

JOHN FULTON REYNOLDS AND HIS AGE: POLITICS, RELIGION, AND
GENERALSHIP IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA

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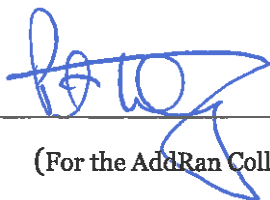
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue	1
<i>Of William Tecumseh Sherman and John Fulton Reynolds</i>	
Chapter One	15
<i>The Rearing and Training of a Soldier: Reynolds in the Age of Jacksonian Democracy and Nascent Army Professionalization</i>	
Interlude	84
<i>Fever</i>	
Chapter Two	87
<i>A Polk Man to the Core? Reynolds, Mexico, and the Army of Occupation from Corpus Christi to Buena Vista</i>	
Interlude	161
<i>Conservative</i>	
Chapter Three	186
<i>“I Will Fight Them Inch by Inch!” New Perspectives on the Command and Generalship of Reynolds at the Battle of Gettysburg</i>	
Interlude	248
<i>Loss</i>	
Chapter Four	254
<i>The Curious Case of Catherine Hewitt and U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds: A Story of Death, Mourning, and Religion in Civil War-era America</i>	
Interlude	297
<i>Flood</i>	
Chapter Five	301
<i>The Cupola and the Sharpshooter: U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds and Enduring Gettysburg Myths</i>	
Epilogue	334
<i>Upon the Altar of the Union: Soldiers and Civilians Remember Reynolds</i>	
Works Cited	371
Vitae	
Abstract	

PROLOGUE

Of William Tecumseh Sherman and John Fulton Reynolds

In April 1865, the fifth April of the War, William Sherman halted his battle-hardened western army in North Carolina. His men recently had set fire to Columbia, South Carolina, much as they had laid waste to Georgia in 1864, all to make unrepentant southerners feel the scourge of war.¹ Outside of Raleigh, Sherman paused to scribble a

¹ Historians divide over the intensity and brutality of Sherman's Atlanta Campaign and ultimate march through Georgia to the sea (the Savannah Campaign). Richard M. Weaver first attached Sherman's military doctrines and his application of destructive war theory to modern notions of total war that took on new meaning after the Second World War. He wrote in 1945 that "it scarcely needs pointing out that from the military policies of Sherman and Sheridan there lies but an easy step to the total war of the Nazis, the greatest affront to Western civilization since its founding"; see Weaver, "Southern Chivalry and Total War," *Sewanee Review* 53, no. 2 (Spring, 1945): 267-278, at 277; Not long after World War Two, John Bennet Walters argued that "in his practical application of [total war]," Sherman "became one of the first modern generals to revert to the idea of the use of military force against the civilian population of the enemy" and, like unto Weaver, noted the interrelatedness of northern military conduct in the Civil War to the terror unleashed in Europe from 1914 onward. The author concluded that though Sherman's application of total war "was not in accord with the accepted rules of his own time, his success in using it as a means of destroying the enemy's resources and undermining his morale was to influence the strategy of future wars and to bring at least a tacit adjustment in the rules under which they were to be fought"; see Walters, "General William T. Sherman and Total War," *Journal of Southern History* 14, no. 4 (November, 1948): 447-480, at 448 and 479-480.

Religious historian Harry Stout, in his provocative "moral history" of the Civil War, argues for the totality—as opposed to the destructive quality—of the Civil War. Civil War combatants and noncombatants experienced their war as total, he writes, in spite of the fact that the severity of that conflict pales in comparison to those that would follow in the twentieth century: "There exists no equivalent of Dresden, or Coventry, or Tokyo, or Rwanda in the Civil War," Stout concedes. "But nineteenth-century participants *experienced* their war as total. If, God forbid, a total war in the twenty-first century were to claim hundreds of millions of casualties that dwarfed losses in World Wars I and II, it would not mean that the twentieth century wars were no longer 'total'" (original emphasis); see Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006), xv-xvi.

Mark M. Smith also suggests that southerners experienced a total war in his sensory history of the conflict. He concludes that Sherman's Army of the West

letter to Sewall L. Fremont, Esq., an old friend who dwelt in Wilmington as the Southern Confederacy drew its final, labored, and shallow breaths. Fremont, like a host of others, had recently found the opportune political moment to express in writing his loyalty and fidelity to the government of the United States. Years before he had silenced that loyalty and lent tacit support to a government dedicated to maintaining and codifying the inferiority of the African race.

Sherman seemed pleased to learn of Fremont's rediscovered loyalty to the United States Constitution. As in much of his correspondence, and indeed in a quality typical of Sherman that his fiercest critics seem to forget, the general opened his letter with a touch of sentimental warmth: "Of course I am gratified to know the truth as to one for whom I entertained friendship dated far back in other and better days." But in a manner that illustrates the cold and hard reality that justice often necessarily excludes forgetfulness, Sherman also issued a cold reminder to Fremont:

I will be frank and honest with you. ... Passive submission to events by a man in the prime of life is not all that is due to society in times of revolution. Had the Northern men residing at the South spoken out manfully and truly at the outset the active secessionists could not have carried the masses of men as they did.

Sherman doubted whether the war might have been avoided in full, but he believed, as his very act of writing to Fremont invites occasion to believe, that men such as Fremont bore responsibility for much of the destruction wrought by the American Civil War.²

unleashed "a sensory assault on the South – heard, seen, smelled, tasted, and felt"; see Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 139.

See, also, Anne Sarah Rubin, *Through the Heart of Dixie: Sherman's March and American Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

² Letter of William T. Sherman to S. L. Fremont, Esq., 21 April 1865, Raleigh, North Carolina, in *Sherman's Civil War: Selected Correspondence of William T. Sherman, 1860-1865*, edited by Brooks D. Simpson and Jean V. Berlin (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 868.

Sherman believed truly that the horrors of the American Civil War resulted from the triumph of disordered human passions over ordered human reason. He seems almost to have understood it, by extension, as a colossal failure of the rule of law, as an ultimate vindication of James Madison's basic philosophical and political axiom expressed in the *Federalist*: namely, that men are not angels, and because of this, they need order, humane institutions, and the rule of law—law rooted in transcendent and timeless realities—to safeguard their happiness and ensure their flourishing. A biographer has remarked of Sherman that he was a man concerned primarily for restraint, tradition, and ordered liberty.³ This concern shines through much of Sherman's writings. It appears with striking clarity in the letter he dispatched to Mayor James M. Calhoun and the City Council of Atlanta on 12 September 1864 as the western armies prepared to enter the city as conquerors. In this letter, Sherman wrote of the chief importance of restoring the "*Union*" (original emphasis). He insisted upon southern submission to the "Authority of the National Government" (original capitalization). The Federals, Sherman waxed, "don't want your negros [sic] or your horses, or your houses or your Lands [sic], or anything that you have, but we do want and will have a just obedience to the Laws of the United States."⁴

What animated Sherman, the first thing and the foundational principle for which he seemed concerned and stood ready to fight, was justice. To the April 1865 letter he sent to Fremont, Sherman added the following:

As long as the South abided by the conditions of our fundamental contract of government, the Constitution, all law-abiding citizens were bound to respect the

³ See John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993).

⁴ Letter of Sherman to James M. Calhoun et. al, 12 September 1864, Atlanta, Georgia, in Simpson and Berlin, eds. *Sherman's Civil War*, 708.

property in slaves, whether they approved or not, but when the South violated the compact openly, publicly, and violently, it was absurd to suppose that we are bound to respect that kind of property.

How unthinkable, indeed nearly incredible, it seemed to Sherman that in 1861 a liberal and civilized Western nation had descended into fratricidal war over the question of racial slavery. The contest itself, and the very “idea of war to perpetuate slavery in 1861” constituted, in Sherman’s view, “an insult to the intelligence of the age.” In the latter half of the letter, all warmth faded from Sherman’s pen as he confessed his “feeling allied to abhorrence toward Northern men resident South.” Such men were stained, in Sherman’s view, with bloodguilt for the war: “their silence or acquiescence was one of the causes of the war assuming the magnitude it did.”⁵

And what a magnitude it assumed. Drew Gilpin Faust has argued, not without her critics but with some success, that the American Civil War ushered into human history unprecedented levels of destructiveness and that it prefigured the horrors of the Great War.⁶ Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh have observed that the American Civil War was the first military experience in the West to wed the material legacy of the Industrial Revolution with the democratic and secular fervor begotten of the French Revolution, partially echoing the recent observation of intellectual, religious, and military historian Allen C. Guelzo, who notes that total war results not from religious zeal, but rather from the totalizing fervor of popular democracy.⁷

⁵ Letter of Sherman to Fremont, in Simpson and Berlin, eds., *Sherman’s Civil War*, 868.

⁶ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

⁷ Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh, *A Savage War: A Military History of the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 5; Allen C. Guelzo channels James Whitman of Yale University when he identifies the transition

Sherman might have sensed, but could not have known in full at the time of his writing to Fremont, that the American Civil War would cost the lives of nearly 800,000 Americans from the North and the South.⁸ What Sherman did know, and what he expressed with conviction in his letter, was that the war cost the lives of gallant northern soldiers and officers, professional and volunteer. Sherman cited with distinction James McPherson and the “thousands of noble gentlemen, any one of whom was worth all the slaves of the South and half of the white population thrown in.” But first among his pantheon of Union heroes, Sherman listed, by name, his friend from the Old Army, United States Major General of Volunteers John Fulton Reynolds.⁹

Sherman had known Reynolds for many years. As early as 1844, when Reynolds and Sherman were assigned to the Third Artillery, and stationed at Fort Moultrie, the

from limited to total war with the waning of monarchical power and resulting ascendant democracy:

“So long as government had been the private preserve of kings, then wars had been the sport of monarchs, and were fought as though they were princely trials by combat or a species of civil litigation. The only class of people likely to suffer severely by them was the nobility. The scope of war was limited simply because war was understood to be the prerogative of kings. ...

“Once democratic governments began to shoulder the monarchs aside—once governments became ‘of the people, by the people, for the people’ and involved the entire people of a nation and not just a handful of aristocrats—war became the instrument of entire populations. No solitary monarch could now call them off; no gentlemen’s agreement could limit their scope. Wars became wars of nations against nations, waged for principles abstract enough to command everyone’s assent, and therefore all the more impossible to win short of the annihilation—not just the defeat—of an enemy”; see Guelzo, “Did Religion Make the Civil War Worse?” *Atlantic* (23 August 2015), web: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/08/did-religion-make-the-american-civil-war-worse/401633/>.

⁸ In his penetrating analysis of micro data samples of census counts from the 1850s, 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, J. David Hacker posits that 130,000 additional men died as a result of the American Civil War, and that 200,000 more women were widowed than cited in previous studies; see J. David Hacker, “A Census-Based Count of Civil War Dead,” *Civil War History* 57, no. 4 (December 2011): 307-348.

⁹ Sherman to Fremont, in Simpson and Berlin, eds., *Sherman’s Civil War*, 868.

two men had hunted deer together in the southern wilderness. In 1852, the two men served together in New Orleans. When Sherman applied to the adjutant-general for six months of leave from the army to pursue a co-partnership in a banking venture in California, Reynolds nearly assumed command of Sherman's duties.¹⁰ Like so many officers of their generation, Sherman and Reynolds possessed an acquaintanceship that approximated a friendship in their military context. The war separated the two men, as Sherman remarked after the war, with a tinge of nostalgia, and their military offices took them to different theaters of operation in the Civil War from 1861 to 1863.¹¹ Still, the sense of patriotism and devotion to duty that both Reynolds and Sherman acquired

¹⁰ In one memorable recollection, Sherman recounted how, while hunting with Reynolds some fifty miles from Fort Moultrie, he had been thrown from his horse and dislocated his shoulder. Reynolds, an expert horseman, "mended the bridle and saddle, which had been broken by the fall," and helped Sherman on his horse. Later in the day, when Sherman's swelling shoulder became too painful to ride, Reynolds carried Sherman on a makeshift litter to a nearby plantation, where a surgeon ultimately set Sherman's shoulder back into its place; See Sherman, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman*, Charles Royster ed. (New York: The Library of America, 1990), 31, 113, 114. It would indeed be fascinating to know Sherman's immediate reaction to the death of Gen. Reynolds at Gettysburg; sadly, such a reflection, if ever the General made one, is a conspicuous omission from his memoirs; In 1884, Sherman reflected on his relationship with General Reynolds and on their tenure together in the old Army:

I knew Reynolds as boy and man from the day he came to West Point, in 1837, to the breaking out of the civil war in 1861. We served nine years together in the same regiment, the Third Artillery, and when, in 1853, I left New Orleans for California he was aide-de- camp to General Twiggs, and volunteered to perform my office of Commissary of Subsistence during my absence on leave for six months, during which I made my resolution to leave the service and embark in civil pursuits. We all supposed he would succeed me in that office, but the Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, gave the appointment to another — Captain Kilburn.

Letter of William T. Sherman to the Hon. A. G. Curtin, 8 May 1884, St. Louis, MO, in Reynolds Memorial Association, *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds, Philadelphia, September 18, 1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), 21.

¹¹ Sherman continued, "During our civil war our spheres of action were wide apart, but knowing his ability, I watched his upward career with intense interest, and mourned his death as a brother"; letter of William T. Sherman to the Hon. A.G. Curtin, in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 21.

through their educations at the United States Military Academy, in their military training, and in the pre-war years had created a fraternal bond that linked the two men. Thus in 1865, in the written word, and from the hand of a great commander in the history of American warfare, lies the recognition of a great and important soldier.

Plutarch, the father of biography, observed like no other that to inquire into the life of man is to ascertain that which is fundamental to human experience and to history itself.¹² In the tradition of Plutarch, albeit with a greater measure of criticism, this dissertation analyzes episodes in the life of an iconic nineteenth-century figure, a commander who, in his time, rated among the ablest generals to lead troops in the Civil War. Killed in desperate action in a battle he orchestrated, John Fulton Reynolds stands even in 2019 as one of the highest-ranking American combat fatalities to fall in war. But Reynolds has remained a neglected figure and one lost to historians; the sole biography he has received is hamstrung by the conventions of its time.¹³ This is regrettable, for Reynolds's life bears significance beyond the Civil War and even beyond the long nineteenth-century United States in which Reynolds featured prominently. In this dissertation I argue that the life of Reynolds illuminates essential military, political, gendered, and cultural spheres of nineteenth-century life: first, the professionalization of the antebellum, or "Old" U.S. Army officer corps; second, the racially-charged nature of conservatism in northern politics that dominated the high command of federal armies in the Civil War; third, the monumental history of the Battle of Gettysburg in Civil War

¹² Plutarch, *Lives*, translated by John Dryden, edited by Arthur Hugh Clough, and with an introduction by James Atlas, in two volumes (New York: Modern Library, 2001).

¹³ Edward J. Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg: A Biography of General John F. Reynolds* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1958).

studies; and lastly, for the war as a lived human experience on the home front, with all its attendant effects on religion and belief.

Chapter one reconstructs the early life of Reynolds. The literary and scientific education he received as a young boy from Moravians inculcated Reynolds with the moral virtues, and essential prerequisites for the training he received from 1837 to 1841 at the United States Military Academy. The service ethic of duty, honor, and country that emanated from West Point coalesced as early as the 1830s, and it molded Reynolds into a devoted servant of the national interest. Paradoxically, Democratic political forces that worked to make possible Reynolds's appointment to the United States Military Academy and that predominated in Reynolds's native Lancaster found expression nationally as the institution's harshest critics. In the end, however, proponents of Jacksonian Democracy who despised West Point for its perceived elitism recognized the importance of a national school for training officers in the French military art who could ensure the conquest of the western frontier and the advance of Manifest Destiny. Reynolds's socialization at the United States Military Academy, illustrated in detailed correspondence with family, mattered for his professional future even as it evidenced the growth and transformation of West Point and the old army. For too long, historians have assumed that the professional organization and fighting effectiveness of the U.S. Army always was, is, and ever shall be, but they should resist that thinking. Like other institutions, the army developed gradually; it bore international (especially French) influence, and it reflected a certain kind of technical expertise that required methodical refinement, experimentation, and application.¹⁴ Reynolds's education, and his later

¹⁴ William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992); Christopher S. Stowe, "A

service in the Mexican-American War and in the West, offers historians of war and peace a window into the evolution and professionalization of the antebellum army.

Chapter two and its accompanying interlude, “Conservative,” place Reynolds’s vast frontier military service from Texas to Utah in the context of westward expansion, the politics of slavery, and the sectional crisis of the 1850s. In his enthusiasm for James K. Polk’s program of national expansion, Reynolds kept close step with partisan voices on the subject of Manifest Destiny. Mormonism he considered the greatest blight upon the nation; abolitionist agitators in the East, Reynolds wrote to his sisters from Utah, ought to be hanged to alleviate sectional tensions. Reynolds tracked closely with establishment middle northerners who expressed anxiety over reactionary anti-slavery elements of society. If Reynolds’s views approximated those of northern civilians, set against the backdrop of the Old U.S. Army junior officer corps, his critiques of moral reformers were exceptional in an age when officers often suppressed political ideology in written correspondence—evidence, as historian Samuel Watson has interpreted it, of the

Philadelphia Gentleman: The Cultural, Institutional, and Political Socialization of George Gordon Meade” (PhD diss., The University of Toledo, 2005); Skelton, “The Commanding Generals and the Question of Civil Control in the Antebellum U.S. Army,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 7, no. 2 (June 2006): 153-172; Samuel J. Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted: West Point Socialization, Military Accountability, and the Nation-State During the Jacksonian Era,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 7, no. 2 (June 2006): 219-251; Ethan S. Rafuse, “‘To Check ... the Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions’: Common Sense, ‘Cobbon Sense’, and the Socialization of Cadets at Antebellum West Point,” *War in History* 16, no. 4 (November 2009): 406-424; Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War: The Old Army in War and Peace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Watson, *Jackson’s Sword: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1810-1821* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012); Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1821- 1846* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013).

army's increasing accountability to civilian control.¹⁵ Later, in the Civil War, Reynolds's conservatism clashed with the moral nature of the conflict that took on a greater dimension with emancipation. The "new birth of freedom" of which Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg, insofar as it pertained to racial equality, was an outcome Reynolds would likely have acknowledged, but one he would hardly have endorsed. Did the United States Constitution establish slavery as a national institution? Alternatively, did the Constitution reserve powers of commerce to the states? Was not freedom national the explicit program of the Founders? Did not the Founders view slavery as an antiquated—and immoral—aberration, as Lincoln and abolitionists like Frederick Douglass maintained?¹⁶ Unlike Republicans, who asserted that the Constitution was an essentially anti-slavery text, and thus expanded the war to include emancipation, Reynolds and northern conservatives generally advocated for the restoration of the federal compact status quo antebellum, a fact that challenges historians' assessments of race in the wider context of northern war motivations.

Chapter three intervenes in a voluminous command and battle study literature by establishing Reynolds as the central actor in the northern high command during the Gettysburg Campaign. In selecting Gettysburg as the key site of action on July 1, 1863, Reynolds merits distinction as the pre-eminent architect of that battle—the grandest military engagement fought on the North and South American continents—a fact lost on

¹⁵ Watson, "Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism: Junior U.S. Army Officers' Attitudes toward War with Mexico," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 99, no. 4 (April 1996): 467-498.

¹⁶ James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012); Sean Wilentz, *No Property in Man: Slavery and Antislavery at the Nation's Founding* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

historians of the battle and on many Americans today. George Meade's circular for a defensive action at Pipe Creek, Maryland, never reached Reynolds, nor did a dispatch from army headquarters that inquired after Reynolds's view of the tactical situation on the morning of July 1. In fact, Reynolds had anticipated battle in advance of his commanding general's wishes. Ironically, however, the soldier most responsible for the greatest battle of the war died fifteen minutes after he committed northern armies to the fight. The death of Reynolds constituted nothing less than a severe blow to the fighting effectiveness of the Army of the Potomac, which lost a capable general officer and one who, in his desire to preserve the town of Gettysburg from Rebel invasion, evinced an application of military restraint consistent with Old Army doctrine. What is more, Reynolds's death prefigured the decline of McClellan's most Democratic lieutenants, without whom Ulysses Grant—a proponent of a hard war and a friend of Republicans—later shaped northern military operations in the eastern theater of the war. This chapter promises to reshape how students and enthusiasts of the Gettysburg Campaign conceive of the battle's origin and causation.

Chapter four, an adaptation of which has found publication in *American Nineteenth Century History*, a transatlantic journal dedicated to the study of the long nineteenth-century United States, assesses the significance of Reynolds's battlefield death for those who endured it on the home front, and with serious implications for religious belief.¹⁷ At the time of his death, Reynolds was the highest-ranking Union officer killed in the Civil War. The return of his body from the battlefield represented an

¹⁷ Phrasing adapted from Mitchell G. Klingenberg, "The curious case of Catherine Mary Hewitt and U.S. Major General of Volunteers John Fulton Reynolds: bodies, mourning the dead, and religion in the era of the American Civil War," *American Nineteenth Century History* 19, no. 3 (October 2018): 225-249.

uncommon feature of a war noted for its industrial scale and for the destruction it wrought. How loved ones grieved Reynolds illustrates mourning practices among middle- to upper-class women in the North and underscores the centrality of death in nineteenth-century America. Reynolds's death also occasioned the introduction of his sisters to the General's secret fiancée, a Roman Catholic convert. Writers have attributed the clandestine nature of the engagement, and Reynolds's reluctance to introduce his fiancée to family, to Catherine Hewitt's religion. But Catholics in the North received greater accommodation in Protestant society than previously imagined, and the many kindnesses that the Reynolds family showed Hewitt point to an increasing acceptance of Catholics in established social settings. Finally, Reynolds's loved ones mourned him in Victorian overtones, but it is not clear that for them religion functioned as the paradigm through which they elicited transcendent meaning of their brother's death. The response of Reynolds's loved ones to his killing illustrates practices of northern civil religion and suggests the waning of traditional belief.¹⁸ Additionally, by utilizing the return of Reynolds's body to loved ones as a microhistory, this chapter proves that the very preservation of Reynolds's body from the battlefield evidences the comparatively limited—and not total—nature of Civil War destruction.¹⁹

¹⁸ Klingenberg, "The curious case of Catherine Mary Hewitt and U.S. Major General of Volunteers John Fulton Reynolds."

¹⁹ Leading historians of society and war question whether the Civil War prefigured the total and industrial wars of the twentieth century, or whether in scope and conduct it more closely approximated limited wars of the nineteenth-century world. Drew Faust, in *This Republic of Suffering*, argued the former view, while other historians have attempted correctives; see Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*; for correctives of Faust, see Hsieh, "Total War and the American Civil War Reconsidered: The End of an Outdated 'Master Narrative,'" *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 3 (September 2011): 394-408; Allen C. Guelzo, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* (New York: Knopf, 2013); Nicholas Marshall, "The Great Exaggeration: Death and the American Civil War," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 1 (March 2014): 3-27; D.H. Dilbeck, A

The final chapter of the manuscript trains its lens on popular controversies that surrounded Reynolds's killing and, in ways that demonstrate the power of historical memory, continue to inform visitors' perceptions of Reynolds's death at the Gettysburg National Military Park. Drawing from a plethora of newspaper accounts and contemporaneous reminiscences, this chapter refutes two myths that resulted from the early-morning combat of July 1, 1863. The first myth held that Reynolds met his cavalry commander near the Lutheran Theological Seminary, which is now a popular museum destination at the Gettysburg battlefield. The second myth concerned the nature of Reynolds's killing, which many students of the war, tourists, and battle enthusiasts believe resulted from a sharpshooter's bullet. A modified version of this chapter appeared in peer-reviewed article form in the July 2018 issue of *Gettysburg Magazine* (published by the University of Nebraska Press).²⁰

Of American officers in the antebellum- and Civil War-era armies Reynolds was exceptional. He was twice brevetted in Mexico; in 1860, he ranked two grades above many of his peers when promotion and advancement in a small professional standing army were rare feats; and, he served as commandant of cadets at the United States Military Academy through Secession Winter.²¹ His service in the Civil War from 1861 to 1863 earned him great acclaim.

More Civil War: How the Union Waged a Just War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Jonathan M. Steplyk, *Fighting Means Killing: The Nature of Civil War Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018); and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

²⁰ Klingenberg, "Of Cupolas and Sharpshooters: Major General John Fulton Reynolds and Popular Gettysburg Myths," *Gettysburg Magazine* 59 (July 2018): 49-65.

²¹ For more on the limited nature of professional advancement in the antebellum army, see Watson, "Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism."

This dissertation concludes that, because of the very nature of his death, Reynolds emerged as a more consequential figure in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War than in life. Civil War veterans and Pennsylvania natives worked with great success to commemorate Reynolds's memory in the public square after the war, evidence of which the historian can trace into the twentieth century, and perceive in the manner by which Americans celebrated Decoration (Memorial) Days. Today, tourists who flock to Gettysburg National Military Park, who visit the hallowed Gettysburg National Cemetery, or who stroll Penn Square and face north from Philadelphia's city hall can still see cast-bronze likenesses of Reynolds. Curiously, however, the influence of Reynolds's national memory has waned over time. In the 1970s and 1980s, and as art, literature, and film reinvigorated public fascination with the Civil War, popular interest shifted to other commanders and battles, displacing Reynolds from the public imagination and reconstructing northern memory of the war.

A brief word on the use of interludes will perhaps prove helpful. With the exception of "Conservative," these interludes lack the critical and analytical structures of more conventional dissertation chapters. This is by design. The author hopes the insertion of these vignettes will help to furnish readers with a broader contextual and narrative understanding of Reynolds's life and times.

One word, too, on spelling and usage: wherever possible, the author has chosen to preserve the inconsistencies and irregularities of capitalization and grammar in the sources. The author believes that this is important for capturing the essence of the original texts. Where relevant, the author has indicated points of emphasis in the original sources, and has modernized spelling and conventions of usage if, left in their original, unaltered forms, they are distracting to the reader.

CHAPTER ONE

The Rearing and Training of a Soldier: Reynolds in the Age of Jacksonian Democracy and Nascent Army Professionalization

Abstract: *This inaugural chapter considers the family, the early life, and the education of John Fulton Reynolds from his first days in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to his days at the United States Military Academy at West Point, from whence he graduated and commissioned as a junior officer in the United States Army in 1841. Specifically, it situates the rearing of Reynolds against the backdrop of Democratic politics in Lancaster County. This chapter also considers Reynolds's early life in the context of American military professionalism, which reached its apogee in the antebellum era after cultural and institutional changes at West Point, engineered by the reform-minded Sylvanus Thayer, ushering in a golden age of military training at the United States Military Academy. Building on the recent scholarship of such historians as Wayne Hsieh, Ethan Rafuse, and Samuel Watson, who all have written on the antebellum officer corps and the institutional culture of the antebellum army with considerable skill, I argue in these pages that the education Reynolds received is conspicuous for three reasons: first, because it cultivated his moral sense; second, because in its synthesis of arithmetic and scientific rationality, Scottish Enlightenment common sense moral philosophy, and Episcopalian religiosity, Reynolds's education predisposed the budding officer toward order, habitual duty, and restraint; and third, because Reynolds's professional military training groomed him for the national service on the eve of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion – arguably the most definitive and consequential political event of the nineteenth century.*

Nestled along the banks of the Conestoga—a tributary navigable by steam ship in Reynolds's time and the inspiration of local poets—and to the east of the wider, deeper, and more powerful Susquehanna River, into which the waters of the Conestoga flow, lies the picturesque city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania.¹ At the time of Reynolds's youth, the

¹ D.B. Landis, "The Conestoga River at Lancaster," *Papers of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 36, no. 11 (1932): 261-271.

city boasted a modest population of eight thousand.² It was, in several respects, typical of Pennsylvania towns for its time. In its industry (the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Lancaster Railroad linked the town to other arteries of commerce in the Keystone State) and in its agriculture (farmers grew wheat, barley, flax, hemp, corn, oats, and potatoes) Lancaster resembled other Pennsylvania burghs and villages. Chief among the town's most historic exports were wagons, railroad cars, nails, whiskey, and snuff.³ Its position along the river made Lancaster home to several mills.⁴ Even into the 1840s, the town maintained architectural conformity, its structures built of red brick or stone and not towering more than two stories in height.⁵ In its culture, too, Lancaster and the county which bears its name reflected the religious values and folkways of Dutch, German, and Irish Protestants. Englishmen established the Church of England in Lancaster in 1744. The Episcopal Church endured in Lancaster into the nineteenth century, though most trappings of English high culture vanished from the burgh in the years of the American Revolution.⁶ Lancaster natives remembered with pride how they had thrown off the yoke of English oppression. In Lancaster, that "inland shire" where the earliest of settlers "flee[d] from the Old World's bigotry, / Free to enjoy their liberty," revolutionary sentiment in the eighteenth century was strong.⁷ Lancaster sent many of

² Frederic Shriver Klein, *Lancaster County, 1841-1891* (Lancaster: Lancaster County National Bank, 1941), 3.

³ Klein, *Lancaster County, 1841-1891*, 3.

⁴ Landis, "The Conestoga River at Lancaster."

⁵ Klein, *Lancaster County, 1841-1891*, 3.

⁶ On the eve of the American Civil War, Episcopalians amounted to a mere three-and-a-half percent of practicing Lancaster County religionists; see J.I. Mombert, *An Authentic History of Lancaster County, in the State of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster: J.E. Barr and Company, 1869), 451.

⁷ William Riddle, *Tribute to Old Lancaster, City – County*, second edition (Lancaster: L.B. Herr, 1908), 11.

her sons to take up arms in the thirteen colonies' great struggle for independence, and even served as a prison site for British prisoners of war.⁸

One of the region's earliest settlers who had fled the religious "bigotry" of the Old World, and an ancestor of John Fulton Reynolds, was Mary Warenbauer Ferree, a woman of influence and "a shining light among pioneer Colonial American Women."⁹ Ferree, a Huguenot, and descended from an old Norman family, had fled to England from the Palitanate by way of Holland upon King Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes.¹⁰ In 1708, she left England with her six children – she was widowed – and in 1712, she possessed, though not by contract letter, some four thousand acres of good farmland in what later became Lancaster County.¹¹ Along with other "band[s] of Huguenots and their "scattered plots," Mary Ferree was one of the earliest settlers of Lancaster County.¹² One of Ferree's children married a LeFevre, and from that marriage was born John Fulton Reynolds's paternal grandmother.¹³

In addition to French Huguenots, Irish Protestants entered Pennsylvania in the early eighteenth century, and these were the ancestors of John Fulton Reynolds's

⁸ Mombert, *Authentic History of Lancaster County*, 298-306, 312-320.

⁹ Marion Wallace Reninger, "Madame Ferree," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 65 (1961): 144-148.

¹⁰ "Persecutions Drive Huguenots Here," Scrapbook, 1802-1930, Box 13, *Reynolds Family Papers*, Archives and Special Collections, Franklin & Marshall College [hereafter cited as *RFP*].

¹¹ Reynolds's biographer, Edward J. Nichols, noted that Ferree "held 4,000 acres in what shortly became Lancaster County." Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg: A Biography of General John F. Reynolds* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1958), 4; Reninger, however, has noted that Mary Ferree did not own the title to the land, even as William Penn's commissioners intended the land for her use. Reninger, "Madame Ferree," 148.

¹² Lyrics adapted from Riddle, *Tribute to Old Lancaster, City – County*, 87.

¹³ "Persecutions Drive Huguenots Here," Scrapbook, 1802-1930, Box 13, *RFP*.

mother.¹⁴ Lydia Moore, wrote the General's grand-nephew in 1958, was full of Irish blood. Her father, who hailed from Rathmelton, Ireland, served in the American Revolution as a captain in the Third Pennsylvania Infantry of the Continental Line; wounded at Brandywine, he later served at Germantown and at Valley Forge.¹⁵

Reynolds's biographer, Edward Nichols, has written that the house into which Reynolds was born was one of the largest in Lancaster, and that the prolific Reynolds family needed comfortable accommodations.¹⁶ John Reynolds Esq. acquired the home after it had passed from George Graeff to William Hamilton in 1811, and after Hamilton's subsequent death.¹⁷ John Fulton Reynolds, born in the family home on 21 September 1821 at 42 West King Street, Lancaster, was one of thirteen children born to John and Lydia Moore Reynolds.¹⁸ Of these thirteen, only nine – roughly three of four – survived beyond infancy, a rate of birth and death more or less commensurate with measures of mortality that most Americans experienced in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ A Lancaster-area writer marked the Reynolds home at 42 West King Street as “a fine example of early American homes,” and noted its “fine Colonial doorway,” its generous marble fireplace, and its upper room meticulously furnished in polished wood. The Reynolds home stood three stories in height and boasted five windows across the length

¹⁴ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 4.

¹⁵ John Fulton Reynolds Scott, “John Fulton Reynolds,” *Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 52, no. 2 (1948): 21-34, at 21.

¹⁶ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 5.

¹⁷ Grace S. Hoffman, “Gen. Reynolds Was Born at 42 West King Street,” Scrapbook, 1802-1930, Box 13, *RFP*.

¹⁸ Scott, “John Fulton Reynolds,” 21; Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 5.

¹⁹ Nicholas Marshall, “The Great Exaggeration: Death and the Civil War,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 1 (March 2014): 3-27. American infants in 1850 had a 77 percent chance of making it to their first birthday, and a mere 69 percent chance of attaining the age of nine. Marshall, “The Great Exaggeration,” 5.

of its front. By nineteenth-century standards, the home made a striking impression. Wrote Nichols, “in a town where fewer than a third of the homes rose more than a single story the Reynolds place ranked among the best.”²⁰ The family hired an African-American freedman to cut its firewood, which a wood delivery service deposited on the front walk in cooler weather. John Reynolds contracted “Buckrum” to cut his wood at fifty cents per cutting. Though the home of his youth, the Reynolds residence at 42 West King Street was not the home Reynolds visited years later while on leave from the United States Army. It passed out of the family’s ownership for a transaction of \$7,500.²¹

The Reynolds family did not possess extravagant wealth, but it benefited from good blood lines, successful business ventures, and robust political connections; in time, three of its members would establish themselves as devoted public servants. Their patriarch, John Reynolds, was born near Lancaster in 1787, the year leading statesmen and political theorists gathered to draft the Constitution of the United States in nearby Philadelphia. Made an orphan early in life, Reynolds learned the trade of a printer in Philadelphia as an apprentice of Archibald Bartram. Bartram thought well enough of his young apprentice to offer Reynolds a share in his firm, and John entered into a business partnership at Bartram and Reynolds in Philadelphia before moving to Lancaster, where a local historian wrote that Reynolds “became active and prominent in many avenues of service.”²² Reynolds displayed an aptitude for the newspaper business. In Lancaster,

²⁰ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 5.

²¹ “Gen. Reynolds Was Born at 42 West King Street,” *RFP*.

²² Biographical sketch of John Reynolds adapted from Horace R. Barnes, “Rear Admiral William Reynolds: A Distinguished Lancasterian,” *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 38 (1934): 61-66, at 61.

and for sixteen years, from 1820 to 1836, Reynolds edited, owned, and published the *Lancaster Journal* before relocating to Cornwall, Pennsylvania, to manage an iron works. Significantly, too, and after returning to Lancaster from Philadelphia, John Reynolds befriended a young Federalist lawyer possessed of remarkable political talent, a tireless passion for social networking, and a man with unbounded ambition for national office – James Buchanan.²³ Reynolds served two terms as a representative in the state legislature as a Federalist – the Jacksonian Political Revolution was still several years off – winning office in 1822 and securing re-election one year later.²⁴ Thus, even in his first year of life, John Fulton Reynolds inhabited a home where local and state politics exercised great influence.

Linden Hall

John Reynolds (the elder) had been a practical jokester in his more youthful days. Klein recounted a story in which, years before his son's birth, John Reynolds and another close associate of James Buchanan shouted out a bid for the public sale of a carriage while driving past the auction at speed, only to have the auctioneer “[knock] down to

²³ Philip Shriver Klein, foremost among Buchanan biographers (and exceptional for his rather high view of Buchanan's career) numbers John Reynolds among Buchanan's early Lancaster friends; See Klein, *President James Buchanan: A Biography* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962), 27; Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 4; For a survey of Buchanan's political ambition, see Michael J. Birkner, “Introduction: Getting to Know James Buchanan, Again,” in *James Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s*, edited by Michael J. Birkner (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1996), 17-36.

²⁴ Biographical sketch of John Reynolds adapted from Alex Harris, *A Biographical History of Lancaster County: Being a History of Early Settlers and Eminent Men of the County; As Also Much Other Unpublished Historical Information, Chiefly of a Local Character* (Lancaster: Elias Barr and Company, 1872), 483.

them as high bidders a hotel and a ferryboat line in Columbia.” In all, this constituted a \$6,700 prank.²⁵

The younger Reynolds, however, was not. From the first, John Fulton Reynolds enjoyed the privilege of an education available almost exclusively to the boys of leading Pennsylvania families, and he acted in a manner becoming of that privilege. For their rudimentary educations John Reynolds the elder sent two of his sons to neighboring Lititz, where Moravians had settled in the first half of the eighteenth century, and where they operated two schools: a seminary for girls and a school for boys.²⁶ Like unto the Huguenots who sought religious refuge on Pennsylvania soil, the Moravians “Came in seventeen-‘ forty-three, / to plant Religious Liberty.” In 1833, John Beck, the teacher at Linden Hall, enjoyed a sterling reputation.²⁷ With the resources of the Moravian Society, Beck had made the boys’ academy at Lititz into a first-rate school since his 1815 hire. The structure of the school was impressive by nineteenth-standards and reflected the architectural design typical of the age. In height it stood two stories. Made of brick, the school building was adorned with a cupola and resembled other Pennsylvania seminaries that incorporated European design elements. A concert hall graced the second floor, which members of the music society enjoyed. At the time of his writing in 1845, one Lancaster historian noted that the school had grown to two buildings, and that through the years Beck had attracted pupils, in addition to those Pennsylvanians, from Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Louisiana.²⁸ In

²⁵ Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 29.

²⁶ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 4.

²⁷ See Riddle, *Tribute to Old Lancaster, City – County*, 93.

²⁸ Israel Daniel Rupp, *History of Lancaster and York Counties* (Lancaster: Gilbert Hills, 1845), 318-319.

1834, there were seventy-five boys who, like John, boarded at Lititz.²⁹ And though he made no mention of it in his writings, it seems reasonable to conclude that John first socialized with southerners at Linden Hall, a kind of socialization he would experience later as a cadet at West Point, and the kind of fraternization that took on a truly political dimension in the 1850s and in the course of the Civil War.

Evidence of Reynolds's knack for discipline, of his desire for self improvement, and of the scientific turn of mind he developed throughout the course of his rudimentary education exists in the letters Reynolds wrote from Linden Hall. His earliest letters bear a beautiful hand that would later degenerate into the kind of scribble one might expect of a soldier writing letters in haste from some remote army outpost on the frontier. In both aesthetic and content, Reynolds's earliest letters, which conform closely to nineteenth-century patterns, put the art form of letter writing in the Jacksonian period on full display; they evince his status as a noble Lancasterian.

One such letter, dated 22 November 1833 and addressed to his father, reveals the younger Reynolds's blossoming sense of duty, his commitment to self-improvement, and the seriousness with which he approached his schooling: "I think I have improved very much since I am here," he told his father, and with some pride, added, "and I think every boy ought to improve here every opportunity for to do so is given to us." The young Reynolds described his academic interests with remarkable clarity, citing his pleasure at the "exhibition of wild beasts," noting the completion of his "Astronomical lectures," and stating also his particular fondness for pneumatics. Mr. Beck had even offered a demonstration of applied pneumatics in his lesson on steam boilers. Beyond

²⁹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to John Reynolds, 18 January 1834, Lititz, PA, *RFP*.

these academic interests, Reynolds used considerable detail to describe his daily study patterns and habits. “When we have no lectures,” Reynolds continued, “we have evening school.” And, lest his father fear that the younger Reynolds would not be able to perform his work successfully in his new learning environment, John assured the elder Reynolds that his school benefited from technology worthy of a father’s investment. John Fulton noted that his school’s rooms “[were] beautifully enlightened by patent Lamps [sic] and one can read and write in any part of the room.”³⁰

As autumn turned to winter, and in a way that illuminates a boy’s youthful tendency to tell his mother anything (and with rather shocking innocence), Reynolds wrote of Mr. Beck’s “very interesting” lessons in electricity. Though the winter atmosphere “was not favorable,” and though several of his experiments fell flat, conditions in the lecture hall did not prevent Mr. Beck from demonstrating the physical properties of electricity – on the students. “We all got several shocks,” Reynolds reported matter-of-factly, and without sparing his mother any detail, continued, “we all stood on the insulating stool, and electric fire then discharged from every part of our body.” Reynolds noted, too, Mr. Beck’s lessons on natural history that drew from Oliver Goldsmith’s *A History of the Earth, and Animated Nature*.³¹ In another letter to his father, dated shortly after the Christmas holiday, Reynolds described how Mr. Beck would dictate formulas to the boys and how they would “make the calculations,” which

³⁰ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to John Reynolds, 22 November 1833, Lititz, PA, *RFP*.

³¹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 7 December 1833, Lititz, PA, *RFP*; Oliver Goldsmith, *A History of the Earth, and Animated Nature*, a new edition, improved, in four volumes (Liverpool: Nuttall, Fisher, and Dixon, 1800).

Reynolds considered a “very good exercise in arithmetic.”³² Winter evening lectures in the sciences and mathematics proved particularly edifying for Mr. Beck, too, who had outfitted the school in 1833 with modern laboratories – “a complete Philosophical and Chemical apparatus” – a telescope, a library, and numerous maps and charts.³³

Details of Mr. Beck’s lessons that Reynolds communicated to his parents illustrate the commitment of Linden Hall to providing boys with a “good and practical English, Mathematical, and Scientific education.”³⁴ In the parlance of the time, this also meant a robust training in the humanities and languages, and Reynolds would doubtless have studied history, philosophy, German – especially given the school’s Moravian heritage – and Latin.³⁵ In short, it was an education that prepared Reynolds for a highly technical and scientific education at the United States Military Academy.

As a creature of his time, Reynolds also received instruction in morals and ethics, which educators then and have since believed are necessary if a young boy is to mature into a man and, ultimately, if he is to lead a full and humane life. In 1830, Beck realized one of his chief aims for the school: a large playground that would be used for the cultivation of morals. Securing one and a quarter acres of uneven ground near the school, he modeled it after one he had read about at a prominent German school.³⁶ The

³² Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to John Reynolds, 18 January 1834, Lititz, PA, *RFP*.

³³ John Beck, “Prof. John Beck: His Valedictory Letter, Embracing a Brief History of the Rise and Progress of the Lititz Academy for Boys, as Well as of Him Who Founded and Managed the Same for Half a Century. Written by Particular Request. 1815 to 1865. Reprinted by Permission of A. R. Beck. From a Complete Catalogue of the Lititz Academy for Boys, Published in 1865,” 31 May 1865, Lititz, PA, in *Historical and Pictorial Lititz*, edited by John G. Zook (Lititz: Express Printing Company, 1905), 51.

³⁴ Rupp, *History of Lancaster and York Counties*, 320.

³⁵ Rupp, *History of Lancaster and York Counties*, 320.

³⁶ Beck, “Prof. John Beck,” in *Historical and Pictorial Lititz*, 49.

boys labored with Mr. Beck to landscape the playground, which they did after school hours “with pleasure and without bidding.”³⁷ A tall, seven-foot fence enclosed Maple Springs, which opened in three places by gates to the outside world.³⁸ In the enclosure Beck constructed miniature garden plots that measured some thirty-six square feet, and boys tended their own gardens.³⁹ Additionally, Beck constructed a riding course where the boys learned horsemanship, and he purchased two ponies for that purpose.⁴⁰ In the open spaces boys played ball.⁴¹ Physical exertion and rigor, in Beck’s view, helped to instill moral character and socialization. Over the playground’s main gate spanned an arch, adorned with a gilded inscription, which read, “In all your actions and amusements, avoid profane language and quarrels.”⁴²

Reminders of morals and good manners were hardly confined to the garden, and the education in Judeo-Christian values that Reynolds received at Linden Hall made its mark on the young boy. Writing to his sisters upon the conclusion of the fall academic term and shortly before Christmas 1833, Reynolds described the education in ethics that his beloved teacher worked tirelessly to impart to pupils beyond the playground and in the lecture hall:

Mr. Beck closed the lectures for last year; the subject was morals and good manners; he firstly told us what awkwardness in society was, and then he told us how to conduct ourselves, he told us all the virtues that adorn a good man’s character; he said above all was Religion, then Humility, Mercy, Justice, Purity of Heart, Charity, Generosity Gratitude Truth [sic], and Cheerfulness; after he had illustrated these he told us to beware of Anger, Revenge and Avarice, and told us to what such vices might lead us, he told us many interesting anecdotes to

³⁷ Beck, “Prof. John Beck,” in *Historical and Pictorial Lititz*, 49.

³⁸ Beck, “Prof. John Beck,” in *Historical and Pictorial Lititz*, 49.

³⁹ Beck, “Prof. John Beck,” in *Historical and Pictorial Lititz*, 50.

⁴⁰ Beck, “Prof. John Beck,” in *Historical and Pictorial Lititz*, 50.

⁴¹ Beck, “Prof. John Beck,” in *Historical and Pictorial Lititz*, 50.

⁴² Rupp, *History of Lancaster and York Counties*, 320.

illustrate all of these virtues ... *some of which I will never forget* (emphasis added).⁴³

Reynolds also seemed moved by the affection his instructor manifested routinely, and especially in this last evening lecture, toward his pupils. Some of the older boys would be leaving school at Lititz the next morning, their rudimentary educations in its halls completed, and Reynolds remarked upon the warmth of his teacher, who addressed the departing students “in a very affecting manner.” To close the lecture, the boys and their instructor sang a hymn, and then they retired to their evening quarters. Reynolds signed off to his sisters, telling them to give all his love to his mother and his father, and asked for his parents to send instruction on how he was to come home for Christmas.⁴⁴

In 1865, John Beck reminisced on the humble origins of his school in Lititz and its remarkable growth in the period before the American Civil War. The year of 1864 had brought a flurry of applications to his school, a record number, and he marveled that his students, and his students’ children who also attended Linden Hall, came from all corners of the Union, Canada, and the West Indies.⁴⁵ Beck admitted his surprise at the school’s success, and underscored his thankfulness that only one student succumbed to illness during his tenure as head of the school. In a manner that confirmed the great success of the Market and Technological revolutions of the Early National and Jacksonian periods, and the emergence of new professions those revolutions wrought, Beck looked with pride to his former pupils who found meaningful vocations as “merchants, manufacturers, agriculturalists, engineers, mechanics, ministers, lawyers,

⁴³ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 19 December 1833, Lititz, PA, *RFP*.

⁴⁴ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 19 December 1833, Lititz, PA, *RFP*.

⁴⁵ Beck, “Prof. John Beck,” in *Historical and Pictorial Lititz*, 54.

and professors.”⁴⁶ Beck noted, too, that several of his students had gone on to hold office in the United States Congress. And he cited with some pride that former pupils had gone on to become “officers of distinction” in the United States Army and Navy. A few of Beck’s students had even stood with distinction before rulers in foreign courts as ambassadors of the United States government.⁴⁷ A historian of Lancaster noted that the success of Beck’s instructional methods derived from his “sociable and parental intercourse with his pupils, by which he gain[ed] their esteem and affection.”⁴⁸ Doubtless, too, the students admired their teacher’s zeal, for as Rupp put it, “the enthusiasm with which [Beck] has always been found to enter on his arduous duties, and responsible calling, deserves the highest commendation.”⁴⁹

Reynolds spent only one more year at Lititz, and in July 1835, he went to Baltimore to study classics at Long Green Academy. Edward Nichols, Reynolds’s biographer, has speculated that Reynolds seemed less happy at Long Green than at Lititz, citing John’s more anxious letter writing on such matters as vacation, suits that no longer fit the growing boy, and more troubled relations with his brother James, who had joined him in Baltimore at the school.⁵⁰ This seems plausible, since Reynolds’s letters – especially his earliest from Long Green, dated 5 July 1835 – to his father, his aunt, and his sisters are generally silent on the subject of school, and do not evince the

⁴⁶ Beck, “Prof. John Beck,” in *Historical and Pictorial Lititz*, 55; For the influence of industrialization and communications on the availability of labor in the antebellum North, see Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), especially chapter fourteen, “The New Economy,” 370-399.

⁴⁷ Beck, “Prof. John Beck,” in *Historical and Pictorial Lititz*, 55.

⁴⁸ Rupp, *History of Lancaster and York Counties*, 320.

⁴⁹ Rupp, *History of Lancaster and York Counties*, 320.

⁵⁰ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 7.

same enthusiasm for learning as those he had penned from Linden Hall.⁵¹ Two months later, on 8 September 1835, Reynolds wrote a letter to his Aunt Lydia (the unmarried sister of John Reynolds) acknowledging that he had received the news of his mother's illness. This illness must have proved severe, because Reynolds inquired with his aunt as to whether he and James should go home for their vacation, and if they were to go home, the mode by which they were to travel. Additionally, he wrote to his aunt about the prospect of having new suits measured and cut in Baltimore; his black suit was "made too small" and "burst" in three places along the back.⁵² In October, Reynolds wrote of his lonesomeness to his father, and reported matter-of-factly that James enjoyed only mild success hunting.⁵³

Following one year at Long Green Academy, Reynolds returned to Lancaster in 1836, where he enrolled in the local academy and completed his secondary education.⁵⁴ In that same year, John Reynolds sold his newspaper, the *Lancaster Journal*, and assumed management of an iron furnace in Cornwall, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania.⁵⁵ John Reynolds sold the family home on West King Street. And while John and James stayed behind to complete their schooling, the Reynolds family left Lancaster.⁵⁶

In all his early childhood correspondence, and even into adolescence, Reynolds's fondness for the school and his instructor at Linden Hall emerges as a salient theme

⁵¹ John Fulton Reynolds to John Reynolds, 5 July 1835, Long Green Academy, *RFP*.

⁵² John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Reynolds, 8 September 1835, Long Green Academy, *RFP*.

⁵³ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to John Reynolds, 27 October 1835, Long Green Academy, *RFP*.

⁵⁴ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 7.

⁵⁵ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 8.

⁵⁶ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 8.

that, in retrospect, anticipated his fondness for the United States Military Academy. More than his fondness for school, Reynolds's correspondence reveals a developing moral center that reflected the ethics of his time. Additionally, Reynolds's letters shed light on a budding love of institutions that would emerge in full bloom in his final days at West Point. While more Americans identified with places and institutions in the nineteenth century than in an twenty-first century one realizing both the promises and limitations of globalism—indeed, these Americans were only then coming to terms with the implications of the Market Revolution and the Communications Revolution—Reynolds evidenced a particular love for place, and especially for institutions, that pointed to a conservative's natural instinct for preservation and socio-cultural continuity in his nineteenth-century context.⁵⁷ Reynolds's affinity for institutions invites some comparison to antebellum Whigs' predispositions toward government, churches, and other mediating institutions; the Democratic Party was, for lack of a better term, the anti-establishment party of its time, its adherents most skeptical about inherited prestige and institutional authority. And it was the shadow of the Democratic Party, and the party of Jackson, that cast a long shadow over Reynolds's rearing in his native Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Lancaster in the Age of Jackson

While Reynolds was enjoying school, Andrew Jackson was enjoying his second term as president of the United States. The Jacksonian Revolution, the second great political revolution in the United States, was in full swing. A movement of the people, claiming

⁵⁷ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*.

the political mantle of Jeffersonian Republicanism, championing a narrow interpretation of executive power and a more limited national government, enjoyed its heyday under the leadership of the Hero of New Orleans, who had first swept into office in 1828. So exuberant were Jackson's supporters upon his first inaugural that they nearly swept the president out of the Executive Mansion, damaging nearly all its furniture; indeed, the people's revolt prompted mortified officials to divert Jackson supporters from the executive mansion's parlors to the White House lawn.⁵⁸ As Michael Birkner has noted, politics in antebellum America was a "rough-and-tumble game."⁵⁹ While biographers have long emphasized (and to varying degrees) the western and southern influences on Jackson's vision for American politics, scholars generally agree on the durability of his national appeal in the 1830s.⁶⁰ Though representatives from Reynolds's native Lancaster County had voted almost unanimously in a deadlocked Pennsylvania State Assembly for John Adams in 1800 (in the end, the Assembly selected sixteen electors to decide the state's vote in the Electoral College, which resulted in eight votes for Jefferson and seven for Adams), there existed a tradition of pro-Jeffersonian Republican sentiment that spanned two decades.⁶¹ The acquisition of Louisiana was a boon for local patriotism; Lancaster natives toasted the purchase of the 500 million-acre

⁵⁸ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 331.

⁵⁹ Birkner, "Introduction: Getting to Know James Buchanan, Again," 20.

⁶⁰ Mark Cheatham has argued convincingly that Jackson was possessed of a distinctly southern—and not, as his earliest biographers (and most famously, Frederick Jackson Turner) have argued, a western—identity in *Andrew Jackson, Southerner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

⁶¹ William Bruce Wheeler, "Pennsylvania and the Presidential Election of 1800: Republican Acceptance of the 8-7 Compromise," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 36, no. 4 (October 1969): 424-429.

swath of territory, and they toasted the president who authorized its acquisition.⁶² Later, pro-Jackson sentiment proved especially strong, and one had no difficulty spotting Hickory Poles in the city or county of Lancaster in 1828.⁶³

To study the rise of James Buchanan in Lancaster is to perceive the region's drift from Federalist devotion to full-blown Jacksonian Democracy, a fact that may help to explain Reynolds's later enthusiasm for Manifest Destiny and the foreign policy of James K. Polk. As early as 1824, in the tumultuous election cycle that terminated in what Jackson advocates termed "the corrupt bargain," James Buchanan, then a congressman from the state of Pennsylvania, had worked to elect Andrew Jackson over the New Englander and Republican John Quincy Adams.⁶⁴ Buchanan, whom Lancaster-native and Republican radical Thaddeus Stevens later described in 1856 famously as "a bloated mass of political putridity," possessed rare political talent that propelled him from his post in the United States Congress to the United States Senate. Eventually, Buchanan was appointed to various diplomatic posts before ultimately securing his party's nomination for, and winning, the office of President of the United States in 1856.⁶⁵ That Lancaster produced James Buchanan—a conservative doughface who

⁶² William Frederic Worner, "Celebration in Lancaster on the Acquisition of Louisiana," *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 34 (1930): 237-238; Gordon S. Wood has noted that though the purchase of Louisiana was the most celebrated event of Jefferson's presidency, enthusiasm for the acquisition was hardly universal. Indeed, Federalists almost unanimously opposed Jefferson's decision to acquire French Louisiana from Napoleon; see Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 369.

⁶³ William Frederic Worner, "A Jackson Pole at Reamstown," *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 34 (1930): 238-239.

⁶⁴ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 209.

⁶⁵ Thaddeus Stevens quoted in Fergus M. Bordewich, "Digging into a Historic Rivalry," *Smithsonian Magazine* (February 2004): <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/digging-into-a-historic-rivalry-106194163/>.

watched, passively, the fracturing of the republic in Secession Winter—and, contemporaneously, one of the leading proponents of racial equality in Thaddeus Stevens, a Republican icon in the Congress, is a noteworthy and curious fact that speaks to the multi-faceted complexities of politics in Reynolds's native city and county.

Pennsylvania's vast territorial expanse and its geography reflected diverse cultural, economic, and racial interests.⁶⁶ In the Age of Jackson, these interests subdivided Pennsylvania into enclaves that reflected dynamic changes underway at the national level. Pennsylvania's geography opened the state to the cultural and mercantile interests of various regions beyond its borders.⁶⁷ In the Southeast, the state benefited from fertile soil because of that region's proximity to tidewater.⁶⁸ In that same region, Philadelphia stood as a bustling center of commerce; several families in that city were descended of old Virginian aristocracy.⁶⁹ In South-central Pennsylvania the Susquehanna Valley opened into Maryland, where Baltimore received what goods, manufactures, and produce residents in the Susquehanna might send.⁷⁰ Farther to the West, residents of Pittsburgh, separated from central and eastern Pennsylvanians by the Allegheny Plateau, used such waterways as the Ohio, the Monongahela, and the Allegheny rivers to transport agriculture and manufactures to market in New Orleans.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Charles McCool Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage: Pennsylvania Politics, 1833-1848* (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1958), 3.

⁶⁷ Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage*, 3.

⁶⁸ Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage*, 3.

⁶⁹ Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage*, 3; Christopher Phillips describes Civil War-era Philadelphia as a northern city with remarkably southern sensibilities in *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 160-161.

⁷⁰ Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage*, 3.

⁷¹ Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage*, 3.

Roads were scarce or impassable, and transport over the best of roads – the likes of which only existed between Philadelphia and New York – occurred in carriages or stagecoaches and at leisurely speeds. At maximum, a stagecoach might move at a leisurely clip of eleven miles an hour.⁷² As Pennsylvanians attempting to emulate the success of internal improvements in New York discovered in 1826, taming the mountainous and the vast, undulating terrain of the Keystone State was no easy undertaking.⁷³

Thus, because of its geography, the Pennsylvania of Reynolds's adolescence was a conglomerate of diverse local economic, cultural, and political interests which ultimately enabled the triumph of Jackson's party in Philadelphia and nearby Lancaster (Lancaster County lay three counties to the west of Philadelphia in 1842).⁷⁴ While geography does not pre-determine culture, place exerts considerable influence on local traditions and values, and Lancaster's prominent families in particular reflected strong political and class elements of Philadelphia, where elite families had, until Jackson's election in 1828, maintained close class ties to the Founding generation and embraced patronage of the arts along with a politics of gentility.⁷⁵ But, as another historian noted in an early assessment of Jackson's ascendancy in Pennsylvania, nuancing the "Western upheaval" thesis for the rise of Andrew Jackson posited by Frederick Jackson Turner, the success of Jackson hung on "a new self-consciousness and organization among the growing

⁷² George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1951), 142.

⁷³ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 218-220.

⁷⁴ Map of "Pennsylvania Counties and County Seats in 1842," in Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage*, ii.

⁷⁵ Alan M. Zachary, "Social Disorder and the Philadelphia Elite before Jackson," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 3 (July 1975): 288-308.

laboring classes in the east.”⁷⁶ Jackson’s popularity in western Pennsylvania hardly surprises; that region, wrote Hailperin, was primed for Jacksonian democracy: “From the very birth of the nation, the people in Western Pennsylvania were anti-federal,” and to western Pennsylvanian farmers, Alexander Hamilton’s excise taxes on liquor and his manner of securing their collection appeared downright “inquisitorial and foreign.”⁷⁷ Anti-Federalism ran deep in western Pennsylvania.

But politics in southeastern Pennsylvania were another matter. There, Philadelphia’s heritage as the birthplace of the American Constitution predisposed locals, and those who lived counties removed but who nevertheless still operated within the city’s reach, toward a politics of order and established eastern high culture.⁷⁸ Their proximity to industry and commerce made otherwise Whiggish Pennsylvanians more favorably disposed, in 1827, to support Jackson’s candidacy for President of the United States when Jacksonians convinced New Yorkers, Ohioans, and Pennsylvanians that they, too, along with Whigs, were friends of northern industry.⁷⁹ Race and ethnicity, more conspicuous in cities, contributed to the Jacksonian surge. Philadelphians could hardly have imagined the violence that would erupt in their city in 1834, the kind of racial rioting presaged by waves of anti-abolitionist violence in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, the likes of which surfaced again, in 1857, with swelling numbers of Irish

⁷⁶ Herman Hailperin, “Pro-Jackson Sentiment in Pennsylvania, 1820-1828,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 50, no. 3 (1926): 193-240, quotation at 194.

⁷⁷ Hailperin, “Pro-Jackson Sentiment in Pennsylvania, 1820-1828,” 195.

⁷⁸ Zachary, “Social Disorder and the Philadelphia Elite before Jackson.”

⁷⁹ Hailperin, “Pro-Jackson Sentiment in Pennsylvania, 1820-1828,” 216-217.

American immigrants.⁸⁰ Jacksonian Democracy was not immune to racial and class violence in prominent urban centers like Philadelphia.

A man of prominence in part responsible for the Jacksonian revolt in his native Pennsylvania, James Buchanan was an opportunist who sought political gain from any quarter; this fact helps to explain his rapid ascent through the rank and file of the Democratic Party in the days of Jackson all the way to his presidency in 1856. It also explains his demise with the coming of the Civil War and his notorious legacy in American politics. In 1821, the year of Reynolds's birth, the thirty-year-old Buchanan fantasized about a new political coalition that would unite Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina and displace the New York-Virginia wing that had dominated national politics in both the executive mansion and the Congress; in time, Buchanan's political ambition led him to galvanize support for Andrew Jackson in Lancaster when it became apparent that the hero of the Battle of New Orleans garnered national, and not merely sectional, support.⁸¹ But Buchanan's first substantive speech in Pennsylvania was an endorsement of John C. Calhoun's work as secretary of war, a political stunt that enabled Buchanan to appear favorably disposed toward a Calhoun presidential bid, but also a move that did not commit Buchanan to supporting the South Carolinian if other

⁸⁰ Wrote Zachary, "The generation of [Philadelphians] that followed the Founding Fathers did not know that their social prestige, political leverage, and economic security were on the verge of collapse in the 1820s"; See Zachary, "Social Disorder and the Philadelphia Elite before Jackson," 289; For coverage of the 1834 Philadelphia Race Riot, see Carl E. Prince, "The Great 'Riot Year': Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 1-19, at 13-15; For Irish immigration to American cities and its attendant ethnic and racial violence, see David Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 88, 135.

⁸¹ Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 44.

candidates appeared in better position to advance his political career.⁸² “As a rising young politician,” notes one scholar of antebellum Pennsylvania politics, “Buchanan gained a reputation for intelligence and sagacity. He knew when to jump on, and when to jump off the bandwagons.”⁸³ In May 1825, Buchanan wrote to Andrew Jackson and encouraged him to mount another campaign for the nation’s high office.⁸⁴ Buchanan worked steadily to win support for Jackson in the summer of 1827 and leading up to the 1828 presidential election, but he merely expanded an extensive grass roots network of pro-Jackson sentiment that extended throughout all of Pennsylvania.⁸⁵ Jackson, upon securing his presidential victory in 1828, did not consider Buchanan an essential architect of his Pennsylvania fortunes.⁸⁶ In fact, he loathed the Lancasterian, who had “made noises” about political patronage in the wake of Jackson’s election.⁸⁷ As an expression of his gratitude to the Pennsylvanian (or, perhaps more to the point, in a manner that evidenced Jackson’s utter contempt for the presumptuous politico), Jackson dispatched Buchanan to Russia as a foreign minister.⁸⁸ Years later, in 1845, President Polk expressed some surprise when an aged Old Hickory questioned his appointment of Buchanan to the office of secretary of state. After all, reasoned President Polk, Jackson had esteemed Buchanan fitted to his post as ambassador to Russia. Jackson retorted that he had sent Buchanan to Russia because “it was as far as I could

⁸² Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 45.

⁸³ Birkner, “Introduction: Getting to Know James Buchanan, Again,” 21-23.

⁸⁴ Cheatham, *Andrew Jackson, Southerner*, 104.

⁸⁵ Hailperin, “Pro-Jackson Sentiment in Pennsylvania, 1820-1828,” 216; David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Henry Clay: The Essential American* (New York: Random House, 2010), 164.

⁸⁶ Birkner, “Introduction: Getting to Know James Buchanan, Again,” 23.

⁸⁷ Birkner, “Introduction: Getting to Know James Buchanan, Again,” 23.

⁸⁸ Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 78-94.

send him out of my sight, and where he could do the least harm.” Then Jackson added, bluntly, that he “would have sent [Buchanan] to the North Pole if [the United States] had kept a minister there.”⁸⁹

Public sentiment toward Buchanan in Lancaster ran the gamut from contempt to popular indifference and finally to measured enthusiasm; significantly, it was hardly confined to the upper echelons of Democratic politics. When a newspaper correspondent from the *New York Herald* traveled to the city of Lancaster in 1867 and inquired with a local about the city’s most famous politicians, James Buchanan and Thaddeus Stevens, the resident stated simply that even in the view of Democrats, who predominated in the city, “Poppy Buchanan’s played out, and don’t amount to anything.” The local expressed firm disapproval of Stevens’s racially egalitarian politics but admitted that the congressman possessed an admirable work ethic.⁹⁰

As a longtime personal and political friend of John Fulton Reynolds’ father, James Buchanan in 1837 secured for young John an appointment to the United States Military Academy. A shrewd master of local politics, Buchanan had worked to secure appointments for Lancaster men to West Point from his earliest days as a member of the U.S. Congress; previously, he had worked to secure an appointment for John’s brother, William, in the United States Navy as a midshipman.⁹¹ An appointment to the United

⁸⁹ Augustus C. Buell, *History of Andrew Jackson: Pioneer, Patriot, Soldier, Politician, President*, in two volumes, volume two (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904), 404.

⁹⁰ The vignette is recorded in Hans L. Trefousse, *Thaddeus Stevens: Nineteenth-Century Egalitarian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 216.

⁹¹ Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 41; J. Hay Brown, *Oration on Maj.-Gen. John F. Reynolds. Delivered at His Grave in Lancaster Cemetery, at the Re-Union of the Penn’a Reserves, Lancaster, PA, on Tuesday, September 18th, 1888* (Lancaster: The New Era Book and Job Print, 1888), 6, *RFP*.

States Military Academy was an opportunity that Reynolds's father had hoped would befall his son, and after one failed try—Reynolds was too young at the time of his first nomination—the appointment to West Point had come through. John Fulton Reynolds was to be a soldier. And he was to become a soldier in an age in which Americans of differing political stripes were of decidedly mixed minds about the necessity of a professionally-trained officer corps for safeguarding the national interest.

Sylvanus Thayer and the United States Military Academy

Formal confirmation of Reynolds's appointment to the United States Military Academy bore the signature of Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett and arrived in the post in the summer of 1837.⁹² Reynolds did not hesitate to accept his place. Though his family was respected in southeastern Pennsylvania and possessed some means, Reynolds was not born into inordinate wealth.⁹³ John Reynolds the elder, though "in the widest sense a man of affairs and of public spirit," and though he had "sought to promote the public welfare" in much of his life's work through his extensive publishing operations and business ventures, was not a wealthy man, and he sought cost-effective means by which to secure formal educations for his sons.⁹⁴ No institution in the antebellum United States offered a federally subsidized education, and afforded its pupils a first-rate education in mathematics and the hard and applied sciences, as West Point did. Though

⁹² Signed appointment of John Fulton Reynolds to the United States Military Academy, 30 June 1837, *RFP*.

⁹³ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 11.

⁹⁴ Brown, *Oration on Maj.-Gen. John F. Reynolds*, 6, *RFP*; Wrote Reynolds's biographer, "Given his large family of children to educate, [John Reynolds] could easily see the advantages of providing [education] at government expense. It was especially tempting when he had such ready access to a senatorial ear." Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 9.

an institution more accessible to the sons of “cosmopolitan, upwardly mobile, ‘respectable’ middle and upper-middle class households,” and accessible only to those with rigorous educations, the United States Military Academy in the 1830s most closely approximated Thomas Jefferson’s Enlightenment ideal of a national university, a place where students, irrespective of social class, might receive a first-rate scientific education.⁹⁵ West Point had not always stood as a bastion of academic rigor and discipline. But Reynolds attended the Academy after a crucial period in its development, when the reforms that had helped to establish the academy as an elite institution held sway. As a cadet at West Point, Reynolds received an education in engineering and military science and became a member of an emerging cadre of junior officers who bore the social and political characteristics of a military caste, a clique that would ultimately shape the future of westward expansion and the fate of American arms in civil war.

Founded formally in 1802 through the Military Peace Establishment Act, and authorized (somewhat paradoxically) by the father of Jeffersonian Republicanism, the United States Military Academy represented the triumph of Federalist reforms and an increasing realization that, in an age of Enlightenment empiricism and science, local militias were not adequate to the task of sustaining political independence and securing a nation from foes who had embraced traditions of military professionalism and who

⁹⁵ Quotation adapted from Ethan S. Rafuse, “‘To Check ... The Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions’: Common Sense, ‘Cobbin Sense’, and the Socialization of Cadets at Antebellum West Point,” *War in History* 16, no. 4 (November 2009): 406-424, quotation at 409. James L. Morrison, Jr., has noted that though “the academic scope of [West Point] never broadened sufficiently to fit the great Virginian’s concept of a national university . . . in its accessibility to boys of all classes and its dedication to measuring merit with mathematical precision the academy did in a peculiar and limited way promote the aristocracy of talent so cherished by Jefferson”; see Morrison, Jr., *The Best School in the World”: West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1986), ix.

possessed arms which required mathematical precision to deploy. Though such prominent Americans as George Washington, Henry Knox, and Alexander Hamilton had long recognized the need for a military academy to train America's sons in European military arts, republican sensibilities engrained in their fellow countrymen had generated considerable skepticism about the prospect of a military academy that risked the creation of a pseudo aristocracy and a professional ruling military class.⁹⁶ American critics of a professional soldiery looked to European armies of the eighteenth century that had degenerated, as one historian put it, into "microcosmic societies in themselves, existing in fact to serve the interests only of their monarchs and sometimes only of their own officers. Prussia, the army with a state, [was] the classic example."⁹⁷ Early Americans struggled to reconcile doctrines of republicanism they professed with Europe's militant history and its legacy of standing armies. Their fears were both recent and ancient in origin: "Americans had inherited from their English ancestors a profound suspicion of standing armies rooted in the military-backed absolutism of ancien régime France," writes Wayne Hsieh, and from "the classical example of Rome's fall into an imperial autocracy backed by a professional standing army."⁹⁸ Charles F. Mullett observed in a famous essay that Americans perceived in Julius Caesar, and in the example of tyrannical Roman emperors more generally, military threats to ordered

⁹⁶ Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh has ably chronicled early Americans' increasing self-realization of the need for military professionalism and a national military academy in *West Pointers and the Civil War: The Old Army in War and Peace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 11-17.

⁹⁷ Steven E. Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (1966; repr., Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1.

⁹⁸ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 2-3.

republican liberty.⁹⁹ But in 1802, President Thomas Jefferson, who only years before the formal establishment of West Point preferred local militias to such European-style standing armies, reversed course and made possible the creation of a national military school in the hope that an academy might, as one scholar writes, train “enlightened, liberty-loving officers” who “could help to deter threats against America’s government and – if this first mission failed – rebuff attacks on Americans’ freedoms.”¹⁰⁰ Later, in the 1840s, and despite animated and vocal criticisms of the United States Military Academy, most Americans recognized, as the War Department put it, that scientific mastery and a command of instrumental rationality determined the course of sieges; that military positions were of greater importance than the strength of a unit’s numbers; that, as the success of Napoleon Bonaparte in Europe seemed to prove, “the power of mind, whether original as the inspiration of genius, or acquired through instrumentality of education, does more for the success of military operations, than the magnitude of an army, the perfection of its appointments, or the valor of the troops.”¹⁰¹

Indeed, the West Point that Reynolds encountered in 1837 as a plebe (a cadet fourth-class) and from which he commenced and commissioned in 1841 as a junior

⁹⁹ Charles F. Mullett, “Classical Influences on the American Revolution,” *The Classical Journal* 35, no. 2 (November 1939): 92-104.

¹⁰⁰ Preface to Robert M.S. McDonald, ed., *Thomas Jefferson’s Military Academy: Founding West Point* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), xi; Wood interprets Jefferson’s reversal as evidence of the third president’s desire to increase Republican influence in the army, and to curb Federalist sentiment among the officer corps. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 292; Lance Betros advances a similar view in *Carved from Granite: West Point since 1902* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 5.

¹⁰¹ The Department of War, “The Military Academy,” in *Documents from the Department of War, Accompanying the President’s Message to Congress, at the Commencement of the Third Session of the Twenty-Seventh Congress*, printed in *The North American Review* 57, no. 121 (October 1843): 269-292, at 270.

officer had matured considerably from its founding. In appearance, its physical structures had morphed from the simple fort that kept watchful guard over the Hudson River in the days of the American Revolution to the Tudor-Gothic style that now characterizes the academy.¹⁰² Since the young academy needed a chapel in which cadets might worship God as they learned to serve their nation, plans were forwarded to the War Department in 1833 for the construction of a sacred space.¹⁰³ The academy's chapel was completed in 1836 under the supervision of Sylvanus Thayer's successor, Maj. Rene E. DeRussy – one year prior to Reynolds's admittance as a plebe.¹⁰⁴ Modeled in the Greek Revival style, and made of marble, the chapel was a “rectangular Greek temple form,” to which were attached “impressive Doric columns and a portico.”¹⁰⁵ In 1838, DeRussy oversaw the completion of another building, an exercise and academic hall that measured some 75 by 275 feet, which then stood as the largest structure on the West Point campus.¹⁰⁶ In 1838, a fire devastated one of the Academy's oldest academic buildings.¹⁰⁷ Thus, in the second year of Reynolds's tenure as a cadet, DeRussy submitted plans to the War Department for the construction of two new buildings – a new library that would feature offices and a natural philosophy wing, in addition to a chemistry building that would accommodate laboratories for applied chemistry – to grow the campus.¹⁰⁸ DeRussy's own tenure as superintendent at West Point did not outlast the plans he helped set into motion; his successor, Maj. Richard Delafield,

¹⁰² Theodore J. Crackel, *West Point: A Bicentennial History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 107.

¹⁰³ Crackel, *West Point*, 107.

¹⁰⁴ Crackel, *West Point*, 108.

¹⁰⁵ Crackel, *West Point*, 108.

¹⁰⁶ Crackel, *West Point*, 108.

¹⁰⁷ Crackel, *West Point*, 109.

¹⁰⁸ Crackel, *West Point*, 109.

contracted a series of architects to propose designs for the new campus buildings, most of which exceeded budget allotments or were considered impractical. Still, Delafield borrowed liberally from the bids he received, and incorporated many of their architectural elements in the renderings he proposed to the War Department. Thus, as West Point historian Theodore Crackel tells it, Delafield was most responsible for the Tudor-Gothic architectural style that began to emanate from the campus in 1841, the year of Reynolds's graduation from West Point, and the year builders completed the Academy's new library.¹⁰⁹

Apart from its growth and architectural metamorphosis, West Point had emerged by 1837 as a leading academy of military science and engineering, a lesson that Ulysses "Sam" Grant, a contemporary of Reynolds at the Academy, learned the hard way upon his 1839 arrival (cadet Grant much preferred to read novels).¹¹⁰ This engineering emphasis at the United States Military Academy had its origins in the Early National period and held forth great promise and importance in the 1820s as the young American nation expanded and required both internal improvements to bind together its infrastructure and commerce, and also the technical expertise necessary to engineer and construct those improvements. The inexorable advances of the technological and transportation revolutions and the wonders they had wrought—most notably steamboats, railroads, and the telegraph—required men possessed of hard scientific and mathematical knowledge, and mental faculties disciplined by the precepts of

¹⁰⁹ Crackel, *West Point*, 111-113.

¹¹⁰ Ronald C. White, *American Ulysses: A Life of Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Random House, 2016), 26-44.

engineering, to build the republic.¹¹¹ As historian Samuel J. Watson explains, the introduction of civil engineering into the curriculum at the Academy “was indispensable to the implementation of the General Survey Act of 1824, which provided dozens of government engineers for road, railroad, and canal surveys, and from the late 1820s to the design and construction of the Baltimore and Ohio and many other railroads.”¹¹² A foremost authority on the subject has concluded that “the internal improvements movement had lagged alarmingly” in the nineteenth century, and that instrumental to the success of westward expansion was the Army Corps of Engineers, which dominated West Point.¹¹³

According to historian Wayne Hsieh, it was Lt. Col. Jonathan Williams, the Academy’s first superintendent, who “bequeathed the academy a conception of engineering far more grandiose than the highly technical set of skills we now associate with the subject.”¹¹⁴ Williams, who trained Thayer and later oversaw the latter’s work when Thayer served as an instructor at West Point, set forth his vision for an academy of higher learning teeming with a culture and ethos of engineering in the French tradition when he wrote to Maj. Decius Wadsworth, his subordinate, in 1802,

Our guiding star ... is not a little mathematical School, but a great national establishment to turn out characters which in the course of time shall equal any in Europe. To be merely an *Engineer*, an inventor, a maker or director of Engines is one thing, but to be an *Officier du Genie* is another. I do not know how it happened but I cannot find any full English Idea to what the French give to the

¹¹¹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*; Rafuse, “To Check ... the Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions,” 412.

¹¹² Samuel J. Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted: West Point Socialization, Military Accountability, and the Nation-State During the Jacksonian Era,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 7, no. 2 (June 2006): 219-251, at 234.

¹¹³ Forest G. Hill, *Roads, Rails, and Waterways: The Army Engineers and Early Transportation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), quotation at 226.

¹¹⁴ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 17.

profession. We must always have it in view that our Officers are to be men of Science, and as such will by their acquirements be entitled to the notice of learned societies.¹¹⁵

Hsieh interprets Williams's vision as an harbinger of "the scientific and Francophilic cast of mind that dominated West Point's curriculum until the Civil War."¹¹⁶ Another authority has concluded that Williams's scientific outlook "was indelibly printed" onto West Point.¹¹⁷

For the reforms he engineered as superintendent, many of which are still evident in the day-to-day operations of West Point in the twenty-first century, Sylvanus Thayer is regarded universally as the "Father of the Military Academy."¹¹⁸ Hsieh has written that it was Thayer who "carved into the high cliffs of West Point a military academy for posterity."¹¹⁹ And Ethan Rafuse has considered Thayer's appointment to the post of superintendent "the key event in West Point's pedagogical and cultural development during the first half of the nineteenth century."¹²⁰ While the vision of a first-class engineering and military science school existed from the first, the education available to cadets at West Point in 1802 was hardly remarkable. "In 1802," notes Crackel, "and for several years thereafter, while other institutions were offering higher mathematics,

¹¹⁵ Williams, quoted in Peter Michael Molloy, "Technical Education and the Young Republic: West Point as America's École Polytechnique, 1802-1833," (PhD diss., Brown University, 1975), 241-242.

¹¹⁶ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 17.

¹¹⁷ Molloy, "Technical Education and the Young Republic," 239.

¹¹⁸ James William Kershner, "Sylvanus Thayer," (PhD diss., West Virginia University, 1976), iv.

¹¹⁹ At the time of his writing, Ambrose claimed, "The methods and techniques [Thayer introduced from 1817 to 1833] are, for the most part, in effect today, the course of studies he outlined is still essentially the same, his disciplinary measures are the basis of those in use today, while his aims and goals are those of the present West Point." Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 63; Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 11.

¹²⁰ Rafuse, "To Check ... the Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions," 413.

astronomy, natural philosophy, and chemistry as a matter of course, the Military Academy offered only the rudiments of mathematics and military fortification.”¹²¹ All was changed when Sylvanus Thayer assumed his office as superintendent of the Academy.

Born in 1785, first in his class at Dartmouth College, and learned enough to complete his course of study at West Point in one year’s time, Sylvanus Thayer seemed just the man to invigorate the budding nation’s military school.¹²² While at Dartmouth, noted Ambrose, Thayer subscribed to the Washington-based *National Intelligencer*, which he read with pious zeal to follow the campaigns of Napoleon Bonaparte in Europe.¹²³ After serving in the War of 1812 – Thayer had provided oversight for the defense of Norfolk, Virginia, as an engineer – and after teaching at West Point as an instructor of mathematics, President James Madison and Brevet Brig. Gen. Joseph G. Swift, Chief of the Army Corps of Engineers, dispatched Thayer to Europe on government funds to study the military art.¹²⁴ Hsieh has written that Thayer’s European excursion approximated, if only in style, the European grand tour that antebellum gentlemen made of Europe in their formative years. During his visit to France, Thayer socialized with the French military establishment, toured the French military academy École Polytechnique, and inspected French fortifications.¹²⁵ For his services, Thayer received a brevet promotion, along with a \$5,000 federal credit to purchase whatever

¹²¹ Crackel, *West Point*, 48.

¹²² Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 63-64.

¹²³ Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 64; for more of Thayer’s early life, see R. Ernest DuPuy, *Where They Have Trod: The West Point Tradition in American Life* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1940), 8-20.

¹²⁴ Kershner, “Sylvanus Thayer,” 73-99; Crackel, *West Point*, 79-80; Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 19-20.

¹²⁵ Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 66; Crackel, *West Point*, 79

supplies he deemed necessary to modernize the United States Military Academy.¹²⁶ Books and military manuals that Thayer could acquire were sent to West Point.¹²⁷ In November of 1817, and while in France, Thayer received word that President Madison had appointed him to the post that would make him famous: superintendent of the academy.¹²⁸ The improvement and rigor that Thayer imprinted onto West Point originated in the French military model, where scientific instructional methods and standardization were developed and maintained by the state.¹²⁹ Curiously, as Steven Ambrose has noted, Thayer's friends studying in Göttingen and observing German pedagogy and educational methods drew different conclusions for the ideal American university; upon his return to the United States, George Ticknor, a friend of Thayer's who had traveled Germany with Edward Everett and George Bancroft, recommended that Harvard adopt the German model of intellectual liberalism "and the elective principle in curriculum organization."¹³⁰ Professional military education and instruction in the arts and letters in the United States both claimed a European inheritance, but they had started down different and very separate paths.

Thayer's reforms at the United States Military Academy grew from the need to instill greater discipline and accountability among cadets; additionally, they originated from the need to overhaul West Point's curricular offerings so as to make possible a true education in mathematics, the hard sciences, and engineering, all to produce an accountable, capable, and disciplined junior officer corps in an age that placed greater

¹²⁶ Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 65.

¹²⁷ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 20.

¹²⁸ Crackel, *West Point*, 79.

¹²⁹ Kershner, "Sylvanus Thayer," 139; Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 66-67.

¹³⁰ Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 66.

confidence in notions of professionalism. Watson has noted that prior to 1817, the beginning of Capt. Sylvanus Thayer's superintendency, West Point graduated few officers, and most officers who did commission ultimately resigned their posts for more lucrative civilian careers.¹³¹ Thayer's reforms would ultimately succeed because of the superintendent's unbounded professionalism, his rigor, and because of his moral strength. All of these inspired cadets, though the reformist impulses of their new leader afforded them none of the comforts they had come to expect from the previous regime. It helped matters that in his appearance Thayer "was majestic."¹³² In all his affairs, Thayer evinced perfect organization and tidiness; "his punctuality," wrote Ambrose, "was unfailing and legendary."¹³³ Thayer, wrote another, "was an accomplished man, and nature had endowed him with the requisites to found a system and give it permanence."¹³⁴ Thayer "introduced a Roman discipline" at West Point.¹³⁵ Cadets were frustrated, too, for the social flexibility and leisurely institutional culture they had enjoyed under Thayer's predecessor, Capt. Alden Partridge, the new superintendent abolished immediately. Upon assuming his office, Thayer ordered a general examination of cadets, twenty-one of whom he dismissed almost immediately for unsatisfactory progress.¹³⁶ After the purge, and under Thayer's direction, faculty prepared weekly reports on cadets' behavior and classroom progress.¹³⁷ Gen. Swift informed cadets that their only course was to submit to the new regime; failure so to do, he implied, would

¹³¹ Watson, "How the Army Became Accepted," 233.

¹³² Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 67.

¹³³ Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 67.

¹³⁴ E.D. Keyes, *Fifty Years' Observations of Men and Events Civil and Military* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), 191.

¹³⁵ Keyes, *Fifty Years' Observations of Men and Events Civil and Military*, 191.

¹³⁶ Crackel, *West Point*, 84.

¹³⁷ Crackel, *West Point*, 84.

result in dismissal, and this he urged Thayer to perform promptly.¹³⁸ This was only the beginning, and for West Point to attain its end – the creation of professional officers who, as Watson has described elsewhere, embodied “the reconciliation of individual and community through the self-discipline and self-regulation ... the Enlightenment quest for cosmopolitan knowledge, purposeful rationality, system, moderation,” who were “agents of the fledging national center,” and who “fus[ed] technical knowledge, mental and military discipline, cosmopolitan gentility, and republican dedication” – Thayer needed more comprehensive reforms.¹³⁹

In the main, and as Watson has observed, Thayer worked to create an academic environment that stressed a depth of knowledge of, and expertise in, pre-existing content rather than an expansion of curricula, all to the end that cadets might internalize and habituate patterns of accountability and discipline.¹⁴⁰ His curriculum, which remained in place at West Point into the 1850s, purposed, in the words of Skelton, “to foster a military atmosphere of discipline, subordination, and habituation to duty.”¹⁴¹ Moral formation and self-discipline, too, were interrelated aspects of “West Point’s objective ... to shape the minds and morals of young men so they could lead others in a spirit of cosmopolitanism, moderation, and Enlightenment rationalism.”¹⁴² Rafuse theorizes that the curricular aims and institutional culture of West Point

¹³⁸ Paraphrased from Crackel, *West Point*, 85.

¹³⁹ Watson, “Developing ‘Republican Machines’: West Point and the Struggle to Render the Officer Corps Safe for America, 1802-33,” in *Thomas Jefferson’s Military Academy*, edited by Robert M.S. McDonald, 154-181, at 155.

¹⁴⁰ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 234.

¹⁴¹ William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 167; Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 234.

¹⁴² Rafuse, “To Check ... the Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions,” 409.

developed by Thayer mirrored broader intellectual and educational reforms of the Scottish Enlightenment that permeated nineteenth-century institutions and informed Americans' notions of cosmopolitanism, rationality, and self-improvement.¹⁴³

When Reynolds arrived at West Point, he encountered a curriculum that Thayer had organized into three divisions, or heads, and standardized courses for cadets in a four-year (and class-based) progression. The result was a “practical and scientific military instruction” that measured cadets according to fixed standards and tracked their academic progress according to merit.¹⁴⁴ The first division of formal coursework pertained to military affairs; the second consisted primarily of mathematics; and the third division consisted of instruction in those arts and letters taught more widely at liberal arts institutions across the United States, such as drawing, rhetoric, logic, geography, moral philosophy, and political science.¹⁴⁵

The organization of the corps of cadets within this academic sequence consisted of four classes, the fourth of which corresponded to the entering – the plebe, or freshman – class, and the first of which corresponded to the most senior class.¹⁴⁶ Classes featured distinct subdivisions that ranked cadets according to performance and merit, and instructors used daily and weekly assessments to report on cadet preparedness to the superintendent.¹⁴⁷ To the extent that a cadet excelled in oral recitations of course

¹⁴³ Rafuse, “To Check ... the Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions.”

¹⁴⁴ The Department of War, “The Military Academy,” 271; for assessments of Thayer and the West Point curriculum, see Molloy, “Technical Education and the Young Republic,” 364-472; Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 62-105; Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 167-172; Rafuse, “To Check ... the Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions”; Morrison, Jr., *The Best School in the World*, 87-101; and Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 16, 24, 32.

¹⁴⁵ The Department of War, “The Military Academy,” 275.

¹⁴⁶ The Department of War, “The Military Academy,” 272.

¹⁴⁷ The Department of War, “The Military Academy,” 272, 276.

content, or could prove his mastery of material via blackboard demonstrations – pedagogical exercises that together constitute the Thayer Method – he might rise in his course standings or receive placement in a lower division.¹⁴⁸ In their fourth and third years, cadets were immersed in mathematics – the weightiest component of the four-year program – and French, the essential language if one were to read avant-garde, primary-source manuals on fortifications and the military art.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, mathematics at the Academy, per the Department of War, consisted of “algebra, geometry, trigonometry, mensuration, descriptive geometry and the applications of it, analytical geometry, and the differential and integral calculus”; additionally, cadets studied “chemistry, mineralogy and geology, natural and experimental philosophy, including statics, dynamics, hydrostatics, hydrodynamics, the phenomena of magnetism, electro-magnetism, and light, with the construction and use of the instruments necessary to illustrate their principles, and a very minute course of astronomy.”¹⁵⁰ Additionally, cadets in their fourth and third years studied drawing.¹⁵¹ In the second class, cadets studied natural philosophy, chemistry, and more drawing – not to appreciate art for its own sake, but rather to understand the technical aspects of renderings, to the end that cadets could draft, and precisely, plans, maps, and sketches of fortifications, positions, and terrain.¹⁵² In their first-class (final) year, cadets studied under the renowned and influential Dennis Hart Mahan, an 1824 alumnus of West Point (where he had taught

¹⁴⁸ Morrison, Jr., “*The Best School in the World*,” 87; The Department of War, “*The Military Academy*,” 276-277.

¹⁴⁹ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 167.

¹⁵⁰ The Department of War, “*The Military Academy*,” 275.

¹⁵¹ Molloy, “*Technical Education and the Young Republic*,” 441.

¹⁵² Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 168; Molloy, “*Technical Education and the Young Republic*,” 441-442; Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 168.

mathematics as early as 1821 while still a cadet and from whence he had graduated at the top of his class) who had also studied at the Military School of Application for Engineers and Artillerists at Metz from 1829 to 1830, then the finest military school in the world.¹⁵³ Mahan's course introduced cadets to military science.

If Thayer's weighty arithmetic and scientific curriculum had the effect, as Samuel Watson has noted, of inculcating in cadets a temperament and psychology of "instrumental rationality," it did not equip cadets to think historically about law, or to read in foreign languages. Nor did it teach cadets to know the classics, to divine the principles of theology, or even to be knowledgeable in *belles lettres*.¹⁵⁴ Curiously, and as Skelton has written, the deepest extent of cadets' training in the military art lay primarily at the level of their knowledge of fortifications and military science, a fact that further underscores the French influence on American military thought.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps more surprising still is the fact that, even in their capstone course on military science, cadets devoted little time to understanding the organization of armies; cadets neither

¹⁵³ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 168; Peter L. Guth, "Mahan, Dennis Hart," in John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, eds., *American National Biography*, in twenty-four volumes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14:338-339; To date, the most thorough treatment of Mahan and his influence at the United States Military Academy is Thomas E. Greiss's "Dennis Hart Mahan: West Point Professor and Advocate of Military Professionalism," (PhD diss., Duke University, 1969).

¹⁵⁴ Watson has written that the "technical training in mathematics, science, and engineering, helped foster a mindset of instrumental rationality, or what officers labeled a sense of 'system and regularity.'" In the end, this education, unique to the United States Military Academy, "instilled the numeracy, detail-orientation, mental discipline, and precision necessary for surveying, building, and accounting." Significantly, this "helped officers to think more systematically – and systemically – than most civilians, to recognize the interactions involved in complex systems and the interdependence of modern society." Watson, "How the Army Became Accepted," 224-225; The Department of War, "The Military Academy," 275.

¹⁵⁵ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 168.

read nor were instructed in grand strategy.¹⁵⁶ In fact, and in a manner that loses its remarkable quality when one considers first the events of the Franco-Prussian War and then later events from 1914 to 1918, only the Prussian military caste, among all military thinkers of established powers in the antebellum era, dedicated themselves to a professional knowledge of international relations, strategy, and logistics – what one might consider, in any meaningful sense, the ways of war. But the Prussians exerted no influence over American military theory, which, because of Thayer’s work, reflected a distinctly French orientation until after the Civil War.¹⁵⁷ Only through summer drill did cadets receive training in artillery and infantry tactics.¹⁵⁸ In sum, Thayer’s curriculum valued military science and mathematics; arts and the humanities were marginal.¹⁵⁹

Thayer instilled much-needed discipline among the corps. Gone were the days of academic leisure for cadets, who once dictated the schedule and timeline of their educational program to instructors.¹⁶⁰ Thayer stipulated that cadets be present physically for their learning and training at West Point at specific and appointed times.¹⁶¹ Beginning in June, cadets “entered a spartan, tightly-structured world” when they tented on the Plain and engaged in hours of drill under the rigorous discipline of

¹⁵⁶ Morrison, Jr., “The Best School in the World,” 94-98; Carol Reardon, *With a Sword in One Hand and Jomini in the Other: The Problem of Military Thought in the Civil War North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 8.

¹⁵⁷ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 168; Morrison, Jr., “The Best School in the World,” 96-97.

¹⁵⁸ Molloy, “Technical Education and the Young Republic,” 452.

¹⁵⁹ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 172.

¹⁶⁰ Ambrose writes of the ease and casualness with which cadets treated their basic duties—and even more shockingly, their examinations—that so startled Thayer upon his arrival. Per Ambrose, cadets enjoyed the flexibility to attend classes, schedule their examinations, and even graduate when it most suited them; see Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 72.

¹⁶¹ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 234.

instructors; there, too, they endured hazing from more senior classes.¹⁶² Thayer abolished annual cadet vacations; he implemented summer encampments.¹⁶³ Additionally, and as Watson has written, Thayer “systematized cadet ranks and responsibilities already on the books, creating an organizational hierarchy of cadet companies,” and “crafted and enforced a comprehensive system of regulations more rigorous than anywhere else in American higher education – or indeed in the army itself.”¹⁶⁴ Thayer forbade cadets alcohol and tobacco; officers who directed cadets in tactical training and in drill slept in the cadets’ barracks and routinely inspected their rooms.¹⁶⁵ Cadets could not possess money; they could not leave post.¹⁶⁶ Cadets were forced to part with all vice: gambling, spitting, and swearing all constituted violations.¹⁶⁷ Thayer held the authority to read cadets’ mail and intercept gifts sent from loved ones at home (though Watson claims that Thayer seldom exercised this power).¹⁶⁸ Rules violations resulted in demerits; cadets who received two hundred demerits were dismissed.¹⁶⁹ As the War Department put it in the pages of the *North American Review*, “discipline is maintained by a system of punishments ... rigidly enforced.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶² Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 173.

¹⁶³ Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 71; rising cadets in the second class were permitted furlough from the end of the examination period to August, pending satisfactory comportment. The Department of War, “The Military Academy,” 278.

¹⁶⁴ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 234-235.

¹⁶⁵ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 235; Earl J. Hess, *Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 29; Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 235.

¹⁶⁶ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 173.

¹⁶⁷ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 235.

¹⁶⁸ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 235.

¹⁶⁹ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 235.

¹⁷⁰ For a more thorough description of discipline at West Point, see Department of War, “The Military Academy,” 278-282.

Taken on the whole, Thayer's work in transforming the culture of West Point rates higher than even his work to transform the education a cadet received in its halls; per Watson, the ability of Thayer's model to transform the individual was matched in its time only by prisons and penitentiaries, and it was his handiwork and legacy, whether realized by Reynolds or not, that molded the United States Military Academy which Reynolds grew to love.¹⁷¹ Thus, in 1843, and in response to the institution's fiercest Jacksonian critics, the War Department claimed, and not without reason, that

the repeated scrutiny to which each class is subjected secures to the army an annual accession of able men, whose merit has been tested. Every graduate possesses an intimate knowledge of the required studies, and has acquired a habit of application and perseverance highly valuable, whatever might be his future occupations. Severe intellectual labor sometimes depresses the youthful spirit, but permanent injury is never produced. The strength of constitution, the habits of thought, and general character, there acquired ... place this school much above any other in the country.¹⁷²

Written two years following Reynolds's graduation from West Point, these words nevertheless reflected and communicated the state of affairs from 1837 to 1841.

In its curriculum of mathematics and engineering, which developed mental habits of rationality and precision, and presupposed the perfectibility of nature (or at least the taming of nature to the end of material and structural improvement), West Point's course of study reinforced the Scottish Enlightenment and common sense moral philosophy of the age that emphasized the perfectibility of the self. Because of his education at Linden Hall, Reynolds proved particularly ripe for this kind of moral training, which in its time was the emphasis of colleges and universities across the

¹⁷¹ Watson, "How the Army Became Accepted," 234.

¹⁷² Department of War, "The Military Academy," 282.

United States.¹⁷³ Ethan Rafuse has demonstrated convincingly that the officer corps of West Point was not an isolated military caste of the European tradition that bore the trappings of a conservative, old-world aristocracy; rather, he writes, West Point and the officers trained in its halls were influenced by liberal and secular (as well as religious) intellectual trends of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Atlantic World, and common sense moral philosophy was a major shaper of contemporary thought.¹⁷⁴ Enlightenment thinkers, in the words of Daniel Walker Howe, sought a “wisely constructed self” who, with a “balanced character,” could re-order society toward humane and rational ends.¹⁷⁵ Known to its practitioners as *faculty psychology*, the model “taught that human nature could be analyzed in terms of certain components, such as ‘understanding’ ... and the ‘will.’”¹⁷⁶ Moreover, faculty psychology presupposed a hierarchy of human thought and passion, and held that, in a well-ordered self, “the moral and rational powers ... had precedence over emotional and instinctive impulses.”¹⁷⁷ Like the ancients, Scottish common sense moral philosophers held that the base, or animal, faculties of human nature required restraint and the moderating influence of reason. Thus, and as Rafuse has written, adherents of Scottish common sense philosophy understood the “self-made man” to be a man who possessed control of

¹⁷³ Frederick Rudolph wrote, “transplanted from the universities of eighteenth-century England and Scotland, the [American] course in moral and intellectual philosophy,” taught widely to college seniors, and usually by the university or college president, “embraced the tough problem of how to reconcile man’s newly emancipated reason and natural law with the old theology and Christian law”; see Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 140-141.

¹⁷⁴ Rafuse, “To Check ... the Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions.”

¹⁷⁵ Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 5.

¹⁷⁶ Howe, *Making the American Self*, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Howe, *Making the American Self*, 6.

his base appetites, a man who displayed a moderate temperament, who exuded personal (by which contemporaries meant “moral”) refinement, and who was possessed of a general character “regulated by reason.”¹⁷⁸ Significantly, in this world view (and again, in the vein of the ancient understanding), man was not isolated from the wider society in which he was a member. The ordering, therefore, of individual faculties bore important consequences for the welfare of the public. And so Rafuse has perceived an important connection between Scottish common sense philosophy and the institutionalization of the American military profession:

American adherents of common sense moral philosophy clung to the belief that the type of society they envisioned could be achieved if the “proper” sort of men ruled – disciplined, educated, and public-spirited men of refinement and balanced character. West Point’s objective was the same as that of other institutions of higher learning in Scotland and America: to shape the minds and morals of young men so they could lead others in a spirit of cosmopolitanism, moderation, and Enlightenment rationalism.¹⁷⁹

Reynolds, like contemporaries George McClellan and George Meade, manifested the Scottish common sense philosophy that was channeled through West Point (all three men also happened to be Pennsylvania natives reared in or near Philadelphia) and cultivated habits of “cool reason and mental discipline” at the academy.¹⁸⁰ Rafuse concludes, modestly, that though the evidence cannot substantiate a direct link between the intellectual worlds of Scottish moral reformers and West Point administrators, “the parallels between the culture and curriculum of antebellum West Point and common sense moral philosophy, and the environments that both were rooted in, are too

¹⁷⁸ Paraphrased from Rafuse, “To Check ... The Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions,” 408.

¹⁷⁹ Rafuse, “To Check ... The Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions,” 409.

¹⁸⁰ Rafuse, “To Check ... The Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions,” 424.

compelling to be dismissed as insignificant or merely coincidental.”¹⁸¹ When Reynolds wrote to his father from Linden Hall to report, “I think I have improved very much since I am here,” he did not write merely to self-congratulate; rather, his expression gave definition to a prevailing ethos of the age.¹⁸² In later years, and in an environment of military professionalism, his was a sense of self that paired perfectly with the regimented and rational curriculum of West Point that underscored the quest for self-mastery inherent to Scottish common sense philosophy.

Reynolds’s socialization and education at the United States Military Academy

Reynolds’s time at West Point offers a window into how cadets socialized and imbibed the institutional ethos of West Point throughout the course of their formal training. Socialization meant more than the mere making of friends (at which Reynolds, unlike Philadelphian George Gordon Meade, succeeded); it entailed the habits of gentility and decorous comportment that cadets acquired through strict military regimen.¹⁸³ As Watson and Rafuse have written, socialization also meant the cultivation of a professional service ethic that inclined a cadet to cosmopolitanism, Enlightenment notions of self-improvement, and equipped him with a sense of apolitical duty and devotion to the national center – to political moderation.¹⁸⁴ Reynolds’s correspondence,

¹⁸¹ Rafuse, “To Check ... The Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions,” 424.

¹⁸² Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to John Reynolds, 22 November 1833, Lititz, PA, *RFP*.

¹⁸³ For Meade’s struggle to make friendships, see Christopher S. Stowe, “A Philadelphia Gentleman: The Cultural, Institutional, and Political Socialization of George Gordon Meade” (PhD diss., The University of Toledo, 2005), 75-76.

¹⁸⁴ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted”; Rafuse, “To Check ... The Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions.”

ten letters exchanged with family members from his time as a cadet at the Academy, illuminate both the culture of West Point and the course of academic study and socialization that cadets underwent at the Point.

From the drilling fields at the academy, Reynolds wrote to his brother William on 20 August 1837. His earliest correspondence from the United States Military Academy reveals an uncertain plebe looking forward with measured optimism to his time at West Point. “Our life in the tented field is nearly at an end for this year,” John noted, which meant that summer instruction in tactics and maneuvers was nearly complete for that year.¹⁸⁵ Cadets looked forward with anticipation to their military ball on the twenty-eighth, but John did not share in their enthusiasm, noting, “The Ball our class has nothing to do with, we are merely invited.” What is more, Reynolds had not made any friends, and he confessed to William that “I do not know any persons on the point.”¹⁸⁶ Not all, however, was somber. Though Reynolds indicated to his brother that he was quite ready to be in barracks and to move beyond summer tent life, still he acknowledged that he was “very much pleased with [his] life” at West Point.¹⁸⁷ Reynolds signed his letter with a slight lament that he had not received any newspapers in three weeks.¹⁸⁸

Nearly a year later, Reynolds demonstrated considerable improvement. Writing to his sister, Lydia, from West Point, Reynolds informed her and family that he was well.

¹⁸⁵ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to William Reynolds, 20 August 1837, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

¹⁸⁶ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to William Reynolds, 20 August 1837, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

¹⁸⁷ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to William Reynolds, 20 August 1837, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

¹⁸⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to William Reynolds, 20 August 1837, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

The ease and stoicism of his prose suggests that the cadet, then in his Third Class year (the second year of the West Point curriculum), was finally feeling at home. His mother had sent a five-dollar note, receipt of which Reynolds acknowledged.¹⁸⁹ He proceeded to inform his sisters that the Board of Visitors had arrived on post for inspections and examinations.¹⁹⁰ At the time of Reynolds's writing, only thirty of the anticipated 105 appointed cadets had arrived at the academy; Reynolds reminisced that, at the same time the previous year, he had already left his native Lancaster.¹⁹¹ Busy with his studies, Reynolds informed Lydia that he expected to stand for his examinations on the fifteenth or sixteenth of June.¹⁹² And in Reynolds's first of what would prove, over the course of his correspondence, to be numerous references to academy administrators, the cadet lamented the death of Commandant and Lieutenant Colonel John Fowle, an officer and instructor of infantry tactics – presumably the man who trained Reynolds and his peers the previous year during summer drill – who perished in April with some two hundred passengers aboard the steamship *Moselle*, when its boiler burst on the Ohio River not far from Cincinnati.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 5 June 1838, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

¹⁹⁰ For a history of the Board of Visitors and its purpose in helping to convince West Point critics of the Academy's necessity, see Crackel, *West Point*, 99.

¹⁹¹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 5 June 1838, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

¹⁹² Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 5 June 1838, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

¹⁹³ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 5 June 1838, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*; Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio; A Collection of the Most Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, Etc. Relating to its General and Local History: With Descriptions of its Counties, Principal Towns and Villages* (Cincinnati: Bradley and Anthony, 1850), 223-224; George Washington Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., from its Establishment, in 1802, to 1890, with the Early History of the United States Military Academy*, third edition,

Though West Point's commitment to mold the minds and moral centers of its cadets mirrored the educational and reformist principles of other American colleges, its curriculum, combined with the military duties and training it imposed on cadets, made the institution unusual in the eyes of many civilians. Often this made it difficult for loved ones outside of the Hudson River Valley to understand a cadet's lifestyle and to empathize, in any degree of realism, with how cadets studied and trained under rigorous and disciplined conditions. That this was so shines forth in a letter Reynolds wrote to his sister Lydia in the spring of 1839; its tone reveals a flustered author, though one resolved to help his sister understand the realities of cadet life. Reynolds opened his epistle by scolding his sister, who had written the young man to chide his deteriorating penmanship and to inquire after why her brother would not write home more frequently. "You must recollect," Reynolds noted, "that I am differently situated here than I ever have been before or could be any-where else, that you may judge for yourself [sic] I will show you how our time is occupied."¹⁹⁴ Reynolds went on to detail the itinerary of a cadet's day-to-day life. From five o'clock in the morning to evening hours, cadets were immersed in coursework and military exercise. Duties such as "Guard Drill Parade" occupied cadets' time, too, and this, combined with those hours cadets spent in their rooms preparing their readings in such subjects Calculus, French, and Ethics, left Reynolds with only two hours to himself.¹⁹⁵ Even studies were to be conducted in

revised and extended, in five volumes, volume one (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1891), 30; Allen H. Mesch, *Preparing for Disunion: West Point Commandants and the Training of Civil War Leaders* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2019), 83.

¹⁹⁴ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 10 April 1839, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

¹⁹⁵ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 10 April 1839, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

private, wrote Reynolds, and cadets who visited friends in other quarters risked accruing five demerits for the offense.¹⁹⁶

In some respects, Reynolds overstated his case. While it is true that study dominated much of a cadet's daily schedule, the average cadet's military duties often proved more manageable. Morrison has detailed a cadet's daily regimen as follows:

Military duties consumed a relatively small fraction of the cadet's time during the course of the academic year. After reveille roll call at dawn each man spent the next half hour cleaning his room; then, he studied until seven o'clock. Breakfast was from seven to seven-thirty. A half hour of recreation followed. The rest of the morning, from eight until one in the afternoon, was devoted to classroom recitations and study periods. Dinner, from one to two o'clock, was followed by afternoon classes until four. The period from then until sunset was taken up with drills, parades, and recreation. Supper began at sunset and lasted half an hour. Fifteen minutes later cadets had to repair to their rooms where they studied until nine-thirty. Another half-hour period of recreation followed. Every student had to be in bed at taps which sounded at ten o'clock. All told, the boys spent between nine and ten hours daily in class or studying, approximately three hours in military exercises, two hours in recreation, and two hours at meals.¹⁹⁷

In the main, however, Reynolds wrote truly when he invited his sister to consider "that all these duties properly attended to occupy all the time allotted to them and leave us very little time for anything else."¹⁹⁸ Indeed, as Reynolds seemed to suggest as gently and as charitably as possible, it was no small wonder when cadets wrote home at all.

In other respects, however, the concerns Reynolds expressed to his sister tracked closely with those any young American male of the nineteenth century away at college might experience. Lacking access to merchants and shops while away at West Point, and

¹⁹⁶ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 10 April 1839, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

¹⁹⁷ Morrison, Jr., "*The Best School in the World*," 73; the superintendent of West Point responsible for the standardization of cadets' daily regimen was none other than Sylvanus Thayer. See Crackel, *West Point*, 82.

¹⁹⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 10 April 1839, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

absent the goods available for purchase in more industrialized urban centers (West Point remains, in spite of its close proximity to New York City, isolated and rural), Reynolds, doubtless like many college men in pastoral settings, turned to the home front for shirts and clothing.¹⁹⁹ These his sister made for him. “I shall want some shirts,” Reynolds continued in his letter, but not “any of them made plain I have enough of them.”²⁰⁰ Instead, he wanted shirts with buttons, patterned after those that Lydia had made for their older brother, William. Reynolds reported home about army fashion, too. He described his uniform coat to his sister as “beautiful,” and the new bottoms that more closely resembled those of the Navy. All told, Reynolds found it a “handsomer” outfit.²⁰¹ As a cadet who enjoyed few liberties, Reynolds looked forward to his furlough, and hoped he might make it home to feast on the Pennsylvania strawberries in season.²⁰² The time Reynolds had devoted to his study and to his training had not prevented him from attending academy balls and from learning to waltz, no matter how imperfectly, though he cautioned Lydia against the hope that he would have much opportunity to practice at home and teach her.²⁰³ Thus, if only in this respect, after one

¹⁹⁹ With some notable exceptions, many American colleges and universities in the nineteenth century had their origins in rural settings, evidence, as Frederick Rudolph has interpreted it, of the prevalent “belief that life was sounder, more moral, more character-building where the college was nestled among the hills or planted on the prairie.” Rudolph also interprets this view of higher learning as a legacy of the agrarian myth that grew from the Early Republic. For more on the pastoral settings of many early American colleges and universities, see Rudolph, *The American College and University*, 91-95. Quotation at p. 95.

²⁰⁰ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 10 April 1839, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

²⁰¹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 10 April 1839, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

²⁰² Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 10 April 1839, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

²⁰³ Reynolds had, on another occasion, described “the handsomest and best ball ever given [at West Point]” to Lydia. See Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore

year of study at the United States Military Academy Reynolds had acquired a sense of cosmopolitan self-awareness; he did not lack knowledge of social norms that gave definition to gentlemanly status in his time and place.

In academics Reynolds proved a capable but unremarkable student. Grade reports dispatched to Reynolds's parents on a monthly basis that survive offer insight only into his third (second class) and final (first class) years at West Point, at which time Reynolds's standing in the merit roll more or less approximated his final rank. At the time of his semi-annual examinations in January 1841, Reynolds rated most highly in artillery (twelfth).²⁰⁴ He performed well in drawing (fifteenth), only to slip seven spots in March 1840.²⁰⁵ For his final grade report (which covered Reynolds's 1841 April record), first-class cadet Reynolds placed twenty-third in engineering; he rated thirty-first in Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy; and in Tactics he finished twenty-seventh, all in a class that would total fifty-two at the time of its commencement.²⁰⁶ In the sound estimation of his biographer, Reynolds performed at West Point on a level comparable to such Civil War legends as Ulysses S. Grant, John Sedgwick (who alone would surpass Reynolds as the highest-ranking Federal combat fatality in the Civil War), Thomas J.

Reynolds, 16 September 1838, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*; Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 10 April 1839, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

²⁰⁴ Engineer Department, Washington, D.C., 25 January 1841, *At the Semi Annual Examination of the Cadets of the MILITARY ACADEMY, during the present Month etc.*, *RFP*.

²⁰⁵ Engineer Department, Washington, D.C., 26 March 1840, *EXTRACT from the Class and Conduct Reports of the Month of February 1840, furnished for the information of Parents and Guardians*, *RFP*; Engineer Department, Washington, D.C., 18 April 1840, *EXTRACT from the Class and Conduct Reports of the Month of March 1840, furnished for the information of Parents and Guardians*, *RFP*.

²⁰⁶ Engineer Department, Washington, D.C., 17 May 1841, *EXTRACT from the Class and Conduct Reports of the Month of April 1841, furnished for the information of Parents and Guardians*, *RFP*.

“Stonewall” Jackson, Joseph Hooker, and Winfield Scott Hancock (like Reynolds, a native Pennsylvanian and committed Democrat).²⁰⁷ In short, Reynolds was a competent cadet and evidenced the makings of a capable, if unremarkable, soldier. He certainly did not neglect his studies, and once wrote home to his sister to inquire after how the State Department had reported his standing in Ethics.²⁰⁸

One can perceive evidence that Reynolds’s moral center informed and dictated his conduct at the academy through the cadet’s faithful accounting of his comportment to loved ones at home. In one letter from the autumn of 1838, Reynolds was transparent with his sister that he had accumulated a few demerits, but stated that because these had yet to be recorded, he did not know the exact number. In any case, Reynolds asked Lydia to “tell mother that I got no demerits on her account” – presumably John’s mother had sent him goods from home that were contraband at West Point.²⁰⁹

In the service of the nation: political moderation, the “fledgling national center,” and the training of a soldiery in the midst of sectional tension

Reynolds’s socialization at West Point was significant, too, because there the Lancasterian mingled with southerners as sectional prejudice began to crystalize. While the extent to which administrators suppressed divisive political talk at the academy in Reynolds’s years did not approximate levels of censorship that occurred in the 1850s, when sectional tensions flared, limits on political discourse nevertheless

²⁰⁷ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 11.

²⁰⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 10 April 1839, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

²⁰⁹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Lydia Moore Reynolds, 16 September 1838, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*.

helped Reynolds and his peers to cultivate a culture of conservative moderation. As the nation's only institution that developed men from various regions and political castes, West Point fostered a spirit and an ethic of national service and accountability. The motto of West Point today – *Duty, Honor, Country* – speaks to what Watson has described as the mission of the institution to train a soldiery dedicated to the “fledgling national center” that took shape in the 1830s.²¹⁰ America possessed no state-sanctioned church, but with the academy it possessed a “national seminary,” as President James Madison had described West Point, at which American men were transformed into the instruments of national policy and became agents of republican virtue and unity.²¹¹

By 1837, the year Reynolds reported to the United States Military Academy, the lucrative nature of cotton cultivation in the Deep South had already wrought an economic transformation for the southern master class. Institutionalized racial slavery, southern elites confessed (or celebrated), was no longer a necessary evil that required awkward political accommodation from local governments; rather, it had somehow transcended into a “positive good” that, in the minds of slavery's beneficiaries, demanded safeguarding.²¹² As a result, slavery had generated dexterous and erudite—though morally bankrupt—philosophical and theological apologias, the most sophisticated of which would appear on the eve of the Civil War.²¹³ By 1837, too, the

²¹⁰ Watson, “Developing ‘Republican Machines,’” 155.

²¹¹ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 223.

²¹² In his notorious 1837 address to the U.S. Senate, John C. Calhoun declared, of the nature of the South's “peculiar institution,” that “the relation now existing in the slave-holding States [between the European and African races], is, instead of an evil, a good – a positive good”; see Calhoun, *Remarks on Receiving Abolition Petitions*, 6 February 1837, in Calhoun, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, edited by Clyde N. Wilson, in twenty-eight volumes (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980), 13:395.

²¹³ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholder's Worldview* (New York:

crisis in Missouri had long since alerted the nation's leading statesman to the alarming specter that political fights over slavery might destroy the republic. As Thomas Jefferson put it, famously, in his letter to John Holmes, slavery was like a "fire bell in the night" that "awakened" and "filled" the former President with terror.²¹⁴ Andrew Delbanco has ably demonstrated that by the 1830s, the visibility of fugitive slaves in northern cities, in the courts, and in a proliferating literature of slave narratives increasingly put southerners on the political defense when discussion came to the morality and politics of slavery.²¹⁵ Cadets like Reynolds read newspapers with regularity; they doubtless would have been inundated with coverage of absconded slaves and are likely to have noted the impassioned debate surrounding slavery.

Like their northern counterparts, the young men of the South's master class attended college. Many stayed resident South, but some went north and, like Reynolds, attended the United States Military Academy.²¹⁶ Though northern in its geography, West Point, as one historian has noted, featured a culture that was distinctly patrician and southern.²¹⁷ Some of these young men became Reynolds's peers when they attended West Point from 1837 to 1841, and so southern cadets "mingled" with northerners like

Cambridge University Press, 2005); Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

²¹⁴ Letter of Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, quoted in John B. Boles, *Jefferson: Architect of American Liberty* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 490.

²¹⁵ Andrew Delbanco, *The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2018).

²¹⁶ From 1833 to 1860, the United States Military Academy admitted nine hundred cadets from the southern states (Kentucky, Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Missouri included), of whom 365 graduated; see Morrison, Jr., "The Best School in the World," 181.

²¹⁷ The observation belongs to Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006), 21.

Reynolds “on intimate terms.”²¹⁸ In the 1830s, and as one biographer of William Sherman has noted, small class sizes made certain that members of the corps of cadets knew each other well.²¹⁹

Fraternization was regular, and though at West Point regulations offered some means to ensure the domestic tranquility, sectional tensions invariably infiltrated cadet life as young men engaged in social intercourse. Skelton has noted that “regional cliques existed among West Point cadets, based on life-style and culture; sectional animosity no doubt simmered beneath the surface.”²²⁰ In 1833, four years prior to Reynolds’s arrival at West Point, a cadet from New Jersey noted, observing his peers, “each is exceedingly prejudiced in favor of his own section of the country, and several squabbles have been the result of conversation on this subject. The southerners complain bitterly of the hardships while the northerners bare [sic] with composure.”²²¹ Skelton cites a Massachusetts man who in 1836 noted that southern cadets “have a great contempt for our yankee [sic] farmers and even tend to compare them with their slaves – they have the greatest contempt for all those who gain a subsistence by the sweat of their brows.”²²² Apart from divergent views about how agriculture drove economic activity,

²¹⁸ Morrison, Jr., “*The Best School in the World*,” x.

²¹⁹ James Lee McDonough, *William Tecumseh Sherman: In the Service of My Country, A Life* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016), 47.

²²⁰ William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 349.

²²¹ Walter Sherwood quoted in Morrison, Jr., “*The Best School in the World*,” 129.

²²² Letter of Isaac Ingalls Stevens to William Stevens, 6 July 1836, quoted in Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 349; this observation from the Massachusetts cadet confirms the agrarian controversy that existed at the foundation of sectional tensions between North and South on the eve of Civil War. As James L. Huston has written, the antebellum period “did not pit a capitalist section against a pre-capitalist one, or an industrial North versus an agrarian South.” Rather, sectional differences stemmed from “a conflict about which economic organization of agriculture would guide the policy of the federal government in choosing which one would be

sectional differences flowed from contending notions of honor and from what Robert F. Pace has characterized as the perceived necessity of a southern man to display publicly his capacity for duty, respect, and honesty.²²³ As Pace has demonstrated, young southern men inhabited social and cultural constellations of honor in their college and university settings that sometimes demanded the performance of martial virtue.²²⁴ For southerners, one's public face in a society in which certain social norms were expected of a man counted for as much as the strength of his moral center. In the South, of course, this sense of honor and the necessity of its public maintenance was essential to one's social standing, and southern cadets brought culturally-influenced and fixed notions of honor with them to the United States Military Academy, where debates concerning matters of politics might quickly turn to existential threats. Thus, and because of this intimate fraternization and socialization, northern and southern cadets occasionally found it difficult to refrain from political debate. Indeed, certain forums created social environments for southern and northern masculinity to engage in rhetorical skirmishing. Such animosities seldom boiled over, however, and Skelton notes how "academy authorities labored to dampen sectional loyalties"; administrators also forbade the discussion of slavery among the corps.²²⁵

Of southerners Reynolds wrote little, though the circumstantial evidence suggests he would have known, and interacted, with many. One fiery cadet from the Tar Heel

allowed to expand out of its borders"; see Huston, *The British Gentry, The Southern Planter, and the Northern Family Farmer: Agriculture and Sectional Antagonism in North America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 208.

²²³ Robert F. Pace, *Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 5.

²²⁴ Pace, *Halls of Honor*, 82-97.

²²⁵ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 349.

State, Braxton Bragg (USMA Class of 1837), overlapped with Reynolds only one year at the academy, but later nursed him to health from a vicious fever in the summer of 1842 when the men were stationed in St. Augustine, Florida, with the Third U.S. Artillery.²²⁶ Presumably, the men were friends, or at least shared the fraternal bond that West Point bestowed on its sons, as Bragg wrote to Reynolds's family in Pennsylvania to notify them of John's illness (at John's request).²²⁷ That Reynolds and Bragg got along at all is a testament to Reynolds's forbearance and likeability, for Bragg was almost universally despised in the army.²²⁸ Other southerners Reynolds knew at West Point who would go on to achieve renown in the Civil War were Richard Garnett, George Thomas, and Richard Ewell – all Virginians.²²⁹ There were others.

In all of this, however, one must be careful not to view the socialization that occurred at antebellum West Point exclusively through the lens of sectional politics that terminated in the Civil War. In 1837, even as sectional divisions and political cliques may have existed among the corps of cadets, Thayer's curriculum had succeeded in overcoming geographical and political boundaries and uniting cadets in their service to the nation. West Point had become, as Jefferson and the academy's founders had envisioned, a national school. Watson has noted, for instance, that while Whigs and Democrats debated the political and economic futures of America, and even as Democrats railed against West Point's perceived elitism, many Democrats who

²²⁶ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 15.

²²⁷ Letter of Braxton Bragg to John Reynolds, 23 July 1842, St. Augustine, FL, quoted in Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 15.

²²⁸ Hess offers a brief overview of Bragg's complicated legacy in his recent revision of the Tar Heel's Civil War career; see Hess, *Braxton Bragg: The Most Hated Man of the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), xi-xx.

²²⁹ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 13.

possessed similar socio-economic standing to the Whigs, and who held high office, did not weaponize their political power against the nation's military seminary but rather sent their own sons to receive an education there.²³⁰ And, indeed, it was the Democrat James K. Polk who most benefited from a professionally-trained officer corps when Manifest Destiny reached its apogee in the Mexican-American War.

In another important respect, too, the culture of the United States Military Academy reinforced an emerging national solidarity that predominated over sectional interests and local concerns: in the realm of religion. Dating to Alexis de Tocqueville, who commented most presciently on the democratic spirit of American Protestantism in *De la démocratie en Amérique*, historians have noted the vast proliferation – what historian Nathan Hatch has described famously as the “democratization” – of Christianity in the nineteenth-century United States.²³¹ The marketplace of religious ideas in the antebellum United States was wide, and as Howe has noted, the power of religious voluntarism in the period was strong.²³² On the eve of the Civil War, for instance, when the fragmenting impulse so engrained in the Protestant sensibility had wrought a series of mini-Reformations in the North and in the South over literal biblical

²³⁰ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 221.

²³¹ Alexis de Tocqueville famously noted the diversity of American Protestantism, writing, “there is an innumerable multitude of sects in the United States.” And in another instance, he wrote, of the democratic spirit that infused evangelical Protestantism in the United States, “Americans so completely confuse Christianity and freedom in their minds that it is almost impossible to have them conceive of one without the other”; see Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield and Deborah Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Quotations at p. 278 and pp. 280-281; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 164-202; a classic interpretation is Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²³² Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 165.

hermeneutics and the immorality of slavery throughout history, Protestant churches accounted for 83 percent of the value of all church property in the United States; there numbered some fifty thousand Protestant places of worship.²³³ In 1860, church adherence doubled the rate of membership, and membership approximated more than one-third and less than two-fifths of the population.²³⁴ As Richard Carwardine, who has authored the definitive take on evangelicals of the era, put the matter, evangelical Protestantism “was the largest, and most formidable, subculture in American society.”²³⁵

But the same fragmentation and diversification of evangelicalism did not hold true at the United States Military Academy. In part, this was because for an institution of its size, West Point simply did not reflect much theological or cultural diversity, though to be sure doctrinal pluralism certainly existed in the wider stream of antebellum evangelicalism and to some limited extent at the academy in microcosm. More than this, however, administrators consciously shaped a culture of religious homogeneity that ran counter to the democratizing forces of religion in the wider social context. And Stout has observed that the United States Military Academy “resisted” the fervent evangelicalism that typified the Second Great Awakening “as divisive and in bad

²³³ For Protestant views on the Bible and slavery, see Noll, “The Crisis over the Bible,” in *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 31-50; Valuation of church property, and the number of Protestant churches, from Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 14.

²³⁴ Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 11.

²³⁵ Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 44; Also of note on the subject of religious adherence and lay participation in antebellum America are studies from Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); And Timothy L. Wesley, *The Politics of Faith during the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

taste.”²³⁶ In his insightful article, “America’s ‘Peculiar Children’: Authority and Christian Nationalism at Antebellum West Point,” Michael Graziano demonstrates that the “informal establishment” of the Episcopal church at the academy illustrates how West Point developed an ethic of republican loyalty and religious non-sectarianism, essential and self-reinforcing components for an “ideologically homogenized” professional officer corps.²³⁷ Graziano contends that West Point “effectively revers[ed]” the process of democratic de-centralization that dominated antebellum political and religious life.²³⁸ Unlike many American colleges and universities whose origins lay in the emotivism and social activism of evangelical fervor inherent to the Great Awakenings, West Point established a church that befitted the institutional army apparatus it existed to train. Just as the curriculum at West Point trained cadets to develop habits of mind attuned to “instrumental rationality,” and just as Scottish common sense moral philosophy informed West Point values of moderation and reason, so, too, religion worked to create a culture of centrism at the academy.

Thus Episcopalianism at West Point functioned as the religious analog of the Whiggish predilection toward authority and national service that was the essence of the academy’s culture. The formality and confessional nature of Episcopalianism made it a respectable religion for the gentleman officer; its hierarchy and ritualism reinforced the Whiggish bent toward tradition and institutionalism.²³⁹ In a culture teeming with

²³⁶ Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation*, 21.

²³⁷ Michael Graziano, “America’s ‘Peculiar Children’: Authority and Christian Nationalism at Antebellum West Point,” *Religions* 8, no. 6 (January 2017): 1-12, doi:10.3390/rel8010006.

²³⁸ Graziano, “America’s ‘Peculiar Children,’” 2.

²³⁹ Glenn Robins, *The Bishop of the Old South: The Ministry and Civil War Legacy of Leonidas Polk* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), 30.

innovation, and as women and men of America's farms and cities came to terms with a Market Revolution ushering in unprecedented social change, and against a wide array of evangelical churches and voluntary associations, the Episcopal Church was one institution, as Noll writes, "that clung to the past" and whose adherents were "fastidious" about matters of tradition.²⁴⁰ Conveniently, and unlike its evangelical contemporaries, the Episcopal Church of the United States did not tear itself asunder in the 1840s over the issue of racial slavery. It endured even to the Civil War as a unified church in its polity even if geographical diversity resulted in internal differences of opinion on the immorality of slavery.

Administrators at the United States Military Academy from the school's earliest days understood religion to possess multiple functions: first, it shaped the moral center of the cadet and offered instruction in revealed truth; and second, religion functioned as a tool that mitigated sectional prejudice.²⁴¹ Small wonder, then, that in 1815, then-superintendent Joseph G. Swift stipulated that chaplains at West Point should be Episcopalians.²⁴² From 1833 to the Civil War, five Protestants served as chaplains at the United States Military Academy.²⁴³ All but one were Episcopalian, and the lone Presbyterian, William T. Sprole, was so disliked by the Episcopalian-dominated faculty that many complained to the War Department, and to Jefferson Davis, the Secretary of War.²⁴⁴ Davis fired Sprole after he refused to tender his resignation.²⁴⁵ In all of this, the Episcopalian religiosity of West Point stands in sharp relief against the Puritan heritage

²⁴⁰ Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 22.

²⁴¹ Graziano, "America's 'Peculiar Children,'" 2.

²⁴² Morrison, Jr., "The Best School in the World," 57.

²⁴³ Morrison, Jr., "The Best School in the World," 57.

²⁴⁴ Morrison, Jr., "The Best School in the World," 57.

²⁴⁵ Morrison, Jr., "The Best School in the World," 57.

of Harvard University, which by 1830 had relinquished its hold on the rigid dogmas of Calvinism to feature a faculty that consisted of six Unitarians, three Roman Catholics, and one Episcopalian, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Quaker apiece.²⁴⁶

In all of this, the informal establishment of the Episcopal Church of the United States at West Point effectively flattened sectional difference because of its fusion of religion and the state. Graziano has noted that for Thayer, who encouraged Episcopal religiosity at West Point, religious conversions, “promoted Christian nationalism and helped keep away hints of larger, national divisions on the horizon.”²⁴⁷ Cadets, who listened to homilies and attended chapel under orders, irrespective of their private religious convictions, were more likely to develop a sense of duty and fidelity to the republic.²⁴⁸ Thus, writes Graziano, “West Point’s Episcopal Church became an ad hoc establishment of religious nationalism”; chaplains at the academy “preached a religion of union, of Federal Union, that prized conformity and obedience to the will of Washington.”²⁴⁹ And as Stout has written, “West Point celebrated the religion of America,” which was reinforced by the “quasi-Episcopal establishment.”²⁵⁰ For West Point cadets, religious devotion and patriotic devotion were one and the same. “West

²⁴⁶ Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard, 1636-1936* (1936; repr., Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 257.

²⁴⁷ Graziano, “America’s ‘Peculiar Children,’” 5; When Charles P. McIlvaine first served as professor of ethics and chaplain at West Point in 1825, he found the academy lacking in religious fervor. McIlvaine commented in later years that Thayer himself was not an adherent of any particular Christian sect. McIlvaine, “Leonidas Polk: The Bishop General Who Died for the South. Interesting Reminiscences of Life at West Point of the Gallant Churchman and Soldier,” *Southern Historical Society Papers*, edited by R. A. Brock, in fifty-two volumes (Richmond: Southern Historical Society, 1890), 18:372.

²⁴⁸ Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation*, 21.

²⁴⁹ Graziano, “America’s ‘Peculiar Children,’” 5.

²⁵⁰ Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation*, 21.

Point celebrated the religion of America,” Stout continues, “and for that purpose trained a cadre of warriors whose divine mandate was unqualified love of country.”²⁵¹

As I will explore in later pages of this dissertation, and in connection with the return of John Fulton Reynolds’s body from the battlefield and its burial in Lancaster, little evidence exists to confirm the exact nature of Reynolds’s religiosity. Reared by Presbyterians, Reynolds nevertheless kept (and presumably read) a *Book of Common Prayer* that was the standard prayer book of the Episcopal Church.²⁵² Even so, it is most likely that Reynolds developed a habit of reading from the *Book of Common Prayer* while at West Point, where he routinely attended compulsory chapel as a cadet and listened to the homilies of an Episcopalian chaplain from the pews. That Reynolds owned an 1858 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* suggests that he kept this habit after his West Point years. He seems not to have written at all about matters of religion. But he fell in love later in life, and was betrothed to marry a Roman Catholic convert at the time of his death. After his death, Reynolds received an interdenominational and Protestant funeral, though an Episcopal priest conducted the interment according to the burial rites of the Episcopal Church of the United States. Still, the funeral was noted more in the newspapers for its patriotic symbolism and its civil-religious tones.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation*, 21.

²⁵² *Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments: and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America: Together with the Psalter, or Psalms of David* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1857), dated 1858, with the name of John F. Reynolds inscribed on the interior cover page, Reynolds Family Library, *RFP*.

²⁵³ Mitchell G. Klingenberg, “The curious case of Catherine Mary Hewitt and U.S. Major General of Volunteers John Fulton Reynolds: bodies, mourning the dead, and religion in the era of the American Civil War,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 19, no. 3 (October 2018): 22-249; see, especially, pp. 236-238.

Such circumstances, however, hardly disprove the effect of organized religion in shaping Reynolds's childhood and education at the United States Military Academy. To the contrary, Reynolds's quiet Episcopalian religiosity confirms the effectiveness of West Point in nurturing a regimented and severe devotion to God and country among cadets that suppressed evangelical emotivism and activism and supplanted those forces with disciplined rationality, moderation of temperament, and complete submission to divine and civil authority. Reynolds's God, and the God of West Point, was due humble and constant devotion. But so, too, was country. John W. French, the chaplain and professor ethics at West Point from 1856 to 1871 (and who held his post while Reynolds served as commandant of cadets on the eve of the Civil War), established the proper hierarchy of affections that a cadet should maintain in the textbook he authored while teaching at the academy. In *Practical Ethics*, first published in 1860, French linked devotion to the Deity – the source of all ethics and the first cause of the moral order of the universe – with service to the Nation, a temporal and civil repository in which God vested his divine authority.²⁵⁴ According to the axioms of French's moral philosophy, cadets owed God their first allegiance, but the distinction between heavenly devotion and fidelity to the state was slight, if in practice it existed at all.

Taking stock: Reynolds as a creature of northern Jacksonianism, West Point whiggery, and nascent army professionalism

From his earliest correspondence at Linden Hall, when, as a young boy, he wrote of his newfound opportunity to better himself as a student, Reynolds evinced a capacity for

²⁵⁴ John William French, *Practical Ethics*, third edition (1860; repr., New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1865), 4, 13, 14.

self-improvement consistent with Scottish Enlightenment and common sense moral philosophy.²⁵⁵ His written correspondence reveals a young boy possessed of a developed moral center; it confirms that Reynolds displayed, and from a young age, the requisite qualities that later made him into a dutiful professional soldier.

On a late March evening, 1841, and as dusk turned to dark, Reynolds sat before a blazing fire in the guard room of the cadet barracks in a mood of “consolatory reflection.”²⁵⁶ His duty, he informed his sister, and with a dry sense of humor, was to serve his country as “Officer of the Day.” His four-year stay at West Point nearly through, Reynolds waxed sentimental in a fashion decidedly Victorian, and in a manner probably designated to elicit some sympathy and admiration from the home front. But his letter also communicated a stern professionalism that checked any excess of nostalgia: “We have lived the portion of our time allotted to us here,” Reynolds wrote to Jane; “it was a part of the contract and we might have foreseen that this must occur.”²⁵⁷ Ultimately, wrote Reynolds, all was part of his military duty. Still, pangs of regret and sadness rise from Reynolds’s words as he contemplated leaving the academy, and the other cadets with whom he had become well acquainted:

We entered [into our appointment as cadets] voluntarily we are bound to fulfil it and bear with the result as best we may – all this taken together with the others. That we go at last in a short time to meet friends dear to us and more closely connected and that tho’ we leave scenes endeared to us by a thousand pleasing reminiscences; and return to those of our childhood and to our homes, like which

²⁵⁵ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to John Reynolds, 22 November 1833, Lititz, PA, *RFP*.

²⁵⁶ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 12.

²⁵⁷ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, 8 March 1841, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*, quoted in Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 12.

there is no place – all this, I say, *must* tend to alleviate, and sweeten the “bitter tear of separation and sad farewell.”²⁵⁸

His time at the United States Military Academy was drawing to a close, Reynolds acknowledged, but such was the natural course of things.

That Reynolds graduated in 1841 as an officer proves the success of the United States Military Academy and its maturation as a professional military school. By Reynolds’s time, West Point routinely educated socially acceptable, responsible, and highly trained junior officers in engineering, mathematics, and the hard sciences, a success that was not a foregone conclusion at the time of Reynolds’s birth.²⁵⁹ The reforms Thayer implemented at West Point endure to the present day, and he left an indelible impression on its culture and ethos. As Hsieh has written,

The Thayer regime went beyond book learning in math and science. It also inculcated certain habits of thought and action, modeled in many ways on Thayer’s own conduct as a gentleman officer. The old army did not create a stereotypical social type to which we can reduce all West Pointers ... but the icy austerity of the Thayer system left every graduate marked in some way, for better or for worse.²⁶⁰

Rafuse, too, has commented that “it was a rare cadet who could survive the academy’s intense four-year programme without accepting, if not embracing, most of the prevailing ethos.”²⁶¹ West Point afforded Reynolds a kind of unique training that made him, ultimately, into a member of a military caste who swore fidelity to the national interest.²⁶² In his very professionalization, Reynolds embodied the service ethos that

²⁵⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, 8 March 1841, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*, quoted in Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 12.

²⁵⁹ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted.”

²⁶⁰ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 24.

²⁶¹ Rafuse, “To Check ... the Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions,” 409.

²⁶² Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*.

emanated from West Point in its golden age; he made manifest that motto which today stands as the school's commitment to duty, to honor, and to country.

That Reynolds attended West Point from 1837 to 1841, as the institution experienced its golden age, is significant for reasons political, professional, and socio-cultural. While perceptions of aristocracy and elitism in the institutional culture of West Point invited frequent criticisms from the egalitarian elements of Jacksonian Democracy, in point of fact West Point produced officers who advanced through Thayer's curriculum on the basis of merit, and who thought systematically and acted according to structures of professional and social accountability.²⁶³ As one contemporary put the matter, commenting on the academy's meritocracy that resulted from fusing different elements of class and politics in an environment of discipline and public accountability,

The Military Academy ... constitutes the only society of human beings that I have known in which the standing of an individual is dependent wholly upon his own merits so far as they can be ascertained without extraneous influence. The son of the poorest and most obscure man, being admitted as a cadet, has an equal chance to gain the honors of his class with the son of the most powerful and the richest man in the country. All must submit to the same discipline, wear the same clothes, eat at the same table, come and go upon the same conditions. Birth, avarice, fashion and connections are without effect to determine promotion or punishment; consequently the Military Academy is a model republic in all things saving respect to constituted authority and obedience to orders, without which an army is impossible.²⁶⁴

Reynolds stood in the middle of his graduating class at twenty-sixth of fifty-two, a ranking that did not necessarily portend the success he would achieve in the U.S. Army,

²⁶³ Watson, "How the Army Became Accepted."

²⁶⁴ Keyes, *Fifty Years' Observations of Men and Events Civil and Military*, 190.

though, as his biographer noted, a measure of success that approximated the finishes of such Civil War luminaries as Ulysses S. Grant and Thomas J. Jackson.²⁶⁵

Finally, at West Point, Reynolds was socialized in an environment that attempted to mute sectional prejudice and emphasize the national interest. In the late 1830s, sectionalism was a looming, if muted, threat at the academy, and this made for an interesting environment in which northern- and southern-born cadets became acquainted. As a northern-born Democrat, Reynolds's politics doubtless played well with men of various and diverse geopolitical sections at the Academy. His innate sense of duty and his sense of public service, whether a product of his Democratic rearing or of the moderate Whiggish culture that emanated from West Point, predisposed Reynolds toward institutions and constitutional unionism, a theme I will develop in pages to come. West Point groomed cadets for national service, and it fostered in them a fidelity to the public interest, all the while suppressing regional prejudice; on the eve of Manifest Destiny, this sense of national service was particularly acute.

But perhaps more than even this, the education Reynolds received at the United States Military Academy equipped the junior officer with military expertise that, in the years to come, would enable him to serve effectively as an instrument of the national interest at the vanguard of Manifest Destiny and as a leading figure in the American Civil War. The success of West Point in producing a professional officer corps was evident first in the Mexican War, when American armies, with some political controversy, defeated their Mexican adversaries with remarkable efficiency, and later in the Civil War, when these junior officers attained higher ranks and exercised more

²⁶⁵ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 11.

significant field commands over armies constituted of citizen-soldier volunteers, men rather unlike themselves.²⁶⁶ As one newspaper correspondent, noting the remarkable success of the United States Military Academy in producing a cadre of professional junior-officers-turned-generals in the Civil War, wrote,

We are not of those who believe that a West Point education will always make good soldiers. Some of the great failures of our war have been of West Point graduates. *But the war has proved that without a military education a man can rarely be a great general* (emphasis added). Sherman, Sheridan, McPherson, Reynolds, Howard, Slocum and others who have won undying fame in the struggle against the Southern rebels, were all graduates of the West Point Military Academy. On the other hand, there is not one man appointed from civil life and raised to the grade of Major General, who has proved fit to command a great army. *It must be admitted that we have been slow to believe that such training as that of West Point was essential for the development and exercise of military genius* (emphasis added). We hailed with pleasure the appointment of such men as Fremont, Banks, and Butler, because we knew they possessed talent, which we presumed would be shown in the field as it had been in civil life. But they and others like them have failed totally when undertaking to direct great military movements. ... None of them have been in chief command of an army. *Their best exploits have been accomplished when under the eye and direction of generals who had had, besides their field experience, four years of careful education for the profession of the soldier* (emphasis added).²⁶⁷

It may seem tempting to assume that American military professionalism always was, is, and ever shall be, and therefore it may seem equally tempting to dismiss Reynolds, and men like him, as common officers and as products of a static or unremarkable institution that has always possessed a certain degree of technical expertise. But historians should resist that kind of thinking. The success of American arms, even into the historical present, was never a foregone conclusion; rather, historians should heed Watson's call and view the professionalization of the antebellum American army and the

²⁶⁶ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*.

²⁶⁷ "Civilian Generals," Eleanor Reynolds Scrapbook, 1802-1930, *RFP*.

attendant effects of military professionalization as *processes*.²⁶⁸ Reynolds emerged from West Point at a conspicuous moment in the development of the United States Military Academy, and with real implications not only for his own future life, but for the future course of American military history. In sum, at West Point Reynolds (who had already demonstrated a concern for accountability, discipline, and self-improvement from his days at Linden Hall) learned the martial discipline required of a soldier and an officer; he received an education, and he became a professional.

²⁶⁸ Watson, "How the Army Became Accepted."

INTERLUDE

Fever

For years, the city of Saint Augustine, Florida, had lured American soldiers with its flora, its tropical climate, its snow-white houses constructed of antediluvian sea shells, and, most important of all, its beautiful women. “I was in the land of flowers,” wrote one West Point-trained artilleryman who preceded Reynolds’s time in the Spanish city by nearly twenty years, “in the midst of an apparent earthly paradise.”¹ But there were dangers, too. The swamps and tributaries near Saint Augustine spawned insects that carried disease, compelling soldiers to sleep under mosquito nets at Fort Marion and other prominent posts. Indeed, soldiers in the U.S. Army suffered severely in Florida in the summer of 1841, creating what historian Samuel Watson has described as “an endemic atmosphere” of malaria and dysentery at army outposts that rivaled those of other barracks in the South.² In the field, conditions were also abysmal. One captain who led January 1842 patrols against the Seminoles in Florida had only two hundred men of eight hundred physically capable of duty.³ One year later, in the summer of 1842, fevers plagued the men of the U.S. Army as they had the Spanish conquistadors of old.

Reynolds had missed the duration of the Second Seminole Indian War (1835-1842) while a cadet at the United States Military Academy, but after his first station at Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland, where he received increased training in artillery,

¹ Description of Saint Augustine adapted and paraphrased from Alfred Beckley, “Memoir of a West Pointer in Saint Augustine: 1824-1826,” edited by Cecil D. Eby, Jr., and annotated by Doris C. Wiles and Eugenia B. Arana, *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (April 1964): 307-320, quotations at pp. 311-312.

² Samuel J. Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1821-1846* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 188.

³ Paraphrased from Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, 187.

the subaltern found himself in old Spanish Florida.⁴ And in 1842, he was taken ill with fever. Unable to write home, Reynolds tasked one of his fellow officers to write on his behalf to the home front, and in particular, to his father, John Reynolds, Esq. “At the request of your son, Lieut. J. F. Reynolds, U.S. Army,” began the letter,

I very cheerfully undertake the task, which it is thought he had better not perform at present, of informing you of the reason for his not having written from this place, and also to relieve any apprehensions which may have arisen on account of his silence.

On the evening of the 12th of July he was taken with symptoms of fever and since the morning of the 13th has been confined to his bed by a pretty severe attack of bilious fever, and tho’ he has at no time been considered dangerous, he has suffered a good deal and it will require some weeks to recover his lost strength. This communication had been delayed at my request, as it was believed it would be more gratifying to you after the crisis had passed, which his attendant physician is now confident of; and I am confident from having been in constant attendance on him that he is far better this morning than he has been since the first attack. ...

You may rest assured that every attention has been and will be rendered him by myself and friends of whom we both have many of the kindest, and though we may not supply the vacuum which must exist from an absent family every gratification which can arise from the kindest attention of friends will be afforded him.⁵

The letter bore the signature of Braxton Bragg, Reynolds’s future commander in the light artillery, and the eventual Confederate officer. Others who cared for Reynolds in

⁴ Fort McHenry functioned as an artillery school, and from its earliest days, was the site of production for American field artillery carriages; See Lester R. Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War, 1846-1847* (Austin: Presidial Press, 1975) and William Edward Birkhimer, *Historical Sketch of the Administration, Matériel and Tactics of The Artillery, United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas McGill and Company, 1884), 35; Edward J. Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg: A Biography of General John F. Reynolds* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1958), 14-15.

⁵ Letter of Braxton Bragg to John Reynolds, Esq., Saint Augustine, Florida, 23 July 1842, *Reynolds Family Papers*, Archives and Special Collections, Franklin & Marshall College [hereafter RFP].

Saint Augustine and helped restore him to his health were the family of William Joseph Hardee, another future Confederate officer and the author of a prominent 1855 manual on infantry tactics, with whom Reynolds was reacquainted when he relieved Hardee as Commandant of Cadets at West Point in September 1860.⁶

⁶ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Eleanor Reynolds, 20 September 1860, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, *RFP*; Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders* (1959, repr.; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013, Boxed Set Edition), 124-125; William Joseph Hardee, *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics; For the Exercise and Maneuvres of Troops When Acting as Light Infantry or Riflemen. Prepared Under the Direction of the War Department*, in two volumes (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, and Company, 1855); For the influence of Hardee's manual, and for its comparatively minor variations from, and improvements upon, Winfield Scott's textbook—the Old Army standard—see Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh, *West Pointers in the Civil War: The Old Army in War and Peace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Earl J. Hess, *Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015); Allen H. Mesch, *Preparing for Disunion: West Point Commandants and the Training of Civil War Leaders* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2019), 117-123.

CHAPTER TWO

A Polk Man to the Core? Reynolds, Mexico, and the Army of Occupation from Corpus Christi to Buena Vista

Abstract: *From 1841, the year of his graduation from the United States Military Academy, to the outbreak of the American Civil War in Secession Winter, and with the bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, John Fulton Reynolds traversed the North American continent as a junior officer, serving in multiple theaters of operation and at pivotal moments in America's quest to overspread the continent. As a soldier, he executed national policy engineered by Democrats and Whigs sympathetic to the project of Manifest Destiny. Though remembered in later years primarily for his Civil War service, Reynolds's exploits in the Old Army during the Mexican-American War were definitive features of his army career. This chapter examines the Mexican War service of Reynolds from 1846 to 1848. An ardent supporter of the Polk regime, Reynolds nevertheless displayed a robust military professionalism that transcended party loyalty, a fact that reinforces the success of the United States Military Academy in producing a highly trained, nonpartisan, and socially accountable officer corps in the period. In the field, Reynolds achieved great success in the Third United States Artillery, contributing to the triumph of American arms at Fort Brown, Monterrey, and Buena Vista. Though Reynolds had not commissioned in the corps of engineers following his education at West Point (a designation reserved for the brightest and most accomplished junior officers), his placement in the artillery put Reynolds at the tip of the proverbial spear in military operations in Mexico, and it was in no small measure because of their superior artillery, and the skill of professionally-trained officers like Reynolds in handling their artillery, that the Americans achieved a decisive victory in the conflict, the result of which was over a decade of intense political strife concerning the future of slavery.*

In the autumn of 1841, following an unremarkable conclusion of his coursework at the United States Military Academy – West Point did not then feature commencement exercises – Reynolds took his first assignment as Second Lieutenant in Battery (Company) H. of the Third United States Artillery, at Fort McHenry, in Baltimore,

Maryland.¹ The second lieutenant's competent – though by no means excellent – finish at West Point had excluded him from the army's prestigious corps of engineers (reserved only for the most accomplished cadets), and he had not made the dragoons, though Reynolds seemed contented with his placement in the artillery. From 1841 to 1860, Reynolds served the United States Army in numerous outposts across the vast territorial expanse of the continent. On the eve of the Civil War, he witnessed the secession of the southern states from his post as Commandant of Cadets at the United States Military Academy.

By far the most notable of his experiences in the Old Army, however, was Reynolds's service in the Mexican American War, where he earned a reputation for skill and valor. Attached to General (and future president of the United States) Zachary Taylor's Army of Occupation, and in command of mobile, or light, artillery, Reynolds played a significant role in the tactical success of American arms in northern Mexico, where troops under Taylor's command won surprising victories at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Fort Brown, Monterrey, and Buena Vista. Engaged in three significant battles, Reynolds faced death while he suffered bombardment at Fort Brown, endured deadly street- and house-to-house fighting at Monterrey, and commanded six-pounders in desperate action (and against a numerically-superior force) upon the cavernous and rocky terrain just south of Buena Vista. For his meritorious conduct, and with a little

¹ James L. Morrison, Jr., *"The Best School in the World": West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1986), 110; Edward J. Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg: A Biography of General John F. Reynolds* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1958), 13.

help from James Buchanan, Reynolds secured two brevet promotions.² He earned the admiration, confidence, and high esteem of General Taylor.³

The Mexican War was historic, and the success of American arms in Mexico transformed the nation as no other conflict in the nation's history, then or since. General Taylor's battlefield victories catapulted him to the American presidency on the Whig ticket. For his brilliant invasion of Mexico and his capture of Mexico City, Winfield Scott, Taylor's nemesis, achieved great military fame. The Duke of Wellington, who followed the Whig commanding general's campaign in Mexico with great interest, considered Scott the greatest living soldier in the world.⁴ Confirming northern, anti-war Whigs' worst political fears, military victory brought territorial spoils. The United States acquired a vast swath of land – all of New Mexico and California – albeit at significant cost in blood and treasure, and extended its southwestern border from the mouth of the Rio Grande to New Mexico, west to the Gila River, to the Gulf of California, and due

² Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 46.

³ In Cullum's *Register* one reads that Reynolds was "greatly distinguished" in Taylor's army, that he commanded Taylor's "high regard," and that Reynolds was the "idol of his men"; See "1084 John F. Reynolds" in Bvt. Maj.-Gen. George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. from its Establishment, in 1802, to 1890. With the Early History of the United States Military Academy*, third edition: revised and expanded, in five volumes (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1891) 2:90-91; Taylor seems to have trusted Reynolds to handle some of his private financial dealings; See Letter of Zachary Taylor to R.C. Wood, Matamoros, Mexico, 21 June 1846, in Zachary Taylor, *Letters of Zachary Taylor from the Battle-Fields of the Mexican War, Reprinted from the Originals in the Collection of Mr. William K. Bixby, of St. Louis, Mo., with Introduction, Biographical Notes, an Appendix, and Illustrations from Private Plates* (1908; repr., New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1970), 13.

⁴ Paraphrased from Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 549.

west to the Pacific at San Diego.⁵ The Mexican Cession, as it was known, cost the United States 15 million dollars. In addition, the United States assumed a vast sum of Mexican public debt – estimated between two and ten million dollars – accrued in wartime.⁶ And while Polk might have hoped for more territory in such an expensive deal, it was, in the end, a treaty he could not refuse, for anti-war sentiment had eroded public enthusiasm for a protracted conflict, and Whig political opposition to any prospective territorial expansion meant that the war could not go on indefinitely.⁷

In its survey of Reynolds's involvement in the Mexican American War this chapter suggests two important lines of inquiry: first, that the forces of politics and professionalization in the antebellum, or "Old," U.S. Army bear greater nuance than the cultural and social historians writing about the army in Mexico have acknowledged, and that, as the case of Reynolds illustrates, Democratic junior officers were not in all cases more susceptible to the spirit of the Jacksonian age, nor more common in social, economic, or political terms than their Whig counterparts. Though an advocate of Polk's politics generally, Reynolds nevertheless maintained professional distance from which to channel informed and measured assessments of Polk's handling of the war. Indeed, Reynolds's criticism of the Polk administration increased as the officer's fondness for his commander strengthened, and as Taylor fell out of favor with Polk's regime and suffered from negative coverage in the press.

⁵ John C. Pinheiro, *Manifest Ambition: James K. Polk and Civil-Military Relations during the Mexican War* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 150; Paraphrased from Steven E. Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies: America's Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 294.

⁶ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 294.

⁷ Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 260-261.

Second, Reynolds's professional training in the artillery, which received a difficult test upon fields of battle in Mexico, proved critical for the success of the American artillery in that conflict, an outcome that was hardly a foregone conclusion in 1846. The creation of mobile, or light artillery companies, and their deployment with Taylor's army, enabled the Americans to fight conventional battles against their numerically superior though professionally disadvantaged Mexican adversaries.⁸ At a critical juncture, and when Mexican forces threatened to route Taylor's army at Buena Vista, the light artillery transformed a near-certain military defeat into an astounding tactical victory, and lengthened the odds that Mexico could, in fact, succeed against an American army trained and led by military professionals but fought largely by volunteer and untested citizen-soldiers.

One final, tangential, theme emerges from Reynolds's military service in Mexico, and it concerns the racial and social attitudes of junior officers. Cultural and social historians have accepted, and not at all times critically, that the American soldiery was essentially racist in their attitudes toward their Mexican adversaries. In her highly influential political history of the war, Amy Greenberg notes, "the war between the United States and Mexico was in many ways a predictable development. ... Widespread racism led many Americans to equate Mexicans with Indians and to conclude that the former were no more deserving of their own land than the latter."⁹ Moreover, and as another historian has written, "it was just before and during this war that American

⁸ Wayne Hsieh has noted that Mexican forces generally suffered from poor morale; additionally, these troops "suffered from crucial disadvantages in professional expertise and small-unit leadership"; see Wayne Wei-sian Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War: The Old Army in War and Peace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 59-60, quotation at p. 60.

⁹ Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, xviii.

whites decided ‘Mexican’ was not only a nationality but also a race. Expansionist Americans had to construe Mexicans as constituting an inferior race to justify taking their land, and racism was central to American nationalism during the war.”¹⁰ Such views constitute nothing less than an emerging historiographical orthodoxy among the new social, gender, and political historians of the Mexican-American conflict.

While it is true that American attitudes toward Mexico were intensely jingoistic and chauvinist, and soldiers and citizens generally assumed the racial inferiority of their Mexican adversaries, a close inspection of Reynolds’s wartime correspondence suggests that race did not offer a totalizing paradigm by which he or his peers assessed the worthiness (or pre-determined the inferiority) of their adversaries. To be sure, nativism emanated from the ranks of many American volunteers in Mexico—some of whom were European immigrants who themselves had suffered highly-racialized slights on account of their Irish or German ethnicity—and who found easy targets in Mexicans. Racial “blackness” and a purportedly anti-liberal Catholicism were anathema to the project of American, or in the parlance of the age, “Anglo-Saxon,” expansionism.¹¹ But the attitudes of army regulars, volunteers, and professionally-trained U.S. Army officers were not identical, and the views of West Point-educated officers betrayed a concern for class and social prestige that, on their own terms, existed quite separate and apart from the racial (and even the religious) component.¹² On this subject the scholarship of

¹⁰ Peter Guardino, *The Dead March: A History of the Mexican-American War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 25.

¹¹ John C. Pinheiro has probed the religious and racial nature of American anti-Mexican sentiment in the era of Jacksonian democracy and westward expansion in *Missionaries of Republicanism: A Religious History of the Mexican American War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹² A typical view of army regulars, for instance, prevalent among professional officers was one expressed by Albert Sydney Johnston who, though writing from Camp

Samuel J. Watson, foremost among historians of the antebellum U.S. Army, offers a guiding light. He has demonstrated successfully that American officers placed little value in a sense of superiority founded upon racial identity, and that officers “can hardly be considered articulate racialists eager to advance the cause of the Anglo-Saxon civilization ... through Manifest Destiny.”¹³

The wartime correspondence of Reynolds is instructive, for it illuminates the professionalized ethos and the sense of superiority that junior officers derived from their West Point educations and from their social standing as government agents in the national service. To be sure, Reynolds documented his distaste for the “stupid” Irish and German volunteers whom he had to train, and with whom he eventually fought.¹⁴ But he also displayed an uncommon willingness, no matter how slight, to sympathize with the volunteers, and with the difficult position they held in Mexico; he predicted – with a degree of accuracy in hindsight – that these men would perform well in the heat of battle.¹⁵ And for the occasional reference to the advance of Anglo-Saxon civilization or

Floyd in the Utah Territory in 1859, characterized the reputation of enlisted men—a view of that “class of men” in the army that spanned three decades—as “very objectionable.” Johnston wrote: “a large majority of them write their names; so that there can be claimed for them, *for their class*, a high degree of intelligence.” Johnston noted that many of these volunteers were foreigners, but ethnic identity was a separate measure of the volunteer than that of his class; See Albert Sydney Johnston, quoted in William Preston Johnston, *The Life of Gen. Albert Sydney Johnston, Embracing His Service in the Armies of the United States, the Republic of Texas, and the Confederate States* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), 242.

¹³ Samuel J. Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1821-1846* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 393.

¹⁴ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 14 November 1845, Corpus Christi, TX, *Reynolds Family Papers*, Archives and Special Collections, Franklin & Marshall College [hereafter *RFP*].

¹⁵ “All the volunteers that have been here yet acknowledge their worthlessness and would be glad to get out of the scrape,” wrote Reynolds. But Reynolds did not question their moral courage: “It is not the fighting they object to, it is the hot weather and marching that has disgusted them ... I have no doubt they will fight well enough

the “barbarous and un-Christian” qualities of Mexican culture that appear in his letters, there exists far greater evidence of Reynolds’s superior sense of class, of his dedication to career, and of his devotion to the American profession of arms.¹⁶ In short, Reynolds was a Democratic expansionist, and thus a creature who embraced the politics of Manifest Destiny with all its attendant jingoism. But Reynolds’s letters do more to reveal an aristocratic soldier who maintained a strict sense of duty and service, and are thus illustrative of a nascent culture of professionalization in the U.S. Army, than they do to confirm the racist attitudes of the junior officer corps; they reveal a socially- and nationally-accountable soldier, the likes of whom Watson has described, and one not unwilling to critique Polk for his handling of Taylor’s army, which Reynolds ultimately found wanting in the extreme.¹⁷

To Reynolds’s service in Mexico the chapter now turns.

when it comes to that ...”; See letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp Butler (near Camargo), Mexico, 3 September 1846, *RFP*.

¹⁶ In his March 1, 1847, re-telling of the Battle of Buena Vista, Reynolds wrote that General Taylor, “Rough and Ready,” was “too much” for Santa Anna, and that the Mexicans must “by this time be convinced that [it] is more than useless to struggle against the Anglo Saxon”; Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *RFP*, in *Edward J. Nichols Collection*, Box 2, Archives and Special Collections, Franklin & Marshall College, hereafter *EJNC*; In a September letter, Reynolds wrote of his eagerness to escape “barbarous and un-Christian” Mexico, but here, too, one must interpret the sentiment against Reynolds’s professional and personal discontent; See letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp near Buena Vista, Mexico, 26 September 1847, *RFP*.

¹⁷ Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted: West Point Socialization, Military Accountability, and the Nation-State During the Jacksonian Era,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 7, no. 2 (June 2006): 219-225; Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 43, 45, 51.

Politics and Professionalization on the Eve of the Mexican-American War

On December 2, 1845, at the invitation of the Congress, President James Polk submitted his first annual message via secretary Joseph Knox Walker to the Capitol.¹⁸ In that message the President articulated his fervent wish that the Congress would consummate the union of Texas and the United States and, in law, add “the lone star” of the Texas republic to the “glorious constellation” of the federal compact. He noted Mexico’s increasingly hostile posture toward the United States, a regrettable development, it seemed to Polk, since the United States was first among nations to welcome Mexico to the rank and file of new-world republics. And the United States, Polk claimed, had borne patiently the injustices and wrongs that Mexico had committed against her through repeated violations of an 1839 treaty of indemnity, by which Mexico had agreed to the adjudication of American claims against its government for property losses in disputed territory, and to compensating Americans for their losses.¹⁹

In the final analysis, as Polk noted, the annexation of Texas was a “bloodless achievement”; its fate in that moment seemed of little concern to many Americans.²⁰ As historian Sam W. Haynes has observed, the salient feature of Polk’s annual message was its re-affirmation of Monroe Doctrine, necessitated, in the eyes of the administration, by

¹⁸ James K. Polk, *The Diary of James K. Polk during His Presidency, 1845 to 1849*, edited and annotated by Milo Milton Quaife, with an introduction by Andrew Cunningham McLaughlin, in four volumes (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1910), 1:109, hereafter *Diary*; Sam W. Haynes, *James K. Polk and the Expansionist Impulse* in the *Library of American Biography* series, edited by Oscar Handlin (New York: Longman, 1996), 121.

¹⁹ Polk, “First Annual Message,” 2 December 1845, in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, edited by James D. Richardson, in twenty volumes (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1897), 4:385-416, quotations at pp. 386 and 388; for American grievances, see Polk, “First Annual Message,” 4:389-392.

²⁰ Polk, “First Annual Message,” 4:387.

Great Britain's designs on Oregon. It was the Oregon question, notes Haynes, and not the prospect of war with Mexico, that intrigued most Americans.²¹ And as Haynes has argued in *The Unfinished Revolution*, Americans even into the 1840s presented a severe case of Anglophobia in a world yet dominated by British foreign policy.²² On the question of his administration's policy toward Oregon, Polk left no ambiguity. His message stressed the failure of Anglo-American joint-occupation in Oregon; it called for the Congress to extend to settlers in Oregon those protections accorded to American citizens through civil and criminal law; it requested that the Congress appropriate funds for the construction of forts along the Oregon Trail and the formation of dragoon regiments to protect American settlers from Native American Indian attack on the frontier. Most important of all, and in a manner that bespoke the jingoism of Manifest Destiny that so dominated Polk's administration and the American mind for the remainder of the decade, Polk declared, "Oregon is part of the North American continent, to which, it is confidently affirmed, the title of the United States is now the best in existence."²³

Writing home to Pennsylvania from his encampment in Corpus Christi, Texas, in January 1846, was Second Lieutenant John Fulton Reynolds of the Third United States Artillery. Reynolds found himself at Corpus Christi in 1845 alongside numerous officers and products of West Point who, through the war with Mexico, gained acclaim and

²¹ Haynes, *James K. Polk and the Expansionist Impulse*, 121-122.

²² Haynes, *The Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); For treatment of Polk and the Oregon question, see pp. 262-263.

²³ Polk, "First Annual Message," 392-397, quotation at p. 397.

military preparedness for their service in the Civil War.²⁴ At the time of his writing, however, Reynolds was what his biographer has characterized as a “restless subaltern,” a junior officer who had recently graduated from the United States Military Academy seeking the thrill of army life and adventure on the frontier.²⁵ Even in Corpus Christi, where Brevet Brigadier General Zachary Taylor had moved his “Army of Observation” from its initial outpost at Fort Jesup, Louisiana, in anticipation of hostilities with Mexico, Polk’s first annual message had reached the rank and file of the U.S. Army.²⁶ If he had not read the entirety of Polk’s message in the Corpus Christi *Gazette*, in papers from New Orleans, or in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, news, Reynolds would almost certainly have seen it printed in the pages of the Philadelphia-based *North American*, or in papers from Washington.²⁷ Reynolds had long kept a close eye on newspapers, a fact attributable, perhaps, to the influence of his father’s pro-Jackson newspaper business that operated into the 1830s.²⁸

²⁴ These included Ulysses Grant, James Longstreet, and Braxton Bragg. See Darwin Payne, “Camp Life in the Army of Occupation: Corpus Christi, July 1845 to March 1846,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (January 1970): 326-342; Other officers who went on to Civil War fame included George Thomas and Jefferson Davis. Also serving as artillerists in Taylor’s army were Daniel Hill and John Sedgwick; See Felice Flannery Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory: Zachary Taylor’s Mexican War Campaign and His Emerging Civil War Leaders* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), xvi.

²⁵ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*. See, especially, “Restless Subaltern,” pp. 3-21.

²⁶ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 143.

²⁷ The arrival of Gen. Taylor’s Army of Occupation in Corpus Christi precipitated the rise of entertainment and news in the town. Shortly after the army came to Corpus, the *Gazette* was founded, which carried local and national news. Payne, “Camp Life in the Army of Occupation,” 337; “Message of the President to the Twenty-Ninth Congress,” *North American*, 3 December 1845; Reynolds references the *Gazette* in his 4 January 1846 letter, and enclosed a copy of the paper for his sisters. In return, he asked that the women send news from Pennsylvania. Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

²⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*; John Reynolds Esq. owned and edited the *Lancaster Journal*. A close friend

Reynolds liked what he read, and so did his fellow soldiers. “The President’s message appears to be much thought of by everybody here,” Reynolds wrote to his sisters in Pennsylvania. Reynolds thought that their father, too, would be pleased with Polk’s message.²⁹ An old associate and friend of Secretary of State James Buchanan, John Reynolds Esq. was a committed Democrat who had secured, by Buchanan’s good graces, an appointment for his son to the United States Military Academy in 1837 when Buchanan was senator.³⁰ Polk’s message impressed the junior Reynolds – “it is the best [message to Congress] I have ever read” – and, in a manner that confirms how the Oregon question concerned contemporaries, Reynolds predicted that soon the army would be bound for the Pacific Northwest. “I think” – concerning the Oregon dispute – “[Polk’s] right,” Reynolds continued, “and I only hope he will act as promptly & energetically as Old Hickory would have done.” America need not fear Great Britain, Reynolds opined. On Mexico the second lieutenant was less astute. Reynolds believed that John Slidell, the Spanish-speaking, Louisiana congressman appointed Minister Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Mexico, would settle matters in that region, and that the Army would depart Texas.³¹ Days later, on January 13, Polk ordered Gen. Zachary Taylor to move his army to the Texas side of the Rio Grande River to enforce the nation’s declared southern boundary.³²

and associate of James Buchanan, John Reynolds Esq. transformed the publication from a Federal to a pro-Jackson paper. See Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 4; “The Late Maj.-Gen. J.F. Reynolds, *New York Times*, 8 July 1863.

²⁹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

³⁰ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 8-10.

³¹ Professional biography of Slidell is adapted from Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 146; Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

³² Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 148.

On the surface, and if one interprets Reynolds's praise of Polk in exclusion of the rest, the picture of the second lieutenant that one gleans from his writings confirms the likeness of a romantic and militant nationalist, an "agent of empire," the likes of whom historian Francis Paul Prucha has described in *The Sword of the Republic*.³³ Upon closer analysis, however, Reynolds's writings are more telling for what they reveal about the junior officer's opinion of matters military and the professionalization of the army he served, which by 1846 hardly resembled an organized band of marauding filibusterers intent on expanding American territorial claims in the tradition of Old Hickory.³⁴ In letter, Reynolds was an outspoken Democrat, something of a rare breed in an army noted for the Whiggish politics of its company-grade officers and, in the case of the Army of Occupation to which Reynolds was attached, troops commanded by Zachary Taylor.³⁵ But in disposition, in his aristocratic sensibility, in the professional training he had received at West Point which stressed, among years of lessons in engineering, French, and mathematics, the values of political moderation, self-control, and the genteel virtues often associated with Scottish Enlightenment Common-Sense Moral Philosophy, Reynolds belonged to a caste of professionals who, in the words of Watson,

³³ Francis Paul Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 319-337.

³⁴ Robert E. May has suggested that the filibustering impulse, prevalent among young American males desperate for an outlet for their militant nationalism, often attracted men who recoiled at discipline, order, and hierarchy, prerequisites all for life in a professionalizing antebellum army often tasked with limiting the scope and effect of filibusters and adventurers on the frontier; see May, "Young American Males and Filibustering in the Age of Manifest Destiny: The United States Army as a Cultural Mirror," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 3 (December 1991): 857-886.

³⁵ Greenberg notes that most officers "supported the Whig Party over the Democrats," citing Whig support for increased funding of the U.S. Army and Whigs' ardent support of the United States Military Academy; See Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 99.

“sought authority and prestige by identifying their values with those of the Old World and its elites, including European military officers.”³⁶ These men adhered to the customs of international law.³⁷ As instruments of national foreign policy, and disenchanted with decades of border policing and crisis mitigation, these officers embraced a politics of conservatism and in their views on foreign policy – to the limited extent they wrote about such things – tended not toward militant expansion, but rather toward restraint.³⁸ Taken together, these qualities typical of junior officers suggest a Whiggish bent for institutions and class hierarchy that were anathema to the spirit, if not the practice, of Democratic politics.³⁹

³⁶ A thorough study on the antebellum curriculum at West Point is Morrison, Jr., “*The Best School in the World*”; Ethan S. Rafuse, “‘To Check ... The Very Worst and Meanest of Our Passions’: Common Sense, ‘Cobbon Sense’, and the Socialization of Cadets at Antebellum West Point,” *War in History* 16, no. 4 (November 2009): 406-424; Even religious instruction at West Point functioned to mold men into gentlemen. As evidence of this phenomenon, see Michael Graziano, “America’s ‘Peculiar Children’: Authority and Christian Nationalism at Antebellum West Point,” *Religions* 8, no. 6 (January 2017): 1-12, doi:10.3390/rel8010006; Watson, “The Uncertain Road to Manifest Destiny: Army Officers and the Course of American Territorial Expansionism, 1815-1846,” in *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansion*, edited by Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 68-114, quotation at p. 73.

³⁷ Watson, “The Uncertain Road to Manifest Destiny,” 73-74.

³⁸ Watson considers the dearth of junior officers’ correspondence on the prospect of war with Mexico, and the various conditions that resulted in a general silence on the politics of the question, in “Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism: Junior U.S. Army Officers’ Attitudes toward War with Mexico, 1844-1846,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 99, no. 4 (April 1996): 467-498.

³⁹ “Spirit,” as opposed to substance, since, as Watson has noted, influential Democrats who sent their sons to West Point “were not substantially more ‘ordinary’ in socioeconomic status than the Whigs.” He also acknowledges that “the research has not yet been done to determine whether Democratic appointments were actually less elitist than those of the Whigs, and the belief that this was the case can only be regarded as an assumption in light of the historiography on Jacksonian politics.” Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” quotations at p. 227.

As his letters home thus help to illustrate, Reynolds, like other officers of his time, was a complex manifestation of the political, cultural, and professional forces that predominated the 1840s. In a manner that well describes Reynolds, Watson characterizes junior officers as men reared in the intensely partisan political culture of Jacksonian America who had “absorb[ed] the values and attitudes of Democratic expansionism,” and as individuals who had nevertheless developed professionally in a context of social accountability to civilian authority. Across the nation at large, Americans were beginning to realize the merits of professionalization for Manifest Destiny across vocations (a realization especially manifested by Whigs bent on modernization and internal improvements).⁴⁰ Thus in Reynolds one perceives at once the zeitgeist of Polk’s America even as one notes the tension between Manifest Destiny and the culture of an increasingly accountable, moderating, and professional – and the first truly national – public organization in the United States Army. For Reynolds, and

⁴⁰ Watson, “The Uncertain Road to Manifest Destiny,” 90; Watson has noted that the “instrumental rationality” engrained in cadets’ minds at West Point, and the education in mathematics and engineering that cadets received at the academy, made them uniquely suited to carry out Whig designs of an American System and later to serve as instruments of national policy in the age of Manifest Destiny under Democratic leadership. See Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 223-226; For a similar interpretation, see Forest G. Hill, *Roads, Rails, and Waterways: The Army Engineers and Early Transportation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957); For the truly modern and nationalizing qualities of Whig politics and policy, see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); And, in a similar vein, Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*; Greenberg has suggested that, in the context of American arms and soldiering, and in wider currents of society, most Americans did not view professionalization in a positive light until after 1865: “professionalization would not take on the positive attributes of skill and expertise until after the Civil War.” Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 131; In point of fact, however, the U.S. Army had already proven its utility and reliability as a professional apparatus in the Jacksonian Era, and Americans by and large perceived both the need for, and the merit of, its technical expertise; See Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted”; and Hill, *Roads, Rails, and Waterways*.

for junior officers like him, nationalism assumed a more expansive quality than strict service to a public will largely intent on territorial expansion – it meant fidelity to and accountability within the army hierarchy.

In his seminal work on the army officer corps, *An American Profession of Arms*, historian William Skelton suggested that “the officer corps greeted the outbreak of fighting in 1846 with an enthusiasm bordering on mania,” but if Reynolds endorsed Polk’s nationalistic vision of Manifest Destiny concerning the Pacific Northwest, his comparative silence on the outbreak of war with Mexico suggests a greater measure of ambivalence, a fact that, if only in a local instance, nuances Skelton’s findings.⁴¹ Reynolds’s false sense of what was to come in Mexico, and his non-reaction to the outbreak of hostilities, confirms what Watson has written on junior officer attitudes toward the hostilities of 1846: namely, that soldiers recorded “remarkably few references to the probability, causes, desirability, or potential outcome of war with Mexico,” and that the silence of officers “reflects the officer corps’ growing sense of accountability to civilian political authority, the most important dimension of its professionalism during this era.”⁴² True, Watson acknowledges, some officers exhibited great enthusiasm about the prospect of service on the Texas frontier, and even hoped to advance their careers through combat experience. But, “their overwhelming consensus was that Mexico would back down and nothing would happen, and they were far from unified on the desirability of annexation and war.”⁴³ By the 1830s, officers who had received professional military educations at West Point “had come to believe that they

⁴¹ William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 294.

⁴² Watson, “Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism,” 468.

⁴³ Watson, “Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism,” 469.

should avoid active involvement in partisan politics,” though some officers favored military interventions in Mexico upon less ideological grounds, such as out of concern for professional careerism.⁴⁴

In this last respect, and in its discussion of his career prospects in the U.S. Army, Reynolds’s correspondence is conspicuous for its praise of Polk’s broader national project *and* for its critique of the President’s perceived slight of the junior officer corps. Hardly advocates of the U.S. Army at their best, and at their worst, the fiercest critics of the United States Military Academy, which trained the junior officer corps in the Jacksonian period and beyond, Democrats like Polk nevertheless relied upon Whiggish junior and general officers – and, significantly, *willingly* so, even entrusting army commands in Mexico to such Whigs as Taylor and Winfield Scott over Brig. Gen. Edmund P. Gaines, an expansionist Democrat from Tennessee with considerably more field experience (a decade) and (arguably) more command prowess than Taylor – to implement and actualize the national project of Manifest Destiny.⁴⁵ But recent

⁴⁴ Paraphrased and quoted from Watson, “Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism,” 475; See, also, Watson, “The Uncertain Road to Manifest Destiny,” 68-114; See, too, Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted”; And Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, 379-440.

⁴⁵ For a public defense of military education at West Point, and a refutation of Jacksonian Democrat critics, see The United States War Department, “The Military Academy,” in *Documents from the Department of War, Accompanying the President’s Message to Congress, at the Commencement of the Third Session of the Twenty-Seventh Congress*, printed in *The North American Review* 57, no. 121 (October 1843): 269-292, especially p. 270; For the Whig politics of Scott, see Allan Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2003); Writes Watson: “Gaines had been in the army a decade longer than Taylor and had temporarily but successfully commanded the army in Canada in 1814 He had far more tactical and operational experience against European-style foes than Taylor, whose War of 1812 experience had been limited. Indeed, Taylor’s lack of tactical sophistication appears as a truism in virtually every account of the war with Mexico, so much so that one might ask why a Democratic militia general, perhaps no more skillful militarily but of greater partisan value and reliability, was not brought in to command the army sent to

hostilities with Mexico required expanding the army's size, influence, and sphere of operations, which necessitated, in turn, the appointment of officers and promotions. For these positions, predictably, Polk selected men cut from Jackson cloth and appointed directly from civilian life, a practice suspended by Whig administrations in the early 1840s when a contraction in the size of the regular army left a surplus of West Point graduates.⁴⁶

In June 1846, Reynolds wrote to his sisters again, but in this letter offered a critique of Polk's selections to lead the newly-formed Regiment of Mounted Riflemen, the creation of which by the Congress had caused a tsunami of supporters to flood Polk's office on quests for appointments for their constituents.⁴⁷ "[President] Polk has acted ... with an energy and judgment that must always redound to his praise," wrote Reynolds from his camp at Matamoros. But, added the second lieutenant, "I don't like [the President's] nominations to the new Rifle Brigade."⁴⁸ Reynolds felt no slight personally, at least none he would admit in writing, but, he suggested, Polk's actions had created a bad precedent. Junior officer commissions directly from civilian life, Reynolds intimated, would "ruin any army in the world," especially one that had won, at the time of Reynolds's writing, a great victory at Fort Texas against an organized and respectable

intimidate Mexico." Watson, "How the Army Became Accepted," 229.

⁴⁶ Paraphrased from Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 144.

⁴⁷ Polk, *Diary*, 1:404, 406-407.

⁴⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, Matamoros, Mexico, 12 June 1846, *RFP*. Reynolds doubtless learned the news of the President's promotions through a variety of papers – he makes explicit reference in the letter to the presence of George Wilkins Kendall from the New Orleans-based *Picayune*, and he is almost certain to have read the news in other papers that found the army via New Orleans, which Greenberg has cited as the conduit of news to and from the United States. Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 178; See also Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 520.

foe.⁴⁹ But if Reynolds thought that these promotions should come from the ranks of professional officers, Polk feared that promotion from within might stoke political intrigue or resentment among officers of equal rank who outnumbered the available commands: “Upwards of 100 hundred officers of the army have applied for promotion,” Polk confided in his diary – Reynolds had estimated that number to approximate 60 – but the case of Capt. John C. Fremont excepted, Polk had, in his own words, “upon full consideration determined to select the officers from civil life.”⁵⁰ What is more, Polk veiled his maneuvering and political preference for officers from civilian life, largely an inheritance of the Jeffersonian tradition, with a rationale geographical in nature: the Mounted Rifles, the President reasoned, were predominately to serve as a western regiment, and so a critical number of its officers should be western men eager to defend their homes and hearths.⁵¹

Polk’s plan hardly satisfied the second lieutenant. Reynolds would not have taken a commission even had he been offered one, the subaltern confided to his sisters, but there were many brevet second lieutenants, attached to various regiments and eligible for promotion, “*educated by the government*” (emphasis added), trained in military

⁴⁹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, Matamoros, Mexico, 12 June 1846, *RFP*.

⁵⁰ Polk, *Diary*, 1:412; Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, Matamoros, Mexico, 12 June 1846, *RFP*.

⁵¹ For Polk’s Whig paranoia and his eagerness to cement Democratic civilian control of the predominately-Whig U.S. Army, see John C. Pinheiro, “All Whigs and violent partisans” in *Manifest Ambition: James K. Polk and Civil-Military Relations during the Mexican War* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 59-81, esp. pp. 70-74. Pinheiro, however, probably overstates his case when he writes that “another reason for Polk to appoint Democrats to high positions in the army simply was to ensure the loyalty of the men who would be leading soldiers in a foreign war that lacked full popular support” (p. 70). In fact, Whigs at the general officer level had proven sufficiently reliable in executing the government’s policies. See Watson, “How the Army Became Accepted,” 229; Polk, *Diary*, 1:412.

science, mathematics, engineering, fortification, and in the art of leading soldiers, much better suited to promotion in a new brigade than ordinary men from civilian life who lacked requisite expertise and technical skill.⁵² “It is the grossest kind of injustice,” Reynolds continued, “not to say *insult*” (emphasis added), to elevate civilians to commands “over [officers’] heads ... *it is not on such principles that any army in the world is raised*” (emphasis added).⁵³ In fact, Polk’s move had caused Reynolds to consider, “for the first time in my life” (original emphasis), a professional transition to civilian life after the war.⁵⁴

If Reynolds had been a Whig, it would be easy to reduce the second lieutenant’s gripes to a well-documented partisan U.S. Army subculture. But Reynolds’s praise of Polk, and his Democratic politics, compel the historian to look elsewhere. What emanates from Reynolds’s criticism of these promotions is a sense that the professional ethos and accountability of the United States Army had been slighted by its commander in chief, and this amounted to more than a mark against the organization’s honor. To suggest, as Reynolds did, that Polk’s acts ran counter to those principles on which “any army in the world is raised” reveals the genteel and cosmopolitan outlook, and the highly professional orientation, of the army’s junior officer corps, two historical developments that were not forgone conclusions when Thomas Jefferson founded the academy at West Point in 1802, but which became realities through the reforms of superintendent Sylvanus Thayer begun in 1817 and continued into the 1830s that

⁵² Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, Matamoros, Mexico, 12 June 1846, *RFP*.

⁵³ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, Matamoros, Mexico, 12 June 1846, *RFP*.

⁵⁴ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, Matamoros, Mexico, 12 June 1846, *RFP*.

emerged in full bloom by 1846.⁵⁵ When hostilities commenced with Mexico, the army in which Reynolds served and in which he ultimately hoped for professional advancement under the Polk regime had proven itself to be a reliable and accountable servant of the public interest not *in spite* of, but *because* of, its Whiggish orientation.⁵⁶ And though some officers in its ranks were possessed of opposing political views, these officers were effective, in most cases, in subordinating political preferences to the will of civilian authority irrespective of difference. These realities invite historians to consider that politics and professionalism developed within the Old Army's culture simultaneously and on parallel historical tracks; often politics dictated the terms and conditions of military professionalism; sometimes, and in key cases, they did not.

Reynolds was quite wrong about looming hostilities with Mexico, even as his prediction that the U.S. Army would end up in Oregon proved, in some measure, correct. In 1856, having received two brevet promotions for meritorious conduct at the Battles of Monterey and Buena Vista in the Mexican-American War, and later made captain of the Third U.S. Artillery, Reynolds led troops against Native American Indians in the Rogue River expedition, even overseeing their forced removal from what one scholar has described, in an adaptation of Richard White's influential thesis, as the

⁵⁵ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, Matamoros, Mexico, 12 June 1846, *RFP*; for accounts of West Point's origin, see Robert M.S. McDonald, ed., *Thomas Jefferson's Military Academy: Founding West Point* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); for the West Point curriculum and the socialization of junior officers, see Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 167-180; Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh has offered brilliant treatment of the Academy's founding and its significance in shaping the success of American arms in Mexico and beyond in *West Pointers and the Civil War: The Old Army in War and Peace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 11-33.

⁵⁶ I owe these insights to the excellent scholarship of Samuel Watson; See, especially, Watson, "How the Army Became Accepted"; and Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*.

“middle ground” of southern Oregon.⁵⁷ But what are historians to make of Reynolds’s 1846 letters from Corpus Christi and Mexico? Though the sentiments Reynolds expressed in his 1846 correspondence were isolated and local commentaries, and though they also contained descriptions of local flora and fauna and the lawless nature of Texas typical of their genre, these letters nevertheless offer the historian a transparent and reliable account of a junior officer’s political and professional mind, for junior officers seldom kept journals, and did not frequently offer editorialized commentaries on federal policy in published outlets.⁵⁸ Indeed, though officers had engaged in frequent – and, significantly for reasons professional, anonymous – debate in the *Army and Navy Chronicle* concerning operations and tactics in the Second Seminole War, they did not sustain that kind of commentary after 1844: the year that this periodical and its successor, the *Army and Navy Chronicle and Scientific*

⁵⁷ Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. from its Establishment, in 1802, to 1890*, 2:90-91; For southern Oregon as a middle ground of exchange between Native American Indians and frontiersmen in the years leading up to, and including, the Rogue River War, see Nathan Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters: Indians and Whites at Peace and War in Southern Oregon 1820s to 1860s* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2002); For Reynolds’s involvement in the Rogue River Expedition, see Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem for a People: The Rogue Indians and the Frontiersmen* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 185, 187; and E.A. Schwarz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 123, 138, 146-147, 149.

⁵⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*; Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, Matamoros, Mexico, 12 June 1846, *RFP*; Watson has noted that only one article authored by an officer was published in the eleven-year life span of the *Military and Naval Magazine of the United States*, the *Army and Navy Chronicle* and its successor, *The Army and Navy Chronicle and Scientific Repository* from the years 1833 to 1844 that featured “broad philosophical analysis of American foreign policy”; See Watson, “Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism,” 468-469.

Repository, ceased publication.⁵⁹ This is significant, as Watson has noted, for it signals “the officer corps’ failure to sustain a professional journal even as the nation moved toward war and the army toward probable expansion – precisely the time when one would expect officers to have taken an increased interest in their profession and its prospects.”⁶⁰

In the end, and despite his frustration with President Polk’s handling of officer appointments in 1846, Reynolds did not resign his commission, nor did he return to civilian life after the war with Mexico.⁶¹ But Reynolds’s praise and critique of the President in the earliest stages of conflict suggest that historians must consider anew how political preferences and the processes of military professionalization co-opted one another and existed sometimes in peculiar tension among the junior officer corps in the antebellum era. Rather than a conflict prosecuted by an aggressive army high command and a cadre of lieutenants hell-bent on American expansion, the Mexican-American War, in this instance, illumines the sometimes-contradictory nature of political allegiance and military professionalism. Such expansionist-minded officers as Reynolds supported the Polk regime, but not along strictly partisan lines, and certainly not at the expense of the national institutions to which they had sworn allegiance, and which they had been conditioned in intellect, morals, and technical expertise to serve through training at the United States Military Academy. For professionally-trained, socialized, and nationally-accountable junior officers, national fidelity and patriotism itself had

⁵⁹ Paraphrased from Watson, “Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism,” 469-470.

⁶⁰ Watson, “Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism,” 470.

⁶¹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, Matamoros, Mexico, 12 June 1846, *RFP*.

come to transcend loyalty to any particular administration as hostilities commenced with Mexico. The manifest tension that Reynolds's letters present suggests that even Democratic junior officers were no more common, nor more susceptible to the spirit of the Jacksonian age in their professional sentiments, than their Whig counterparts, a fact that should cause historians to rethink the Whig-Democratic political binary that has so informed debates about the U.S. Army in Mexico from 1846 to 1848.

From Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande

On July 19th, 1845, Company E of the Third U.S. Artillery Regiment, to which Reynolds was assigned, arrived in New Orleans. Along with Reynolds, this battery contained several officers who would go on to garner considerable fame in the American Civil War, most notably First Lieutenant George H. Thomas (a native Virginian and a 1840 graduate of the United States Military Academy), Brevet Second Lieutenant Daniel Harvey Hill (a South Carolinian and Class of 1842, USMA), and the three lieutenants' commander, Lieutenant Braxton Bragg of North Carolina (a Tar Heel and graduate of the Class of 1837, USMA).⁶² In a previous outpost at St. Augustine, Florida, Reynolds was taken ill with fever, whereupon Bragg had nursed the subaltern back to health and undertaken correspondence with family on Reynolds's behalf.⁶³ The only northerner of the group, Reynolds would join Thomas, the Virginian, in serving the Union from 1861

⁶² Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 19-20; Daniel Harvey Hill, "Chickamauga – the Great Battle of the West," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, edited by Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, in four volumes (New York: The Century Company, 1887), 3:639; Brian Steel Wills, *George Henry Thomas: As True as Steel* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 38; Grady McWhiney, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, in two volumes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 1:53.

⁶³ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 15.

to the former's premature death in 1863. The young officers and their battery had arrived from Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, where the men had enjoyed the fine summer hospitality of Charlestonians on Sullivan's Island, and so for Reynolds the stop in Corpus Christi was not his first visit to the slaveholding South.⁶⁴ After a five-day stay in New Orleans to re-supply and re-organize, and after the artillerists were re-acquainted with their West Point classmates from other outfits – men like Ulysses Sam Grant, for instance, who served in the Fourth U.S. Infantry – the junior officers of Company E boarded the steamer *Queen Victoria* bound for Corpus Christi.⁶⁵

In January 1846, Reynolds wrote home to describe conditions in Corpus Christi. While during summer things had seemed pleasant enough – Reynolds delighted in the hunting and the wildlife – the environment had turned hostile for the army as autumn turned to winter.⁶⁶ The lieutenant described the cold weather and his winter quarters.

⁶⁴ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 18.

⁶⁵ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 20.

⁶⁶ "Game of all kinds abound," wrote Reynolds. "Geese and ducks in the thousands. Deer in abundance. ... I have commenced slaughtering the 'Jack Snipe' which, tho [sic] not very numerous (for they have not begun to migrate from the North yet) offered tolerable amusement." Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 14 November 1845, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*; The flora and the fauna also made a strong impression on a young Ulysses Sam Grant. "Really I don't know but it would be desirable to remain in Texas," Grant wrote from Corpus Christi on 10 October 1845. "It is just the kind of country Julia that *we* (original emphasis) have often spoken on in our most romantic conversations. It is the place where we could gallop over the prairies and start up Deer [sic] and prairie birds and occasionally see droves of wild horses or an Indian wigwam. The climate is delightful and healthy and the soil fertile, and when protected by troops no doubt will be settled up very rapidly." See letter of U.S. Grant to Julia Dent, 10 October 1845, Corpus Christi, TX, in Ulysses S. Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, edited by John Y. Simon, with a foreword by Ralph G. Newman and prefaces by Bruce Catton and Allan Nevins, in thirty-two volumes (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), 1:56; Officers often enjoyed hunting trips that lasted several days, and returned with a "variety of game ... almost beyond belief"; See Payne, "Camp Life in the Army of Occupation," 329; Justin Harvey Smith, *The War with Mexico*, in two volumes (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 1:143.

He shared with his sisters, too, that out of a disregard for basic comforts (and a lack of foresight), he had no stove or fireplace in his tent to keep warm, and that often he slept on the ground.⁶⁷ Like other soldiers, Reynolds had, at first, “reveled in the area’s unspoiled natural wonders.”⁶⁸ But conditions in the camps degenerated and became quite unpleasant.⁶⁹ Soldiers’ quarters were hardly adequate for the weather. Reynolds deplored his tent, and his dissatisfaction was hardly an isolated case.⁷⁰ “Tents,” Justin Smith wrote in his seminal, two-volume history of the conflict, “could scarcely keep out a heavy dew,” and in the best of seasons the gulf winds caused the climate “to oscillate sharply between sultry heat and piercing northers, so that one lay down gasping for breath and woke up freezing.”⁷¹ Soldiers, many of whom had probably never seen the sea, greeted the waters of Corpus Christi Bay by jumping into the tide and “frolicking in the surf like children” when they arrived from New Orleans in July 1845; at peak rainy season (late summer and early fall), however, they could hardly keep the water from finding its way into their tents, and often the very water they once rejoiced to see pooled to three feet in depth in their quarters.⁷² Drinking water was brackish, and a scarcity of wood meant fires only for army cooks.⁷³ Other supernatural elements terrified the

⁶⁷ “If this country is blessed with the climate of Italy in Summer,” wrote Reynolds, “it is cursed with that of England in Winter”; See letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

⁶⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*; Quotations adapted from Payne, “Camp Life in the Army of Occupation,” 326.

⁶⁹ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 151; Guardino offers a cursory assessment of the deplorable conditions at Corpus Christi in *The Dead March*, p. 31.

⁷⁰ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

⁷¹ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:143.

⁷² Payne, “Camp Life in the Army of Occupation,” 327; Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:143.

⁷³ Guardino, *The Dead March*, 31; Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:143.

soldiers, who had never witnessed Texas storms. An August lightning storm put fear into the hearts of the Americans, literally and figuratively, when a lightning bolt struck the tent of two slaves who belonged, presumably, to Lt. Braxton Bragg.⁷⁴ And there were vermin. One soldier noted that his “camp-ground [was] infested with rattle-snakes; as many as two at a time have been found in the tents of the officer.”⁷⁵ Insects abounded.⁷⁶

Apart from the terrifying elements, soldiers found distractions aplenty, and Corpus Christi developed a reputation for vice, danger, and lawlessness. A young Ulysses Sam Grant, who would later develop a penchant for cigars, noticed, almost immediately upon his arrival at Corpus, the enormity of the tobacco trade and tobacco consumption: “almost every Mexican above the age of ten years, and many much younger, smoked the cigarette. Nearly every Mexican carried a pouch of leaf tobacco, powdered by rolling in the hands, and a roll of corn husks to make wrappers. The cigarettes were made by the smokers as they used them.”⁷⁷ The American army in Corpus Christi attracted Mexican traders, who traveled from such distances as

⁷⁴ Payne, “Camp Life in the Army of Occupation,” 331; The incident is also described by U.S. Grant in a letter dated 14 September 1845; See Grant, *Papers*, 1:54.

⁷⁵ W.S. Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1847), 27.

⁷⁶ One soldier wrote in the New Orleans *Weekly Picayune*, doubtless for colorful effect, “In clearing the ground to pitch my tent, I killed a water moccasin; about 3 o’clock in the morning I was awakened up by the barking of a dog; he had just run a rattlesnake out of my neighbor’s tent, when the rattling and the barking aroused me – 9 rattles – captured. I again lay down, and when day broke, a yellow-necked lizard was cocking his eye cunningly at me from the ridge-pole of my tent. I sprang up, seized my boot to despatch [sic] him, when, lo! out of the boot dropped a tarantula! Exhausted from fright and fatigue, I sank back into a chair; but no sooner down than I was compelled rapidly to abandon the position, having been stung in the rear by a scorpion!”; Quoted in *Niles’ National Register* 69 (25 October 1845): 114.

⁷⁷ Grant, *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant: The Complete Annotated Edition*, edited by John F. Marszalek, with David S. Nolen and Louie P. Gallo (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 40-41.

Monterrey and dealt horses, exotic blankets, and other goods, often at prices the soldiers deemed incredible.⁷⁸ Horses provided little distraction. More problematic was the “horde of gamblers and liquor-sellers” who began operations in Corpus. “Soldiers,” one historian wrote, “driven to desperation, paid what little money they had to be drugged into insensibility or crazed into brawls and orgies,” and others committed acts of violence against locals.⁷⁹ So prevalent was such behavior that Taylor restricted his troops to quarters at night.⁸⁰

While advertisements of saloons, billiards, and bowling alleys in the newspapers doubtless aroused the curiosities of Americans reading about the Army of Occupation from their firesides, the reality of affairs in Corpus Christi did not phase Reynolds, who disavowed all the frivolity and noted the dangers of occupation in a January letter to Pennsylvania.⁸¹ Reynolds warned his sisters that the advertisements misled: “you must not imagine from [the news] that we have all the luxuries and amusements it would lead you to suppose upon a mere perusal.”⁸² The bars, billiards, grog shops, and other sources of entertainment described by one historian amounted to little more, in

⁷⁸ So ubiquitous was trade with merchants that the quartermaster for the Army of Occupation secured horses and one thousand mules from Mexican traders for the anticipated advance into Mexico; See Payne, “Camp Life in the Army of Occupation,” 335.

⁷⁹ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:144; Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 100.

⁸⁰ Karl Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 34.

⁸¹ For amusements that American and Texan businessmen and traders brought to the Army of Occupation, see Payne, “Camp Life in the Army of Occupation,” 336; Some of these amusements, such as saloons, as well as the Army and Union theaters, are depicted in the advertisements of the *Corpus Christi Gazette*, 8 January 1846.

⁸² Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

Reynolds's telling, than "a few canvas sheds filled with trash."⁸³ Incidents of violence among soldiers, and even of violent crimes which had received considerable circulation in the national press, Reynolds confirmed: "Upon the whole ... [Corpus Christi] is one of the Rowdyest [sic] most cut-throat places I have ever been." The violence and crime were enough to keep one from going out in the evening for fear of being shot and robbed, he added. And in a more ominous tone, Reynolds noted, with surprising transparency given his intended readership, "there is no law here of any kind – save the Bowie knife & pistol – which is rather uncomfortable for a civilized person."⁸⁴ To the Lancaster native who had experienced the more cosmopolitan culture of Philadelphia, Texas seemed a middle ground between savagery and civilization.

Though distractions abounded for the soldiers through the winter months, the men of the Army of Occupation had plenty for which to prepare – whether they sensed danger or not – and this they began in earnest long before the winter doldrums. Soldiers

⁸³ Payne, "Camp Life in the Army of Occupation," 336; Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

⁸⁴ Payne, "Camp Life in the Army of Occupation," 338-339; One soldier who authored an anonymous letter to New Orleans news outlets noted that the outpost in Corpus Christi was "crowded with outlaws, thieves, and murderers who daily commit robbery and murder with impunity"; See *Niles' National Register* 69 (3 January 1846): 273; Ulysses Grant tried to downplay the severity of this violence, news of which had reached his fiancé, Julia Dent, and sought to assuage her concern. Grant confirmed that several soldiers had been murdered, though he was quick to add that they had been murdered by Americans, and that no proof could substantiate the claim that Americans had been murdered by Mexican vagabonds. "Soldiers are a class of people who will drink and gamble," wrote Grant in his explanation of events, "and they can always find houses to visit for these purposes. Upon the whole Corpus Chri[sti] is just the same as any other plase [sic] would be where there were so many troops"; See Grant, *Papers*, 1:73; Years later, in his memoirs, Grant suggested the socio-economic inferiority of privates in the regular U.S. Army at Corpus Christi, and rated them as lesser to the volunteers, a condition, he implied, that predisposed army regulars to lawlessness; See Grant, *Memoirs*, 42; Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

occupied themselves with a variety of tasks ranging in scope from gathering firewood to procuring and branding wild mules.⁸⁵ When time and duty allowed, some officers hunted and fished away from camp upon the Nueces River, and for days at a time.⁸⁶ More serious still, and when weather permitted, troops devoted much of their time to military drill and training.⁸⁷ Junior officers like Reynolds benefited from time at Corpus Christi to train the rank and file of Taylor's army and to whip it into fighting shape. In this they succeeded, though at the outset the army proved little better than an organized rabble.⁸⁸ In November, and in a manner that evidences the sometimes-nativist (though almost certainly classist) orientation of West Point-trained officers, Reynolds wrote to his sisters that he had been "much employed" for several weeks training some 30 "stupid Germans, Irishmen, &c" the principles of horsemanship, tactics, and maneuver.⁸⁹ This training was not ineffectual. Wayne Hsieh, a leading historian of the

⁸⁵ Paraphrased from Payne, "Camp Life in the Army of Occupation," 340.

⁸⁶ Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico*, 40; Reynolds lamented in his 14 November 1846 letter from Corpus Christi that he was unable to participate in such hunting expeditions. Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 14 November 1845, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

⁸⁷ Payne, "Camp Life in the Army of Occupation," 340; Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 18; Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*, 34.

⁸⁸ Wrote one historian, "[Gen.] Taylor knew so little of military evolutions that he could not get his men properly into line"; See Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:143.

⁸⁹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 14 November 1845, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*; For the nativism of some junior officers and their attitudes toward foreigners who made up the rank and file of the regular army, and for the classism of some officers in the Old Army, see Richard Bruce Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 59-61; Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 130; Records of the General Recruiting Service for the U.S. Army indicate that forty percent of recruits from 1840 to 1849 were foreign born; See Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 22-23; Watson has argued that a superior sense of class more informed American attitudes toward Mexicans than did racialism; See Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, 391-394.

Old Army, has noted that its encampment at Corpus Christi proved beneficial to Gen. Taylor's men, "allow[ing] both officers and enlisted men to drill and train in the large-unit maneuvers of a proper European-style army, which the widely dispersed state of the old army in its Indian campaigns usually prevented." Although this training was effective, Hsieh concludes, "its benefits should not be exaggerated."⁹⁰

In the main, however, and as the encampment at Corpus Christi drew to a close, the predominant sense among officers in the Army of Occupation was dread of inactivity, which flowed from a general conviction that hostilities with Mexico would not come to pass.⁹¹ "Few men," writes Watson, "found relief in close attention to their professional duties or analyses of the political and diplomatic contexts they were performed in."⁹² Like George Meade, who had written home on November 12th that "the question of war" was neutralized, and that "the whole affair will be settled before spring," and not unlike Grant, who wrote one day prior on November 11th that in spring the army would return to the United States, Reynolds suggested on November 14th that Mexico would negotiate terms of its boundary with the United States, and that no war would come.⁹³ In his divination Reynolds was proven wrong.

⁹⁰ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 56; Payne has offered a similar conclusion, noting, "It is difficult to assess the military effect on the United States troops from their stay at Corpus Christi. Bad weather and widespread illness hampered training as winter came; dissension over rank flared among the officers ... Nevertheless, the soldiers' first encounter against much larger Mexican forces along the Rio Grande were sensational successes, and the regulars continued to play key roles for both Taylor and Scott later in the war"; see Payne, "Camp Life in the Army of Occupation," 342.

⁹¹ Paraphrased from Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, 408.

⁹² Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, 408.

⁹³ George Gordon Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade: Major-General United States Army*, edited by George Meade, in two volumes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 1:36; Grant, *Papers*, 1:61; Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 14 November 1845, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

Diplomatic negotiations with Mexico offered little reason for optimism, and on 9 March 1846 – having received its orders to strike tents from President Polk in January via Secretary of War William L. Marcy – the Army of Occupation finally ended its encampment at Corpus Christi and departed for the Rio Grande with the flexibility to establish posts where Taylor deemed most appropriate for defensive, though if conditions necessitated them, offensive operations.⁹⁴ Grant doubtless spoke for many when he exclaimed, in a letter to Julia, “evry [sic] one rejoises [sic] at the idea of leaving Corpus Christi.”⁹⁵ As one military historian of the conflict has written, commenting on the diplomatic and strategic significance of Polk’s orders, “Polk was taking a momentous but measured step. As long as he had allowed the Mexicans to hold the disputed ground between the Nueces and the Rio Grande, the southern republic had had little motivation to negotiate or even to take notice of American overtures.”⁹⁶ But Polk seemed to believe – as did young officers like Grant – that the presence of an American army might compel the Mexicans to settle the boundary dispute once and for all.⁹⁷ Thus, and as Woodworth has written, “the next move would belong to the Mexicans, who could opt either to open negotiations or to take up the gage of war Polk had thus thrown down.”⁹⁸ But first the American Army of Occupation needed to reach its destination, the vicinity of Matamoros, which required covering a distance of some 150 miles (as Grant

⁹⁴ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 37.

⁹⁵ Grant, *Papers*, 1:75.

⁹⁶ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 148.

⁹⁷ “It is to be hoped,” wrote Grant, “that our troops being so close on the borders of Mexico will bring about a speedy settlement of the boundary question”; see Grant, *Papers*, 1:75.

⁹⁸ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 148.

estimated the distance later in his memoirs) with limited reconnaissance.⁹⁹

Additionally, the army needed to traverse difficult terrain filled with only the occasional pool of water.¹⁰⁰ Soldiers endured difficult, and sometimes waterless, marches; Captain Kirby Smith admired the beautiful scenery along the march, noting its terrain features, and the beautiful flora, but also commented on the endless number of snakes, scorpions, and spiders that plagued the army on the move.¹⁰¹ The observations of Smith confirm what Payne has written, namely, that soldiers who departed Corpus Christi with the Army of Occupation did so only in a physical sense, for their many marches and encampments throughout Mexico from 1846 to 1848 reflected, in varying degrees, the Corpus Christi experience.¹⁰²

General Zachary Taylor selected Point Isabel as a staging ground for his advance to the Rio Grande and concentrated his supplies there. Located on the Gulf of Mexico and some twenty-five miles to the north of the mouth of the Rio Grande, Point Isabel afforded the U.S. Army access to the Gulf of Mexico and thus to men and materiel by sea.¹⁰³ The men who marched with Taylor from Corpus expected no direct confrontation with Mexican forces, though the enemy had burned whatever wood and herbage might benefit an advancing army.¹⁰⁴ On March 19, dragoons in advance of Taylor's army

⁹⁹ Grant, *Memoirs*, 43; In point of fact, the distance was some 196 miles; see Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:147.

¹⁰⁰ Grant, *Memoirs*, 43.

¹⁰¹ Paraphrased from Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 151; Ephraim Kirby Smith, *To Mexico with Scott: Letters of Captain E. Kirby Smith to His Wife*, edited by Emma Jerome Blackwood, with an introduction by R.M. Johnson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), 22-27; For more on the march, see Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:146-147.

¹⁰² Paraphrased from Payne, "Camp Life in the Army of Occupation," 341.

¹⁰³ Grant, *Memoirs*, 58.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *To Mexico with Scott*, 27; Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:147.

encountered a smattering of Mexican soldiers under the command of General Francisco Mejia near a salt lagoon, the Arroyo Colorado, that lay some thirty miles from Matamoros.¹⁰⁵ Mejia lacked the authority to initiate hostilities with the Americans, but hoped nevertheless to halt the American advance. His cavalry informed Taylor's men that any attempt to cross the Arroyo Colorado would be received as an act of war.¹⁰⁶ Taylor stated that he intended to cross the river at once, and that if the Mexicans did not disperse, he would fire on their positions with artillery.¹⁰⁷ Taylor readied his guns, suspecting the Mexicans to be few in number.¹⁰⁸ Then, Captain Charles Ferguson Smith (who had served as commandant of cadets at the United States Military Academy from 1838 to 1842 while Reynolds was a cadet) and General William Jenkins Worth led American soldiers of the First Brigade across the Arroyo Colorado.¹⁰⁹ Other troops watched anxiously, expecting the men to draw fire while exposed in the water. But the Americans scrambled up the fifteen-foot embankment on the other side, and the enemy scattered. The sounds of Mexican bugles and the sight of cavalry galloping to and fro opposite the arroyo prior to the American crossing had been a ruse to give an inflated, and false, impression of Mexican strength.¹¹⁰

Hostilities that Sam Grant later supposed in his memoirs he was sent to Mexico to initiate occurred the next month, when on April 26, 1846, Mexican cavalry clashed with sixty-three U.S. Army dragoons, killing sixteen and capturing the others. These the

¹⁰⁵ The Arroyo Colorado measured one hundred yards in width, and in depth, three to four feet; See Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:147.

¹⁰⁶ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 151-152.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:147; Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 48.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 48-49.

¹¹⁰ Smith, *To Mexico with Scott*, 30-31.

Mexicans paraded through the streets of Matamoros in triumph.¹¹¹ Thus, in late April, the state of quasi-war that Captain Kirby Smith had described previously on April 9 in a letter to his wife transformed into an open conflict: “Hostilities,” Taylor wrote to Polk, “may now be considered as commenced.”¹¹²

Besieged at Fort Texas

In early May, Second Lieutenant John Reynolds and his comrades in arms found themselves at Fort Texas, a small garrison on the northern bank of the Rio Grande opposite Matamoros, which they had worked for weeks to construct.¹¹³ Here, especially, the junior officers’ expertise in engineering, fortification, and mathematics, acquired through their training at West Point, proved particularly useful.¹¹⁴ Across the river the Mexicans had assembled an army that one historian of the conflict has termed “respectable,” which featured approximately 175 artillerymen, 3,500 infantrymen, 1,100 cavalrymen, 425 irregular horsemen, and local militia numbering approximately 500.¹¹⁵ His supply threatened by Mexican cavalry advances north of the river, General Taylor decided to divide his forces, and left a small garrison of infantry and artillery that

¹¹¹ Grant, *Memoirs*, 43; Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 155; Smith, *To Mexico with Scott*, 39-42.

¹¹² Wrote Smith, “We are here neither in a state of peace nor war.” Smith, *To Mexico with Scott*, 37; Zachary Taylor quoted in Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 155.

¹¹³ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 23.

¹¹⁴ Molloy, “Technical Education and the Young Republic: West Point as America’s École Polytechnique, 1802-1833,” PhD diss., Brown University, 1975, 239-270; James L. Morrison, Jr., *“The Best School in the World”: West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1986), 87-101.

¹¹⁵ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:158.

included Lieutenant Bragg's artillery battery and the Seventh Infantry at Fort Texas while he led the greater bulk of his force to Point Isabel to defend his supply.¹¹⁶

In the morning hours of May 3, the Mexicans commenced a bombardment of the fort, which the Americans at Point Isabel heard with considerable anxiety from afar.¹¹⁷ Napoleon Dana, an American soldier inside Fort Texas, wrote that the Americans had hardly finished washing in the morning before the artillery barrage opened. In an instant, however, the Americans found their arms and artillery, and returned fire on the Mexican batteries.¹¹⁸ The Americans, whose ordinance in 1845 had benefited immensely from increased spending and the visionary leadership of Secretary of War Joel Roberts Poinsett (who had formed creation of an ordinance board that toured Europe to ascertain the best production methods for artillery), had at their disposal more superior artillery pieces than the Mexican army had in its possession.¹¹⁹ Lieutenant Bragg's light artillery battery, in which Reynolds served, consisted of six-pound field cannon that featured brass, smoothbore barrels and lighter, two-wheeled carriages for increased mobility. These tubes weighed nearly 900 pounds, and possessed a range of 1,500 yards.¹²⁰ But their great virtue was maneuverability – these pieces were not suited to

¹¹⁶ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 38; Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 23; Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 157; McWhiney, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, 1:59.

¹¹⁷ Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico*, 88.

¹¹⁸ Letter of Napoleon Dana, 4 May 1846, quoted in Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 70.

¹¹⁹ One historian of American weaponry and ordnance of the period has noted that the American artillery rated favorably against the best pieces in the world, and that the field and siege pieces that the Americans brought to Mexico were vastly superior to Mexican ordnance; See Lester R. Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War, 1846-1847* (Austin: Presidial Press, 1975), 9-11.

¹²⁰ The Department of War, *Ordnance Manual for the Use of the Officers of the United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: J. and G.S. Gideon, 1841), 4.

firing from defensive works – and an ability to maintain consistent and rapid fire.¹²¹ So rapid was the fire that Bragg, Reynolds, and the other lieutenants poured forth from their guns that, as barrels overheated, and as the gunners waited for their pieces to cool, the officers were compelled to nurse a brandy-based toddy.¹²² In the initial artillery exchange, however, the guns that Reynolds and his fellow lieutenants commanded and deployed inflicted minimal damage on the enemy, a fact attributable to their small-caliber ordinance and limited range.¹²³

In time, however, the bombardment of Fort Texas turned into more than a drinking affair, for the siege lasted until May 9. Mexican forces had demanded the surrender of Fort Texas on May 5, the third day of the siege, and a council of war constituted of American officers rejected the Mexican ultimatum in unanimous agreement.¹²⁴ Though they possessed technologically-superior ordnance and munitions, the Americans fired sparingly. Taylor had not supplied the garrison with much ammunition, and the Mexican army threatened to sever the Fort from its supply and communications at Point Isabel.¹²⁵ On May 7 the Mexican bombardment reached its zenith in intensity, and in accuracy it increased to a startling degree: “shells,” as

¹²¹ Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 11.

¹²² McWhiney, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, 1:60.

¹²³ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 38.

¹²⁴ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 159; John Corey Henshaw, an infantry officer in the Seventh U.S. Infantry, wrote scathingly of Captain Edgar S. Hawkins’s decision to call a council of war, given the two real possibilities of unconditional surrender or fighting to the death, and noted Hawkins was “destitute of every qualification of a soldier, as he is deficient in all and every attribute of a gentleman”; See John Corey Henshaw, *Recollections of the War with Mexico*, edited, and with an introduction, by Gary F. Kurutz (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 61.

¹²⁵ For artillery munitions, see The Department of War, *Ordnance Manual for the Use of the Officers of the United States Army*, 184-202; See, also, Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 14-17; Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:176.

historian Steven Woodworth has written, “scoured the inside of the fort.”¹²⁶ Compared to the engineering and production quality of American munitions, these shells were largely ineffective, detonating sometimes between the legs of soldiers and not maiming them or, in the case of solid shot, passing through tents and lodging in the earthen floor of the fort’s interior.¹²⁷ Most vulnerable were the horses, who could not retreat into the bomb proofs or the “gopher holes.”¹²⁸ Numerous horses were killed outright; the less fortunate had their legs broken by more effective artillery fire and suffered from exposure in the hot sun.¹²⁹ Major Brown, the fort’s initial commander (and for whom the fort would take its name following the American victory) was the highest-ranking combat fatality, but in the final accounting the garrison suffered minimal losses, and Taylor’s army, which departed Point Isabel on May 7, winning victories at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma while en route to reinforce the fort, ultimately broke Arista’s siege of Fort Texas.¹³⁰ Reynolds and the Third U.S. Artillery had survived their first battle, though, in the recollection of another soldier, “they ha[d] suffered everything.”¹³¹ That same soldier confessed, after considering the horror of the shelling that his comrades-in-arms endured while he was away with Taylor’s main force, “I would rather have fought twenty battles than have passed through the bombardment at Fort Brown.”¹³² Reynolds agreed and echoed the sentiment verbatim, writing of the ordeal, “I had rather

¹²⁶ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 160.

¹²⁷ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 160; Henshaw, *Recollections of the War with Mexico*, 61.

¹²⁸ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:176.

¹²⁹ Henshaw, *Recollections of the War with Mexico*, 61-62.

¹³⁰ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:176; Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 159; Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 73-89.

¹³¹ Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico*, 103.

¹³² Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico*, 104.

be on ten battle fields [sic] than take another week's bombardment, such as we had at 'Fort Brown.'"¹³³

Following the American victories at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, and Fort Brown, General Taylor's army occupied the city of Matamoros.¹³⁴ The occupying force adhered to the rules of war and respected Mexican private property to ensure better conditions for the residents of Matamoros, though they confiscated large amounts of tobacco (Mexican law recognized the government's monopoly on tobacco, thereby making it public, and not private, property) in the process.¹³⁵ Predictably, however, the Americans found Matamoros far inferior to American towns, and in May and early June the Mexican soldiers who had been wounded and could not evacuate left an impression on the occupying force.¹³⁶ Grant, in a letter home to Julia, likened the Mexican inhabitants to Indians in "looks and habits."¹³⁷ On June 12, 1846, Reynolds also wrote home to discuss the state of military affairs from Matamoros, and noted the lamentable condition of the wounded Mexican soldiers who suffered there. Forced to endure extreme heat, without access to water, food, or medical care, and abandoned by their army, these soldiers were a pitiable lot. Reynolds had confronted, for the first time, the grim harvest of war. His experience proved a meaningful one. "I have tried not to say

¹³³ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 12 June 1846, Matamoros, Mexico, *RFP*.

¹³⁴ Taylor's army crossed the Rio Grande and occupied the city on 18 May 1846. Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 1:85.

¹³⁵ Grant, *Memoirs*, 67; Paraphrased from Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 168-169.

¹³⁶ "We have all been very much disappointed in the appearance of the town," wrote Meade in a letter dated May 19th. *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 1:85.

¹³⁷ Grant, *Papers*, 1:88.

much upon the Character [sic] of the Mexican,” wrote Reynolds after his visit to the Mexican wounded,

but if the citizens of my country could have walked through the hospital, with me, in Matamoros, and beheld the manner in which the poor, unfortunate wounded have been left without help without proper medical attention and a scanty allowance of provisions, who as you pass along, beg for a “Picayune” – in a tone of pity that would move a heart harder than a soldier’s. Who I say could look upon all this and not thank his God most devoutly and exclaim “I am not a Mexican.”¹³⁸

It was fortunate for the Mexican wounded, continued Reynolds, that they had fallen into American hands, and received attention from the medical corps. And Reynolds noted, too, that he and other officers freely gave U.S. dollars to the Mexican wounded so they could purchase creature comforts to hasten their recoveries.¹³⁹ Unlike his friend, George Meade, who had expressed boundless confidence in American military prospects against Mexico following the string of May victories – “I have no fears of the result,” wrote Meade, “we shall beat [the Mexicans] wherever we meet them, and in whatever numbers” – Reynolds allowed himself, after reflecting upon the somber hospital scene, to imagine a reality in which Mars, the ancient Roman god of war, did not smile on American arms in battle: “How different would have been our fate,” wrote Reynolds, sounding notes of solemnity and introspection, “if fortune had picked on the Mexican banner in these battles the few who survived to fall into their hands would have been the most unfortunate.”¹⁴⁰ For Reynolds, who had endured the relentless and tormenting

¹³⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 12 June 1846, Matamoros, Mexico, *RFP*.

¹³⁹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 12 June 1846, Matamoros, Mexico, *RFP*.

¹⁴⁰ Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 1:85; Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 12 June 1846, Matamoros, Mexico, *RFP*.

bombardment at Fort Brown, the outcome of war seemed less certain than it appeared to Grant or Meade in the summer of 1846.¹⁴¹

Battle at Monterrey

The September 1846 battle at Monterrey that pitted Zachary Taylor's Army of Occupation against Mexican forces under the command of Pedro de Ampudia took place against the backdrop of an American strategic design to occupy a vast territorial swath of land in northern Mexico that stretched to the Pacific, the results of which would, President Polk believed, force the Mexicans to negotiate a peace settlement.¹⁴² That it took place where it did, at Monterrey, and not elsewhere stemmed from the fact that any advance on Mexico City from Matamoros would have necessitated traversing one thousand miles of desert and mountains, a difficult (if not impossible) feat for any army, and especially so for a force that numbered fewer than ten thousand men (Reynolds had mentioned the prospective difficulties of crossing the eastern range of the "[S]ierra Madre") and lacked the logistical strength and network to move men and materiel.¹⁴³ To press the American advantage, Secretary of War William L. Marcy suggested that Taylor advance on the city of Monterrey, and on June 12 Winfield Scott, the commanding general (or general in chief), also ordered General Taylor to move on Monterrey.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Grant wrote confidently in a July letter that the Americans would enter Mexico City as "a conquering force." Grant, *Papers*, 1:102-103.

¹⁴² For Polk's strategic designs, see Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 170.

¹⁴³ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 175; Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 12 June 1846, Matamoros, Mexico, *RFP*.

¹⁴⁴ John D. Eisenhower, *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848* (New York: Random House, 1989), 105.

Taylor's army possessed few boats to move up the Rio Grande, and fewer pilots who could navigate the river, the current of which flowed swiftly and swirled against American efforts (to compound problems, a lack of wood made for a scarcity of fuel).¹⁴⁵ Taylor's men therefore endured yet another hard march from Matamoros to Camargo, but they speculated, as Reynolds had written in his June letter to the home front, that from Camargo the army would proceed to Monterrey, "cross the country in juncture with the mountains" toward the Mexican capital, and end the war.¹⁴⁶

On September 3, Reynolds composed a letter to Pennsylvania from his encampment at Camp Butler on the road to Monterrey. He noted the local news which told of political upheaval in Mexico City and the return of Antonio López de Santa Anna to power.¹⁴⁷ Reynolds discussed military affairs. He speculated that Taylor's army would fight again, and sooner rather than later. What is more, the lieutenant seemed of the mind that the next fight would prove decisive, and might even "terminate" the war.¹⁴⁸ The presence of volunteers frustrated Reynolds, and they also proved a bane to the existence of many professional officers.¹⁴⁹ He wrote that a volunteer army was

¹⁴⁵ Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 106.

¹⁴⁶ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 175; The miserable conditions of the march are manifest in the writings of Napoleon Jackson Tecumseh Dana, *Monterrey is Ours! The Mexican War Letters of Lieutenant Dana, 1845-1847*, edited by Robert H. Ferrell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 96-100.

¹⁴⁷ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp Butler (near Camargo), 3 September 1846, *RFP*; For Santa Anna's return to power, see Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 177.

¹⁴⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp Butler (near Camargo), 3 September 1846, *RFP*.

¹⁴⁹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp Butler (near Camargo), 3 September 1846, *RFP*; For a blunt assessment of volunteers from the perspective of West Point-educated officers, see George B. McClellan, *The Mexican War Diary and Correspondence of George B. McClellan*, edited by Thomas W. Cutrer (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), which is saturated with deprecations of citizen-soldier volunteers; See, also, Abner Doubleday, *My Life in the Old Army: The*

practically useless for the purpose of invading a foreign nation.¹⁵⁰ Had America possessed a stronger professional army from the first, and stationed it near the Rio Grande, Reynolds reasoned, the war would not have happened at all.¹⁵¹ Reflecting on the American papers, Reynolds sensed anti-war sentiment waxing on the home front.¹⁵²

Finally, on September 19th, at 9.00 am, lead elements of the American army under Taylor, still in marching columns, arrived on the northeast side of Monterrey.¹⁵³ Set against the Sierra Madre (indeed, protected on three of its sides by mountains), and nestled against the Santa Catarina River, the city and the surrounding mountain landscape presented a striking vista for the Americans to behold. A morning mist shrouded much of Monterrey, including the spires of the beautiful Mexican churches, and much of the high ground surrounding the city was veiled in fog.¹⁵⁴ When the mist began to lift, the Americans caught glimpses of Mexican fortifications – especially a deserted cathedral-turned-fort, the Citadel – and abandoned hopes that their enemy would cede the city without a fight. Then, the advance of skirmishers and the deployment of a brigade of mounted Texans tasked with reconnaissance and with

Reminiscences of Abner Doubleday from the Collections of the New-York Historical Society, edited and annotated by Joseph E. Chance (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1998), 65; For the friction that existed between army regulars and volunteers, well-documented among historians, see Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 130-131; Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 72-73; James M. McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 119-128; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 83, 101-102, 147, 220-221.

¹⁵⁰ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp Butler (near Camargo), 3 September 1846, *RFP*.

¹⁵¹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp Butler (near Camargo), 3 September 1846, *RFP*.

¹⁵² Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp Butler (near Camargo), 3 September 1846, *RFP*.

¹⁵³ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 127.

¹⁵⁴ Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*, 90.

ascertaining the strength of the Mexican defenses drew artillery fire, some of which fell within feet of George Meade.¹⁵⁵ The Mexicans were eager to give battle.

The key to the Monterrey position, as Eisenhower wrote, was the Bishop's Palace, which stood atop Independence Hill, and towered over Monterrey.¹⁵⁶ One participant described Monterrey in the wake of battle as a "second West Point in strength"; the Mexicans, he had written, were determined to hold Monterrey to the last. The position held by the Mexicans, Dana continued, "was a perfect Gibraltar."¹⁵⁷ Sam Grant, too, had eyed the Mexican redoubts with some anxiety, and detailed the elaborate defenses of Monterrey.¹⁵⁸ To turn the Mexican position Taylor would need to separate his forces.¹⁵⁹ From his position at Walnut Springs the American commander devised a plan of attack on Monterrey that involved a pinching movement: two wings would converge on the city, one via the southwest, where the Saltillo road left Monterrey and threaded the Sierra Madres through the Santa Catarina gorge, in an effort to sever the enemy's communications and supply line, and the other from the northeast, utilizing the Marín – Walnut Springs road.¹⁶⁰ Reconnaissance teams of engineers conducted operations in the

¹⁵⁵ Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 1:132.

¹⁵⁶ Paraphrased from Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 127-128; Infantryman John Corey Henshaw described Independence Hill as a position high in elevation, from which one could see the whole valley; see Henshaw, *Recollections of the War with Mexico*, 80.

¹⁵⁷ Dana, *Monterrey is Ours!* 122, 128; Henry echoed Dana's sentiment verbatim: "after riding over the city and examining minutely its defenses," he wrote, "my only astonishment is how [the Mexicans] could yield it. It is a perfect Gibraltar"; see Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico*, 219; These reminiscences have been adopted by one historian in a recent battle study; see Christopher H. Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar: The Battle for Monterrey, Mexico, 1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

¹⁵⁸ Grant, *Memoirs*, 70-71.

¹⁵⁹ Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 127-128.

¹⁶⁰ Paraphrased from Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 128; And Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 92; See, also, Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 179-180.

late afternoon and into the evening to test the viability of General Taylor's designs, and around 10:00 pm, they confirmed the soundness of the proposed attack.¹⁶¹ Taylor's plan was daring and ran counter to inherited military wisdom. It was also, in a certain sense, predictable, for Taylor was noted more for his reliability, and for his contempt of technical military doctrine, than he was esteemed for his tactical ingenuity and for his skill in managing a battle.¹⁶²

The battle for Monterrey commenced in earnest when troops under the command of Colonel John Garland hit the Mexican right flank to the north and east of Monterrey and fought their way into the city. Incapacitated by medicine he took to loosen his bowels (the general seems to have believed that a bullet would do less damage to an empty stomach), General Twiggs was unable to direct his division personally in the morning demonstration that was to draw attention away from Worth's advance south and west of the city.¹⁶³ Taylor therefore appointed Garland to lead the advance, and instructed the officer to make a demonstration on the Mexican right and to capture some of the enemy's redoubts if he could do so with few losses.¹⁶⁴ The Americans

¹⁶¹ Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 93; Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico*, 191; Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 1:133.

¹⁶² Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 128; For his reliability, and for Taylor's limitations concerning tactical knowledge and the martial art, see Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, 373; And Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 64; McWhiney noted, citing the teachings of Mahan at the United States Military Academy and the martial doctrine of Napoleon, then available in print, that Taylor's decision to divide his forces ran counter to the inherited wisdom of the military art that cadets received at West Point; see McWhiney, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, 1:65; Bauer wrote that Taylor's plan was "bold" and "imaginative," indeed, "so uncharacteristic of Taylor as to suggest it was authored by [Captain William Wallace Smith] Bliss," one of Taylor's lieutenants; see Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 93.

¹⁶³ John R. Kenly, *Memoirs of a Maryland Volunteer: War with Mexico, In the Years 1846-7-8* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1873), 119.

¹⁶⁴ Paraphrased from Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 103.

formed on the plain before Monterrey and just out of range of the Mexican artillery. Eight hundred strong, they advanced in columns toward their objective on the Mexican right.¹⁶⁵ But Garland seems to have misinterpreted his orders, believing that Taylor wished for an assault – not merely a demonstration – and after drawing heavy direct and enfilading fire from the Mexican forts and artillery redoubts, elements of the First and Third U.S. Infantry Regiments, along with volunteers from Maryland and the District of Columbia, dashed for the city streets of East Monterrey.¹⁶⁶ In the midst of heavy street fighting the U.S. infantry encountered a concealed Mexican artillery battery, which unleashed a devastating fire. Mexican soldiers converted adobe homes into fortresses and rifle pits; their sharpshooters fired from the rooftops. Musket and artillery fire produced a blanket of smoke that engulfed street and soldier alike, veiled friend from foe, and created suffocating and invisible conditions for close-quarter, urban warfare.¹⁶⁷ Mexican guns raked the Americans, who fell in droves. Wrote Meade, of action on the right, “the slaughter here was terrific.”¹⁶⁸

In that first hour, with five officers (four trained at West Point) fallen, and with the two infantry regiments nearly “cut to pieces,” the fate of the great struggle, which had assumed an intensity and scale far grander than the commanding general’s original intent, seemed to hang in the balance. Taylor ordered Bragg’s artillery company forward

¹⁶⁵ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 95; Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 103-109.

¹⁶⁶ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 95; Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico*, 194.

¹⁶⁷ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 95; Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 107; Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 29; Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:251; Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico*, 194-195.

¹⁶⁸ Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 1:135.

to support the infantry.¹⁶⁹ The men and twenty-four horses of light artillery came across Monterrey's northern plain at a gallop, drawing enfilading fire from the Mexican Citadel ("the Black Fort"), Fort Teneria, and two additional redoubts as they crossed the mile-wide field.¹⁷⁰ And so, on the afternoon of September 21st – his twenty-sixth birthday – Reynolds found himself engaged in Company E's fight against the Mexicans in desperate street and house-to-house action. Enemy fire did not slacken. Solid and grape shot passed through soft adobe huts. Lieutenant French, an officer who served with Reynolds and commanded one of Bragg's six-pounders, recalled later that enemy fire and the rubble from the adobe filled the air with lime and powder. Visibility was limited.¹⁷¹ One Maryland volunteer recounted that Reynolds and his gun "encountered a rough reception."¹⁷² Indeed, Bragg's artilleryists deployed tremendous skill to maneuver the guns along the narrow streets under fire.

In the end, however, the Mexican resistance proved too fierce. With men falling around them, and with the battery's guns ineffective in such tight quarters, lieutenants Reynolds, French, and Thomas worked desperately to limber their guns and escape. The Mexicans, attempting to cripple the guns and kill the artilleryists, took deliberate aim at the horses pulling the caissons and the artillery pieces. Some of the horses fell, their entrails dragging along in the dirt, and Reynolds and Samuel French detached the

¹⁶⁹ Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 113; Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 1:135; Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 29; McWhiney, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, 1:67; Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 40-41.

¹⁷⁰ Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 113-114.

¹⁷¹ Samuel G. French, *Two Wars: An Autobiography, Mexican War; War Between the States, a Diary; Reconstruction Period, His Experience; Incidents, Reminiscences, Etc.* (Nashville: Confederate Veteran, 1901), 62.

¹⁷² Kenley, *Memoirs of a Maryland Volunteer*, 111.

horses from the artillery equipment and shoved them aside to save what they could.¹⁷³ One infantry officer advancing past Bragg's battered unit of light artillery described the outfit as "a perfect wreck," and the scene he rendered is conspicuous for its gore and devastation: "a few of [Bragg's] artillerymen, and more than a dozen of his horses, were down in the same spot, making the ground about the guns slippery with their gasped foam and blood."¹⁷⁴ Still, Bragg's artillerists worked with cool and calm to save the harnesses and materials from the disabled crews while drawing a hot fire.¹⁷⁵ Only the advance of Ohio volunteers spared the artillery battery from what might have proven total annihilation and loss. Writing some time after the battle to his sister Jane, Reynolds shed additional light on action that he characterized as a blundered or botched attack: four guns and their caissons deployed to relieve the infantry, but only one could fire, and so three returned across the plain under fire; his horse had been hit, though not fatally, in the action on the twenty-first, and by the battle's end the battery had suffered twenty-two horses and fourteen men "disabled."¹⁷⁶ Reynolds's battery saw limited action for the remainder of the fight at Monterrey.

The ill-fated artillery attack in which Reynolds participated fared much worse than General Worth's advance and hook assault to the south and west of Monterrey, which, in the estimation of one historian, "made excellent use of [Worth's] total force,"

¹⁷³ French, *Two Wars*, 62.

¹⁷⁴ Luther Giddings, *Sketches of the Campaign in Northern Mexico, in Eighteen Hundred Forty-Six and Seven, by an Officer of the First Regiment of Ohio Volunteers* (New York: George P. Putnam and Company, 1853), 168.

¹⁷⁵ Giddings, *Sketches of the Campaign in Northern Mexico*, 168.

¹⁷⁶ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, dated 6 December 1846, quoted in Joseph G. Rosengarten, *Reynolds Memorial: Addresses Delivered before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania upon the Occasion of the Presentation of a Portrait of Maj.-Gen. John F. Reynolds, March 8, 1880* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1880), 13-14.

and succeeded in capturing Mexican redoubts upon the heights and severing the Saltillo road with few casualties.¹⁷⁷ The next morning, American troops under General Worth fought their way through the town to its center, from house to house, through gardens, even occupying a bakery to feed themselves along the way.¹⁷⁸

Historians debate whether Taylor's conduct of the battle was to credit for the ultimate success of his army against the Mexican defenders.¹⁷⁹ Dishman has offered the clearest and soberest view, noting that Taylor's results at Monterrey were mixed, and that whatever his accomplishments, the commanding general's performance was tainted with the botched assaults of the 21st. Bragg's artillery battery in which Reynolds served had suffered heavily. Garland's failed attempt to enter east Monterrey, a consequence of poor communication and coordination from Taylor, resulted in the deaths of many West Point-trained officers. Indeed, and as Dishman has noted, the fighting on September 21st was the bloodiest fight in the history of the United States Military Academy to that date. Adding to the setback, in Dishman's view, was that for his losses in professional officers,

¹⁷⁷ Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 27; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 94.

¹⁷⁸ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 185-186.

¹⁷⁹ Woodworth writes that many in the United States—but the Polk administration especially—thought Taylor could, and should have, achieved a more decisive victory at Monterrey, and that the rank and file of the army “believed they had been cheated out of a complete victory.” Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 187; Hsieh has characterized the American victory at Monterrey as “messy”; See Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 62; Justin Harvey Smith, in his classic history of the war, offers the most glaring critique of Taylor: “So far as one can see,” he concluded, “nothing saved Taylor from a disaster that would have meant the ruin of his army but the poltroonery of one man, Ampudia”; See Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:501n10; Bauer, in his history of the conflict, noted, “Taylor’s attack as as poorly executed as any action by American forces during the war outside California. He issued ambiguous orders; committed units piecemeal, without apparent plan or coordination; sent unsupported infantry against artillery; and exposed large masses to the fire of the Mexican forts”; See Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 96.

Taylor “had little to show for their sacrifice.”¹⁸⁰ For his part, Grant remembered the attack as “ill-conceived, or badly executed,” and Meade described the assaults on Monterrey in Reynolds’s sector as “disastrous.”¹⁸¹ Though the attack fared poorly, Reynolds had proven his physical courage in the heat of combat, just as he had proven his efficiency and effectiveness at manning Bragg’s artillery. For his meritorious conduct Reynolds received a brevet promotion to captain.¹⁸²

On September 24th, the Mexicans raised a white flag and dispatched commissioners to negotiate surrender terms with the Americans. On September 25, 1846, they surrendered Monterrey formally. General Taylor acquiesced to charitable and flexible terms: the Mexican soldiers under Ampudia’s command kept their small arms, the Mexican army retained six batteries of its light artillery, cavalry kept their horses, and each soldier was allotted twenty-one rounds of ammunition.¹⁸³ For their part, the Mexicans agreed to evacuate the city in its entirety, and the prized Citadel position, and to retire to a negotiated line beyond the Rinconada Pass.¹⁸⁴ Both sides agreed to abstain from hostilities for eight weeks, a period of time that would allow men in both armies to recover and receive supplies, unless either government moved to terminate the armistice.¹⁸⁵ Upon taking possession of the Citadel, the Americans fired a twenty-eight gun salute (one gun for every state of the Union), and a band played “Yankee Doodle.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 217-219, quotation at p. 219.

¹⁸¹ Grant, *Memoirs*, 73; Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 1:135.

¹⁸² Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. from its Establishment, in 1802, to 1890*, 2:90.

¹⁸³ Paraphrased from Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 198; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 99; And Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 147.

¹⁸⁴ Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 198.

¹⁸⁵ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 187; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 100.

¹⁸⁶ Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico*, 215.

The Mexican prisoners aroused the pity of Sam Grant as they recessed from Monterrey; for Democrats in the nation's capital, however, pity was in short supply.¹⁸⁷

In Washington President Polk did nothing outwardly to diminish the limited success of General Zachary Taylor's army at Monterrey – the press carried the news of the American victory with tremendous enthusiasm – inwardly, however, and in the privacy of his diary, the President fumed: “[General] Taylor,” confided the President, “violated his express orders” in agreeing to an armistice with Mexican forces.¹⁸⁸ “He had the enemy in his power,” Polk continued, “and should have taken them prisoners, deprived them of their arms, discharged them on their parole of honour, and preserved the advantage which he had obtained by pushing on without delay further into the country.”¹⁸⁹ In the view of Polk and his cabinet, Taylor had committed a grave error, though it seems reasonable to question whether such criticisms were legitimate.¹⁹⁰

And so, in time, having escaped with its arms, its horses, and some ammunition, the Mexican army would fight with Reynolds, and with what remained of Taylor's Army of Occupation in northern Mexico, another day.

A brevet at Buena Vista

¹⁸⁷ Grant, *Memoirs*, 76.

¹⁸⁸ Paraphrased from Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 187; And Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 149; Polk, *Diary*, 2:181.

¹⁸⁹ Polk, *Diary*, 2:181.

¹⁹⁰ “It was a great mistake,” wrote Polk, “in [General] Taylor to agree to an armistice”; see Polk, *Diary*, 2:181; In point of fact, Taylor possessed no real advantage to press against his adversary. His army was outnumbered at the beginning of the fight, and it endured significant losses; see Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 199; Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 187; and Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 30.

By December of 1846, Reynolds had acquired considerable field experience as an officer, but his true test—and his vindication—came in February at Buena Vista, when the U.S. Army innovation that was the light artillery brought its mobility and versatility to bear against numerically superior Mexican adversaries who threatened to scatter Taylor’s army and cut it down in retreat. As at Monterrey, the Americans faced a perilous challenge, and, momentarily, stared straight into the eyes of defeat. But, as Hsieh has written, “the inherent strength of the American position,” and “the excellence of the American field artillery”—not to mention luck—resulted, once more, in a victory for Taylor’s men, and yet another brevet promotion for Reynolds.¹⁹¹

The Battle of Buena Vista occurred, in part, because General Winfield Scott, Commanding General of the U.S. Army, had in October submitted plans to the War Department for an invasion of Mexico City, which required the siphoning of troops from Taylor’s Army of Occupation following the Battle of Monterrey and transformed Taylor’s outfit—to which Reynolds and the Third U.S. Artillery were still attached—from a confident, if battered, two-time battlefield champion into a ripe plum for Santa Anna and his men.¹⁹² Following its losses through re-allocation, Taylor’s army could count only seven thousand men, of whom eight hundred were U.S. Army regulars.¹⁹³ Taylor, who resented Scott, did not take well to this arrangement, which went into effect in

¹⁹¹ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 63; Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. from its Establishment, in 1802, to 1890*, 2:90.

¹⁹² Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the American Profession of Arms*, 141; Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 30; Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 195.

¹⁹³ Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 202-203.

January, and openly defied the commanding general's order that he station the remnant of his Army of Occupation at Monterrey; instead, Taylor kept his army near Saltillo.¹⁹⁴

At San Louis Potosí the Mexican commander worked to prepare his army for another battle. His objective was to drive the Americans from northern Mexico, a move that neither Taylor nor Scott had anticipated (indeed, dispatches that detailed the planned invasion of Mexico City via Veracruz had been intercepted by Mexican vaqueros, and Scott predicted, not unreasonably, that Santa Anna would attempt to oppose him at Veracruz).¹⁹⁵ A tactical victory for the Mexicans against Taylor might well have dashed American hopes for victory in Mexico and carried strategic, as well as political, implications. On the home front, the Whigs had gained a narrow majority in the House of Representatives in the autumnal midterm elections, strengthening Polk's political opposition and empowering anti-war sentiment.¹⁹⁶ A defeat for Taylor may well have eroded support for Polk's war, already slipping, all the more.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Paraphrased from Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 217-218; Wrote Reynolds in a letter to his brother on 5 February 1847, from Saltillo, "General [Taylor] is perfectly disgusted with the part assigned to him here ... he certainly never expected the treatment he has now [received] at [the hands of the administration] withdrawing all his regular troops and the greater part of the volunteers to go upon a distant and dangerous expedition and leave him behind with a small force scarcely sufficient to hold the country he has conquered – this however is not the first instance of ingratitude they have been guilty of and we may expect with reason that it will not be the last"; see letter of John Fulton Reynolds to James Reynolds, Saltillo, Mexico, 5 February 1847, *RFP*.

¹⁹⁵ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 218; Reynolds feared that Santa Anna would put the captured dispatches to good use. See letter of John Fulton Reynolds to James Reynolds, Monterrey, Mexico, 30 January 1847, *RFP*; Reynolds also confirmed, less than one week later, that initial intelligence suggested Santa Anna had departed San Louis Potosí for Veracruz; see letter of John Fulton Reynolds to James Reynolds, Saltillo, Mexico, 5 February 1847, *RFP*.

¹⁹⁶ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 213.

¹⁹⁷ Greenberg, citing mounting fatalities, and soldiers' correspondence with the home front which found occasional publication in local newspapers depicting deplorable conditions in Mexico, has perceived a subtle, but decided, shift in anti-war opinion in October 1846; see Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 129.

Santa Anna's army numbered twenty thousand men—including troops under General Ampudia, who had violated the terms of their parole following the Mexican surrender at Monterrey—and he moved northward from San Louis Potosí to strike Taylor's force. Meanwhile, Taylor had moved his army south of Saltillo to a valley known as La Angostura, and just south of the Hacienda San Juan de la Buena Vista. The position was an enviable one for any army that needed to hold ground against a numerically superior force: to its east and west, the gorge was flanked by mountains, streams, and plateaus too formidable for large quantities of troops. Any flanking maneuver over this terrain risked eroding the soil, which was not traversable for wagons or artillery.¹⁹⁸ Taylor posted his army, which then numbered approximately 4,500—of whom none were regular U.S. Army infantry—in this gorge.¹⁹⁹

In the mid-morning hours of February 22, Santa Anna's army arrayed itself before Taylor's position, and the Americans saw for the first time the vast expanse of the Mexican force with its banners and lances "sparkling in the sun" to their front.²⁰⁰ Around 11:00 a.m., Santa Anna demanded the surrender of Taylor's army, which the American commander refused, though his forces were outnumbered by nearly four-to-one odds.²⁰¹ The Mexican commander then expended a few rounds of artillery (doubtless to put fear into the hearts of Taylor's untested volunteers), but these were

¹⁹⁸ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 200; Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:385.

¹⁹⁹ Accounts of Taylor's troop strength vary. Lewis tabulates Taylor's army at 4,700 in *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 200; Dishman estimates Taylor's force to have numbered 4,500; see Dishman *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 203; Woodworth confirms that Taylor's force "numbered fewer than 4,800 men" in *Manifest Destinies*, 220.

²⁰⁰ Quotation from James Henry Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista: With the Operations of the "Army of Occupation" for One Month* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1848), 33.

²⁰¹ Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista*, 37; French, *Two Wars*, 77; The Mexican army approximated twenty thousand men; see Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 45-46.

harmless, and he momentarily engaged American infantry on both flanks to probe the strength of Taylor's position.²⁰² It seems likely, as Smith has written, that Santa Anna would have preferred not to fight at Buena Vista—the Mexican general later likened the American position south of Saltillo to the pass at Thermopylae defended by the ancient Spartans—and operate strategically on more open ground, but the impression of an American retreat toward Saltillo had compelled the Mexican commander to give chase.²⁰³ With his army then before the Americans, Santa Anna gave an impassioned address to his troops, imploring them to fight nobly. Turning to the barbaric invaders from the North, Santa Anna informed the Americans that his forces outnumbered their own, and that they were at his mercy. Having refused to surrender with honor, Santa Anna crowed, the Americans would be slaughtered on the morrow.²⁰⁴ Mexican bands serenaded their men in the early evening hours, and notes from their instruments ascended to the American camp on the heights.²⁰⁵ Dusk turned to a wet and cold February night.²⁰⁶ At dawn, and good on his word, Santa Anna attacked.

Reynolds and his fellow artilleryman Sam French had passed a very cold night “bundling” together on the eve of the fight; they nearly froze.²⁰⁷ Nourished with some ham and bread, however, Reynolds, despite a possible fever, was ready for battle on the

²⁰² Of Taylor's small volunteer army, only Mississippians under the command of Jefferson Davis, and a small number of Texas Rangers, had been engaged in previous combat; See Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 220; Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 203; Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista*, 39-41.

²⁰³ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:385.

²⁰⁴ Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista*, 46-47.

²⁰⁵ McWhiney, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, 1:80.

²⁰⁶ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:388.

²⁰⁷ “In all my varied experience in life I cannot recall a night when I came so near perishing from the cold,” wrote French. “There was nothing severely frozen, only the wind carried all the heat from our bodies. When we got up I could not keep my teeth quiet”; see French, *Two Wars*, 78.

morning of February 23.²⁰⁸ Kept to the rear of the American front where he could offer mobile artillery support, Reynolds saw great action throughout the day's fight, and quickly shook off whatever cold he had suffered the night before.

Ordered from his reserve position to the plateau in support, Reynolds possessed a field of vision to witness Santa Anna's assault on the morning of the 23rd. The Mexican lines formed at 8:00 a.m., Reynolds recounted to his sister, Jane, in a later letter, and "beyond the brow of a slight ridge," which shielded their infantry from American artillery fire. After feigning an attack along the length of the road that ran north-south through the gorge, Santa Anna's men pivoted and hit the American left. Their formations made an impression on the brevet captain: "I never in my life beheld a more beautiful sight," wrote Reynolds, "their gay uniforms, numberless pennants, standards and colors, streaming in the Sun [sic] shone out in their 'pride and pomp'" (original emphasis).²⁰⁹ With an artillerist's eye that beheld, in one suspended moment, the still, crystalline, and awesome beauty of an army arrayed in battle formation apart from the ruination, mutilation, and gore that would doubtless ensue as that army entered into fire, Reynolds detailed the Mexican formations, which vastly outnumbered the Americans, for his sister: "[The Mexican] line appeared three times as long as ours and 4 [sic] times deep – besides their second line in reserve."²¹⁰ The Mexican legions advanced against the elevated American position, and encountered opposition from Kentucky and

²⁰⁸ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 204; Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 39; Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*.

²⁰⁹ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*.

²¹⁰ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*.

Arkansas volunteer cavalry, in addition to volunteer infantry from Illinois and Indiana.²¹¹ Joining the volunteer cavalry and infantry along the plateau were elements of the Third Artillery, Company E, belonging to T.W. Sherman, who had ascended to command of Reynolds's company in the wake of Bragg's re-assignment to Company C on February 14.²¹² The excitement that came with battle made Reynolds forget the chills from the past night. And for a moment the sun shone so brightly, and so intensely, that Reynolds's mind turned to Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz.²¹³

Representing Company E at the battlefield on the plateau with their guns were George Thomas and Sam French, who commanded a six-pounder and a twelve-pound howitzer, respectively.²¹⁴ The Mexican advance put some of the American infantry to flight, and French took a severe wound in the right thigh while commanding his howitzer. Unable to walk, French oversaw the operation of his guns mounted to his horse.²¹⁵ Meanwhile, Bragg had led some of his guns across ravines and around boulders from the American right, the western flank, and into the vicinity to support Company E.²¹⁶ Bragg's field pieces "did good execution" on the Mexican advance, which faltered in

²¹¹ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 206.

²¹² Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 36.

²¹³ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*; One participant, and an early historian of the battle, chronicled the vista as battle was set to unfold on the morning of February 23: "The morning was unusually bright and clear; the sunlight seemed to cover with flashing diamonds the burnished weapons and appointments of the Mexicans; while a cool and invigorating breeze displayed every flag, and sported with the gaudy and fluttering pennons of what appeared to be a countless forest of lances"; see Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista*, 56-57.

²¹⁴ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 46; Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista*, 53.

²¹⁵ French, *Two Wars*, 80.

²¹⁶ Paraphrased from Dishman, *A Perfect Gibraltar*, 204; Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 33; McWhiney, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, 1:80-81.

the face of heated artillery fire.²¹⁷ But the Mexicans enjoyed greater strength in numbers, and after their initial repulse, renewed the attack, swarming the American center-left – what Reynolds described in his March 1st letter as the fixture of the American position – enveloping it, and threatening the Americans from the rear.²¹⁸

As the situation on the American left grew perilous and the battle evolved, Reynolds deployed his guns in a masterful fashion that pointed to the promise of the light artillery. First, Reynolds went forward from his position in relief to face the attack on the American left, and to relieve his friend, French, who had refused to be taken from the field and put in an ambulance.²¹⁹ The battle raged and whirled. Before long, Mexican cavalry under General Torrejón swept around the American left completely and dashed for the Buean Vista hacienda.²²⁰ Reynolds gave hot pursuit.

The artillerists rushed their pieces and caissons at a two-mile gallop to support the wagon trains to the rear of the hacienda, which were threatened by Torrejón's mounted lancers.²²¹ Santa Anna's objective, from the first, was to turn the American army by taking its rear; he believed, not unreasonably, that the presence of cavalry to their backs would cause undisciplined American volunteers to flee.²²² This would result in the massacre of American forces that Santa Anna portended on February 22.²²³

²¹⁷ McWhiney, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, 1:82.

²¹⁸ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*; Smith, too, noted the importance of this position for the Americans; see Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:391.

²¹⁹ French, *Two Wars*, 80.

²²⁰ Paraphrased from Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 208.

²²¹ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 40.

²²² Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:393.

²²³ Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista*, 46-47.

Reynolds and French worked desperately to repulse the Mexican attack at the just outside the hacienda.²²⁴ Burdened with an inexperienced gun crew—Reynolds noted in his correspondence that his gunners were new recruits and very “raw,” having never seen combat, and having received very little drill—Reynolds sat near the ammunition chests mounted to the caissons and prepared the artillery rounds for firing himself (he also took great care cutting fuses for the shells).²²⁵ Ammunition then available to light artillery batteries in ammunition chests came both factory-ready to shoot and also in need of customization and assembly (the technical designations for shell types were *fixed*, *semi-fixed*, and *separate loading rounds*), dependent upon battlefield conditions and tactical necessity, and so expertise, as well as care, in loading and preparing shells for firing bore as much import as ensuring a round found its mark.²²⁶ While Reynolds prepared the shells, French directed the firing of the artillery pieces. Eventually, the Mexicans retreated, and Reynolds ordered the guns limbered up, and his team of twelve

²²⁴ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 208.

²²⁵ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*; French, *Two Wars*, 80; The inexperience of a gun crew might have presented grave problems for a less confident officer than Reynolds. As Dillon, Jr. has written, “heavy responsibilities rested on the individual gun commander, or gunner,” who controlled the artillery piece, and aimed and sighted it in battle; see Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 14; A caisson, carrying two ammunition chests, accompanied each cannon; See Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 13.

²²⁶ Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 16-17; The Department of War, *Ordnance Manual for the Use of the Officers of the United States Army*, 184-202, 228; For more on artillery munitions in the Mexican War era, see Charles P. Kingsbury, *An Elementary Treatise on Artillery and Infantry, adapted to the Service of the United States. Designed for the Use of Cadets of the U.S. Military Academy, and for the Officers of the Independent Companies of Volunteers and Militia* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1849), 78-87.

horses, crew, and six-pounders (and their carriages) pursued the retreating enemy at full speed.²²⁷

Later in the afternoon, Santa Anna managed one last coordinated assault against the withering American position on the center of the plateau, which had dwindled as the battle raged on the American left flank and near the hacienda. Twelve thousand Mexican soldiers and a battery of eight-pounders ground into the Americans.²²⁸ Artillerists John Paul Jones O'Brien and George Thomas positioned their tubes and poured forth canister and grape shot into the advancing hordes, but the weight of the Mexican attack was too great, and both units ceded precious ground, slowly, and methodically, using the recoil of their guns to pace the withdrawal.²²⁹ Here the fighting was desperate and deadly.²³⁰ Gunners gave up any hope of aiming; the brass guns fired whatever canister the crews could load and discharge at point-blank range.²³¹ O'Brien's gunners all perished. The lieutenant himself hobbled away wounded, having lost two horses shot beneath him, and his third was wounded and bleeding.²³² The Mexican forces captured O'Brien's six-pounders, and, in the words of one of the war's great chroniclers, "swept" the Americans "on at a run."²³³ All seemed lost.

²²⁷ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*; French, *Two Wars*, 80.

²²⁸ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 210.

²²⁹ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 48-49; Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:394.

²³⁰ Wrote Carleton, "[The fighting] being very close, the destruction of life, caused by their three pieces, was immense"; see Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista*, 109.

²³¹ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 49.

²³² Paraphrased from Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:394; Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 49; Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista*, 113.

²³³ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:394.

Fearing a total collapse, and with no fresh infantry available, Taylor directed his light artillery to the plateau to stabilize the American center.²³⁴ Accordingly, Braxton Bragg moved his guns to the sound of heaving fighting. Withholding their fire until the enemy advanced to within yards, Bragg's crews unleashed a devastating canister fire.²³⁵ Reynolds also arrived with his artillery on the plateau, and was placed alongside Bragg's guns.²³⁶ Thomas's gunners fought on.²³⁷ The Americans had deployed their light field guns to slow the Mexican attack in the nick of time, and together these pieces achieved devastating success: Bragg's guns "belched forth a storm of iron and lead, which prostrated everything in its front."²³⁸ In time, what remained of the infantry joined the American artillery atop the plateau to halt the Mexican attack in its tracks.²³⁹

"We ... succeeded in repelling them," Reynolds put the matter succinctly in his letter home.²⁴⁰ But the simplicity with which Reynolds described the success of the American artillery at Buena Vista at this critical afternoon juncture suppresses the intensity of the fight that occurred on the plateau, and shrouds the reality that his work ultimately helped to save the American position. The battle, it had seemed to Reynolds, had lasted for eight uninterrupted hours.²⁴¹ In that time, his unit, much like the artillery under Bragg's command, had traversed miles of uneven, rocky, and cavernous terrain. It

²³⁴ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 210.

²³⁵ McWhiney, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, 1:84.

²³⁶ Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista*, 116; Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*.

²³⁷ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 49.

²³⁸ Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista*, 115-116.

²³⁹ Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 34.

²⁴⁰ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*.

²⁴¹ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*.

delivered ordnance with great effect under enemy fire. More impressive still, it had leveled—literally and figuratively—the numerical advantage enjoyed by the Mexicans at the onset of the battle and reversed that advantage, proving the value of mobile artillery and interior lines of defense against mass infantry assaults.

Even so, Reynolds admitted, the Battle of Buena Vista had been the “greatest battle yet.” He estimated American losses at seven hundred killed and wounded, and Mexican losses at over twice that number at two thousand.²⁴² The fight for Monterrey, which at the time had seemed intense and important in Reynolds’s view, paled in comparison to what the American officer faced in the February sun, rain, and hail at Buena Vista in the daylong battle.²⁴³ Americans who remembered the battle in the twilight of their lives noted the fighting at Buena Vista for its intensity, desperation, and loss of life. Abner Doubleday, who would serve under Reynolds at Gettysburg – indeed, who would momentarily succeed him in command after Reynolds’s death on the battlefield, wrote sometime around 1890 that he remembered seeing artillerymen Reynolds, Bragg, and Thomas at Buena Vista following the desperate fighting on the 23rd, “leaning upon their guns,” and “surrounded upon all sides by the dead.” Wrote Doubleday, solemnly, “it was a picture I shall never forget.”²⁴⁴ Justin Harvey Smith described the outcome of the battle as nothing short of “extraordinary”; the Americans, who had begun the battle “in flight,” in the end were its victors. “Marred by mistakes

²⁴² Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*; General Taylor reported 267 men killed in the February 23 fight—including 28 officers—and 456 wounded, along with 23 missing; see Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 210.

²⁴³ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*.

²⁴⁴ Doubleday, *My Life in the Old Army*, 113.

and failures,” Smith notes, “[the battle] exhibited even more strikingly both skill and moral grandeur.”²⁴⁵ Lewis puts the matter well: “perhaps because the Americans came so very close to losing the Buena Vista battle,” she writes, “they tended to regard it as a monumental achievement.”²⁴⁶

So, too, did Americans on the home front, and Reynolds achieved some celebrity as an army hero. After-action reports praised Reynolds for his masterful handling of the light artillery.²⁴⁷ *Niles’ National Register* carried similar reports of the artillery’s excellent showing. The artillery, wrote the correspondent, wrought “such carnage in the ranks of the enemy, as to make his columns roll to and fro, like ships upon the billows.”²⁴⁸ Significantly, the correspondent, who was in fact a friend of Reynolds’s from West Point, depicted the artillerist’s performance in glowing terms: in one place, Reynolds’s six-pounder delivered “fierce grape”; in another section of the article, readers learned that “Reynolds’s artillery, beautifully served, hailed the grape and canister upon [the Mexicans] with terrible effect.”²⁴⁹ Reynolds confessed to his brother in private correspondence, for fear of embarrassment, that he did not wish for the author’s identity to come to light.²⁵⁰ Elsewhere behind the scenes, John Reynolds, Esq. inquired about the possibility of a second brevet for his son with James Buchanan.²⁵¹

²⁴⁵ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:395.

²⁴⁶ Lewis, *Trailing Clouds of Glory*, 211.

²⁴⁷ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 43-44.

²⁴⁸ “Battle of Buena Vista,” *Niles’ National Register* 72 (10 April 1847): 85.

²⁴⁹ Reynolds identified the author of the Buena Vista piece as Lt. Kingsbury of the Ordnance Department, “a particular and intimate friend of mine”; see letter of John Fulton Reynolds to James L. Reynolds, Esq., Camp at Buena Vista, Mexico, 23 May 1847, *RFP*; “Battle of Buena Vista,” *Niles’ National Register* 72 (10 April 1847): 85.

²⁵⁰ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to James L. Reynolds, Esq., Camp at Buena Vista, Mexico, 23 May 1847, *RFP*; Paraphrased from Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 44.

²⁵¹ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 46.

Reynolds's correspondence with family in the aftermath of the Battle of Buena Vista places his approbation of General Taylor and his criticism of President Polk in stark relief, a fact that suggests further the malleability and pliability of political allegiance in the Old Army among junior officers, and a reality that underscores the nascent professionalization and sense of identity that came with army culture. Flush with confidence in the American profession of arms that had scored successive victories at Fort Brown, Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Monterrey, and Buena Vista, and intensely proud of his commander, and of the army in which he served, Reynolds noted the significance of the American victory at Buena Vista. While it might not prove to be the ultimate battle, Reynolds noted, the American victory was significant. Santa Anna's men had made a desperate gamble to sweep the Army of Occupation from northern Mexico. But "Rough and Ready was too much for [Santa Anna]," Reynolds emphasized, "and [the Mexicans] must by this time be convinced," he continued, that it was "useless to struggle against the Anglo Saxon."²⁵² Reynolds took the opportunity to express his distaste for how General Scott and President Polk's administration had treated his commander, and even voiced his belief that Taylor would be elected the next President of the United States.²⁵³ In May, Reynolds wrote again, and in favorable terms, of General Taylor, this time to his brother James. Taylor struck Reynolds as a perfect Democrat in habit and appearance, wrote the officer, though on certain political questions – namely the bank – Taylor sided with Whigs. But chief among Taylor's virtues was his character: Taylor was "perfectly honest," it seemed to Reynolds, and

²⁵² Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*.

²⁵³ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*.

“honorable in all his public duties, which is more than can be said of many of the political candidates.”²⁵⁴ Considering that Reynolds doubtless knew of his patron James Buchanan’s presidential ambitions – Buchanan lost the 1848 Democratic nomination to Lewis Cass – this was quite a statement.²⁵⁵

By September, Reynolds had had quite enough of military occupation in Mexico. Operations had shifted chiefly to the theater of General Winfield Scott in the South, where American troops threatened to storm Mexico City. But in the North the situation was very different. Much as they had at Corpus Christi, Taylor’s men suffered from monotonous inactivity. “Who would believe,” wrote Reynolds,

that I am now twenty – I am almost ashamed to write it, however, it is not my fault, so here goes – Seven [sic] years old! Who would think that I have now been in this county more than two years! Two years in the best part of a man’s life, I can hardly realize all this, yet, they are melancholy facts. I should not regret it probably so much if one could see any reasonable limit to the period which is yet to be spent *so uselessly and unsatisfactorily in this barbarous and un-Christian country* (emphasis added).²⁵⁶

Much of Reynolds’s frustration was rooted in the hope—which seemed fleeting—of an armistice that might end the war and allow him to return to the United States.

Winfield Scott captured Mexico City after the Battle of Chapultepec, entering the city plaza on September 14, 1847. The war, however, had not ended, and Americans doubted whether they could secure a lasting and meaningful peace with an unpredictable (and unstable) Mexican regime.²⁵⁷ The failure to reach an armistice

²⁵⁴ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to James L. Reynolds, Esq., Camp at Buena Vista, Mexico, 23 May 1847, *RFP*.

²⁵⁵ Buchanan finished with 55 votes at the Democratic Convention to Lewis Cass’s 125 on the first ballot; see Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 300-301.

²⁵⁶ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp near Buena Vista, Mexico, 26 September 1847, *RFP*.

²⁵⁷ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 276-292.

brought Reynolds to despair and offered an occasion for the artillerist to voice his distrust of Mexican diplomacy with the chauvinism one might expect from an army officer: “I will always look on the bright side of the picture,” he wrote to his sister, Jane, “and hope that some will yet turn up unexpectedly and arrange our difficulties with Mexico” (original emphasis). Still, Reynolds reasoned, it was difficult to negotiate with a nation under the leadership of scoundrels who refused to honor international law: “it [is] rather hard to deal with a nation whose Generals at the head of it[s] Army, lie unqualifiedly and without hesitation, in their intercourse with ours” (original emphasis). This seemed to Reynolds typical of the Mexican temperament, and it was one feature that distinguished the Mexican nation from other nations that were the inheritors and custodians of Anglo, or Franco, law and military custom: “Where other nations would be disgraced” by false armistices, Reynolds wrote, “[the Mexicans] think they have done something very smart, by their wilful deceit practiced in relations.” Americans, in contrast, and especially those trained in international law, operated according to established customs within the bounds of just war. American officers, Reynolds wrote, performed their duties with a moral obligation to the honor and welfare of the nation: “we suppose the honor of the nation,” he declared, when an officer gives his word in matters of diplomacy or military negotiations.²⁵⁸

Diplomacy between the two nations ground to a halt in the winter months. Reynolds’s frustrations doubtless continued. But in due time, the Americans forced a negotiated peace with the Mexican government, and on February 22, Polk submitted the

²⁵⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp near Buena Vista, Mexico, 26 September 1847, *RFP*.

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to the Senate, where it garnered sufficient votes for ratification.²⁵⁹ The Mexican-American War was over.

Taking stock: Reynolds, the Old Army, and the success of American arms in Mexico

Wayne Hsieh has suggested, of historians' interpretations of the Mexican American War in the historical present, that describing the success of American arms in Mexico as inevitable is somewhat anachronistic, and that this false sense of inevitability flows from the tendency of scholars to argue—as one did rather famously in explicit terms—that the Mexican-American War was a “rehearsal for conflict” and mere preparation for the American Civil War, which proved American military might on a much grander scale.²⁶⁰ In 1846, however, the picture was not so clear, and enlightened thinkers and students of war felt no certainty about the outcome of a prospective war with Mexico.

Excepting the Seminole Wars, which American military professionals discounted since their foe did not fight according to the conventions of traditional European armies, the mettle of the United States Army had received no significant test since its annihilation (its performance at the Battle of New Orleans excepted) at the hands of the British in the War of 1812.²⁶¹ And in 1846, the U.S. Army was hardly poised to fare any

²⁵⁹ Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 291-294; Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 256-261.

²⁶⁰ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 54-55; Alfred Hoyt Bill, *Rehearsal for Conflict: The War with Mexico, 1846-1848* (New York: Knopf, 1947).

²⁶¹ Watson has noted that some American officers, hopeful for professional advancement, discounted military service against the Seminole Native American Indians and, in the hope it might bolster their army careers, welcomed a conventional war against Mexicans; See Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, 394.

better.²⁶² The Mexican army, in contrast, featured “an elaborate military organization” and was estimated to have fielded some thirty-two thousand men under arms in 1845.²⁶³ How might the U.S. Army perform in a war against Mexico? The British press looked upon the United States and Mexico with predictable, and measured, contempt. The London-based *Times*, for instance, noted that “neither of the belligerents possesses an army at all proportioned to the vast extent of the operations necessary to accomplish any practical result.”²⁶⁴ Dignitaries foreign and domestic viewed the Mexican Army with respect as an organized European-style field army. Calderón de la Barca, the Spanish Minister at Washington in 1845, opined, “There are no better troops in the world, nor better drilled and armed, than the Mexicans.”²⁶⁵ Indeed, along with the Spanish minister, dignitaries from Prussia and Great Britain then in Washington portended an American military defeat in Mexico.²⁶⁶ Even Joel Roberts Poinsett, who signed Reynolds’s commission to the United States Military Academy as Secretary of War in 1837, and served as American Minister to Mexico for four years in the previous decade, admired the Mexican irregular cavalry.²⁶⁷ At best, enlightened minds disagreed on the certainty of American victory in a war against Mexico in 1846. At worst, they foretold an American military defeat.

²⁶² Winders has cited the ill-preparedness of the U.S. Army in 1846 in *Mr. Polk’s Army*, noting that the U.S. Army was forty percent under strength, too dispersed across numerous (seven) military departments, and at a low ebb not experienced since 1808; See Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 9.

²⁶³ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:156, 157.

²⁶⁴ *The Times*, 5 April 1845, quoted in Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 55.

²⁶⁵ Calderón de la Barca quoted in Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:106.

²⁶⁶ Phoebe Warren Tayloe and Winslow M. Watson, *In Memoriam: Benjamin Ogle Tayloe* (Washington, D.C.: Winslow M. Watson, 1872), 114.

²⁶⁷ Signed appointment of John Fulton Reynolds to the United States Military Academy, 30 June 1837, *RFP*; Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:440.

Through Reynolds's service in the artillery in that war the historian can perceive three important themes. First, the war illuminated American military professionalization and accountability and, in the case of Reynolds, proved that Old Army and West Point-trained officers were not always as political as some scholars have assumed. Second, and as Hsieh has argued, the war validated the professionalization of American arms.²⁶⁸ The technical education that Reynolds received at West Point, with its attendant military drill, enabled him and other artillerists to play decisive roles in achieving military victory in the war.²⁶⁹ Third, it demonstrated that professionally trained officers viewed themselves as superior to American volunteers, enlisted regulars, and their Mexican adversaries, but not along strictly racial lines, as some of the new social and political historians have supposed. In fact, the sense of superiority that shines

²⁶⁸ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 54-74; Wrote Reynolds's biographer, "military writers have been fond of making long lists of [Old Army] officers to prove how well the Mexican War trained them to fight the big one that followed. But the men from the Point did more immediate service by knocking out the old prejudice against the Academy"; See Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 47.

²⁶⁹ One contemporary, in his history of Taylor's campaign in northern Mexico, and noting the success of West Point in shaping American fortunes in war, wrote, In common with every candid observer of events in Mexico, I would cheerfully testify to the incalculable benefits derived by our country from its Military Academy. Not only did it give to the regular army nearly all its efficiency, but its advantages were realized to a considerable extent, in every volunteer corps connected with the war. To the thorough military training and knowledge which it imparts, the nation is much indebted for a series of splendid victories; any one of which would more than compensate for all the expenditures at West Point. *That will be an unfortunate day for the Republic, when Congress, influenced either by motives of fancied economy or the vile appeals of the demagogue, shall consent to abandon an institution which has already done much to establish the reputation and extend the borders of the country* (emphasis added); and which is constantly spreading among us that intelligence and skill by which *the people* – in their freedom from the burden of a large standing army – may at any time be converted into the grandest host of soldiers that ever battled in any cause or clime (original emphasis).

See Giddings, *Sketches of the Campaign in Northern Mexico*, 79n.

through Reynolds's wartime correspondence is more conspicuous for its classism than the well-documented belief, common in the era of the war, in the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race.

In his Mexican War service Reynolds manifested the emerging professionalization of American junior officers who accepted accountability to civilian political authority even as they tended toward Whiggish institutionalism and emphasized technical mastery and military expertise, thereby rejecting the republican and Jeffersonian tradition of the citizen volunteer soldier. Though a committed Democrat, and one who had risen to a successful career in the army through Democratic political graces, Reynolds did not spare the Polk administration the criticism the brevet major believed it warranted in Washington for its poor handling of the war. In the case of the President's selections for army promotions, and, in his view, for the administration's poor handling of Taylor's army, Reynolds offered blunt criticism of the Polk regime, a fact that should compel historians to question assumptions about political loyalty in the Old Army. Following the Battle of Buena Vista, Reynolds defended the honor and command of General Taylor, and criticized the Polk administration and even General Scott for their treatment of his field commander.²⁷⁰ While Reynolds's biographer has interpreted the officer's actions in political terms—"a nonpracticing [sic] Democrat like John Reynolds could accept the mild Whiggism of a great general like Taylor," Nichols wrote—it seems as reasonable to conclude that Reynolds displayed great admiration for Taylor because of the social and professional

²⁷⁰ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *EJNC*.

standing the brevet major enjoyed in the U.S. Army.²⁷¹ Though Taylor was no West Point graduate, he nevertheless had proven himself as professionally capable to a younger class of men “educated by the government” at the United States Military Academy.

The formal training of U.S. Army professionals like Reynolds, and in turn, the performance of West Point-trained officers in the war, made American victory possible. At Fort Brown, the defensive works engineered by the army regulars, which required the kind of professional and technical expertise learned at West Point, had sufficiently mitigated American losses. The estimated one thousand shells that the Mexicans lobbed into Fort Texas during the seven-day siege had managed to kill only two officers.²⁷²

The Battle of Monterrey did not prove the success of American arms as did other engagements that followed in the Mexican American War, but it did occasion heroic action from Reynolds, whose conduct in desperate and deadly action merited the brevet promotion to captain for gallant and meritorious conduct he received in the wake of the battle.²⁷³ Reynolds’s brevet promotion was a harbinger of things to come. That Reynolds survived Monterrey and escaped the botched assault into the town, which proved a bloody and, in comparison to action on Worth’s front, disastrous affair, is a significant fact. Whether the historian attributes the survival of Reynolds at Monterrey to the fates or providence is of little account; he survived for more prolonged and greater military service on behalf of the nation in later conflicts and in other reaches of the continent.

²⁷¹ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 45.

²⁷² Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 1:84.

²⁷³ Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. from its Establishment, in 1802, to 1890*, 2:90.

At Buena Vista, Reynolds garnered military laurels and national fame for his expert handling of the mobile artillery, which effectively saved the American effort on that battlefield.²⁷⁴ Additionally, and along with officers Braxton Bragg and George Henry Thomas, Reynolds entered into a pantheon of officers who went on to achieve great and lasting fame in the American Civil War. Still, as Hsieh has noted, the performance of the Old Army in Mexico was more a validation of American military professionalization and tactical expertise than mere preparation for civil war.²⁷⁵

Like his peers, Reynolds harbored a sense of superiority on the bases of ethnicity and class toward his Mexican counterparts, but also demonstrated, out of professional self-interest, an equal tendency in his correspondence to emphasize—if even indirectly—the mettle of his adversaries. While Americans generally harbored racialized views of Mexican inferiority that bore close association with deep-seated, Anglo-Protestant aversions to Mexican Catholicism, the comparatively small number of Americans who served in the U.S. Army as officers typically viewed Mexicans as inferiors on account of their class, and were motivated less, as Watson has noted, by Anglo-Saxon racialism and religious prejudice.²⁷⁶ Only in his cynical assessment of Mexican diplomacy did Reynolds express a view of his opponent that invites closer inspection for its racialism.

²⁷⁴ Smith has written, “[American] artillery was beyond praise for both daring and skill. Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 1:396; Another scholar has concluded, “in America’s first foreign war, artillery emerged as the greatest power on the battlefield. The artillery arm of the United States Army demonstrated its worth by repeatedly influencing the actions at critical moments”; See Dillon, Jr., *American Artillery in the Mexican War*, 55.

²⁷⁵ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 54-74.

²⁷⁶ For Americans’ views of Mexican racial and religious inferiority, see John C. Pinheiro, *Missionaries of Republicanism*; Writes Watson, “some [American officers] admired the beauty of hierarchy of [Catholicism’s] liturgy, and few commented at any length on Catholicism as a dimension of Mexican society and culture before the war began. ... Thus, nativism in the officer corps seems to have been primarily a matter of

Finally, one should note that Reynolds did not embrace the prospect of war with Mexico with great enthusiasm; nor did he seem to view it as a foregone conclusion. In this respect, Reynolds's example seems to conform to a broader pattern of professional disinterest, well documented by Watson, that existed among the officer corps concerning the Mexico question in 1846.²⁷⁷ Though untested in combat against an organized and (at least in the eyes of the Americans themselves) a respectable foe like the Mexican army, American officers and professional soldiers, in the words of Watson, "took it for granted that Mexico was no match for the United States, and this confidence led most of them to assume that war was unlikely."²⁷⁸ Should war come, many junior officers welcomed opportunities, as another scholar has written, "to prove that they were not merely 'epauletted loafers' and 'idle vagabonds.'"²⁷⁹ Still, in his 1845 ambivalence on the prospect of hostilities with Mexico, Reynolds confirmed the widespread suspicion that war with Mexico was improbable.²⁸⁰

Contrary to the predictions of Reynolds and other officers, the war came, and looking back from 1848, and from later years that provided Americans with a new frame of reference for their military experience—and in a matter that no doubt shocked those who harbored skepticism concerning American prospects for victory—the conflict was a colossal success. One historian has written, encapsulating the conventional view, that

class and ethnicity, especially as these characteristics were associated with the army's growing percentage of foreign-born enlisted men—an enduring source of complaint from many commanders—rather than religion per se"; see Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, 391-398, quotation at 393.

²⁷⁷ See, especially, Watson, "Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism."

²⁷⁸ Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors*, 394.

²⁷⁹ Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 65.

²⁸⁰ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 4 January 1846, Corpus Christi, TX, *RFP*.

the Mexican War was the most decisive in American history.²⁸¹ That this is so, however, was neither inevitable nor expected for those who anticipated and endured it.

²⁸¹ Douglas V. Meed, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7.

INTERLUDE

Conservative

The United States transformed dramatically from 1841 to 1860, and for those like Reynolds who observed that transformation as adults, the change must have seemed jarring. The communications revolution connected cities with telegraph wire; railroads overcame the tyranny of distance; the age of news was come.¹ Cities swelled with immigrants, many of whom were Irish, German, and, to the outrage of nativists, Roman Catholic. The advance of American evangelical Protestantism co-opted the turbulent social forces of democracy.² War with Mexico, perhaps the most epochal change of the era, procured for the United States vast sums of land that gave fulfillment to John L. O’Sullivan’s 1839 prophecy of national futurity and Manifest Destiny.³ And from newly-acquired territories, or from newly-settled ones, sprang forth troubling questions that divided parties, geographical sections, and local communities on political questions foundational to the very arrangement and cohesion of American society: namely, debates about the future of self-government in the territories and the future of slavery in the republic.⁴ Indeed, the most incisive and eloquent expressions of American political philosophy emerged from debates over the euphemism that was “popular sovereignty”

¹ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

² See Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); And Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³ John L. O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 6 (1839): 426-430.

⁴ Steven E. Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies: America’s Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2010).

in the territories and the heinous decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* three years later in 1857.⁵ Vitriolic disagreement on the question of whether the United States Constitution recognized the legal right to property in man, reinvigorated with the 1840 publication of James Madison's private notes on the Constitutional Convention, ultimately wrought a civil war.⁶ Abolitionist theologians who stood at the radical fringes of society and preached gospels of religious nationalism, and who pined for the immediate destruction of slavery, greeted bloodshed in 1861 with rejoicing. A far greater number of Americans, however, were troubled by the looming war, and imagined their futures darkly through apocalyptic visions of destruction, violence, and loss.⁷

In his recent assessment of northern, Civil War-era conservatism, historian Adam I.P. Smith has noted that for the interest the radical reformers of antebellum society have received in the scholarly literature, scant attention has been paid to those individuals who did not identify as reformers and who greeted the advance of social change in the pre-war years with ambivalence.⁸ To be sure, historians have inquired into

⁵ For more on the moral and political vision of Abraham Lincoln essential to the re-definition of liberty in the period, see Harry V. Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

⁶ Sean Wilentz, *No Property in Man: Slavery and Antislavery at the Nation's Founding* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

⁷ For more on religious nationalism and those New England intellectuals and theologians who met the Civil War with considerable jubilation, see Richard M. Gamble, *A Fiery Gospel: The Battle Hymn of the Republic and the Road to Righteous War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); Conversely, for fears and prophecies of war, see Jason Phillips, *Looming Civil War: How Nineteenth Century Americans Imagined the Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁸ Adam I. P. Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics, 1846-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 3.

the various conservative sensibilities of prominent Civil War-era individuals on case-by-case bases and across political divides.⁹ But as the titles of metanarrative histories of the period suggest—one historian has recently written of the United States in the nineteenth century as the *Ecstatic Nation*—scholars privilege change, dynamism, enthusiasm, and progress more than they celebrate continuity, resistance to change, or ambivalence toward cultural upheaval.¹⁰ Recently, and with what one scholar has described as the “unwriting” of the American freedom narrative—a process that has underscored the unsavory aspects of Reconstruction, and has suggested that emancipation for African Americans simply gave way to new kinds of economic and political enslavement for women and men formerly held in bondage—historians have engaged in more comprehensive, critical, and on rare occasions, empathetic examinations into the northern, conservative temperament.¹¹

⁹ One thinks, for example, on Robert W. Johannsen’s sympathetic portrait of the senator from Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas; See Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); John F. Marszalek has perceived in William Tecumseh Sherman’s life an endless quest for stability and order amidst turbulent social conditions and civil war; Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier’s Passion for Order* (New York: The Free Press, 1993); One thinks most especially on the work of Ethan S. Rafuse, which locates the wellspring of George McClellan’s conservatism in the social and political upheaval of the antebellum era and in its corresponding Old Whig values—not, as is commonly supposed, in the Democratic Party; See Rafuse, *McClellan’s War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Brenda Wineapple, *Ecstatic Nation: Confidence, Crisis, and Compromise, 1848-1877* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013); Whether like Daniel Walker Howe, they have underscored technological innovation, or whether like Charles Sellers they have emphasized the evolution of a market economy that connected rural artisans and farmers to broader networks of exchange, historians almost universally describe the domestic changes wrought in nineteenth-century American life as “revolutionary.” Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹¹ Carole Emberton, “Unwriting the Freedom Narrative: A Review Essay,” *Journal of Southern History* 82, no. 2 (May 2016): 377-394, especially pp. 379-384.

The label *conservative*, or the culture of *conservatism*, describes not a political program, nor a set of policy objectives. It bears no relation to right-wing political ideology in the late twentieth century. Nor does it bear any semblance to the so-called “populist” revolt of 2016, though recent scholarship of politics in the antebellum period has deployed the term *conservative*, influenced by contemporary inquiries into white privilege in the Age of Trump, to frame racially-defined notions of Jacksonian political culture prior to the creation of the Republican Party.¹² Rather, and in keeping with Smith’s use of the term, I deploy *conservatism* and its various iterations to describe a disposition that transcended sectarian politics and political ideology in the era, and to understand a world view through which many nineteenth-century northerners interpreted the calamitous events of their time against notions, perhaps imagined, of inherited values, customs, and order.¹³ Individuals who self-identified as conservatives, in Smith’s words, sought “less to change their world than to save it” and viewed themselves more or less as passive observers and even as victims to whom the radical transformation of the nineteenth century had happened.¹⁴

Recent historical literatures of American life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have illuminated across a wide spectrum how conservative northerners confronted, processed, and came to terms with social and political upheaval in their time. Rather than embrace change, many Americans met the prospect of transformation with uncertainty, and sensed acutely, and anxiously, the passing of one age and the

¹² See, for instance, the provocative title of Joshua A. Lynn, *Preserving the White Man’s Republic: Jacksonian Democracy, Race, and the Transformation of American Conservatism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018).

¹³ Smith, *The Stormy Present*.

¹⁴ Smith, *The Stormy Present*, 3-4, quotation at p. 4.

beginning of another. Andrew Delbanco has illuminated with arresting clarity how the visibility of escaped slaves helped northerners in the courts, in the public square, and in reform movements to resist enforcement of fugitive slave laws from the era of the Revolution to the Sectional Crisis and ultimately the Civil War. But his work is as much a story about conservative northerners who were confronted with the personhood of escaped slaves for the first time in northern society as it is a story about escaped slaves themselves. Delbanco has observed that for many northerners, sympathy for escaped slaves—which emanated from sincere convictions grounded in natural law—could not overcome their duties as citizens to respect legal comity and reciprocity as defined by proscribed law; nor, he has shown, did sympathy always compel northerners to jettison their duty to enforce fugitive slave laws. Delbanco’s study fosters an admirable empathy for escaped slaves. But his work is also instructive for how it engenders a particular sensitivity for the law-abiding northerner—likely not an abolitionist, though almost certainly anti-slavery in sentiment—who wished for the betterment, even the freedom, of enslaved persons, and yet, coerced by the southern slaveholding aristocracy, lacked the political and legal flexibility to help them.¹⁵

Notes of conservatism—or of the tendencies of nineteenth-century Americans to safeguard institutions and law, and to value political continuity over change—have sounded, too, in recent studies that inquire into the war motivations of northern citizens and the cause of the Union for which they fought. Front and center in the “War for the Union” school of historiography, Gary W. Gallagher has given eloquent expression to the

¹⁵ Andrew Delbanco, *The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for the Soul of America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018).

belief that sprawling literatures of race and emancipation studies in American history have clouded the motivations of most nineteenth-century northerners from historical view. These individuals, writes Gallagher, understood their own efforts as dedicated not to the cause of emancipation or abolition, or to more enlightened ideals of racial equality, but rather toward the preservation of a political Union—what Lincoln described famously as the “last, best hope” of the world—dedicated to the principles of representative government, rule of law, and free labor.¹⁶ Put another way, the vast majority of northerners did not enlist in legions of volunteer armies to end racial slavery (though many resented the institution), but rather to conserve the government of their fathers. The oft-quoted 1861 letter from Sullivan Ballou to his wife, Sarah, is instructive for understanding the cause of Union as nineteenth-century Americans understood it: “I know how strongly *American Civilization* now leans on the triumph of the *Government*” (emphasis added), wrote Ballou on the eve of his death at the Battle of Bull Run, “and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the Revolution. And I am willing—perfectly willing—to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this *Government*, and to pay that debt” (emphasis added).¹⁷ It was the Union, their political and institutional inheritance, that compelled 1.2 million loyal Americans to take up arms voluntarily for the preservation of the republic; for them it

¹⁶ Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Gallagher, “The Civil War at the Sesquicentennial: How Well do Americans Understand their Great National Crisis?” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3, no. 2 (June 2013): 295-303; Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

¹⁷ Letter of Sullivan Ballou to Sarah Ballou, dated 11 June 1861, “Sullivan Ballou Letter,” *The Civil War, PBS* (web): <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/civil-war/war/historical-documents/sullivan-ballou-letter/>.

was the Union, to turn Chandra Manning's lofty assessment on its head, that the "cruel war was over."¹⁸

Other traces of a conservative outlook—a *weltanschauung* of limits and restraint—emerge in Civil War literatures that concern the war's intensity, its destruction, and its political and social outcomes. While Drew Faust and others have famously interpreted the Civil War as a harbinger of the industrial and total wars of the twentieth century, other scholars have noted the comparatively restrained manner by which American belligerents waged war against one another.¹⁹ Still others have noted that the conflict's chief accomplishment, the emancipation of slaves, emerged organically. In its earliest phase, the war featured northern commanders who had received educations at West Point, who had gained field experience in Mexico, and who were not sympathetic to the Republican administration. These military leaders sought to wage a limited war with engineer-like precision, thereby keeping with centuries of Western, just war theory and with the modern limits of international law.²⁰ And while it is true that, in the end, the war liberated millions of slaves and brought about the demise of institutional racial slavery, these processes emerged out of military necessity,

¹⁸ Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

¹⁹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008); For correctives to Faust in the realm of military history, and for those works that liken the American Civil War to more limited and traditional European conflicts, see Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh, "Total War and the American Civil War Reconsidered: The End of an Outdated 'Master Narrative,'" *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 3 (September 2011): 394-408; Earl J. Hess, *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat: Reality and Myth* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016); Hess, *Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015); And, for a more comprehensive view, Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

²⁰ See, especially, Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence*.

were achieved first by *Practical Liberators* in the field before they emerged full bloom in national law as *de jure* emancipation, and led most Americans to believe, by war's end, that the great struggle which had rid the nation of its Original Sin—racial slavery—had wrought a final purification.²¹ The assassination of President Lincoln on Good Friday, 1865, enabled religiously-minded Americans—of whom there were yet many—to see the meaning of their war in a new light. Theirs had been a war for righteousness, and the lives of their sons, and their Redeemer President, were the propitiation for “every drop of blood drawn with the lash.”²² Emancipation had been a miracle, one unforeseen and unexpected in 1861, and one deemed by most northerners in 1865 as incredible in retrospect. It came at a great cost, one unimaginable to twenty-first century sensibilities.²³ What, then, in the eyes of northerners—themselves the victims of a terrible war—was left to accomplish?

Finally, in their conduct of the war, and to whatever extent such high-profile commanders as George McClellan prosecuted or resisted the policies of President Lincoln and his administration, many of the “Old” U.S. Army officers who rose to

²¹ Kristopher A. Teters, *Practical Liberators: Union Officers in the Western Theater during the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

²² Martha Hodes, *Mourning Lincoln* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); For the religious symbolism Americans divined from Lincoln's assassination, see George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 370-388; And Allen Carl Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 433-463.

²³ In his case against reparations for institutionalized racial slavery, Guelzo notes that the growing literature which advocates for the federal financial compensation of African Americans ignores the monumental costs of emancipation. These included seven hundred thousand dead Americans (some twenty million in today's population), \$6.6 billion—a four-hundred percent increase in the national debt—and the total ruination of the South, from which that region did not recover for almost a century; See Guelzo, “The Antislavery World of Abraham Lincoln,” in *Redeeming the Great Emancipator* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 59-114, at 107-113.

brigade, division, corps, and field commands during the American Civil War manifested the institutionalist and elitist tendencies of conservative army professionals. As Wayne Hsieh has demonstrated, these men had monopolized technical military expertise in the antebellum era, and wielded that expertise unevenly when the Civil War began in 1861.²⁴ McClellan notoriously lorded his technical expertise over war planners, including President Lincoln himself, and went so far as to snub the president in the social confines of his parlor by refusing to meet with the commander in chief.²⁵ Northerners desired and in many cases expected a swift and decisive war, but initially lacked the requisite professional understanding to coordinate, supply, and maneuver massive armies of citizen-soldiers in protracted campaigns across vast territorial expanses. While outwardly John Reynolds performed his duty with rigid professionalism, privately he manifested the conservative tendencies of such prominent commanders as George Meade, Winfield Hancock, and George McClellan—all Democrats—who were decidedly critical of the Republican administration and its handling of the war on political as well as professional grounds.²⁶

Reynolds experienced the turbulent decade of the 1850s and Secession Winter 1860, much as he had war in Mexico in the 1840s, as an agent of great national

²⁴ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War: The Old Army in War and Peace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

²⁵ President Lincoln visited the home of Gen. McClellan in November 1861 to discuss military operations. McClellan, who was at a wedding, returned home, evaded the porter, and absconded to his bedroom while Lincoln, William Seward, and John Hay sat in the parlor. At some length—Hay’s diary reveals a ninety-minute wait—the men sent a servant to inform McClellan of their presence. McClellan had gone to bed. The account appears in John Hay, *Letters of John Hay and Extracts from Diary*, in three volumes (Washington: Printed, not published, 1908), 1:52-53.

²⁶ Guelzo has characterized Reynolds as an “unbending professional” in *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 29.

transformation. Still, it would be wrong to mistake him for one sympathetic to the social reforms and politics that attended that change. As the United States grew in size and stature, and as the politics of slavery deepened the fissure that separated northern and southern societies, Reynolds displayed real distaste for the reactionary elements of New England culture whose social activism and domestic terrorism threatened to widen the cultural and political divide. This is perhaps unsurprising, for Reynolds had devoted his life's work to the national service and to an institution—the U.S. Army—that represented not the triumph of sectional interests, but rather their consolidation, as well as their accountability and subservience to the federal will. The political crises of the 1850s threatened to tear the nation asunder; in so doing, they risked Reynolds's national service, because at stake was the question of the perpetuity of the American state—the very object to which he had sworn his devotion as an officer. Thus, for Reynolds, conservatism and loyalty formed two sides of the same coin.

Reynolds's military service to the nation conditioned his understanding of loyalty that came into sharp relief as the Sectional Crisis intensified and culminated with the secession of the southern states from the Union. Loyalty to inherited institutions—the Constitution of the United States and the United States Army—was paramount for any officer. Mormon uprisings in the West threatened the American political order, and Reynolds was tasked with suppressing the Mormon insurrection. John Brown's domestic terrorism in Kansas and at Harper's Ferry compelled Reynolds to criticize severely the actions of abolitionist zealots, whose acts of violence Reynolds believed had strained sectional relations. Reynolds served his country as commandant of cadets at West Point during Secession Winter, where he learned that officers in the Old Army had worked to warp the minds and transform the hearts of once-loyal, southern-born cadets

into those of treasonous and villainous secessionists. The exodus of these states from the Union presented southern-born officers of the Old Army, and cadets at West Point, with a stark choice: to honor or abjure the oaths they had sworn to the U.S. Constitution. Many chose the latter and violated those oaths.

As the Civil War protracted, Reynolds rose in the ranks upon the recommendations of George McClellan, widely considered the conservative archetype of the Union officer corps in the Army of the Potomac. A patrician from Philadelphia, McClellan no doubt took a liking to Reynolds, whose Pennsylvania and Democratic roots ran deeper than even his own. Military professionals like McClellan and Reynolds understood political loyalty as fidelity to the United States Constitution. As professional military officers, they swore oaths to uphold that Constitution; not, on the contrary, to implement policies pertinent to emancipation favored by the Lincoln administration. Reynolds, then, from his anti-reactionary sensibility to his conservative, military-professional outlook, was a creature of northern conservatism who embodied devotion to the American political tradition, to social stability, and a robust loyalty to the U.S. Constitution as a member of the professional military caste.

Northern conservative

Who or what was *conservative* in the Civil War-era North? While the literature of antebellum politics is too voluminous to detail here, and while political variation by region and socio-economic status resists easy classification, the recent scholarship of Adam I.P. Smith offers a guiding light.²⁷ Mid-century northerners, notes Smith,

²⁷ For historiography concerning politics in the Age of Jackson and the Sectional Crisis, see John Ashworth, *'Agrarians' and 'Aristocrats': Political Ideology in the*

paradoxically claimed that they stood on the vanguard of history, championed the breathtaking progress they had achieved, and lamented the turbulence of their times. In multitudinous aspects of their private and public lives—spanning spheres of religion, immigration, modernizing economies, and politics—“Americans talked all the time about the consequences of living in an age of transformation, yet ... were still taken aback by the pace of change.”²⁸ Upheavals wrought by the Second Great Awakening, which further splintered and democratized American evangelical Protestantism; influxes of Irish and German immigrants, which galvanized nativist sentiment along class, racial, and religious lines; effects of the so-called Market Revolution, which all but ended the romantic and Jeffersonian ideal of landed and independent yeomen farmers; the technological revolution that made possible more immediate communication; the realization of Kentuckian Henry Clay’s American System—the construction of roads, canals, railroads, and telegraph lines that bound disparate sections of the republic together even as, ideologically, culturally, and politically, those same sections drifted further apart; the radical democratization of American politics in the Age of Jackson that seemed to overturn genteel and republican norms; these events and forces

United States, 1837-1846 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1983); Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1983); *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); See, too, Daniel Walker Howe’s magisterial *What Hath God Wrought*; For great books of the Jacksonian age, see Arthur J. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945); And Robert Remini’s *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); For a helpful re-orientation of Andrew Jackson, and for a life sketch that interprets Jackson against the contours of southern—and not frontier—culture, see Mark R. Cheatham, *Andrew Jackson: Southerner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

²⁸ Smith, *The Stormy Present*, 2.

combined to unsettle northerners on the eve of the American Civil War as never before.²⁹ On the whole, many northerners did not embrace these changes.

Unlike those studies that have sought to understand the Civil War-era North through the lens of abolitionists, religious zealots, and more secular-minded moral reformers who often advocated for particular policy positions or social re-organization, Smith's work concerns itself with those "many millions" of northern Americans "who were not the change-makers but who saw change as something that happened to them, or around them."³⁰ More often than not, these individuals, as Smith tells it, manifested a certain disposition, "a way of signaling a measured, mature approach to the problems of the world."³¹ Conservatism, to these northerners,

implied an ethic of self-discipline and self-restraint. Self-described conservative men thought of themselves as innately anti-ideological; yet that did not mean they did not have their own ideological commitments – above all, to the Union as the symbol and guarantor of their freedoms as white men and thus, as Lincoln famously put it, as the "last, best hope of the earth."³²

Conservatism, then, was not a political project per se; rather, it was a worldview.

Smith deploys a self-avowed, "non-essentialist" approach to understanding conservatism in the nineteenth-century context, and expressly rejects that a real essence

²⁹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*.

³⁰ Smith, *The Stormy Present*, 3; For abolitionists in the era of the Civil War, see Andrew Delbanco, ed., *The Abolitionist Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); For an aged but nevertheless learned and provocative account of how northern clergy marshalled religious history, Millennial thought, and visions of the apocalypse, see James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); For a consideration of reformers' boundless faith in human potential and moral perfectibility, see Philip F. Gura, *Man's Better Angels: Romantic Reformers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017).

³¹ Smith, *The Stormy Present*, 5.

³² Smith, *The Stormy Present*, 5.

of conservatism exists to be recaptured and put into the books. Nevertheless, he pinpoints three tendencies among persons who self-identified as conservatives. First,

conservatives generally put faith in institutions – whether (with varying emphasis) they meant the law, churches, the Constitution, local government, schools, or political parties – and saw their authority deriving from their historical continuity, dating back to the Revolution and perhaps further back into British history.

Second, conservatives disavowed ideological absolutism and understood “a willingness to see politics as a process of compromise” as inherent to, and as a component of, conservatism itself. Third, conservatives championed their worldview as representative, in a Jacksonian sense, “of the people.”³³

Democrats in the antebellum North generally manifested these principles. They certainly harbored a general aversion to slavery in principle but demonstrated remarkable flexibility toward, and an uncomfortable accommodation of, the institution in practice. James Buchanan, the nation’s fifteenth President of the United States, towered over Lancaster as the pre-eminent statesman of his time. It was Buchanan who is supposed to have meddled in the Supreme Court’s *Dred Scott v. Sanford* decision, and who ignored the suggestion of General Winfield Scott to declare that federal property be protected after South Carolina seceded from the Union in December of 1860.³⁴ Buchanan’s botched handling of the Sectional Crisis and Secession Winter

³³ Smith’s three-point, “non-essentialist” encapsulation of conservatism adapted and paraphrased from *The Stormy Present*, pp. 7-8.

³⁴ Allan Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the American Profession of Arms* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2004), 234.

embarrassed John Reynolds, stationed at West Point as commandant of cadets on the eve of the war; indeed, it all but assured a Republican win in 1860.³⁵

The election of 1860 put on full display the rise of the Republican Party in Pennsylvania, but it also revealed residual elements of conservatism. Abraham Lincoln, who emerged from the Republican convention in Chicago, Illinois, as the moderate compromise candidate, won some 13,353 votes in Reynolds's native Lancaster County. The southerner, Democrat, and sitting vice president in President Buchanan's administration, John C. Breckenridge, finished ahead of his northern counterpart from Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas, with some 5,000 votes to spare.³⁶ That the southern slaveholder, John C. Breckenridge, received more votes in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the election of 1860 than a northern—albeit, a western—Democrat reveals much about the constellation of values in northern and eastern politics in 1860. Indeed, Philadelphia, which lies only sixty-five miles to the east of Lancaster, was in certain respects a city with southern sympathies in 1860.³⁷ In its values, Lancaster more closely approximated a middle conservative temperament—not a western one.

The Lancaster, Pennsylvania, of Reynolds's rearing was more thoroughly Democratic, and presumably more conservative, than in 1860. When Reynolds left his native soil to attend the United States Military Academy, and when, following his

³⁵ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Eleanor Reynolds, 25 April 1861, West Point, New York, *Reynolds Family Papers*, Archives and Special Collections, Franklin & Marshall College [hereafter *RFP*].

³⁶ George L. Heiges, "1860 – The Year Before the War," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 65 (1961): 113-135, at 126.

³⁷ Historian Christopher Philips has described Philadelphia at the time of the Civil War as a "border city with a middle temperament whose most prominent families were of Virginia origins and to varying degrees in sympathy with the South"; See Philips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 160.

graduation and commissioning as an officer, he moved beyond the halls of West Point to military outposts on the frontier, Reynolds manifested a seasoned, conservative sensibility in much of his personal correspondence. One might characterize Reynolds's conservatism, insofar as it took the form of a coherent worldview, most succinctly as a general aversion to social and political unrest. This became all the more apparent later in Reynolds's life as the Sectional Crisis came to a head in the late 1850s.

Writing to his sisters from Fort Vancouver in the aftermath of John Brown's infamous 1859 raid at Harper's Ferry, and three weeks to the date from Brown's hanging in Charles Town, West Virginia, Reynolds commented on the mounting crisis: "Our little excitement on this side of the continent has quietly settled down, while on your side I see things rather increasing." In a manner that illustrates Reynolds's predisposition toward social order, he opined, "I think if they could hang along with old Brown, Gerrit Smith, Wendell Phillips, [and] a few more of the *abolitionist stripe* it would effectually [end] this agitation, for a time at least" (emphasis added).³⁸ Appeals to the moral law

³⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 23 December 1859, Fort Vancouver, Washington Territory, *RFP*.

Gerrit Smith, a leading reformer and philanthropist, was an early advocate of temperance. A native of Utica, New York, Smith was a financier of John Brown's domestic terrorism and an early proponent of abolitionism. In 1840, the year prior to Reynolds's graduation from the United States Military Academy, Smith helped to organize the Liberty Party. He made two unsuccessful runs for President of the United States on the Liberty Party ticket; Biographical sketch adapted from Encyclopedia Britannica, "Gerrit Smith," *Britannica Academic* (web): <https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Gerrit-Smith/68281>; For more on the life of Smith, see Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Gerrit Smith: A Biography* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1877).

Wendell Phillips, a cousin of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., a Boston native, and an associate of the likes of Theodore Parker and Julia Ward Howe, was a radical reformer and a proto-progressive. As Louis Menand writes, "[Phillips] preached a doctrine of pluralism, a vision of an America in which 'all races, all customs, all religions, all languages, all literature, and all ideas' enjoyed the protection of 'noble, just, and equal laws.'" Phillips, per Menand, was something of a utopian, and was "willing to say the

made by such abolitionists as Brown—indeed, at his trial for treason, murder, and inciting slave insurrection, Brown claimed to have honored the spirit of the New Testament—fell on the deaf ears of such northern white conservatives as Reynolds, who privileged inherited customs and proscribed law. Tried and convicted according to Virginia law, Brown was widely believed to have committed treason against the United States.³⁹ Though he did not say so in explicit terms, as a professional soldier, Reynolds almost certainly believed that Brown had committed treason against the Constitution and the government.⁴⁰

Opposition to social unrest thus formed a foundational element of nineteenth-century northern conservatism. That Reynolds perceived in the domestic terrorism of John Brown, and its attendant sanctification in the mind of abolitionist zealots, a destructive impulse and the latent potential for civil war put him squarely in line with an author in the *New York Observer and Chronicle*, who had written earlier in 1852,

From the noise made by a few ... editors-errant ... fifth-rate writers [and] broken down preachers, one might think that the world was coming to an end ... and that universal equality ... and polygamy ... was about to dawn. But the fool's paradise is still delayed ... Church-towers show no tendency to totter. ... It is a pity to disturb the pleasant dream of the drunken zealots, but let us tell them the truth, the American people is conservative after all. ... The millions of American people are in favor of property, of law, of wedlock, of the Sabbath, of the church, of Christianity. ... Agitation toward social ruin is, thank God, un-American.⁴¹

unspeakable on any occasion (and at any length)”; See Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 16.

³⁹ William A. Blair, *With Malice toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 34.

⁴⁰ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 23 December 1859, Fort Vancouver, Washington Territory, *RFP*.

⁴¹ “American Conservatism,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 4 March 1852.

As a career soldier, Reynolds was, for lack of a better term, an institutionalist. The nature of his institutional commitments made him a nationalist. And his rearing in a region of the country noted for its Democratic and southern sympathies made him cringe at the prospect of abolition, at the utopian hopes of Romantic, New England, Transcendentalist reformers who dreamed of a more equal society. For the nineteenth-century conservative, customs, class, and institutions trumped egalitarian idealism.

Not surprisingly, notions of loyalty shaped much of the conservative temperament in the antebellum era, and Reynolds's military service to the nation, tried by war in Mexico and strengthened on the frontier, conditioned his understanding of loyalty that came into sharp relief as the Sectional Crisis intensified and culminated with the secession of the southern states from the Union. Loyalty to inherited institutions—first to the Constitution of the United States and then to the United States Army—was paramount for any officer. As commandant of cadets at the United States Military Academy on the eve of the Civil War, Reynolds was tasked with instilling a manly devotion, discipline, and accountability to the foundational precepts of American government in the minds and hearts of cadets under his authority.

In September of 1860, Reynolds arrived in West Point to assume his new office as commandant of cadets.⁴² He replaced the southern-born William Joseph Hardee, the very officer whose family had nursed Reynolds back to health when he was ill in St. Augustine as a subaltern.⁴³ Reynolds wrote in September to Eleanor that he was not at all eager to displace Hardee, whose family was at West Point on a visit, and to whom

⁴² Edward J. Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg: A Biography of General John F. Reynolds* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1958), 72.

⁴³ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 72.

Reynolds owed a great debt of kindness.⁴⁴ If Reynolds and Hardee maintained a close friendship, however, still it was apparent that the United States Military Academy, not unlike the nation writ large, was fracturing along political and cultural lines.

That same month, a group of cadets staged a mock election among members of the corps of cadets. An estimated 214 members voted of 278, and their ballots reveal the conservative proclivities of the military caste at West Point. Ninety-nine cadets cast ballots for the southern Democrat John C. Breckenridge, while only 47 voted for Breckenridge's northern counterpart, Stephen A. Douglas. John Bell, the Constitutional Union candidate, received a more modest 44 votes, and the Republican Abraham Lincoln, who opposed the spread of slavery into the West, received a paltry 24 votes.⁴⁵

In November 1860, Reynolds lamented the Manichean state of American politics in a letter to his brother, Samuel. "We are in the midst of troubles everywhere now," he wrote on the 19th, sounding melancholy notes. Reynolds intimated, too, that the turbulent election cycle was affecting affairs at the United States Military Academy: "even here," he continued, "we feel the effects of this sad condition of affairs."⁴⁶ Though he did not mention the incident, Reynolds was likely referencing the November 19 resignation of a cadet—the South Carolinian and fire-eater Henry S. Farley, who is supposed to have possessed the "appropriate red hair" for his politics.⁴⁷ Farley was the

⁴⁴ Paraphrased from the letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Eleanor Reynolds, 20 September 1860, West Point, New York, *RFP*.

⁴⁵ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 169.

⁴⁶ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Samuel Reynolds, 19 November 1860, West Point, New York, *RFP*.

⁴⁷ Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 169.

first cadet to leave West Point as sectional tensions became enflamed.⁴⁸ Others would follow, and with considerable pomp. Still, Reynolds hoped that the political virtues of forbearance and moderation—quintessentially conservative qualities in the Burkean sense—would win the day and trump mounting sectionalism at the academy: “I hope there will be found a way out [of] all the difficulties, [and] by a moderate course on the part of both north [and] south.” Reynolds expressed his wish, doubtless held by many white American conservatives, that “old feuds” would be “banished forever.”⁴⁹

Reynolds was not alone in noting the “sad condition of affairs” at the nation’s military school.⁵⁰ Oliver Otis Howard, several years Reynolds’s junior, an instructor of mathematics at West Point in Secession Winter, and with whom Reynolds would share the field at Gettysburg, remembered in later years, of the culture of the United States Military Academy in the throes of the Secession Crisis, that “probably no other place existed where men grappled more quickly, more sensitively, and yet more philosophically with the troublesome problems of secession,” and that “prior to any overt act ... a few members of our community were much disturbed, and by almost morbid anticipations experienced all the fever of the subsequent conflict.”⁵¹ Of his

⁴⁸ Morris Schaff, *The Spirit of Old West Point, 1858-1862* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1907), 175.

⁴⁹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Samuel Reynolds, 19 November 1860, West Point, New York, *RFP*.

⁵⁰ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Samuel Reynolds, 19 November 1860, West Point, New York, *RFP*.

⁵¹ In fact, upon receiving an intimation that he would be offered a colonel’s commission to command a Maine regiment of volunteers, Howard, while an instructor of mathematics at West Point, solicited Reynolds’s recommendation on whether or not it would be prudent to accept. Reynolds instructed the assistant professor of mathematics to accept the commission; See Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, in two volumes (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1908), 1:107; Quotation from Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 1:99.

commandant, however, and of Reynolds's devotion to the national government, Howard offered high praise: Reynolds possessed "eminent loyalty to the Union."⁵² Unlike southern-born officers whose sentiments toward the Union were lukewarm—Howard cited Col. Hardee as a case in point—Reynolds was faithful to his office.⁵³ Amidst great political uncertainty, Reynolds's fidelity to the Union was assured.

At the time of Reynolds's writing to his sisters on December 10, 1860, South Carolina had not yet seceded from the Union, and Reynolds acknowledged his gratitude that James Buchanan had remembered him and recommended him in the War Department for the office of commandant.⁵⁴ Ten days from the date of Reynolds's letter, however, delegates from South Carolina convened in Charleston and voted overwhelmingly to dissolve their political ties with the Union. Then, on April 12, Confederate forces under Pierre Gustave Toutant-Beauregard—who only recently had resigned his commission as an officer in the U.S. Army and as superintendent of the United States Military Academy—commenced their bombardment of Fort Sumter.

News of the bombardment reached the Military Academy around nine o'clock in the morning.⁵⁵ "The firing on Fort Sumter," one historian has written, "changed everything."⁵⁶ One cadet reminisced, in later years, that "like a mighty cross" the bombardment of Sumter "threw a shadow over all the land."⁵⁷ On post, northern cadets congregated in a member's room and together sang the Star Spangled Banner while

⁵² Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 1:101.

⁵³ Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 1:101.

⁵⁴ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 10 December 1860, West Point, New York, *RFP*.

⁵⁵ Schaff, *The Spirit of Old West Point, 1858-1862*, 219.

⁵⁶ Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 171.

⁵⁷ Schaff, *The Spirit of Old West Point, 1858-1862*, 218.

their southern peers prepared for imminent departures.⁵⁸ Officers, too, noted the solemnity of the great tragedy at hand: “as we men from the North and South, at our post on the Hudson, looked into each other’s faces,” Howard recalled, “such indeed was the situation that we knew that civil war with its unknown horrors was at hand.”⁵⁹

Writing in the wake of the firing of Fort Sumter near the end of April, Reynolds could only describe the events that had terminated in the fracturing of the republic as “sad.” Like Howard, he sensed the momentousness and imminence of the impending conflict. What had transpired during the course of Secession Winter and earlier that month, Reynolds wrote, were “events of the deepest interest to country, to us, and to all mankind.”⁶⁰ Of the exact nature of the future that such events portended Reynolds was less certain, but he did predict that in short order all the southern-born cadets would be gone. Officers, too, were awaiting orders that would compel departures from their “quiet nook” on the Hudson River. Reynolds refused to speculate on how long he would remain at West Point. “Everything,” he wrote, “depends upon the turn events take,” only to add, ominously, that in “Revolution, events terminate rapidly.”⁶¹

Taking stock: Reynolds as northern institutionalist and arch-nationalist

Assessing Reynolds’s place in the Civil War as a man to whom the war happened may at first glance seem quaint. After all, he was a professional soldier who had received an education from the nation’s leading military school. Reynolds’s chosen profession was to

⁵⁸ Schaff, *The Spirit of Old West Point, 1858-1862*, 220.

⁵⁹ Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 1:103.

⁶⁰ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Eleanor Reynolds, 25 April 1861, West Point, New York, *RFP*.

⁶¹ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Eleanor Reynolds, 25 April 1861, West Point, New York, *RFP*.

serve his national government. Combined, these realities would not seem to make Reynolds into a passive observer of those transformative events in the United States from the antebellum era to Secession Winter. Still, for all the ink spilt on the subject of the American Civil War, comparatively little scholarship has assessed how professional soldiers, trained in the halls of West Point, reconciled sectional conflict to national service and understood their motivations for war in light of sectional variation and national devotion. These soldiers, in ways quite unlike their citizen-soldier volunteer counterparts, felt their worlds transformed by the diplomatic and political upheavals of the antebellum era and the Secession Crisis, when they were confronted first with the prospect, and then the reality, of civil war. In this light, considering Reynolds against the backdrop of conservatism in the antebellum and Civil War eras reveals much about a man who, for better or worse, represented much that was mainstream about nineteenth-century northern culture, who was an embodiment of the nationalistic and professional ethos cultivated at the United States Military Academy, and who recognized in secession a sinister disregard for law and American institutions.

In June, Reynolds took time from his duties as commandant at the United States Military Academy to respond to a letter he had received only days before from his sister, Ellie. News in her letter, confirmed by two other notes, told of the death of a family friend. This sad revelation was made more regrettable, wrote Reynolds, in light of the southern insurrection against the Union and the bombardment of Fort Sumter. By June 1861, what once was the specter of revolution and civil war had become reality. Americans' worst fears were realized. The war had come. "Every one," Reynolds noted, "feels the depressing influence from the sorrowful conditions of our recently so happy and prosperous country." But Reynolds was not melancholic merely; his letter teemed

with vitriol for Jefferson Davis, the West Point graduate, Mexican–American War hero, former Secretary of War and, until recently, the Mississippi senator.⁶² For some time, Davis had defended West Point as an institution that cultivated a robust and healthy patriotism. He had viewed his alma mater, as historian William J. Cooper, Jr. has written, “as a force for national sentiment and as essential for the country’s security.”⁶³ In 1854, while serving as Secretary of War, Davis visited West Point to review the corps of cadets and to observe the workings of the academy.⁶⁴ Davis even instituted reforms to the academy’s curriculum—lengthening it by a year—and helped to determine the schedule of course offerings.⁶⁵ In September 1860, when Reynolds had just begun his tenure as commandant of cadets, Davis had labored with other members of the U.S. Congress to institute reforms at the nation’s military school once again.⁶⁶ But at the time of Reynolds’s writing in June 1861, Jefferson Davis was the leader of an illegitimate government in rebellion against the Constitution of the United States, and a traitor.⁶⁷

In his June 11 letter, Reynolds spared no criticism of Davis. Utter contempt for the treasonous Mississippian poured forth from the hand of the commandant, comingled with the ink, and spilled onto the paper: “Who would have believed,” declared Reynolds with rhetorical flourish,

when I came here last September and found Mr. Jeff Davis here labouring with a committee of Congress and civilians to re-organize the Academy, our *National School* (emphasis added)! whose sons never, until the seeds sown by his

⁶² Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 11 June 1861, West Point, New York, *RFP*.

⁶³ William J. Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis: American* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 256.

⁶⁴ Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 141.

⁶⁵ Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis*, 256.

⁶⁶ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 11 June 1861, West Point, New York, *RFP*.

⁶⁷ Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis*, 327.

parricidal hand had filled it with the poisonous weed of secession, *had known any other allegiance* than that one to the *Whole Country*, or *worshipped* any other flag than that which has waved over our youthful hopes and aspirations and under which we marched so friendly in our boyish days (emphasis added) — “Who!” I say, could have believed that he was then brooding over his systematic plans for disorganizing the whole Country (original emphasis). *The depth of his treachery has not been plumbed yet, but it will be* (emphasis added)!⁶⁸

And so it would.

⁶⁸ Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, 11 June 1861, West Point, New York, *RFP*.

CHAPTER THREE

“I will fight them inch by inch!” New Perspectives on the Command and Generalship of Reynolds at the Battle of Gettysburg

Abstract: *This chapter considers the command and generalship of John Fulton Reynolds at Gettysburg, the memorable battle that took place in Pennsylvania in July 1863. Gettysburg is regarded, not with complete accuracy, as a pivotal turning point of military operations in the Civil War. Leading scholars hold divergent, though not mutually-exclusive, views on the centrality of Reynolds’s command in that battle. Allen Guelzo has suggested in *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* (Knopf, 2013) that Reynolds is the Union general most responsible for the battle’s occurrence. Gary Gallagher has written in the pages of *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* (24 no. 1) that Reynolds’s reputation as a corps commander is not commensurate with the ability he demonstrated before or at the Battle of Gettysburg, and implies that the general’s luster derives from his premature death. This chapter attempts at once to harmonize and move beyond these interpretations. It builds upon Andrew S. Bledsoe’s eloquent call in the *Journal of the Civil War Era* (9 no. 2) for a more imaginative assessment of generalship that accounts for historical contingency, for the uncertainty and unpredictability inherent to battle and command, and for studies of commanders that transcend one-dimensional evaluations of battle performance, instead encompassing wider considerations of politics, personality, command culture, and tactics.*

Drawing from official records, reminiscences, the battle correspondence of contemporaries, and an extensive secondary literature, I argue that Reynolds’s command of the left wing on the eve of Gettysburg constitutes a terrible paradox. On one hand, Reynolds merits distinction, more than any other Federal officer, for anticipating, and for making certain, the clash of arms at Gettysburg between the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia. He exhibited remarkable professionalism, skill, and moral courage in the short time he commanded the field. At his orders, what began as a skirmish between a division of Federal cavalry and a division of Confederate infantry west of Gettysburg town escalated into a meeting engagement, and then, most violently, into open battle that, in the final accounting, claimed some 53,000 casualties and inflicted a devastating defeat upon southern insurrectionists. On the other hand, though Reynolds selected the site of battle after careful tactical consideration, he did so with incomplete knowledge of the enemy’s location, a fact that would ultimately compromise the Federal position. The picture rendered is that processes of historical contingency, borne out in conditions of military necessity, dictated terms of battle to Reynolds on July 1. The wing commander responded to those conditions with great alacrity and proficiency. In the end, however, it is not clear that Reynolds warrants the recognition he has received as the most talented corps lieutenant in the Army of the Potomac, a

recognition that grew as the post-war period lengthened, and as Americans enshrined the Battle of Gettysburg in their national mythology.

In recent years, and as questions concerning the meaning of the American Civil War have sparked national conversations about monuments, race, politics, and how these things shape public remembrance, Americans have exhibited a renewed interest in the battlefield prowess of their Civil War commanders. Adam Serwer, for instance, in an incisive *Atlantic* essay published in 2017 at the height of the Robert E. Lee monument controversy, took direct aim at the Confederate icon, lambasting the Rebel for his racism, his treason, and, to the dismay of southern-born armchair generals everywhere, the Virginian's lackluster strategic sense. "The myth of Lee," writes Serwer, "goes something like this: He was a brilliant strategist and devoted Christian man who abhorred slavery and labored tirelessly after the war to bring the country back together." But, Serwer charges,

there is little truth in this. ... Historians regard him as an accomplished tactician. But despite [Lee's] ability to win individual battles, his decision to fight a conventional war against the more densely populated and industrialized North is considered by many historians to have been a fatal strategic error.¹

More recently, the blogger, cultural critic, and social media provocateur Matt Walsh elicited impassioned reactions from Civil War *#Twitterstorians* when he graded the treasonous Lee and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson above Union generals Ulysses "Sam" Grant and William Sherman.² While the tendency to rank generals on the merit of command performance reflects aspects of the antiquated "chessboard of war" mentality

¹ Adam Serwer, "The Myth of the Kindly General Lee," *Atlantic*, 4 June 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/06/the-myth-of-the-kindly-general-lee/529038/>.

² Matt Walsh (@MattWalshBlog), "Civil War generals ranking," Twitter, 26 April 2019, <https://twitter.com/mattwalshblog/status/1121780208061882368?lang=en>.

bemoaned by more innovative practitioners of military history, it nevertheless illustrates a central feature of popular enthusiasm for Civil War studies: Americans, in the parlance of the Trumpian Age, prefer historical narratives in which their generals are winners.³

In a 2011 article published in *Military History Quarterly*, military historian Gary W. Gallagher lists U.S. Major General of Volunteers John F. Reynolds among five “overrated officers,” Union and Confederate, in the Civil War. Reynolds, writes Gallagher, “has often been described as the best corps chief in the Union’s Army of the Potomac, a gifted officer who turned down command of the republic’s largest force on the eve of Gettysburg.” But, Gallagher continues, Reynolds “exemplifies the phenomenon of reputations inflated by death in dramatic circumstances.” Reynolds, “prior to Gettysburg,” had “led the I Corps at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, in neither instance distinguishing himself,” Gallagher notes. The Pennsylvanian’s premature death in the battle on the morning of July 1, 1863, “sparked untold speculation about what might have been.”⁴ Channeling elements of the chessboard mentality that privilege battlefield performance at the expense of other qualities necessary for sound generalship, Gallagher implies that American military historians and Civil War enthusiasts have overvalued Reynolds, who performed ably but perhaps not spectacularly at Gettysburg, and who lacked a prior record of distinction as a brigade, division, corps, and, ultimately, army wing commander.

³ Andrew S. Bledsoe, “Beyond the Chessboard of War: Contingency, Command, and Generalship in Civil War Military History,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 9, no. 2 (June 2019): 275-301.

⁴ Gary W. Gallagher, “Five Overrated Officers in the American Civil War,” *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 24, no. 1 (August 2011): 19.

Gallagher's measured take of Reynolds's generalship at Gettysburg is not altogether new. In a 1975 review of Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that rekindled American public fascination with the Civil War, and in a manner similar to Gallagher, historian Robert Ashley took issue with Shaara's glowing portrayal of Reynolds. For Ashley, Reynolds's refusal of the Army of the Potomac in May 1863 is an indictment of the general's oft-praised professionalism, something historians have overlooked. This resulted in an inflated and ahistorical view of Reynolds's ability. "Shaara as a novelist culls from history those characters which appeal most vividly to his imagination," wrote Ashley, and "[he] ... overrates Reynolds." The reason was simple: "It has always seemed to me," Ashley noted, "that Reynolds' reputation as 'Perhaps the finest soldier in the Union Army' is largely a myth inspired by his early death: The finest soldier in any army would have accepted the command of that army rather than reject it as Reynolds did."⁵

Critical appraisals of the Pennsylvania general and his ability, combined with more-recent assessments leveled by politicians and bloggers on the commands of other Civil War generals, help illustrate how, as historian Andrew S. Bledsoe has written, "in understanding the history of Civil War command and generalship, the chessboard mentality, with its emphasis on battles and campaigns and the strategic, operational, and tactical command decisions intrinsic to them, has defined the long sweep of traditional Civil War military history."⁶ Bledsoe traces the influence of this chessboard mentality to the "imagination and graceful, dark-limned language" of Bruce Catton,

⁵ Robert Ashley, "Review: The Killer Angels: A Novel," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 14 (August 1975): 49-50.

⁶ Bledsoe, "Beyond the Chessboard of War," 278.

perhaps the finest popular historian of the American Civil War ever to have written on the subject.⁷ As Bledsoe has noted, citing Catton's work, the Michigan-born journalist and historian of the war took a narrow view of generals who held commands in the Army of the Potomac to 1863, while elevating Ulysses "Sam" Grant to the pantheon of American generals. Catton, in *America Goes to War*, wrote of Union generals in the Army of the Potomac, "none of them we would call sluggers ... Until Grant came along, they seem to have looked on war as an elaborate game played by elaborate rules. ... In some ways, war to them was like a game of chess."⁸ Catton's writings have informed the Civil War historical imaginations of millions of readers. Bledsoe and others have noted the residual influence of Catton's work in shaping America's collective Civil War consciousness. David Blight, for instance, foremost among historians of American Civil War memory, has noted that Catton, like the poet laureate Robert Penn Warren, wrote of the Civil War as American epic, that he wrote with forceful appeals to the nostalgic, and that he packaged his imaginative histories with a distinct "brand of realism."⁹ Catton's influence has endured, but the chessboard mentality has not inspired new research in the realm of military history. Americans, Bledsoe continues, "tend to fall back on comfortable intellectual terrain" by "weighing, assessing, and judging military commanders on their battlefield performance, branding them as 'good' or 'bad' generals, and endlessly reinforcing, arguing about, or revising received historical narratives to no

⁷ Bledsoe, "Beyond the Chessboard of War," 278.

⁸ Bruce Catton, *America Goes to War: The Civil War and Its Meaning in American Culture* (1958; repr., Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), 74.

⁹ David W. Blight, *American Oracle: The Civil War in the Era of Civil Rights* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 81-82; for the Civil War literature and memory of Robert Penn Warren, see Mitchell G. Klingenberg, "Robert Penn Warren, Wendell Berry, and the Dark Side of Civil War History," *Civil War History* 64, no. 2 (June 2018): 175-208.

greater purpose.”¹⁰ New lines of inquiry into Civil War command and generalship are necessary, for as Bledsoe argues, channeling historian Steven E. Woodworth, it requires little imaginative power to realize “that the game of chess bears only the vaguest theoretical resemblance to the hard business of war. A little more reflection,” Bledsoe continues, “should assure us that military command is not solely, perhaps even mostly, a matter of strategy and tactics either.”¹¹

In “Beyond the Chessboard of War,” Bledsoe sets forth a re-imagining of command- and generalship-styled military history that promises to widen historians’ understandings of the political, personal, and cultural aspects of army command in the Civil War. Bledsoe believes that newer approaches to studies of generalship hold the potential to re-orient perceptions of military history from the older view of the field—military history as a set of dry facts that conform to predictable patterns—to a newer and more invigorating perspective, one that establishes the structures of military leadership as relatable to, and even essential for, other modes and styles of historical inquiry. More important still, careful examination of command and leadership reveals processes of historical contingency at work: “Deep and thoughtful historical engagement with command and generalship,” Bledsoe writes,

promises to illuminate the interplay between war and the important historical concept of contingency, or how past events, circumstances, contexts, and outcomes influence possible futures. While shaped by prior conditions and connections, historical contingency emphasizes the uncertain and unpredictable nature of the future for the actors who experienced it. Therefore, the military history of the Civil War is not simply the “what” of the past; it does not merely chronicle campaigns and recount decisions, blunders, or master-strokes of tactical or strategic genius. The Civil War’s military history is, more importantly, the “why,” “how,” and, crucially, “what does it mean for what came after” the

¹⁰ Bledsoe, “Beyond the Chessboard of War,” 278-279.

¹¹ Steven E. Woodworth, introduction to Woodworth, ed., *The Art of Command in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), ix.

conflict, tempered by context and the understanding that things need not have turned out as they did.¹²

Capturing a similar essence of historical contingency, and one that underscores the uncertain nature of command and battle, historians Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh have written elsewhere,

historians have distorted too much of the [Civil War's] history by Monday-morning quarterbacking and their failure to recognize that, living in the present, they can see what was happening on both sides. As a result, they make it seem clear as to what those on the fields of bloodshed chaos should have seen and understood. But the fog of war cloaked the events of the Civil War in as tight an embrace as it did for those recent Americans who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹³

Properly executed, and with careful attention to what Bledsoe has enumerated as the various “whys” and “hows” of historical contingency, studies of command and generalship illuminate the uncertain and unpredictable nature of warfare. Additionally, they reveal how human agency and decision making in the fog of war “were important to the Civil War in complex ways,” and with ramifications beyond the battlefield and attendant changes in grand strategy or public policy.¹⁴ For, as Bledsoe concludes, and as recent controversies over monuments and generalship have borne out, “Civil War generals were, and continue to be, cultural symbols laden with deep and evolving meaning much of it distorted by competing sectional, national, political, and racial narratives of intervening centuries.”¹⁵ As such they merit close and careful study.

This chapter moves beyond the chessboard mentality of traditional command and generalship studies to offer a fresh perspective on Reynolds at Gettysburg. Building

¹² Bledsoe, “Beyond the Chessboard of War,” 280.

¹³ Williamson Murray and Wane Wei-siang Hsieh, *A Savage War: A Military History of the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 512-513.

¹⁴ Bledsoe, “Beyond the Chessboard of War,” 294.

¹⁵ Bledsoe, “Beyond the Chessboard of War,” 295.

on Bledsoe's framework, it locates Reynolds's command performance on the night of June 30 and July 1, 1863, in wider considerations of historical contingency that shaped the course of the momentous battle in Pennsylvania. In its holistic picture of command and generalship, the chapter accepts a certain aspect of Gallagher's criticism—namely, that the Reynolds of Gettysburg lore has transcended the Reynolds of historical fact—but refrains from endorsing Gallagher's charge wholesale. Instead, I advance the view that Reynolds executed his orders dutifully and, because they afforded him considerable command discretion, he bears responsibility for the Battle of Gettysburg. In fact, the available evidence suggests that Reynolds was the battle's key architect, and that he was the first to possess the tactical wherewithal to establish a defense in depth with an eye toward the preservation of Cemetery Hill, an essential artillery platform.

Moreover, the generalship of Reynolds at Gettysburg offers the historian a window through which to view the unpredictable forces—what Bledsoe has characterized as the “whys” and “hows”—that gave birth to an important military engagement, one that shaped later Civil War operations and influenced the course of American history. Reynolds's command of three corps, the First, the Third, and the Eleventh, which together constituted the left wing of the Army of the Potomac, was brief, spanning his appointment under Meade on June 30, 1863, to Reynolds's death on July 1. But Reynolds's politics, which probably compelled him to reject President Lincoln's offer of command of the Army of the Potomac, his command partnership with Gen. George Meade—commander of the Army of the Potomac—and crucially, his tactical decision-making that wrought the Battle of Gettysburg present worthy subjects to the historian inquiring into the complexities of Civil War generalship.

Having removed himself from consideration for high command of the Army of the Potomac on the eve of battle, it is not unreasonable to believe Reynolds wished to deflect either the professional responsibility or the political pressure of commanding the Union's most venerable field army. Curiously, however, his rank and geographical position as wing commander placed Reynolds nearer to the action that would transpire at Gettysburg than his commander. Incensed at local news that detailed atrocities committed by Rebel troops during their invasion of Pennsylvania, having anticipated the possibility of battle on the evening of June 30, and absent written instructions from Meade to withdraw to the Pipe Creek Line in Maryland, Reynolds exercised appropriate and swift discretion as the Federal wing commander nearest Gettysburg to initiate an engagement. His move to reinforce Gen. Buford's federal cavalry on McPherson's Ridge west of Gettysburg bore important tactical, operational, strategic, and in time, political consequences.

In a matter of hours, this move meant the near destruction of the First Corps in the late morning of July 1. In his issuing orders on the field at Gettysburg, and in personally deploying lead elements of the First Corps near McPherson's Ridge, Reynolds displayed an uncommon aptitude among Army of the Potomac corps commanders, often noted for their cautious temperament and conservative decision making in combat, for adapting to battlefield conditions as they arose. But Reynolds's decision to support Buford's men west of Gettysburg was curious, in the final analysis, fatal, and fraught with significance for the battle that ensued over the next two days. Reynolds chose not to occupy Cemetery Hill, the greatest topographical feature of the battlefield, and in turn opted to hold the town as best he could. This decision cost the general his life; it meant, too, the destruction of the First Corps and the retreat of the Eleventh

Corps through Gettysburg town, which resulted in chaos that brought northern civilians into the center of an escalating battle. Still, Reynolds's decision to fight on McPherson's Ridge and hold Gettysburg resulted in the federal fortification of heights beyond the town, ground that proved invaluable to the fate of Union arms later in the battle. Today, many Americans who visit Gettysburg National Military Park leave with the distinct impression that the action on the second and third days of the battle was inevitable, but students of war should resist the temptation to think this. Instrumental to the Battle of Gettysburg, and responsible, in some measure, for the battle assuming the magnitude, shape, and sequence it did, Reynolds died minutes after fighting began.

Reynolds's command performance at Gettysburg is thus illustrative of historical contingency, of the uncertain and unpredictable nature of battle, and constitutes a terrible paradox. On one hand, Reynolds merits distinction, more than any other Federal officer, even the commanding general, George Meade, for making certain the clash of arms at Gettysburg between the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia. He exhibited remarkable professionalism, skill, and moral courage in the short time he commanded the field. At his orders, a skirmish between a division of Federal cavalry and a division of Confederate infantry west of Gettysburg town escalated into a meeting engagement and then, most violently, into open battle that claimed some 53,000 casualties and stopped Robert E. Lee's second northern invasion in its tracks, inflicting a heavy strategic defeat upon the southern insurrectionists. On the other hand, conditions of military necessity dictated terms of battle to Reynolds on July 1. The wing commander responded to those conditions with great alacrity and proficiency. That Reynolds was in position to meet the Rebel threat was fortuitous for Federal forces, for not all Union corps commanders might have performed as ably. Even so, Reynolds did

not issue orders to his division commanders that would suggest he had settled on a sustained and developed tactical plan for the duration of July 1, a reality his premature death underscored, and a fact that the Federal defeat that morning proved with brutal clarity.

The political command culture of the Army of the Potomac, 1861-1863

Without indulging the counter-factual, to acknowledge that Reynolds commanded a wing of Gen. Meade's forces, and was not commanding general of the Army of the Potomac itself, is to note that the fate of Union arms at Gettysburg might have turned out very differently had civilian authorities ordered Reynolds to assume army command. This observation points to the process of historical contingency at work in the Gettysburg Campaign and, upon closer inspection, reveals both the residual political culture of the Army of the Potomac at the corps-command level in 1863 and the rigid, Old-Army professionalism which Reynolds manifested that was an essential aspect of that culture. Had Reynolds not visited Washington upon hearing rumblings and rumors of his impending promotion to commanding general of the Army of the Potomac, and, as reported, recommended his friend George Meade for the post, Reynolds might well have been ordered to assume command of President Lincoln's most venerable field army. As it happened, however, Reynolds visited Washington, and, after an interview, removed his name from consideration for the position.

The Army of the Potomac possessed a particular command culture, one distinct from those of other Union field armies that marched under federal colors.¹⁶ In the first

¹⁶ Paraphrased from Murray and Hsieh, who write, "Each of the major armies developed particular cultures which helped determine their battlefield prowess"; see

place, it was the first Union field army, and the first in American history, to facilitate the arrangement of its troops into corps. Historian Ethan S. Rafuse has described a corps, “in essence,” as “a mini-army that combined its own cavalry, infantry, and artillery assets,” and which afforded competent and “creative” generals “greater flexibility operationally and tactically.”¹⁷ The concept had its origin in the martial mind and military theory of Napoleon, who integrated *corps de armée* into his *Grande Armée* with historic success.¹⁸ In its aspirations to emulate the French model, the U.S. Army displayed an academic appreciation for Napoleon-styled army corps through its study of Napoleonic military theory at the United States Military Academy.¹⁹ Beyond West Point, and in the field, American observers of the French military art—most famously McClellan, who visited France in the 1850s with the War Department—“recognized the desirability of organizing corps” as hostilities escalated in 1861, and as the scope of the war increased and featured armies of unprecedented size that required historic quantities of materiel and precise logistical coordination.²⁰ President Lincoln ordered the re-assignment of the Army of the Potomac’s structure from divisions into corps in

Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 9, 544-545; Other prominent Federal field armies included the Army of Virginia (until September 1862), the Army of the Tennessee, and the Army of the Cumberland (previously named the Army of the Ohio).

¹⁷ Ethan S. Rafuse, introduction to *Corps Commanders in Blue: Union Major Generals in the Civil War*, edited by Ethan S. Rafuse (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁸ Paraphrased from Rafuse, *Corps Commanders in Blue*, 2.

¹⁹ Robert M. Epstein, “The Creation and Evolution of the Army Corps in the American Civil War,” *Journal of Military History* 55, no. 1 (January 1991): 21-46, at 22-23.

²⁰ Rafuse, *Corps Commanders in Blue*, 4; In time, McClellan’s knowledge of French military science became a political liability and offered a target for his Republican critics. See Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 93, 151; Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 515; Epstein, “The Creation and Evolution of the Army Corps in the American Civil War,” 28.

1862, when it became apparent that *de facto* command by a committee of divisional generals in open disagreement with the nation's chief executive was bad policy. The President chose, not unreasonably, to commission his commanders of the four army corps on the basis of seniority alone; not, on the other hand, to allow division commanders to prove their mettle, and in turn their suitability to corps command, in battle.²¹ As Rafuse and others have noted, the very genesis of corps command in the Army of the Potomac, while legitimate and even sound military policy, ensured that its command culture would prove political.²²

The Army of the Potomac was distinct for another less fortunate reason: unlike Sherman's Army of the Tennessee that swept across the southern heartland in 1864 and 1865, and which exuded assertiveness, independence, and rugged self-reliance, the seemingly more refined Army of the Potomac was plagued in its early years by leaders who displayed the technical expertise of West Point-trained officers and yet, because of their regimented, engineer-like training, seldom took command risks in battle.²³ Army of the Potomac commanders, write Murray and Hsieh, "suffered more often than not from the bureaucratic mindset of the Old Army," and, because they had been hand-selected by George McClellan, the army's architect, often presented "the Old Army's worst habits as embodied in McClellan's makeup: a prideful preoccupation with status and rank, a confusion of administrative consistency with military effectiveness, and an

²¹ Paraphrased from Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 171.

²² Rafuse, *Corps Commanders in Blue*, 4-5; Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 171.

²³ For the rugged character and *esprit de corps* of the men who marched in Sherman's Army of the Tennessee, see "The Army of the West" in Victor Davis Hanson, *The Soul of Battle: From Ancient Times to the Present Day, How Three Great Liberators Vanquished Tyranny* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 123-262, especially pp. 123-130; Paraphrased from Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 9.

overly cautious and engineering-oriented style of command.”²⁴ This was not a prescription for combat effectiveness.

What is more, from the moment of its organization, and even before the advent of army corps, the command culture of the Army of the Potomac was essentially political in that it reflected the command preferences of its organizer. George McClellan hand selected his officers at the brigade and division levels in what one writer has characterized as “a wholesale revamping” of the Army of the Potomac’s officer corps, and his preferences reflected genuine concern for professional credentials and Old Army technical expertise.²⁵ McClellan wasted no time with officers who commanded state militias; he retained from Irvin McDowell’s army officers who had received educations at West Point.²⁶ That McClellan looked the part of a great general, and manifested many of the virtues great generals were supposed to possess, made his appointments seem all the more credible, and strengthened the influence he exerted over the Army of the Potomac.²⁷ So complete was McClellan’s pre-Civil War mastery of military science, for example, and so effective was his organizational skill that in time these proved political liabilities. As Hsieh has written, the Little Napoleon’s failure in the Peninsula Campaign jeopardized American civil-military relations and severely compromised the very perception of American military professionalization and technical expertise in the eyes

²⁴ Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 9, 54.

²⁵ Stephen W. Sears, *Lincoln’s Lieutenants: The High Command of the Army of the Potomac* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 85; Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 9.

²⁶ Sears, *Lincoln’s Lieutenants*, 85.

²⁷ Paraphrased from Stephen R. Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 7.

of McClellan's many Republican critics.²⁸ But for all his shortcomings, McClellan had fashioned an entire field army, its command, and its soldiery—top-down, bottom-up—in his own image. Hsieh writes,

McClellan's influence on the Army of the Potomac's command echelons throughout the entire Civil War stemmed from his early influence on the appointment of all general officers in the army. His authority had not been unlimited, but during the army's most formative months, he could ensure the advancement of such close friends as Baldy Smith, Fitz John Porter, and William B. Franklin to positions of high command and prominence. Furthermore, it was McClellan who organized the brigades and divisions that became the primary building blocks of the army, and whose commanders would be eligible for positions of higher responsibility later on during the war as a result of the army's iron-clad respect for seniority.²⁹

Though Lincoln, and not McClellan, chose the Army of the Potomac's first four corps lieutenants, McClellan would hand-select leaders of the army's Fifth and Sixth Corps, just as he had fashioned his brigade- and division-level commanders in other outfits.³⁰ In time, McClellan would promote Reynolds to command of the First Corps over officers who held rank over the native Pennsylvanian.

And then there were sectarian politics. Adding to the political environment that nurtured controversy within the Army of the Potomac high command almost from the moment of its creation were Radical Republicans in the Congress and their allies who urged a more expansive war against slavery. These men were especially eager to influence the war effort from its earliest stages. Union defeat at Ball's Bluff in October, 1861, coupled with the elevation of conservative Democrat George McClellan to General in Chief in November, presented the opportune political moment to strike a blow at the

²⁸ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War: The Old Army in War and Peace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 82-83, 4.

²⁹ Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 145.

³⁰ Paraphrased from Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 171.

conservative military caste, and Republican Radicals created the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. The committee's purpose was to ensure—under the thinly-veiled pretense of non-partisanship—that Union generals were sufficiently loyal to their cause of overthrowing the southern slaveocracy. As a conservative, McClellan aroused suspicion from the first, and the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War exercised its power of subpoena with great liberality. Radical Republicans accounted for few seats in the Congress in 1861, but on the Committee, they exerted real political force.³¹

For his part, the General in Chief did little to win over his Republican adversaries. From 1861 to 1862, McClellan lorded his technical military training over President Lincoln and flaunted his superior sense of military strategy. In some sense, this is not surprising; the tradition of civilian control of the military so celebrated in American politics came about organically as well as structurally, and the professional maturation and expansion of the antebellum U.S. Army hierarchy often blurred the distinction between civil and military commands.³² In another sense, it was true that McClellan possessed a greater knowledge of matters military science than the President, though throughout the war Lincoln demonstrated a remarkable grasp of policy objectives, grand strategy, and their interrelatedness to military operations in ways McClellan did not. In time, this proved essential for northern victory.³³ McClellan, however (and as Lincoln

³¹ Paraphrased from Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 9.

³² William B. Skelton, "The Commanding Generals and the Question of Civil Control in the Antebellum U.S. Army," *American Nineteenth Century History* 7, no. 2 (June 2006): 153-172.

³³ For more on the application of political and military thought in the Civil War, and especially on distinctions between, and integration of, policy, grand strategy, strategy, operations, and tactics, see Donald J. Stoker, *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

biographer Richard Carwardine has noted), had determined early on that the President was “an idiot”; on other occasions McClellan called Lincoln a “well-meaning baboon,” and later, less charitably, “the *original guerrilla*” (original emphasis). For Lincoln’s Republican accomplices McClellan demonstrated commensurate contempt. These, he thought, were “imbeciles.”³⁴ At the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation, McClellan circulated his own proclamation to the Army of the Potomac, and advocated explicitly that whatever errors existed in the policy of emancipation should be corrected by the loyal citizenry at the ballot box in November 1864 (McClellan doubtless hoped that his fawning soldiers would vote him into the Executive Mansion).³⁵ And, of course, there is the story in which President Lincoln visited the home of Gen. McClellan in November 1861 to discuss military operations. McClellan, who was at a wedding, returned home, evaded the porter, and absconded to his bedroom while Lincoln, Secretary of State William Seward, and White House Secretary John Hay sat in the parlor. At some length—Hay’s diary reveals a ninety-minute wait—the men sent a servant to inform McClellan of their presence. McClellan, with full knowledge that he had company in his parlor, had gone to bed.³⁶

After the Battle of Antietam in September 1862, in which he achieved a strategic (though not a tactical) victory after barely managing to hold the field, McClellan appointed Reynolds, then a brigadier general, to command of the First Corps.³⁷ Stephen

³⁴ George Brinton McClellan quoted in Richard Carwardine, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 187.

³⁵ Carwardine, *Lincoln*, 212.

³⁶ John Hay, *Letters of John Hay and Extracts from Diary*, in three volumes (Washington: Printed, not published, 1908), 1:52-53.

³⁷ Special Orders No. 266, 29 September 1862, in The United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the*

R. Taaffe, front and center among historians of Army of the Potomac corps command, observes that Reynolds had always been one of McClellan's favorite officers.³⁸ Indeed, in later years, and in the twilight of his life, McClellan would remember Reynolds as "a splendid soldier," one who "performed admirably every duty assigned to him," and as "remarkably brave and intelligent, an honest, true gentleman."³⁹ This was not mere embellishment. Early in the war, McClellan worked to promote Reynolds to brigadier general and requested that Secretary of War Simon Cameron attach the former Commandant of Cadets at West Point to the Army of the Potomac.⁴⁰ When McClellan recommended that Reynolds's temporary command of the First Corps become permanent in 1862, other commanders ranked Reynolds for the First Corps position.⁴¹ This fact was not lost on Reynolds's friend in the Army of the Potomac, George Meade, to whom temporary command of the First Corps had first descended, and whom Reynolds ultimately displaced for the post. Meade remarked in his personal correspondence, with notes of melancholy if not outright bitterness, that he wished Reynolds had stayed away from the army.⁴²

Union and Confederate Armies [hereafter *OR*] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887) series one, volume 19, part 2, p. 367.

³⁸ Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 49.

³⁹ George Brinton McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story: The War for the Union, the Soldiers Who Fought It, The Civilians Who Directed It and His Relations to It and to Them* (New York: Charles L. Webster and Company, 1887), 140.

⁴⁰ Letter of George Brinton McClellan to Simon Cameron, Head Quarters of the Army of the Potomac, Washington, 8 September 1861 in George Brinton McClellan, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865*, edited by Stephen W. Sears (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989), 97.

⁴¹ Paraphrased from Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 49.

⁴² Paraphrased from Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 49; Letter of George Gordon Meade to Margaret Meade, Sharpsburg, MD, 29 September 1862, in George Gordon Meade, *Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, compiled by his son, George Meade, and edited by his grandson, in two volumes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 1:314-315; Guelzo stresses Meade's resentment of Reynolds in

His appointment of Reynolds to command the First Corps in 1862 is telling, for by that time McClellan had emerged as a fully partisan commander adverse to the expansion of northern war aims against institutionalized racial slavery. Though the liberation of slaves took place in the war's early stages out of military necessity, the *de facto* liberation of slaves wrought by the incursion of Union armies into the South compelled Lincoln to expand northern war aims in the fall of 1862 with the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation, which the President signed on 1 January 1863.⁴³ For McClellan and many northern conservatives, the evolving Republican war for emancipation far exceeded the bounds of a just struggle against their southern brethren for the restoration of the Union *status quo antebellum*, though historian Zachery A. Fry has demonstrated that by 1864 most junior officers in the Army of the Potomac had successfully refashioned the political culture of their army, and had succeeded in re-defining loyalty as fidelity to the Republican administration and its political purposes; not, in a stricter sense, to the U.S. Constitution.⁴⁴ If Reynolds was well liked because he abstained from politics, surely his Democratic loyalties still won him favors.

Gettysburg: The Last Invasion (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 87-88. Indeed, Meade's supposed envy of Reynolds is a minor theme that permeates much of Guelzo's book.

⁴³ Kristopher A. Teeters, *Practical Liberators: Union Officers in the Western Theater during the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

⁴⁴ Gary W. Gallagher has demonstrated that the majority of the loyal U.S. citizenry believed in a war for the restoration of the Union—not, on the contrary, in a war for the eradication of racial slavery—and that the rise of abolitionist and Reconstruction studies have obscured the motivations of northern Americans from the historical record. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Zachery A. Fry, "Lincoln's Divided Legion: Loyalty and the Political Culture of the Army of the Potomac, 1861-1865," PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2017.

In time, and after McClellan's removal from the army, corps commanders in the Army of the Potomac would reflect greater political and ideological diversity, but in reality the culture of high command in that army still bore the impressions of McClellan's conservative politics and his habit of cautious command as late as 1864, tendencies that frustrated Ulysses S. Grant after he had assumed his role as General in Chief.⁴⁵ Taaffe has observed that corps commanders in the Army of the Potomac over the course of the war "fell into one of four overlapping categories": In one clique were "officers who sympathized with and supported Major General George McClellan," a staunch Democrat, and, often to President Lincoln's chagrin, an unflinching proponent of a limited war that in its execution respected the rights of southerners to their property in slaves as part of the North's broader objective to restore the Union to its *status quo ante bellum* under the Constitution.⁴⁶ Another faction owed their appointments to the Republican president. These were the political generals, men who received appointments as political favors owed in Washington. Then there were the opportunists who, per Taaffe, "allied themselves with any politician or general who could advance their careers, even those whose beliefs did not coincide with their own."⁴⁷ The fourth grouping constituted those men who rose through the ranks on the basis of merit to command a corps, typically at the grade of major general. Thus, generals who commanded corps in the Army of the Potomac were often sectarian, self-interested, and

⁴⁵ Brooks D. Simpson, "Ulysses S. Grant and the Problems of Command in 1864," in Woodworth, ed., *The Art of Command in the Civil War*, 138.

⁴⁶ Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 5.

⁴⁷ Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 5.

almost always harbored ideological commitments that affirmed, or ran counter to, the emancipationist politics of President Lincoln.⁴⁸

In the spring of 1863, the high command of the Army of the Potomac contained elements of all these groups, and it was laden with controversy, intrigue, and strife. Though commanders with close ties to McClellan had come to display a certain shrewdness and suppressed those loyalties, the McClellanite faction still exerted considerable influence.⁴⁹ And Hooker, a Republican political general who held the admiration—albeit the waning confidence—of President Lincoln, had squandered his opportunity to defeat Robert Lee at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Hooker’s lieutenants pounced.⁵⁰ In the second week of May, sensing the tenuous nature of his general’s position, and fearful that “Fighting Joe” had suffered a crippling loss of credibility, Lincoln considered the possibility that Hooker would need to be replaced.⁵¹ But the President’s first clandestine attempt to shelve the embattled Hooker failed. Darius Couch, second in command, declined Lincoln’s overture to take the reins of the army during his May 22 visit to Washington, citing poor health, and recommended Meade.⁵²

⁴⁸ Bledsoe has ably differentiated between the kinds of [p]olitics and [P]olitics that permeated Civil War field armies, writing, “Beyond politics, public policy, or political partisanship, Civil War army officer corps were vigorous, sometimes cutthroat, political arenas, with rivalries, power struggles, nepotism, favoritism, partisanship, and other political considerations informing command culture and decisions”; see Bledsoe, “Beyond the Chessboard of War,” 285. In no field army was political discord more glaring than in the Army of the Potomac.

⁴⁹ Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 107; Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 29.

⁵⁰ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 28.

⁵¹ Sears, *Lincoln’s Lieutenants*, 526-527.

⁵² Francis Amasa Walker, *History of the Second Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1886), 254; Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 103-104.

The President summoned Reynolds to the capital.⁵³ Departing camp on May 31, Reynolds traveled alone, and is reported to have met with Lincoln sometime on June 2, and then to have visited with family in Baltimore at the conclusion of the interview.⁵⁴ Reynolds returned to First Corps headquarters on June 3.⁵⁵ All available evidence suggests, but cannot prove, that a meeting between President Lincoln and Gen. Reynolds took place, though the closest contemporary corroboration—a letter penned by Reynolds’s sister to the General’s nephew in 1913 that chronicled events of that evening as Reynolds himself is purported to have narrated them—has disappeared from the Reynolds Family Papers (though it appears that Edward J. Nichols, Reynolds’s biographer, once studied it).⁵⁶ Lincoln’s secretaries John Hay and John Nicolay kept no known record of any meeting between the general and the president that survives. In

⁵³ Joseph G. Rosengarten, *William Reynolds, Rear-Admiral, U.S.N., John Fulton Reynolds, Major-General U.S.V., Colonel Fifth U.S. Infantry: A Memoir* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1880), 15.

⁵⁴ Stephen Minot Weld, *War Diary and Letters of Stephen Minot Weld* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1911), 208; Reynolds’s visit to Washington “for a few days” is confirmed in U.S. Maj. Gen. Abner Doubleday’s chronicle of his temporary ascension to command of the First Army Corps. Circular, Headquarters, First Army Corps, 31 May 1863, OR 51.1:1043; “Oration of Colonel Henry S. Huidekoper,” in *Pennsylvania at Gettysburg: Ceremonies at the Dedication of the Monuments Erected by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to Major-General George G. Meade, Major General Winfield S. Hancock, Major-General John F. Reynolds and to Mark the Positions of the Pennsylvania Commands Engaged in the Battle*, in two volumes, edited and compiled by John P. Nicholson (Harrisburg: William Stanley Ray, 1914), 2:995; Edward J. Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg: A Biography of General John F. Reynolds* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1958), 220-223.

⁵⁵ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 209.

⁵⁶ Reynolds confided to Meade in a brief conference on June 12 that he had, in fact, met with Lincoln. Meade, *Life and Letters*, 1:385; The letter in question, [letter details] is cited in Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 220-223; An 1981 card index at Archives and Special Collections at Franklin & Marshall College that catalogued letters of the *Reynolds Family Papers* does not list the 1913 letter, nor does the letter appear in the collection inventory dated 1985. It appears that the letter was in the private possession of John Fulton Reynolds Scott and his widow, Mary Scott, as late as October 1954. Mike Lear, email message to the author, August 20, 2018.

any event, Reynolds declined command of the army, a move that has prompted one chronicler of the Gettysburg Campaign to conclude that, in so doing, Reynolds threatened the very essence of the American civil-military tradition that championed civilian control of the professional army.⁵⁷

Forced to continue his search throughout the month of June, President Lincoln sounded out Hooker's remaining corps commanders to gauge their interest in inheriting the top command. All balked. Winfield Scott Hancock, a McClellan confidant, friend, and partisan who commanded the Second Corps at Gettysburg after inheriting it from Couch, and whom Guelzo has characterized as "chief of the McClellanites," wrote to his wife that he "had been approached" about the command, but that he would never accept such an offer because he did not "belong to that class of generals whom the Republicans care to bolster up."⁵⁸ John Sedgwick, in command of the Sixth Corps and also a fervent admirer of McClellan, was targeted by the President for the high command, and refused.⁵⁹ Lincoln conducted more fruitless interviews. ⁶⁰ Finally, on June 28, the President informed his cabinet that he was prepared to make a change of commanders. He proposed George Meade, John Sedgwick, and Darius Couch as possible replacements for Hooker. Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, reported in his diary entry for June 28 that Lincoln, after proposing the three officers for command, confessed to having had

⁵⁷ Sears, *Gettysburg* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 41.

⁵⁸ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 28; Letter of Winfield Scott Hancock to Almira Hancock, in Winfield Scott Hancock, *Reminiscences of Winfield Scott Hancock*, edited by Almira R. Hancock (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1887), 95.

⁵⁹ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 28; Thomas Worcester Hyde, *Following the Greek Cross, Or, Memories of the Sixth Army Corps* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1897), 140.

⁶⁰ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 85.

already selected Meade.⁶¹ As it happened, General in Chief Henry Halleck had already issued written orders the day before, and these were carried to Meade's tent.⁶² The Fifth Army Corps commander learned at 3:00 in the morning on June 28 of his appointment as commanding general of the Army of the Potomac.⁶³

In keeping with his oft-noted habit of secrecy, and consistent with his professional ethic, Reynolds seems only to have mentioned his meeting with President Lincoln—and the resultant offer of army command—to a select few, and not until Meade's promotion on June 28 became common knowledge.⁶⁴ In his *War Diary*, Captain Stephen Weld (who served on Reynolds's staff), wrote of the welcomed intelligence that Meade—a good McClellanite—was ordered to assume command.⁶⁵ Weld added to his diary by way of a footnote that Reynolds confessed to the captain that he had been offered the command, but refused it.⁶⁶ Still a more descriptive account of the command offer endures from the war diary of Colonel Charles Wainwright, an artilleryman who commanded the guns of the First Corps: “General Reynolds told me today,” wrote Wainwright in his entry for June 29,

that the command of this army was offered to him when he was summoned up to Washington a month ago; but he refused it, because, to use his own expression, “he was unwilling to take Burnside and Hooker's leavings.” I learn too that it was

⁶¹ Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, with an introduction by John T. Morse, Jr., in three volumes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 1:348.

⁶² U.S. Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck to U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Special Order No. 6, Washington, D.C., 27 June 1863, *OR*, 27.1:61.

⁶³ Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2:11.

⁶⁴ “Reynolds kept his opinions about politics and personalities to himself, so he was a hard man to get to know,” writes Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 49.

⁶⁵ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 227-228.

⁶⁶ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 227n.

mainly on Reynolds's recommendation that General Meade received his appointment.⁶⁷

In a striking commentary that was to contain elements of truth, evidenced in a matter of days at the Battle of Gettysburg, Wainwright continued his assessment of the command change thus: "For my part, I think we have got the best man of the two, much as I think of Reynolds. He will do better at carrying out plans than at devising them."⁶⁸

Presumably, Reynolds was one of the first to congratulate Meade on the latter's promotion to commanding general, though Meade, cynical even of the intentions of his friends, suspected in private correspondence that Reynolds had not told him the entire truth about how events had conspired to give him the top command.⁶⁹

Reynolds's refusal of the Army of the Potomac illustrates the highly political nature of army command, both within its corps-command structure and among contending cliques and factions—what Bledsoe characterizes as "vigorous" and "cutthroat" arenas wherein "rivalries, power struggles, nepotism, favoritism, partisanship, and other political considerations" all influenced command culture—and beyond, when commanding generals were subordinate to the demands of national politics and the frustrating agendas of war planners.⁷⁰ Irate at General Hooker for his loss of nerve at the Battle of Chancellorsville (Hooker infamously called a council of war in the early morning hours only to decide on a retreat, a move that frustrated the

⁶⁷ Charles Shiels Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles S. Wainwright*, edited and with an introduction by Allan Nevins (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1962), 229.

⁶⁸ Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, 229.

⁶⁹ Charles F. Benjamin, "Hooker's Appointment and Removal," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, edited by Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, in four volumes (New York: Century Company, 1884-1887), 3:243; Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2:33; Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants*, 532.

⁷⁰ Bledsoe, "Beyond the Chessboard of War," 285.

Pennsylvanian), Reynolds took opportunity to signal his opposition to the Republican political general and his faction through his interview for the top command.⁷¹ The man Reynolds recommended to President Lincoln, George Meade, was a McClellan sympathizer hand-chosen for brigade command in 1861 whose elevation to top command in June 1863 suggested to onlookers, if not the second coming of “Little Mac” to his army, then perhaps a partial restoration of McClellanite army culture.⁷²

In a broader sense, Reynolds’s refusal of the Army of the Potomac confirms his reluctance to accept responsibility for the war from a Republican administration that had a track record of meddling in the affairs of its armies and dictating, from the perspective of U.S. Army professionals, unreasonable or impracticable terms of military policy. Reynolds had also soured on the fact that his peers in the Army of the Potomac felt too beholden to the civil-military authority in Washington. In January 1863, Reynolds wrote to his sisters and implicitly criticized war planners in Washington for meddling in professional military affairs.⁷³ Four months later, in the wake of the Battle of Chancellorsville, Reynolds agreed with Meade that for too long the Army of the Potomac had been made subservient to the whims of Washington.⁷⁴ In sum, Reynolds’s

⁷¹ Darius N. Couch, “The Chancellorsville Campaign,” in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3:154-171, at p. 171.

⁷² Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 28; Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War*, 145; Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 112; Sears, *Lincoln’s Lieutenants*, 93; Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 215; Weld, *War Diary and Letters of Stephen Minot Weld*, 227-228; Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, 229.

⁷³ Transcription of Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to Jane Reynolds, Camp at Agua Nueva, Mexico, 1 March 1847, *Reynolds Family Papers*, in *Edward J. Nichols Collection*, Archives and Special Collections, Franklin & Marshall College [hereafter *RFP* and *EJNC*]; Letter of John Fulton Reynolds to his sisters, Head Quarters First Army Corps, Left Grand Division, 23 January 1863, *RFP*.

⁷⁴ Missive of U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds to U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Head Quarters, First Army Corps, 24 May 1863, *OR*, 25.1:510.

refusal of army command reflected real political, as well as professional, considerations, and sheds light on how West Point-trained U.S. Army professionals often resented civilian war planners who, in their view, failed to understand the exigencies of war.

In back of these considerations lies the apparent fact that Reynolds seems to have felt particularly comfortable in, and suited to, corps command. After all, and as Rafuse has written, the opportunity to command a corps was an enviable one that offered prestige.⁷⁵ Moreover, competency in command of a corps offered confirmation that a major general possessed leadership skill, requisite attention to administrative detail, and sufficient tactical ability.⁷⁶ This latter aspect was, in Reynolds's case, especially true. Though ambitious officers might have viewed corps command as a proverbial stepping stone to command of a field army, for Reynolds, competency at the helm of a corps offered professional security, and, as important, insulation from political interference. "Reynolds was not without ambition," one historian has concluded, but the Lancaster native "preferred his role of corps commander to army commander unless he could have a free hand."⁷⁷ With ample reason to believe that his friend would assume the Army of the Potomac high command in the event President Lincoln moved to replace Hooker, Reynolds must have felt confident, too, that he would retain his position and continue to exercise maximum command latitude under the authority of a peer over whom he formerly had held rank. If Reynolds had in fact considered this possibility, his

⁷⁵ Paraphrased from Rafuse, *Corps Commanders in Blue*, 6.

⁷⁶ Epstein notes that corps command in the Army of the Potomac initially lagged behind its Confederate adversaries, and that northern generals, despite their conceptual understanding of *corps d'arme* and the place of corps in the Napoleonic operational military art, "did not understand how to organize a corps to provide maximum combat capability." Epstein, "Creation and Evolution of the American Army Corps," 29, 44-45.

⁷⁷ Oliver J. Kelly, "Soldier General of the Army: John Fulton Reynolds," *Civil War History* 4, no. 2 (June 1958): 119-128, quotations at pp. 124, 127.

speculation turned out to have been well founded, for Meade's trust in Reynolds was complete. After he received orders to command the army, and on the eve of battle at Gettysburg, Meade placed Reynolds in command not of one corps, but of three: the First, the Third, and the Eleventh.⁷⁸

The command partnership of Reynolds and Meade

Joseph T. Glatthaar, foremost among Civil War military historians, wrote in *Partners in Command* (1994) that “the personalities and interactions of civil and military leadership ... are an integral component of the enduring appeal of the Civil War.”⁷⁹ The personalities and partnerships of Civil War generals continue to command popular appeal because they were essential preconditions for battlefield outcomes: “More than disputes about this or that strategy,” historian Steven E. Woodworth has written, “defensive versus offensive operations, or allocations of troops to one front or another, the key questions in matters of high command during the Civil War were often ones pertaining to the personalities of those who exercised leadership and how those personalities interacted with one another.”⁸⁰ In a similar vein, Bledsoe observes that

⁷⁸ U.S. Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck to U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Special Order No. 6, Washington, D.C., 27 June 1863, *OR*, 27.1:61; Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2:11-12; Meade deputed Reynolds for wing command on the morning of June 30. See *OR* 27.3:414-415; Reynolds commanded on June 30 some 38,134 infantry across three corps, of whom 27,815 were available or fit for duty. Additionally, his wing command counted 84 pieces of artillery. Fifty-two cavalymen were attached to U.S. Maj. Gen. Howard's 11th Corps. Figures tabulated from No. 8, Abstract from returns of the Army of the Potomac, June 10—July 31, 1863, 30 June 1863, *OR*, 27.1:151.

⁷⁹ Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Partners in Command: The Relationships Between Leaders in the Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 2.

⁸⁰ Woodworth, *No Band of Brothers: Problems of the Rebel High Command* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), xii.

“leadership of a Civil War army was often an extremely personal enterprise,” and that to understand the essence of command and generalship, historians

would be well served to adopt a biographer’s mentality—for there, in the details and texture of individual lives are the patterns of behavior, tendencies, traits, and experiences that inform commanders’ perceptions, mold their assumptions, and otherwise fill out the environment of deliberation and decision that comprise military operations.⁸¹

While none can deny that battles escape the control of generals, and that external conditions such as environment and the fates, as well as other factors of consequence—junior command decisions and the discipline, as well as the moral courage of the rank and file, for instance—influence military engagements, it remains true that generals and their particular personalities help to shape the course of battles.⁸²

The Battle of Gettysburg was a crucial “why” that resulted from command perceptions, assumptions, and deliberations inherent to the very short but consequential command partnership that existed between Reynolds and Meade for three fateful days in Maryland and Pennsylvania.⁸³ Historians have acknowledged that a friendship existed between Meade and Reynolds, a fact documented by contemporaries.⁸⁴ Whatever his faults—Guelzo characterizes Meade, perhaps with

⁸¹ Bledsoe, “Beyond the Chessboard of War,” 286-287.

⁸² Paraphrased from Bledsoe, “Beyond the Chessboard of War,” 283.

⁸³ Bledsoe writes, “the military history of the Civil War is not simply the ‘what’ of the past,” it is, “more importantly, the ‘why,’ ‘how,’ and, crucially, ‘what does it mean for what came after’ the conflict”; see Bledsoe, “Beyond the Chessboard of War,” 280.

⁸⁴ Rafuse considers the friendship that existed between Meade and Reynolds in *George Gordon Meade and the War in the East* (Abilene: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2003). See pp. 38, 72, 79; Charles Henry Veil, Reynolds’s orderly at the Battle of Gettysburg, wrote in his memoirs that “General Meade was an old army officer and a particular friend of General Reynolds.” Veil, *The Memoirs of Charles Henry Veil: A Soldier’s Recollection of the Civil War and the Arizona Territory*, edited and with an introduction by Herman J. Viola (New York: Orion Books, 1993), 27.

embellishment, as an envious and bitter man, especially of Reynolds—Meade remained on good terms with Reynolds from the time the two men served together as brigade commanders in the Pennsylvania Reserves, to the winter of 1862, when Meade eventually assumed corps command, and after June 28, 1863, when Meade assumed command of the Army of the Potomac.⁸⁵ Reynolds was universally admired in the Old Army, at West Point, and likeable even to the irascible Meade.⁸⁶

One account of Meade's appointment to the high command, while perhaps apocryphal, illustrates the friendship and the sense of professional trust that existed between Meade and Reynolds. "When Reynolds heard the news" of Meade's ascension to the high command, wrote Charles F. Benjamin, a clerk at Army of the Potomac headquarters who later claimed to have witnessed morning events,

he dressed himself with scrupulous care and, handsomely attended, rode to headquarters to pay his respects to the new commander. Meade, who looked like a wagon master in the marching clothes he had hurriedly slipped on when awakened in his tent, understood the motive of the act, and after the exchange of salutations all around, he took Reynolds by the arm, and, leading him aside, told him how surprising, imperative, and unwelcome were the orders he had received; how much he would have preferred the choice to have fallen on Reynolds; how anxious he had been to see Reynolds and tell him these things, and how helpless he should hold himself to be did he not feel that Reynolds would give him the earnest support that he would have given to Reynolds in a like situation. Reynolds answered that, in his opinion, the command had fallen where it belonged, that he was glad that such a weight of responsibility had not come upon him, and that Meade might count upon the best support he could give. Meade then communicated to Reynolds all that he had learned from Hooker and

⁸⁵ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 87-88, 120; Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants*, 92-93, 493.

⁸⁶ Admiration of Reynolds cut across political boundaries within the Army of the Potomac high command. Oliver Otis Howard, an abolitionist and evangelical, wrote of Reynolds, in his autobiography, "From soldiers, cadets, and officers, junior and senior, [Reynolds] always secured reverence for his serious character, respect for his ability, care for his uniform discipline, admiration for his fearlessness, and love for his unfailing generosity. Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, in two volumes (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1908), 2:402; McClellan, a fierce Democrat, also admired him; see McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, 140.

Butterfield concerning the movements and positions of the two armies, and hastily concerted with him a plan of cooperation which resulted in the fighting of the battle of Gettysburg upon ground selected by Reynolds.⁸⁷

Penned after the Battle of Gettysburg, the account carries notes of embellishment and historical selectivity; certainly, it chronicles events in the light of known outcomes. And no written evidence of any “plan of cooperation” between the two generals exists (of course, this does not preclude the possibility that the men spoke of battle plans).⁸⁸

Benjamin’s narrative has found acceptance among some of the Gettysburg Campaign’s most able historians, and for whatever it may embellish, his retelling of the Reynolds-Meade exchange on June 28—the last documented meeting of the two generals and friends—squares with the available evidence concerning the friendship and sense of mutual trust that both men shared, along with the unfavorable view they held concerning the prospect (though, in Meade’s case, the eventuality) of being chosen by President Lincoln and the Republican administration for the Army of the Potomac’s high command.⁸⁹ In a matter of days from Meade’s appointment to commanding

⁸⁷ Benjamin, “Hooker’s Appointment and Removal,” in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3:243.

⁸⁸ In an account published five years before the appearance of Benjamin’s narrative in *Battles and Leaders*, Col. Joseph G. Rosengarten, who served on Reynolds’s staff, confirmed that Reynolds had been with Meade at Frederick when the latter officer received orders to assume command of the Army of the Potomac, and that the two men conferred that evening and together “work[ed] out the plan which ended in Gettysburg.” Joseph G. Rosengarten, “General Reynolds’ Last Battle,” in Alexander Kelly McClure, edited, *The Annals of War: Written by Leading Participants North and South* (Philadelphia: The Times Publishing Company, 1879), 62. Like Benjamin’s narrative, the account of Rosengarten displays traces of embellishment and selective memory. His account, however, is more contemporaneous, and merits careful consideration.

⁸⁹ Benjamin’s chronicle has found varying degrees of acceptance in leading campaign, battle, and command histories, including, most famously, Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (1979; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1997); Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The First Day* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Rafuse, *George Gordon Meade and the War in the East*; Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*; and Guelzo, *Gettysburg*.

general, the professional partnership of Meade and Reynolds would help to determine the course of a great battle.

Meade's trust in Reynolds was borne, too, of military necessity, for Robert E. Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania was well underway in late June, and the decision of President Lincoln to replace Gen. Hooker left Meade with no time to make changes to his general staff. The Confederate Army of Northern Virginia had been pillaging and plundering its way through central Pennsylvania.⁹⁰ Two Confederate corps operated near Chambersburg, and another was split between Carlisle and York.⁹¹ Battle loomed. Meade possessed the sound, but vague, strategic sense upon assuming his post to keep the Army of the Potomac between Washington, Baltimore, and Lee's army—an essential condition of his orders from Halleck—and entertained the possibility of mobilizing the federal garrison at Harper's Ferry to reinforce his position north of the Potomac River.⁹² But the only possible staff change that Meade entertained concerned the administration of his army. After sounding out two officers to serve as his chief of staff, and after formally offering the position to Brig. Gen. Andrew Humphreys, a divisional

⁹⁰ Colorful depictions of Lee's plundering of Pennsylvania appear in Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 99-114; The most exhaustive study of Lee's operations against Pennsylvania to date, which reveals the extensive and generally unrestrained nature of the Confederate war against the citizenry of the Keystone State, is Jason Mann Frawley, "Marching Through Pennsylvania: The Story of Soldiers and Civilians during the Gettysburg Campaign," Ph.D. diss., Texas Christian University, 2008; A key and tragic feature of this plundering included the capture and enslavement of African American freepersons; see Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 281-282.

⁹¹ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 32.

⁹² U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade to U.S. Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck, Frederick, Maryland, 28 June 1863, *OR* 27.1:61-62; U.S. Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck to U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Special Order No. 6, Washington, D.C., 27 June 1863, *OR*, 27.1:61; U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade to U.S. Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck, Headquarters Army of the Potomac, Frederick, Maryland, 28 June 1863, *OR* 27.1:62-63.

commander of the Third Army Corps, who declined it, Meade made the decision to retain Maj. Gen. Dan Butterfield, a Republican political general who served Hooker.⁹³

But with mounting intelligence that brought the picture and positions of Lee's army into clearer view, Meade had little time to waste.⁹⁴ On June 28, Meade ordered the First and Eleventh Corps from Frederick to Emmitsburg nearer to the Maryland-Pennsylvania border, so as to protect Baltimore, and to guard against any possible Confederate thrust in the direction of Washington, all the while maintaining preparedness for an engagement in Pennsylvania.⁹⁵ Reynolds's First Corps began its march at 4:00 a.m. the next day in a pouring rain; they marched through the beautiful Maryland countryside, convinced that the entirety of Robert E. Lee's army lay waiting for them to the north and east.⁹⁶ On the evening of June 29, Meade ordered Reynolds and the First Corps halfway to Gettysburg the following day.⁹⁷ On June 30, the First Corps marched again, this time in a drizzle, and Reynolds made headquarters at Moritz Tavern, seven miles south of Gettysburg and nearer still to the Pennsylvania line.⁹⁸

⁹³ U.S. Maj. Gen. Daniel Butterfield to U.S. Brig. Gen. Andrew Humphreys, Headquarters Army of the Potomac, Frederick, Maryland, 28 June 1863, *OR* 51.1:1064.

⁹⁴ See communiques exchanged between Meade and Halleck in the afternoon and evening of 28 June 1863, and the morning of 29 June 1863 *OR* 27.1:63-67.

⁹⁵ Report of U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade to U.S. Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck, *OR* 27.1:114-115; No. 7, Itinerary of the Army of the Potomac and co-operating forces, June 5—July 31, 1863, *OR* 27.1:144; Orders, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, 28 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:375; No. 29, Reports of Maj. Gen. Abner Doubleday, U.S. Army, commanding Third Division of, and First Army Corps, Washington, D.C., 14 December 1863, *OR* 27.1:243.

⁹⁶ U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, General Orders No. 70, Headquarters First Army Corps, 29 June 1863 *OR* 51.1:1064; Weld, *War Diary and*, 228; Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, 228.

⁹⁷ Circular, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, 29 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:402; Orders, Headquarters Army of the Potomac, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:416.

⁹⁸ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 229.

Sensing an imminent battle, Meade dispatched a circular to all his corps lieutenants that was disseminated to the Army of the Potomac. In it the commanding general ordered that corps and division commanders address their troops and underscore the severity of their military situation. “The enemy are on our soil,” read the circular. “The whole country now looks anxiously to the army to deliver it from the presence of the foe. ... Homes, firesides, and domestic altars are involved. The army has fought well heretofore; it is believed it will fight more desperately and bravely than ever if it is addressed in fitting terms.” And, lest any soldier fail to grasp the gravity of the campaign, Meade authorized “corps and other commanders” to order the instantaneous death of any enlisted man “who fails in his duty at this hour.”⁹⁹ At nearly the same hour in which he ordered the circular, and because he was not nearer to the front, Meade deputized Reynolds as commander of the left wing.¹⁰⁰ With several of his corps inching into closer proximity with reported locations of the enemy, Meade, as Coddington put the matter, “wanted someone whom he trusted to act in his stead.”¹⁰¹

In all of this, Meade’s confidence in Reynolds was borne out in the command latitude, and, when it mattered most, the flexibility that Meade’s multiple dispatches to his wing commander on June 30 communicated. The two generals maintained close communication that day. Reynolds speculated in a morning dispatch that Lee’s army might move to strike the Federals south of Emmitsburg closer to Frederick and Mount

⁹⁹ Circular, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:415.

¹⁰⁰ Order of U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade to U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:414-415.

¹⁰¹ Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 232; Rafuse has described Reynolds as Meade’s “most trusted subordinate” in *George Gordon Meade and the War in the East*, 79.

St. Mary's College, and counseled Meade to reconnoiter that ground for a defensive position.¹⁰² Meade responded in turn, shortly before the noon hour, by indicating that he had intended for the move northward, toward Gettysburg, but he also included a conditional postscript for Reynolds appended to the communique: "*If*," the postscript read, "after occupying your present position, *it is your judgment* that you would be in a better position at Emmitsburg than where you are, you *can* fall back without waiting for the enemy or further orders" (emphasis added). Meade's second sentence emphasized the northward advance: "Your present position," the commanding general continued, "was given *more with a view to an advance on Gettysburg* than a defensive point" (emphasis added).¹⁰³ Reynolds therefore possessed clear discretion as wing commander to advance on Gettysburg or to fall back on Emmitsburg, south of the Pennsylvania line, as he saw fit, where he would receive reinforcements.¹⁰⁴ If Meade had wished for Reynolds to abstain from an engagement with the enemy, he did not say so. In fact, Meade's dispatch communicated a certain measure of latitude for aggressive action that Reynolds is almost certain to have intuited: "if [the enemy] advance against me," Meade wrote, "I must concentrate *at that point* where they show the strongest force."¹⁰⁵ In the absence of more explicit directives, and in light of orders from Meade that Reynolds

¹⁰² U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds to U.S. Maj. Gen. Herbert S. Butterfield, Headquarters of the Left Wing, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:417-418.

¹⁰³ U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade to U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, Taneytown, Maryland, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:420.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade to U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, Taneytown, Maryland, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:420.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade to U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, Taneytown, Maryland, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:420.

would receive in the pre-dawn hours of July 1, this June 30 dispatch proved consequential, for from it Reynolds believed he had divined Meade's intentions.

But Meade's own designs were morphing as June turned to July. He had accomplished the concentration of his army. Intelligence then available to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton in Washington suggested that Lee, too, had begun concentrating his forces, a signal that the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia had turned from the northeast and was willing to give battle.¹⁰⁶ On the evening of June 30 Meade drafted orders for Reynolds to advance on Gettysburg in the morning with Oliver Otis Howard's 11th Army Corps in supporting distance.¹⁰⁷ Almost simultaneously, however, and with the meticulous attention to detail and contingency one might expect from the Old Army engineer, Meade formed an elaborate plan to draw the Confederate Army into Maryland. Entrenched upon heights overlooking Pipe Creek, which Meade ordered reconnoitered and scouted, the Federals would occupy a formidable defensive position *if*—no small condition—Lee's army gave battle to the Army of the Potomac in its attempt to threaten Baltimore or the nation's capital.¹⁰⁸

Known famously as the Pipe Creek Circular, and begun sometime in the evening on June 30, Meade's order dictated that all corps should prepare to execute withdrawals to the position fixed by his engineers between Middleburg and Manchester. It was an

¹⁰⁶ Edwin M. Stanton to U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Washington, D.C., 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.1:69.

¹⁰⁷ Orders, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, Taneytown, Maryland, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:416.

¹⁰⁸ Henry J. Hunt, "The First Day at Gettysburg," 3:274; "Testimony of Major General George G. Meade," 5 March 1864, in Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, 2nd Session, 38th United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War*, in four volumes (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1865), 4:330; "Testimony of General Henry J. Hunt," 4 April 1864, in *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War*, 4:452-453.

elaborate and intricate circular, one that reflected careful thought and design. It almost certainly took time to draft, proof, and refine for clarity and delivery, but at some twenty-nine sentences in length, the circular was laden with ambiguities and fraught with complexities: “the time for falling back,” wrote Meade, “can only be developed by circumstances.” Even so, logistics and routes were to be pre-determined by corps commanders and other officers, who were also to make themselves familiar with terrain and roads, even as there was no certainty that the order would come. In the event that Meade decided to execute his circular, he would give immediate notice (of course, the commanding general would need to rely on messengers and aides to ensure that his lieutenants received that order in a timely manner to execute it in concert). Corps commanders needed to prepare for all possible contingencies. And while a narrow literal reading of one sentence contained in the otherwise labyrinthine text certainly allows for the possibility that Meade wished to attack—“developments may cause the commanding general to assume the offensive from his present positions”—the thrust of the circular suggested a defensive posture.¹⁰⁹ But the circular, which left headquarters on July 1, never found Reynolds, to the later realization of his staff.¹¹⁰

Nor did a missive that Meade also dispatched to Reynolds in the late morning hours of July 1, drafted in the approximate hour of the Pipe Creek Circular, which offers unique insight into the commanding general’s frame of mind and is illustrative, too, of the confidence Meade placed in his lieutenant. “The commanding general cannot decide,” wrote Meade, via his assistant adjutant general, “whether it is his best policy to

¹⁰⁹ Circular, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, Taneytown, Maryland, 1 July 1863, *OR* 27.3:458-459.

¹¹⁰ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 232.

move to attack until he learns something more definite of the point at which he is concentrating.” The missive continued: “he would like to have your views upon the subject.” What is more, Meade expressed his uncertainty about the suitability of positions around Gettysburg for offensive and defensive operations. “He feels,” the missive continued in a revelation of considerable candor, “that *you know more* of the *condition of the troops* in your vicinity *and the country* than he does” (emphasis added).¹¹¹ That Reynolds had possessed sound knowledge of and appreciation for the terrain around Gettysburg, and its strategic significance, was confirmed by the general’s aide, Joseph Rosengarten, in later years, as well as others who recalled the July 1 battle.¹¹²

What, then, did Meade intend? Coddington, in his definitive campaign study, has concluded (with sympathy for the Army of the Potomac commander) that Meade’s Pipe Creek Circular and his late-morning dispatch to Reynolds are not necessarily in contradiction, and that they signal their author’s intent to maintain maximum readiness and flexibility to fight at a moment’s notice.¹¹³ To be sure, Meade’s orders do suggest

¹¹¹ U.S. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade to U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, Taneytown, Maryland, 1 July 1863, *OR* 27.3:460-461.

¹¹² Rosengarten, “General Reynolds’ Last Battle,” 62; For additional confirmation of Reynolds’s grasp of key terrain features, see, Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 232; Martin D. Hardin, *History of the Twelfth Regiment, Pennsylvania Reserve Volunteer Corps (41st Regiment of the Line), from its Muster into the United States Service, August 10th, 1861, to its Muster Out, June 11th, 1864, Together with Biographical Sketches of Officers and Men and a Complete Muster-Out Roll. Compiled from Official Reports, Letters, and Other Documents* (New York: Published by the author, 1890), 146; and Hardin, “Gettysburg Not a Surprise to the Union Commander,” in *Military Essays and Recollections: Papers Read Before the Commandery of the State of Illinois, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, in eight volumes (1907; repr., Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1992), 4:267-268.

¹¹³ “When studied in reference to each other,” writes Coddington, the commanding general’s dispatches “demonstrate Meade’s willingness to fight Lee at any

that the commanding general was preparing with engineer-like precision for unknown possibilities on June 30 and July 1. They demonstrate, with almost commensurate clarity, Meade's preference for a pitched battle at Pipe Creek. And they dispel the notion, much in vogue in the aftermath of the battle, that the Army of the Potomac had moved recklessly and initiated an inadvertent clash with Confederate forces. But close analysis of the Pipe Creek Circular and Meade's July 1 missive bear out another conclusion, acknowledged by some contemporaries, and a select few historians (Coddington chief among them), though it has not received wide circulation: while Meade desired to fight at Pipe Creek, and though he appears to have given more thought to battle in Maryland than at Gettysburg, the commanding general ordered Reynolds, his longtime friend, closer to the front, and, as one soldier recollected, "practically gave him *carte blanche*"; that is, Meade invited his trusted subordinate to order a general engagement in his stead if the wing commander thought it prudent so to do.¹¹⁴ And on the morning of July 1, absent more complete knowledge that his actions might upset his commander's preferred strategy, Reynolds did precisely this.

time and any place as long as it was to his advantage to do so." Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 240.

¹¹⁴ Hardin, "Gettysburg Not a Surprise to the Union Commander," 4:268; Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2:33-35; Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 240; Pfanz channels a similar interpretation in *Gettysburg*, p. 49.

“I will fight them inch by inch!” Cemetery Hill and Reynolds’s sense of the tactical situation on July 1

Reynolds had good reason to expect a battle on the morning of July 1, though he did not admit as much to the junior officers under his command.¹¹⁵ In the first place, he possessed sound and thorough intelligence from U.S. Brig. Gen. John Buford, who entered Gettysburg with two brigades of Federal cavalry around noon on June 30, and who visited with Reynolds personally that afternoon.¹¹⁶ Given the frequency and detail of their communication that had spanned the morning and into the night, and their close proximity as day turned to dusk on June 30, which allowed for the exchange of views via rider, it is not unreasonable to conclude, though the available evidence contained in the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* cannot prove, that Reynolds possessed more contemporaneous intelligence concerning the whereabouts of the Army of Northern Virginia than did Meade.¹¹⁷

In the second place, Reynolds met with Maj. Gen. Oliver Howard during the night of June 30, and the two men had discussed the real prospect of an imminent battle on

¹¹⁵ In his July 1 reminiscence, Charles Wainwright recorded that he had ridden to find Reynolds “to learn what [he] could as to the prospects of a fight.” Reynolds, per Wainwright, “did not expect any”; see Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, 232.

¹¹⁶ Rosengarten, *William Reynolds, Rear-Admiral, U.S.N., John Fulton Reynolds, Major-General U.S.V., Colonel Fifth U.S. Infantry*, 17.

¹¹⁷ U.S. Brig. Gen. John Buford to U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.1:922; U.S. Brig. Gen. John Buford to U.S. Maj. Gen. Alfred Pleasanton, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.1:923; U.S. Brig. Gen. John Buford to U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.1:923-924; Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 229; Walter Kempster, “The Cavalry at Gettysburg,” in *War Papers Read Before the Commandery of the State of Wisconsin, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, in four volumes (1914; repr., Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1992), 4:399-400; I owe this particular observation to Guelzo, who writes, “thanks to John Buford’s cavalry screen, Reynolds may have known more about the precise location of the Army of Northern Virginia than the Union commanding general did”; see Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 120.

July 1. In an 1876 reminiscence he published in the July issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and later in his *Autobiography*, Howard remembered how Reynolds had summoned him to the left wing commander's headquarters at Moritz Tavern just after dark.¹¹⁸ The men had communicated throughout the day on June 30, but Howard did not possess a map of Adams County, which he desperately wanted, and so Reynolds took the initiative to meet with Howard directly.¹¹⁹ Accounts Howard rendered after the war bear subtle differences, but on key points, they display important consistencies: Howard found Reynolds in the back room of the tavern. The wing commander had amassed a considerable amount of dispatches, local intelligence, maps, and orders for review. Among these was Meade's circular from earlier in the day that issued an appeal to the patriotic and manly sentiments of all the Army of the Potomac and admonished its soldiers to stand and fight with the enemy on Union soil.¹²⁰ Reynolds shared Meade's circular with Howard. Then together the two men examined the day's dispatches. Though these were "abundant and conflicting," and came "from all directions," as Howard was to recall, nevertheless they impressed upon both generals "the conclusion ... that Lee's infantry and artillery *in great force* were in our neighborhood" (emphasis

¹¹⁸ Howard, "Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg, June and July, 1863," *The Atlantic Monthly* 38, no. 225 (July 1876):48-71, at 52, in the *Oliver Otis Howard Papers*, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine [hereafter *OOHP*]; Howard, *Autobiography*, 402; Howard also detailed his final meeting with Reynolds in remarks he delivered at Gettysburg in 1890; see Howard, "Some Fallen Heroes of Gettysburg," *OOHP*.

¹¹⁹ U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds to U.S. Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard, Moritz Tavern, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:417; U.S. Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard to U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, Emmitsburg, Maryland, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:419.

¹²⁰ Howard, "Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg," 52, *OOHP*; Howard, *Autobiography*, 403; Circular, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:415.

added).¹²¹ After this, the men studied the terrain of and surrounding Gettysburg, and considered “the probabilities of a great battle.”¹²² When they parted late in the evening—Howard estimates sometime near 11:00 pm—both men had a clearer sense of the role Reynolds’s left wing “would be likely to play in the conflict.”¹²³

While these accounts have been interpreted by some historians, in light of the outcome of the fighting on July 1, to suggest that Reynolds had experienced, as Howard put it, “some presentiment of his death” (Reynolds had impressed Howard as both “unusually sad,” as well as “depressed” and “anxious”), they are also telling for how they confirm—if only indirectly—that Reynolds possessed more than a vague sense of Meade’s plan for luring the Army of Northern Virginia into battle.¹²⁴ They suggest, too, that Reynolds believed on June 30 what Meade’s grandson was to write in later years, namely, that he was in possession of Meade’s “plans as far as they could be formed,” and that “he had ... the fullest understanding with the commanding general” of the role his wing was to play in the looming battle.¹²⁵ If Reynolds’s subordinates did not sense an immediate engagement on the morning of July 1, the evidence bears out with near certainty that Generals Reynolds and Howard went to sleep on June 30 convinced that a great battle loomed, and that they were to perform crucial roles in it.

Reynolds was startled at 4:00 am on July 1 by Maj. William Riddle, his aide-de-camp, who arrived at corps headquarters from army headquarters with Meade’s orders

¹²¹ Howard, *Autobiography*, 403.

¹²² Howard, *Autobiography*, 404.

¹²³ Howard, “Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg,” 52, *OOHP*; Howard, *Autobiography*, 404; Howard, “Some Fallen Heroes of Gettysburg,” *OOHP*.

¹²⁴ Howard, “Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg,” 52, *OOHP*; Howard, *Autobiography*, 404; Howard, “Some Fallen Heroes of Gettysburg,” *OOHP*.

¹²⁵ Quotations adapted from Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2:35.

for the day's march, which had been issued on June 30.¹²⁶ Wrapped in his blanket and lying upon the floor, "in accordance with that disregard for luxury for which he was remarkable," the General was enjoying his first "sound" sleep in several night's time.¹²⁷ After he awakened from his slumber, Reynolds instructed Riddle to read the orders aloud. Riddle read and then twice repeated the orders: "First Corps to Gettysburg"; "Eleventh Corps to Gettysburg (or supporting distance)"; corps commanders were to put their marching columns "in lightest possible order" for maximum alacrity; "vigilance" and "energy" from all commanders were required, and the "personal attention of corps commanders" was necessary for the "reduction of *impedimenta*."¹²⁸

His orders received, Reynolds woke his staff, "as he frequently had to do," and began readying the First Corps for its march to Gettysburg.¹²⁹ Reynolds dispatched directives to Howard, and instructed the Eleventh Corps commander to subordinate the movement of his wagon trains to the movement of his troops.¹³⁰ He also summoned U.S. Maj. Gen. Abner Doubleday, acting commander of the First Corps in Reynolds's stead, to his headquarters, where the men sorted dispatches and communiques from army headquarters in Taneytown.¹³¹ One reminiscence—perhaps apocryphal—holds that

¹²⁶ Copy of Letter of William Riddle to Lt. Bouvier, Warrenton Junction, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, 4 August 1863, *RFP*.

¹²⁷ Letter of Riddle to Bouvier, 4 August 1863, *RFP*.

¹²⁸ Orders, Headquarters Army of the Potomac, 30 June 1863, *OR* 27.3:416.

¹²⁹ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 229.

¹³⁰ U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds to U.S. Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard, Headquarters of the Left Wing, Moritz Tavern, 1 July 1863, *OR* 27.3:457.

¹³¹ Paraphrased from Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 69; Doubleday recollected that together the two men reviewed telegrams before Reynolds "sprang on his horse" and rode to the front of his column; see Doubleday, "Testimony of Major General Abner Doubleday," *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War*, 4:305.

Reynolds and his staff enjoyed a fresh breakfast of meat, potatoes, eggs, and bread, courtesy of a local farmer, for which Reynolds offered \$5.00 reimbursement.¹³²

The First Corps started for Gettysburg at around 8:00 am on July 1.¹³³ While Maj. Gen. Doubleday ordered the Third Division to take the lead, Reynolds reversed that decision, placing Brig. Gen. James S. Wadsworth's First Division in the lead of the march north of Moritz Tavern on the Gettysburg road.¹³⁴ This proved significant and fortuitous, for Wadsworth's two brigades under the command of brigadiers Solomon Meredith and Lysander Cutler featured some of the Army of the Potomac's most crack and veteran units.¹³⁵ One may suppose, not unreasonably, that Reynolds wanted these available for immediate action in case of a general engagement. Reynolds's decision to countermand Doubleday's order expedited the march. In approximately two hours'

¹³² "History of the Shriver Family," Vertical File Collection, Participant Accounts, John F. Reynolds, *Gettysburg National Military Park* [hereafter *GNMP*]. While descriptive, the account is nevertheless suspect for it is retrospection, and attributes to Reynolds the words, as he is purported to have spoken to the farmers, "take [the money], for I may not live to come back this way and reimburse you for your kindness." While the account captures Reynolds's characteristic kindness, it is otherwise suspect for its notes that sound the General's impending death at Gettysburg.

¹³³ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 229.

¹³⁴ Paraphrased from Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 261.

¹³⁵ Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 262; The First Brigade, First Division, First Corps was an all-western brigade composed of the 19th Indiana Regiment, the 24th Michigan Regiment, the 2nd Wisconsin Regiment, the 6th Wisconsin Regiment, and the 7th Wisconsin Regiment; The Second Brigade, First Division, First Corps featured one western regiment—the 7th Indiana—and five eastern units: the 76th, 84th, 95th, and 147th New York Regiments, along with the 56th Pennsylvania. Organization of the Army of the Potomac, Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, U.S. Army, commanding, at the battle of Gettysburg, July 1-3, 1863, *OR* 27.1:155-157; For sketches of the personalities and performances of the First and Second Brigades, First Division, First Army Corps, see Bradley M. Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg: The Union and Confederate Brigades at the Battle of Gettysburg* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2002), 38-56.

time, these brigades would be the first infantry to see action west of Gettysburg. On the morning of July 1, many of these soldiers sensed imminent danger.¹³⁶

With Lysander Cutler's brigade of easterners in the lead, trailed by the artillery, and with Solomon Meredith's famed "Iron Brigade" in third position, Brig. Gen. James Wadsworth's First Division marched north along the Emmitsburg Road toward Gettysburg at the route step.¹³⁷ Reynolds and his staff moved out in front of the division.¹³⁸ The weather was warm and humid; a brief rain shower soaked the men and dampened the roads.¹³⁹ As one historian has written, locals who might have happened to stand beside the Emmitsburg Road that morning would have seen the finest units in the Army of the Potomac on the move.¹⁴⁰ The division neared Gettysburg. Col. Rufus Robinson Dawes of the Sixth Wisconsin, the last regiment of the Iron Brigade in its order of march, ordered his drum corps forward so as to serenade the Gettysburg citizenry as they approached the burgh. From fife and drum sounded notes of "The Campbells are Coming."¹⁴¹ Everything changed, however, when "the boom of the cannon and the crack of the carbine" west of Gettysburg signaled the arrival of battle.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ The soldiers of the 24th Michigan Regiment, following theirhardtack breakfast, assembled for prayer, perhaps in anticipation of battle; see Orson Blair Curtis, *History of the Twenty-Fourth Michigan of the Iron Brigade, Known as the Detroit and Wayne County Regiment* (Detroit: Winn and Hammond, 1891), 155.

¹³⁷ Lance J. Herdegen, "John F. Reynolds and the Iron Brigade," in Alan T. Nolan and Sharon Eggleston Vipond, eds., *Giants in Their Tall Black Hats: Essays on the Iron Brigade* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 107; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 72.

¹³⁸ Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 262.

¹³⁹ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 229; Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, 232.

¹⁴⁰ Paraphrased from Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 72.

¹⁴¹ Rufus Robinson Dawes, *Service with the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers* (Marietta: E. R. Alderman and Sons, 1890), 164.

¹⁴² Dawes, *Service with the Sixth Wisconsin*, 164; Curtis, *History of the Twenty-Fourth Michigan*, 423.

In the 9:00 hour, a messenger from Brig. Gen. John Buford found Reynolds and informed him that enemy troops under the command of C.S.A. Maj. Gen. Harry Heth had dislodged Buford's vedettes and were advancing east, in force, against the federal cavalry.¹⁴³ Reynolds and his staff galloped ahead of the division and into Gettysburg, first to the George House, to inquire about directions, and then beyond town to McPherson's Ridge, where the wing commander greeted Buford.¹⁴⁴ An open engagement raged, the result of an attempt on the part of Confederate infantry to enter Gettysburg.¹⁴⁵ Buford's vedettes and brigades had deployed—dismounted—along parallel ridgelines whose crests ran north-south to the west of Gettysburg: Knoxlyn Ridge, Herr Ridge, and McPherson's Ridge.¹⁴⁶ Reynolds and his staff watched as Buford's cavalry, "spread out like fingers of the hand," slowly gave ground and fired at the advancing Confederates.¹⁴⁷ Since 7:00 a.m., Buford's troopers had withstood the mounting weight of the Confederate advance, but their fatigue and inferior numbers told. By the time of Reynolds's arrival on McPherson's Ridge, approximately 10:00 a.m.,

¹⁴³ Letter of Charles Henry Veil to D. McConaughy, Esq., 7 April 1864, *Robert L. Brake Collection*, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania [hereafter USAMHI]; Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 229; No. 32, Report of Brig. Gen. James S. Wadsworth, U.S. Army, Headquarters First Division, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 4 July 1863, *OR* 27.1:265; Edward G. Longacre, *General John Buford: A Military Biography* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003), 191.

¹⁴⁴ Letter of Charles Henry Veil to D. McConaughy, Esq., 7 April 1864, USAMHI; Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 229; Rosengarten, *William Reynolds, Rear-Admiral, U.S.N., John Fulton Reynolds, Major-General U.S.V., Colonel Fifth U.S. Infantry*, 17-18.

¹⁴⁵ Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 263.

¹⁴⁶ For the terrain west of Gettysburg, and the fighting between Buford's cavalry and Heth's infantry, see Carol Reardon and Tom Vossler, *A Field Guide to Gettysburg: Experiencing the Battlefield through Its History, Places, and People*, Second Edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 37-42; Of great usefulness is Gottfried's beautifully rendered *The Maps of Gettysburg: An Atlas of the Gettysburg Campaign, June 3—July 13, 1863* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2007), especially pp. 60-61.

¹⁴⁷ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 231.

Buford's cavalry had already ceded Herr Ridge to the Rebel infantry, and their strength on McPherson's Ridge was waning by the minute.

At this juncture, and during his brief council of war with Buford (Weld, the youngest member then on Reynolds's staff, estimated that the meeting lasted only three minutes), Reynolds made the fateful tactical decision to engage the Confederate infantry west of Gettysburg town and to forego occupying the region's landmark defensive position: Cemetery Hill.¹⁴⁸ Doing so, he seems to have believed, would vindicate Buford's embattled cavalymen who had held McPherson's Ridge against a numerically greater and mightier foe, and allow necessary time for the bulk of Reynolds's own First Corps, and the Eleventh Corps under Howard, to arrive and occupy "the heights on the other side of the town."¹⁴⁹ One reminiscence, authored long after the war by an aide-de-camp to U.S. Maj. Gen. Daniel Sickles (who claimed to have been sent on a mission by the Third Corps commander to find Reynolds, and then to have found the wing commander with his staff at the critical moment of decision west of Gettysburg), depicts a careful and calculating Reynolds. In his version of events, Reynolds gazed longingly upon the key features of Cemetery Hill, but for fear of destroying the burgh, opted instead to strike the enemy on McPherson's Ridge.¹⁵⁰ While the account is suspect on some counts, and contains notes of sentimentalism, it nevertheless illustrates what others were to observe after the battle, namely, that as an artilleryist, Reynolds recognized the terrain around Gettysburg as ideal ground upon which to place an army and fight, and that he perceived, from the first, that Cemetery Hill was enviable

¹⁴⁸ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 231.

¹⁴⁹ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 230.

¹⁵⁰ Henry Edwin Tremain, *Two Days of War: A Gettysburg Narrative and Other Excursions* (New York: Bonnell, Silver and Bowers, 1905), 11.

defensive ground—perhaps the ground most suitable for artillery—that held the potential to decide the outcome of a great battle.¹⁵¹ The most definitive proof that Reynolds perceived the importance of holding Cemetery Hill comes from one of his aides, William Riddle, who in August of 1863, one month to the day from Reynolds’s burial, wrote in a letter of the “rapid and comprehensive glance” with which his late commander had ascertained “the necessity of gaining the low range of hills beyond the town.”¹⁵² Reynolds thus decided to preserve Cemetery Hill for Union forces by fighting west of it on McPherson’s Ridge, wherefrom he could mount a defense in depth and execute a methodical withdrawal if his forces were overcome by the enemy.¹⁵³

Summoning his staff, Reynolds issued prompt orders. He commanded Capt. Weld to ride immediately to Taneytown and to find Gen. Meade. Weld was to ride his horse dead into the dirt if necessary, and inform Meade that “the enemy were coming on

¹⁵¹ Tremain’s account contradicts certain aspects of the message Reynolds is supposed to have dictated to Capt. Stephen Weld. If Tremain’s reminiscence is accurate, and there is ample reason to believe it admissible historical evidence, the aide-de-camp to Gen. Sickles would almost certainly have heard Reynolds instruct Weld, as Tremain claimed to be in the presence of Reynolds and his aides when the event took place. This is a crucial point, for Reynolds informed Meade via Weld that he would barricade the streets of Gettysburg and fight the Rebels through the town if necessary—hardly the mindset of a commander who, as Tremain remembered, wished to spare the town from danger. Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 232; Tremain; *Two Days of War*, 11; Hardin, *History of the Twelfth Regiment Pennsylvania Reserve Volunteer Corps*, 146; Hardin, “Gettysburg Not a Surprise to the Union Commander,” 4:267-268; Rosengarten, “General Reynolds’ Last Battle,” 62; Edward C. Culp, *The 25th Ohio Vet. Vol. Infantry in the War for the Union* (Topeka: George W. Crane and Company, 1885), 77; Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 123-124.

¹⁵² Transcription of Letter of William Riddle to Lt. Bouvier, Warrenton Junction, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, 4 August 1863, *Robert L. Brake Collection*, Box 4, USAMHI.

¹⁵³ Anecdotal and contemporaneous evidence that suggests Reynolds was quick to ascertain the tactical importance of Cemetery Hill for a defensive position is found in a local professor’s 1864 reminiscence of the battle; see “Later Rambles Over the Field of Gettysburg,” *United States Service Magazine* 1 (January 1864) in the *Robert L. Brake Collection*, Box 16, USAMHI.

in strong force, and that [Reynolds] was afraid that they would get the heights on the other side of town before he could; that he would fight them all through the town, however, and keep them back as long as possible.”¹⁵⁴ In later years, Weld would revisit the event when he published his *War Diary*. His edited journal is striking for its specificity and accuracy, and for its remarkable command of chronology. Weld recounted that his journey to Meade took one and a quarter hours. He estimated the distance of his ride at fifteen or sixteen miles, and he affixed to the emended chronicle of events more specific directives from Reynolds, corroborated by Meade’s retelling of the story, which were that the left wing commander would “barricade the streets at Gettysburg” if necessary, and fight the Rebels “inch by inch” through the town.¹⁵⁵ Reynolds, predicted Meade, would “hold on to the bitter end.”¹⁵⁶ Other orders Reynolds seems to have issued were to Wadsworth, to hurry his division to the front; to Meredith, to bring up the Iron Brigade; and to Howard and to Sickles, informing his lieutenants to rush their corps to Gettysburg with all speed.¹⁵⁷

Reynolds then galloped south along the Emmitsburg Road to the vicinity of the Codori Farm, where he met his advancing infantry, consulted briefly with Brig. Gen. James Wadsworth, made his final determination to place the First Division west of Gettysburg town, and urged his men forward.¹⁵⁸ Lysander Cutler’s Second Brigade,

¹⁵⁴ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 229-230.

¹⁵⁵ Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 232; Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2:35-36.

¹⁵⁶ Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2:36.

¹⁵⁷ Veil, *Memoirs*, 28; Curtis, *History of the Twenty-Fourth Michigan*, 156; It is likely that William Riddle was the courier to Howard. See Letter of Maj. William Riddle to Gen. Oliver Howard, 3 April 1864, *OOHP*; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 74; Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 267; Herdegen, “John F. Reynolds and the Iron Brigade,” 108.

¹⁵⁸ “No. 32. Report of Brig. Gen. James S. Wadsworth, U. S. Army, commanding First Division,” Gettysburg, 4 July 1863, *OR* 27.1:265; “Testimony of Brigadier General James S. Wadsworth,” *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War*, 4:413.

composed of four regiments of New Yorkers, along with one Pennsylvania and Indiana regiment apiece, and totaling some 2,017 strong, was in the lead of the First Division.¹⁵⁹ One New Yorker attached to the Seventy-Sixth Regiment of Volunteers, the regiment out front of the march, remembered his unit leaving the Emmitsburg Road and crossing over the gentle, undulating ridges that sloped toward the Lutheran seminary.¹⁶⁰ This was the shortcut that Reynolds selected to get his men to the battlefield as quickly as possible, for a series of paths emptied near the seminary somewhere in the area of the Hagerstown Road.¹⁶¹ The New Yorkers were ordered “forward” at the double-quick across fields, gardens, and lots; regimental pioneers rushed to the advance to tear down rails and fences and make way for the brigade; men loaded their rifle muskets “at will” and on the run.¹⁶² Enemy cannon on Herr Ridge boomed, hurling shells over the heads of Cutler’s New Yorkers. Next came the Iron Brigade under Meredith, its men were devoted “sons of the West” and, as the *National Tribune* was to wax in later years, “unsurpassed ... in the history of the world,” the very troops who had won their moniker at the Battle of South Mountain.¹⁶³ These men, too, turned off the Emmitsburg Road near the Codori farm on the run, their bayonets pointed toward the enemy.

¹⁵⁹ Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg*, 48.

¹⁶⁰ Henry L. Lyman, “Historical Sketch,” in New York Monuments Commission, *Battlefields of Gettysburg and Chattanooga: Final Report of the Battlefield of Gettysburg*, in three volumes (Albany: J. B. Lyon Company, 1900), 3:1001.

¹⁶¹ Paraphrased from Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 75.

¹⁶² Abram P. Smith, *History of the Seventy-Sixth Regiment New York Volunteers; What it Endured and Accomplished; Containing Descriptions of its Twenty-Five Battles; its Marches; its Camp and Bivouac Scenes; with Biographical Sketches of Fifty-Three Officers and a Complete Record of the Enlisted Men* (Cortland: Truair, Smith and Miles, 1867), 237; “Address by Capt. J. V. Pierce,” in *Final Report of the Battlefield of Gettysburg*, 3:990.

¹⁶³ “The Men of the First Corps,” *National Tribune*, 29 April 1915; Curtis, *History of the Twenty-Fourth Michigan*, 156; Dawes, *Service with the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers*, 164.

As the infantry deployed from marching columns into lines and loaded their rifle muskets at the quick step, Reynolds rode forward to McPherson's farm to reconnoiter the ridgeline. The wing commander had "appreciated ... with quickness what the advance of a division of Confederate infantry meant," and he summoned one of his artillerists attached to the First Army Corps, Capt. James A. Hall, to join him at the front.¹⁶⁴ Reynolds then directed Hall to take the Second Maine Artillery Battery to the crest of the ridge just north of the Chambersburg Road, a position from which the Maine gunners could provide covering fire for the advancing infantry and, simultaneously, draw the enemy's artillery fire away from Wadsworth's First Division.¹⁶⁵ The position offered certain natural advantages, as Coddington has noted, though its right flank floated in proverbial midair.¹⁶⁶ To address this, Reynolds directed Gen. Wadsworth to position three regiments of Cutler's brigade in support of the artillery to the north of the battery.¹⁶⁷ Wadsworth was to oversee the Federal defense north of the Chambersburg Road, Reynolds instructed, while he would direct those troops to the south of it.¹⁶⁸ The presence of Hall's Maine Battery, with Cutler's New Yorkers in support, would "present a strong front" to check the enemy's advance.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ "Reynolds's Quick Decision," *National Tribune*, 22 April 1915; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 75.

¹⁶⁵ "No. 72, Report of Capt. James A. Hall, Second Maine Battery," Berlin, Maryland, 16 July 1863, *OR* 27.1:359; Maine Gettysburg Commission, *Maine at Gettysburg: Report of Maine Commissioners Prepared by the Executive Committee* (Portland: Lakeside Press, 1898), 16.

¹⁶⁶ Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 267.

¹⁶⁷ Maine Gettysburg Commission, *Maine at Gettysburg*, 16.

¹⁶⁸ Maine Gettysburg Commission, *Maine at Gettysburg*, 16; "No. 32. Report of Brig. Gen. James S. Wadsworth, U. S. Army, commanding First Division," Gettysburg, 4 July 1863, *OR* 27.1:265.

¹⁶⁹ "Cutler's Brigade," *National Tribune*, 15 July 1915.

His orders to Hall and Wadsworth issued, Reynolds then dispatched orders via a staffer to Maj. Gen. Abner Doubleday, acting commander of the First Army Corps, to rush the rest of the corps forward to Gettysburg.¹⁷⁰ Reynolds wheeled his mount to assess the situation developing along the southern half of the ridge. The Iron Brigade was advancing steadily, inexorably, toward the Herbst Woodlot, but not soon enough. Confederate infantry, largely oblivious to the weight behind the Federal infantry converging upon them, were threatening the First Corps's designs on McPherson's Ridge. Doubleday claimed to have arrived on the southernmost edge of the field only moments before, while Reynolds himself "was superintending the placing of Cutler's brigade"; still, he had no personal contact with Reynolds on the battlefield.¹⁷¹ In his official report, Doubleday wrote that he had urged the men of the Iron Brigade toward the Herbst woodlot, which he had deemed an important redoubt and a fixture of the Federal position, and which he supposed that Reynolds had wanted to hold at all costs.¹⁷² At the urging of their commander, the men are supposed to have responded, resolutely, "If we can't hold [the woods], where will you find men who can?"¹⁷³

Still, from where he sat upon his mount at the northern edge of the tree line, and with a vantage point that enabled him to see into the wood, Reynolds perceived a problem developing along the western slope of McPherson's Ridge that Doubleday could not have seen. Tennesseans under C.S.A. Brig. Gen. James Archer had crossed

¹⁷⁰ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 76.

¹⁷¹ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 77.

¹⁷² "No. 29, Reports of Maj. Gen. Abner Doubleday, U. S. Army, commanding Third Division of, and First Army Corps," Washington, D.C., 14 December 1863, *OR* 27.1:244.

¹⁷³ "No. 29, Reports of Maj. Gen. Abner Doubleday, U. S. Army, commanding Third Division of, and First Army Corps," Washington, D.C., 14 December 1863, *OR* 27.1:244.

Willoughby Run and were pushing east. Left unchecked, Archer's Brigade would crest the ridge and crash into the southern flank of Cutler's brigade and, if they dislodged the Federal infantry, take Hall's Maine Battery.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, the Confederates would benefit from fighting from the crest of the ridgeline – the very defensive topographical feature for which Buford's cavalry had struggled.¹⁷⁵ The whole position would be lost, and Wadsworth's First Division severed. The Second Wisconsin was ordered into the fray.¹⁷⁶ In front of Reynolds the Badgers rushed forward to stem the Confederate advance.¹⁷⁷ Tennesseans greeted the Badgers with a devastating volley that cut down thirty percent of the regiment.¹⁷⁸ Charles Veil, Reynolds's orderly, wrote not long after the battle that the distance between the Tennessee infantry and the Federal wing commander, who sat atop his mount behind the Second Wisconsin Regiment, urging them onward, approximated sixty yards, and that "Minnie Balls were flying thick."¹⁷⁹

Then Reynolds turned in his saddle, apparently to see what Iron Brigade infantry were available to support the bold charge of the Second Wisconsin. At that moment a minié ball crashed into Reynolds's neck and felled the General from his horse. Wrote Veil, who later claimed to be the only soldier at the General's side at the time of his

¹⁷⁴ Gottfried, *Maps of Gettysburg*, 72.

¹⁷⁵ Paraphrased from Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 77.

¹⁷⁶ Pfanz indicates that Reynolds himself ordered the Second Wisconsin forward in *Gettysburg*, p. 77. Reports submitted on behalf of the acting regimental commanders, however, complicate this, and suggest that Wadsworth was responsible for the order via his aide-de-camp; see "No. 34, Report of Maj. John Mansfield, Second Wisconsin Infantry," Beverly Ford, Virginia, 15 November 1863, *OR* 27.1:273.

¹⁷⁷ "No. 36, Report of Col. William W. Robinson, Seventh Wisconsin Infantry," Headquarters Seventh Wisconsin Volunteers, 18 November 1863, *OR* 27.1:279.

¹⁷⁸ Gottfried, *Maps of Gettysburg*, 72.

¹⁷⁹ Letter of Charles Henry Veil to D. McConaughy, Esq., 7 April 1864, *Robert L. Brake Collection*, USAMHI, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

killing, “I have seen many men killed in action, but never saw a ball do its work so instantly as did the ball which struck General Reynolds” (original emphasis).¹⁸⁰

The battle raged on without the man who had ordered its escalation. In short order, overwhelming federal losses, confusion among the northern high command present on the field, and the arrival of C.S.A. Maj. Gen. Richard Ewell’s infantry to the North compelled the First and the Eleventh Federal Army Corps to retreat through Gettysburg to the heights of Cemetery Hill, the ground for which the battle had been fought in the first place.

Taking stock: Reynolds, architect of a battle

Writing twenty years after the war, U.S. Maj. Gen. Henry J. Hunt, Meade’s artilleryist who had reconnoitered the Pipe Creek position, characterized his commanding general’s Pipe Creek Circular as “wise and proper.” At a time when many veterans sought distinction for their role in orchestrating the great Union victory at Gettysburg, Hunt added, perhaps out of self-interest, but almost certainly out of conjecture, and with the added value of hindsight, “it would probably have been better had [Meade] concentrated his army behind Pipe Creek rather than at Gettysburg.”¹⁸¹ In his recollection, the artilleryist noted his early-morning return on July 1 from Pipe Creek to Meade’s headquarters, which brought confirmation of the position’s features and advantages. For reasons inexplicable, Meade’s circular was dispatched in late morning, a mistake that later caused the commanding general, upon learning of hostilities at Gettysburg, to

¹⁸⁰ Letter of Charles Henry Veil to D. McConaughy, Esq., 7 April 1864, *Robert L. Brake Collection*, USAMHI, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

¹⁸¹ Hunt, “The First Day at Gettysburg,” 274.

“roundly [damn]” his chief of staff.¹⁸² But no matter how advantageous it might have proven to fight at Pipe Creek, Hunt reminisced, sounding ominous notes, “the battle of July 1st changed the situation.”¹⁸³

It was Reynolds who changed “the situation,” and whose decisions initiated battle at Gettysburg on July 1. “Reynolds was not one of your retiring generals,” Abner Doubleday was to recall years later in the pages of the *North American Review*, “nor was he in favor of making an everlasting war of positions.” Rather, the left wing commander was eager to clash with the Rebel invaders: “He saw the hordes of the advancing enemy ravaging his native State, and, proud of the men he commanded, determined to fight the invaders *à outrance* as soon as he could get at them.” The invading enemy, per Doubleday, “were impoverishing a large part of Pennsylvania by their merciless requisitions.”¹⁸⁴ Such recollections were not lofty, post-war embellishments. In an 1864 sworn and examined testimony before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, Doubleday stated that Reynolds “*believ[ed] that it was the best policy to fight the enemy as soon as he could meet him, and prevent his sending off those immense quantities of supplies from Pennsylvania*” (emphasis added).¹⁸⁵ And so Reynolds seems to have well determined that battle should take place in Pennsylvania,

¹⁸² Weld, *War Diary and Letters*, 232.

¹⁸³ Hunt, “The Second Day at Gettysburg,” 291.

¹⁸⁴ Philippe Comte de Paris, Oliver Otis Howard, Henry Slocum, and Abner Doubleday, “Gettysburg Thirty Years After,” *North American Review* 152, no. 411 (February 1891): 143, in the *Robert L. Brake Collection*, Box 4, USAMHI; For confirmation of Rebel foraging and its excesses, see “Mrs. Joseph Bayly’s Story of the Battle,” copied from the *Gettysburg Compiler*, in the *Robert L. Brake Collection*, Box 5, USAMHI; See, also, Frawley, “Marching Through Pennsylvania.”

¹⁸⁵ “Testimony of Major General Abner Doubleday,” *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War*, 4:305.

and not, as Meade had hoped, and plotted with the precision of an engineer, in Maryland.

It is possible, as Guelzo and Pfanz have hinted, that Reynolds might have knowingly sabotaged Meade's Pipe Creek design had he possessed insight into the full extent of his commanding general's plan.¹⁸⁶ But this is purely speculative, and runs counter to Reynolds's professional ethic. Curiously, conventional wisdom in the wake of the battle held that Reynolds may well have received his commander's orders, and exceeded them, in determining to commit three corps of the Army of the Potomac to the fight at Gettysburg when Meade did not wish to fight there at all. In their exhaustive (and hagiographic) ten-volume history of Abraham Lincoln, executive secretaries John Hay and John Nicolay wrote that for the "peerless soldier who dashed up the Emmitsburg road in hot haste on the morning of the first of July" there existed only one clear decision.¹⁸⁷ Suggesting in no uncertain terms that Reynolds had received explicit orders and, having perceived the immense tactical value of Cemetery Hill, acted against them, Hay and Nicolay continued,

in a case so clear, the letter of his orders mattered little to a man like Reynolds. His duty was under his eyes, clearer and more sacred than anything written upon paper could be. He was the lifelong friend and comrade of Meade ... he felt sure Meade would approve his action, and resolved to make his fight there. He was as ready to sacrifice his life as his orders.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 120; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 49.

¹⁸⁷ Nicolay and Hay's biography of Lincoln appeared in a series of installments in *Century* magazine beginning in the November 1886 issue. The final installment ran in an 1890 edition of *Century*, after which the complete biography found publication in the ten-volume set. Guelzo has written that the ten-volume set "read like a Republican Party campaign tract" whose subject shone forth "as the showpiece of Republican democracy." See Guelzo, "Lincoln and His Biographers," *Civil War History* 64, no. 3 (September 2018): 239-271, at 250-251; John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, in ten volumes (New York: The Century Company, 1890), 7:238.

¹⁸⁸ Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln*, 7:239-240.

According to Lincoln's secretaries, Reynolds had disobeyed orders, but heroically so.

Though it is probable that Reynolds possessed more than a vague sense of Meade's strategic designs, the available evidence suggests beyond reasonable doubt that Reynolds lacked a perfect knowledge of Meade's battle plan as outlined in the Pipe Creek Circular. It is likely that Reynolds and Meade discussed the campaign in strategic and tactical terms when Meade assumed command on June 28. But historians agree that Reynolds never received the Pipe Creek directive. What is more, Reynolds did not receive Meade's July 1 missive, in which the commanding general inquired after his lieutenant's views as to the advisability of battle.

What did Reynolds know of his enemy's strength and position, and when did he know it? On this question hangs any meaningful assessment of Reynolds's tactical performance on July 1 at the Battle of Gettysburg. Had Reynolds marched "impetuously forward" with "little or no reconnaissance," as one journalist was to claim in the immediate aftermath of the fight?¹⁸⁹ To the contrary, the wing commander's decision to deploy the First Corps west of Gettysburg town upon McPherson's Ridge was a careful but fateful move, one which suggests that the General possessed sound but incomplete knowledge of his enemy's exact location to the north of Gettysburg. Reynolds deliberately chose to fight upon McPherson's Ridge west of Gettysburg town at the expense of racing his men to the plateau-crested Cemetery Hill, where he might have deployed his artillery and Lysander Cutler as well as Solomon Meredith's brigades. While his men would have had no time to prepare defensive works, still they might have

¹⁸⁹ Whitelaw Reid, "The Gettysburg Campaign: A Contemporary Account by Whitelaw Reid," in Gallagher, ed., *Two Witnesses at Gettysburg*, 2nd edition (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 28.

commanded a superior defensive position, one more suitable as an artillery platform than the crest of McPherson's Ridge.¹⁹⁰ But the prospect of forfeiting Gettysburg to Confederate forces appears to have been a non-starter for the Federal wing commander, as was the prospect of abandoning Buford's cavalry. What is more, any abandonment of Gettysburg would almost certainly have compromised the Army of the Potomac's ability to concentrate its corps along the convergent road network that terminated there, and the artillery platform that the Federals might have gained in Cemetery Hill from which to fire upon their adversaries would have been neutralized if, after Confederate forces advanced into Gettysburg, Reynolds's cannons were confronted with the horrible prospect of having to shell the town. Finally, and to compound difficulties, there is no way to know with certainty whether the men under Reynolds's command would have reached Cemetery Hill before the enemy could claim it. By meeting the enemy squarely upon McPherson's Ridge and placing his forces between the advancing elements of Heth's division, Gettysburg, and Cemetery Hill, Reynolds executed a textbook defense that allowed for maximum depth.

In retrospect, Reynolds's decision to fight west of the town suggests that the federal wing commander had arrived at three fundamental (and altogether creditable) assumptions: first, that a strong contingent of the Confederate enemy were squarely and most immediately to the west of Gettysburg; second, that the best way to preserve Cemetery Hill for Federal control was to fight as far to the west of it as possible, so as to buy time for other Federal units to arrive on the field; and third, that Gettysburg should be preserved from Confederate occupation if at all possible. "On the evidence of the

¹⁹⁰ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 124.

moment,” Sears has concluded, fittingly, the risk to deploy west of Gettysburg “was reasonable risk.” And, as a professional soldier with a fighter’s instinct, Reynolds “accepted the risk and responsibility” of selecting McPherson’s Ridge for battle.¹⁹¹ In time, and as Coddington has observed, the weaknesses of the Federal position told as Confederate forces under the command of C.S.A. Maj. Gen. Richard Ewell converged on Gettysburg from the north and “the weight of the Confederate attack shifted north” of the Chambersburg Road.¹⁹² But Reynolds did not live to see the battle develop as it did. How the wing commander might have responded to meet the advance of Ewell’s corps against the Federal right had he known of their imminent location is conjecture, for as Coddington notes, Reynolds left no plans, and his death left the First and Eleventh Corps leaderless.¹⁹³

For all the unknown possibilities, and in the face of much speculation, the presence of Reynolds at the front of the Federal advance to Gettysburg was fortuitous for the fate of Union arms on July 1. For their part, the Confederates did not benefit from competent command decisions on the field in the battle’s earliest phase.¹⁹⁴ It may seem tempting to reason that in the final accounting this mattered very little; after all, two Confederate corps ultimately dislodged the Federals from the ground Reynolds had selected, and it was a confluence of overwhelming force and timing—not generalship—that guaranteed their initial success. Even so, a student of tactics cannot dismiss the

¹⁹¹ Sears, *Gettysburg*, 168.

¹⁹² Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 278.

¹⁹³ Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 278.

¹⁹⁴ See, for instance, Robert K. Krick, “Three Confederate Disasters on Oak Ridge: Failures of Brigade Leadership on the First Day at Gettysburg,” in *Three Days at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership*, edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1999), 72-106, esp. p. 88.

possibility that, absent Gen. Reynolds's urgency, sound decision-making, and on-field presence, the Federals might have fared much worse on July 1.

It has become fashionable for historians of war to insist that senior-level commands have little direct influence on the outcome of battles, and that generals exert, in point of fact, very little control over clashing armies. The Napoleonic Wars invigorated belief, as Cathal Nolan has written, "in an elusive military genius, that rare general who sees through to the essence of war and leads armies to decisive victory." The "allure of battle," and of the "great captains" who orchestrate them have, in Nolan's view, "intoxicated generations of generals and military theorists."¹⁹⁵ This development, Nolan insists, is not helpful: "claims to genius distance our understanding from war's immense complexity and contingency, which are its greater truths," he continues. Now that environment, technology, and the deployment of mass armies have fundamentally changed the nature of warfare, Nolan concludes, "no one truly commands or ever controls such a complex and dynamic thing as battle, let alone war."¹⁹⁶ Doubtless there exists an element of truth in this. And the course of battle as it developed on the morning of July 1 lends credence to this view. To be sure, the brief duration in which Reynolds held the field before his death means that one cannot place too much weight on what his performance did, or did not, achieve. Additionally, it is quite possible, though beyond the realm of proof, that had Reynolds lived, he might not have recognized the evolving conditions of battle and adjusted to them accordingly, and that

¹⁹⁵ Cathal J. Nolan, *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7.

¹⁹⁶ Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 579.

he would have lacked the strength to meet the threat posed by Ewell's Confederates even if he had recognized the difficulty of the Federal position.

Though certain ambiguities remain, and though one ought not to outrun the available historical evidence, the fact that Reynolds was on the field to command the First Army Corps in person and that he acted with great discernment and vigor in the battle's early stages is illustrative of the great uncertainty inherent in war, and unites the political, strategic, and tactical conditions that shaped the Gettysburg Campaign. Had he accepted the offer to command the prestigious Army of the Potomac, it is possible that Reynolds might not have been so near to the front of the action on the morning of July 1. But Reynolds, as Meade's trusted lieutenant, exercised considerable command latitude to make crucial tactical decisions. The command and generalship of Reynolds at Gettysburg therefore presents a useful case study for practitioners of the new military history who seek not necessarily to jettison older command studies, but in heeding Bledsoe's call, who wish to move beyond the "Chessboard of War" and widen historians' lenses so as to bring into clearer view the contingencies of battle, command, and generalship in their various dimensions.¹⁹⁷

In the final analysis, Reynolds's command at Gettysburg, while brief, was nothing short of competent, and probably better. There is ample evidence to suggest that Reynolds's tactical decision making was sound, and it is fitting to question whether another corps commander such as Howard or Sickles—or even the commanding general George Meade himself—might have fared any better, or acted with the same alacrity and decisiveness under the circumstances. Still, one cannot escape the suspicion that

¹⁹⁷ Bledsoe, "Beyond the Chessboard of War."

Reynolds's early death occasioned the praise he has received. Responsible for the Battle of Gettysburg, Reynolds became the battle's preeminent casualty, and his memory in death would transcend his command on the battlefield.

INTERLUDE

Loss

“General Reynolds, one of the best Yankee generals, was reported killed.”¹ So wrote Englishman A.J.L. Fremantle, a lieutenant colonel in the British Coldstream Guards, in his diary entry for July 1, 1863. Fremantle had witnessed the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg from the inner circles of the Confederate high command while trailing the Army of Northern Virginia in 1863 as a foreign dignitary and observer. To the British officer the loss of Reynolds constituted a significant event.

After three days of fighting at Gettysburg, with Fremantle riding in a covered doctor’s wagon, the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia began its retreat to the Potomac River just after the midnight hour on July 5.² Bruised and beaten, however, it was not destroyed, and much to President Lincoln’s frustration. From July 7 onward, the President had wired his commander in the field daily and urged him to assume offensive operations in pursuit of Lee’s army. At these persistent admonitions, Meade grew flustered.³ For his part, Lincoln spiraled into despair and depression. Once more, it seemed to the President, a Democrat, a West Point-educated and professionally-trained soldier at the lead of the Army of the Potomac lacked the nerve to annihilate Lee’s army when it appeared most vulnerable. Meade struck the President as weak and

¹ A.J.L. Fremantle, “The Gettysburg Campaign: *From the Diary of A. J. L. Fremantle*,” in Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *Two Witnesses at Gettysburg: The Personal Accounts of Whitelaw Reid and A. J. L. Fremantle*, second edition (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 109.

² Fremantle, “The Gettysburg Campaign,” 127.

³ John George Nicolay and John Hay, “Gettysburg,” in *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, in ten volumes (New York: Century Company, 1890), 7:274.

indecisive. To John Hay, Lincoln lay bare his emotional and psychological burden: “we had them within our grasp,” he told his secretary. “We had only to stretch forth our hands and they were ours.” Sounding one last note of despair, Lincoln simply added, “nothing I could say or do could make the Army move.”⁴ While Lincoln suppressed much of his anger when communicating with his general directly, the General in Chief of the Army, Henry Halleck, put the matter to Meade in the frankest of terms:

I need hardly say to you that the escape of Lee’s army without another battle has created great dissatisfaction in the mind of the President, and it will require an active and energetic pursuit on your part to remove the impression that it has not been sufficiently active heretofore.⁵

In the Executive Mansion, in the dark and silent heat of the July night, and contemplating what, in God’s name, it all meant, the President took up his pen to write a letter to his (morally) defeated general.⁶ Meade, acutely aware of the President’s mounting discontent via General in Chief Henry Halleck, had that day offered his resignation. The letter that Lincoln drafted bears quoting at length:

I have just seen your despatch to Gen. Halleck, asking to be relieved of your command, because of a supposed censure of mine. I am very—very—grateful to you for the magnificent success you gave the cause of the country at Gettysburg; and I am sorry now to be the author of the slightest pain to you. But I was in such deep distress myself that I could not restrain some expression of it. I had been

⁴ John Hay, *Inside Lincoln’s White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay*, edited by Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 62.

⁵ Telegram of H. W. Halleck, General-in-Chief, to Major-General Meade, Army of the Potomac, Washington, D.C., July 14, 1863 in The United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* [hereafter *OR*] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887) series one, volume 27, part 1, p. 92.

⁶ In his diary, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles recounted how Lincoln, despairing his general’s passivity, had exclaimed after a failed cabinet meeting on July 14, “What does it mean, Mr. Welles? Great God! What does it mean?” See Gideon Welles, Diary Entry for 14 July 1863, in Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, with an introduction by John T. Morse, Jr., in two volumes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 1:370.

oppressed nearly ever since the battles at Gettysburg, by what appeared to be evidences that yourself, and Gen. Couch, and Gen. Smith, were not seeking a collision with the enemy, but were trying to get him across the river without another battle. What these evidences were, if you please, I hope to tell you at some time, when we shall both feel better. The case, summarily stated is this. You fought and beat the enemy at Gettysburg; and, of course, to say the least, his loss was as great as yours. He retreated; and you did not, as it seemed to me, pressingly pursue him; but a flood in the river detained him, till, by slow degrees, you were again upon him. You had at least twenty thousand veteran troops directly with you, and as many more raw ones within supporting distance, all in addition to those who fought with you at Gettysburg; while it was not possible that he had received a single recruit; and yet you stood and let the flood run down, bridges be built, and the enemy move away at his leisure, without attacking him. And Couch and Smith! The latter left Carlisle in time, upon all ordinary calculation, to have aided you in the last battle at Gettysburg; but he did not arrive. At the end of more than ten days, I believe twelve, under constant urging, he reached Hagerstown from Carlisle, which is not an inch over fifty-five miles, if so much. And Couch's movement was very little different.

*Again, my dear general, I do not believe you appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape. He was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our other late successes, have ended the war. As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely. If you could not safely attack Lee last Monday, how can you possibly do so south of the river, when you can take with you very few more than two thirds of the force you then had in hand? It would be unreasonable to expect, and I do not expect you can now effect much. Your golden opportunity is gone, and I am distressed immeasurably because of it (emphasis added).*⁷

It was a letter the President never sent.⁸ But to the melancholic Lincoln, a momentous opportunity had been lost by the general to whom he had entrusted the Army of the Potomac only weeks before; to the President, Meade had morphed into a spectre of the Army of the Potomac's creator: the cautious, conservative George Brinton McClellan.⁹

⁷ Letter of Abraham Lincoln to George Meade, Washington, D.C., 14 July 1863, in Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy P. Basler, in eight volumes (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 6:327-328.

⁸ Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 495.

⁹ "This is a dreadful reminiscence of McClellan," Lincoln is reported to have said to his secretary; See Hay, *Inside Lincoln's White House*, 62.

It was during a council of war on July 12 that Meade had put the issue to his lieutenants, the result of which so caused the president to despair: should the Army of the Potomac strike Lee's army at Williamsport, Maryland?¹⁰ Five of Meade's six corps commanders voted against an attack; only Brig. Gen. James Wadsworth, who had commanded the First Division of the First Corps under Doubleday and Reynolds on the morning of July 1, and whose brigades had deployed on McPherson's Ridge to relieve the Federal cavalry, voted in favor of an assault (the acting First Corps commander had taken ill and could not attend the council).¹¹ When he informed Halleck that his lieutenants had counseled against an attack on Lee's position, the General in Chief of the Army admonished Meade, coolly, "act upon your own judgment and make your generals execute your orders. Call no council of war. It is proverbial that councils of war never fight. ... Do not let the enemy escape."¹² Meade informed his wife of the censure from the capital and pretended not to notice Gettysburg accolades in the press.¹³

In all of this, one wonders how the presence of Reynolds might have affected the outcome of Meade's July 12 council of war, and if the general's absence may have given the Army of the Potomac commander an increased measure of caution. Ever on the aggressive, and responsible for the Battle of Gettysburg in the first place, there is ample reason to believe that Reynolds would have favored striking the enemy again with fresh

¹⁰ Stephen R. Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 120.

¹¹ Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 121; The views of Meade's lieutenants are also expressed in John Sedgwick, *Correspondence of John Sedgwick, Major-General*, in two volumes (New York: De Vinne, 1902), 2:135.

¹² Telegram of H. W. Halleck, General-in-Chief, to Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Army of the Potomac, Washington, D.C., 13 July 1863, *OR* 27.1:92.

¹³ George Gordon Meade, *Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, compiled by his son, George Meade, and edited by his grandson, in two volumes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 2:134.

troops then at Meade's disposal.¹⁴ But Reynolds was gone, and the First Corps he had commanded was decimated in the fight on July 1.¹⁵ The sense that Meade depended on Reynolds permeates the narrative of the campaign bequeathed to historians by the general's grandson and namesake, George Meade. Writing on the death of Reynolds in the early morning fight on July 1, and on events that followed it, Meade offered a striking commentary on Reynolds's death and the wing commander's ability:

Never, perhaps, has a general fallen in a battle at a more momentous time; never, perhaps, at such a crisis, has a command passed from an extraordinary soldier to one so inferior to him. Doubleday, to whom that command fell by seniority, was brave, and capable enough for ordinary emergencies; but this emergency was extraordinary, and *the soldier to whom he succeeded was without a peer in the army* (emphasis added).¹⁶

At the time of his writing, George Meade would have had an interest, no doubt, in celebrating the place of the Battle of Gettysburg in American history, for his grandfather was its great victor. To praise Reynolds was to add to the luster of Meade's grandfather.

But there is more contemporaneous evidence that suggests Meade took the loss of his friend especially hard. In an August 6 condolence letter drafted to the late general's sister, Eleanor Reynolds, Maj. William Riddle, who served on Reynolds's staff, noted how difficult it was to return to the old First Army Corps following the death and burial of its chief. It was a comfort for Riddle, of course, to hear praise for Reynolds and

¹⁴ For Reynolds's aggressiveness, see the reflection of U.S. Maj. Gen. Abner Doubleday contained in Philippe Comte de Paris, Oliver Otis Howard, Henry Slocum, and Abner Doubleday, "Gettysburg Thirty Years After," *North American Review* 152, no. 411 (February 1891): 143, in the *Robert L. Brake Collection*, Box 4, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

¹⁵ Only Sedgwick's Sixth Army Corps did not see substantial action at Gettysburg; See Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 120; In his published letters, Sedgwick noted his opposition to an assault on Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in Maryland; See Sedgwick, *Correspondence*, 2:135.

¹⁶ Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2:46.

tributes to his memory “from all in the army,” and to hear even Confederates bestowing compliments on their former adversary. But of singular note was the remark George Gordon Meade is supposed to have made to Riddle following the general’s death. Meade, in a private conversation with the major, lamented that he “would rather have lost twenty thousand men, for the country’s sake, than Reynolds.”¹⁷ It is possible, of course, that Riddle might have embellished the account for Eleanor, and praised the memory of his former chief in an effort to assuage her grief. But the conviction that animated Meade’s remark—apocryphal or not—is nevertheless illustrative of the high view in which the commanding general held his late lieutenant.

Reynolds was gone. Lee escaped. And Meade’s “golden opportunity” was lost.¹⁸

¹⁷ Letter of Maj. William Riddle to Ellie Reynolds, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 6 August 1863, *Reynolds Family Papers*, Archives and Special Collections, Franklin & Marshall College.

¹⁸ It is doubtful that Meade could have destroyed Lee’s army had he given more energetic pursuit, as Civil War battles bore little semblance to decisive struggles of bygone conflicts; For the rarity of decisive engagements, see Cathal J. Nolan, *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Relatedly, Jennifer M. Murray has attempted to rescue Meade from critics who suggest that the commander wasted his “golden opportunity”; Meade, writes Murray,

Proved capable in *defeating* the attacking enemy force and thus fulfilled his army’s strategic objective by protecting Washington and Baltimore. Yet he was unable to *destroy* Lee’s forces. Still, placed within context from military campaigns prior to Gettysburg, Meade’s inability to achieve a decisive battlefield victory and then execute a relentless pursuit resulting in the complete destruction of the enemy was not uncommon. Few generals have demonstrated the ability to fight battles resulting in the complete annihilation of the foe. Crushing victories such as Austerlitz or Waterloo ... are incredibly rare in military history. Thus, in Murray’s view, public opinion in the North, and Lincoln’s expectations for decisive military action did not square with the realities of war; see Murray, “Your Golden Opportunity is Gone’: George Gordon Meade, The Expectations of Decisive Battle, and the Road to Williamsport,” in *Upon the Fields of Battle: Essays on the Military History of America’s Civil War*, edited by Andrew S. Bledsoe and Andrew F. Lang, with a foreword by Gary W. Gallagher (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 71-91, quotation at p. 86.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Curious Case of Catherine Hewitt and U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds: a Story of Death, Mourning, and Religion in Civil War-era America

Abstract: *This chapter examines the death of U.S. Major General of Volunteers John Fulton Reynolds in broader contexts of gender, military, and religious history. At the time of his death at the Battle of Gettysburg, Gen. Reynolds was the most senior Union officer killed in the American Civil War. The return of the General's body from the battlefield represented an uncommon feature of a war noted for its industrial scale and for the casualties it produced. How loved ones grieved Reynolds and kept watch over his body illustrates mourning practices among middle- to upper-class women in the Civil-War North and points to the centrality of death in the nineteenth-century American experience. The battlefield death of Reynolds also occasioned the introduction of Reynolds's sisters to the General's secret fiancé, a Roman Catholic convert. The story of this introduction has been romanticized in boutique Gettysburg literature, and writers often attribute the clandestine nature of the engagement, and the General's reluctance to introduce his fiancé to family, to Catherine Hewitt's Roman Catholicism. Contra these interpretations, however, Catholics in the North received greater accommodation in mainline Protestant society than previously imagined, and the many kindnesses that the Reynolds family showed Hewitt point to an increasing acceptance of Catholics among Protestants in established social settings. What is more, though Reynolds's loved ones viewed his death and mourned him in religious and Victorian tones, it is not altogether clear that for them religion functioned as the predominant paradigm from which they elicited a transcendent meaning of the General's death. In this local context, the responses of Reynolds's loved ones to his death suggest the waning of religious belief in the era of the American Civil War, a trend noted by intellectual and religious historians.*

The hard fighting on McPherson's Ridge west of Gettysburg on the morning of July 1, 1863 had claimed the lives of some of the finest soldiers in the Army of the Potomac. In intensity, it tracked closely with the heightened slaughter of the Civil War, made possible by advancing technologies and ideologies of moral absolutism, and because of

the democratic fervor marshalled in Civil War combat. Just east of Willoughby Run, the Iron Brigade collided with James Archer's Tennessee Brigade with the kind of force that resulted from clashing hoplite phalanxes in ancient Greek battle. The fighting was close, desperate, and deadly.¹ Battle narratives of Gettysburg, known to many, dominate the popular literature of the Civil War and have retained their prominent place even in fresh scholarly interpretations of the conflict.²

At the time of his death, Major General of Volunteers John F. Reynolds was the highest-ranking Union officer killed in the Civil War.³ At the war's end, Reynolds was surpassed only by James B. McPherson, who as a Major General of Volunteers and as commander of a field army, the Army of the Tennessee, became the highest-ranking

A modified version of this chapter appears in published, article form in the pages of *American Nineteenth Century History*, the official journal of the Association of British American Nineteenth Century Historians. Professors Christopher S. Stowe of Marine Corps University and Lorien Foote of Texas A&M University read a much abbreviated version of this chapter when the author delivered it in conference-paper form at the 2017 meeting of the Society for Military History. T. Michael Parrish, Linden G. Bowers Professor of American History at Baylor University, read this chapter and offered helpful comments and editorial corrections. The author is grateful to these scholars. Additionally, the author wishes to thank the staffs of LancasterHistory.Org and the Library Archives and Special Collections at Franklin & Marshall College, who furnished the author with valuable research assistance in the archives. Materials from their collections enhanced the depth and rigor of this chapter.

¹ One veteran of the Second Wisconsin reminisced, probably with embellishment, that his unit exchanged fire with the Tennesseans at ten yards; see R.K. Beecham, *Gettysburg: The Pivotal Battle of the Civil War* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1911), 66; The volley fired from the rifles of the Fourteenth Tennessee devastated the Second Wisconsin: thirty percent of its men fell in this initial blast; see Steven E. Woodworth, *Beneath a Northern Sky: A Short History of the Gettysburg Campaign* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 57.

² See, for instance, Allen C. Guelzo's Lincoln Prize-winning *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

³ The definitive, scholarly, book-length treatment of Major General John Fulton Reynolds is Edward J. Nichols's *Toward Gettysburg: A Biography of General John F. Reynolds* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1958).

Union officer killed in Civil War combat. What follows in these pages is a concerted effort to reframe the story of Gen. Reynolds's death and offer a new perspective. To do so I divorce the significance of his life—well known to practitioners of military history—from the usual literature of command and battle studies in which he has featured prominently.⁴ To be sure, Reynolds played a meaningful role in the Gettysburg Campaign, a role which merits the extensive coverage it has received in that context.⁵

But lost in the story of Reynolds's killing, which has assumed mythic proportions in Gettysburg lore, is how it was that the body of the General was preserved for burial and mourned by the northern women who loved him.⁶ This is unfortunate, because the death of Gen. Reynolds, aside from its military consequence for the corps-level leadership of the Army of the Potomac and the fate of Union arms at Gettysburg, occasioned an intrusion of the Civil War and its attendant tragedy into the domestic space of northern women in unique ways. The reaction of Gen. Reynolds's sisters to his

⁴ For Reynolds and the nature of command in the Army of the Potomac, see Stephen R. Taaffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); and Stephen W. Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants: The High Command of the Army of the Potomac* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2017).

⁵ Reynolds occupies a significant place in Gettysburg historiography, a literature too vast and voluminous to consider here. For classics of the battle, see Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (New York: Touchstone, 1968); Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The First Day* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Stephen Sears, *Gettysburg* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2004); Guelzo, *Gettysburg*; and Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants*.

⁶ See Oliver J. Keller, "Soldier General of the Army: John Fulton Reynolds," *Civil War History* 4, no. 2 (June 1958): 199-128; Kent Gramm, *Gettysburg: A Meditation on War and Values* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 73, 162; and Steve Sanders, "Enduring Tales of Gettysburg: The Death of Reynolds," *Gettysburg Magazine* 14 (January 1996): 27-36; See, also, Lance J. Herdegen, "John F. Reynolds and the Iron Brigade," in Alan T. Nolan and Sharon Eggleston Vipond, eds., *Giants in Their Tall Black Hats: Essays on the Iron Brigade* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 101-112.

death, along with the mourning of Catherine Hewitt, the General's fiancé, illustrate how nineteenth-century women took solace in securing, observing, sensing, and keeping watch over bodies of the deceased. In their desire to know how the General perished, these women manifested the bereaved who sought reassurances that their soldier died a good death—the death a manly soldier, a Christian, and a defender of the Constitution should suffer.⁷ The death of Reynolds offers a remarkable view into how women of the era experienced and came to terms emotionally and spiritually with the costs of war.

Close analysis of the Reynolds-Hewitt vignette helps to fill several important gaps in the historical literature. First, for all the nascent scholarship on southern women, emotions, condolence letters, and widowhood, the ways in which northern women of the middle and upper classes experienced the death of the American Civil War varied from southern women, and the question of how northern women confronted death in disturbing and intimate ways has received scant scholarly attention.⁸ Ashley Mays has noted that because they inhabited more urban environments, benefited from efficient transportation networks and a reliable postal service, and because their losses were, in some sense, redeemed by the government's limited work to identify and enumerate their dead who perished in a victorious national cause, northern women mourned in ways distinct from southern women who, absent those conditions, divined alternate meanings

⁷ For how men and women of the Civil War era understood the “Good Death,” see Drew Gilpin Faust, “The Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying,” *Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 1 (February 2001): 3-38.

⁸ For Confederate widows, see Ashley Mays, “‘A Past Still Living’: The Grieving Process of Confederate Widows” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014); and Angela Esco Elder, “Married to the Confederacy: The Emotional Politics of Confederate Widowhood” (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2016).

of their suffering in light of Confederate defeat.⁹ Recent scholarship from Nina Silber illustrates how the Civil War altered the very ways in which men related to home life, thereby compromising the moral authority once enjoyed by northern women in the domestic sphere even as the economy of life in the North shifted toward “moral paternalism.”¹⁰ Judith Giesberg has demonstrated that the refusal of northern working-class women to mourn quietly “stood as a sharp critique of the way the war had objectified men’s bodies,” and that for less fortunate families, the war transformed homes – traditionally the sites of mourning – into “site[s] of contention, where a war that relied on anonymity was confronted with the individual circumstances of a soldier’s life.”¹¹ But taken on the whole, northern women – especially northern intendeds and affianced ones – have received more limited scholarly attention than their southern counterparts. The presence of his body retrieved from the battlefield offered women in the General’s life an intimate encounter with death uncommon in a conflict noted for the anonymous, indiscriminate, and gruesome killing it produced.

Second, the introduction of Catherine Hewitt to the General’s sisters that the death of Reynolds occasioned offers an instructive look at Roman Catholic accommodation in a region of Pennsylvania noted for its Protestant heritage.¹²

⁹ Mays, “‘If Heart Speaks Not to Heart’: Condolence Letters and Confederate Widows’ Grief,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7, no. 3 (September 2017): 377-400, at 379.

¹⁰ Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); see, especially, chapter three, “Domesticity under Siege,” pp. 87-122.

¹¹ Judith Ann Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 143-145.

¹² In 1839, when Reynolds was a cadet at the United States Military Academy, the number of Catholic churches in Philadelphia numbered only six; in contrast, Baptist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Dutch and German Reformed, German Lutheran, and Episcopalian Methodist churches—not to mention other various Protestant sects—

Historians of religion and war in the nineteenth century have recently rehabilitated the thesis that religious opinion and ethnic prejudice in the Civil War era privileged evangelical Protestantism and violently threatened the place of Roman Catholicism in America. Scholars have especially labored to demonstrate how anti-Catholicism in the context of the Mexican-American War came packaged with intense racial animus. According to John C. Pinheiro, expansionist-minded Protestants conflated Mexican Catholicism with racial blackness.¹³ And the Civil War, William B. Kurtz suggests, alienated Irish but especially German Catholic immigrants who, in spite of their Civil War service for the cause of the Union, experienced religious discrimination.¹⁴ In this context, the longstanding assumption that Reynolds held serious reservations about introducing his fiancé to family members on account of her Catholicism seems grounded in historical fact. Curiously, however, the interaction of Reynolds's Protestant family with Hewitt, a Roman Catholic convert, points to increasing acceptance of Catholicism among Protestant Pennsylvanians who had coexisted with Catholics in local pockets for

combined for a total of eighty-six congregations; see Daniel Bowen, *A History of Philadelphia, with a Notice of Villages, In the Vicinity, Embellished with Engravings, Designed as a Guide to Citizens and Strangers, Containing a Correct Account of the City Improvements, Up to the Year 1839; Also, the State of Society, In Relation to Science, Religion, and Morals; With an Historical Account of the Military Operations of the Late War ...* (Philadelphia: Daniel Brown, 1839), 197; Though they enjoyed considerable longevity in Lancaster County, and in fact pre-dated Presbyterians in the region by twenty-three years, Lancaster-area Catholics accounted for a mere 3.95 percent of religious communicants on the eve of the Civil War. Of the county's two hundred and twenty churches, only four were Roman Catholic; see J. I. Mombert, *An Authentic History of Lancaster County, in the State of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster: J.E. Barr and Company, 1869), 450, 458-9; for an early centennial celebration of the Roman Catholic Church in the county, see "Notable Celebration," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1899.

¹³ John C. Pinheiro, *Missionaries of Republicanism: A Religious History of the Mexican-American War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ William B. Kurtz, *Excommunicated from the Union: How the Civil War Created a Separate Catholic America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

much of the Commonwealth's history. To complicate matters further, the clandestine marital engagement of Reynolds to Hewitt is even less remarkable in light of nineteenth-century conversion trends to Catholicism.

Historians accept the centrality of death to the American Civil War-era experience.¹⁵ More recently, however, they have interpreted the Civil War as a watershed in how Americans understood the nature and practice of religious belief. Louis Menand argued famously that thinking elites fashioned an intellectual culture devoid of religious influence in the war's wake.¹⁶ And in *This Republic of Suffering*, Drew Gilpin Faust suggested provocatively that the death and destruction of the Civil War prefigured the horrors of the two World Wars, that the carnage of war refashioned Americans' relationships to spiritual and existential questions of life and death, and because of these changes, that ultimately the suffering of the Civil War weakened the hold of traditional Christianity on American society.¹⁷ Though some historians have sought to issue a corrective, the argument posited and accepted in prevalent quarters is that the trauma of the American Civil War was so intense, the scale of death it wrought

¹⁵ See, for instance, Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Michael Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Ian Finseth, "The Civil War Dead: Realism and the Problem of Anonymity," *American Literary History* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 535-562.

¹⁶ Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

¹⁷ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death in the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 267, 270-1; Analyses of Civil War-era census data reveal shocking numbers of fatalities that seem, at least on the surface, to confirm Faust's interpretation; see J. David Hacker, "A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead," *Civil War History* 57, no. 4 (December 2011): 307-348.

so unprecedented, and the anonymity of death so jarring, that the war discredited religious and intellectual assumptions that came before.¹⁸

In uniting scholarly literatures that concern death and religion, this chapter posits a third intervention in the historiography of the Civil War era that nuances recent interpretations. Contra Faust, and in a vein that affirms the recent findings of Nicholas Marshall, the death of Gen. Reynolds and the pattern of mortality the Reynolds family experienced in the era of the Civil War illustrates the ubiquitous nature of death in the nineteenth century. Though it was traumatic, the Civil War did not introduce Reynolds's loved ones to an unprecedented kind of death. Yet significantly, the Reynolds and Hewitt story confirms historians' depictions of a Victorian America notable for the gradually receding role of religion, part of a larger cultural shift from romanticism toward realism and pragmatism. The general absence of religious dialogue (a salient feature of condolence writing) in the letters of the Reynolds sisters, the funeral of Gen. Reynolds that bore all the trappings of an American civil religion and showcased, primarily, the General's commitment to the American nation, and the diminished piety of Catherine Hewitt in the postwar period suggest that though religious belief functioned as a balm that healed the wounds of war, it did not necessarily inspire lasting

¹⁸ Nicholas Marshall has critiqued Faust and argued that the Civil War receives disproportionate attention in the scholarly literature for all the death common to the nineteenth-century American experience: "Demographic realities Americans faced before, during, and after the war," Marshall writes, "reveal a society constantly coping with large-scale mortality"; see Marshall, "The Great Exaggeration: Death and the American Civil War," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 1 (March 2014): 3-27, 5; Susan-Mary Grant writes that Americans experienced "a loss of life and a way of death unimaginable at the Civil War's outset"; see Susan-Mary Grant, "Patriot Graves: American National Identity and the Civil War Dead," *American Nineteenth Century History* 5, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 74-100, quotation at 76.

devotion among all northern women.¹⁹ In addition to building on the extant literature of women and death in the Civil War, the Reynolds-Hewitt vignette therefore illustrates, if only in a local instance, how the Civil War unsettled the foundational place of religion in the Victorian era.

Death, Bodies, and Mourning in the Civil War

News traveled quickly to Lancaster natives that John Fulton Reynolds was dead at the age of forty-two and that his body would be coming home by way of Philadelphia.²⁰

Twice-brevetted for heroism in the Mexican War, and a former commandant of cadets at the United States Military Academy at West Point, he was a man whom generations of historians have considered the finest corps commander in the Army of the Potomac.²¹

Indeed, Reynolds refused command of the Army of the Potomac when President Lincoln offered it to him in Washington in a private meeting on the eve of the Gettysburg Campaign.²² Hailed in the pages of the *New York Times* shortly after his death as a

¹⁹ Sean A. Scott, *A Visitation of God: Northern Civilians Interpret the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71-96; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*.

²⁰ Edith Bushong Diary, entry for 1 July 1863, *Bushong Diary Collection*, MG-278, box 1, folder 3, Lancaster County Historical Society and President James Buchanan's Wheatland (LancasterHistory.Org) [hereafter cited as LCHS], Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Telegram of J.G. Rosengarten, 2 July 1863, *Reynolds Family Papers*, Franklin & Marshall College [hereafter cited as *RFP*].

²¹ An early assessment of Reynolds's capability as a military officer that evidences scholarly rigor is Nichols, "The Military Record of General John F. Reynolds," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 63 (1959): 113-127; More contemporaneous to the battle is the account L.P. D'Orleans, the Comte de Paris, which helped to enshrine the reputation of Gen. Reynolds in Civil War lore; see L.P. D'Orleans, *The Battle of Gettysburg* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1886), 103.

²² J. G. Rosengarten, *William Reynolds, John Fulton Reynolds, A Memoir* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1880), 15; John Fulton Reynolds Scott, "John Fulton Reynolds," *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 52, no. 2 (1948): 21-34, at 30; Oliver J. Kelly, "Soldier General of the

paragon of “the dignity and decorum which should always illustrate the character of the American soldier,” Reynolds was shot through the head.²³ Reports vary as to whether he died immediately or endured a gradual death.²⁴ But his body was removed from the field and, after passing through Gettysburg in an ambulance and on ice, traveled to Baltimore, where it arrived at approximately 10:00 a.m. on the morning of July 2.²⁵

Army: John Fulton Reynolds,” *Civil War History* 4, no. 2 (June 1958): 119-128, at 123-124.

²³ “The Late Maj.-Gen. J.F. Reynolds,” *New York Times*, 8 July 1863.

²⁴ Carl D. Sandburg, in his multi-volume Abraham Lincoln biography, channeled the mythic interpretation of Reynolds’s death, in which the General uttered his famous admonition to the Second Wisconsin—“for God’s sake, forward!”—after he had been struck by the fatal round: “The brave and able General John F. Reynolds ... felt a bullet sink into his neck, called to his men, ‘Forward! For God’s sake, forward!’ and fell into the arms of a captain with the words, ‘Good God, Wilcox, I am killed’”; see Carl D. Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, in six volumes (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 2:342; The available evidence contradicts this version. Wrote Reynolds’s sister Eleanor, “[the General] turned his head to look if the Brigade were coming up when a minié ball struck behind his right ear, a little lower down than the ear, & following the skull passed through his brain & lodged in his breast.” She continued, “He fell & his orderly, Veil, raised him & they carried him off hastily. When they reached a field they stopped & asked if he suffered but he only turned his glazed eyes on Capt. Mitchell, who asked him, & smiled. He gasped a few moments & died. We all think he could not have suffered & would have been impossible to have spoken.” Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 5 July 1863, *RFP*; the most authoritative word on the matter is that of Sgt. Charles H. Veil, who served as Reynolds’s orderly at Gettysburg, and who witnessed the General’s death from his side: “He never spoke a word, or moved a muscle after he was struck. I have seen many men killed in action, but never saw a ball do its work so instantly as did the ball which struck General Reynolds ...” (original emphasis); Significantly, Veil also noted that the wound was bloodless, a remarkable and rare occurrence compared to what resulted normally when a large-caliber, rifle musket ball tore into human flesh; see the letter of Charles H. Veil to D. McConaughy Esq., 7 April 1864, *Peter Frederick Rothermel Papers, Brake Collection*, United States Army Military History Institute [hereafter USAMHI], Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

²⁵ Capt. Stephen M. Weld, whom Reynolds had ordered to ride fast to General Meade’s headquarters with news of the battle, encountered the ambulance carrying the body of his general after returning to Gettysburg; see Stephen M. Weld, *War Diary and Letters of Stephen Minot Weld, 1861-1865* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1912), 230; Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, 5 July 1863, Eleanor Reynolds Scrapbook, *RFP*; Telegram of Don Piatt to Abraham Lincoln, Baltimore, MD (2 July 1863), *Abraham*

James E. Weaver, the undertaker who had earlier prepared the General's father, John Reynolds (d. 1853), for burial, embalmed the body.²⁶ At about six o'clock, Mary Jane Reynolds Gildersleeve and her husband George departed their home in Baltimore to view the remains of her brother. Mary Jane, "Jennie," as she was known to family, brought with her two American flags, which she draped over the casket. She crowned them with flowers. Shortly after eight o'clock in the evening, the body of Gen. Reynolds—accompanied by two family members and six members of the general's staff—departed for Philadelphia, where it arrived in the early hours of the morning on July 3rd, the final day of the Battle of Gettysburg.²⁷

The events that transpired from the afternoon and into the night hours of July 3, 1863, in the home of Katherine Reynolds Landis at 1829 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, where the family gathered to view and grieve their war hero, reveal much about the nature of bodies, mourning, and death rituals in Civil War-era America, for they concern and confront the very nature of death, which was a central feature of both the American Civil War and of the long nineteenth-century Victorian context. That there rested in the home and miles away from the battlefield a body preserved for the family to see, observe, sense, and mourn according to Christian and Victorian convention constituted an uncommon feature of the war. The most accurate data suggest that the Civil War claimed the lives of as many as 750,000 Americans, and of those killed in combat, a vast

Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Telegram from Samuel Reynolds to W.M. Riley, Washington, D.C., 2 July 1863, *RFP*.

²⁶ "Despach [sic] of Mr. F. G. Chapman," *New York Herald*, 3 July 1863; Letter of Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

²⁷ Letter of Jennie Reynolds Gildersleeve to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, PA (5 July 1863), *RFP*; Telegram of George Gildersleeve to James L. Reynolds, Baltimore, MD, 2 July 1863, *RFP*.

majority were not returned to their families.²⁸ Despite the proximity of the Gettysburg battlefield to Reynolds's native Lancaster and to his relatives in Philadelphia, and though the North benefited more than the South from modern railroads that enabled frequent and reliable transport, an overwhelming number of fatalities at the Battle of Gettysburg did not leave the field. Scholars estimate that bodies of only 1,500 Union soldiers killed were returned to their homes. Coffins were scarce. The heat of the 1863 Pennsylvania summer rapidly accelerated the decomposition of bodies and compelled Gen. Meade, out of concern for the public health, to issue an order prohibiting the disinterment of the dead.²⁹ One historian, in his sensory history of the Civil War, has noted that the Battle of Gettysburg consumed six million pounds of human and horse flesh, and that the atmosphere of death, the pungent stench that resulted from decomposing bodies (for which, the author claims, there exists no sensory equivalent in the twenty-first century), lingered over Gettysburg until autumnal frosts.³⁰

Though sensory reminders of battle forced Gettysburg residents to confront the grim realities of war in unique and gut-wrenching ways, death remained a permanent feature of human experience for persons throughout all Civil War-era America. One historian has written that death, even more than such other sacred occasions as birth and marriage, demanded a privileged status within the hierarchy of life events.³¹ If true,

²⁸ Hacker, "A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead."

²⁹ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 90; George Ashton Coco, *A Strange and Blighted Land: Gettysburg, the Aftermath of a Battle* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1995), 110; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 90.

³⁰ Mark M. Smith, *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 83.

³¹ Michael Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 31.

then the Civil War strained this hierarchy of life events by removing a significant number of deaths from the domestic sphere and the home, which was long considered the sanctuary of Victorian life.³² Faust has argued that this process was so profound and jarring that it compelled Americans to ponder anew basic conceptions about the meaning of life and how to confront the problem of death. The Civil War introduced to participants and observers a harsh reality marked by sudden death and suffering.³³

The scale of the Civil War and the means by which the war shifted death away from the familiar domestic sphere were unprecedented in the American experience. Thousands of Civil War casualties “were literally blown to fragments on the field of battle,” writes one historian.³⁴ Faust has claimed that the killing of the war, which resulted from modern weaponry, outpaced individuals’, organizations’, and even the government’s ability to count and name the dead.³⁵ Approximately half of Union war dead—and a far higher number of Confederate dead—“perished without names.” Not until the Korean War did the United States engage in systematic administrative efforts to identify and repatriate the remains of soldiers, she writes, and the Great War marked

³² Silber, *Daughters of the Union*, 87.

³³ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*.

³⁴ Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country*, 60.

³⁵ Faust views the Civil War as the first of its kind in the long twentieth century, but historians debate the modern character of the American Civil War, and especially the supposed increased killing power and efficiency of its weaponry in connection with battlefield tactics. The “rifle revolution” thesis—the notion that rifle muskets resulted dramatically in greater numbers of casualties—first posited by Grady McWhiney and Perry Jamieson in *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982), and still widely popular among Civil War enthusiasts, has undergone thorough revision. The first substantive reimagining of the rifle revolution thesis was Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Earl J. Hess has offered a more recent critique in *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008); See, too, Hess, *Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

the introduction of identity badges—what later became known as dog tags—for U.S. soldiers.³⁶ But in the Civil War, men literally vanished in combat without a trace. A colonel who marched in Pickett’s ill-fated assault up the slopes of Cemetery Ridge recalled losing consciousness during the attack, only to waken with shards of bone and lumps of flesh, once belonging to comrades unidentified, all over his uniform.³⁷ In that same attack, a rifle musket ball dropped one of Pickett’s brigade commanders from his saddle; his body was never recovered nor identified.³⁸ Faust, too, cites a Union chaplain who wrote after the Battle of Gettysburg about “little fragments” of human remains “hardly ... recognizable as any part of a man.” Another soldier wrote of a man “blown to atoms.”³⁹ While prominent military historians maintain that the weapons and battlefield tactics of the American Civil War more closely approximated other nineteenth-century conflicts in the global context, Faust and others insist that modern weaponry on an industrial scale transformed the nature of killing in Civil War combat.⁴⁰ Modern weapons, in their view, held a new terrifying power to obliterate soldiers on the field of battle.⁴¹ In turn, the ghastly effects of this modern weaponry and ordinance forced the American government to confront its obligation to recover, identify, and

³⁶ Faust, “‘Numbers on Top of Numbers’: Counting the Civil War Dead,” *Journal of Military History* 70 (October 2006): 995-1010, at 996.

³⁷ Joseph C. Mayo, “Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg,” in R. A. Brock ed., *Southern Historical Society Papers* 34 (Richmond, Virginia: The Southern Historical Society, 1906), 334.

³⁸ R. H. Irvine, “Brig. Gen. Richard B. Garnett,” *Confederate Veteran* 23, no. 1 (January 1915), 391.

³⁹ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 128.

⁴⁰ Allen Guelzo has mapped the boundaries of this historiographical debate and eloquently stated the view accepted among practitioners of more conventional military history in *Gettysburg*, pp. 35-37.

⁴¹ For more on the perceived relationship of industrialization and the brutality of Civil War killing, see Michael C.C. Adams, *Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 60.

reinter dead citizen soldiers who perished as volunteers for the nation. For their part, citizens at home struggled to comprehend how soldiers could literally disappear without a trace.⁴² But the body of Gen. Reynolds escaped anonymity, and the relief that his sisters expressed at securing their brother's remains is illustrative, for it reinforces how non-combatants struggled to fathom the conditions of the modern war. Indeed, that civilians expressed surprise, as the Reynolds sisters did, that the bodies of most slain soldiers did not come home underscores how the Civil War unsettled the northern home front.

The Reynolds sisters took much comfort from the presence of John's embalmed corpse: "Twas such a comfort to have the body so soon," wrote Jennie Reynolds, John's favorite, to their brother William on July 5.⁴³ Eleanor, in her own reminiscence to William, wrote, "it was but a great comfort to know the remains were coming to us. *It never entered my mind till this moment, that they would not be saved*, which was a merciful thing" (emphasis added).⁴⁴ A chasm of expectation and experience existed between those who killed and died in anonymity in Civil War combat, and those who waited for news on the home front, wandered the battlefields, and travelled across the

⁴² Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*; For the Civil War as a turning point in how the government conceived of its obligations to its dead, see Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁴³ William James Reynolds, John's younger brother, served in the United States Navy. He attained the rank of Rear Admiral in December of 1873 and full command of the United States Naval Asiatic Station. J. G. Rosengarten, *William Reynolds, John Fulton Reynolds, A Memoir* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1880), 6; Letter of Jennie Reynolds Gildersleeve to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, PA, 5 July 1863, *RFP*; At the time of General Reynolds's death, William Reynolds was stationed with the United States Navy in Port Royal, South Carolina; see Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 213.

⁴⁴ Letter of Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

country seeking lost loved ones.⁴⁵ While Reynolds's rank as Major General of Volunteers might have helped to ensure that his body was secured quickly and removed from the field in theory, conditions of battle as they existed on July 1 meant that it was not a foregone conclusion that Reynolds's body would be identified, secured, and returned to loved ones. That the body of Gen. Reynolds returned to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is a fact owed to the heroism of his staff, and in particular to his orderly, Sgt. Charles Veil, who removed the body from the edge of the Herbst woodlot. Veil helped to carry the fallen general from the field, hunted for a coffin in the small town and, unable to locate one, procured a box from a local marble cutler, knocked out its baseboards, and filled the box with ice.⁴⁶

The viewing of Reynolds's body in the Landis home conformed closely to how loved ones observed and obsessed over human remains in the antebellum and Civil War-eras. Laderman has written that antebellum Americans developed "a fixation on the bod[ies] of the deceased," that many Americans exhibited a peculiar preoccupation with the corpse, and that "the viewing of the body remained an integral ritual moment in the disposal of the dead," particularly for American Protestants.⁴⁷ The coffin, a metallic case painted to resemble rosewood, and bearing an oval viewing window of glass and a silver plate with the inscription, "Maj. Genl. J.F.R., U.S. Army. July 1st, 1863," rested upon a table in the family parlor in front of the mantle.⁴⁸ Viewing bodies

⁴⁵ For more on desperate family members traveling across the country to learn the fate of loved ones, see Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 127-128.

⁴⁶ Letter of Charles H. Veil to D. McConaughy Esq., 7 April 1864, *Peter Frederick Rothermel Papers, Brake Collection*, United States Army Military History Institute [hereafter USAMHI], Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

⁴⁷ Laderman, *The Sacred Remains*, 73, 75.

⁴⁸ Letter of Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

offered family a final opportunity to preserve the memory of a lost loved one. Curiously, heightened interest in viewing the effects of death sometimes led to unusual and disturbing rites. One scholar has noted a rise in post-mortem photoportraiture in the era.⁴⁹ Laderman has described in shocking detail how mourners sometimes departed from antebellum death ways and attempted to sustain the “last view” of their loved one by entering into tombs, opening coffins, and viewing the gradual effects of decomposition on their beloved. For some mourners, putting oneself into close proximity with the dead helped to assuage emotional and psychological suffering, and it reinforced their hope in the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection.⁵⁰ The sisters of General Reynolds did not evidence a fascination with death to such extremes, but they did preserve a lock of the General’s hair (the preservation of mementos was rather customary), and they took to the written word to describe the condition of John’s body to preserve their brother’s memory for William, who could not attend the funeral.⁵¹ Jennie informed William that the body looked “quite natural,” but Ellie, who kept a journal of antebellum morbid poetry, evidenced a more grotesque fascination with death typical of the era, and offered a striking description of the body.⁵²

Ellie noted at first that the body was difficult to see through the glass and “much obscured.” She commented on the general’s bruised face, which the embalmer apparently had bleached. The effects of death at first prevented her from recognizing her brother. But, she noted, if one looked “very closely” one could recognize John (original

⁴⁹ Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies*, 39.

⁵⁰ Laderman, *The Sacred Remains*, 76.

⁵¹ Lock of hair belonging to General John F. Reynolds, dated 3 July 1863, *RFP*.

⁵² Letter of Jennie Reynolds Gildersleeve to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, PA, 5 July 1863, Eleanor Reynolds Scrapbook, *RFP*; Journal of morbid poetry collected by Eleanor Reynolds, *RFP*.

emphasis). Ellie continued to observe the trim of the General's mustache and facial hair, which "had been cut very short in Baltimore." His lips were parted slightly, revealing a bit of teeth. Significantly, Ellie looked for the the mortal wound, which she could not locate, but did take the care to describe what might possibly have been an exit wound – "a slight protuberance at his collar as if there were a compress there" – suggesting a possible downward deflection of the rifle musket ball through the neck. Ellie "longed to see his hand." She expressed some disappointment that the coffin's glass viewing window did not enable the viewer to see all the buttons on the General's uniform.⁵³

If the Reynolds sisters wept over the body of their brother, they did not say so in their later writings, which otherwise disclosed in detail the emotions and mourning of the other significant woman in the late General's life. Found on the general's body shortly after his death was a gold ring. Reynolds customarily wore this ring on his little finger, and it contained the inscription "Dear Kate." An aide wrote later that Reynolds prized the ring and guarded it carefully.⁵⁴ Catherine Mary "Kate" Hewitt was the General's secret fiancé. The two met on an oceanic voyage from San Francisco to New York in 1860, after Reynolds received a summons to serve as Commandant of Cadets at the United States Military Academy.⁵⁵ On the afternoon of July 3rd, a young woman called on the Reynolds sisters at the home of Kate Reynolds Landis in Philadelphia and requested permission to view the General's body. The woman at the door was indeed

⁵³ Descriptions of the body of General Reynolds taken from Letter of Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

⁵⁴ Copy of Letter of William Riddle to Lt. Bouvier, Warrenton Junction, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, 4 August 1863, *RFP*.

⁵⁵ Kalina K. Anderson, "The Girl He Left Behind," *America's Civil War* 12, no. 3 (July 1999): 48-53; Anderson's essay, written for a popular audience, features rich and valuable—but undocumented—material concerning the life of Kate Hewitt.

Catherine Mary Hewitt, “Kate,” whose name matched the one inscribed on the gold ring that the General wore on his little finger. Kate “had not been able to shed a tear” until she saw the body of her former fiancé. After some time, Hewitt confessed to the siblings that they had intended upon marriage after the war. She felt awkward, naturally, among strangers, and departed the home of Kate Landis after she had mourned a while longer. But in the evening she returned, and asked permission to hold a vigil with the body through the night, a vigil she shared with Ellie. During this vigil Hewitt beheld once more the personal effects she had gifted the General that were discovered in Reynolds’s valise: several pictures; letters she had sent to John, sealed with his West Point ring; she saw, too, the gold ring he wore on his finger that bore her name.⁵⁶ “Dearest,” she murmured repeatedly as she sat by the General’s body, “it is very hard to give you up.” But, confident she had given her beloved to his God, she placed his West Point ring on the glass window of the casket, stating only, “let it never be tainted by a disloyal hand.”⁵⁷ Hewitt then confessed to the General’s siblings that together the couple had decided that should he perish in the war, she would pursue a religious life of celibacy and orders. Though heart-rending, the scene is illustrative of a rare occurrence in the American Civil War, for loved ones did not often enjoy the good fortune of viewing, mourning, and holding vigils over the bodies of their beloved.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Letter of Jennie Reynolds Gildersleeve to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, PA, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

⁵⁷ Letter of Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

⁵⁸ In describing the “good death” of General James Ewell Brown Stuart, and the reaction of his widow, who arrived too late to his bedside, Mays notes that viewing and burying a body were “small comforts” in war; see Mays, “If Heart Speaks Not to Heart’: Condolence Letters and Confederate Widows’ Grief,” 381.

The scene also reveals how a woman steeped in religious piety common to the era of the Civil War responded to grief and suffering. Richard Carwardine has observed that the republic in 1860 was a decidedly religious society. On the eve of the Civil War, religious adherence—active participation in church life—was double the rate of church membership. And in 1860, approximately four times as many Americans attended religious services every Sunday as voted in the presidential election that year.⁵⁹ Sean Scott has demonstrated that women forced to endure the war from afar took comfort in religion and used their faith to inspire devotion in soldiers. Women wrote letters to the men and urged them to take comfort from frequent readings of Holy Scripture.⁶⁰ Kate Hewitt corresponded with Reynolds, and doubtless her correspondence would help to illuminate how she perceived the workings of Providence in the war. While her letters to Reynolds no longer exist, Kate did supply John with a Catholic medal and crucifix that he wore into battle – evidence of her affection for him and also of her confidence in the sovereignty of God.⁶¹ Through her mourning, Kate Hewitt gave “[Reynolds] up to his

⁵⁹ Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 44; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 172; Timothy L. Wesley has also noted the depth and breadth of institutionalized American Protestantism on the eve of the Civil War, which encompassed some twenty-eight formally distinct denominations; see Wesley, *The Politics of Faith during the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 33.

⁶⁰ Sean A. Scott, *A Visitation of God: Northern Civilians Interpret the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71-96.

⁶¹ Wrote William Riddle, an aide to Reynolds, one month after the General's burial in Lancaster, Pennsylvania: “On the General's little finger was that gold ring I spoke of bearing inside the words ‘Dear Kate,’ which he valued very highly. I remember hearing Col. Kingsbury speak of the great anxiety he exhibited when the ring was once lost for a time. He wore about his neck by a short silken string those two emblems of the Catholic faith—heart and cross—which I remember seeing once during his life time—both of which I gave to his brother”; see letter (copy) of William Riddle to Lt. Bouvier, Warrenton Junction, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, 4 August 1863, *RFP*.

God” and recognized, however difficult in the moment, the inscrutability of Providence in war.⁶²

Strangers in a Strange Land? Catholics in Civil War America

That Hewitt gave Reynolds up to “his God” is also instructive, for the very language of that submission points to a foundational religious dynamic of nineteenth-century American life: the antagonism of Protestantism and Catholicism in America. Historians divide on the reception of Catholicism in a predominantly Protestant, Anglo-Saxon culture in nineteenth-century America. The traditional and established narrative emphasizes intense anti-Catholicism as a salient feature of American culture with roots in the English Reformation. According to some historians, the American Revolution intensified longstanding Anti-Catholicism in the English religious and intellectual tradition transplanted to North America via English colonization. It was once fashionable, as Gordon Wood notes, for American historians to look to the Revolutionary moment as the triumph of Enlightenment Liberalism. But Americans of the founding generation were also deeply religious, and their particular religiosity helped to influence the War for Independence and the creation of a new republic.⁶³ In particular, as George McKenna has written, the political and social implications of Calvinism strengthened the revolutionary imperative.⁶⁴ The American Revolution, which bore great Calvinist influence, united Protestant colonialists against hierarchical

⁶² Letter of Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

⁶³ Gordon S. Wood, “Religion and the American Revolution,” in Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart, eds., *New Directions in American Religious History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 173-205.

⁶⁴ George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 49.

structures of the Old World. The War for Independence was at once a war against monarchy, aristocracy, and antiquated religion. Colonials developed a serious aversion to sacramental Christianity – most especially to high liturgical forms of Anglicanism and to Roman Catholicism. James P. Byrd has written that “Anti-Catholicism was a central biblical conviction for colonial Protestants, an inheritance from Europe that had its origins in the Reformation” (and Counter Reformation).⁶⁵

In their attempts to explain the alienation of Catholics in Civil War-era America, historians have rehabilitated narratives that depict nineteenth-century Catholicism as a vilified religion in the eyes of American Protestants. Americans, in their view, perceived in Roman Catholicism a hierarchical and anti-democratic faith lacking in patriotic zeal and a religious worldview tainted with foreignness and racial inferiority. In the nineteenth century, Americans viewed the burgeoning Catholic threat – which strengthened with growing numbers of German and Irish immigrants – as a threat to their mission to establish an empire of Protestant republicanism. Moreover, Catholicism incorporated inferior elements of race and class with heretical dogma. The religion therefore constituted a distinct “other” to which patriotic republicans stood (often violently) opposed. Antebellum Protestants expressed their anti-Catholic sentiments in a variety of mediums—in print, in fantastic literature, through political rhetoric, and even through the destruction of convents and schools.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5; Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

⁶⁶ For instances of anti-Catholic violence in antebellum America, see David Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011); see, also, Jon Gjerde’s treatment of the 1844 Philadelphia riots in

Nothing captured this apparent anti-Catholicism in antebellum America with greater clarity than the Mexican-American War, which aligned American interests in the West decidedly against Catholicism. John C. Pinheiro argues that Anglo-Saxons interpreted Roman Catholicism in Mexico as a threat to that divine mission for which God chose America, and that Manifest Destiny in the United States (and the very language which gave form to this idea) fused vehement anti-Catholicism and racism in a fashion readily comprehensible to white, Protestant Americans in the age of Jacksonian democracy. For antebellum Americans, racial “blackness” in Mexico comingled with the darkness and evil of “popery” and threatened to check the American Protestant advance westward.⁶⁷ More recently, William B. Kurtz has offered an insightful treatment of those effects the American Civil War wrought on Catholicism. Instead of moving American Catholics into the cultural mainstream, Kurtz contends, the war alienated northern Catholics and intensified pre-existing divisions with American Protestants.⁶⁸

Set against this Protestant-centric view of American cultural and religious history, the conversion of Kate Hewitt to Roman Catholicism, her secret betrothal to the Protestant Reynolds, the reception she received from Reynolds’s sisters, the manner in which she mourned over the General’s body, and her decision to pursue a religious life all seem rather exceptional. Taken together, these circumstances have given rise to a romantic interpretation of the Reynolds and Hewitt story that has its origins in an early biography of the General and in an essay published by the Lancaster County Historical

Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America, edited by S. Deborah Kang (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-7.

⁶⁷ Pinheiro, *Missionaries of Republicanism*.

⁶⁸ Kurtz, *Excommunicated from the Union*.

Society.⁶⁹ More recently, and most famously, the Hewitt story re-emerged in Michael Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Killer Angels*, and has found expression in a highly-dramatized account of the Reynolds and Hewitt story in the journal *America's Civil War*.⁷⁰ Interpreted in this light, Catherine Hewitt did more than arrive unannounced at a Philadelphia home to mourn her loss according to Victorian custom: she inflicted a great surprise for the Reynolds family when she revealed her identity as a convert to Roman Catholicism.⁷¹

In point of fact, however, Kate's conversion to Roman Catholicism and her subsequent engagement to John Reynolds, while perhaps unusual, were not far outside the cultural mainstream in the Civil War-era North. Catherine Hewitt received a Catholic education at Eden Hall, just removed from Philadelphia, and her 1861 reception into the Roman Catholic Church mirrored broader nineteenth-century conversion trends across the United States.⁷² Lincoln A. Mullen has demonstrated, for

⁶⁹ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 211-213; Mary R. Maloney, "Dear Kate," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 65 (1961): 136-143, at 138.

⁷⁰ Michael Shaara, in his biographical sketch of Reynolds in the opening pages of his classic Civil War novel, wrote, "[Reynolds] has fallen in love late in life, but the girl is Catholic, and Reynolds has not yet told his Protestant family, but he wears her ring on a chain around his neck, under his uniform"; see Shaara, *The Killer Angels: A Novel of the Civil War* (New York: Modern Library, 2004), xx; For the significance of Shaara's work in shaping Civil War memory, see Craig A. Warren, *Scars to Prove It: The Civil War Soldier and American Fiction* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2009), 118-159; Anderson, "The Girl He Left Behind," 50-52.

⁷¹ Letter of Jennie Reynolds Gildersleeve to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, PA, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

⁷² Kate was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church on 18 March 1861; see baptismal entry for March 1861, Société du Sacré Coeur de Jésus, *Liber baptismalis*, 18 March 1861, Archives of the United States-Canada Province of the Society of the Sacred Heart [hereafter cited as AUSCPSSH], St. Louis, Missouri; See, also, the student register of Eden Hall, which in addition to listing the dates of Catherine Hewitt's baptism and her first communion—March 19, 1861—describes Kate as "Protestante convertie"; see Société du Sacré Coeur de Jésus, "Catherine Hewitt," *Pupil's Register, Eden Hall: 1845-1895*, AUSCPSSH.

instance, that the years from 1840 to the end of the American Civil War – “the critical period for Catholic conversion” – brought about a flurry of conversions to Roman Catholicism from members of Protestant sects. Though their motives for conversion were often diverse, notes Mullen, “American Protestants, troubled by the divisions and heresies in the American free market of religion, sought out a catholicity marked by unity in a visible, orthodox church.”⁷³ Jon Gjerde has documented that the total number of converts received into the Roman Catholic Church in the same period approximates 60,000.⁷⁴ Conversions came from laypersons and thinking elites. Patrick Allitt notes that American converts to Catholicism did more to fashion Catholic intellectualism in America and Europe than Catholics born into the religion.⁷⁵

Kate was no intellectual, but her reception into the Roman Catholic Church, and particularly her baptism, reinforce a sacramental aspect typical of Protestant conversions to Catholicism in the Civil War era. Mullen has written that the “Catholic Church’s theology of baptism impacted the mode and meaning of Protestant conversion” because the Roman church recognized the validity of Protestant baptisms, even if those baptized in Protestant schismatic sects had “fallen away.” He argues additionally that priests, especially members of the Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle, effectively confronted Protestants with the Catholic doctrine of baptism to convince their schismatic fellow Christians of their innate – and lapsed – Catholicity.⁷⁶

⁷³ Lincoln A. Mullen, “The Contours of Conversion to Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 1-27, quotes at 4.

⁷⁴ Gjerde, *Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America*, 16.

⁷⁵ Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); paraphrased from Mullen, “The Contours of Conversion to Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century,” 3.

⁷⁶ Mullen, “The Contours of Conversion to Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century,” 7-9.

For those not previously baptized who received the sacrament, however, baptism, with its attendant confirmation and first communion, marked one's entry into the visible Church.

A letter from the Sacred Heart Academy in Torresdale, Pennsylvania, a school established by the Catholic Order of the Sacred Heart, and penned by Catherine's Madam Superior Thompson, describes the "remarkable" conversion of Hewitt – "a young Protestant person" – to Roman Catholicism in 1861. Significantly, this letter underscores the importance of sacramentalism to Catholic conversion. Catherine, according to the author, had "never heard of the Catholic religion," but desired "to know the truth." She was possessed of a character "strongly impetuous," noted the Madam Superior Thompson, and "religion was needing to make its conquest" of her soul. With elation, Madam Superior Thompson described how Catherine Hewitt had made her confession of sin with true contrition and religious fervor – "Catherine made her abjuration with a furor that penetrates all hearts" – and was next welcomed to the sacrament of baptism. "As soon as the waters of baptism flowed upon her forehead," wrote Madam Superior Thompson, "a palpable change was perceptible in her. Her companions no longer recognized her. She prepared herself for her first communion with truly admirable feelings of faith and of recognition."⁷⁷

If the account enshrined by novelists is to be believed, Catherine's conversion to Catholicism and the Protestantism of Reynolds constituted two immovable objects in the constellation of nineteenth-century religious belief. This helps to account for why, in

⁷⁷ *Lettres de annualles de La Société du Sacré Loeur de Jésus, 1859 es 1862*, 343-344, AUSCPSSH. I am grateful to Dr. Joshua M. Blaylock, Assistant Professor of French in the Modern Language Studies Department at Texas Christian University, for graciously translating this source.

the romantic interpretation of their clandestine engagement, Reynolds was reluctant to introduce Hewitt to his family.⁷⁸ But in point of fact the religious chasm between the two, if in fact one such divide existed on theological or doctrinal grounds, was not wide. Mullen has noted that Episcopalians, especially those attracted to the sacramental and traditionalist features of the Oxford Movement, proved ripe for conversion to Catholicism in the 1840s and 1850s.⁷⁹ Though descended of French Huguenots and Irish Protestants (hardly dispassionate religious adherents) and reared a Presbyterian, Reynolds received significant moral and religious instruction at the United States Military Academy.⁸⁰ Such instruction came from Episcopalians whose faith best co-opted values of military duty, manly honor, and devotion to the republic.⁸¹ In fact, to the

⁷⁸ Shaara, *The Killer Angels*, xx.

⁷⁹ Mullen, in “The Contours of Conversion to Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century,” writes, “the greatest source of converts to Catholicism in the 1840s and 1850s were Episcopalians who already believed themselves ‘catholic’” (p. 14).

⁸⁰ No baptismal records for First Presbyterian Church in Lancaster exist for years 1820 or 1821, when Reynolds would likely have received baptism, but his parents worshiped at First Presbyterian Church in Lancaster and maintained a pew there; see Pew Rentals 1805-1820, *First Presbyterian Church, Lancaster (city) Pa. [Church records, 1821-1874 includes communicants, baptisms and marriages; also record of pew rentals 1805-1900]* [microform, reel one], LCHS; see, too, genealogical data and notes on the Reynolds family contained in Reynolds Family Notes, *Fulton: Eleanor Fulton, Presbyterian Collection, 1703-1991*, MG-50, box 2, folder 39, LCHS; see, finally, Mrs. James D. Landis, “Who was Who in Lancaster County One Hundred Years Ago,” *Papers Read Before the Lancaster County Historical Society* 11, no. 10 (1907): 373-421, at 390, 400-1.

⁸¹ Michael Graziano notes that the United States Military Academy developed a religious culture in opposition to the democratization of Protestantism. Instead of a fragmented evangelicalism, administrators at West Point cultivated a nationalistic civil religion that drew from Episcopalianism: “The informal establishment of the Episcopal Church,” writes Graziano, “shaped the political and religious loyalties of a generation of US Army leaders.” Men graduated from the United States Military Academy catechized in Episcopal forms, which they observed under orders. There existed, too, a cultural aspect to the Army’s embrace of Episcopalianism: “the Army and the Academy understood Episcopalianism as a proper religion for ‘gentlemen’”; see Graziano, “America’s ‘Peculiar Children’: Authority and Christian Nationalism at Antebellum West Point,” *Religions* 8, no. 6 (January 2017): doi: 10.3390/rel8010006, quotations at p. 1

extent that material evidence can confirm the General's religiosity, the most contemporaneous proof suggests that Reynolds practiced an Episcopalian, and not a Presbyterian, Protestantism. He owned, and presumably read, a copy of the Book of Common Prayer.⁸² While it is impossible to know with complete certainty what Reynolds believed, his religious world view, to the extent that one can understand it in such terms, evidenced a generic Protestant outlook compatible with social norms expected of a military professional and a gentleman. Moreover, his conduct evidenced none of the sensibilities typical of Civil War-era evangelicals. The religious zeal of U.S. Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard, for instance, a renowned evangelical, and with whom Reynolds associated and served alongside as a corps commander in the Army of the Potomac, little resembled the reserved and more formal religiosity of Reynolds.⁸³ Interpreted in these lights, Reynolds's prospective marriage to a Catholic hardly posed social problems. Additionally, historian Anne Rose has written that marriages of the period often accommodated religious diversity, and that while the conversion of a wife to Roman Catholicism might result in Catholic offspring, gentlemen often retained and practiced their own religious convictions.⁸⁴

To be sure, and to children descended of Irish Protestants and French Huguenots, knowledge of the Reynolds-Hewitt romance, and of the fact that Reynolds

and p. 3; "Clergymen Educated at West Point," *Niles' National Register* 20, no. 3 (March 1846): 36; See, also, Stephen E. Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), 151-152.

⁸² Book of Common Prayer, dated 1858, with the name of John F. Reynolds inscribed on the interior cover page, Reynolds Family Library, *RFP*.

⁸³ For the religiosity of Gen. Howard, see Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, in two volumes (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1907).

⁸⁴ Anne C. Rose, "Some Private Roads to Rome: The Role of Families in American Victorian Conversions to Catholicism," *The Catholic Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (Jan. 1999): 35-57.

fell dead at Gettysburg with a Roman Catholic medal around his neck, must have seemed nothing short of surprising. But set against the historical and cultural backdrop of anti-Catholicism in Civil War-era America, the interaction of Gen. Reynolds's sisters with their once-to-be sister-in-law is noteworthy for how it proved an occasion of accommodation in a period of American history often noted for its anti-Catholicism. In fact, to the extent that the interaction of Reynolds's sisters with Catherine Hewitt points to the complexity of religious and social dynamics of the era, they suggest something of a thaw in the frosty relationships that had long persisted between Catholics and Protestants. The sisters seemed not at all disturbed when Catherine Hewitt announced her intention to lead a devout and chaste life in a religious order. They praised her mind, which struck them as extraordinarily beautiful. "You would be so pleased with her letters," Jennie wrote to William Reynolds on 5 July 1863. "They show such a delicate, refined mind so far above ordinary love epistles." With good reason, a sense of shock permeates the letter. "I need not tell you," Jennie continued, "what a thunder clap it was to us all."⁸⁵ More distinct notes of surprise, which a reader eager to discover religious animus might interpret as evidence of deeply-seated anti-Catholicism, rise from the pages of Eleanor's letter. Catherine "was so pleased to see" the cross of flowers prepared in Philadelphia for the General's casket, Ellie recalled, and significantly, "made no parade of her religion nor in any way did anything that was in the least disagreeable"

⁸⁵ Letter of Jennie Reynolds Gildersleeve to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, PA, 5 July 1863, Eleanor Reynolds Scrapbook, digital, *RFP*; Charles Henry Veil, Reynolds's orderly who saved the General's body from falling into enemy hands at Gettysburg, confirmed Catherine Hewitt's erudition and to her deep learning. In a reminiscence that detailed a call he made on Catherine Hewitt at the Emmettsburg convent in Maryland following the General's death, Veil recorded that Hewitt was "highly educated"; see Veil, "Sergeant Charles Vale's Memoir: On the Death of Reynolds," ed. Robert D. Hoffsommer, *Civil War Times Illustrated* 21 (Winter 1982/1983): 16-25.

(original emphasis).⁸⁶ But such commentary does not necessarily corroborate anti-Catholic sentiment from a Protestant point of view. In fact, a reader may interpret and attribute this observation of Hewitt's religious practice, which emphasizes the "other"-ness of Catholicism, to the generic and cultural Protestantism of the Reynolds sisters, who were likely baptized into Protestant churches (Mary Jane Reynolds was married in the Episcopal Church) but who otherwise evidenced few signs of strong Protestant piety.⁸⁷

Whatever the exact nature of their religious convictions, both sisters treated Kate Hewitt with grace, a noteworthy fact when viewed in the light of Kate's Catholicism. It is possible, as Barbara Welter has argued famously, that religious values inherent to the cult of femininity in the nineteenth century obligated the sisters to treat Kate Hewitt with such kindness in their social sphere, especially during her time of mourning.⁸⁸ It is possible, too, that the Reynolds sisters were not possessed of the same degree of religious fervor as Catherine Hewitt, and found Catherine's Catholicism not at all troubling. And it seems remotely plausible that, paradoxically, the very death of John Reynolds freed the sisters to treat Kate warmly, because his death killed the social discomfort potential in her joining their brother in the marriage sacrament and them in law. Whatever their motivations, the sisters treated Kate with a kindness uncommon in

⁸⁶ Letter of Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

⁸⁷ Baptismal and wedding record for Jane Reynolds, *St. James Episcopal Church Lancaster, PA: Parish records, 1744-1950* [microfilm, reel one], LCHS.

⁸⁸ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, part 1 (Summer 1966): 151-174.

the broader context of antebellum Catholic-Protestant relations. Kate never received such kindness even from her brother, a devout Baptist, with whom she was estranged.⁸⁹

In addition to praising Kate's appearance and her refined intellect, and in a manner that suggests the sisters did not automatically perceive Catholicism as a religion of the poor, the sisters considered Catherine to be a woman of means.⁹⁰ Such treatment suggests that the Reynolds sisters thought highly of Kate Hewitt, that their kindness transcended mere social obligation, and that they thought her a suitable partner for their brother. Read against the grain of anti-Catholicism in the Civil War era, and in the broader context of numerous conversions to Catholicism in the nineteenth century, the vignette of the Reynolds women and Catherine Hewitt suggests that historians would do well to seek out exceptions of religious accommodation to established interpretations of anti-Catholicism in the Civil War era.

The Funeral of Reynolds

With the authority of the Health Department of Philadelphia, and aboard one of the finest passenger coaches the Pennsylvania Railroad had on offer, the body of Maj. Gen. John Reynolds made its way to Lancaster from Philadelphia in the late morning hours of July 4, Independence Day, 1863.⁹¹ The corpse fell to the charge of Capt. Joseph G. Rosengarten, who accompanied the metallic casket with other members of the staff and

⁸⁹ Wrote Eleanor, "Kate ... has a brother who is as prejudiced against her religion that she cannot be much with him. They have been very much separated. He is a Baptist"; see the letter of Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

⁹⁰ Letter of Jennie Reynolds Gildersleeve to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, PA, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

⁹¹ Certificate authorizing the removal of the remains of Jno. Fulton Reynolds, Registration Office, Health Department, Philadelphia, 3 July 1863, *RFP*; *Daily Inquirer*, 6 July 1863, quoted in Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 212.

grieving family. On the same train but in separate cars traveled curious citizens of Philadelphia and Washington who, though not invited to the funeral, nevertheless sensed its historic significance and wanted to witness the solemn occasion.⁹²

It was a typical July day in Pennsylvania, and an oppressive, humid heat hovered over the small town. An immense throng—one newspaper correspondent estimated more than five thousand strong—gathered in the streets near the train depot sans an official funeral announcement and waited more than an hour in advance of the train’s arrival. They gathered out of simple devotion to pay their final respects to the slain hero of Lancaster. American flags dotted the tiny town to mark the occasion of Independence Day, but these were now decorated with mourning crapes and flew at half-mast. The mood of the town shifted from immense joy over victory at Gettysburg and jubilee befitting a Fourth of July celebration to silence, solemnity, and reverence.⁹³

Flowers covered the metallic coffin, which was draped in an American ensign. When the body arrived in Lancaster, elements of the Pennsylvania Reserves “opened a passage way through the dense crowd assembled at the depot, and after the relatives and staff of the deceased were seated in carriages, carried the coffin to the hearse.”⁹⁴ These members of Reynolds’s previous command had begged to serve the family as pallbearers, a wish the sisters granted.⁹⁵ And at high noon, the funeral cortege, “drawn

⁹² “Lancaster – Funeral of Major General Reynolds,” *The Press*, 6 July 1863.

⁹³ “Lancaster – Funeral of Major General Reynolds,” *The Press*, 6 July 1863; a succinct but descriptive account of the town and the funeral processional may also be found in the S. J. Meyer Diary, entry for 4 July 1863, *The Civil War Collection*, MG-18, box 8, folder 3, LCHS.

⁹⁴ “The Funeral of General Reynolds,” *New York Herald*, 8 July 1863; *Daily Inquirer*, 6 July 1863, quoted in Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 213.

⁹⁵ Letter of Jennie Reynolds Gildersleeve to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, PA, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

by two dark bays,” and absent the standard military guard (conditions in the wake of battle required that all available forces should be dedicated to driving the Confederates out of Pennsylvania), rolled slowly down the Lancaster streets to the cemetery.⁹⁶ Following the hearse were carriages carrying family and the General’s staff. No element of grandeur surrounded the funeral. One correspondent even reported that the General had stated, in the event of his death, that his funeral should be modest.⁹⁷ It was a humble procession for a humble soldier: “in keeping with that Spartan simplicity which had ever distinguished the man,” noted the Philadelphia-based *Press*, “[the General’s] remains were borne to the tomb without military ceremonies of any kind; not the waving of one plume, nor the tap of a single drum, marked the funeral procession as that of one of the purest and best of American soldiers.”⁹⁸ Shattering the silence, church bells “tolled forth a mournful requiem for the lamented brave.”⁹⁹

Hundreds followed the cortege. Men, women, children, the aged, the infirm—“men who could scarcely walk, children who were carried in their mother’s arms”—all flowed together into a single sea of humanity. “The quaint, home-life of this old-fashioned country city,” wrote one correspondent, “came out in motley gathering from every door and avenue.” Old soldiers and veterans present left a striking impression on the observer: “moist eyes under a hard, weather-beaten, sometimes battle-scarred forehead, told the involuntary grief of the veteran.” As in other small towns across the heartland of Civil-War America, where residents assembled to mourn the deaths of the

⁹⁶ “The Funeral of General Reynolds,” *New York Herald*, 8 July 1863; “The Funeral of General Reynolds,” Eleanor Reynolds Scrapbook, 1802-1930, *RFP*.

⁹⁷ “Lancaster—Funeral of Major General Reynolds,” Eleanor Reynolds Scrapbook, *RFP*.

⁹⁸ “Lancaster – Funeral of Major General Reynolds,” *The Press*, 6 July 1863.

⁹⁹ *Daily Inquirer*, 6 July 1863, quoted in Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 213.

local fallen, the smallness of the Lancaster community made the occasion all the more sorrowful, “for in towns like Lancaster, there [were] perhaps more neighbors and friends than elsewhere.”¹⁰⁰ Deaths in the Civil War made their presence felt in all quarters, and entire communities mourned together.

At long last, the funeral procession arrived at the Lancaster Cemetery. Family disembarked from their carriages. Not among them, and absent from the processional, was the late General’s fiancé, Catherine Hewitt.¹⁰¹ Onlookers gathered around the gravesite to hear the ministers. The service communicated a broad Protestant ecumenism and an intense patriotism. A Presbyterian, a Lutheran, and an Episcopalian presided over the burial, a tribute, perhaps, to the ethnic diversity of Reynolds’s native county, and each contributed to the service in his own way.

The eulogy of the Presbyterian Reverend Walter Powell, noted for its eloquence, made the local papers. While one might have suspected, and from a Calvinist, an elegy on the sovereignty of God even in the suffering of war to be fitting for the occasion, the Rev. Powell fine tuned his words to more immediate concerns. A correspondent from the *Lancaster Daily Express* captured the Rev. Powell’s lament. In a timbre at once mournful and triumphal, Powell declared:

The fortune of War has brought us together in a solemn state to mingle our tears over a soldier’s grave. Our grief is not without some mixture of pride, for we remember that he stood high in the Nation’s confidence and fell in leading brave men to the charge. The fatal instruments of death know no exemptions in the favor of such honored ones, but the officer and the private alike fall before their destructive way.

¹⁰⁰ “Lancaster – Funeral of Major General Reynolds,” *The Press*, 6 July 1863.

¹⁰¹ “The Funeral of Gen. Reynolds,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 6 July 1863.

Then, situating the death of Gen. Reynolds against a broader and more transcendent narrative of redemption and American nationhood, Powell proclaimed,

The fall of Gen. Reynolds will stand as a beacon-light to the future navigator of this tumultuous strait in human history and he will count his whereabouts thereby. We may even venture to suppose that the light of re-established order in American Government will begin to dawn upon him and hold out its cheerful prospects. To-day is the anniversary of the Declaration of American Independence. What a day for a military hero to be buried on! I cannot refrain from a reflection on such a conjuncture. It recalls to me the unity that was then felt, and professed. ... It is some consolation to know that the spirit which actuated our fathers is not yet wholly dead, and that there are those ready to fight and die for the integrity of our nation. To-day we are asserting against a domestic, what we then asserted against a foreign foe. And the funeral pageants of our fallen braves are the periods to the style of our Declaration. We breathe and reflect at them, only to grow more stern in our voice.¹⁰²

With his remarks, Rev. Powell made perfect the consummation of mourning and the nationalism of Independence Day that the death of a great soldier occasioned.

The Lutheran minister, Rev. Wedekind, offered a prayer for the soul of the deceased. Finally, in a manner that seems to confirm Gen. Reynolds's Episcopalian proclivity, the Rev. Jacob Isidor Mombert, a German-born and converted Jew, who as a mere twelve-year-old emigrated to London and ultimately found his way to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, as the rector of St. James' Church, performed the burial rites and pronounced the benediction.¹⁰³ Thus, in one final religious rite, Reynolds, if only in spirit, was an Episcopalian. Upon the conclusion of religious rituals the crowd dispersed. Gravediggers completed the burial. And John Fulton Reynolds entered into perpetual rest in his natal soil. "Henceforth," noted a correspondent for *The Press*, "the

¹⁰² "The Late General Reynolds," *Lancaster Daily Express*, 6 July 1863.

¹⁰³ "Burial of Gen. Reynolds," *Lancaster Examiner and Herald*, 8 July 1863; for biographical material concerning Jacob Isidor Mombert, see H.M. Klein and William F. Diller, *The History of St. James' Church (Protestant Episcopal), 1744-1944* (Lancaster: The Vestry of St. James' Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1944), 151-163.

fair cemetery of Lancaster will be a new shrine of freedom, and the monument which will soon rise over the grave of the hero will record the name of one of the best and bravest of the soldiers of America.”¹⁰⁴ Interred at his native Lancaster, Reynolds therefore perished not in anonymity and tragic isolation, as so many of the Civil War dead fell, but as a martyr upon the altar of the nation.

On July 10, 1863, William Reynolds responded from his naval station in South Carolina to the letters he received from his sisters. William mourned deeply the loss of his brother. He agreed that the recovery of John’s body and the Christian treatment it received helped to dampen the shock of a loss so overwhelming: “that he was quickly taken from the field,” wrote William, “that his body was soon in the possession of his family – that so many of you could see him laid beside his father and his mother, and that no parade was made over his remains, are all matters to be thankful for.” He grieved that John was “a good soldier; a modest hero; an upright man; a faithful brother; and as we learn at last, a pure lover of a saint like woman.” One could hardly think on any of it, lamented William, “without tears for him, and for us all.” And striking a warm note of sympathy, William stated the great difficulty, if not the impossibility, of imagining the heartache and grief of Kate Hewitt, the Catholic stranger, the one “who was to have been his dear wife and our sister.”¹⁰⁵

The Reynolds sisters and the General’s orderly, Charles Henry Veil, maintained a friendship with Kate for some time into the post-war years.¹⁰⁶ Kate entered the St.

¹⁰⁴ “Lancaster – Funeral of Major General Reynolds,” *The Press*, 6 July 1863.

¹⁰⁵ Letter of William Reynolds to Jennie Reynolds Gildersleeve and Eleanor Reynolds, Vermont Port Royal, 10 July 1863, *RFP*.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Henry Veil, *The Memoirs of Charles Henry Veil: A Soldier’s Recollections of the Civil War and the Arizona Territory*, edited and with an introduction by Herman J. Viola (New York: Orion Books, 1993), 35-36.

Joseph's Convent in Emmitsburg, Maryland. There she took initial vows to become a Daughter of Charity in 1864 and grew in her religious observance. But she did not take final vows of chastity and poverty.¹⁰⁷ Hewitt's devout faith—and her great learning for which she had received praise from the General's sisters—did not result in her entering formally or permanently into the convent, which she left in 1868.¹⁰⁸ In 1976, the fate of Catherine Hewitt remained unknown even to the Daughters of Charity at Saint Joseph's in Emmitsburg.¹⁰⁹ Marian Latimer has traced the obscure and tragic post-war life of Catherine Hewitt through state and county records, and concludes, bluntly, “the cold, hard fact is Kate Hewitt was a mere woman of average means living in a world where much of the female identity was closely tied to that of her spouse.” Hewitt died in 1902, long estranged from her Baptist relatives, with no husband, no children, and with an estate valued at under three hundred dollars.¹¹⁰

Taking stock: death and the wane of postbellum religion in America

The reaction of the Reynolds family, and of his secret fiancé, to John Reynolds's death complicate and nuance historians' assessments of death and religious belief in the nineteenth century. Clearly, the family mourned Gen. Reynolds in accordance with Christian and Victorian customs that attempted to reconcile the tragedy of the war with

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, “The Girl He Left Behind,” 52-53.

¹⁰⁸ Veil, *The Memoirs of Charles Henry Veil*, 35; Anderson, “The Girl He Left Behind,” 53.

¹⁰⁹ Memo from Sister Mary Louise to Sister Romana Re: Catherine Hewitt, 27 August 1976, John Reynolds Vertical File, Gettysburg National Military Park Library and Research Center.

¹¹⁰ Marian Lattimer, “*Is She Kate?*” *The Woman Major General John Fulton Reynolds Left Behind* (Gettysburg, PA: Farnsworth Military Impressions, 2005), 47, 43; see, also, “Civil War Love Affair Unearthed,” *Times Union*, 19 October 2004.

notions of patriotism and the Good Death. The case of the Reynolds family and Hewitt seems in one sense to reinforce Faust's claim – that the magnitude of death resulting from the Civil War overturned nineteenth-century norms.¹¹¹ Yet, while the Reynolds family experienced war as a great maker of personal tragedy, it is less clear that for them it stood out as a trauma for which there existed no equivalent in their nineteenth-century context. This fact shines forth with greater clarity when one considers the tragic history of the Reynolds family in the years leading up to the war. They, like other Americans, suffered a rate of mortality that seems astonishing by twenty-first-century standards. Of the thirteen children born to John and Lydia Moore Reynolds, nine survived to adulthood. Jane Moore (b. 1817), who preceded John Fulton in birth by three years, died in infancy. Edward Coleman (b. 1827) did not live beyond his first year. Anne Elizabeth, the twin sister of Edward, did not live to the age of five. And Edward Reynolds (b. 1829) lived hardly more than one month. In all, four of the Reynolds children perished before pre-adolescence. Lydia Moore Reynolds, John Fulton's mother, died in 1843, shortly following her son's graduation from West Point. Only her husband, who passed one decade later at the age of sixty-six, attained an age that moderns consider, in approximate measure, aged.¹¹²

While these numbers seem staggering for people in the twenty-first century who associate death most often with old age and the fullness of life, they were in fact far more typical for nineteenth-century Americans. In opposition to Faust, Marshall has argued convincingly that the carnage and suffering of the Civil War receives disproportionate attention in the scholarly literature, especially in light of the profusion

¹¹¹ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*.

¹¹² "The Reynolds Family Genealogy," *RFP*; Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 17.

of the death common to the nineteenth-century American experience. Diseases, accidents, and erratic medical care resulted in high numbers of antebellum and postbellum deaths. “Demographic realities Americans faced before, during, and after the war,” Marshall writes, “reveal a society constantly coping with large-scale mortality.” In 1850, the average American, in all likelihood, would not live to “even the most conservative definition of ‘aged.’” Americans of the era enjoyed only a 77-percent chance of living past their first year, a 69-percent chance of surviving to the age of nine, a 62-percent chance of seeing their twenty-fourth year, and less than a 50-percent chance of attaining the age of forty-nine. Even more remarkably, nearly a third of Americans in 1850 died as preadolescent children. Those who grew in health and stature faced startling odds that they would die in the prime of life. The effect of all this was that rampant death conditioned the minds and emotions of most antebellum and postbellum Americans to accept the harsh reality that life did not endure forever.¹¹³

To be sure, the carnage of the Civil War accentuated this sentiment in unique and perhaps unprecedented ways, but many Americans—and here the Reynolds family offers a case in point—had been made aware of life’s frailty before that conflict and sensed it acutely.¹¹⁴ Viewed in the proper historical context, the death of Gen. Reynolds confirms Faust’s observation that the suffering of the war ruptured longstanding cultural norms even as it reinforces the observation of Marshall: though full of tragedy, and though it illustrates in the local sense how loved ones wrestled with the unprecedented nature of

¹¹³ Marshall, “The Great Exaggeration,” 5-6.

¹¹⁴ Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies*; Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country*.

battlefield deaths in the domestic sphere, the death of Gen. Reynolds conformed to a broader pattern of mortality that most Americans experienced with regularity.¹¹⁵

Curiously, the Hewitt-Reynolds story sheds additional light on the supposed durability of religious belief in the post-war period. The staggering amount of men killed in grisly battles, the agonies of those who suffered in Civil War hospitals, the resulting stench, and the unexpected alienating, and often overwhelming, effects of such horrors after the firing ceased – what scholars now understand as PTSD, opiate addiction, and the prevalence of amputees in postbellum society – compelled Americans to confront disturbing and difficult questions concerning the very nature of existence and the capacity of religion to cope with modern problems.¹¹⁶ Victorian values, one scholar has concluded, ceased to privilege as strongly traditional religious belief after the war.¹¹⁷ Allen Guelzo has written that the contradictions of moral absolutism during the Civil War, and the inability of clergy and theologians to explain coherently the origins of the war and the meaning of the vast bloodshed, diminished the currency of religious belief and theological commentary in the postwar years.¹¹⁸ Louis Menand, in his history of

¹¹⁵ Marshall, “The Great Exaggeration.”

¹¹⁶ Coco, *A Strange and Blighted Land*; Smith, *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege*; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*; For southerners in the post-war period and substance addiction, see Dillon J. Carroll, “Civil War Veterans and Opiate Addiction in the Gilded Age,” *Muster: How the Past Informs the Present*, published by the *Journal of the Civil War Era* (22 November 2016): <https://journalofthecivilwarera.org/2016/11/civil-war-veterans-opiate-addiction-gilded-age/>; Brian Craig Miller, *Empty Sleeves: Amputation in the Civil War South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015); Brian Matthew Jordan, *Marching Home: Union Veterans and Their Unending Civil War* (New York: Liveright, 2015).

¹¹⁷ Rose, *Victorian America and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹¹⁸ Guelzo, “Did Religion Make the Civil War Worse?” *Atlantic*, 23 August 2015 (web): <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/08/did-religion-make-the-american-civil-war-worse/401633/>.

ideas in postwar America, offered a similar observation, noting that the Civil War wrought such a fundamental intellectual transformation on the United States that ideas mainstream in American culture before 1865 no longer possessed meaning in its wake:

As traumatic wars do – as the First World War would do for many Europeans sixty years later, and as the Vietnam War would do for many Americans a hundred years later – the Civil War discredited the beliefs and assumptions of the era that preceded it. Those beliefs had not prevented the country from going to war; they had not prepared it for the astonishing violence the war unleashed; they seemed obsolete in the new, postwar world.¹¹⁹

Belief in revealed religion gave way to a new culture of realistic and pragmatic ideas better suited, their practitioners believed, to the concerns of an increasingly industrial and urban modernity, and the doctrines of Christianity seemed less powerful in a secularizing culture fashioned by such strong-minded elites as William James, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles S. Peirce, and John Dewey.¹²⁰

Events surrounding the General's death and resulting from it seem in the long view to complement this narrative of slow religious decline. While possessed of generic Protestant sensibilities, the Reynolds siblings evidenced no written sign of mourning their brother's loss in religious terms. As a convert in a period of American history noted for the surprising number of Protestants who joined the Roman Catholic fold, Catholicism informed Catherine Hewitt's worldview and helped her accept the death of her affianced one. But the war seems to have tested and weakened Kate's religious devotion. In the final analysis, Kate left her religious order. She died in upstate New York an obscure figure, one out of touch with the Reynolds family, and one with few

¹¹⁹ Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, x.

¹²⁰ Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, xii.

worldly possessions. Lacking any contextual information, the *Pupil's Register* for Eden Hall listed Hewitt simply as “dead” in its final accounting.¹²¹

For Gen. Reynolds's sisters, and for his brother, religion appears to have functioned as a coping mechanism that imbued the death of their General with serious meaning, but it is not altogether clear that religious meaning transcended the patriotic significance of Reynolds's death. Empty of any discussion concerning the fate of their brother's undying soul and of his attaining heaven—a key feature of letters penned by soldiers and grieving loved ones in response to Civil War deaths—the sisters' correspondence with their brother William is as conspicuous for what it omits as for what it reveals.¹²² That the Reynolds family would later co-operate in local and regional efforts to commemorate the memory of their fallen brother in the postwar years suggests that they interpreted his sacrifice in civil terms as well as religious ones, and perhaps in greater measure.

In one of its darker ironies, the Civil War compelled a man of such prominence as Gen. Reynolds to the front of critical action to die a hero's death one day's hard ride from his birthplace. For Reynolds, for his family, and for Catherine Hewitt, the war was inescapable. To be sure, death in the Civil War did not compel all Americans to jettison longstanding assumptions about the nature of religious belief and the place of spiritual manifestations in the material world, but it had the effect of unsettling religion as a centerpiece of American society. And the tragedy of the war, in the case of John Fulton

¹²¹ Société du Sacré Coeur de Jésus, “Catherine Hewitt,” *Pupil's Register, Eden Hall: 1845-1895*, AUSCPSSH.

¹²² For more on the religious aspects of condolence letters that helped the bereaved to believe that their soldier attained eternal life, see Faust, “The Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying.”

Reynolds and his family, showcases the pliability of religion for Americans who were confronted with the carnage of that conflict in intimate ways.

INTERLUDE

Flood

Charles Henry Veil was born in February 1842 in Scalp Level, Cambria County, Pennsylvania. The son of a German immigrant, he received the kind of rudimentary education typical of a Pennsylvania farm boy. The school house in which Veil studied was characteristically Spartan for its place and time: built of unhewn logs, and with slabs for seats that did not feature backs, the school house nevertheless enabled local children in the district to receive three months of schooling a year.¹ At fourteen years of age, Veil had received enough education to begin work, which he did for his father at a tannery. Unable to bear the physical strain of his labor, Veil took up a job at a store in Davidsville before finding employment at a lumberyard in Ashtola. At the age of sixteen, he worked as a schoolteacher, first in South Fork, Pennsylvania, and later in Scalp Level, the town of his birth, just seven miles to the south of Johnstown.²

After the bombardment of Fort Sumter, Charles watched with envy as other local boys of the Johnstown militia “had the privilege of going out and having a hand in defending the flag and restoring the Union.”³ With war looming, Veil felt restless and unable to remain at home. “I felt,” he recollected, “that it was my duty to at least make an effort to show that I was loyal and willing to lend a hand at such an important time.” And so on June 13, 1861, after taking his breakfast, Veil announced to his mother and

¹ Charles Henry Veil, *The Memoirs of Charles Henry Veil: A Soldier's Recollection of the Civil War and the Arizona Territory*, edited and with an introduction by Herman J. Viola (New York: Orion Books, 1993), 1.

² Biographical sketch adapted from Veil, *Memoirs*, 2.

³ Veil, *Memoirs*, 5.

his father that he would leave for Johnstown, where he could show that “[he] was willing to sacrifice [his] life, if necessary, in defense of the Union.” Veil said his goodbyes and set out on his first march, a seven-mile walk to the village, apparently too poor to ride even a mule. He was the first boy to leave his town for the national service.⁴

Veil fell in with the Ninth Regiment of the Pennsylvania Reserve Corps, where he first served as an orderly to Brig. Gen. Edward Otto Cresap Ord, and it was in his time with the Third Brigade of the Pennsylvania Reserves that the young orderly became acquainted with Brig. Gens. John Reynolds and George Meade, who commanded the First and Second Brigades of the division. In August 1862, John Reynolds returned from Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia, on exchange to take command of the Pennsylvania Reserves. Reynolds retained Veil as his orderly, a duty Veil performed with great diligence until Gen. Reynolds’s death on the battlefield near the Herbst Woodlot on July 1, 1863. Like other members of the general’s staff, Veil accompanied Reynolds’s body to its burial in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on Independence Day.⁵ Veil claims that he alone was “directly present” with Reynolds when the general fell.⁶

For his devoted service to their soldier, the women who loved Gen. Reynolds—his sisters and Catherine Hewitt, the general’s secret fiancé—gave the orderly handsome gifts. The sisters gifted Veil a gold watch, which bore the inscription, “Presented to Orderly C. H. Veil by the Sisters of the Late General J. F. Reynolds, United States Army, Gettysburg, July 1, 1863,” and was passed to Veil by Gen. Meade at Army of the Potomac Headquarters sometime in the mid to late summer of 1863.⁷ Hewitt gifted the orderly an

⁴ Veil, *Memoirs*, 6.

⁵ Veil *Memoirs*, 19.

⁶ Veil *Memoirs*, 29.

⁷ Veil, *Memoirs*, 31.

embroidered handkerchief she had intended to give Reynolds. It featured a “very beautifully done” emblem of the Coat of Arms of the United States.⁸ The watch Veil retained on his person, but the handkerchief he passed along to his mother for safe keeping. In time, Veil went west to California and later to Arizona. And with his mother’s passing, the handkerchief fell to the care of Veil’s sister in Johnstown.⁹

The wall of water cascaded from the Pennsylvania hills that formed the basin of the Old Reservoir. The South Fork dam had burst. “Most of the people in Johnstown never saw the water coming,” one popular historian writes, “they only heard it.”¹⁰ The inland sea moved toward Johnstown with awesome destructive power, sparing nothing and no one in its path. It was a terrible “avalanche of sound”; one could hear only the “earsplitting crash of buildings going down,” of “glass shattering,” and “of houses ripping apart.”¹¹ Veil retold the story thus:

My brother-in-law was on the street in front of their home [in Johnstown] when he saw the wall of water coming down the street in the direction of their home, crushing every building in its course and carrying everything before it as it came on. He rushed into the house and up to the first story with my sister and her family of four children. As they gained the first floor, the water was there, too. My sister, like many other ladies, had a little casket with her valuable trinkets, jewelry, etc., and it contained, among other things, my handkerchief. In passing through the bedroom for the upper story, she picked that up on her way to the garret and out on the roof. By that time, the building had begun to turn on its foundation. Just then a large flat roof floated up alongside of their house and my brother-in-law, thinking that would make a more secure raft than the house they were on, pushed my sister off onto that and threw the children after, one after another, and then followed himself. They then floated off, first down toward the Stone Bridge, where a jam was formed, and then back up Stonycreek. They

⁸ Veil, *Memoirs*, 36.

⁹ A helpful narrative of Veil’s military and later professional life, though not altogether critical, appears also in Fred W. Veil, “Charles Henry Veil: Civil War Veteran, Indian Fighter, and Arizona Pioneer,” *Journal of Arizona History* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 59-78; Veil, *Memoirs*, 36.

¹⁰ David McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 145.

¹¹ McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood*, 145.

floated around during the greater portion of the night, among the drowned and the drowning ... During all this terrible night my sister had held on to her little casket containing, among other valuable things, my handkerchief.¹²

In the final 1890 accounting tabulated in the local *Tribune*, the Johnstown Flood claimed the lives of 2,209 Pennsylvanians.¹³ But the handkerchief, embroidered by the late general's fiancé, survived.

Veil was one of 151 officers discharged from the U.S. Army in 1871; after a series of unsuccessful business ventures, he retired to Pennsylvania.¹⁴ "That I was, and am, proud of the watch you may be assured," Veil reflected in later in life. And, observed the son of the German immigrant who had served the Union, "there is not a farm in Tioga County I would take in exchange for it."¹⁵ In 1910, Veil died penniless in Pennsylvania, a man of decidedly mixed repute.¹⁶

At the time of his writing in 2009, Veil's great-grandnephew, Fred W. Veil, claimed that both the watch gifted to the orderly by Reynolds's sisters, and the handkerchief gifted from Catherine Hewitt, were still in the family's possession.¹⁷

¹² Veil, *Memoirs*, 36-37.

¹³ McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood*, 269

¹⁴ Viola, introduction to Veil, *Memoirs*, xxvi; Veil, "Charles Henry Veil," 66-75.

¹⁵ Veil, *Memoirs*, 31.

¹⁶ Viola, introduction to Veil, *Memoirs*, ix-xxviii.

¹⁷ Veil, "Charles Henry Veil," 63.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Cupola and the Sharpshooter:

U.S. Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds and Enduring Gettysburg Myths

Abstract: *This chapter considers longstanding myths that grew out of the Battle of Gettysburg concerning the General's earliest action on the field and the manner in which he fell. The arrival of Reynolds on the battlefield at Gettysburg has received highly romanticized depiction in literature and film. Curiously, no conclusive evidence exists to support the battle reminiscence of Lt. Aaron Brainard Jerome, an officer in the Signal Corps attached to Buford's cavalry division, which established the meeting of Generals Reynolds and Buford at the cupola of the Lutheran Seminary. It seems more likely that Reynolds first met Buford closer to the battlefield on McPherson's Ridge, west of the Lutheran Seminary. What is more, early battle narratives held that Reynolds fell the victim of a Confederate sharpshooter, a highly-trained marksman skilled with the rifle musket. While sharpshooters in the Civil War context functioned more as skirmishers – the term "sniper" had not yet entered the professional military lexicon, they did not feature prominently in the Battle of Gettysburg. Sources more contemporaneous to the Battle of Gettysburg, however, did not seem to believe that Reynolds fell the victim of a marksman's shot. All of this points to the romanticizing of Reynolds in Gettysburg and Civil War memory, a process that persists to the present day.*

To watch the iconic 1993 Civil War film *Gettysburg* and to see its portrayal of Gen. John Fulton Reynolds is to sense that the Union general commanded a place of special significance in the history of the Army of the Potomac.¹ Filmmakers depicted Gen. Reynolds as both architect and hero of the first day's action. In the film, Sgt. Jerome, an aide to Brig. Gen. John Buford, spots Reynolds riding hard and fast to the base of the

The author wishes to thank T. Michael Parrish, Linden G. Bowers Professor of History at Baylor University, for reading a version of this chapter, and for offering helpful comments and editorial corrections. A slightly modified version of this chapter appeared in the July 2018 issue of *Gettysburg Magazine* (University of Nebraska Press) as "Of Cupolas and Sharpshooters: Major General John Fulton Reynolds and Popular Gettysburg Myths." The author thanks Jim Pula and the editorial staff of the *Gettysburg Magazine* for their assistance in providing suggestions for revisions.

¹ *Gettysburg*, directed by Ronald F. Maxwell (1993; TNT Originals, Inc.), DVD.

Lutheran Theological Seminary upon Seminary Ridge. Set to a rousing music score, the scene signals the arrival of salvation for Buford's embattled and much worn cavalry brigades: "Thank God," mumbles the grizzly and fierce Buford as he wipes sweat from his brow. Here, finally, was the Union commander who had the lead of Meade's left wing which featured some of the most veteran units in the Army of the Potomac. Not long after the arrival of Gen. Reynolds the best Federal infantry would deploy along McPherson's Ridge, "surprise Harry Heth," and deprive converging Confederate corps of high ground—the coveted position of Cemetery Hill.² Filmmakers adapted the scene of Reynolds's arrival from Michael Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of Gettysburg, *The Killer Angels*, in which the author wrote, of Reynolds's arrival upon the field, Buford "looked toward the south—and there was Reynolds. He was coming at a gallop across the fields . . . a line of aides strung out behind him, cutting across the field to save time. No mistaking him: matchless rider gliding over rail fences in parade-ground precision, effortless motion, always a superb rider."³

Reynolds therefore arrived at the base of the Lutheran Seminary as a killer angel, one ready to fly swiftly with a fiery sword to the defense of his native state and his family, which lay dispersed not one day's hard ride from the field of battle. His death at the hand of a Rebel sharpshooter posted in Herbst's Woodlot, which the filmmakers portray in a highly dramatic and romanticized fashion, also signals that Reynolds was a man of supreme importance, for the battle seems to stop around him after he falls. His

² In *Gettysburg*, Gen. Reynolds quips to Gen. Buford, as they ride forward to guide the First Corps as it deploys, "let's go surprise Harry Heth." *Gettysburg*, DVD; See, also, John Rothman, "Gettysburg," *John Rothman: Actor, REELS (Clips and shorts)* (web): <http://johnrothmanactor.com/reel>.

³ Michael Shaara, *The Killer Angels* (1974; repr. New York: Modern Library, 2004), 72.

aides gather around, the musical score assumes an ominous melody, and soldiers rush to his body and look on.⁴ These two scenes are powerful for their ability to portray lasting Gettysburg myths that have endured into the twenty-first century concerning Reynolds at the Battle of Gettysburg.

This chapter assesses two critical events that are purported to have transpired on the morning of July 1, 1863, at the Battle of Gettysburg and remain inextricably linked to mythic interpretations of that battle: first, the arrival of the general on the field; and second, his death in the morning fight. I argue that though narratives of Reynolds's arrival at Gettysburg and his death at the hand of a sharpshooter are firmly entrenched in Civil War memory, the historical evidence does not confirm these events beyond reasonable doubt. Circumstances surrounding the arrival of Gen. Reynolds on the battlefield are less certain than their triumphal portrayal in literature and film, and while it is possible that the general arrived at the base of the Lutheran Theological Seminary to hold a council of war with Gen. Buford, the available evidence suggests that Reynolds met Buford closer to the battlefield. Like unto this, the circumstances that surround the death of Gen. Reynolds remain clouded and somewhat inconsistent from Civil War genre to Civil War genre, a remarkable fact given the increase in historical scholarship concerning the military history of the American Civil War (generally) and the voluminous literature that chronicles the Battle of Gettysburg (specifically). A myth that emerged immediately from the battle—before the battle was even through—held that Reynolds was felled by a Confederate sharpshooter. This myth has persisted in old histories, in popular representations, and it persists in prominent Civil War military

⁴ *Gettysburg*, DVD.

histories published even in 2016.⁵ Conversely, historians of the Battle of Gettysburg (including Edward Nichols, Reynolds's biographer) have long suspected that the bullet which killed Reynolds came not from a sharpshooter (the word "sniper" had not yet entered the American military lexicon), but rather from a volley that erupted from the ranks of James Archer's Tennessee Brigade.⁶ To prove which bullet killed Reynolds is impossible, and a definitive answer is of little historical consequence. But no study has traced extensively the remarkable divergence in historical interpretations of what exactly happened to Reynolds at the moment of his death.

Reynolds, Buford, and the cupola at the Lutheran Theological Seminary

"What goes, John?" Then, a response from Gen. John Buford, standing in the cupola atop the Lutheran Theological Seminary on Seminary Ridge: "the Devil's to pay!" This classic exchange, accepted in most historical accounts of the battle, marked the beginning of the council of war that Reynolds held with Gen. Buford shortly before the deployment of the First Corps.⁷ Despite its wide acceptance in the historical literature, and even in film, there is some reason to doubt that the verbal exchange occurred—and

⁵ One shooting enthusiast, in a popular history of sharpshooting in Civil War combat, passionately denounces so-called "revisionists" who look to "tinker" with history in disproving the sharpshooter narrative: "that [Reynolds] was the victim of a sharpshooter's bullet is almost universally accepted," claims the author; see John L. Plaster, *Sharpshooting in the Civil War* (Boulder: Paladin Press, 2009), 123.

⁶ Jonathan M. Steplyk, "Citizen-Soldiers and Killing in Civil War Combat," Ph.D. diss., Texas Christian University, 2015; I wish to acknowledge the kind assistance of Dr. Steplyk, who has helped to guide and inform my inquiry into Civil War sharpshooting.

⁷ *Gettysburg*, DVD; Most accounts of the initial exchange indicate that Reynolds shouted, upward to Buford, "What's the matter, John?" See, for instance, Allen C. Guelzo, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 143; and Steven E. Woodworth, *Beneath a Northern Sky: A Short History of the Gettysburg Campaign* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 52.

even that the meeting between the two generals occurred at the seminary at all. In fact, given the available evidence, it seems most probable that the meeting of the two generals occurred nearer to McPherson's Ridge.

The dramatic account of the meeting between Generals Reynolds and Buford traces to a version of events recounted first in a letter to Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock, and then to a more thorough reminiscence, published four years after the battle. Lt. Aaron Brainard Jerome, who served as signal officer to Brig. Gen. Buford on the morning of July 1, greatly admired his commander, and feared that the premature death of Buford in the autumn of 1863 might diminish the memory of his commander in Gettysburg lore. To the end that the name of Buford would remain synonymous with glory, courage, and excellence in Gettysburg memory and myth, the signal officer penned a letter to Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock in which he implored the general, as one historian has put it, "to make certain that Buford's role in the battle would not be forgotten."⁸ Then in 1868, Jerome contributed more developed reflections on the battle—and how he and his commander had helped to bring it on—in a volume published in New York by John Watts DePeyster, an inordinately wealthy New Yorker and a close friend of Gen. Daniel Sickles. DePeyster, who had inherited over one million dollars from his father before his twenty-fifth year, was also a prolific military historian. Though he never graduated college (he attended Columbia College in New York), DePeyster published hundreds of pamphlets and essays on the subject of military history, which were read widely and with enthusiasm.⁹

⁸ Eric J. Wittenberg, "'The Devil's to Pay': An Analysis of the Buford Manuscripts," *Gettysburg Magazine* 15 (July 1996): 7–23, quotation at p. 7.

⁹ Wittenberg, "'The Devil's to Pay': An Analysis of the Buford Manuscripts," 15.

Writing from New York in October of 1865, Jerome penned a letter to Hancock. His chief purpose was to remind the general of his late commander's pivotal role in deciding the outcome of the Battle of Gettysburg. "In all the parade that has taken place since [the battle]," lamented Jerome, "memories oratorical and poetical from Edward Everett to Gen. [Oliver Otis] Howard, have you not noticed that that your friend the heroic Buford has been nearly disregarded?" Then, as if Jerome had taken it upon himself to inform Hancock of all that had transpired at Gettysburg, the signal officer recounted how Reynolds had first arrived on the field and met Buford. The cavalry "held on with as stubborn a front as ever faced an enemy," wrote Jerome, "when Gen. Reynolds and a few of his staff rode up on a gallop and hailed the General who was with me in the steeple." Reynolds inquired about "how things were going on," to which Buford replied matter-of-factly, "let's go and see." But the point of Jerome's letter was hardly to communicate the facts—whatever those were. Jerome's language betrays a deeper motive: the enshrinement of Buford in Gettysburg lore. And in the unlikely event that Hancock had missed his point, Jerome concluded, regarding Buford, "everyone knows that he 'in his day' was first and foremost."¹⁰

Jerome was not finished. In his 1868 reminiscence of the battle at Gettysburg, Jerome wrote again of the engagement that developed on the morning of July 1 and of the circumstances that brought about the Buford-Reynolds meeting. Buford had dispatched Jerome, then a first lieutenant and signal officer for that division, with orders "to seek out the most prominent points and watch everything." Buford, Jerome

¹⁰ Letter of First Lt. Aaron Brainard Jerome to Maj. Gen. Hancock, New York, 18 October 1865, in John B. Bachelder, *The Bachelder Papers: Gettysburg in Their Own Words*, transcribed, edited and annotated by David L. and Audrey J. Ladd, in two volumes (Dayton: Morningside House, 1994), 1:200–202.

recalled, appeared very nervous. Some two hours after Confederate infantry under the command of Gen. A.P. Hill had engaged Buford's cavalry, and as the ranks of Federal cavalry tired and began to give way, Jerome spotted the First Corps flag of Gen. Reynolds at about one-and-a-half miles' distance. Reynolds and his staff were racing at a full gallop, much in advance of the First Corps. Lt. Jerome sent word to Gen. Buford immediately: "Reynolds, himself, will be here in five minutes, his corps is about a mile behind." Upon receipt of the message, Buford raced to the Lutheran Seminary and ascended the cupola, where he watched anxiously and awaited the arrival of the wing commander. Reynolds reigned his mount, and "seeing Buford in the cupola, he cried out: 'What's the matter, John?' 'The devil's to pay,' said he (Buford)." Reynolds, in this account, also ascended the cupola to obtain a better field of vision for the battle that was developing at rapid pace. He inquired as to whether the rugged Federal cavalry could hold on for a while longer. "I reckon I can," was Gen. Buford's reply. The two men descended the cupola to ride to the front and Reynolds, summoning more than a little confidence for the fight to come, declared, "Let's ride out and see all about it."¹¹

While Jerome's 1865 and 1868 narratives reveal a certain consistency—Eric J. Wittenberg argues for the "striking" similarity of the two accounts—they are more remarkable for their subtle divergence and variation.¹² In the first place, Jerome makes no mention of Buford's "The Devil's to pay!" comment in his letter to Gen. Hancock. Second, Jerome does not mention in his 1865 letter, as he does later in his account

¹¹ Aaron Brainard Jerome, "Buford in the Battle of Oak Ridge: The First Day's Fight at Gettysburg, A.M. Wednesday, 1st July, 1863," in *The Decisive Conflicts of the Late Civil War, Or Slaveholders' Rebellion: Battles Morally, Territorially, and Militarily Decisive*, edited by J. Watts DePeyster (New York: MacDonald and Company, 1868), 152–53.

¹² Wittenberg, "'The Devil's to Pay': An Analysis of the Buford Manuscripts," 19.

published in DePeyster's history, that he rode to the front with the generals. Third, it is not altogether clear that Jerome possessed a firm command of memory, for how he represented the dialogue attributed to both generals varies from account to account. In his 1865 letter, Jerome attributed the words, "let's go and see" to Gen. Buford.¹³ Later, in his 1868 account, Jerome wrote that "Reynolds then said, 'Let's ride out and see all about it.'"¹⁴ Wittenberg is particularly keen in his analysis that Jerome sought glorification in both written records; his decision to overlook these inconsistencies and argue for the validity of the Jerome narratives, which Wittenberg justifies on account of the meticulous detail presented in both Jerome's letter and in his published history in DePeyster's 1868 volume, rests upon softer ground.¹⁵

Prominent historians have accepted, rejected, and demonstrated a certain ambivalence toward Jerome's account of the cupola meeting. Edward Nichols, in his masterful biography of Reynolds, noted that "Buford saw the general from the cupola, where he had been watching the first of A. P. Hill's divisions deploy along both sides of the Cashtown road. He started down the ladder and was met by Reynolds part way" (whether the generals exchanged pleasantries on the stairs, from atop the seminary and within the cupola and below upon the ground, or up in the cupola itself, is also an unanswered question and a point of variation in the historical accounts). Citing the high praise that Jerome received from Gen. Buford following the battle, Nichols concludes, "there seems to be good reason for accepting Jerome's version" of the Buford-Reynolds

¹³ Letter of First Lt. Aaron Brainard Jerome to Major General Hancock, New York, 18 October 1865, in *The Bacheider Papers*, 1:201.

¹⁴ Jerome, "Buford in the Battle of Oak Ridge: The First Day's Fight at Gettysburg, A.M. Wednesday, 1st July, 1863," 153.

¹⁵ Wittenberg, "An Analysis of the Buford Manuscripts," 19, 21.

meeting and the resulting council of war.¹⁶ Wittenberg refrains from wholly endorsing Jerome's account of the meeting, but hardly abstains from making an historical determination. "The Jerome version," writes Wittenberg, "leaves the least room for doubt," and "seems too detailed for it to have been entirely false." All told, "the first meeting between the two Union commanders most likely took place at the Seminary, as related by Jerome."¹⁷ In *Gettysburg*, Allen C. Guelzo channels Wittenberg's interpretation in "The Devil's to Pay." Drawing liberally (and with no stated reservation) from Jerome's account, Guelzo chronicles how Buford made the cupola his observatory for the developing battle. Guelzo also notes that Buford "kept climbing up and down from the cupola spitting orders, riding out along the line of McPherson's Ridge to supervise the placement of Gamble's and Devin's brigades, then riding back to the seminary and climbing up to the cupola again."¹⁸

Edwin B. Coddington, whose 1968 study of the Battle of Gettysburg remains, in spite of its age, the definitive treatment in a voluminous literature of Civil War campaign histories, rejected outright the Jerome account—an account "dear to the heart of the romanticists"—and suggests that Reynolds found Buford on McPherson's (not

¹⁶ Edward J. Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg: A Biography of General John F. Reynolds* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1958), 202, 251n17; For Buford's praise of Jerome, see United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* [hereafter OR] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887) 27.1:930. Buford writes in Serial 43 that Jerome "was ever on the alert, and through his intrepidity and fine glasses on more than one occasion kept me advised of the enemy's movements when no other means were available." This report would seem to suggest, or at least imply, that Jerome and Buford kept personal contact throughout the battle, and might even have stood in the cupola together to watch the battle unfold. The report, however, is not conclusive with regard to the exact location of the meeting.

¹⁷ Wittenberg, "An Analysis of the Buford Manuscripts," 21.

¹⁸ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 139, 140, 517n1, 518n2.

Seminary) Ridge. Citing the Jerome account as suspect, and noting too that Jerome's version of events was less contemporary than the historical accounts from Gen. Reynolds's staff, Coddington delivered another critique of the Jerome story, and his observation complicates further the traditional narrative. According to Coddington, the chronology, or the temporality, of the morning action on July 1, 1863, and the subsequent development of battle, makes it less plausible that Buford observed the action from the cupola. It makes little sense to believe, wrote Coddington, that "when the situation was getting tight" shortly after 10:00 a.m., and when his brigades were nearly overwhelmed, that Buford would not have been present, personally, closer to the battlefield and in the thick of the action.¹⁹

Stephen Sears, who has authored a lucid and engaging history of the Battle of Gettysburg praised by Civil War enthusiasts, also distrusts the Jerome version. In *Gettysburg*, Sears writes that Reynolds and his staff galloped down the Chambersburg Pike searching desperately for Buford: "They found him on McPherson's Ridge with his men," Sears determines. He implies elsewhere in the text that Jerome's deeper motive for enshrining the role Buford played in saving Gettysburg betrays his "dramatized" account, which is "filled with after-the-fact embellishments." And to date, Sears has offered the most emphatic and decided opinion on the question which concerns the authenticity of the Jerome account. Simply put, Sears writes, the Jerome account "cannot be reconciled with the more contemporaneous accounts" of Reynolds's aides.²⁰

¹⁹ Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (1979; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1997), 682n14, 263, 682n14.

²⁰ Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 166, 560n14; It bears observation that in his recently published *Lincoln's Lieutenants: The High Command of the Army of the Potomac* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt,

Less decided on the question is the standard biographer of John Buford, Edward G. Longacre, who has written widely on Gettysburg. Longacre does well to note that Jerome's version of events contradicts the post-war account of the battle that emerged from a citizen observer. This account offers another possibility altogether, which is that Buford and Reynolds met in the town of Gettysburg near the Blue Eagle hotel. Longacre's assessment of Buford does not offer a final word on whether the meeting between his subject and Gen. Reynolds occurred at the Lutheran Theological Seminary or whether it occurred elsewhere. It is silent, moreover, on the possibility that the two generals held their council of war on (or near) McPherson's Ridge, which would have positioned both men nearer to the fighting.²¹

This variance in historical interpretation raises a pressing question: If the Jerome version of the meeting between Buford and Reynolds is not altogether reliable, then from what sources can the discerning historical critic piece together a more trustworthy narrative of how the two generals met on the field of battle? One possible course, since Gen. Reynolds did not live to record a personal reminiscence of the battle himself, is to turn to the words and recollections of the men who served with him on the morning of July 1. But here too, the accounts do not offer decisive proof. Joseph G. Rosengarten, one of Reynolds's aides, famously placed the historic meeting between the two commanders at the Lutheran Seminary cupola in the pages of the *New York Times*.²²

2017), Sears, without explanation in the notes, alters his interpretation of the Reynolds-Buford meeting and accepts Jerome's version of events; see pp. 550, 827-828n34.

²¹ Edward G. Longacre, *General John Buford: A Military Biography* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003), 192-93.

²² Joseph G. Rosengarten, "Reynolds, Hero of the First Day, by One of His Staff: Major Joseph G. Rosengarten, Who Was Close to the Famous Union Commander Throughout the Fighting, Pays Tribute to the Man Who Paved the Way for the Federal Victory," *New York Times*, 29 June 1913.

Rosengarten's account is suspect on two counts: first, it appeared on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the battle; and second, Rosengarten, among all of Reynolds's staff, worked most actively and publicly to commemorate his fallen commander in the post-war years. His account in the *Times*, chock full of embellishment, purposed clearly to heap praise on his former commander. Historians Coddington and Sears have concluded that the dramatized Jerome accounts, from which many Americans (and quite possibly Rosengarten) have derived their impressions of the Buford-Reynolds encounter, cannot square with the war memoirs and reminiscences of aides Charles H. Veil and Stephen M. Weld who rode with Reynolds to the battlefield. Both men kept memoirs remarkable for their specificity and measured senses of disinterestedness. Significantly, these men are conspicuously silent on the meeting between the two generals at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. Moreover, they are silent on how the meeting took place and they do not tell what the generals said to one another or determined about the intensifying fight. But they are not silent on the question of *where* the meeting occurred. To suggest otherwise, as several leading historians have done in no uncertain terms, invariably privileges the account of one observer who invites suspicion for his embellishment, and diminishes firsthand perspectives from officers closest to Gen. Reynolds.

On April 7, 1864, Charles Henry Veil, who served as Reynolds's orderly at Gettysburg, dispatched a letter to D. McConaughy, Esq. McConaughy wrote to Veil on April 2 to inquire about those events that transpired at Gettysburg on July 1. Veil lamented that he could not meet with McConaughy in person (he had recently been to Gettysburg), and he stressed in his opening lines that a letter did not afford the best medium to communicate what he knew of the first day of battle, but he went on to

describe in some detail how Reynolds arrived on the field. A close reading of Veil's letter reveals that its author devoted a particular attention to landmarks and sites. Veil recounts that Reynolds encamped "near a tavern" on the night before the battle. When Reynolds and his staff approached Gettysburg and had learned of the trouble along the Chambersburg Pike, they proceeded to the home of Mr. George. He noted too, that Gettysburg citizens seemed anxious when the general rode through the town. Significantly, for a writer who recorded events with an apparent eye for sites and place, Veil makes no mention of a meeting at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. Instead, Veil recounted how the general and his staff rode to the front, where they "found Genl [sic] Buford engaged" on McPherson's Ridge and in *front* of the Seminary.²³

The *War Diary and Letters of Stephen Minot Weld* is also instructive in helping the historian to ascertain some sense of where Reynolds found Buford. Remarkable for its detail, the diary records a wealth of firsthand experiences that span the length of the war. Weld, an alumnus of Harvard College, was a meticulous note-taker. Weld's letters include commentaries on the capabilities and qualities of Army of the Potomac Commanders, including the vices of officers; they display a Victorian sensibility attuned to truth and adverse to immorality. What is more, Weld's letters to the home front evidence a remarkable transparency. In places of the diary, and in his correspondence, Weld entrusts his father with a knowledge of events otherwise known presumably only to the command of the Army of the Potomac. Weld joined the staff of Reynolds shortly before the Gettysburg Campaign following his disassociation with Gen. Benham on

²³ Letter of Charles H. Veil to D. McConaughy Esq., 7 April 1864, *Robert L. Brake Collection*, United States Army Military History Institute [hereafter cited as USAMHI], Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

account of that man's public intoxication, which had caused some scandal in the army. Still, Capt. Weld and Gen. Reynolds were not entirely unacquainted; the two men endured Confederate captivity at Libby Prison together in Richmond in 1862.

Weld's diary entry for July 1 details in clearer terms what the letter of Charles Veil establishes through implication. According to Weld, Reynolds and his staff departed Moritz Tavern at 8:00 a.m. only to encounter unfavorable roads, which the captain attributed to the "muggy" and "disagreeable" weather. A man on the outskirts of Gettysburg informed the general of the situation, which was not good, and that Confederate infantry were dislodging Buford's cavalry. What follows in the diary offers critical perspective: "General Reynolds went into the town on a fast gallop, through it, and a mile out on the other side." There, Weld noted, Reynolds "found General Buford and the cavalry engaging the enemy, who were advancing in strong force." Weld's firsthand account is therefore instructive, and one wishes he might have been present at Reynolds's side longer to record the events of that morning in even greater detail. But Reynolds selected Weld to ride posthaste to Gen. Meade, camped some fourteen miles away, with news of the battle. That Reynolds selected Weld personally to ride for Meade enhances the credibility of the captain's account, for it implies that Reynolds possessed great confidence in Weld to relay the exact nature of the battle and things outside of Gettysburg to Meade.²⁴

²⁴ Stephen Minot Weld, *War Diary and Letters of Stephen Minot Weld, 1861–1865* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1912), 229, 230, 231.

It bears observation that Weld's diary, published in 1912, features an extended commentary on the 1 July 1863 entry. In this commentary Weld might have stated more definitively that Reynolds and Buford met at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. But the Union war veteran did precisely the opposite, and the effect of his diary, which benefited from even greater space and time for further reflection, does more to disprove the Jerome account than to verify the signal officer's version of events. To be sure, and

While one cannot mistake these pieces of evidence for conclusive or definitive proof, taken together the accounts of Veil and Weld do significantly more to diminish the romantic account of the cupola meeting between Buford and Reynolds, and to invalidate the Jerome reflection from which that account is derived, than to establish his version of events. The more contemporaneous accounts of Veil and Weld—who were close to Reynolds on the morning of July 1 and who demonstrated a keen attention to detail—fail to mention the Lutheran Seminary as the site of the meeting. To be sure, one of Reynolds's aides, Capt. Joseph Rosengarten, did mention the cupola meeting, but his account appeared one-half century after the battle in the pages of the *New York Times*, and his account is suspect for its notes of embellishment.²⁵ Furthermore and as Coddington suggested, it is not logical, nor does it seem consistent with the tenacious spirit and meticulous attention to detail characteristic of Buford, that the cavalry commander should have been considerably to the rear of his troops in the cupola at the Lutheran Seminary at their greatest moment of trial. At 10:00 a.m., the approximate

to grant a shred of credibility to opposing claims, the Weld Diary does not conclusively disprove the Jerome version, and Weld's Diary even tells that General Reynolds and his staff "rode out and saw the Confederates' batteries going into position on Seminary Hill" which allows, perhaps, for the possibility that the meeting took place at the Seminary itself. But it is conspicuous that Weld, who in every other respect demonstrated a tremendous capacity for detail, omits the Lutheran Seminary from his narrative. And it is conspicuous too that he positions the meeting that occurred between General Reynolds and General Buford in spatial terms—Reynolds rode "a mile out on the other side [of Gettysburg]"—and does not reference a particular landmark.

But Weld's Diary offers one further point of clarification that torpedoed the Jerome version, which is that Reynolds, after surveying Buford's lines slowly giving way, "rode back to the town, went into a field on the right of the road and talked two or three minutes with General Buford, and then called his staff around him" (p. 232).

²⁵ Rosengarten, "Reynolds, Hero of the First Day, by One of His Staff: Major Joseph G. Rosengarten, Who Was Close to the Famous Union Commander Throughout the Fighting, Pays Tribute to the Man Who Paved the Way for the Federal Victory," *New York Times*, 29 June 1913.

hour in which Reynolds found Buford, the cavalryman's brigades had been engaged with the enemy for some time and were yielding ground to advancing Confederate infantry.²⁶ That Buford was significantly to the rear of his men as their positions collapsed to direct their delayed withdrawal is not impossible, but it is hardly probable.

The death of Reynolds

That Reynolds perished in the great fight at Gettysburg is at once shocking and not—shocking, because of his quality as a commander and the effect his absence wrought on men yet engaged in the battle, and not, because of his demonstrated personal tendency in previous engagements to move too far to the front of action.²⁷ In this limited respect Reynolds invites some comparison to Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, a commander who required a close and perfect knowledge of battle, and a man for whom there stood

²⁶ Four troopers of the Eighth Illinois Cavalry first detected the movement of Heth's division in the early morning hours of July 1, 1863. Lt. Marcellus Jones fired off the first shot of the battle between 7.00 a.m. and 7.30 a.m. The action increased until it assumed a serious magnitude at 10.00 a.m.; see Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 135.

²⁷ Writing from Albany, New York, twenty-one years following the battle (and with not a little embellishment), Abner Doubleday, to whom command of Union forces at Gettysburg fell immediately after the death of Gen. Reynolds, recalled his then-recent visit to Fredericksburg, VA, and noted how peaceful it seemed to him. He "contrasted the warm welcome" he had received with "the bitter contest that occurred there in December 1862." He remembered too, a striking image of Reynolds, seen "just after the gallant charge made by Meade and the Pennsylvania Reserves, *sitting upon his horse in front of his corps facing the sharp-shooters of Stonewall Jackson, whose bullets were striking at his feet*" (emphasis added); see the letter of Abner Doubleday, 14 September 1884, Albany, New York, in Reynolds Memorial Association, *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds* (Philadelphia, 1884), 18; It seems rather plausible that Doubleday, who attributed Reynolds's death to a sharpshooter in his recollection of the Battle of Gettysburg, recalled this scene with an especially heightened sense of tragedy; Reporting on the action in Pennsylvania, one North Carolina newspaper reported the mortal wounding of Gen. Reynolds. Reynolds, according to the *Fayetteville Observer*, "was, as usual, leading his corps, and in the thickest of the fight"; see "The War in Pennsylvania," *Fayetteville Observer*, 9 July 1863.

no danger too great to prevent or impede his own act of reconnaissance into the nature and thick of things. Historians have perceived similarities in their command styles and acts of physical courage. There is some reason for this. The style of command outlined in nineteenth-century military doctrine had not yet developed to resemble the command style that emerged in the Great War and World War Two. Technology did not yet allow for more rapid communication between high command from a position of security and prominence and more junior commanders on the front. Capable generalship—and a nineteenth-century understanding of honor and gentlemanly duty—required leadership from the front; not the rear. In the Civil War, writes Michael C. C. Adams,

Officers still adhered to the maxim that necessity required leadership from the front, as their brethren had done for centuries. Generals believed they must, in person, direct the disposition of their troops in the "fog of battle" or chaos would ensue. And they had precious few staff officers to assist them in this. Stonewall Jackson fell fatally wounded by his own men while riding beyond his lines after dark, trying to ascertain the relative position of the combatants. A sniper picked off Major General John Reynolds, mounted and vulnerable, in plain view of both sides, as he led his command into their positions on July 1, 1863.²⁸

Adams's observation, published in 2014, reflects the enduring quality of the myth, perpetuated in scholarly and popular accounts (and perhaps true—it is impossible to conclude with certainty) that Reynolds was the victim of a Confederate sharpshooter.

²⁸ Michael C.C. Adams, *Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 76. Adams's use of the word "sniper" in this context is instructive, for it reveals how scholars in the twenty-first century impose twentieth and twenty-first century understandings of intensely personal killing from long range that soldiers experienced in World War Two and beyond onto nineteenth-century subject matter. Civil War soldiers would not have recognized the term. Even the practice of sniping would seem foreign to the most capable sharpshooter, who in the Civil War operated in a battalion. For more on this, see Fred L. Ray, *Shock Troops of the Confederacy: The Sharpshooter Battalions of the Army of Northern Virginia* (Asheville: CFS Press, 2006).

This myth is remarkable for its resiliency, a result perhaps of one constant feature of human nature: the wish that great men should not die from accidental or random acts. A man marked for killing and sought by an excellent marksman is, by virtue of his being hunted, greater than the man who falls randomly and senselessly to a stray shot.²⁹

Adams's description of the death of Reynolds raises a second point that requires comment: "sniping," as understood in the twenty-first century, was hardly a developed military art in 1863, and it remains difficult to distinguish from sharpshooting. The modernity of sniper warfare is evident in its very etymology. As historian Earl J. Hess has written, "the word sniping has its origin in nineteenth-century India, where British officers often amused themselves by hunting the snipe, 'a small, fast-flying game bird' that was difficult to hit in midair." Over time, "the term *snipe* therefore became a byword for a crack shot." Still, the term did not truly enter the Anglo-American lexicon until World War One.³⁰ But sniper warfare certainly existed, and it represented a significant development in the history of small-arms combat in the United States, which advanced as innovators began to experiment with the placement of telescopic optics on long-range rifles. The Confederate armies did feature marksmen who excelled in long-range shooting, whom Confederate administrators later arranged in sharpshooting battalions. The art of sharpshooting, according to Hess, was more prevalent among Confederate soldiers in 1863 (the availability of long-range target rifles that Confederate blockade runners smuggled through the Federal blockade helped to drive this trend)

²⁹ Steplyk, "Hunters of Men: Sharpshooting and Killing," in "Citizen-Soldiers and Killing in Civil War Combat," 172–204.

³⁰ Earl J. Hess, *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat: Reality and Myth* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 176.

than in previous years.³¹ Taken on the whole however, one senses that certainty about the sharpshooter debate remains elusive, because the language of the debate about who killed Gen. Reynolds—a "sniper," a "sharpshooter," a "marksmen"—is not firm.

This caveat aside, the death of Reynolds at Gettysburg and its appeal to the popular imagination has borne a glamorous literature among battle devotees. The most thorough inquiry into this narrow subject is Steve Sanders's "The Death of Reynolds," which appeared in a 1996 issue of *Gettysburg Magazine*.³² Apart from Edward Nichols's thoughtful examination of the death of Reynolds, however, no scholarly study has framed the death of the general at Gettysburg in American memory. And while to determine, with exact precision, how Reynolds died at Gettysburg is nigh impossible (if not historically insignificant), it is of consequence to note how and to what extent romantic portrayals of his death that have endured through the years square with the conditions of battle as they existed on the morning of July 1st, 1863, and how such histories have shaped and informed the memory of Reynolds in the postwar years.

Edward Nichols noted in 1958 that the sharpshooter myth emerged around the turn of the century in 1902. An article published in the *Lancaster Intelligencer* featured a reminiscence of one Pennsylvanian who, after the war, met and conversed with a North Carolinian, Benjamin Thorpe, who served as a sharpshooter with the 55th North Carolina. Thorpe claimed to have killed Reynolds from a cherry tree and at a range of some 800 yards. He claimed too, that Reynolds was in the act of positioning artillery when he fired the lethal round.³³ In point of fact, however, the notion that a Confederate

³¹ Hess, *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat*, 175.

³² Steve Sanders, "Enduring Tales of Gettysburg: The Death of Reynolds," *Gettysburg Magazine* 14 (January 1996): 27–36.

³³ Nichols, *Toward Gettysburg*, 253–348.

sharpshooter felled Reynolds emerged before the conclusion of the battle at Gettysburg.³⁴ A correspondent for the *New York Times*, Lorenzo L. Crouse, wrote in special dispatch to the paper that the fighting on the morning of July 1 was "quite severe," and that "Gen. Reynolds . . . was killed by a sharpshooter early in the fight."³⁵ On July 18, *Harper's Weekly* published its obituary of the late general. The journal revealed that the general rode forward to find a "knoll or eminence" upon which to "favorably plant his [artillery] pieces." Intense firing from the enemy had made the general's horse "unmanageable." The general's movement forward, the paper claimed, and the unruly behavior of his mount, "exposed [Reynolds] to the unerring aim of the sharp-shooters, and a rifle bullet struck him in the neck, severing the vertebrae, and causing his instant death."³⁶

These stories did not emerge exclusively from newspaper accounts. Men who fought at Gettysburg enshrined the sharpshooter myth in their regimental histories and personal reminiscences. One regimental history of Pennsylvania volunteers communicates the classic and mythic interpretation of the death of Reynolds:

As a Pennsylvanian [Reynolds's] blood grew hot at the thought of the invasion and devastation of his native State. . . . In the midst of a hot fire the line was formed. Reynolds went forward to direct. He himself skillfully posted Hall's Second Maine battery on the road and threw forward two regiments in advance upon the left. At the same time, he directed General Wadsworth to post the three other regiments on the right of the road. While he was thus in the very front . . . a ball fired by a rebel sharpshooter struck him in the back of his head and came out in the front causing instant death.³⁷

³⁴ Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 687–752.

³⁵ "The Great Battles: Our Special Telegrams from the Battle Field to 10 A. M. Yesterday," *New York Times*, 4 July 1863.

³⁶ "The Late Gen. Reynolds," *Harper's Weekly*, 18 July 1863.

³⁷ William J. Wray, *History of the Twenty-Third Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, Birney's Zouaves: Three Months and Three Years Service, Civil War, 1861 to 1865* (Philadelphia: privately printed, 1904), 390.

Another reads that Reynolds, after placing his artillery and seeking out positions for Howard's batteries, which were forthcoming, "was struck down by a sharpshooter."³⁸

Beyond formal regimental histories, individual soldiers chronicled their belief that Reynolds fell the victim of a sharpshooter's bullet. The highest-ranking Union officer to state in explicit terms that a Confederate marksman shot Reynolds was Abner Doubleday, to whom Union command descended following the death of Reynolds, and who claimed a long friendship with the Pennsylvanian. In *Chancellorsville and Gettysburg*, Doubleday recounted that Reynolds, along the edge of Herbst's Wood, turned in his saddle—he was anxious to see and learn that supporting infantry, were, in fact, in rapid advance—and that "while looking back in this way, a rebel sharpshooter shot him through the back of the head, the bullet coming out near the eye."³⁹ A junior officer who self-identified as a mere "stripling" in his history of the battle, and a combatant at Gettysburg (though not engaged in the action on McPherson's Ridge), First Lt. Jesse Bowman Young of the 84th Pennsylvania Infantry also recalled how Reynolds fell in the fight. The wing commander "had stationed his men, under Cutler's command, on the right of the [Chambersburg] pike, and had hastened to supervise the movement on the left. While pointing to the woods to be taken and inspiring his command by word and example he was hit by a sharp-shooter's bullet."⁴⁰

³⁸ M.D. Hardin, *History of the Twelfth Regiment Pennsylvania Reserve Volunteer Corps: From Its Muster into the United States Service, August 10th, 1861, to its Muster Out, June 11th, 1864, Together with Biographical Sketches of Officers and Men and a Complete Muster-Out Roll* (New York: privately printed, 1890), 146.

³⁹ Abner Doubleday, *Chancellorsville and Gettysburg* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 131.

⁴⁰ Jesse Bowman Young, *The Battle of Gettysburg: A Comprehensive Narrative* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1913), 3, 185.

Joseph Rosengarten, a member of Reynolds's staff, put on record on more than one occasion, and in various mediums and contexts, the widely accepted view that a Confederate sharpshooter killed Reynolds. In 1879, Rosengarten contributed a personal reminiscence to a collection of first-hand accounts of the Civil War published in the *Philadelphia Weekly Times*. Re-published in *The Annals of the War*, it communicates the author's belief in the sharpshooter myth. "Reynolds," wrote Rosengarten, "was a shining mark to the enemy's sharpshooters," and after placing his lead elements (the Second Wisconsin) in Herbst's Woods, and having turned and rode to receive more advancing elements of the Iron Brigade, "he was struck by a Minnie ball, fired by a sharpshooter hidden in the branches of a tree overhead."⁴¹ In 1880, Rosengarten attended a meeting of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania where he formally presented a portrait of the late general that had been bequeathed to the society by Admiral William Reynolds, the general's brother.⁴² The address he delivered before the society channels his 1879 view, albeit with a slight increase in ambiguity: Reynolds hurried the 2nd Wisconsin into the woodlot, "full of rebel skirmishers and sharpshooters," and as quickly as he had deployed that unit, the General turned to look for supporting regiments and "was struck, *it is supposed*, by a rebel sharpshooter" (emphasis added).⁴³ Rosengarten's memoir and dual biography of Reynolds and the

⁴¹ Major Joseph G. Rosengarten, "General Reynolds' Last Battle," in *The Annals of the War: Written by Leading Participants North and South*, edited by Alexander K. McClure (Philadelphia: The Times Publishing Company, 1879), 63.

⁴² Historical Society of Pennsylvania, "Meetings of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 4 (Philadelphia: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1880), 246.

⁴³ Rosengarten, "Address of Mr. J. G. Rosengarten," in *Reynolds Memorial: Addresses Delivered Before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Upon the Occasion of the Presentation of a Portrait of Maj.-Gen. John F. Reynolds, March 8, 1880* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1880), 24.

admiral, a slight adaptation of his speech delivered before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in March of 1880 and published in that same year, repeats—almost word for word—that same account.⁴⁴ Fifty years after the battle, Rosengarten penned a similar story in the *New York Times*.⁴⁵

The sharpshooter narrative has endured. If one examines the great body of Civil War literature that has grown from the nineteenth century and runs to the present, one notices that this conviction—this persistent belief that a sharpshooter felled Reynolds—permeates much of the popular historical literature. Pre-eminent among popular Civil War historians in the middle years of the twentieth century, Bruce Catton, with typical eloquence and flair, wrote of the battle that transpired on McPherson's Ridge, "Reynolds was studying the battle, trying to make out just how much weight lay back of the Rebel attack, and a Southern sharpshooter in an old stone barn got him in the sights of his rifle and shot him dead."⁴⁶ First published in his seminal *Glory Road*, Catton updated and adapted this history of Reynolds's death for a shorter history the Gettysburg campaign in 1982. The arch of his narrative, however, remained largely unchanged:

Reynolds did not live to see much of [the battle]. He rode forward to get the Iron Brigade lined up against Hill's advancing infantry, in the woods and fields of a farm owned by a man named McPherson, and some Confederate sharpshooter in Mr. McPherson's barn drew a bead on him and shot him dead.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Rosengarten, *William Reynolds, John Fulton Reynolds, A Memoir* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1880), 19.

⁴⁵ Rosengarten, "Reynolds, Hero of the First Day, by One of His Staff: Major Joseph G. Rosengarten, Who Was Close to the Famous Union Commander Throughout the Fighting, Pays Tribute to the Man Who Paved the Way for the Federal Victory," *New York Times*, 29 June 1913.

⁴⁶ Bruce Catton, *Glory Road* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1952), 274.

⁴⁷ Catton, *Gettysburg: The Final Fury* (1974; repr., New York: Vintage, 2013), 24.

Catton's southern counterpart, the venerable Shelby Foote, offered a slight variation on the sharpshooter myth in his adapted history of the Gettysburg campaign, *Stars in Their Courses*. The Confederate sharpshooter, or "marksman," in Foote's account dropped Reynolds from his perch in "an orchard" just "ahead" of Herbst's Woodlot.⁴⁸

Hardly isolated to popular histories, the sharpshooter legend has emerged in full bloom in biographies, meta-narratives, and military histories of the Civil War, and it is tightly interwoven into heroic portrayals of the general's death. Carl D. Sandburg, in his seminal, multi-volume Abraham Lincoln biography, has channeled the mythic interpretation of Reynolds's death in which the General uttered his famous admonition to the Second Wisconsin *after* he had been struck by the fatal round: "The brave and able General John F. Reynolds . . . felt a bullet sink into his neck, called to his men, 'Forward! For God's sake, forward!' and fell into the arms of a captain with the words, 'Good God, Wilcox, I am killed.'"⁴⁹ In his history of the Civil War and Reconstruction, J. G. Randall wrote that in the action on July 1 "the Unionists sustained a grievous loss in the death of General Reynolds, who exposed himself in the woods near the Chambersburg road west of Gettysburg and was brought down by a sharpshooter."⁵⁰

James M. McPherson reinforces this same narrative in his timeless *Battle Cry of Freedom*. In the intense fighting near Willoughby Run and Herbst's Wood, writes McPherson, the Union Army lost many of its best men, but no casualty was of greater consequence than the loss of Reynolds, "considered by many the best general in the

⁴⁸ Shelby Foote, *Stars in Their Courses: The Gettysburg Campaign June-July 1863* (New York: The Modern Library, 1994), 74.

⁴⁹ Carl D. Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, in six volumes (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 2:342.

⁵⁰ J.G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, second edition, with a preface by David Donald (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1961), 402.

army," who was "drilled through the head by a sharpshooter."⁵¹ Michael C. C. Adams, in *Living Hell*, frames the death of Reynolds—which he attributes to a Confederate *sniper*—as an example of the shocking and horrific nature of killing in Civil War combat.⁵² In their recent book authors Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh note that Reynolds fell the victim of a Confederate sharpshooter.⁵³

Despite its endurance in the literature, the myth that a Confederate sniper, marksman, or sharpshooter felled Reynolds hardly squares with historical reality, and it remains difficult to assess against the historical backdrop of Civil War combat. In the first place, initial newspaper accounts that reported the death of Reynolds at the hand of a marksman were notoriously unreliable. In the second place, early indications from Reynolds's family make plain that they did not believe he died the victim of a sharpshooter. Third, for the remarkable longevity and ubiquitous nature of the sharpshooter myth in Reynolds Civil War lore and literature, early histories of the battle emphasized more clearly that Reynolds died at the front of critical action—not that he was targeted and selected as a shining mark by enemy sharpshooters. Fourth, the accounts of Reynolds's death put forward by Gettysburg participants long after his death contain remarkable inconsistencies and factual errors. But in back all of this, and on a more foundational level, the idea or specter of the "sharpshooter" in the imaginations of Civil War soldiers, and the designation of "marksman" conferred upon a talented shot, often constituted two different realities. Men who wrote and spoke about sharpshooters

⁵¹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 654.

⁵² Adams, *Living Hell*, 76.

⁵³ Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh, *A Savage War: A Military History of the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 274.

in the Civil War could not imagine the mental picture conjured now by the word "sniper" in twenty-first century America. Sniping in modern warfare exists as a highly developed professional skill and military art; in marked contrast, sharpshooters who operated in Civil War combat did not always (and only in rare cases) benefited from enhanced optics and sights to increase their weapon's accuracy.

Initial newspaper reports confirmed for anxious readers that Reynolds died in the throes of combat at the head of his men, but those accounts hardly presented a uniform picture of the battle as it transpired on July 1. Nor did they answer with precision the question of how Reynolds fell. To compound problems, published newspaper accounts did not always report the facts. One account posited in the *New York Herald* on the third day of the battle informed readers that Reynolds had ridden out to seek out good ground—"a knoll or eminence"—upon which to plant artillery pieces, and in so doing exposed himself to the "unerring aim of the sharpshooters."⁵⁴ The *New York Times* also reported on Independence Day, 1863, that Reynolds, who had brought on the fighting of July 1 under the false "impression that his force exceeded that of the enemy," fell the victim of a Confederate sharpshooter.⁵⁵ Still another account in the *Herald* read that General Reynolds received a fatal volley from sharpshooters posted in a thicket.⁵⁶ In a manner that reveals the frequent unreliability of Civil War newspaper coverage, the *New Haven Daily Palladium* reported that Reynolds fell in the fight around 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon (in fact, he perished in the morning hours).⁵⁷

⁵⁴ "How General Reynolds Met His Death," *New York Herald*, 3 July 1863.

⁵⁵ "The Great Battles: Our Special Telegrams from the Battle Field to 10 A. M. Yesterday," *New York Times*, 4 July 1863.

⁵⁶ "Despatch of Mr. F.G. Chapman," *New York Herald*, 3 July 1863.

⁵⁷ "By Telegraph," *New Haven Daily Palladium*, 3 July 1863.

Conflicting newspaper coverage likely imbued the Reynolds sisters with a greater urgency first to learn the truth about the death of their brother and then to communicate the facts—as best they understood them—to family not present in Philadelphia and Lancaster after Reynolds's burial. The July 5 letters of sisters Eleanor Reynolds and Mary Jane "Jennie" Reynolds Gildersleeve to William Reynolds, then stationed in South Carolina and not able to be in Pennsylvania, reveal shock and profound sadness, but also an attention to the particular details of the battle that only first-hand witnesses could provide. For witnesses of the general's last day the sisters had several: Capt. Rosengarten, Capt. Weld, Capt. Wilcox, Maj. Riddle, and Sgt. Veil all met with the family and attended the general's funeral.⁵⁸ The historian wishing to ascertain degrees of historical accuracy in the letters has sufficient reason to believe that the narrative of Reynolds's death, as told in the letters, is sourced in the accounts of the men themselves. In all of this, Eleanor Reynolds made certain to communicate to her brother in explicit terms how the general had died. Significantly, she at once channeled certain aspects contained in accounts of Reynolds's death in the newspapers and contradicted them. In her letter to William, Eleanor wrote, "[John] was exposing himself very much & the balls were falling like hail." But she added, in what appears as an intended refutation of the popular accounts, "it was not a sharp shooter but a chance shot."⁵⁹ The sisters gleaned this knowledge, in all likelihood, from Capts. Mitchell and Baird and

⁵⁸ Mary Jane Reynolds Gildersleeve to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

⁵⁹ Eleanor Reynolds to William Reynolds, Philadelphia, 5 July 1863, *RFP*.

from Sgt. Veil. Veil rode with the general into battle and stood paces from him when he fell dead from his horse.⁶⁰

But if the sisters' words cannot offer conclusive proof that Reynolds died the victim of a stray shot, the sharpshooter thesis remains suspect on additional counts foundational to the very conditions of battle as they existed at Gettysburg on the morning of July 1. Steve Sanders has noted that no Union soldier engaged in battle that morning possessed the field of vision to identify with certainty the location of the shooter. "Is it reasonable to assume," inquires Sanders, "that anyone on the Union side of the battle line could have actually seen *where* the fire originated and *who* did the shooting" (original emphasis)? More important still, no known account of the fight, or of Reynolds's death, from an Iron Brigade veteran exists in which the combatant claimed a knowledge of the sharpshooter's position. To complicate the sharpshooter myth further, no man ever claimed to have witnessed the fatal shot.⁶¹ Doubtless, the density of the woodlot, the undulating terrain, the close proximity of the fighting, the smoke that resulted from the steady artillery and musket fire and drifted over the battlefield—these conditions might have made it impossible to note visually the exact position of a sharpshooter. But then the opposite is almost certainly true in equal measure: if one positioned on the Union battle line lacked the field of vision to see the shooter, then it is

⁶⁰ The most authoritative and descriptive account of the death of Reynolds comes from Sergt. Charles H. Veil, who served as Reynolds's orderly at Gettysburg, and who witnessed the General's death from his side: "He never spoke a word, or moved a muscle after he was struck. I have seen many men killed in action, but never saw a ball do its work so *instantly* as did the ball which struck General Reynolds . . ." (original emphasis). Significantly, Veil also noted that the wound was bloodless, a remarkable and rare occurrence compared to what resulted normally when a large-caliber, rifle musket ball tore into human flesh; see the letter of Charles H. Veil to D. McConaughy Esq., 7 April 1864, *Peter Frederick Rothermel Papers*, USAMHI.

⁶¹ Sanders, "The Death of Reynolds," 33.

also quite possible that a sharpshooter lacked the field of vision—at least from range—to see, and even more incredibly, to shoot the general.⁶²

The sharpshooter thesis is equally untenable when one considers the relative positions of units and the availability of organized sharpshooters on the battlefield in the early morning hours of July 1. Confederate sharpshooters operated in battalions—

⁶² While Civil War sharpshooters openly targeted officers in opposing armies, and even reportedly executed successful shots from ranges approximating 1,400 yards, the topographical features of the battlefield on which Reynolds died—the Herbst Woodlot most especially—would not have allowed for such a long shot; For more on the efficient and deadly work of sharpshooters generally, see Steplyk, "Hunters of Men: Sharpshooting and Killing," in "Citizen-Soldiers and Killing in Civil War Combat," 172–204; One account of Reynolds's death, posited by Glenn Tucker in *Lee and Longstreet at Gettysburg*, is suspect for a myriad of reasons, but it especially borders on the ridiculous for its embellished portrayal of sharpshooting at range. Ben Thorpe, the North Carolinian who claimed dubiously long after the war to have shot Reynolds, supposedly climbed to his perch in a cherry tree near McPherson's Barn, where he coordinated with his lieutenant to drop Reynolds. Tucker's incredible retelling, derived from a 1903 newspaper clipping, has it that the lieutenant was able to trace Thorpe's shots and note their marks through his field glasses:

"Ben," [the lieutenant] shouted up, "do you see that tall, straight man in the center of that group? He is evidently an officer of some high rank and is directing the operations. Sight your gun at 700 yards and see if you can reach him."

"That was a little short, Ben," said the lieutenant. "Sight her at 900 yards this time and hold steady, for we must have [Reynolds]."

Ben sighted carefully, resting his long-barreled rifle on a limb of the cherry tree. He held his aim and squeezed the trigger. "I knew before the report died away . . . that the shot had been a good one," he said. Then he saw the tall man fall and his horse plunge forward. . . .

Not until after the battle—"long afterwards," he said—did Ben Thorpe learn whom he had shot; and when he was told that Reynolds was a "great and good man," he said he was "genuinely sorry."

"I have been sorry ever since," he added.

Glenn Tucker, *Lee and Longstreet at Gettysburg* (Indianapolis, Kansas City, and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968), 215–216; For the original account, see "He Shot General Reynolds," *Pittsburgh Leader*, 1903. The author is grateful to Mr. Michael Lear, formerly of the Library of Special Collections at Franklin and Marshall College, for furnishing a high-resolution image of the *Pittsburgh Leader* article.

not at the regimental level—which allowed for more fluid movement on the battlefield (in contrast, the Union, under the leadership of the acclaimed marksman and innovator Hiram Berdan, raised and trained highly specialized regiments of sharpshooters, later known as "Berdan's Sharpshooters," which operated with greater organization) and makes them more difficult to track.⁶³ However, Bradley M. Gottfried, in his masterful atlas of the Gettysburg Campaign, notes that no Confederate sharpshooting units operated in that sector of the battlefield at the time of Reynolds's death.⁶⁴ Curiously, Earl J. Hess documents no Confederate sharpshooter activity at the Battle of Gettysburg on the morning of July 1 when Reynolds was killed.⁶⁵

Finally, whatever the exact conditions of the battle, and no matter the presence or absence of sharpshooters in the vicinity of Reynolds's death, one senses that the sharpshooter myth did not seem as credible to Americans more contemporaneous to the battle, a fact evidenced in the reality that though occasional early (and somewhat unreliable) battle histories attributed Reynolds's death to a sharpshooter, far more numerous campaign histories that surfaced in the wake of the battle and into the early years of the twentieth century make no mention of a sharpshooter.⁶⁶ Without any

⁶³ For the creation of Confederate sharpshooter battalions, see Hess, *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat*, 131; For the development of sharpshooter units in the northern and southern armies, see Steplyk, "Hunters of Men: Sharpshooting and Killing," in "Citizen-Soldiers and Killing in Civil War Combat," 172–204, at 175.

⁶⁴ Bradley M. Gottfried, *The Maps of Gettysburg: An Atlas of the Gettysburg Campaign, June 3–July 13, 1863* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2007), 72; Confederate sharpshooters under the command of Gen. Rhodes operated near Oak Hill, to the north and east of where Reynolds fell, but these troops arrived on the field after Reynolds perished; see Fred L. Ray, *Shock Troops of the Confederacy: The Sharpshooter Battalions of the Army of Northern Virginia* (Asheville: CFS Press, 2006), 72.

⁶⁵ Hess, *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat*, 179–185.

⁶⁶ One early history—a self-proclaimed compilation of first-hand, eyewitness accounts of the action—holds that Reynolds, far up in the advance of his men, had "dismounted from his horse, approached the fence near the eastern extremity of the

mention of a sharpshooter or sniper, Abner Doubleday noted in his 1888 history of the battle, *Gettysburg Made Plain*, that Reynolds simply "was killed" while forming his men for battle—a claim he would alter and embellish years later.⁶⁷ A battle study that emerged in 1893 described Reynolds's gallantry leading his men into the fight and lamented that he was fated to die "at the very moment success had crowned his first effort . . . with a bullet in his brain."⁶⁸ One European military historian, who wrote with the kind of English sympathy for the Southern Confederacy well chronicled by historian

grove, and was standing in a stooping position, examining the woods, when he received a ball through the neck, breaking the bone. He fell forward on his face, and expired in a few minutes." This narrative borders on the absurd, and it runs counter to all the historical evidence surrounding the events of the General's death; see T. Ditterline, *Sketch of the Battles of Gettysburg, July 1st, 2d, and 3d, 1863: With an Account of the Movements of the Respective Armies for Some Days Previous Thereto. Compiled from the Personal Observation of Eye-Witnesses of the Several Battles* (New York: O. A. Alvord, Electrotyper and Printer, 1864), 9; Another history written in the more immediate aftermath of the battle claimed to put forward a definitive, first-hand account of the Rebel invasion of Pennsylvania. Published to serve as a field manual for Gettysburg visitors, *Notes on the Rebel Invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania* claimed to put forward "a chronicle of facts." Its author (an ordained minister and professor of mathematics at Pennsylvania College), claimed the editor and publisher in the introduction, "carefully sifted" history from myth, and the reader, "the pilgrim who, with this little volume in their hands, shall visit the memorable fields whose undying story it tells, the thousands who eagerly read all that bears upon the grandest and most critical struggle of the most momentous war in the annals of our race," benefits therefore from all truth and no embellishment. In his account, M. Jacobs wrote that Reynolds "fell a victim to his cool bravery and zeal. As was his custom, he rode in front of his men, placing them in position and urging them to the fight, when he was shot through the head, *as was supposed*, by a Rebel sharpshooter, and died shortly afterwards" (emphasis added). This account too is suspect, for the accounts of those closest to Reynolds at the time of his death reveal that he was killed instantly; see M. Jacobs, *Notes on the Rebel Invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania and the Battle of Gettysburg July 1st, 2d and 3d, 1863. Accompanied by an Explanatory Map* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1864), 27.

⁶⁷ Doubleday, *Gettysburg Made Plain: A Succinct Account of the Campaign and Battles, With the Aid of One Diagram and Twenty-Nine Maps* (New York: The Century Company, 1888), 26.

⁶⁸ Samuel Adams Drake, *The Battle of Gettysburg, 1863* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1893), 64.

Sheldon Vanauken, but also with a meticulous attention to tactical and operational detail, noted only that Reynolds "was shot through the head at close range" in the fight that ensued between Meredith's Iron Brigade and the skirmishers of Archer's Tennesseans swarming the copse of trees.⁶⁹ All of this suggests that if the sharpshooter thesis emerged more forcefully in later battle histories, it nevertheless seemed more incredible to Americans and historians more contemporaneous to the outcome of the Battle of Gettysburg.

All told, to consider the conflicting interpretations of Reynolds's death that have guided and shaped the stream of Gettysburg and Reynolds memory is not unlike to participate in a bad game of Clue: Civil War Edition. Various accounts place the alleged Rebel sharpshooter in an orchard, in a barn, in trees. Battle enthusiasts writing in popular publications have considered how the rifle ball might have traveled as it struck Reynolds, from its trajectory when fired to the placement of the exit wound. Many written accounts underscore that the general turned in his saddle before falling dead—wishful thinking and insurance, perhaps, against the dreaded and impossible thought that Reynolds died much like Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, a victim of friendly fire. The kind of fascination that has emerged in the popular literature of Reynolds and Gettysburg, contrasted with more academic inquiries, suggests a divergence in historical interpretation: serious scholars tend at once to channel and dismiss the sharpshooter myth, while legions of Gettysburg devotees consider the circumstances that surrounded Reynolds's death—and the cause of his death—of utmost importance. Taken on the

⁶⁹ Cecil Battine, *The Crisis of the Confederacy: A History of Gettysburg and the Wilderness* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1905), 189; Sheldon Vanauken, *The Glittering Illusion: English Sympathy for the Southern Confederacy* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1989).

whole, these facts confirm an eloquent expression of the profound meaning of Reynolds for American Civil War history and Civil War memory: "to the survivors, and the other veterans of both sides, and, finally, even the country," writes Lance J. Herdegen,

Gettysburg became the grand epic of the American Civil War and "the gallant Reynolds" the symbolic fallen knight of the Union—a brave and true American soldier struck down just as his promise was being realized. In death he became "John Reynolds of Gettysburg," a heroic figure on a big, black horse forever shouting to the soldiers of the Iron Brigade as they ran toward the crest of a wooded ridge, "Forward Men! Forward for God's sake, and drive those fellows out of those woods!"⁷⁰

The evidence of history does not often appear starkly as black or white. The question of how Reynolds died ultimately carries little significance, but the manner of his death matters entirely for how Americans framed his memory in the post-war years. Implicit in the sensibility and outlook of those who perpetuate the sharpshooter narrative is the conviction that men of such prominence as Reynolds are not supposed to die by a mere random chance. The aimless stray minié ball from one rifle musket in ranks of many, fired at some unseen object, that happened to find *a*—not *its*—mark violates popular desire. Romantic fascination, inherent perhaps to human nature, demands that a sharpshooter or a marksman—one well trained in the military art—take the life of a strongly capable Army of the Potomac wing commander. If Gettysburg has assumed the status of an American epic, then conventions of epic myth demand a death for Reynolds akin to the slayings of Hector and Leonidas in ancient times. All of this helps to explain then, why in Ron Maxwell's *Gettysburg* a sniper, with telescopic optics mounted to the top of his rifle musket, stops in the woods, aims at General Reynolds—mounted on his majestic stallion—and lets loose the fatal round.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Herdegen, "John F. Reynolds and the Iron Brigade," 112.

⁷¹ *Gettysburg*, DVD.

EPILOGUE

Upon the Altar of the Union: Soldiers and Civilians Remember Reynolds

Abstract: *In spite of his extensive service in the antebellum U.S. Army, Reynolds is remembered almost exclusively for perishing at the Battle of Gettysburg on July 1, 1863. Like other such prominent officers of the antebellum U.S. Army as Robert Lee and George Meade, Reynolds's military service and professional expertise as a soldier was absorbed into, and measured by, the fratricidal conflict that ravaged America from 1861 to 1865. In the years following the Civil War, Americans enshrined the Battle of Gettysburg as a centerpiece in their national memory, and the memory of Reynolds became inseparable from the memory of the battle itself. After the Civil War, with their Union that secured the blessings of religious and civil liberties restored, citizens and veterans together set about to bind up the nation's wounds, and to commemorate men like Reynolds who had given their last full measure of devotion upon the altar of the Union.*

As the historical literature has proven beyond reasonable doubt, the American Civil War was a thoroughly religious conflict.¹ Citizens and politicians attempted to divine the purposes of God in their sufferings; theologians produced contradictory Biblical hermeneutics on the moral and political dimensions of slavery in global history. At the same time, they preached gospels of destruction that called for the total annihilation of their enemies.² On battlefields across the heartland of America, when they were not shooting at one another, killing, or coming to terms with the moral contradictions of their profession, soldiers in opposing armies worshipped and prayed to the same God.³

¹ George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

² Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006); James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

³ Jonathan M. Steplyk, *Fighting Means Killing: Civil War Soldiers and the Nature of Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018); Steven E. Woodworth,

Fidelity to the United States Constitution was interpreted in religious terms, compelling many in the northern press to identify treason with sin in their proclamations that the “first secessionist was Satan.”⁴ The assassination of Abraham Lincoln on Good Friday, 1865, invited obvious religious symbolism, likening the slain Republican “Redeemer President” to the crucified Christ.⁵ In all of this, Americans, but none more than Julia Ward Howe, beheld an inscrutable God whose bloody intervention in their history to crush the curse of slavery only solidified their standing as a chosen, redeemer nation.⁶

No wonder, then, that the men who died in the service of such a nation received veneration. Five months after Reynolds’s death, and in honor of the national day of Thanksgiving, *Harper’s Weekly Magazine* printed an engraving to commemorate the national holiday. In the engraving, lady Columbia knelt in prayer—her hands folded and her eyes lifted toward heaven—at the “Altar of the Union.”⁷ Similarly, the negative of a photograph composite produced after the war illustrates the robust connection, as loyal American contemporaries would have understood it, between the deaths of prominent northern officers and the religious meaning and symbolism inherent to their conflict. Pictured alongside such luminaries as James McPherson and John Sedgwick, Reynolds and his comrades bear the noble distinction (in bolded typeface) of “Union Martyrs.”⁸

While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

⁴ Edward J. Blum, “The First Secessionist was Satan’: Secession and the Religious Politics of Evil in Civil War America,” *Civil War History* 60, no. 3 (September 2014): 234-269.

⁵ Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, 376-387.

⁶ Richard M. Gamble, *A Fiery Gospel: The Battle Hymn of the Republic and the Road to Righteous War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

⁷ “The Union Altar,” *Harper’s Weekly Magazine*, 5 December 1863.

⁸ “Union Martyrs: Berry, Jas. R. McPherson, Alex. Hayes, Ransom, Buford, J. Sedgwick, D. Russell, Geo. Stone, N. Lyon, O.M. Mitchell, E.V. Sumner, Wadsworth,

The meaning of such an image was self-evident: these officers were not the casualties of a domestic insurrection merely, but slain martyrs in the cause of a holy government.

The memorialization of U.S. Major General of Volunteers John F. Reynolds began almost immediately in the wake of his death, when local Lancasterians worked to enshrine their hero in national lore. The notice of Reynolds's death on July 3, 1863, in the *Lancaster Daily Inquirer* lamented that so glorious a military career had come to an end. Because this fine soldier—one of the noblest the Keystone State had “given to the army of the Union,” indeed, one of the army's “brightest stars,” as the same editors were to underscore three days later—had fallen, “Pennsylvania should render every honor to his memory.”⁹ No soldier that Pennsylvania had given to the cause of the Union, nor any general from her ranks, merited more honor than Reynolds, claimed the editors of the *Lancaster Examiner & Herald* on July 8; indeed, “if there was ever a lion-hearted man in our army,” wrote the editors, “it was General Reynolds.”¹⁰

By 1872, and as histories of the war proliferated, tall tales of Reynolds's life featured prominently in local histories that purposed to enshrine the memories of heroes who hailed from Lancaster County. In his *Biographical History of Lancaster County*, Alexander Harris detailed with considerable precision the annals of Reynolds's military life. But Reynolds's accomplishments in the U.S. Army prior to 1863 paled in

Richardson, Stevens, Kearney, J.J. Reynolds [sic], and Birney,” Library of Congress, call no. LC-B813- 6799 A [P&P].

⁹ “Major General Reynolds,” *Lancaster Daily Inquirer*, 3 July 1863, microfilm, accessed in June 2018 at the Lancaster County Historical Society and President James Buchanan's Wheatland (LancasterHistory.Org) [hereafter cited as LCHS]; “Local Affairs,” *Lancaster Daily Inquirer*, 6 July 1863, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS.

¹⁰ “The Death of General Reynolds,” *The Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, 8 July 1863.

comparison to the noble leadership of the Pennsylvanian's final campaign that resulted in his death. "When General Meade moved the army from Frederick into Pennsylvania" in the summer of 1863, wrote Harris, "he selected General Reynolds, his bosom friend, and the man of all others in whom he reposed the most implicit confidence, to lead the advance wing." And Reynolds, wrote Harris, "with the whole ardor of his noble nature, entered into the work assigned him; he led forth his troops, marching at the head of the great army as a patriot going out to battle *for the honor of his country and the liberty of his race*" (emphasis added).¹¹ As decades of post-war commemorations bore out, often tragically, the "liberty of [Reynolds's] race" achieved in the preservation of the Union triumphed over the memories of the very persons liberated in the great struggle.

From 1863 and into the twentieth century, Americans paid homage to Reynolds and honored him as one of the finest soldiers to fall in defense of the Union. National figures of considerable prominence praised Reynolds in death. Reynolds's peers and friends delivered solemn and moving eulogies that commemorated his sacrifice. On great anniversaries of the Battle of Gettysburg, and before public assemblies, soldiers recalled the death of Reynolds in addresses and orations, hailing him as "one of the brightest and bravest soldiers the war produced."¹² In Reynolds's native Lancaster, children, women, and men annually paid tribute to his memory through their

¹¹ Alexander Harris, *A Biographical History of Lancaster County: Being a History of Early Settlers and Eminent Men of the County; As also Much Other Unpublished Historical Information, Chiefly of a Local Character* (Lancaster: Elias Barr and Company, 1872), 487.

¹² Thomas W. Hyde, "Recollections of the Battle of Gettysburg," in *War Papers Read Before the Commandery of the State of Maine, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, in four volumes (1898; repr., Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1992), 1:192.

participations in Decoration Days, a tradition that spanned decades. Pennsylvania children participated in essay contests to chronicle the life of their hero.

From these various rituals of public commemoration, a general pattern emerges. Pennsylvanians had regarded Reynolds, not unreasonably, as a military hero years before the American Civil War. Like his contemporaries from the Old Army, Reynolds earned great acclaim for his military service in Mexico, a fact borne out by local newspaper coverage as early as 1849.¹³ Prior to his death, many Americans shared in the view that Reynolds was an able soldier. But Reynolds's death in the War for the Union—and in one of that struggle's greatest battles—made him a martyr in the eyes of his countrymen and brother soldiers, one who shared in the sacrificial attributes of a Christ-like death to redeem and restore a holy nation. In their efforts to consecrate the battlefield at Gettysburg, Americans transfigured Reynolds into a martyr and fashioned his image as the finest corps commander in the Army of the Potomac. In short, his memory could not stand apart from the growing place the Battle of Gettysburg occupied in the national consciousness, and one suspects that even histories of the war that reference Reynolds before Gettysburg are not free from the influence of hindsight.¹⁴ In time, and as Lance J. Herdegen has concluded, "Gettysburg became the grand epic of the American Civil War and 'the gallant Reynolds' the symbolic fallen knight of the Union—a brave and true American soldier struck down just as his promise was being

¹³ See the *Lancaster Examiner and Herald*, 3 January 1849, quoted in William Frederic Worner, "Dinner Declined by Major John Fulton Reynolds," *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 34 (1930): 213-215, at p. 213.

¹⁴ Indicative of such histories is Gamaliel Bradford's *Union Portraits* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916); see, especially, pp. 38, 69-70, 93.

realized. In death, he became ‘John Reynolds of Gettysburg.’¹⁵ In death, Reynolds gained immortality in the eyes of his countrymen as a Union martyr.

Eulogies for the fallen

The memorialization of Reynolds extended beyond print culture in his native Lancaster. In November 1863, at the dedication of Gettysburg National Cemetery, the renowned orator Edward Everett linked the high-religious cause of American nationalism with the memory of Reynolds and the Battle of Gettysburg. Near the climax of his dedicatory address, and in a section that bore the subtitle, “The Graves of Gettysburg—the Whole Earth is the Sepulcher of Illustrious Men” (and invoking the ancient memory of Pericles’ funeral oration at the close of the Peloponnesian War), Everett gave singular praise to the “noble Reynolds” who had “held the advancing foe at bay.” As important, and in a manner that would link Reynolds to the Union victory at Gettysburg, Everett added that Reynolds, by his forethought, had “assured ... the triumph of the two succeeding days.” The battle in which Reynolds fell had assumed, in Everett’s view, the status of a holy struggle. “God bless the Union,” he continued; the Union appeared “dearer” to Everett and his listeners because of Reynolds’s sacrifice.¹⁶

¹⁵ Lance J. Herdegen, “John F. Reynolds and the Iron Brigade,” in *Giants in Their Tall Black Hats: Essays on the Iron Brigade*, edited by Alan T. Nolan and Sharon Eggleston Vipond (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 101-112, quotation at p. 112.

¹⁶ Edward Everett, *An Oration Delivered on the Battlefield of Gettysburg (November 19, 1863) at the Consecration of the Cemetery, Prepared for the Interment of the Remains of Those Who Fell in the Battles of July 1st, 2nd, and 3rd 1863. To which is Added Interesting Reports of the Dedicatory Ceremonies; Descriptions of the Battlefield; Incidents and Details of the Battles, &c.* (New York: Baker and Godwin, 1863), 30.

In 1864, Maj. Gen. (ret.) George Brinton McClellan returned to the United States Military Academy. In later years, McClellan would remember Reynolds as a “splendid soldier” who, when killed at the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863, was the best soldier then with the Army of the Potomac. Reynolds, McClellan would recall in his memoirs, was “remarkably brave and intelligent, an honest, true gentleman.”¹⁷ But McClellan’s June 15, 1864 visit to West Point carried special significance; he was to speak at the dedication of the Battle Monument at the Academy, a tall granite structure erected near the Hudson River, that memorialized U.S. Army regulars trained at West Point—men such as Reynolds—who had perished in the War for the Union.¹⁸ The Battle Monument was covered in flags and other emblems of the American nation. An estimated crowd that exceeded three thousand was in attendance. Dignitaries included Maj. Gen. Robert Anderson, who had surrendered Fort Sumter in 1861, and New York Governor Horatio Seymour, whom McClellan would trump for the Democratic nomination in the 1864 presidential election. Gen. (ret.) Winfield Scott, whose health was on the wane, was prohibited from attending the dedication of the Battle Monument.¹⁹

After Rev. John William French, the Academy’s ethicist and chaplain (and also a contemporary of Reynolds at West Point), offered the invocation, McClellan rose to

¹⁷ George Brinton McClellan, *McClellan’s Own Story: The War for the Union, the Soldiers Who Fought It, The Civilians Who Directed It, and His Relations to It and to Them*, with an introduction and biographical sketch by William Cowper Prime (New York: Charles L. Webster and Company, 1887), 140.

¹⁸ Today, one can see Reynolds’s name inscribed on the Battle Monument, along with his rank and assignment—Colonel of the Fifth United States Infantry Regiment—in the U.S. Regular Army; the author viewed and photographed the Battle Monument at the United States Military Academy on June 7, 2016.

¹⁹ “Interesting Ceremony at West Point. Dedication of the Site for the Battle Monument. Speech of Gen. McClellan,” *New York Times*, 16 June 1864.

speak.²⁰ With eloquence, McClellan linked the wartime deaths of U.S. Army regulars to the deaths of Biblical and ancient heroes: “The poetry, the histories, the orations of antiquity, all resound with the clang of arms,” he declared. Indeed, McClellan continued, nations’ sacred texts dwelt on the subject of war more than the “gentle arts of peace.” The Hebraic Old Testament, McClellan noted, was flush with illustrations of the heroic deaths of the “Jewish patriots”; and the annals of antiquity offered the glorious example of those fallen “upon the plain at Marathon,” and “in the pass at Thermopylae.” So long as noble blood coursed through American veins, McClellan portended, patriots would draw inspiration from the martial deeds of men who inhabited, fought for, and died in ancient worlds.²¹ The deaths of West Point’s sons offered similar inspiration.

“Would that a new Demosthenes, or a second Pericles could arise and take my place to-day,” declared McClellan, “for he would find a theme worthy of his most brilliant powers.” This theme, of course, was that an unprecedented, fratricidal war in the history of nations—a war that had tested and, even as McClellan spoke, was testing the limits of republican self-government—had required the sacrifices of its noblest sons upon the altar of the Union. “God knows that David’s love for Jonathan,” McClellan eulogized, “was no more deep than mine for the tried friends of many eventful years, whose names are to be recorded upon the structure that is to rise upon this spot.”²²

²⁰ “Decease of Prof. French, of West Point,” *New York Times*, 10 July 1871; “Interesting Ceremony at West Point. Dedication of the Site for the Battle Monument. Speech of Gen. McClellan,” *New York Times*, 16 June 1864.

²¹ McClellan, *Oration at Dedication of West Point Battle Monument and Address at Lake George, 1864* (New York: C.S. Wescott and Company, 1864), 3-4, in *George Brinton McClellan Papers*, Speech, Article, and Book File, 1864-1885, Library of Congress, MSS31898, Box D6; Reel 68.

²² McClellan, *Oration at Dedication of West Point Battle Monument and Address at Lake George, 1864*, 5.

These men had fallen in a “just and righteous war” against the “infinite evils” of national “dismemberment”; their deaths occasioned “pride, sorrow, and prayer.”²³

With Reynolds and with other men of the U.S. Army, trained at West Point, and who had perished in the War for the Union McClellan claimed a fraternal bond. His task, and the task of all assembled, was to “consecrate a cenotaph, which shall remind our children’s children, of their fathers’ struggles in the great rebellion.” This memory, as McClellan made clear, was for the few, fortunate souls whose membership was the U.S. Regular Army. These Army Regulars differed in a profound way from their citizen-soldier counterparts. Their loyalty was not to any one state, but to the nation. “We have no states to look for the honors due our dead,” McClellan declared; rather, he, and they, “belong[ed] to the whole country.” Men of the Regular Army were “few in number, a small band of comrades, united by peculiar and very binding ties.” Chief among these was the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The Academy, “with her large heart,” adopted all “graduates and those appointed from civil life.” West Point was like a mother, McClellan continued, who viewed all her fallen as children. “Generals and private soldiers,” McClellan went on,

men who have cheerfully offered our all for our dear country, we stand here before this shrine, ever hereafter sacred to our dead, equals and brothers in the presence of the common death which awaits us all, perhaps on the same field and at the same hour. Such are the ties which unite us, the most endearing which exist among men; such the relations which bind us together, the closest of the sacred brotherhood of arms.²⁴

²³ McClellan, *Oration at Dedication of West Point Battle Monument and Address at Lake George, 1864*, 5.

²⁴ McClellan, *Oration at Dedication of West Point Battle Monument and Address at Lake George, 1864*, 6-7.

Thus with Reynolds and other Army Regulars McClellan felt particularly close kinship; bound to the Union, and to her laws, these men were sons of the Point, members of an elite class whose devotion to the state bore the trappings of a religion.²⁵

For Reynolds, his brother in arms, McClellan offered high though not singular praise. Reynolds, at the time of his death at Gettysburg, was in the “full vigor of manhood and intellect.” He had proven his “ability and chivalry on many a field in Mexico.” Reynolds, in the estimation of his longtime friend and former commander, was a “gallant” gentleman “of whom [his] country had much to hope had it pleased God to spare [his life].”²⁶ While McClellan’s praise for other fallen sons of West Point communicated a similar solemnity, still his praise of Reynolds is noteworthy because of the command relationship the two men shared in the Army of the Potomac to 1862. It was praise McClellan would echo in his later memoir.²⁷

Gravesite observances

The Reynolds gravesite in the Lancaster Cemetery is today overgrown; the grass stands some six inches tall in places. What is today generally accessible—one can stroll right up to the Reynolds marker—was in 1866 surrounded by cedar fence posts.²⁸ From the moment that this plot became the resting place of Gen. Reynolds on Independence Day, 1863, it became, in the eyes of local Pennsylvanians, hallowed soil. From the December

²⁵ See Michael Graziano, “America’s ‘Peculiar Children’: Authority and Christian Nationalism at Antebellum West Point,” *Religions* 8, no. 6 (January 2017): 1-12. DOI:10.3390/rel8010006.

²⁶ McClellan, *Oration at Dedication of West Point Battle Monument and Address at Lake George, 1864*, 17.

²⁷ McClellan, *McClellan’s Own Story*, 140.

²⁸ The author visited the Reynolds gravesite in the summer of 2018.

22, 1866 issue of *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, Americans of all places learned with vivid detail that, at long last, a monument to the general had finally been placed at his gravesite the previous April: "A beautiful Monument was erected to the memory of Major-General J. F. Reynolds ...," wrote the editors of the magazine,

It is inclosed [sic] in a lot, together with smaller monuments, by a fence of cedar. The Monument is built of white marble. It is sixteen feet high and four feet square at the base. Upon the sides it contains the names of ten battles—namely, FORT BROWN, MONTEREY, BUENA VISTA, ROGUE RIVER, MECHANICSVILLE, GAINES MILL, SECOND BULL RUN, FREDERICKSBURG, CHANCELLORSVILLE, and GETTYSBURG.²⁹

It was fitting that such a towering obelisk should commemorate a soldier who, in death, towered over Pennsylvanians' memories of their Civil War.

Conspicuous displays of honor to the general's memory in Pennsylvania occurred annually on Decoration Day, beginning in the 1880s and beyond, when local citizens placed flowers on the grave of Reynolds and other Civil War soldiers from the Keystone State who perished in the War for the Union. In Pennsylvania, as elsewhere in the Union, Civil War deaths demanded transcendent meaning. As historian David W. Blight has written, Decoration Days shaped the memory of the American Civil War as much as any other cultural rite.³⁰ Historians dispute the origins of Decoration Day in the North (southerners embraced their own ceremonies of commemoration). Some locate the genesis of the holiday in the South on May 1, 1865, when African Americans held services at Charleston's Race Course cemetery.³¹ Others, Caroline Janney observes, believe that Decoration Day took place for the first time in New York, and "still others

²⁹ "The Reynolds Monument," *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, 22 December 1866.

³⁰ David W. Blight, "Decoration Days: The Origins of Memorial Day in North and South," in *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, edited by Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 89.

³¹ Blight, "Decoration Days," 91.

contend that the wife of a Union general, John A. Logan, witnessed such activities in Petersburg and suggested that northern soldiers implement the practice for their own fallen.”³² Irrespective of the exact nature of its local or sectional origins, the first nationally observed Memorial Day was established in the spring of 1868, when commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, Gen. John A. Logan, issued General Order No. 11. This order, according to Janney, “called on GAR posts throughout the country to organize ceremonies on May 30 at which they might strew with flowers or otherwise decorate ‘the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion.’”³³

The Grand Army of the Republic (G. A. R.) had emerged in the post-war period as “the largest and most prominent” of veterans’ organizations, no small feat in an age that featured a range of veterans groups that commemorated the war, worked to provide professional and social opportunities for former servicemen, and even contributed to the rise of leisure culture through recreational activities for veterans and their families.³⁴ With roots in the Midwest, the Grand Army of the Republic had attracted some 240,000 members by 1868.³⁵ Veterans flocked to the Grand Army, Janney writes, “because of its goals, reflected in their motto ‘Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty.’”³⁶ In Reynolds’s native Lancaster, Post No. 84 of the Grand Army of the Republic claimed a

³² Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 98.

³³ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 99.

³⁴ Quotations and paraphrasing from Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 108; For Civil War veterans and leisure culture, see C. Ian Stevenson, “Vacationing with the Civil War: Maine’s Regimental Summer Cottages,” *Civil War History* 63, no. 2 (June 2017): 151-180.

³⁵ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 108.

³⁶ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 109-110.

committed and robust membership. Indeed, named for Reynolds's old comrade-in-arms in the Third United States Artillery Regiment from the Mexican American War, George Henry Thomas, Post No. 84 was instrumental in the celebration of Decoration Days in Lancaster, as was the post from Philadelphia that bore Reynolds's name.

For Decoration Day festivities in 1882, the weather was especially pleasant. A cool rain had dampened the dirt roads and so prepared them for the Lancaster Decoration Day parade. "Ladies and gentlemen" flocked to the local courthouse with bouquets of flowers, which were arranged for distribution upon soldiers' graves. Flags flew at half-mast. What began as a strictly local practice in time became the custom of Philadelphians, for representatives from the General John F. Reynolds Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, Post No. 71, in Philadelphia, had arrived the night before with a "very handsome floral emblem," which the *Lancaster Intelligencer* described as

A large shield of the ordinary pattern, the field of which is blue, set with thirteen white stars; the stripes are alternately white and red. Diagonally across the shield is the word "HONOR," in purple flowers. Surmounting the whole are three large stars, red, white and blue. The base on which the whole rests is white and is inscribed in purple letters, "Post 71, Gen. John F. Reynolds." It is certainly a beautiful tribute alike creditable to the patriotic impulse that suggested it and to the rare skill that designed and executed it.³⁷

At noon, the parade began, and the procession was formidable. The chief marshal marched first, trailed by aides. Then came an eighteen-man cornet band, donning "brilliant red coats and blue helmets" with gold mounts. After the band came the George H. Thomas Post, No. 84, of the G. A. R., and the veterans marched in uniform. In tow of the veterans came the sons of veterans of the great war, and these were trailed by two hearses filled with the floral arrangements to be strewn upon the graves. An empty

³⁷ "Decoration Day," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1882, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS.

carriage containing the magnificent seal and floral emblem from the John F. Reynolds Post, No. 71, of the G. A. R. followed the hearses. The procession went on, featuring more cornet bands, committee members, and members of the local fire department. Then, it arrived at the Lancaster Cemetery, where thousands more awaited the parade to participate in the principal ceremonies of flower laying and homages to the heroic dead that were central to the order of the Grand Army of the Republic.³⁸

In the years to come, Decoration Day festivities such as these became fixtures of local remembrance.³⁹ They featured little variation in the decade of the 1880s. In 1884, for instance, G. A. R. posts in Lancaster greeted the arrival of the Gen. John F. Reynolds Post, No. 71, of Philadelphia, at the train station the evening before Decoration Day. The members of the Reynolds post brought with them their handsome floral arrangement to honor the fallen General, and in this particular year, the Mayor of Philadelphia; all were treated by the Lancasterians to an elaborate dinner at the local hotel. The next day, the Memorial Day processional culminated with ceremonies officiated by the G. A. R. posts at the Lancaster Cemetery (as well as other neighboring cemeteries). At the gravesite of Reynolds, Mr. Thomas Leaborne of Philadelphia's G. A. R. Post No. 71 "delivered an address, wherein was recounted the principal events in the life of Gen. Reynolds," a tradition of summarizing the heroic deeds of the fallen general that would endure.⁴⁰

³⁸ "Decoration Day," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1882, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS.

³⁹ In 1883, the *Intelligencer* described an almost-identical scene to the one of the year before. See "Decoration Day," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1883, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS.

⁴⁰ "Memorial Day," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1884, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS.

Decoration Day observances in 1888 tracked closely with those that came before. The George H. Thomas Post Commander J. A. E. Reed relayed General Order No. 1 to the veterans of Lancaster. In the order, dated May 24, 1888, Reed channeled the desire of the G. A. R. that every member of the Post participate in Memorial Day festivities. The theme of national and fraternal loyalty permeated the program for that year's observances. Significantly, too, the day was to be observed and kept not unlike a religious holy day. "Though [Decoration Day is] legally a holiday," communicated General Order No. 1, "let it be guarded from all forms of frivolous or undignified behavior. Let it not be forgotten that our Comrades dead, were earnest, manly men, who voluntarily faced death for a cause worthy of the sacrifice." For the festivities, specified General Order No. 1, "regular G. A. R. uniforms, white gloves, canes, black neck tie, G. A. R. badge worn on left lapel of coat will be observed."⁴¹ The program for that year's Memorial Day featured a poem that graced an engraving of the G. A. R. badge worn by all members. The poem, underscoring the purpose of the holiday, read:

Scatter the floral tributes,
Over the thickening graves,
On the Sun-kissed air, unstained and fair,
Our splendid banner waves.
Freedom grows well in our Country's soil;
Behold! How it blooms and thrives—
But we must not forget that its roots were wet,
With the blood of a million lives.⁴²

Not surprisingly, this poem, and other similar expressions of patriotic and nationalistic sentiment that permeated commemorative G. A. R. literatures, emphasized themes of

⁴¹ "1888 Memorial Day Program," *Grand Army of the Republic Collection* [hereafter GARC], MG-17, Memorial Day Services, 1885-1891, Box 3, Folder 32, Lancaster County Historical Society, accessed summer 2018, LCHS.

⁴² "1888 Memorial Day Program," *GARC*, accessed summer 2018, LCHS.

fraternal loyalty, national service, Union, and liberty restored in the war. Such themes transcended the poetic verses in which they found initial expression; on Decoration and Memorial Days, these themes gave profound religious meaning to the rite of laying flowers upon gravesites, and members of the G. A. R. became guardians of rituals that became essential to American religious nationalism.

Gravesite commemorations were not limited to the Grand Army of the Republic and local Lancasterians, however. In 1888, the Pennsylvania Reserves, the unit Reynolds had commanded early in the war, hosted a reunion in Lancaster, and one of the signal events of the reunion was an oration delivered by J. Hay Brown at the gravesite of the fallen general. Sounding Biblical notes, Brown opened his oration by trumpeting the great virtues of free government, and how the American Revolution had secured liberty in the “Western World” in the “fullness of time.”⁴³ This war he considered the first of two great conflicts in all of western history. The American Revolution had determined, Brown believed, that Pennsylvania “was Freedom’s abiding place; that here her proudest temple should be reared, and here her worshippers should come.”⁴⁴ The American Civil War, in Brown’s view, had purified and made holy the Revolution that had established the temple of American liberty. From the first, Pennsylvanians—“an unequaled band of patriots,” indeed, the “sublimest” assemblage of political talent in all of human history—had played critical roles in securing the blessings of liberty for America; in his own time, declared Brown, the American Civil

⁴³ J. Hay Brown, *Oration on Maj.-Gen. John F. Reynolds, Delivered at His Grave in Lancaster Cemetery, at the Re-Union of the Penn’a Reserves, Lancaster, PA., On Tuesday, September 18th, 1888* (Lancaster: The New Era Book and Job Print, 1888), p. 3, accessed in June 2018 in the *Reynolds Family Papers*, Archives and Special Collections, Franklin & Marshall College [hereafter *RFP*].

⁴⁴ Brown, *Oration on Maj.-Gen. John F. Reynolds*, 3, *RFP*.

War “made that temple perfect and bound its worshippers together from ocean to ocean in an everlasting faith in their common country and common destiny.”⁴⁵

Pennsylvanians rightly perceived southern secession as a decisive threat to this destiny and their republican political experiment. During the War for the Union, Brown reminded listeners near the Reynolds gravesite, Pennsylvania’s soil was the only northern soil “dyed with the blood of a great battle,” and such was Pennsylvania’s resolve “that her last son and last dollar were pledged to the preservation of the Union.”⁴⁶ In Pennsylvania, the contagion of disunion had withered and died. “On our own free soil,” waxed Brown, “at Gettysburg, on that plain and on those slopes and hills of eternal glory the tidal wave of the rebellion, surging farthest in its northward course, was checked.”⁴⁷ The meaning of Brown’s remarks was unmistakable to contemporary listeners: Reynolds had perished in a holy cause for the Union.

It is unlikely, of course, that Brown’s listeners would have interpreted his reference to “our own free soil” as a plea to extend the fullness of freedom to the formerly enslaved; indeed, few would have mistaken Brown’s reference to “free soil” even in 1888 for a more racially inclusive and integrated society. As Gary Gallagher has noted of northerners who had congregated to hear President Lincoln in November 1863, and who had derived from his famous dedicatory address at the Gettysburg National Cemetery a particular interpretation of a free white man’s republic, most Americans “would have conjured images not of ending slavery but of guaranteeing and extending their own liberty and freedom, through political action and economic promise, to shape

⁴⁵ Brown, *Oration on Maj.-Gen. John F. Reynolds*, 3, *RFP*.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Oration on Maj.-Gen. John F. Reynolds*, 5, *RFP*.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Oration on Maj.-Gen. John F. Reynolds*, 5, *RFP*.

and benefit from a Union where the cards were not stacked against common people.”⁴⁸ While the United States of 1888 had changed considerably from the Union of 1863, the insistence of northerners that theirs was a war to suppress insurrection and save their political inheritance—not, on the contrary, to end slavery—remained unchanged.

In the years that followed Brown’s oration, Pennsylvanians continued to place flowers upon the grave of Reynolds in keeping with the national holiday. Newspaper coverage from the town’s most prominent outlet, the *Lancaster Intelligencer*, teems with stories of Decoration and Memorial Days. This coverage continues almost without interruption from 1889 into the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴⁹ In 1898, as the number of living veterans dwindled, public school children contributed in greater measure to decorating the graves of the fallen. In that same year, coverage in the *Lancaster Intelligencer* sounded a mixed timbre of solemnity and jingoism, lamenting the deaths of those who had fallen in defense of the Union even as it clamored for the

⁴⁸ Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 85.

⁴⁹ “Flowers for the Dead,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1889, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “Memorial Day,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1890, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “Memorial Day,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1891, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “In Honor of Heroes,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1892, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “Memorial Day,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1893, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “Tributes Paid to Heroes,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1894, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “The Heroic Dead,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1895, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “Memorial Day,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1896, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “Memorial Day,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 29 May 1897, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “Tributes to the Dead,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1899, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “Memorial Day Observed Here,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1901, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “Tributes to the Dead Paid by Old Comrades,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1902, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS; “Memorial Day,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1903, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS.

capture of Cuba.⁵⁰ Indeed, as late as 1948, and in the spirit of Decoration Day, local schoolchildren placed flowers upon the gravesite of Reynolds. This was in keeping with local Memorial Day custom, and it was especially fitting of their station as pupils at the John Fulton Reynolds Junior High School.⁵¹

“He had no superior as a corps commander in the army”: Reynolds as America’s pre-eminent Civil War soldier, myth and historical fact

In 1880, members of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, along with other dignitaries, gathered in Philadelphia to commemorate the presentation of a portrait of Gen. Reynolds to the society. The portrait, painted by a Norwegian artist who had served in the 145th New York Regiment during the Civil War, had been in the possession of William Reynolds, a brother of John Reynolds and a rear admiral in the U.S. Navy.⁵² Upon the 1876 death of William Reynolds, executors of the admiral’s estate requested that Joseph George Rosengarten, a family friend a former member of the general’s staff, present the portrait to the society. This Rosengarten did on March 8, 1880. Standing

⁵⁰ “Memorial Day” and “On to Cuba,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 30 May 1898, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS.

⁵¹ “Further Notes on the Life of Reynolds,” *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 52, no. 2 (1948): 37.

⁵² John Fulton Reynolds Scott, “John Fulton Reynolds Scott,” *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 52, no. 2 (1948): 29; “Further Notes on the Life of Reynolds,” *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 52, no. 2 (1948): 35; Historical Society of Pennsylvania, *Reynolds Memorial: Addresses Delivered Before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Upon the Occasion of the Presentation of a Portrait of Maj.-Gen. John F. Reynolds, March 8, 1880* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1880), 5; For a life sketch of William Reynolds, see Joseph G. Rosengarten, *William Reynolds, Rear-Admiral U.S.N. John Fulton Reynolds, Major-General U.S.V., Colonel Fifth U.S. Infantry. A Memoir* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1880); See, too, Horace R. Barnes, “Rear Admiral William Reynolds: A Distinguished Lancasterian,” *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 38 (1934): 61-66.

before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Rosengarten had at his back the tattered flag of the First Corps that had accompanied Reynolds at Gettysburg. Suspended beneath the portrait of Reynolds was a gold sword intended for the general from the rank and file of the Pennsylvania Reserves. It was a gift he never received.⁵³

Absent from the ceremony on that day was U.S. Maj. Gen. (ret.) Winfield Scott Hancock, the Second Army Corps commander whom Meade had dispatched to Gettysburg to lead Federal forces upon learning of Reynolds's death on July 1.⁵⁴ As George McClellan had done in 1864, Hancock in 1880 sought the Democratic nomination for President of the United States. Like McClellan, Hancock was defeated in the general election by a Republican nominee—in 1880, the Ohioan James A. Garfield.

Though he was prevented from attending the meeting, citing his travels to the West, Hancock nevertheless penned remarks that he sent to the leadership of the society, which the secretary delivered before those assembled. Hancock expressed his disappointment that he was not able to see the portrait presented, for he “knew General Reynolds intimately through a long course of years.”⁵⁵ The two men met in 1840 at West Point. Hancock remembered seeing Reynolds “a day or two” before the wing commander’s “heroic death on the battle-field of Gettysburg.” As one who well knew Reynolds’s “lineaments and the expression of his features,” Hancock would have been an astute critic of the portrait’s artistic merits, and of the quality of its subject’s

⁵³ Historical Society of Pennsylvania, *Reynolds Memorial*, 5.

⁵⁴ Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (1979; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1997), 297; Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The First Day* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 337; Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 188.

⁵⁵ Letter of General Hancock to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 4 March 1880, Governor’s Island, New York, in *Reynolds Memorial*, 92.

likeness.⁵⁶ Hancock noted, too, that Reynolds possessed, like contemporaries Meade, Sedgwick, and Thomas, but more than Hancock's other acquaintances and friendships throughout his army career, those qualities of the "model soldier resulting from the instruction of our Military Academy at West Point."⁵⁷

In the penultimate paragraph of his letter, Hancock gave expression to a view that already permeated much of Union war memory: the belief that Reynolds, as a soldier, had no superior as a soldier in the Army of the Potomac. "I may take this occasion to state," wrote Hancock, "that, in my opinion, there was no officer in the Army of the Potomac who developed a character for usefulness and ability, in the highest grades of command, superior to that of General Reynolds."⁵⁸ Hancock's letter gave rise, too, to the belief, much in vogue in the postwar years, that had Reynolds survived Gettysburg, he might have become the North's pre-eminent soldier. Hancock continued to state his opinion that had Reynolds lived, "he would most probably have attained the highest honors in that army." As evidence of this view, Hancock cited the account (which he received not as a speculative matter but as historical fact) in which Reynolds was offered command of the Army of the Potomac on the eve of the Battle of Gettysburg before George Meade. After all, wrote Hancock, Reynolds ranked Meade, and from this fact, and from Reynolds's "well-known merit," it could be "well understood" that Reynolds "was first considered when the command was in question."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Letter of General Hancock to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 4 March 1880, Governor's Island, New York, in *Reynolds Memorial*, 92.

⁵⁷ Letter of General Hancock to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 4 March 1880, Governor's Island, New York, in *Reynolds Memorial*, 92-3.

⁵⁸ Letter of General Hancock to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 4 March 1880, Governor's Island, New York, in *Reynolds Memorial*, 94.

⁵⁹ Letter of General Hancock to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 4 March 1880, Governor's Island, New York, in *Reynolds Memorial*, 94.

Indeed, the view that Reynolds was the finest soldier in the Army of the Potomac enjoyed great circulation and popularity in the post-war period. Hardly confined to the upper echelons of army command, and to such commanders as George Brinton McClellan and Winfield Scott Hancock (who, like Reynolds, were committed Democrats and political opponents of the wartime administration), it permeated the ranks of junior officers. In 1893, on the thirtieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, James Stewart, an Ohioan and former member of the Fourth U.S. Artillery, which was engaged on the morning of July 1 in the momentous battle, remembered learning of Reynolds's death. After he had reached the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Stewart learned that Reynolds had fallen. The news of Gen. Reynolds's death "was terrible to me," Stewart recollected, "as I thought he had no superior as a corps commander in the army."⁶⁰

Still another soldier under Reynolds's command, Sidney G. Cooke of the 147th New York Infantry, attached to Lysander Cutler's Brigade, could hardly contain his admiration for Reynolds. In a 1897 paper delivered before the Kansas Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, and on the subject of the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, Cooke noted that Reynolds had resolved, "with his customary decision and self-reliance," to engage the enemy.⁶¹ Cooke lamented Reynolds's death—as it was widely believed to have transpired—at the hand of a Rebel

⁶⁰ James Stewart, "Battery B Fourth United States Artillery at Gettysburg," in *Sketches of War History, 1861-1865. Papers Read Before the Ohio Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, 1890-1896*, edited by W.H. Chamberlain, in six volumes (1896; repr., Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1994), 4:184.

⁶¹ Sidney G. Cooke, "The First Day of Gettysburg," in *War Talks in Kansas: A Series of Papers Read before the Kansas Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States* (1906; repr., Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1992), 279.

sharpshooter. Then, in a manner that illustrates at once how Reynolds was endeared to soldiers under his command, and how his illustrious reputation increased in death, Cooke continued: “I have been told that the officers of the army held [Reynolds] in high esteem for his social and soldierly qualities.” He added, “I know that the ranks of the old First Corps believed in him and would have followed him anywhere he might have led. It is necessary to serve in the ranks to appreciate how the soldier is inspired by a manly, courteous, brave, and knightly commander.”⁶²

On the subject of which commander had chosen Gettysburg, and in particular, Cemetery Hill, as the ground upon which the Army of the Potomac would make its stand in Pennsylvania (a point of much dispute between Army of the Potomac veterans in the post-war years), Cooke also offered perspective.⁶³ In his attempt to rise above the rancor of partisanship, Cooke noted that “Reynolds was first there,” and that “his quick military eye would hardly have failed to observe [the strength of the position]”; absent positive evidence to the contrary, Cooke concluded, “I shall probably continue to believe ... as I did on that day, that [the selection of the Federal position] was due to [Reynolds’s] military foresight.”⁶⁴ As the twentieth century dawned, the success of Union arms at Gettysburg was remembered by many of the men who fought there as the result of Reynolds’s presence, tactical vision, and alacrity of action. This fact, and Reynolds’s

⁶² Cooke, “The First Day of Gettysburg,” 280.

⁶³ For an introduction to this debate, see Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *Three Days at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1999); and, especially, A. Wilson Greene, “From Chancellorsville to Cemetery Hill: O. O. Howard and Eleventh Corps Leadership,” in *The First Day at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership*, edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1992), 57-91.

⁶⁴ Cooke, “The First Day of Gettysburg,” 281.

reputation for “usefulness and ability” in the “highest grades of command,” gave rise to the view that Reynolds was an essential military instrument in the War for the Union.⁶⁵

One Badger who had served at Gettysburg as a lieutenant in the Sixth Wisconsin remembered Reynolds in 1908 as “one of the *soldier* Generals of the army” (original emphasis).⁶⁶ Reynolds, Haskell continued, “was a man whose soul was in his country’s work,” and this work Reynolds accomplished “with a soldier’s high honor and fidelity.”⁶⁷ Haskell remembered seeing Reynolds more than a year before Gettysburg when Reynolds’s division was engaged at the Battle of Fredericksburg. Even then, the image of Reynolds “mounted upon a superb black horse” presented Haskell with the “very beau ideal of a gallant general.”⁶⁸ Reynolds, in Haskell’s recollection, was then all over the field, issuing orders and directing the movement of troops personally, “his head thrown back and his great black eyes flashing fire.”⁶⁹ But this impression, like the others, is betrayed by its retrospection. In fact, comparatively few contemporaneous accounts of Reynolds pre-1863 exist that do more than establish Reynolds as a competent officer. Generals, so long as they lived and instilled discipline in the ranks, were often feared or resented more than loved, thus occasioning fewer instances of recorded praise from enlisted men. While Reynolds was praised as an empathetic commander, such acclaim resounded only after he had perished, his star had risen, and when the men who served under him attached increased importance to his national memory.

⁶⁵ Letter of General Hancock to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 4 March 1880, Governor’s Island, New York, in *Reynolds Memorial*, 94.

⁶⁶ Frank Aretas Haskell, *The Battle of Gettysburg* (Madison: Wisconsin History Commission and the Democrat Printing Company, 1908), 14.

⁶⁷ Haskell, *The Battle of Gettysburg*, 14.

⁶⁸ Haskell, *The Battle of Gettysburg*, 14.

⁶⁹ Haskell, *The Battle of Gettysburg*, 14.

Predictably, the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg produced recollections of Reynolds from veterans in local Lancaster newspapers that teemed with sentimentalism. One veteran recalled that when the men learned of the death of their “loved Reynolds,” their “grief and anger ... was intense.”⁷⁰ To the rank and file in his First Army Corps, and never more than in the post-war years, Reynolds was beloved.

But for all the post-war nostalgia, impressions of Reynolds recorded among Civil War soldiers that predate July 1863 are few. Those that exist offer a striking contrast to accounts that emerged following the Battle of Gettysburg. In 1862, Charles Wainwright, an artilleryist in the Army of the Potomac, noted in his September 30 diary entry that Brig. Gen. Reynolds had assumed command of the First Army Corps. Wainwright’s assessment was measured: “I have not yet seen enough of [Reynolds] to say how I like the change.” Still, Wainwright believed that Reynolds, as “an old light-battery captain,” would “know how to take care of his artillery.”⁷¹ Later that autumn, in October, Wainwright wrote approvingly of how Reynolds had snubbed newspaper correspondents (probably of the New York-based *Times* and *Tribune*, which were Republican outlets) who had wanted information about the Army of the Potomac’s movements. “I was delighted to see the General receive them coldly,” Wainwright noted, in keeping with Civil War officers’ contempt of the press.⁷² A close reading of Wainwright’s memoir reveals Reynolds as an able commander and one who possessed a

⁷⁰ “A Veteran at Gettysburg: The Vivid Personal Recollections of The Great Conflict by the Late Dr. B. F. W. Urban,” *The Lancaster Intelligencer*, 1 July 1913, microfilm, accessed in June 2018, LCHS.

⁷¹ Charles S. Wainwright, diary entry for 30 September 1862, in Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journal of Colonel Charles S. Wainwright*, edited by Allan Nevins (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1962), 108.

⁷² Wainwright, diary entry for 29 October 1862, in *A Diary of Battle*, 118-119.

firm knowledge of military science. As a corps commander, Reynolds was exacting, and one detects from the pages of Wainwright's diary an admiration for the general that seems to have blossomed as the war protracted.

By June 1863, and because of his position as chief of the corps' artillery, Wainwright had had ample time to take the measure of Reynolds's ability as commander of the First Corps. When word reached the headquarters of the First Army Corps on June 28 that Reynolds's friend, George Meade, had received orders from Washington to assume command of the Army of the Potomac, spirits lifted.⁷³ Tellingly, too, it was Meade—not Reynolds—who had been Wainwright's candidate to succeed Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker after the Battle of Chancellorsville. In his diary entry for the next day, June 29, Wainwright recorded that Reynolds had spoken in confidence of the private offer he had received to command the Army of the Potomac while in Washington. Reynolds informed Wainwright that he had declined President Lincoln's offer. Wainwright's most candid reflection in his diary entry for June 29 is therefore instructive: he was relieved that the command had passed to Meade, and not Reynolds. "For my part," he wrote, "I think we have got the best man of the two, much as I think of Reynolds. He will do better at carrying out plans than at devising them, I think."⁷⁴ If, however, Meade seemed a superior general to some contemporaries in June 1863, he ceased to be so in the eyes of Pennsylvanians in the post-war era.

⁷³ Wainwright, diary entry for 29 October 1862, in *A Diary of Battle*, 227.

⁷⁴ Wainwright, diary entry for 29 October 1862, in *A Diary of Battle*, 228.

“A true soldier, and a real man!” Schoolchildren remember Reynolds

In February 1948, as Americans celebrated a renewed sense of national pride and purpose in the wake of the Allied triumph in the Second World War, Col. John Fulton Reynolds Scott, the grandnephew and namesake of Gen. Reynolds, visited the Lancaster County Historical Society. To increase local attention in the colonel’s visit, the society organized an essay contest for the students of John Fulton Reynolds Junior High School.⁷⁵ The essay contest would also increase local knowledge of the Lancaster soldier and inspire an invigorated patriotism. It succeeded. “By this contest,” wrote members of the society in its journal, “the pupils learned much about the character of the man whose name adorns their school building.” The contest, open to seventh, eighth, and ninth graders, garnered thirty-five essay submissions. All of these were “admirably written, and gave the judges considerable trouble in choosing the most meritorious papers.” The authors of winning essays, one per grade, received a five-dollar cash prize.⁷⁶

On February 6, Col. Scott arrived at John Fulton Reynolds Junior High School. All members of the school gathered in its auditorium. In true Civil-War fashion, the assembled school sang “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” (the very creed of American religious nationalism and, if Theodore Roosevelt had had his way in 1931, perhaps the national anthem of the United States) “in a thrilling manner.”⁷⁷ The students and all gathered then participated in readings of Scripture. They saluted the flag. Then, upon

⁷⁵ “Essays on the Life of General Reynolds,” *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 52, no. 2 (1948): 37-46.

⁷⁶ “Essays on the Life of General Reynolds,” 38.

⁷⁷ “Essays on the Life of General Reynolds,” 38; For Theodore Roosevelt’s profound admiration of Julia Ward Howe’s “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” and for his efforts to effect its adoption as the national anthem of the United States of America, see Gamble, *A Fiery Gospel*, 108-111.

singing the “Star Spangled Banner,” the school principal introduced Col. John Fulton Reynolds Scott, who presented the school with a framed picture of Gen. Reynolds, and gifted the junior high school a copy of Reynolds’s signed major-general’s commission.⁷⁸

In the evening, Col. Scott returned, speaking at greater length to the public audience. In the evening, too, the winners of the essay contest received their recognition and cash prizes. The winning essays appear printed in the *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society*. While hardly authoritative on the factual record, and though they contain inconsistencies, as testimonials to the general’s popular memory these essays possess considerable relevance, for they reveal the considerable extent to which Pennsylvanians believed in Reynolds as the archetype and paragon of the American soldier in the wake of his death. As expressions of the rigor inherent to junior high school literary education in the 1940s, they are also illustrative.

After noting how the nation had enshrined the memory of Reynolds, Anne E. Arey, the seventh-grade award recipient, wrote with pride that her school could “be considered a memorial to General Reynolds, as it is now called John Fulton Reynolds Junior High School.”⁷⁹ Shirley Lutz, Anne’s schoolmate in the eighth grade, traced the familiar narrative arch of Reynolds’s military life, and concluded, modestly, that at “fully six feet in height, with dark hair and eyes,” and “very erect in carriage,” Reynolds “was a commanding figure.”⁸⁰ A more triumphal account of Reynolds’s life emerges from the essay of Paul Hoh, the ninth-grade award winner: “Ever since writing came into

⁷⁸ “Essays on the Life of General Reynolds,” 38.

⁷⁹ Anne E. Arey, “The Life of Major General John Fulton Reynolds,” in “Essays on the Life of General Reynolds,” 41.

⁸⁰ Shirley Lutz, “John F. Reynolds,” in “Essays on the Life of General Reynolds,” 44.

existence,” declared Hoh, “the literate percentage of the human race have been able to record the deeds of the great men of their day, and the rest of the literate population have been able to read about those deeds. Facts have been recorded since 4,241 B.C., but still mankind has seemed incapable of putting into black and white the inner feelings—the character and personality—of the men who have been its heroes.”⁸¹

In the tradition of Plutarch, who wrote famously that he did not want to record histories merely, but *lives*, and to capture the moral interiority of men, Hoh wrote that “the deeds of any man are but reflections of his soul and mind.”⁸² Indeed, as the son of a local minister, Hoh was probably drawn to a greater degree than his peers to Reynolds’s moral center. “I believe,” wrote Hoh, “that it is the soul of a man that is most important—that it is a hero’s spirit that makes him what he is—that no man can be truly great without a warmth of feeling within him. I feel,” he continued with eloquence remarkable for a ninth-grade writer, “that it is not the mere deed of valor, but the spirit behind the deed which makes it last in the minds of all men.” Hoh’s express purpose was to impart to readers “the character of a man so great that those he was in charge of would gladly lay down their lives at his command. I cannot say it in words,” Hoh acknowledged; “I hope you can read between the lines—grasp the impressions—to take a look inside the soul of this man, Major General John Fulton Reynolds.”⁸³

⁸¹ Paul Hoh, “The Life and Character of General John Fulton Reynolds,” in “Essays on the Life of General Reynolds,” 44.

⁸² Plutarch, *Lives*, translated by John Dryden, edited by Arthur Hugh Clough, and with an introduction by James Atlas, in two volumes (New York: Modern Library, 2001); Hoh, “The Life and Character of General John Fulton Reynolds,” 44.

⁸³ Hoh, “The Life and Character of General John Fulton Reynolds,” 44.

In keeping with his peers, Hoh offered readers a biographical sketch of Reynolds's military life that climaxed with the Battle of Gettysburg. Indeed, Hoh's prize-winning account of the general's death is nothing short of dramatic:

on the morning of July 1, 1863 ... General Reynolds rode onto a knoll overlooking the battlefield at Gettysburg. What a figure he was—six feet tall, dark hair and eyes, sitting erect in the saddle as his eyes swept the field. He was a true defender and champion of his nation's liberties!

Then, and in a manner consistent with the contemporaneous sources, Hoh drew his readers to the culmination of his battle account. "Without hesitation," Reynolds "launched his attack, leading it himself, always urging on his men, showing an unsurpassed example of courage." A sharpshooter killed Reynolds. But, Hoh noted with the kind of elegiac prose one might encounter in the writings of the journalist-turned-historian Bruce Catton, the death of Reynolds "could not stop the fury of the battle; in fact, it increased as the men, incensed by his death, rode on to victory."⁸⁴ While on this particular count Hoh's narrative lacks historical accuracy—the First Corps was decimated in the mid-morning fight of July 1—it nevertheless instills in readers an admiration of Reynolds, and leaves in their minds little doubt about the duty of nations, as Hoh seems to have understood it, to instill in their young a knowledge of heroes. The author concluded, sounding martial and triumphal notes, "I salute General Reynolds as being a great general, a true soldier, and a real man! His spectacular service and death raised General Reynolds on a pinnacle of fame for all the world to see; and the world can never forget him; he will live for all time in the hearts of all patriots!"⁸⁵ Chock full of sentimentalism, imbued with hero worship, and teeming with a heady dose of

⁸⁴ Hoh, "The Life and Character of General John Fulton Reynolds," 46.

⁸⁵ Hoh, "The Life and Character of General John Fulton Reynolds," 46.

nationalism, Hoh's account nevertheless portrays Reynolds as Pennsylvanians imagined him in the post-war years, a fact attributable to the manner of the general's death at the Battle of Gettysburg.

Taking stock: Reynolds, hero of Gettysburg, Union martyr

While Reynolds had established himself as a soldier in years that predated the American Civil War, he is remembered in the annals of American military history for his Civil War commands, and of these, most prominently for his generalship and death at the Battle of Gettysburg. Joseph Rosengarten put the matter in clearest view when he prophesied of the future of Reynolds's memory at the 1880 meeting of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, that Reynolds's "name and fame are now indissolubly bound up with the history of the operations that culminated in the battle which finally and forever freed the North from the fear even of an invasion in force."⁸⁶ Because in the eyes of many Americans the Civil War was a holy war, the death of Reynolds at Gettysburg contained profound religious meaning.

One year later, inspired, perhaps, by the display of patriotism and honor to Reynolds's memory and the unveiling of his portrait at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Joseph E. Temple pledged \$25,000 dollars for the creation of a monument to Gen. Reynolds. The monument would stand in Philadelphia's city square. In his letter to the Reynolds Monument Association, Temple expressed his wish that the equestrian monument would stand upon a pedestal that bore the inscription, "GENERAL JOHN F. REYNOLDS, PENNSYLVANIA'S HERO, Who Fell at Gettysburg,

⁸⁶ Joseph G. Rosengarten, "Address of Mr. J.G. Rosengarten," in *Reynolds Memorial*, 24.

July 1, 1863.”⁸⁷ He expressed his wish, too, that the association would be able to secure “further funds” from soldiers who served with Reynolds in the war.

“All soldiers who served with Reynolds” were invited to contribute funds to the Reynolds Monument Association, “each according to their means.”⁸⁸ Pennsylvania’s wartime governor, the Whig-turned-Republican Andrew Gregg Curtin, was elected president of the association, and he reminded all who had served with Reynolds in that same invitation that “a dollar from every man who was with Reynolds in his successive commands, from the time he left West Point until he fell at Gettysburg,” would prove more than sufficient for financing the monument. Curtin directed would-be subscribers to send their contributions to Joseph G. Rosengarten, Reynolds’s former aide and the association’s treasurer.⁸⁹ Before long, the state legislature of Pennsylvania, in which Reynolds’s father had briefly served many years before, adopted a joint resolution in support of the monument. The resolution pledged the services of the governor and the speakers of both legislative chambers and promised their cooperation with the Reynolds Monument Association; it imparted to the governor legal authority to melt as many artillery pieces as necessary from the state arsenal to supply the requisite bronze; and, it commended Temple for his “patriotic example” in perpetuating Reynolds’s memory.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Letter of Joseph E. Temple to Joseph G. Rosengarten, 1 July 1881, in Reynolds Memorial Association, *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds, Philadelphia, September 18, 1884* (Philadelphia: printed, not published, 1884), 3.

⁸⁸ A. G. Curtin, “To All Soldiers Who Served With Reynolds,” in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 4.

⁸⁹ A. G. Curtin, “To All Soldiers Who Served With Reynolds,” in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 4.

⁹⁰ Reynolds Monument Association, *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 5-6.

After much pomp and circumstance, at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 18, 1884, the Reynolds Monument Association unveiled its striking equestrian statue of Reynolds in what is now Philadelphia's City Hall Plaza. Thousands of eager spectators lined the north fronts of public buildings near Broad and Market Streets. In attendance and on the ceremonial platform were members of Reynolds's family; unable to attend was Gen. William T. Sherman, who wrote that he "mourned [Reynolds's] death as a brother." The equestrian monument, Sherman wrote, would serve to inspire the youth of the present generation, and encourage them "to imitate [Reynolds's] example."⁹¹

Local newspapers printed tributes to Reynolds on September 18. A correspondent for the Philadelphia-based *Times* noted that the unveiling of the Reynolds statue was "an event of note," for, "with the exception of the figure of Washington at Independence Hall, this will be the first public statue erected in the streets of Philadelphia." The city of Philadelphia, the correspondent continued,

has not done very much to commemorate her great men. There is no adequate statue of Penn; none of Franklin ... none of Morris, or Pastorious, or other of our early civic worthies, and heretofore there has been no public statue of any of the military heroes of the Commonwealth of either the earlier or the later period.⁹²

Thus the statue of Reynolds would "supply this neglect."⁹³ Alongside the planned future statue of George Meade, which would also be erected in the city square, the Reynolds monument would inspire remembrance of the man who had died to save the Union.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Reynolds Monument Association, *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 24; Letter of William Tecumseh Sherman to Andrew Gregg Curtin, 8 May 1884, St. Louis, Missouri, in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 21.

⁹² *The Philadelphia Times*, quoted in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 13-14.

⁹³ *The Philadelphia Times*, quoted in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 14.

⁹⁴ *The Philadelphia Times*, quoted in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 14.

The tribute in the *Philadelphia Times* to Reynolds was especially apt and representative of the myth that had emerged from Reynolds's death in the post-war years. While too substantive to repeat at length, particular excerpts bear quotation:

It is idle to speculate upon what might have been had Reynolds survived that fatal first day Gettysburg which cut short his bright career. That the story of the great battle would have been different cannot be doubted, any more than that he must have risen to higher and more responsible command.⁹⁵

The *Times* correspondent did not heap laurels upon Reynolds merely; in fact, the author acknowledged that history might have turned out quite differently had Reynolds risen to the top of the Army of the Potomac and accepted its command. But what followed in the *Times* gave greater definition to the mythology surrounding the Union martyr:

It is possible that [Reynolds] too might have been dwarfed by great responsibility, as Burnside and Hooker, and even Meade were dwarfed, though each had won a brilliant fame in subordinate command. Reynolds himself ... shrank from this thought, and declined advancement when offered him. But up to, and beyond, the full limit of the charge laid upon him he displayed all the qualities that command confidence in the fullness of his powers and that won for him the distinction of the foremost soldier of the Army of the Potomac.

Other officers were brave and daring; others had the power of command; others had skill in organization, knowledge of military science, the gift of leadership; but Reynolds had all of these, and with them a keenness and quickness of perception—the trained military instinct that foresaw the occasion and seized it as it arose—that raised him above all his brilliant compeers in that glorious army. It may be that there was an untried place which Reynolds was not big enough to fill; but he was always bigger than any place he occupied.⁹⁶

The correspondent denied the charge that Reynolds's fame derived from his premature death: "there have been men who owed all their fame to the accident of an early death,

⁹⁵ *The Philadelphia Times*, quoted in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 14.

⁹⁶ *The Philadelphia Times*, quoted in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 14.

but Reynolds had already won his fame, and all the posthumous honors that we can heap upon him we may feel sure that he deserves.”⁹⁷

Today, the statue is not well known, and one historian of art has observed that such heroes as Reynolds who “were celebrated in their own time have been all but forgotten” in Philadelphia’s public square.⁹⁸ In its time, however, the statue of Reynolds “[did] honor to the city and Commonwealth that [could claim] him as their own.”⁹⁹ The statue commemorated more than martial glory. It told, continued the correspondent for the Philadelphia-based *Times*, “of a life of courage, endurance and obedience; of large powers consecrated to duty and patriotism; of heroic daring and entire sacrifice—a life cheerfully laid down for country and mankind.”¹⁰⁰

In her scrapbook, Eleanor Reynolds collected numerous newspaper clippings, letters, presidential invitations, and even legislative minutes that testified to the life and death of her brother, the hero of Gettysburg. Many of these concerned the dedicatory addresses and speeches delivered at various Reynolds monuments in Pennsylvania. She collected, too, poetry inspired by the memory of her brother that ran in national outlets. In death, Reynolds had assumed the status of a national hero whose valor and virtue were gloried far above the power of any living American to add or detract. Featured prominently in the Reynolds scrapbook—it occupies a full page—is the engraving from *Harper’s Weekly Magazine* that commemorated the national day of Thanksgiving in

⁹⁷ *The Philadelphia Times*, quoted in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 14-15.

⁹⁸ Penny Balkin Bach, *Public Art in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 44.

⁹⁹ *The Philadelphia Times*, quoted in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 15.

¹⁰⁰ *The Philadelphia Times*, quoted in *Unveiling of the Statue of General John F. Reynolds*, 15.

November 1863. Dated December 5, 1863, the engraving doubtless possessed profound meaning for Eleanor Reynolds and her family. In the engraving, the goddess and very personification of American liberty, Columbia, kneels in prayer, her hands folded, and her eyes lifted toward heaven. Before her is the “Altar of the Union.”¹⁰¹

Nestled within the scrapbook on a page not far from the *Harper’s Weekly Magazine* cutout is the clipping of an unidentified hymn. Entitled “Give Thanks, all ye People,” the hymn tells in Biblical verse of how the judgments of the Lord had saved the Union. The hymnist makes no mention of Reynolds. But the message of the psalm of praise, its inclusion in the scrapbook, and its proximity in the bound volume to the rendering of the “The Union Altar” all suggest that Eleanor well understood—and surely felt, much as the bereaved across the heartland of the Union would have felt at the loss of their loved ones—the connection between her brother’s national service, his death, and the symbolism of America’s new birth of freedom.

The hymn bears quoting in full:

“Give Thanks, all ye People.”

1. Give thanks, all ye people, give thanks to the Lord,
Alleluias of freedom, with joyful accord:
Let the East and the West, North and South roll along,
Sea, mountain, and prairie, one thanksgiving song.

Chorus after each verse.

Give thanks, all ye people, give thanks to the Lord,
Alleluias of freedom, with joyful accord.

2. For the sunshine and rainfall, enriching again
Our acres in myriads, with treasures of grain;
For the Earth still unloading her manifold wealth,
For the Skies beaming vigor, the Winds breathing health:
Give thanks—

¹⁰¹ “The Union Altar,” *Harper’s Weekly Magazine*, 5 December 1863, Eleanor Reynolds Scrapbook, *RFP*.

3. For the Nation's wide table, o'erflowingly spread,
Where the many have feasted, and all have been fed,
With no bondage their God-given rights to enthrall,
But Liberty guarded by Justice for all:
Give thanks—
4. In the realms of the Anvil, the Loom, and the Plow,
Whose the mines and the fields, to Him gratefully bow:
His the flocks and the herds, sing ye hill-sides and vales;
On His Ocean domains chant His Name with the gales.
Give thanks—
5. Of commerce and traffic, ye princes behold
Your riches from Him Whose the silver and gold.
Happier children of Labor, true lords of the soil,
Bless the Great Master-Workman, who blesseth your toil.
Give thanks—
6. Brave men of our forces, Life-guard of our coasts,
To your Leader be loyal, Jehovah of Hosts:
Glow the Stripes and the Stars aye with victory bright,
Reflecting His glory—He Crowneth the Right.
Give thanks—
7. Nor shall ye through our borders, ye stricken of heart,
Only wailing your dead in the joy have no part:
God's solace be yours, and for you there shall flow
All that honor and sympathy's gifts can bestow.
Give thanks—
8. In the Domes of Messiah, ye worshipping throngs,
Solemn litanies mingle with jubilant songs;
The Ruler of Nations beseeching to spare,
And our Empire still keep the Elect of His care.
Give thanks—
9. Our guilt and transgressions remember no more;
Peace, Lord! Righteous Peace, of Thy gift we implore
And the Banner of Union, restored by Thy Hand,
Be the Banner of Freedom o'er All in the Land.

*And the Banner of Union, restored by Thy
Hand / Be the Banner of Freedom o'er All in
the Land (emphasis added)
Give thanks.¹⁰²*

¹⁰² "Give Thanks, All Ye People," in Eleanor Reynolds Scrapbook, *RFP*.

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GNMP—Gettysburg National Military Park Library and Research Center, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

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VITAE

Mitchell George Klingenberg was born on May 25, 1988, in Holland, Michigan. He is the son of Randal and Jane Klingenberg. In 2006, Mitchell received his diploma from Hamilton High School in Hamilton, Michigan. He graduated *cum laude* from Hillsdale College in 2010, having studied German and history. Mitchell received his M.A. in United States History from Texas Christian University in 2012, and his Ph.D. in United States History from Texas Christian University in 2020.

The recipient of numerous fellowships and awards, including the Gen. and Mrs. Matthew B. Ridgway Military History Research Grant from the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Mitchell is additionally the author of peer-reviewed essays and articles that have appeared in the pages of *Connecticut History* (now the *Connecticut History Review*), the *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, *Civil War History*, the *Gettysburg Magazine*, and *American Nineteenth Century History*. He holds professional memberships in the Southern Historical Association, the Society of Civil War Historians, and the Society for Military History.

In February 2020, Mitchell joined the faculty of the U.S. Army War College as Postdoctoral Fellow and Instructor in the Department of Military Strategy, Planning and Operations in the School of Strategic Landpower. Previously, he served as Lecturer of History at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, and as Instructor of History in the Upper School at Trinity Valley School in Fort Worth, Texas.

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ABSTRACT

JOHN FULTON REYNOLDS AND HIS AGE: POLITICS, RELIGION, AND GENERALSHIP IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA

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This doctoral thesis is the first significant work to examine the U.S. Army life of U.S. Major General of Volunteers John Fulton Reynolds in more than six decades. In its assessment of army culture and professionalization, leadership and command, Civil War-era politics and religion, and Civil War memory studies, this paper integrates elements of the so-called “old” and “new” military histories, shedding new light on the fabled Pennsylvanian who brought on the momentous Battle of Gettysburg in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on July 1, 1863.

Of American officers in the antebellum- and Civil War-era armies Reynolds was uncommon. Twice brevetted in Mexico, Reynolds ranked two grades above many of his peers on the eve of the Civil War, an era in which advancement in a small professional army was a rare feat. Reynolds served as commandant of cadets at the United States Military Academy through Secession Winter. As a commander in the Civil War, Reynolds was thoroughly competent, and probably better. Still, his service in the Civil War has earned him great—and perhaps excessive—acclaim. This work concludes that, because of the very nature of his death, and because of the religious meaning and symbolism Americans divined from their fratricidal conflict, Reynolds emerged as a more consequential figure in the aftermath of the Civil War than in life.