

# **“To Reach Sweet Home Again”: The Impact of Soldiering on New Jersey’s Troops During the American Civil War**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the profound disillusionment with soldiering, caused by sheer physical hardship and psychological trauma, experienced by New Jersey servicemen during the Civil War. While not unique to New Jersey soldiers, ample sources are cited in the footnotes examining this phenomenon endured by soldiers from other states. The paper is also placed in a larger historiographic debate, spearheaded by military historian Gerald F. Linderman, surrounding soldiers’ motivations regarding enlistment and the more varied and complex reasons for remaining in the ranks. Such motivations encompassed principally patriotic and religious beliefs, as well as the motivation to prove one’s manhood and courage on the battlefield. Linderman convincingly argues that the war’s horrors and brutalities soon transformed lofty ideals into sentiments of utter despair and hopelessness which historians have failed to appreciate. Historians James M. McPherson and Earl J. Hess directly responded to Linderman’s thesis and argue instead soldiers’ beliefs and values not only induced their enlistment but actually sustained them as the war dragged on. This paper attempts to validate, through the medium and experience of New Jersey servicemen, Linderman’s more compelling argument regarding the transformation of Civil War soldiers.

When General William T. Sherman proclaimed “war is hell,” he succinctly summarized for many Civil War soldiers the horrors of combat and its psychological impact. Imbued with patriotism and galvanized by their ideological and religious beliefs, many enthusiastic citizens eagerly enlisted during the war’s first year. However, as the war escalated the hardships of soldiering rendered these ideals meaningless. Consequently, soldiers became disillusioned—what historian Gerald F. Linderman has “defined as the deeply depressive condition arising from the demolition of soldiers’ conceptions of themselves and their performance in war...” Other historians have also acknowledged this change such as Reid Mitchell, who writes that “The Civil War experience changed men...Most men who were soldiers for any period of time underwent a psychological transformation.” But it is Gerald Linderman’s interpretation, which this study will attempt to validate, that better grasps this transformation and the utter collapse of soldiers’ ideals.<sup>1</sup>

Though Bell I. Wiley’s prodigious two volume study on Civil War soldiers can be considered the “paradigm”<sup>2</sup> upon which future scholars have relied on, it is only recently that the debate surrounding and understanding soldiers’ motivation and commitment has gained momentum. According to historians James McPherson and Earl J. Hess, “ideology”, here defined as duty, honor, and faith, was what motivated men to enlist and endure.<sup>3</sup> And, while some have disputed Wiley’s claim Civil War soldiers were no more “ideologically” motivated than soldiers of future wars<sup>4</sup>, it is precisely Linderman’s assertion that “The experience of combat frustrated [soldiers’] attempts to fight the war as an expression of their values and generated in them a harsh disillusionment[.]”<sup>5</sup> which has provoked the most intense and critical response from scholars.<sup>6</sup>

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Though the particular focus here will be on New Jerseyans who volunteered, their experiences were not unique.<sup>7</sup> Northern and Southern soldiers, whatever their differences, ultimately had to face the reality of soldiering and its concomitant hardships and sufferings. The memoirs, diaries, and letters left by New Jersey's soldiers reveal clearly their reasons and motivations for enlisting, but reveal as well their disillusionment and their longing for home. As James I. Robertson states, "... loneliness and longing explain why letter-writing was by far the most popular occupation of Civil War troops..."<sup>8</sup>

While New Jersey's soldiers complained early on about some of the duties associated with soldiering, they still wanted of course to see the Union restored, uphold their values of duty and honor, and vindicated in their faith in God. Because many expected the conflict to be short, enthusiastic recruits were eager to achieve honor and glory on the battlefield. But none could imagine the journey they were set to embark upon for no other war in American history could equal the carnage of the Civil War. Rapid advances in technology and weaponry, coinciding with the rise of industrialization in American society, proved too powerful for soldiers simply to rely on and find comfort in their beliefs. As much as they tried to fulfill their ideals, the war was just too destructive.<sup>9</sup>

The written material left behind by New Jersey's soldiers can contribute to this historiographic debate. As their words will reveal, New Jersey's citizens enlisted for different reasons as they took up arms to fight for the cause. They also capture the soldiers' intense physical and emotional challenges, and their responses to them. Invoking home eventually became the predominant theme in their letters as it reflected the "harsh disillusionment" soldiers suffered. Whatever their reasons for enlisting they expected and wanted to return home safely, but the nature of events did not coincide with their wishes. As will be shown, soldiers' beliefs and values could not provide the wherewithal to endure and they were not resilient enough to withstand the carnage as advances in technology and weaponry were too overpowering relative to the tactics employed.

### **"Copperhead" New Jersey?**

Historians have argued that New Jersey's role and its citizens' commitment to the Northern war effort was dubious, and its interests lay more with the South because of its financial and economic ties to the region. The presence of an anti-war faction known as the Peace Democrats or so-called Copperheads helped to solidify this view.<sup>10</sup> More recently, William Gillette has argued New Jersey's reputation as a Copperhead state is a misrepresentation of its actual role. According to Gillette, New Jersey was "ignited with patriotic fire...New Jerseyans strongly supported the suppression of the rebellion and a vigorous prosecution of the war. Residents flocked to volunteer in the Union army. There was no strong sympathy for the South. Although opinion shifted according to the outcome of a military campaign, support for the war and its purposes did not change fundamentally."<sup>11</sup>

While Gillette claims the views of those who were against the war "were on the political periphery," he does acknowledge that once the casualty lists mounted and maimed veterans arrived back at their communities many discerning citizens no longer enthusiastically



volunteered.<sup>12</sup> As with the rest of the Union, New Jersey faced a lack of recruits after the summer of 1861. Consequently, New Jersey and her sister states resorted to hefty bounties to entice its citizens to enlist and eventually a federal draft was imposed to force its citizens to join.<sup>13</sup> New Jerseyans may have desired victory but the decline in volunteering suggests they were not ready or willing to risk their own lives on the battlefield.<sup>14</sup>

Early in the war, as in other Northern states, they were willing because many were outraged when Fort Sumter was attacked by Confederate troops. With the fate of the nation at stake, its citizens “joined the army for a variety of reasons ranging from the idealistic to the practical, and sometimes combining the two.”<sup>15</sup> Sergeant Albert C. Harrison of Company G, 14<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers was glad to have enlisted because it offered him a way out of his job. Employed as a grocery store clerk in Red Bank, he made clear “My health is better than it ever was in that store. I don’t feel the least inclined to be there.”<sup>16</sup> Edward Jones served as drummer in the Regimental Band with Company C, 14<sup>th</sup> Regiment and was happy to be in the army because “we have better living here [at Camp Vredenburgh] than half of the folks in Plainfield have.”<sup>17</sup>

Peer and societal pressures influenced others to join. Private David Boody left his trade as cabinet maker behind and signed up with Company F, 12<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers, making clear “...should we ever be in a battle, we intend to make our friends and the whole of New Jersey feel proud of such soldiers, and if I ever return to friends and home, I’ll return with honor, for sooner than returned disgraced, I would fill a patriot’s grave.”<sup>18</sup> Rutgers graduate and First Lieutenant Sebastian Duncan of Company E, 13<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers asked one of his sisters “Are you not glad that I came out [enlisted] when I did? I should almost certainly have been drafted before the war was over, or what is worse been living in constant dread of such an event. And as a drafted man I should have had much harder service, with no sympathy or honor.”<sup>19</sup> Acting as the adjutant’s clerk but sworn in as Private of Company K, 15<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers, Edmund D. Halsey proclaimed “If I live through it undisgraced I will always feel myself more of a man than I ever could by staying home.”<sup>20</sup> Financial incentives persuaded citizens to enlist as well. In addition to army pay, lucrative bounties were offered to entice potential recruits.<sup>21</sup> Private Aaron D. Crane of Company H, 2<sup>nd</sup> N.J. Volunteers bluntly informed his sister to “Tell Uncle Sam[uel] I am fighting for neither the Laws or the ‘Niggers’ but for \$13.00 per month & board & clothes.”<sup>22</sup> Just arrived from England, James Horrocks tried enlisting in New York but ended up with the 5<sup>th</sup> Battery New Jersey Volunteers and informed his parents

The bounty is about the best that has been given yet. I shall get when muster’d in \$200 from the state of New Jersey, 50 dollars from Hudson City (where I enlisted) and 25 dollars from the Government. This together with a month’s pay in advance will make \$288 cash down...I shall be able to save more money as a soldier than as a clerk with 400 dollars a year...<sup>23</sup>

Issac H. Meeker enlisted for nine months as a Private with Company B, 26<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers in September 1862. He reenlisted later in the war with Battery E, 3<sup>rd</sup> New York Light Artillery. His father was disappointed that Issac failed to inform him of his decision but Issac felt the financial incentive was too strong to resist:

I am sorry I did not see you before I left but you must not think that I did not care to I have been sorry ever since. The reason I went to war again was that I thought that every young man ought to go and see

the fighting done up and another was it is a large sum of money provided a person gets out of it all right there are some men in the battery that own 150 acres of land well cultivated but thinking perhaps they would be drafted of two evils they chose the least Volunteered and got the bounty from \$1000 to \$1300 each. The opinion seems to be that their will be no more fighting...that they will finish it up soon.<sup>24</sup>

Many volunteers also viewed army life as an adventure and enjoyed their new status. According to some, soldiering was indeed a great way of life. “i hardly think of hom i like soalgering,” affirmed Private Joseph Sullivan of Company A, 15<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers.<sup>25</sup> Private Charles Hopkins confirmed early in the war “I like this kind of life very well indeed hope we shall not return for at least 3 months...”<sup>26</sup> Lieutenant Duncan confidently asserted “I am quite contented & happy here & the more accustomed I become to this wild life the better I like it. I enlisted for the war & six months, ‘soldier life’ in its rightest style has not in the least altered my determination, or made me feel any more like going home a whipped man. ‘Ten years is not to long to fight for the Union,’ though I hope we will get through in less time.”<sup>27</sup>

At the outset, however, “patriotism was dominant at the start of the war.”<sup>28</sup> Men joined because they wanted to prove their manhood by displaying courage on the battlefield knowing it was their duty and thereby honorable to do so. Courage, states Gerald Linderman, was “for Civil War soldiers a narrow, rigid, and powerful meaning: heroic action undertaken without fear.” And soldiers “assume[d] that, within God’s superintendence, the world’s most powerful force was that of the individual will brought to bear on the course of events, including those of war, and that courage was the fulfillment of man’s highest nature.”<sup>29</sup>

A Princeton College graduate working on his father’s Morris County farm, Edmund Halsey enlisted because “...when the call was made for 600,000 men [in August 1862] I considered it my duty to fall in with the rest.” Halsey wanted to enlist in a nine months regiment because “... in some respects it would have been better...” but he eventually signed on for three years of active service and was subsequently promoted to Sergeant Major. Later in the same letter he declared “I came because I considered it my duty to go...If I should not come back I fall in a cause my friends will not be ashamed to speak of and as for myself it will be only a few years taken from time & added to Eternity.”<sup>30</sup>

Eventually promoted to Captain of Company K, 13<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers, Charles Hopkins exclaimed “...I will sustain the Government to the end; will sacrifice Home, Health, Friends, Life itself to defend that glorious Flag under which I was born & which I pray God I may die under.” In another letter Hopkins directed a question to himself as to “‘Why am I in the Army’? For two reasons; to uphold the honor of my country, and to better my condition, and indeed the condition of all of us.”<sup>31</sup>

Private Jacob C. Wandling of Company B, 31<sup>st</sup> N.J. Volunteers recorded in his diary “I enlisted as a private and intend to serve as a private while I am out the better to learn the life of a soldier.” Before leaving home for Camp Kearny in Flemington, he described how he “bade many an aching heart a cheerful good bye” at the town church, knowing the “trials and danger I should be compelled to endure [and] deprived of almost all I held most dear.” But he “...went because I felt that it was my duty knowing that if I lived to get home I should never regret it; and it was this feeling that caused me to go, and sustained me at this affecting scene.”<sup>32</sup>

Whether seeking escape from the boredom of home, for financial gain, or to uphold their patriotic beliefs, New Jerseyans left behind civilian life and found themselves in the army. They left confident in their decisions and reminded loved ones not to fret and worry for they would be home before long. Once they were officially in the service of the United States the men were transported to several induction centers across New Jersey and mustered in. Overall, they were liked by the men as family and friends sometimes visited and supplied them with much appreciated home-cooked meals. Stationed on the outskirts of Newark, Private Samuel Toombs of Company F, 13<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers thought:

Life at Camp Frelinghusyen during our brief stay there, was very enjoyable. The food furnished, with a few exceptions, was good, but the friends of those who had enlisted brought in daily supplies of home-cooked food, so that the greater number of the men seldom used the government rations. When not on duty the men engaged in various sports, and some indulged their propensity for playing jokes of a very practical kind.<sup>33</sup>

Enjoying himself at Camp Olden in Trenton, Private Crane wrote

We have good times here as we are not by any means confined to our 'regulation grub!' Nearly every day some one in our tent has a bundle or blanket of good things sent to him from Newark consisting of cakes, pies, berries etc etc...We expect two ladies from Boonton this afternoon and then hurrah for a good time.<sup>34</sup>

After several weeks, the troops were then prepared to head south to begin their journey. Marched along city streets of Newark, Trenton, and other towns across New Jersey, their departure prompted a flood of emotions from both soldiers and spectators who gathered to cheer them on.

Private Toombs recalled when leaving Camp Frelinghusyen for the front "the pealing of bells, the shouts and cheers of friends, the waving of handkerchiefs and flags innumerable by fair hands...The crowd became more and more dense as we marched down [Broad] street [in Newark]...It was a proud day for all who participated in that march."<sup>35</sup> Private Josiah Quincy Grimes wrote his sister how the

folks at Lambertville...gave us a first rate dinner in the [cattle] cars. Then on to Trenton, from there to Camden, and then took the boat for Philadelphia, where we stacked arms, washed, and had the best supper we could have wished for. After supper we marched through the streets to the Baltimore Depot. The ladies and girls stood along the line of march shaking hands with us. There was the greatest marching this time that I have ever seen. The boys would stop and shake hands and then run to catch up, officers just the same.<sup>36</sup>

Spurred on by well-wishers and the glances and kisses of the ladies, scenes like this surely would have made the task at hand seem easy. Some, like Private Wandling, were anxious to move on. He enjoyed himself in camp but he knew time there was short. He described how "We left our encampment with mingled feelings of regrets and pleasure. Many were the good times we had on this ground but we were concious that we were not enlisted for the purpose of fun and were anxious to see what the fates had in store for us."<sup>37</sup> Others more likely felt how Private Benjamin Borton of Company A, 24<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers remembered it years later. He believed "...a great many of the volunteers at that period of the Rebellion [in 1861] regarded the deadly work before them to be little more than a grand military picnic."<sup>38</sup>

As soldiers moved closer to the field of operations, however, changes in attitude soon emerged. Marching through Baltimore on an early Sunday morning and observing the residents making their way to church, Private Wandling noticed by “Contrasting the difference between this day’s experience and our former way of spending Sunday did we fully realise our change of life and some of the boys wore a rather woe-bygone[?] cast of countenance.”<sup>39</sup> Private George B. Wright of Company G, 1<sup>st</sup> N.J. Volunteers confidently opined “I am not one of those who believe the war will be long and bloody. I believe that it will end as suddenly as it commenced[,]” soon changed his mind when boredom in winter quarters near the front and news of his brother’s sickness caused him to declare “Never before have I had my contentment in a soldier’s life shaken. Before I did not really care whether the war was terminated in two or three years. Now every day that passes, will bring a renewed anxiety to my mind and a fresh desire for a speedy-yet honorable, thorough, lasting peace...”<sup>40</sup>

Changes in attitude were more discernible as the hardships and dangers of soldiering intensified. As Reid Mitchell notes, “In most cases the transformation experienced by Civil War soldiers was not as dramatic or as clear-cut as that from drunkard to model soldier, devoted husband to madman, or man to beast. Men found that the war called forth a broad array of emotional responses.”<sup>41</sup> True and some historians have argued that of those “emotional responses” fear was predominant. Once on the battlefield, the soldier is

in a two-front war: on one front, he fights the enemy, and on the other front, he struggles with himself to hold his fear in check. In his psychological struggle, his mood races through a series of wild oscillations in reaction to the changing situation on the battlefield. Through it all, he tries to hold on, to keep control. Moods change from moment to moment in response to the rapid succession of terrifying stimuli.<sup>42</sup>

But before soldiers even had a chance to hold their fears in check during combat, they had to grapple first with low morale as they established camps near the front in Virginia or elsewhere. While many enjoyed “camp-life” in New Jersey, they now encountered miserable and unsanitary conditions. Soldiers also suffered miserably from sheer physical and mental fatigue as they endured long grueling marches in the scorching sun and pouring rain, turning roads into dust or mud.<sup>43</sup> Henry D. Crane of Company C, 7<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers informed his sisters “we have lost several men by sun stroke.” Private Issac H. Meeker told his father how his regiment had a “forced march [of] about 20 miles...my feet...are blistered a good deal.” Private Edmund J. Cleveland of Company K, 9<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers described in his diary how he “fell in at 1:00 PM and marched toward the front, guarding the brigade wagon train. The tramp was hard enough in the hot sun. It began to rain and we had to paddle along. The mud is awful-leg deep in some places. I threw away my overcoat as it was too heavy to carry...I feel miserable tonight.”<sup>44</sup>

Private Cleveland also recorded on one night “The march...was a very severe one. We passed over a dusty road strewn with dead horses, emitting a most offensive odor. We reached [our destination] at sunrise (having marched 18 miles) and are now awaiting further orders.” As the weeks passed, Cleveland’s predicament was made worse by lack of proper footwear. He once found a pair of shoes in camp but they “were too short, [and] the march to me was perfect torture. My feet are so sore that I can hardly walk.”<sup>45</sup>

Even as soldiers reached their destinations, they still had to contend with Mother Nature. "It rained so hard" for several days, Private James Lindsley Conklin of Company H, 2<sup>nd</sup> N.J. Volunteers lamented, "that it was impossible for us to do any cooking...and when we lay down to Sleep to find the water about three inches deep, I think if I live to get through with this I can stand almost anything..."<sup>46</sup> Private Theophilus Holcombe of Company D, 28<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers related to his mother how he and his fellow comrades "...arrived in the evening [at Aquia Creek, VA] in a pelting snow storm, the ground was so wet that the men could not pitch their tents, so they had to stand out in the storm all night."<sup>47</sup>

Such conditions were ripe for physical ills like rheumatism. Private Conklin was "sick...from laying on the damp ground it has rained for the last four days...the Center of our tent is very wet." As a result "I am not able yet to do duty but I am able to go around with a cane." A few months later he informed his daughter Libbie "...I have got the rheumatism in the neck and shoulders."<sup>48</sup> Private Henry Crane was indeed one of the fortunate few because "Such weather as this I realize the value of my rubber blanket. I have been offered five times the value of it or at least the cost of it but could not think of parting with [it]."<sup>49</sup>

The physical health of soldiers was affected as well from government issued rations or lack thereof, and bacteria-ridden water which spread rampant diseases such as typhoid fever and chronic diarrhea throughout the camps.<sup>50</sup> A Northern soldier's diet usually consisted of hardtack, a stale cracker infested with worms, fried meat, and an oversupply of coffee.<sup>51</sup> Fresh vegetables and fruits were noticeably absent, explaining why soldiers resorted to foraging and pleading with family members to send foodstuffs from home. Understandably, soldiers often complained of not only how poorly the food tasted but some resented how the quality of the food was determined by rank.<sup>52</sup>

Writing from Fort Marcy in Virginia, Private Simeon B. Drake of Company D, 11<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers complained "we don't get verry good vitals Not Near as good as we ust to get at trenton." Simeon became ill and was transported to a US Army Hospital in Newark. Disgusted with the food there as well, he made clear to his wife "I had mush and molasses for my breckfast this morning but I did not eat it for I think Uncle Sam can afford to give us better food than that. The officers gets the good things always and the poor privets has to take up with the slops that the Pigs would not eat hardley."<sup>53</sup> Private Wandling, however, would have been grateful just to have had something to eat. He must have been famished when one night he went to bed hungry and "Awoke at early dawn so cold I could not sleep built a fire and felt better but had a severe pain in my head which continued all day, have had nothing to eat but Bread and water since yesterday noon."<sup>54</sup>

Even when fresh food was served, some soldiers found it still unpalatable. Private Cleveland and his comrades had "...fresh meat served out to us. The consequences are not at all good. This morning 'Dad' Cook sent some 'scouse' to the company made of it. I ate some of the stuff and have been sick ever since, and now feel miserable."<sup>55</sup> Fortunately, relief was found elsewhere. Private Issac Meeker was grateful of the services rendered by members of a religious organization and recognized the importance of such efforts. He observed "...when the army is moveing around and do not have much to eat except raw pork and hard tack the [Christian



Commission] furnish [the troops] with eatables and probably save a good many lives by giving them good healthy food.”<sup>56</sup>

Just as exposure to the weather could inflict death, so too could diet. Private Theophilus Holcombe served in a nine-month regiment and in a short time became quartermaster clerk at regimental headquarters. Stationed near Falmouth, Virginia, Holcombe noted “We have had three deaths in the regiment this week, from typhoid fever, a disease which is getting to be very prevalent in this camp.”<sup>57</sup> Three months before his regiment was mustered out, Holcombe himself was transferred to New Brunswick and succumbed to the same disease. Those who prepared the meals were just as susceptible as those who ate them. Private James Grimstead of Company C, 14<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers lamented “...it is quite a sad day to us for the first time we have lost a man out of our own company...a man whom all thought well of, which is more than can be said of every man in this, or any other company. what makes it sadder still is the fact that he contracted his disease working for us as cook.”<sup>58</sup>

As a result of these experiences, some inevitably expressed mixed feelings and doubts about soldiering. Private James Conklin underscored this in a series of letters to his family during the latter part of 1861 and early 1862. He was determined to see the war through but wondered how well he could withstand it all. He told his brother-in-law Abraham P. Jones how “you ought to be down here in old va. It has been very cold, cold enough to take the haire of[f] a dog.” While on guard duty one Friday, Conklin didn’t “think that I ever felt the Cold quite as mutch as I did then...[but]...there is no use to complaine for there is no backing out, you got to Stand up to it...”<sup>59</sup>

Two months earlier though, while he was out on picket duty near Camp Seminary in Virginia, he wrote his niece “...I don’t Know how long I will have to Stay here but I hope not long for I am getting sick of this life, Its the most demorilizing life a man can lead...”<sup>60</sup> And in early spring 1862, James wrote his mother “How I wish this war was over, I am getting disgusted with the Life I am living, its nothing but Slavish life swearing from morning untill night and everything else that is degrading.”<sup>61</sup> Eventually, the impact of soldiering took its toll. During the Peninsular Campaign in spring 1862, Conklin informed his brother-in-law “I am so nearly used up that I can hardly write.” While James was optimistic that “this war will Soon be brought to a close” and longed to be home “for I am tired enough of it...”<sup>62</sup> he was killed at the battle of Gaines’ Mill, Virginia, on 27 June 1862.

As troublesome as these challenges of over-marching, the weather and diet proved to be, soldiers still had to confront combat, undoubtedly the most traumatic event of their experience. The sights and sounds of battle unleashed powerful emotions of fear and anxiety. Soldiers tried desperately to keep them in check, but Private William Haines remembered it was not an easy thing to do. During the battle of Chancellorsville, he and his comrades were “fighting that first terrible battle of courage against cowardice, to keep from running away.” “Oh,” Haines sighed, “how our hearts did beat! How we trembled! How we shrank and hugged the ground, as those frightful shells went whistling and screaming just over our backs!” “Were we scared?” asked Haines, and answered with a resounding “No; that word don’t express it!”<sup>63</sup>



As combat provided the ultimate test in determining how well soldiers' beliefs and values could hold up in the face of unimaginable horrors on the battlefield, it also left an indelible mark on their memories. When wounded men were sent to the rear during the Second Battle of Bull Run, Private Samuel Toombs recalled in his memoirs how he and his comrades "looked shudderingly upon the dreadful mutilations of body and limb of the poor fellows...The horrors of war...carried with them a full consciousness of the dangers we should soon become familiar with. He realized then that "Those who had treated their journey to the Capital as a holiday excursion and contemplated their three years enlistment as a season of pleasure and victorious conquest, began to realize the stubborn fact that they were to endure severe hardships and engage a foe whose prowess we were too apt to underrate." And after observing "the scenes of death" at Antietam, Toombs claimed the "ghastly spectacle...produced an everlasting impression on the mind of each member of the Regiment."<sup>64</sup> Private Borton too confessed years later the carnage suffered at Fredericksburg "...made a lasting impression upon my memory."<sup>65</sup> While soldiers concealed their fears and anxieties from each other, some did not hesitate to reveal their thoughts in letters sent home. Private Conklin was stationed near Mechanicsville, Virginia and recalled how he:

Went out to the roade to See whare [the Confederate shells] was coming from when I saw the flash and I made a dodge for the woods againe, but instead of getting out of the way I came very near of getting my head Knocked off...You Cant tell what feelings I experienced when that Shell passed over my head I felt as though a terriable hurrycane was all done up in a Space as large as a channel. it upset me and I did not Know but what I was Struck, it made my head swim for a while, I dont want another come so near againe.<sup>66</sup>

Fighting in the Peninsular Campaign, Private Aaron Crane described to his sister how "It was a perfect storm of shot & shell, bullets & nearly all the time...I saw some fearful sights such as I never wish to see again."<sup>67</sup> A few months later he described graphically the scene at Antietam: "The fighting has been as a general thing very severe and the battle fields presented a fearful sight Dead & dying men & horses, broken & busted guns broken wheels and gun carriages all in one mingled mass...I don't care to see any more such sights but suppose I shall." The carnage inevitably led to him conclude "I hope we shall see but one more [battle] at any rate and not even that if it can be helped, as I am about tired of it, and for that matter have been for some time."<sup>68</sup>

In a letter to his brother John, Private Issac Meeker conveyed his resentment of the tactics employed at Fredericksburg, and also inquired about his other brother Will, a corporal in a New York Regiment. Issac suspected "Will does not seem to like soldiering very well. Their is a good many things that I do not like about it it is a dirty lousy life...To see the men brought up an[d] slaughtered as they were on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Dec I say the Union is not worth so many valuable lives."<sup>69</sup>

As with the subject of "ideology", historians have also examined what role religion played in allowing soldiers to remain committed and endure. Gerald Linderman maintains religious beliefs and religious symbols such as chaplains became less consequential, whereas historian Steven E. Woodworth asserts that even as the war reached its most brutal phases, soldiers continued to rely on their faith.<sup>70</sup> Many Americans in the mid-nineteenth century adhered to the Protestant Christian doctrine of achieving salvation by cleansing oneself of sin and faith in God, and soldiers hoped to use that conviction as a way of ensuring God's protection on the battlefield.<sup>71</sup>

But, soldiers were still dying and some, like Cornelius Mandeville, may have recognized the limits of religion in sustaining them as he impatiently waited for his term of service to expire.

Cornelius enlisted for three months as a Private with Company A, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Militia on 26 April 1861; was mustered out but reenlisted with Company C, 21<sup>st</sup> N.J. Volunteers in August 1862 and served as Corporal. Unnerved by what he witnessed at Antietam Cornelius nonetheless could tell his parents

It is an awful thing, to contemplate a battlefield! But, in the midst of all this, how delightful it is, to feel a Savior near! An almighty friend! Who is every where present! Not only in the Sanctuary on Sabbath Days, but every where, On the Battlefield; In the Camp; On the march and when asleep, He is not absent from us! Oh the Depth of the riches! Both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgements, and his ways past finding out!<sup>72</sup>

A few months later, however, Corporal Mandeville felt obligated to reassure his father why he enlisted and was determined to see the war through: "I hope, Dear Father, That you will not for one moment, harbour the idea that your only Son, Who has sacrificed every thing he held dear, to put down this wicked rebellion, could be so far gone in iniquity as to sell his life and soul with all its interests for a few dollars, or a few months, or because the negro has got to be the subject of the war by deserting..." Another month passed and Corporal Mandeville revealed he looked forward to returning home. Excited that "...our time is rolling on at a rapid rate, only a very few weeks more and we will have to report in Jersey; New Jersey! there is music in that name which hath charms to sooth the savage beast."<sup>73</sup> Indeed, his wish was fulfilled as he was mustered out on 19 June 1863.

Private Samuel Hull was well-liked and known for his strong beliefs and visiting the tents of his fellow comrades to discuss religious affairs. During the Peninsular Campaign in spring 1862, Hull was "...trying to serve God and save my soul. i do not know what I would do if I had no hope beyond this life..." Prior to a pending battle, he tried to calm his anxiety by placing his trust in God. He was "...about 7 or 8 miles from Yorktown I guess and we Sometimes here the cannons or some other things go off. I know that all things work together for good to them that love God and if our Regiment goes in to the fight at Yorktown or anywhere else I know that if it is Gods Will that I should not git hurt it will be So however Gods will and not ours be done."<sup>74</sup> A few months later on Sunday, 14 September 1862, Hull was "shot through the neck by a minie ball [at Crampton's Pass, Maryland] and died instantly, his lips moved for a moment but could not be heard to say any thing."<sup>75</sup> While Hull may have expected to come out safe because he believed God would protect him he may also have come to the realization, as he nervously heard the roar of the cannons near Yorktown, that faith alone could not protect him. If Hull doubted whether his religious convictions could ensure safety on the battlefield, his faith at least allowed him to confront and accept death.<sup>76</sup>

Private George J. Van Arsdale of Company D, 13<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers used poetry to express his feelings on war and divine intervention. In one poem entitled "A Soldier to his Mother" George wrote,

Since I left my home, Dear Mother,  
In the scenes of war to share,



I have felt you, if none other  
Would remember me in prayer.

Oft amid the storms of battle,  
In its fiercest forms, I've stood,  
Heard its loudest thunders rattle,  
Seen the field run red with blood.

Cannon roared in tones of thunder,  
Whilst the solid shot and shell  
Rent the air and burst asunder,  
Leaving death wherever they fell.

Heaps of dead were round me lying,  
Gory heaps on every side,  
Mangled, shattered, torn and dying,  
Rolling in the crimson tide.

But some unseen power preserved me  
In the wild and fearful fight,  
And a strength heroic nerved me  
As I struck for truth and right.<sup>77</sup>

His brother William was sorry George "...enlisted because of the privations, and hardships, which a soldier has to endure." But George made clear to William "...I enlisted with the expectation of going through privations and hardships and I have been able to endure it all so far, and have been healthy and able to keep up with my regiment all the time, although it tried me sometimes...I am not sorry yet that I enlisted..."<sup>78</sup>

After witnessing the slaughter at Antietam, George seemingly remained firm in his determination to continue fighting, but then suddenly appeared to waver in his feelings. He admitted to being "...very glad to get away from the battlefield. I had seen all that I wanted to see...there were hundreds of dead rebels along our path that were unburied...they laid in swaths like grain across the field...it was an awful sight...I hope I will never be compelled to see again..." He consoled himself by exclaiming "...if it is necessary that I should [fight again], I am ready and willing at any moment to undergo it, I set out with the intention of helping to put down and crush this wicked and unholy rebellion...if It is my turn to die on the battle field, I am willing, and hope I may be ready to meet it." He concluded, however, by stating his true desire: "but if I have my own choices of course I would like to go through safe, and reach sweet home again."<sup>79</sup> In the end, George was wounded at the battle of Chancellorsville and died five days later on 8 May 1863.

As the horrors of combat unraveled them, soldiers attempted to reconcile their fears and anxieties with devotion to duty and God. They wanted the rebellion crushed and the Union restored, but wondered aloud at what cost. Private David Boody expressed his willingness to risk his life for the Union but wanted most of all "to live to see our country restored, and have the proud

satisfaction to know that I helped to achieve a complete restoration.”<sup>80</sup> Two months later he succumbed to disease at the Regimental Hospital in Ellicott’s Mills, Maryland and left behind a widow and six children.

As much as soldiers boasted early on they were ready to lay down their lives, combat forced them to reconsider that their willingness to volunteer did not of course translate into a willingness to be killed or maimed. Invoking home eventually emerged as the most salient feature in their letters and it illustrated vividly the utter sense of despair and the “profound sense of disillusionment” that Gerald Linderman discovered in his broader study of Civil War soldiers. And invoking home also served another purpose: Now familiar with war, they wanted to ensure that others did not experience the same and so they warned those family and friends who expressed a desire to join to stay home.<sup>81</sup>

After fighting along the James River during the Peninsular Campaign, Private George B. Wright urged his friend James

not to enlist as a private in any Regiment just at present. You have no idea of the fatigue...There are ten chances to one that your health would break down before you had been in service a month. A private soldier sick, and here is indeed unfortunate. No human eye pities him, and feels for his suffering. No one strives to render his condition easier by attending to his [needs]...I have not...since I have been in the service of saying anything about our sufferings and privations, neither will I say much now, and I only write it so that you may know what the real condition is. I dont want to paint the reality with glowing colors to deceive my friends. But if your mind is made up to enlist, which I hope it is not, write and let me know...<sup>82</sup>

Private Holcombe informed his younger brother Andrew “Now let me give you a word of advice. Don’t you never get it in your head to enlist, for it would kill you before you would be out a month. You could not stand the hardships.”<sup>83</sup> Private Hull let it be known that he did not want his brother John to enlist because “...if he knows when he is well off[f] he will Stay in Jersey and if he thinks about [en]listing tell him to take my advice and Stay at home.” In another letter he reminded his friends to “tell John that I say for him to Stay at home and not to [en]list unless it is necessary.”<sup>84</sup>

Lieutenant Sebastian Duncan gave his brother Willie a full account of a soldier’s hardships in order to discourage him from enlisting:

...when we got into a fight & the bullets began to whistle & the shells to howl & the great cannon to thunder, one every second, sixty in a minute; when you began to see mens heads & arms & legs knocked off; see some fall dead by your side, & others bleeding & torn carried off on stretchers to the Rear, you would wish yourself playing doorkeeper with Josie Crosby again. Then perhaps you would have after the battle to work all night building intrenchments, no fires allowed & often nothing to eat, & plenty of Rain. No Willie you study hard & go to College some day & stay there & make a man of yourself & let soldiering alone. For though I have happened to do pretty well in the army, you...might not be so fortunate.<sup>85</sup>

Duncan’s remark dramatized how the war changed ideas of manhood. Citizens enlisted to prove their manhood; now manhood reverted once again to domestic, educational endeavors. Obtaining glory on the battlefield, which proved a soldier’s courage and worth, was no longer adequate.



Awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions at the battle of Gaines' Mill in 1862 and dreading the upcoming campaign in 1864, Lieutenant Charles Hopkins ruefully commented "There will no doubt be some severe fighting this summer, but I do not think we shall share in it, and consequently will not share in the glory. Well I shant complain I have got all the glory I want. It does not amount to much after it is obtained."<sup>86</sup>

If fortunate to survive, the war and its aftermath troubled those who contemplated it. Enjoying a rare pleasurable moment one spring evening, Lieutenant Duncan related to his sister how "The whole face of nature is cheerful & beautiful & you can imagine how much I enjoyed the sunset hour listening to the inspiring strains of the band [playing] upon her beauties & dreaming of home & friends far away. I sometimes think I am becoming a very strange sort of animal out here & wonder if I'll ever be fit for civil society again."<sup>87</sup>

How ironic the war must have seemed to those like Lieutenant Duncan who volunteered in some respects because they did not want to feel ostracized from their community, but nevertheless anticipated it after the war because they were sure homefolks could not understand what they experienced. During General Sherman's March to the Sea Campaign, Lieutenant Duncan and other Union soldiers were roaming the streets of Atlanta after its surrender, and he overheard a story that "A soldier stopped at a house for a drink. A little boy came up to him & said, 'Are you Yanks going to throw any more of those iron ball[s] over here?' The soldier said, 'No why do you ask that?' 'Well I was playing in the yard with little Bobbie & one of those things took little Bobbie's head right off.' How little do you know of war at home. I shuddered as I heard the story & thought of a shell falling among my little brothers at play in their own door yard."<sup>88</sup>

More than thirty years after the war, Issac S. Jones, formerly a Private in Company B, 2<sup>nd</sup> N.J. Volunteers, was living in Parsons, Kansas when he received a letter from his old friend and fellow comrade-in-arms, Benjamin Hornbeck. Jones responded with both a lengthy letter in which he reminisced about old days and provided a war-time photograph of himself which Benjamin requested. The clarity and tone suggests the war was just as vivid for Issac Jones as it was when he fought in it. Studying Benjamin's photograph Issac saw "some resemblance of the soldier I knew a third of a century ago in camp, on the march, in line of battle, the personification of endurance, courage and fortitude..." Issac related to Benjamin that through the years "It has been my practice not to boast or brag of the sturdy part we played as pawns for the Union on the Nation's chess board of strife..." and how he was "magnanimous to those who 'point with pride to the past.'" But in remembering the past and retelling it to others, Issac believed he was entitled to something in return:

If they desire to appropriate it and are jealous of it, either from real or imaginary service at the front or in the rear, on the field or off the field, at the beginning, middle or end of it, or subsequent thereto, I accord to them the privilege, and am in return, when they or some of them are gracious enough to accord to us the common privileges of citizenship, very thankful.<sup>89</sup>

His reference to citizenship may well have implied his willingness to finally put the war behind him as his days of soldiering had passed away long ago. But in describing his friend Benjamin as a soldier who "personified courage" defined precisely why young men like Issac and Benjamin left home and enlisted. Most historians agree that "ideology" and patriotism were important motivating factors early in the war as new recruits were eager to defend "the cause" and prove

their manhood on the battlefield.<sup>90</sup> They disagree, however, on what exactly kept them in the ranks. Some, like Earl Hess, have exaggerated both the ability of soldiers to endure the debilitating experience of battle, and that they could emotionally overcome it as well.<sup>91</sup> Other historians such as Gerald Linderman have portrayed a more realistic picture of combat's devastation upon its victims, showing how soldiers were emotionally and physically powerless to control their own fates and began questioning their own motives and values because of combat's harsh realities.<sup>92</sup>

Whether enlisting for noble or opportunistic reasons, the purpose here has been to relate how the rigors of soldiering and the trauma of combat tested these Jersey soldiers' resolve to endure its reality. Once they departed the cheering crowds and waving handkerchiefs in their towns and communities across New Jersey and headed to the arena of hostilities some soon realized the import of their decisions. While combat proved the most traumatic experience of their lives, they first had to contend with the daily vicissitudes of soldiering such as the weather, grueling marches, and an inadequate diet which led to crippling diseases causing exhaustion, sickness, and death. It is quite remarkable indeed they even had the stamina left to face the enemy.

Once in battle, they had to contend with the most intense array of emotions such as fear and anxiety, doing their utmost to suppress them so as to escape any potential ridicule from fellow soldiers after a battle, particularly in the war's first stages. If lucky to survive, soldiers then contemplated what they encountered. While some may have seemed unnerved, others were apparently not as resilient as they revealed their despair in letters sent home. Combat clearly heightened their disillusionment and while ideals of duty, honor, and faith were clung to in the face of the withering storm, ultimately these intangibles could not provide the foundation upon which soldiers could stand. Perhaps religion may have been more durable than duty and honor insofar as one could look elsewhere in securing protection on the battlefield. But even here, religion could not withstand the indiscriminate lethal firepower of modern weapons imposed on outdated tactics. Religion, if only tenuously, could at least potentially provide the acceptance of one's own demise.

Another significant feature of this breakdown in original ideals was the repeated references to home. Reid Mitchell suggests that for the Northern soldier it was used as a means to ensure "psychological survival." While not improbable, it appears to have served also as a stark reminder of the soldiers' miserable circumstances and, by urging potential recruits to remain home, ensured that their own grandiose notions of soldiering were finally swept away. One could plausibly argue that if the war had indeed been short, as many had originally perceived, soldiers' expectations may have been fulfilled. But few things remain immutable when new dynamics emerge, as occurred when the war intensified and greater sacrifices were needed. It is this recognition, that as the war changed it was only logical that its combatants had to change as well, which distinguishes Gerald Linderman's interpretation from the rest.

While they desperately wanted to play their part in the Union's restoration, they increasingly found themselves in the uncomfortable position of balancing their commitment to duty and victory with their more fervent wishes of leaving soldiering behind and returning home. Why they did not leave<sup>93</sup> can perhaps be explained by the depressive and despairing condition Linderman uncovered in his broader study of Civil War soldiers and may in fact explain as well

why these New Jerseymen in the end believed they simply had no choice and their only recourse was to “endure” until discharge or death relieved them.

<sup>1</sup> Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat In The American Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 240; Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations And Their Experiences* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 56. Linderman is also correct in observing the following, (pg. 240): “Forced to absorb the shocks of battle, to remodel combat behavior, to abandon many of the war’s initial tenets, to bear discipline of an order intolerable not long before, to rationalize a warfare of destruction, and to come to terms with changes in their relationships with commanders, conscripts, and civilians, soldiers suffered a disillusionment more profound than historians have acknowledged...” More than twenty years after the book’s publication, his words have yet to be heeded.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Barton and Larry M. Logue, ed., *The Civil War Soldier: A Historical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 2. Wiley’s two volumes are *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Indianapolis, 1943); and *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis, 1952).

<sup>3</sup> In his *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought In The Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), James M. McPherson believes soldiers could endure the ordeal of combat because “For the fighting soldiers who enlisted in 1861 and 1862 the values of duty and honor remained a crucial component of their sustaining motivation to the end.” (pg. 168) Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier In Battle: Enduring The Ordeal Of Combat* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press Kansas, 1997), also contends “ideology was taken seriously by the generation that fought the Civil War.” (pg. 98) He correctly points out “The factors that kept men in line of battle were more complicated, multifaceted, and diverse than the factors that impelled them to support the war effort as civilians and then to join the army.” (pg. 95) Admitting that “the extent to which [ideology] was a factor in helping [soldiers] deal with the dangers of the battlefield is controversial,” he confidently declares however “Ideology certainly played an important role in helping men endure battle.” (pg. 98) Further on he also says “For many Northern soldiers, the 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. Ideology, therefore, became the most lasting justification for continuing the conflict despite the apparent lack of success.” (pg. 101)

<sup>4</sup> See James McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades*, 91: “Research in the letters and diaries of Civil War soldiers will soon lead the attentive historian to a contrary conclusion. Ideological motifs almost leap from many pages of these documents. A large number of those men in blue and gray were intensely aware of the issues at stake and passionately concerned about them. How could it be otherwise?”

<sup>5</sup> Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Hess, *The Union Soldier In Battle*, pg. ix-x, claims Linderman “addresses only one theme-the ideal of courage-with respect to a select group of Northern and Southern soldiers. Linderman takes a decidedly negative view of ideology and ideals and portrays Civil War combat as an unmasterable experience that warped the view of its participants. I offer a completely different interpretation of the impact of battle on Northern soldiers, an interpretation that makes use of a great deal of the primary literature that Linderman does not mention.” Like Hess, McPherson also comments on Linderman’s sources, (*For Cause & Comrades*, 186): “...it is perhaps worth noting that Linderman relies heavily on memoirs, regimental histories, and other writings from a postwar-perspective as well as on wartime letters and diaries, and that some of this evidence does not seem to support his thesis.” (However, Hess also relies on a good deal of memoirs and regimental histories, which can be susceptible to embellishing the past.) While McPherson is not overly critical of *Embattled Courage*-it “is a provocative, thesis-driven book [and]...immensely important in stimulating my own thinking about the will to combat in the Civil War”, (pg. 186)-he insists it is flawed. In response to Linderman’s assertion that soldiers underwent a “harsh disillusionment,” McPherson, (pg. 168), admits “This conclusion seems consistent with common sense.” He then reasonably asks, (pg. 168), “How could soldiers sustain a high level of ideological commitment or belief in noble ideals through the grim experiences of disease, exhaustion, frustration, and death as the war ground on through its fourth year?...The tone of some soldiers’ letters as well as their behavior did take on a more negative, cynical, callous, even brutal quality as time went on. Without question there was a decline in the romantic flag-waving rhetoric of the war’s first two years.” Even with this recognition however McPherson oddly concludes that “...this is not the whole story. Indeed, it is not the most important part of the story. [Upholding their values of duty and honor and] [t]heir rhetoric about



these...was the same in the war's last year as in its first." (pg. 168) Other historians' critique of Linderman will be found below.

<sup>7</sup> Writing to his parents in Wisconsin, Henry C. Taylor described his feelings after a battle in Kentucky: "I did not realize anything about the fight when we were in action, but the battlefield at midnight will bring one to a realizing sense of war. I never want to see such a sight again. I cannot give such a description of the fight as I wish I could. My head is so full that it is all jumbled up together and I can't get it into any kind of shape." He warned his parents to "Tell Mrs Diggins not to let her boy enlist." Taylor was not a New Jersey soldier but his words are nearly identical to those New Jersey's soldiers used in their letters sent home, as will be shown. The point here is to emphasize regardless where one originated from, the horrors of war were real and soon dispelled any illusions about its supposed romantic qualities. Taylor quoted in Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic Of Suffering: Death And The American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 56-57. To cite other examples to show New Jersey's troops were not unique in their reactions to soldiering, see Stephen W. Sears, ed., *Mr. Dunn Browne's Experiences in the Army: The Civil War Letters of Samuel W. Fiske* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998). Samuel W. Fiske, Second Lieutenant in Company I, 14<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Regiment, jotted down firsthand the sentiments of his fellow soldiers and which were featured in a prominent newspaper he contributed to back home: "News of army movements, & c. I can't tell you, but how the soldiers feel here in camp and in battle and on marches I can tell you, for that I see and know. When you read from newspaper correspondents and 'reliable gentlemen' that the army are 'full of enthusiasm' and 'eager for the renewal of the conflict,' that they 'have entire confidence in their generals' and 'rush joyfully to battle under their guidance as to a feast,' I doubt not your common sense teaches you just about how much such gammon is worth. The simple fact of the matter is that the soldiers universally...dislike the war and dislike battles, as all good citizen-soldiers should, dislike to be killed with shell or minie bullets, or to be starved to death or to be marched to death, just as much as other men do...But they have come to war reluctantly from the pressure of urgent necessity and a strong sense of duty, and they want the war over within the quickest possible time...They endure it, they bear the privations...They go into battle, aware that it is pretty much a chance whether their bravery and endurance will be of any avail..." (2 October 1862, pg. 17-18) While Fiske certainly recognized combat's unfavorable impression amongst the men and its dire consequences- "We are discouraged, wearied, indignant, disgusted; we have found war no boys' play, no easy game of glory and rewards, but a serious, terrible, heart-breaking, soul-sickening reality"-he could still proclaim "...we are not yet fallen so low as to prefer a dishonorable peace...We grumble, indeed,...as soldiers will and as these soldiers have good reason to grumble. I have done my share of it (I am ashamed to think a little more than my share), but I grumble henceforth no more." (17 January 1863, pg. 53) But as the war grinded on, Fiske's disillusionment grew sharper for he knew "It requires more patriotism to enlist now than it did two years ago. To be sure it does. The novelty of the thing has worn off... We see now, far more than at first, the magnitude of the work in hand, and we know more (oh, by what a serious experience) how hard and practical and wearing and toilsome and bloody a thing war is. So the volunteer who goes forth to join his country's defenders now, goes with few visions of martial glory, and with a realizing sense of the hardships and privations that are before him. And it is better so. I would not bring one recruit to our ranks by misrepresenting the case to him. Soldiering *is* a hard business, the best you can make of it. I have laid a good deal of stone fence, dug many a rod of ditch, worked at carpentering and all sorts of farming...But of all the different kinds of manual labor that I ever attempted, the business of marching with an army, 'in heavy marching order' and on rations of 'hard tack' and pork, is the most exhausting...It is hard to be a private, hard to be an officer, hard to march, hard to fight, hard to be out on picket in the rain, hard to live on short rations and be exposed to all sorts of weather, hard to be wounded and lose legs and arms and get ugly scars on one's face, hard to think of lying down in death without the gentle hand of love to smooth one's brow." Yet, even in the face of these horrors Fiske believed that "...there is just one thing that makes all these things easy, and that is the spirit of Christian patriotism. And I do not believe that that spirit is dead in our land. I don't believe that the nation is *so* tired of this wearisome, wasteful and bloody war as to be ready to give up the principles in whose defense we first engaged." (14 November 1863, pg. 192-93) Because Fiske was a pastor in Madison, Connecticut before the war and was of higher rank as a soldier he was therefore inclined to hold onto these ideals more firmly than the average soldier, who may have acknowledged the limits and futility of them more willingly. Also, see Mark H. Dunkelman's history of the 154<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment, *War's Relentless Hand: Twelve Tales of Civil War Soldiers* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006). Though Dunkelman tends to emphasize the positive aspects of their experiences, their trials and tribulations nevertheless come to light. Dunkelman recounts the story of Privates Barzilla Merrill and his son Alva. Barzilla enlisted because "I am here to try and do my duty as a soldier for my country and the old flag." (pg. 153) As the hardships of soldiering became apparent he often had the "blues" and as Dunkelman astutely observes "Here was the crux of Barzilla's war-the constant internal battle between his sense of duty and his desire to

return home.” (pg. 154) New Jerseymen too experienced the same ordeal. Barzilla “and the rest of the regiment agreed that they wanted the war to end so they could go home. ‘But,’ declared Barzilla, ‘we have got on the harness and we are going to keep it on until we see the thing through, and no whining.’” (pg. 157) Of course, as the war did not end as quickly as many had hoped skepticism inevitably surfaced. While he expected to return home and reunite with his wife Ruba, Barzilla admitted “Sometimes I have a thought that it is possible that I shall never see home again.” (pg. 165) Sadly for Ruba, her husband and son were killed at the battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863.

<sup>8</sup> James I. Robertson, *Soldiers Blue And Gray* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 104. He also notes that “At the height of the war, some 45,000 letters passed daily through Washington to the Union armies, while an equal number went the opposite direction. Twice that number reportedly went through Louisville, Kentucky, for the Union forces in the West.” (pg. 104) It should be noted from the outset who exactly comprises this selection of New Jersey troops. They were picked randomly and coincidentally most were “native-born” Jerseymen and Protestant. That proved to be fortuitous because those soldiers who were motivated to enlist by their fervent commitment to uphold their cherished values tended to be in this ethnic category. This does not mean the “foreign-born” did not have the same commitment but their motivations appeared to be driven more by financial inducements-though the “native-born”, especially those from the lower end of the working-class and struggling rural farmers, could be influenced by this as well. Notwithstanding some overlapping, some have found that the Irish and German peoples of New Jersey were more likely to enlist for financial reasons because work was scarce. Joseph G. Bilby and William C. Goble, (*“Remember You Are Jerseymen!” A Military History of New Jersey’s Troops in the Civil War* [Hightstown, New Jersey: Longstreet House, 1998, 11]), write that “Many Irish and German urban residents were without both property and jobs. Valentin Bechler, a thirty-eight year old German immigrant living in Newark who joined the Eight New Jersey’s Company E in August 1861, regarded his military service as a substitute for the work he had not found as a civilian.” William J. Jackson, (*New Jerseyans In The Civil War: For Union And Liberty* [New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000, 51]), found that the newcomers “frequently enlisted en masse from neighborhoods or towns, [even] whole companies were sometimes made up of one ethnic group. Anglo-Saxon ‘natives’ were more common in the regiments from West Jersey; predominantly German or Irish companies came from the more industrialized East Jersey [such as Newark and Jersey City]. Military service attracted immigrants throughout the war; they found it an easy way to provide for themselves.” One example of the ethnic make-up of some regiments was the Fifth New Jersey Infantry’s Company C whose recruits were mainly Irish and Germans and they “outnumber[d] native-born Jerseymen by more than three to one.” (Bilby and Goble, 10)

<sup>9</sup> Faust, *This Republic Of Suffering*, 4, 12. As she states, “Changing military technology equipped [Civil War] armies with new, longer-range weapons-muzzle-loading rifles-and provided some units, by the latter stages of the war, with dramatically increased firepower in the form of breech-loading and even repeating rifles. Railroads and emerging industrial capacity in both North and South made resupply and redeployment of armies easier, extending the duration of the war and the killing.” These new weapons were “significantly more technologically advanced even than those generally available in the Mexican War a decade and a half earlier.” She shrewdly points out the “...Civil War departed in significant ways from what had come before.”

<sup>10</sup> For a succinct analysis of these views see William Gillette, *Jersey Blue: Civil War Politics in New Jersey, 1854-1865* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), esp. Introduction.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 145, 158.

<sup>13</sup> On the challenges faced by local and state authorities in recruiting enough men see Joseph G. Bilby and William C. Goble, *“Remember You Are Jerseymen!”*, esp. Ch. 1. On federal efforts to counter the drop-off in volunteers see Eugene C. Murdock, *One Million Men: The Civil War Draft in the North* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1971). On the efforts made by some states-such as Massachusetts whose Governor wanted to ensure its industrial interests could still rely on an ample supply of labor-to control the recruiting process when the national draft was called see James W. Geary, *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), pg. 18-21.

<sup>14</sup> As Gillette notes, (*Jersey Blue*, 158), “In 1862...the supply of volunteers slowed to a trickle” and by “1863 a fuller understanding of the realities and dangers of soldiering chilled the ardor of many able-bodied men of military age.” Gillette also provides a more descriptive account as to why citizens were reluctant to come forward on pg. 195: “After a year and a half of war the outcome remained stubbornly inconclusive. The burden of taxes, the magnitude of the national debt, the rising prices, the unending calls for additional recruits, and the mounting casualties began to test the people’s resolve. When the rivers of Virginia ran red with the blood of soldiers and when New Jersey’s newspapers printed long lists of Jerseymen killed or wounded in the latest battle, the horrors of war sank in. The funerals-whether an elaborate cortege winding through the hushed streets of a city or a simple

ceremony mourning a man in a quiet country church-were poignant reminders of the cost of war. A Hunterdon man reported that the local funeral of a fallen soldier ‘shows us what rebellion is.’” Bilby and Goble, (*“Remember You Are Jerseymen!”* 33), also note the same phenomenon: “As 1863 came to a close it was apparent that the task of raising troops was clearly not one the state could perform with entirely satisfactory results. Larger than ever bounties did not produce an outpouring of men... The pool of Jerseymen willing to fight an increasingly bloody war whose end was not in sight, even for relatively large amounts of money, had dried up.”

<sup>15</sup> Gillette, *Jersey Blue*, 160.

<sup>16</sup> Sergeant Albert C. Harrison quoted in Bernard A. Olsen’s *Upon The Tented Field: An Historical Account of the Civil War As Told By The Men Who Fought And Gave Their Lives* (Red Bank, New Jersey: Historic Projects Inc., 1993), 35. The letters of Albert Harrison in Olsen’s edition are intriguing because they shed light on the inconsistencies in Albert’s correspondence as the war dragged on. He eventually employed more matter-of-fact language, particularly to his cousin Clemmy near the end, as opposed to the loftier and reassuring letters he sent to his parents, mostly addressed to his mother. Throughout, Albert made a conscious effort to minimize the hardships he endured for he did not want his mother to worry and instead reiterated how “...we are all well and in jubilant spirits.” (pg. 123) Apparently, his mother suspected Albert was not always sincere and wondered if he really enjoyed himself as often as he said. Albert, then, was obliged to confront her intuition. For instance, Albert seemed annoyed when he recounted that “You said you were glad to hear I enjoyed myself if I meant what I said.” He quickly reminded her “I shouldn’t have told you so if I hadn’t meant it.” (pg. 43) But Albert insisted he was always honest with her even as in spring 1863 he “...heard some of the greatest news lately. It is really laughable. I have heard that I was going to be discharged. And I heard again that I wouldn’t live long if I stayed down here [in Maryland]...and it all comes from Jersey. I would like to know who tells such. They tell, and seem to know, more about me than I know myself. It is no such thing...I love the Service too well to leave even if I could get my discharge. You must not think that I am deceiving you for I tell the truth and nothing but the truth.” (22 April, 1863, pg. 106) Once again, he reassured her in the fall of 1863 that “I have not seen to tell the truth as much hardship as I expected when I left home. And I thank God that it has been no worse” (3 November 1863, pg. 181). Yet no sooner had he said this, Albert was hit on the heel “with a spent Ball at Locust Grove Nov. 27<sup>th</sup>...while I was lying upon my face behind [a] fence.” (pg. 315) Concerned his mother may have found out more than he would have liked, he pleaded with her to rely on his trustworthiness: “I have told you often Mother, that if you believed what every one said, you would always worry...I am sorry that you don’t and I cannot imagine why you listen to anything of the kind when you hear from me so often. But I know your weakness and I know too well that you worry at all such rumors.” (15 December 1863, pg. 203) Pointedly, Albert lost a friend, Private Elliot Fields, at Locust Grove and simply informed his mother Eliot “died a noble death. He fought with all the vigor and zeal of a lover of his Glorious Country.” (18 December 1863, pg. 207) His mother appeared to want more information but he downplayed the event and said “When I last wrote I told you the particulars.” (15 December 1863, pg. 203) At least in Olsen’s edition, the only letter Albert penned before this date was four days earlier and there was no mention of a fight, least of all the particulars. Albert finally and freely provided-not to his mother-the particulars of the events at Locust Grove nearly two years later to his cousin Clemmy: As Albert lay behind a fence trying to avoid enemy fire he realized his “ammunition [was] all expended [and] poor Elliot Fields lay beside me dead. I crawled behind him, and lay down again, and just as I done so a ball went in his breast, which no doubt would have killed me. So my life was spared through the body of a dead man. He was struck several times after he was killed. Upon going into that fight, he told me he would be killed. I talked with him and told him to try and shake off such a feeling as that. But it was no use and sure enough he was killed and never spoke a word after he was struck, scarcely breathed. And he wore almost a smile, for he had been laughing at a Rebel that was wounded to see him run a ways and fall down, get up and start again and fall down until he got out of range, behind a stack of corn stalks.” (15 May 1865, pg. 315) As a result of his experiences, Albert realized “...I never wish to pass through the same ordeal again, as that of the past two years...A soldier does not care to look back over the many bloody battlefields if he expects to get in another engagement, for if he does, he is apt to think of some of his comrades who’s hopes one day were as bright as his own. But they were gone and he might go in the same way. It don’t do for a man to go to battle thinking that he is going to be killed. I have noticed many a time that the ones who were most reckless of their lives, always came out first best.” (15 May 1865, pg. 315) Perhaps this explains why Albert omitted much detail when writing to his mother. Now, with the war over he could write without constraints and describe to Clemmy in greater detail what were his concerns and trepidations.

<sup>17</sup> Edward C. Jones to his parents, August 24, 1862, Edward C. Jones Papers, Rutgers University Special Collections (hereafter RUSC).

<sup>18</sup> Boody quoted in William P. Haines’ *History of the Men of Co. F, 12<sup>th</sup> New Jersey Vols.*, 1897, 105.



<sup>19</sup> Sebastian Duncan to his sister, August 7, 1864, Sebastian Duncan Papers, New Jersey Historical Society (hereafter NJHS).

<sup>20</sup> Edmund D. Halsey to his brother, October 28, 1862, Edmund D. Halsey Papers, Free Public Library of Morristown, (hereafter FPLM).

<sup>21</sup> See Bilby and Goble, "*Remember You Are Jerseymen*"! According to them, "The first months of the war were marked by economic dislocation and depression, with unemployment remaining a problem until 1863" in the urban areas. Rural New Jersey did not fare much better. "Although harvest laborers could command as much as \$3 a day for the brief period of time they were needed, the average farm worker in the state was paid \$8 to \$10 a month. While this salary included room and board, so did the army's pay, which became even more attractive when state pay and bounties were included. Recruiting advertisements were, therefore, as great a temptation to native-born farm laborers as to unemployed urban immigrants." Pg. 11, and also 14-50. Privates earned throughout most of the war \$13 a month. See also William J. Jackson, *New Jerseyans In The Civil War*, 49-50 and Gillette, *Jersey Blue*, 158-59.

<sup>22</sup> Aaron Crane to his sister Louisa Wheeler (Crane) Cook, December 24, 1861, Louisa Wheeler Papers, RUSC.

<sup>23</sup> James Horrocks, *My Dear Parents: The Civil War Seen By An English Union Soldier* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 23.

<sup>24</sup> Issac H. Meeker to his father, October 9, 1864, Issac H. Meeker Papers, RUSC. For an analysis of the combination of soldier motivation and financial gain, see Eugene C. Murdock, *Patriotism Limited, 1862-1865: The Civil War Draft And The Bounty System* (Kent State University Press, 1967). Issac's motivation underscores Murdock's assertion "...that many patriots did go to the war chiefly for the money." pg. Vii.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Sullivan to Mary Ewing, Mary Ewing Papers, April 28, 1861, RUSC.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Hopkins to his family, Charles Hopkins Papers, April 28, 1861, RUSC.

<sup>27</sup> Sebastian Duncan to his sister Susie, February 20, 1863, NJHS.

<sup>28</sup> Bilby and Goble, "*Remember You Are Jerseymen*!" 10.

<sup>29</sup> Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 17, 19-20.

<sup>30</sup> Edmund D. Halsey to his brother, October 28, 1862, FPLM.

<sup>31</sup> Hopkins to his family, May 11, 1861; Hopkins to his mother, Dec. 1862 or Jan. 1863, RUSC.

<sup>32</sup> Diary of Jacob C. Wandling, all quotes dated August 28, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Toombs, *Reminiscences Of The War: Comprising a Detailed Account of the Experiences of the 13<sup>th</sup> N.J. Vols.* (Orange, New Jersey: Printed at the Journal Office, 1878), 5.

<sup>34</sup> Aaron Crane to his sister Louisa, June 20, 1861, RUSC.

<sup>35</sup> Toombs, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Private Grimes to his sister Lizzy, September 7, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>37</sup> Wandling, September 27, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Borton, *Awhile With The Blue or Memories Of War Days: The True Story of a Private* (Passaic, New Jersey: WM. Taylor, 1898), 6-7.

<sup>39</sup> Wandling, September 28, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>40</sup> George B. Wright to his friend James A. Grimstead, Letters of James A. Grimstead, December 3, 1861; February 9, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>41</sup> Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, 71.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Allan Frank and George A. Reaves, "Emotional Responses to Combat" in *The Civil War Soldier*, 386.

<sup>43</sup> See Eric T. Dean, Jr.'s "*Dangled Over Hell: The Trauma of the Civil War in The Civil War Soldier*. Dean argues that "Such was the centrality of marching to the experience of the Civil War soldier that when some men were eventually issued disability discharges, it was not uncommon for the examining surgeon to give as the reason for such separation the fact that the man was no longer able to carry a knapsack or keep up with the army on the march. In the years following the war, Union veterans frequently claimed 'sunstroke' and 'hard marching' as the basis for military disability pensions-and these claims were often granted. All who had been through the experience knew exactly how trying and destructive it could be." pg. 398. Indeed, Joseph M. Crampton enlisted as a private and was mustered in with Company F, 15<sup>th</sup> N.J. Volunteers on 25 August 1862 for three years. However, he was discharged on 21 June 1863 in White Oak Church, Virginia. After the war, he sought the services of Samuel Southard Halsey, an attorney in Morristown, New Jersey, who dealt with the problems of soldiers trying to collect their bounty money and helping former soldiers file for disability pensions. Private Crampton claimed "He contracted disease of the lungs and heart caused by overmarching while with his regiment under Major General [Ambrose E.] Burnside [during the Fredericksburg campaign in December 1862] by reason of which he was rendered incapable of

performing military duty and upon the command of Major General [John] Sedgwick he was honorably discharged from said service..." Crampton lived in Rockaway, New Jersey after his discharge "...but by reason of the disability contracted while...in the line of his duty he is not only incapacitated for Military duty but totally disable[d] from obtaining his subsistence by Manual labor [as a shoemaker]..." See Box 122, Charles A. Philhower Collection, Civil War Folder, RUSC.

<sup>44</sup> Henry D. Crane to his sisters, June 20, 1863, Louisa Wheeler (Crane) Papers, RUSC; Issac Meeker to his father, November 5, 1862, RUSC; Diary of Edmund J. Cleveland, 2 June 1864, *Proceedings Of The New Jersey Historical Society* 66 (No. 1, January 1948): 30. In a letter to his mother, Private Josiah Quincy Grimes of Parsippany described the over-marching he endured en route to Gettysburg: "We have had forced marches lately. In fact, we have not stopped a day since we left Fairfax, [Virginia] except a few days on the battlefield of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. We have marched days and nights as well. Instead of ten miles a day, which was about the average of our marches last Fall, it is now between 20 and 30. We marched 37 the night and day before we arrived at Gettysburg." Grimes Papers, July 11, 1863, RUSC.

<sup>45</sup> Diary of Edmund J. Cleveland, June 13, 1864, Pg. 37; October 12, 1864, Pg. 79 NJHS.

<sup>46</sup> James L. Conklin to "My Dear Sister," October 26, 1861, James L. Conklin Papers, RUSC.

<sup>47</sup> Theophilus Holcombe to his mother, December 7, 1862, Holcombe Papers, RUSC.

<sup>48</sup> Conklin to his brother-in-law, Abraham P. Jones, August 18, 1862; *ibid.*, September 8, 1861; Conklin to his daughter Libbie, November 20, 1861, RUSC

<sup>49</sup> Henry to his sister Louisa Wheeler, June 5, 1861, RUSC.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph G. Bilby states "Typhoid fever, with its 37% mortality rate, was endemic and sometimes epidemic in units occupying static positions. Spread by bacteria bred in the feces of unsuspecting 'carriers', (two out of every thousand people in the general population) it was transmitted via food and water, primarily the latter." See his, *Three Rousing Cheers: A History of the Fifteenth New Jersey From Flemington to Appomattox* (Hightstown, New Jersey: Longstreet House, 1993), 25.

<sup>51</sup> James I. Robertson, Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 68-71.

<sup>52</sup> Historians have estimated "up to two-thirds of a regiment might be on sick call at the same time, and...there were approximately 10 million cases of sickness (6 million for the Union Army and 4 million for the Confederates)...with every participant falling ill an average of four to six times." See Eric T. Dean, Jr., in *The Civil War Reader*, 400.

<sup>53</sup> Simeon B. Drake to his wife Lidia, April 1862; Simeon to Lidia, August 10, 1863, Simeon Drake Letters, RUSC.

<sup>54</sup> Wandling, October 6, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>55</sup> Diary of Edmund Cleveland, June 10, 1864, *New Jersey Proceedings*, P.35, NJHS.

<sup>56</sup> Issac Meeker to his father, January 18, 1865, RUSC.

<sup>57</sup> Holcombe to his mother, January 18, 1863, RUSC.

<sup>58</sup> Grimstead to his brother Frank, November 18, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>59</sup> Conklin to his brother-in-law, Abraham P. Jones, December 29, 1861, RUSC.

<sup>60</sup> Conklin to his niece, October 5, 1861, RUSC.

<sup>61</sup> Conklin to his mother, April 16, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>62</sup> Conklin to A.P. Jones, May 21, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>63</sup> William P. Haines, *History of the Men of Co. F, 12<sup>th</sup> N.J. Vols.*, 34-35. Benjamin Borton, (*Awhile With The Blue*, 41), remembered seeing at Fredericksburg "...a few so overcome by fear that they fell prostrate upon the ground as if dead. I have seen men drop upon their knees and pray loudly for deliverance, when courage and bravery, not supplication, was the duty of the moment."

<sup>64</sup> Samuel Toombs, *Reminiscences Of The War*, 12, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Borton, *Awhile With The Blue*, 52-53.

<sup>66</sup> Conklin to his brother-in-law, June 14, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>67</sup> Aaron to Louisa, July 11, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>68</sup> Aaron to Louisa, September 28, 1862; July 17, 1863, RUSC.

<sup>69</sup> Issac to John, December 27, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>70</sup> Steven E. Woodworth's book, *While God Is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), is essentially the religious equivalent of the "ideology" component put forth by Earl J. Hess in his *The Union Soldier In Battle*. And both authors are identical in their vigorous attack on Linderman's thesis. Woodworth's criticisms can be found mostly in his footnotes. In regard to the subject of army



chaplains and Linderman's treatment of it, which can be found in his *Embattled Courage*, pg. 254, Woodworth remarks: "The assertion of Gerald F. Linderman...that chaplains in general lost respect and came to be held in contempt by the end of the war simply does not square with the preponderance of the evidence, notwithstanding the few exceptional cases that he adduces as evidence." (pg. 322, footnote 76) .On Linderman's claim that religion "disappeared" at the infamous Confederate prison camp Andersonville, Woodworth retorts: "Incredible as it may seem, Gerald F. Linderman asserts [on pg. 259] that at Andersonville, 'Religious sensibility seemed almost to disappear...and prayed diminished'...Obviously, my findings do not support his assertion..." (Woodworth, pg. 308, footnote 35) . As to Woodworth's interpretation of soldiers' religious views, the following needs to be quoted at length: "The doctrine of providence, correctly understood, was central to the religious faith of a vast number of Civil War soldiers. Their views of themselves and the world were profoundly shaped by the realization that the sovereign God was actively at work within His creation, accomplishing His own good purposes through all the various circumstances He caused or allowed. The soldiers' ideas about God and His ways extended well beyond the doctrine of providence, whether correctly or incorrectly understood, but all of it stood on the foundation of the knowledge that God was there and that He was neither silent nor idle." (pg. 39)

<sup>71</sup> James M. McPherson, *For Cause And Comrades*, 67. Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 172.

<sup>72</sup> Cornelius to his parents, October 16, 1862, Mandeville Papers, NJHS.

<sup>73</sup> Cornelius to his parents, February 6, 1863; March 11, 1863, NJHS.

<sup>74</sup> Hull to his friend George, September 23, 1861; Hull to "My Dear Friends," April 30, 1862, Hull Papers, RUSC.

<sup>75</sup> Quote is from Hull's Captain, Robert S. Johnston, whose letter informed Hull's sister, Mrs. Lyelia Ann Jones, of her brother's death, October 2, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>76</sup> The idea of God ensuring protection on the battlefield-and whether soldiers believed it and continued to do so with the increased bloodletting-has engendered some curious interpretations. Steven Woodworth's *While God Is Marching On* states that "No other aspect of the Civil War soldiers thought about God is more frequently repeated in their writings than this belief in God's superintending care of His creation." (pg. 29) On the same page he also says "It was providence that preserved a soldier's life through the dangers of camp and battlefield" and "...soldiers looked to providence for protection in battles to come." On pg. 32, however, he takes his argument a step further and in the process greatly exaggerates the soldier perspective: "Yet trusting in God's providence did not mean having confidence that He would preserve His servants from sickness, sorrow, or death. Rather, it was an assurance that He would allow such painful providences to enter a Christian's life only when in His perfect wisdom He knew that those circumstances were necessary in order to make the believer's character more like that of Jesus Christ." The rationale for this can be found on pg. 299, footnote 25: "This point has been misunderstood in previous studies of the Civil War soldiers' beliefs. Gerald F. Linderman wrote, 'The common understanding was that the more complete the soldier's faith the greater would be God's care. Perfect faith seemed to offer the possibility of perfect safety.' Although a few misguided souls may have thought so, this strange conceit was far from being the 'common understanding' of the Civil War soldiers."

<sup>77</sup> January 24, 1863, George J. Van Arsdale Papers, RUSC.

<sup>78</sup> George to William, September 28, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Boody quoted in William P. Haines, *History of the Men of Co. F.*, 105.

<sup>81</sup> In his *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Reid Mitchell focuses on the theme of "domestic imagery", such as the importance of the home and women's role in it as wives and mothers, to understand why Northern citizens enlisted in 1861 and then endured as soldiers till the end of the war. He notes there were many reasons why men enlisted "[b]ut the volunteers of 1861, who continued to compose the bulk of the Union army throughout the war, were motivated by ideology as well. Apparently, Republican Mothers had done their job well." (pg. 154) Notwithstanding his different approach, Mitchell concurs with James McPherson and Earl J. Hess on the importance of "ideology" in motivating and sustaining soldiers. He also believes, in direct contrast to Linderman's assessment that "The soldiers' ideology continued to motivate them through the hellish second half of the war." Asking "How did the Union succeed in employing its heaviest battalions?", Mitchell answers with "The Union succeeded because the men who made up those battalions volunteered to employed, not just in 1861, when they might not have known better, but in 1864 as well. Understanding why these men continued to risk their lives requires considering a great many factors, some of them not commonly associated with military analysis. Some of these factors-the ones I have called 'domestic imagery'-have been considered in preceding chapters." (pg. 158-59) The subject of "home" needs to be elaborated here. Mitchell maintains that "The principal incentive that volunteers shared was their love for the Union. To them, the



Union meant both the ideals of liberty and democracy that they believed unique to the United States, and the government that would uphold those ideals...[and d]efending it was in many ways a familial duty..." (pg. 154) Because the connection was so cherished, "...this dreaming of home, characterized not just the experience of the northern soldier but the experience of many soldiers at many times in many wars. By looking at [the northern soldier] it is possible to see that this longing is not simply a natural affection but a reaction to war; to go further, it is in some ways a psychological construct necessary to cope with the war experience. And if it was a psychological construct, it was one made from handy cultural materials as well as from personal history." (pg. 136) Finally, "The reality that had created the strong attachment to home turned out to be the war, not home itself. The nostalgia had served its purpose: psychological survival." (pg. 137) While Mitchell is correct in saying that longing for home was "not simply a natural affection" this author believes he is mistaken in the view that it provided psychological survival. When New Jersey soldiers invoked home it was not intended merely as a nostalgic gesture that allowed them to survive. It was rather a manifestation of their disillusionment-perhaps more a cry for help, an outcome of their despair and hopelessness-arising from the reality that the ideals they once held in high regard-proving one's manhood by exhibiting courage on the battlefield; commitment to duty, country, and God-were no longer adequate to fulfill their expectations, and returning home with pride and honor. And this disillusionment was further magnified when soldiers warned others not to enlist because they alone recognized that soldiering was quite demoralizing from what they had previously imagined. This phenomenon could also be observed in soldiers from other states. Historian Mark H. Dunkelman, (*Brothers One And All: Esprit de Corps in a Civil War Regiment* [Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2004, 109]), provides an account of First Lieutenant John C. Griswold of the 154<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment whose words perfectly capture the context and meaning of home: "It will not do," wrote Griswold, "for a soldier in the field especially in the winter to indulge too much in the thoughts of home and society and the comforts to be enjoyed there for it only serves to make him dissatisfied with his lot which he cannot change." Dunkelman notes how "Griswold realized that the soldier faced a psychological battle: 'His mind will at times go back to times past when enjoying the comforts of home and the pleasure of mingling in the society of friends and all that makes life pleasant; and then compare it with his condition in camp, he finds that contrast not very encouraging, but we are learning to take things as they come and not fret about that which we cannot control.'" For Griswold, then, the true test was to retain control if one became too melancholy and despairing of his condition. If longing for home was proof of disillusionment and hopelessness, did that necessarily translate into indifference regarding the Union achieving victory? Aforementioned private Issac Meeker-(see pg. 24)-conveyed such thoughts after the disaster at Fredericksburg when he questioned whether the Union was "worth so many valuable lives". This is not to suggest of course that one soldier's consternation represented the feelings of his fellow New Jersey soldiers, and least of all the majority of the Union's soldiers. However, Mitchell, McPherson, and Hess have maintained that soldiers' ideals provided the wherewithal for remaining committed and enduring in the face of unspeakable atrocities and then concluding, particularly Mitchell, that this commitment was most clearly revealed in late 1863 and early 1864, just as the war was becoming even more violent, when volunteers in the Army of the Potomac, the main fighting force for the Union in the East, vindicated their commitment by reenlisting for three more years. Mitchell, (*The Vacant Chair*, pg. 159), believes "That in itself suggested the commitment of the rank-and-file to the cause of the Union, but as a sign of this commitment it was surpassed by the soldiers' vote in the fall elections [as] the soldiers of the Union voted overwhelming for Abraham Lincoln and the Republican party [in 1864]-voted, indeed, for the continuance of the war." This author, however, believes Linderman's assessment of that significant event is more persuasive and that the reasons for it derived from something much more sinister than simply commitment to the "cause" and continuation of the war. Linderman noticed, (*Embattled Courage*, 261), that "...among the men ran a more powerful counter-current, suggesting that a spirit of another kind informed the great reenlistment, a spirit of disillusionment and desperation rather than hopefulness and resolution." One of the incentives to reenlist was a thirty-to thirty-five day furlough that many took advantage of to see their family and friends back home for possibly one last time. According to Linderman, (pg. 262), the debate surrounding reenlistment "was waged not between the ardent and the unenthusiastic but between greater and lesser pessimists, with those of greatest foreboding urging reenlistment." And because many did not expect to survive the upcoming campaign in spring 1864, "They thus argued with heavy emotion that given the likelihood of their deaths, a reenlistment furlough would at least allow them to see their families again." (pg. 262)

Was this sense of despair matched on the home front? Undoubtedly, war weariness could be observed there as well but hope for Union victory clearly did not vanish. Northern civilians, Mitchell states, (pg. 157), "...believed that saving the Union was worth it..." True, but Linderman's recognition of the divide between civilian and soldier expectations renders a more compelling analysis: "Every war begins as one war and becomes two, that watched by civilians and that fought by soldiers...Combat changed soldiers more profoundly than participation on the home



front alters even the most ardent civilian. Conceptions initially embraced by society at large-national war aims, attitudes toward the enemy, views regarding the character of the fighting-retain vitality for civilians long after the experience of the soldier has rendered them remote or even false. The divergence of outlook leads inevitably to tension.” (pg. 1) Though the experience of African-American soldiers has not been treated in this study, the significance of touching upon it here relates directly to scholars’ contention that the Union could not have achieved victory without its committed volunteer forces of 1861 and 1862. The purpose simply is to ask: Did not the enlistment of African-American soldiers have any impact on the outcome of the conflict? For the treatment of New Jersey’s African-American soldiers see Joseph G. Bilby and William C. Goble, “Remember You Are Jerseymen!” chapter 38; Joseph G. Bilby, *Forgotten Warriors: New Jersey’s African-American Soldiers in the Civil War* (Hightstown, NJ: Longstreet House, New Book No. 119, 1993); and William J. Jackson, *New Jerseyans in the Civil War*, 146-150, 161-163, 179-82.

<sup>82</sup> George to his friend James A. Grimstead, July 11, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>83</sup> Holcombe to Andrew, February 2, 1863, RUSC.

<sup>84</sup> Hull to his friend George (?), October 30, 1861; Samuel to his friends, September 4, 1862, RUSC.

<sup>85</sup> Duncan to his brother, March 31, 1865, NJHS.

<sup>86</sup> Hopkins to his sister Hattie, March 21, 1864, RUSC.

<sup>87</sup> Duncan to his sister Hattie, May 17, 1863, NJHS.

<sup>88</sup> Duncan to his father, September 17, 1864, NJHS.

<sup>89</sup> Jones to Hornbeck, February 20, 1896, Letters and Papers of Benjamin Hornbeck, RUSC.

<sup>90</sup> Of course, motivations always varied. Bilby and Goble, (“Remember You Are Jerseymen!” pg. 16-17), cite an interesting account of a Joseph E. Crowell who worked for the newspaper Paterson Guardian as a typesetter. Years after the war he tried to find a satisfactory answer as to why he and others enlisted: “...the ‘ambitious, impulsive youths,’ he observed, ‘who are ever on the watch for adventure, constituted the first spontaneous outpouring of robust young patriots. But in ’62 it was different. Things had become serious.’ Crowell enlisted in Captain Hugh Irish’s company of the Thirteenth. In his post-war memoir Crowell was unusually frank as to his motives: ‘Why I and the other fellows came to enlist is something I never could explain. I think I am safe in saying that, at the moment, genuine patriotism hardly entered into the question.’ Of all the impassioned orators he heard at a war meeting in Paterson, Crowell discovered none ever went into the army, except one who later was drafted and ‘fought and died-by proxy’ through a substitute.”

<sup>91</sup> See Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier In Battle*, esp. Ch. 7. On the factors that enabled soldiers to endure, “...they ranged from ideology to religion, from the comradeship of the army community to support from home, from the pragmatic habits of those who were nurtured in a working-class culture to successful efforts to overcome fear by comparing battle with typical peacetime experiences. The interpretive framework is based on an acknowledgment that although battle is a frightening and disorienting experience, the majority of Northern soldiers were able to psychologically and emotionally endure it...The soldiers came to recognize the horrors of the battlefield but succeeded in retaining faith in the ideals or motives that had impelled them to go to war...The soldiers of the Union were not victims, as twentieth-century authors tend to portray soldiers in all wars, but victors over the horrors of combat.” (pg. ix) As a result, then, of their pre-war experiences, ideals, and faith, soldiers could indeed emotionally overcome because “As in their efforts to take control of their lives and careers in the civilian world, soldiers came to understand that they did not have to be passive victims of battle. They had the opportunity to take hold of the experience and mold it into familiar and manageable forms. Individual soldiers used a variety of tools, ranging from romantic literature to pastoralism to the intimate workings of their common lives, but the result was similar. The unique horror of combat was softened and domesticated, and battle was turned into an experience that could be understood. Soldiers not only survived it but emotionally triumphed over it as well.” (pg. 142). And one of the “tools” soldiers could employ to calm their fears was nature, which “...played a major role in shaping the battle experience.” (pg. 130) “Not surprisingly,” Hess continues, “many soldiers could not help but recall the sounds of nature when they heard the roar of battle. A charge of canister striking a stone wall behind which soldiers took shelter at Antietam sounded like hailstones striking window glass. Minie balls flying through the air made a sound resembling ‘a swarm of bees running away in the hot summer air overhead.’ Comparing flying balls to bees not only gave the soldier something familiar to associate with the experience of battle but also helped soften the fear of combat.” (pg. 130-31). Steven E. Woodworth, *While God Is Marching On*, reaches essentially the same conclusion with his emphasis on religion. Even while acknowledging the war was far different in 1864 and 1865 than it was a few years previous, Woodworth, like Hess, is still prone to embellishment: “The final year of the war brought fighting even more ferocious and bloodshed even more appalling than all that had gone before. Many soldiers were enabled to face such horrors and continue doing their duty in large part through ‘the comfort there is in religion.’”

(pg. 231) And later on he says, “The Christian faith of many soldiers helped them endure the repeated loss of comrades and the constant threat of death...The frequent references in soldiers’ letters and diaries to the comfort of their hope of salvation leave no room for doubt that this affected their morale-both their willingness to remain in the ranks, forgoing desertion, and their readiness to go into battle again when ordered.” (pg. 249)

Woodworth was apparently directing his remarks squarely at Linderman and then issued a strong, and unfair, indictment of his work: “...Gerald Linderman writes, ‘The experience of combat frustrated their attempts to fight the war as an expression of their values and generated in them a harsh disillusionment.’ He states later, ‘Few soldiers returned home professed skeptics, but neither had the war permitted its participants any easy retention of their prewar certainties...It was indeed difficult to see God’s hand in combat and remain convinced that it was driving the war forward in order that good might ensure.’ In fact, what is hard to see is how Linderman ever came to this conclusion-clearly not by reading soldiers’ own writings.” (see pg. 343 footnote 19)

<sup>92</sup> This realism can best be summed up with the following in *Embattled Courage*, pg. 251: “Reflecting the sense of victimization by war, soldier letters contained new images that had little in common with those of 1861. One set spoke to feelings of helplessness and bitterness at the seeming inevitability of death in combat.” Later on, (pg. 265), he astutely observes that “The change in soldier perspective between 1861 and 1865 was never a matter of smooth or all-embracing sequences. Some soldiers, probably those least equipped and least inclined to record their reactions, may have entered the war with a feeble allegiance to courage’s values. Others, holding to them tightly whatever the stresses of combat, may have survived the war with their dedication to courage-and even knightliness-largely undamaged. But experience cost many soldiers their conviction that war was ‘a question of valor.’”

This last point is in reference to a speech Linderman quoted from a New York Congressman in the House of Representatives, Roscoe Conkling, who asserted “[War] is not a question of valor, but a question of money; ...it is not regulated by the laws of honor but by the laws of trade. I understand [that] the practical problem to be solved in crushing the rebellion of despotism against representative government is, who can throw the most projectiles? Who can afford the most iron or lead?” (pg. 264) Linderman concludes that these sobering remarks “Challenged the bases of [soldiers’] own participation in war. The four years that followed, however, would reveal to them the brutal reality behind Conkling’s words.” (pg. 264-65)

<sup>93</sup> As in other conflicts, desertion too was a popular tactic in the Civil War. In her, *Desertion During The Civil War* (New York: The Century Company, 1928, 137), historian Ella Lonn acknowledged “War weariness and discouragement was [a] potent cause of desertion...” And, “Nowhere is the weakened morale more clearly shown than in a soldier’s letter: ‘But, Mrs...my faith is getting weak, and I fear we are gone; the internal enemies are too many and great. Many of our own generals are no more than traitors; the soldiers are becoming discouraged, and we will be compelled, after a while, to yield or to compromise in some dishonorable way, I fear.’”

As to the numbers of deserters, Lonn concludes “If we accept [Thomas L.] Livermore’s figures [in his *Numbers and Losses During the American Civil War* New York, 1900] of the number of enlistments in the Union armies as 1,556, 678 with [Provost Marshal General, James B.] Fry’s estimate of 200,000 desertions as compared with 1,082,119 services in the Confederate armies and 104,000 desertions, the proportion of desertion is even greater in the Union than in the Confederate army. It stands one desertion to each seven enlistments in the Northern army as compared with one to nine in the Confederate army.” (pg. 226)

