the draft under the Enrollment Act in the State of New York was issued on July 1, 1863 for the 30th district. The Enrollment Act was passed to be promptly enforced. There was no dispute that a pressing necessity existed for more troops. The enforcement of the law was the way provided by Congress, it was not the only way to obtain them. The draft was going on favorably in New England.¹⁷²

On October 17, 1863, the President called for 300,000 volunteers and ordered that a draft be made for all deficiencies which might exist. On July 18, 1864, the President made a call for 500,000 men, and quotas based on the revised enrollment were distributed. This revised enrollment led to the largest Draft Riot of all which occurred in New York City.¹⁷³

The draft brought in many men who were not dedicated to the cause and were there for money or because they were being forced. This did not go unnoticed by the dedicated volunteer soldiers. A private in the 85th New York agreed that “thoes money soldiers are not worth as much as they cost for when you heer firing ahead you may see them hid in the woods.”¹⁷⁴

Changes in Battle Strategies Later in the Civil War

Later in the war, after 1864, Northern soldiers found themselves fighting with little possibility of quick victory on the battlefield. They would have to pay a deadly price for their nation’s insistence on maintaining a small, poorly trained professional army in

¹⁷² James B. Fry, *New York and the Conscription of 1863; A chapter in history of the Civil War* (New York and London, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, The Knicker Bocker Press, 1885), 11, 19, 29.

¹⁷³ In New York City and Brooklyn, twenty six percent of the population was enrolled, while in Boston, only twelve and a half percent were liable to be drafted. The population of New York City and Brooklyn based on the last census were 1,092,791. The number of citizens enrolled in the draft in those two cities was 184,925, a percentage of 16.92 percent. The quotas of New York were larger than those of the New England States, but they were smaller than those of New Jersey, and much smaller than those of several Western states, due to their larger proportion of men. The quotas in New York were only 104 per congressional district above the United States average. In the end, more than one thousand of the rioters were killed or wounded to death. Retrieved from James B. Fry, *New York and the Conscription of 1863; A chapter in history of the Civil War* (New York and London, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, The Knicker Bocker Press, 1885), 60-68.

¹⁷⁴ James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 116.

peacetime. The only thing they could do was obey orders and move forward into yet another costly and probably futile assault that should not have taken place. There were no military commissions charged with finding out why battle was indecisive in order to offer recommendations for dealing with this problem. The regular army was too small, poorly trained, and overwhelmed with other duties to fulfill that important role.¹⁷⁵

By 1864, in response to the persistent deadlock on the battlefield, Northern commanders developed a policy of continuous campaigning, a major innovation in the course of American military history. This new policy of continuous campaigning led to another innovation, the use of sophisticated field fortifications. Continuous campaigning failed to make battle decisive, but it did wear down the Confederate army in a strategy of exhaustion that shortened the war. The use of sophisticated field fortifications was a major reason that the tactic of continuous campaigning did not lead to dramatic breakthroughs on the battlefield. The North would win the war with continuous campaigning, but its casualty rate would rise exponentially. Continuous campaigning was a new experience for Northern soldiers.

During the first three years of the Civil War, operations had centered on the pitched battle, a distinct engagement lasting from a few hours to a few days, each engagement separated by weeks if not months of preparation, maneuvering and idleness. In Europe, where geographic distances were shorter and improved road systems offered armies a greater opportunity to achieve strategic gains in a shorter time, seasonal campaigning did not necessarily prolong conflicts. However, in America, with its dirt roads, and greater geographic expanses, seasonal campaigning prolonged the fighting and

¹⁷⁵ Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War*, (New Haven Connecticut, Yale University Press, 2001) 190.

the loss of life. This pattern was changed in March of 1864 when Ulysses S. Grant was promoted to Commander of all the Federal armies. Grant intended to apply continuous pressure on the two major Confederate armies in Virginia and Georgia in order to wear down their strength and prevent them from taking the strategic offensive into territory already cleared of rebel troops. As a result, the campaigns of 1864-1865 would be a new and terrible experience for the Western New York soldier. The pitched battles of 1861-1863 had been extremely costly. That would not change. Essentially, Grant's strategy would pack several battles with the intensity of Gettysburg and Chickamauga into a compressed time span, each one linked by only a few hours or days of maneuvering into new positions while under the guns of an "alert and desperate enemy".¹⁷⁶

The extensive use of earthen field fortifications was a direct result of continuous campaigning. Earthworks had been widely used from 1861-1863, but primarily to protect fixed assets such as towns, artillery emplacements, and river passages. This technique lead to an ominous preview of World War I, with massed frontal attacks against determined men armed with modern weapons and protected by a sophisticated series of trenches. The casualty rate was similar as well.¹⁷⁷

After four months of continuous campaigning and the loss of some 23,000 Union and 29,000 Confederate soldiers, the western armies knew the hardships of modern warfare as well as the eastern armies.¹⁷⁸ Major Charles Houghton of the 14th New York Heavy Artillery described the transformation of these trenches into hell holes.

¹⁷⁶ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 65.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁷⁸ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, 1988), 742.

The sun was pouring its fiercest heat down upon us and our suffering wounded. No air was stirring within the crater. It was a sickening site: Men were dead and dying all around us; blood was streaming down the sides of the crater to the bottom, where it gathered in pools for a time before absorbed by the hard red clay.¹⁷⁹

This was the environment that the Western New York soldier entered. The nature of battle during the Civil War was such that the warrior could expect little opportunity to participate in quick or decisive engagements. Instead, he had to find his way through a vast, often cruel experiment in modernization. The military world in which the American Civil War took place was changing, and the average soldier did not have a chance to affect the course of this new battlefield or even to fully understand it.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Charles H. Houghton, "In the Crater" in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 4. (New York, 1956), 562. Retrieved on March 7, 2012 from <http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/books/battles/vol4/pageview.cfm?page=562>.

¹⁸⁰ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 72.

Chapter 4 Postwar Memory/Conclusion

Clearly, there was some cause for concern that physical survival might not be enough. The emotional and moral degradation could be as serious a problem in the postwar world as amputated limbs. Federal veterans quickly rejected the more unrealistic images of combat and the soldier that were handed to them by the media, and the educational system. History books, pictures from illustrated newspapers, and poetic descriptions of combat paled in comparison to the unadorned reality they saw in their first engagements. The soldier's knowledge of war could produce bitterness toward civilians who were isolated from combat and still retained unrealistic conceptions of it.

However, it must be noted from my own research, most Civil War soldiers from Western New York did not allow frustration, bitterness, or callousness to permanently alter their character or their faith in the war effort. The proof of this was the tone and content of their memoirs and public speeches to veteran's groups, in which they evaluated and reaffirmed their war experiences. George F. Williams of the 5th and 146th New York supports this with the following quote from his memoir.

But when a man has spent a week in toilsome marches toward battle, and then faced the enemy when death was hovering in the air, it is not easy for him to forget the fatigue, the hunger and thirst, the blanket-bed by the roadside, the hot skirmish on the picket-line, the gallop of the battery into position, the steady advance in line of battle, or the fierce charge at a turning point in the engagement. Though these scenes make but little impression on his mind at the moment, they all come back to him in after years, and he is surprised to find how clearly he can recall each incident. It is this faculty that leads the veteran, whether he wore the blue or the gray, to talk lovingly of the days when he carried the musket or the sword.¹⁸¹

It is certainly true that the experience of battle took whatever glory there was out of war.

The expectations of combat held by most volunteers in 1861 were so naïve that any

¹⁸¹ Quote by George F. Williams of the 5th and 146th New York. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 158.

exposure to battle would have destroyed them. They developed a sense of professionalism that was based not on the models offered by the media or by politicians, but on their own personal experiences with combat.

The Western New York soldier had come a long way from the innocent enthusiasm of 1861 to the grizzled embrace of war and its costs in 1865. The conflict had lasted far longer than anyone could have dreamed. It initiated a generation in the hard realities of life on the battle line and weakened the health of thousands of young men who would have to deal with lost limbs and battle wounds that refused to heal properly. The nature of combat certainly threatened the morale of all those who endured battle. It was an unusual experience far removed from the civilian life of Western New York. He had to leave behind his naïve, imaginative conceptions of battle and begin crossing the gulf of experience that separated the veteran from the civilian. He had to learn that battle was an experience of the senses. The sights, sounds, smells, and even the tactile sensations caused by near misses were his battle experience. He went a step beyond this to know the full lethality of combat as he saw his comrades hit by balls and shells and became a target himself. Actually getting hit by projectiles and experiencing the life in the Union army hospitals took many of these Western New York soldiers even farther across the gulf of experience. Still, others gave their lives as payment for preserving the Union. As the war continued its slow course, it became evident that this conflict was characterized by dubious victories, prolonged defense, and the grinding trauma of total war as an entire nation collapsed of exhaustion. It was a war that fully tested the battlefield morale of its participants.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 192-193.

Inevitably, some proportion of Western New York soldiers failed the emotional challenge of battle, but the exact percentage is hard to determine. About nine percent of all Federal soldiers deserted during the war, but their motivations were difficult to pin down.¹⁸³ The terrible tragedy of it all was the unrelenting scything of the youth of America in both body and mind. The lessons learned about life had been so severe as to alter the essence and demeanor of a generation. The nation's innocence had gone with the winds of war and the tariff had been the death of 620,000 Americans, about one quarter of the soldiers enlisted and two percent of the entire population of 31 million. Ironically, once the historians and statisticians sorted it out, the fatalities on the battlefield, about 205,000 paled in comparison with those from disease. More than two-thirds of Civil War soldier's deaths were not battle induced. A total of about 415,000 Civil War fatalities were from sickness.¹⁸⁴

The goal of this research was to uncover what motivated Civil War soldiers from Western New York to fight so valiantly and for so long. From my research, as discussed in this work, motivations of the thrill of combat, adventure, and hatred of the enemy served as the initial motivations for Western New York Civil War soldiers to go to war, while the motivations of duty, honor, patriotism, and ideology/religion functioned as both initial and sustaining motivations. The impulses of courage, self-respect and group cohesion were the main sources of combat motivation. This study supports James McPherson's work *For Cause and Comrades* in which he analyzed more than 25,000

¹⁸³ From my own research, it does not appear that deserters wrote down their personal accounts as to why they left. Most of them deserted between battles rather than during engagements. A range of factors that were not necessarily related to combat probably led them to take that route. The evidence clearly shows that most soldiers stayed in the army and provided some sort of service to the cause.

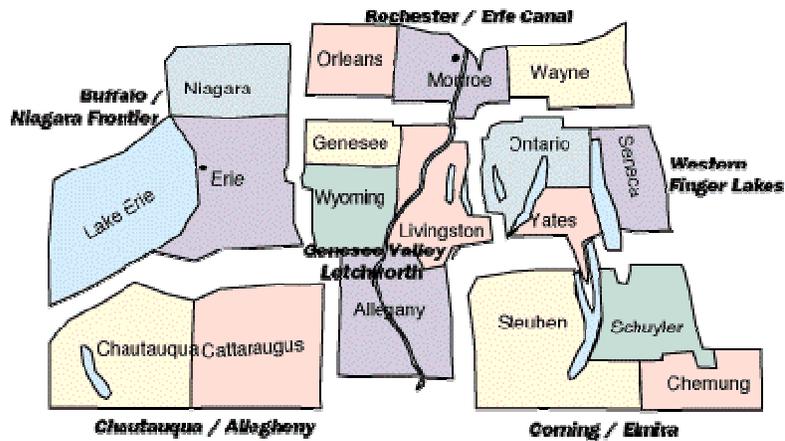
¹⁸⁴ Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861-1865*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company. 1901, 55. Retrieved on March 5, 2012 from the Buffalo and Erie County Central Library

letters and 250 diaries from Union and Confederate soldiers. I support his conclusion that soldiers during the American Civil War remained powerfully convinced of the ideals for which they fought throughout the conflict. This was no different for Civil War soldiers from Western New York. This study does not support Richard Kohn's beliefs that no single phenomenon could possibly explain the motives of soldiers. This study clearly shows that soldiers from Western New York knew what they were fighting for and were motivated by it.

This study also gives a glimpse into how republics engage in war. As this study demonstrates, when volunteer soldiers are motivated enough by the cause of the conflict they will fight to the death, for both their comrades and for abstract concepts. However, when a draft is put into place in a republic, it will often produce soldiers who are not dedicated. This makes sense since in a republic forced military service goes against its core ideals. This was the case during the American Civil War. As the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War has just passed, one should keep in mind the motivations that inspired these men to sacrifice so much for a better future for generations to come.

Images

Figure 1 (Western New York)



<http://www.westernny.com/regions.html>

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Lincoln, Abraham. "First Inaugural Address" March 4, 1861. Retrieved on March 8, 2012 <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/1inaug.htm>

Smith, A.P. "Lieutenant Ralph W. Carrier" Regimental History of the 76th New York, 1867. Retrieved on March 5, 2011 from, <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76carrier.html>.

Smith, A.P. "Lieutenant Chauncey D. Crandall" Regimental History of the 76th New York, 1867. Retrieved on March 5, 2011 from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76crandallcd.html>

Biographies:

Biography of Adjutant Hubert Carpenter. Retrieved from the Regimental history of the 76th New York. Retrieved on March 2, 2012. <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76Carpenterh.html>

Biography of Mike Brown, "76th NY Roster-B" Regimental History of the 76th New York, 1867. Retrieved on March 5, 2011, from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/roster-b.html>

Biography of Captain Oscar C. Fox. Retrieved from the Regimental history of the 76th New York, on March 2, 2011. <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76foxo.html>.

Letters and Diaries:

Bauer, Jack K., ed., "Soldiering: The Civil War Diary of Rice C. Bull, 123rd New York Volunteer Infantry" San Rafael, 1977, 44. Retrieved from, Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 6.

Diary entry from Henry Warren Howe, May 26, 1863. Retrieved from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 115.

Diary entry from Willie Root, Sept. 25, 1864. Retrieved from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 83.

- Letter from Edward Cook to his parents, November 1862. Retrieved from Neal E. Wixson, *Echoes from the Boys of Company 'H'*. New York: iUniverse, 2008, 45.
- Letter from Captain Fred E. Ranger, Company F, 22nd New York Infantry, December 17, 1862, Wiley Sword Collection. Retrieved from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007, 33-34.
- Letter Constant Hanks to Mother, April 20, 1863. Hank Papers. Retrieved from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 121.
- Letter from Daniel Holt to his wife, May 15, 1863. Daniel Holt Papers, New York State Historical Association. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 100.
- Letter from Felix Brannigan to sister, July 26, 1862, Brannigan Papers, Retrieved from James McPherson *For Causes and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 66.
- Letter from George Harper to James Harper, December 21, 1862, Hopper Papers. Retrieved from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 44.
- Letter from Henry S. Randall to the State's Adjutant General, November 3, 1863. Retrieved on March 10, 2011 from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/flagletter.html>.
- Letter Henry M. Crydenwise to Parents, August 19, 1862. Crydenwise Papers. Retrieved from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 118.
- Letter from Henry S. Gansevoort to his father, August 4, 1861 in Memorial of Henry Sanford Gansevoort, ed. John D. Hoadley (Boston, 1875). Retrieved from, James M. McPherson, *What They Fought For*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994, 32.
- Letter from Henry Webb to Mrs. Smiley. Retrieved from *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007, 168-169.
- Letter from Horace B. Ensworth to family at home, April 20, 1862. Retrieved from, Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007, 11.

- Letter from Horace B. Ensworth, Company B 81st New York Infantry to his father, December 1, 1864. Retrieved from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007, 12-13.
- Letter from David Ketcham to his Mother, August 19, 1862. Retrieved from, A. J. H. Duganne *Fighting Quakers: A True Story of the War For Our Union*. New York: J.P. Robens, 1866, 29.
- Letter from Edward Cook to his parents, November, 1862. Retrieved from Neal E. Wixson *The Boys of Company 'H'*. New York: iUniverse, 2008, 45.
- Letter from Edwin Brookfield to mother, December 7, 1863, Brookfield Papers. Retrieved from James M. McPherson *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 55.
- Letter from Francis E. Pierce to Edward Chapin, September 25, 1862, "Civil War Letters of Pierce" Retrieved from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 39.
- Letter from Jacob Heffelfinger to Jennie Heffelfinger, August 11, 1862. Retrieved from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 29.
- Letter from Private James Perry Campbell, Company D, 79th Illinois Infantry, October 17, 1863. Retrieved from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007, 27.
- Letter from John G McDermott to Isabella McDermott, March 14, 1862. Retrieved from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 154.
- Letter from John Pellet to parents, Aug 4, 1861. Retrieved from, James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 23.
- Letter from John J. Sherman, undated, in George E. and William D. Murphy, "The Eighth New York Heavy Artillery" Retrieved from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 48.
- Letter from Martin Lennon to sister, April 9, 1862, in "Letters and Extracts from the Diary of Captain Martin Lennon." Retrieved from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 72.

- Letter from Nathan Buck to his sister, July 9, 1864. Retrieved from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 87.
- Letter from Nelson Chapin to his wife, October 19, 1863, April 26, 1862 in Chapin Papers. Retrieved from James M. McPherson, *What They Fought For 1861-1865*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994, 34.
- Letter from Paul Oliver to “Quita”, November 8, 1864, Oliver Papers, Retrieved from James McPherson *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 85.
- Letter from Paul A. Oliver to Sam Oliver, January 2, 1863. Retrieved from, James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 99.
- Letter from Private Emmet M Irwin, Company C, 82nd New York Infantry, December 15, 1862. Wiley Sword Collection. Retrieved from Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War*. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007, 34.
- Letter from Private Erastus Gregory, Company C, 114th New York Infantry, May 31 to June 13, 1863. Wiley Sword Collection. Retrieved from Wiley Sword, *Courage under Fire: Profiles in Bravery from the Battlefields of the Civil War* New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007, 165-166.
- Letter from Private Henry Ferguson to his Mother, December 24, 1863. Retrieved on April 25, 2011, from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76fergusonh.html>.
- Letter from Private William Galpin to his Father, January 26, 1863. Retrieved on April 25, 2011, from <http://www.bpmlegal.com/76NY/76galponw.html>.
- Letter from Samuel C. Day to Irving Greenwood, December 28, 1862, Samuel C. Day Papers, Minnesota Historical Society. Retrieved from, Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 7.
- Letter from Surgeon George T. Stevens, 77th New York Infantry, August 4, 1863. Wiley Sword Collection. Retrieved from, Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War* New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007, 99-101.

Letter from William P. Barker to daughter, February 23, 1865. William P. Barker Papers. New York State Historical Association. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 120.

Letter from William H Murray to sister, early 1863, Murray Papers. Retrieved from James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 34.

Wheeler, William. *Letters of William Wheeler of the Class of 1855*. Cambridge, 1875, 409, 417. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 28, 102

State Papers:

“Life of Henry Warren Howe: Diary and Letters Written during the Civil War 1861-1865”. Lowell, Massachusetts: Courier Citizen Company Printers, 1899, 5. Retrieved from <http://www.archive.org/texts/flipbook/flippy.php?id=passagesfromlife00howe>.

Secondary Sources:

Abernathy, Byron R. ed., *Private Elisha Stockwell, Jr., Sees the Civil War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958) 8ff. Retrieved from, Wiley Sword, *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War*. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007, 38.

Boulpaep, Emile Walter F. Boron. “Medical Physiology: A Cellular and Molecular Approach” Philadelphia: Elsevier/Saunders. Retrieved on March 7, 2011 from <http://www.worldofmolecules.com/drugs/adrenaline.htm>

Dodge, Theodore A. “Left Wounded on the Field,” *Putnam Magazine*. 4 September 1869: 320-321. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 80-81.

Duganne, A. J. H. “Fighting Quakers: A True Story of the War For Our Union”. New York: J.P. Robens, 1866

Elson, Ruth Miller. *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century*. Lincoln, 1964. 324-327. Retrieved from, Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 2.

- Fitts, James Franklin, "In the Ranks at Cedar Creek," *Galaxy* vol.1 Issue 6. 1866: 566. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 78, 121, 540-541.
- Fry, James B. "New York and the Conscription of 1863; A chapter in history of the Civil War". New York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knicker Bocker Press, 1885, 5,8,9,11,70, 19, 29, 32-33, 57.
- Gerrish, Henry Memoir, 28 *Civil War Times Illustrated* Collection, U.S. Army Military History Institute. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 27.
- Goss, Warren Lee. *Recollections of a Private* (New York, 1890), 40-41. Retrieved from *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 3.
- Griffith, Paddy. "Battle Tactics of the Civil War", New Haven Connecticut, Yale University Press, 2001. 190.
- Hattaway, Herman Jones, Archer. *How The North Won: A Military History of the Civil War*. Urbana, 1983, 47.
- Heslin, James J. ed., "A Yankee Soldier in a New York Regiment", *New York Historical Quarterly* 50 April 1966:116.
- Hess, Earl J. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997.
- Holt, Daniel. "In Captivity," *Civil War Times Illustrated*. 18 August 1979: 38.
- Houghton, Charles H. "In the Crater" in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 4. New York, 1956, 562. Retrieved on April 5, 2012 from <http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/books/battles/vol4/pageview.cfm?page=562>.
- James, Tanner. *Experiences of a Wounded Soldier at the Second Bull Run*. N.P., 1927, 123. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 30-31.
- Jamieson, Perry D. McWhiney, Grady, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* Tuscaloosa, 1982, 31-32.
- Karsten, Peter. "The "New" American Military History: A Map of the Territory. Explored and Unexplored" *American Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1984): 394.

- Kohn, Richard "The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus For Research" *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (June 1981) 560. Retrieved on March 15, 2012 from Bengal Central Search, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1860370>.
- Linderman, Gerald, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*, New York: Free Press, 1987.
- Little, Roger W. "Buddy Relations and Combat Performance," in M. Janowitz (Ed), *The New Military: Changing Patterns of Organization*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964, 219.
- Livermore, Thomas L. "Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861-1865". Reprint. Dayton, Ohio: Morningside House Inc., 1986.
- Lyons, Albert S. "The Nineteenth Century-The Beginnings of Modern Medicine Part 1". *Health Guidance*. Retrieved on March 20, 2012 from <http://www.healthguidance.org/entry/6352/1/The-Nineteenth-Century--The-Beginnings-of-Modern-Medicine-Pat-1.html>
- Manning, Chandra "All For The Union...and Emancipation, too" *Dissent* Winter 2012
- "Map of Western New York." *Genesee Country Magazine*. Retrieved on April 15, 2012, from <http://www.westernny.com/regions.html>
- McPherson, James M. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. New York, 1988.
- McPherson, James M. *For Cause and Comrades*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Metcalf, George P. "Reminiscences", 99. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 79.
- Mitchell, Reid, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home*. New York, 1993. 19-37, 71-87. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 122-123.
- Moore, William A. Memoir. 26, 28. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 75-76
- "New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs: Military History" New York State Military Museum. September 26, 2006. http://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/civil_inffIndex.htm

- O'Boyle, Shaun. "Gettysburg Battlefield; Photo of Little Round Top". Retrieved on April 2, 2012, from <http://oboylephoto.com/gettysburg/index.htm>.
- Phisterer, Frederick, *New York in the War of the Rebellion*, 3rd ed. Albany: J.B Lyon Company 1912. Retrieved on March 5, 2011 from <http://dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/76thInf/76thInfTable.htm>
- Pierce, Francis E. "I Have With the Regiment Been Through a Terrible Battle", *Civil War Times Illustrated* 1, no. 8 (December 1962): 6.
- Ripley, Amanda. "How to Get Out Alive", *Time*, May 2, 2005, 59-62.
- Robertson, John "Re-enlistment Patterns of Civil War Soldiers" *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 32, no. 1 (2001): 34.
<http://proxy.buffalostate.edu.2090/stable/3656484>.
- Rorabaugh, W.J. "Who Fought for the North in the Civil War? Concord, Massachusetts, Enlistments." *The Journal of American History* 73, no.3 (1986), 701.
- Sheehan-Dean, Aaron. "Everyman's War: Confederate Enlistment in Civil War Virginia." *Civil War History* 50, no.1 (2004).
- Small, Abner R. *The Road to Richmond*. Berkley, 1939, 193.
- Stouffer Samuel A. *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath (Studies in Social Psychology in World War II)*. Princeton University Press, 1949, 175.
- Sword, Wiley *Courage Under Fire: Profiles in Bravery From the Battlefields of the Civil War*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007.
- "The Draft Rioters of 1863" *New York Times*, 1879." Retrieved from James B. Fry *New York and the Conscription of 1863; a Chapter in the History of the Civil War*. New York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knicker Bocker Press, 1885. 68.
- Vandiver, Frank E. *Blood Brothers: A Short History of the Civil War*. College Station, 1992, 178. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997, 43.
- Wiley, Bell Irvin. *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union*. Baton Rouge, 1952, 292, 303, 17-30. Retrieved from Earl J. Hess. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997. 144-145.
- Wixson, Neal E. *The Boys of Company 'H'*. New York: iUniverse, 2008.