

The map is from Cornelia B. Rose, Jr., "Civil War Forts in Arlington," *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, vol.2, no. 4, October 1960, pp. 14, 16. The site of Fort Richardson marks the approximate location of Camp Seward.

## CAMP SEWARD ON ARLINGTON HEIGHTS: A YANKEE REGIMENT'S FIRST STOP IN DIXIE

By

Mark H. Dunkelman

Dixie Land! For many an excited Yankee, his first steps in the Confederate States of America, on the sacred soil of Virginia, were in Arlington. From the day after Virginia seceded in 1861, when Union soldiers crossed the Potomac without opposition and occupied positions on the Old Dominion shore, until the end of the war, when the great flow of Union troops finally reversed direction, Arlington was the first stop in the South for tens of thousands of Northern volunteers. Many newly raised Yankee regiments traveled to Washington via railroad, and from the foot of Maryland Avenue in the capital the soldiers were funneled to Virginia across the Long Bridge, aptly named at a mile in length. On the southern side they finally reached their long-anticipated destination and got their first look at Dixie from Arlington Heights.

What did they find when they got there? What did they think about Arlington, and what were their experiences there? Those questions are best answered by the soldiers themselves. A close study of a typical Union regiment, the 154th New York Volunteer Infantry, yields some answers. Letters and diaries written by a score of members of the regiment while they were briefly in camp at Arlington have been located, and they provide a vivid picture of what the neophyte soldiers saw and did during their stay there and how they felt about it.

They were western New Yorkers, approximately 930 of them, and although a handful had been mariners or traveled in the West, most of them had never been so far from home before. Home was in Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties, and for 80 percent of the men, home was a farm. About half of them were natives of the two counties, the sons or grandsons of pioneer settlers of the region, but many of them had been born elsewhere, often in central New York, and had moved west with their parents as children. By the time of their young adulthood — they averaged about 26 years of age — New York State's southwestern tier was well settled. Cleared farmsteads dotted the wooded landscape, connected to numerous villages by a web of dirt roads, and the Erie Railroad traversed both counties on a steady downgrade from the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains in Cattaraugus to the shore of Lake Erie in Chautauqua.

The men had been full-fledged soldiers for scarcely a week. The 154th

New York was recruited in response to Abraham Lincoln's call for 300,000 three-year volunteers in the summer of 1862. The men rendezvoused at Camp James M. Brown (named for a martyred Union officer) in Jamestown, New York, at the eastern end of Chautauqua Lake. Eight of the companies were raised in Cattaraugus County, the other two in Chautauqua County, and as the recruits gradually assembled at Camp Brown during July and August they were housed in barracks constructed on a fairgrounds. On September 24–26 the regiment was mustered into the service of the United States, and on the afternoon of September 29, after an emotional goodbye to loved ones and friends, the men boarded a 23-car train and left for the seat of war, armed with a flag, a Bible per soul, and \$100 worth of fruit, the gifts of grateful citizens.

It was a memorable trip. The first morning, September 30, the train stopped at Elmira, and the men debarked briefly and received their Enfield rifled muskets and accouterments. Instead of the comfortable, upholstered passenger cars they had traveled in from Jamestown, the soldiers boarded ordinary box-cars for the rest of the journey. Winding its way south through Pennsylvania, the train made an evening supper stop in Williamsport and continued over the mountains, passing through occasional tunnels. All along the way the New Yorkers marveled at the new sights. On the morning of October 1 they passed through Harrisburg, crossed the Susquehanna River, made a brief stop in York, and entered Maryland. In Baltimore the regiment marched through the city to a soldiers' relief agency and had a noontime meal. After a frustrating and lengthy delay, that night they once more got under way and proceeded at a crawl to Washington. The engineer was worried that bushwhackers might have damaged the tracks, and it took all night to make the short trip to the capital. After arriving on the morning of October 2, the men were issued rations of wormy hardtack and bacon, which most of them refused to eat. Then they lounged around until 5 p.m., when they loaded their knapsacks on wagons and marched over the Long Bridge into Virginia.<sup>1</sup>

After a tramp of about seven miles, the weary soldiers bivouacked for the night at Camp Seward on Arlington Heights at about 8 p.m. "A tired set of fellows you never saw," claimed Private James D. Emmons of Company F, and First Lieutenant John C. Griswold of the same company admitted, "We was all pretty well tuckered out." That evening Corporal Newell Burch of Company E grumbled in his diary, "Will have to lay on the ground tonight" — the men had no tents, and most of them had no rations. "We spread a blanket on the hard bare ground and [another] one over us," Lieutenant Griswold wrote. "I presume the same number of men never slept sounder than we [did], for we had been three nights in succession on the cars and the two last was crowded about two deep in freight and cattle cars." A tired and hungry

Private Thomas R. Aldrich of Company B thought, "We could sleep anywhere," and Private Andrew D. Blood of Company A declared, "I slept as sound as though I had laid in bed in my father's house."<sup>2</sup>

The next day, October 3, the 154th New York settled in. Their camp, named after Secretary of State William H. Seward, was on high ground about half-way between the Toll Gate and Hunter's Chapel and south of the Columbia Turnpike. Across a valley on a hill was Fort Richardson, one of many fortifications forming a circle around Washington, bristling with cut brush and cannons and marked by a flag flying from a towering pole. (Today, the well-preserved parapets of Fort Richardson surround the ninth green of the golf course at the Army Navy Country Club, off 17th Street, South, and South Glebe Road in Arlington.) That first morning the men woke up wet from a heavy dew. During the day they received rations, and that evening they were issued tents. On October 4, the regiment received its "furniture," as James Emmons called their knives, forks, spoons, tin cups, and cooking pans.<sup>3</sup>

For over a week, the men of the 154th New York got acquainted with soldiering at Camp Seward. The monotonous military routines were interrupted on a couple of noteworthy occasions. On October 6, the 154th marched to Washington and was reviewed along with three other regiments by Major General Silas Casey, who commanded the provisional forces in the Washington defenses. The general did not impress Private William Charles of Company F. "I should think that he was too old altogether to take charge of anything on a battlefield," Charles wrote. (Casey was 55 years old.) Charles recorded on October 8, "William H. Seward paid us a visit today," and he noted that the secretary too was "a very old looking man."<sup>4</sup>

From the day they arrived on Arlington Heights until the day they left, the men described the place in letters to loved ones back home. Universally, they mentioned the magnificent view from their camp of the broad Potomac, the Long Bridge, and the city of Washington. "All I will stop to say," James Emmons wrote to his sister, "is that we are situated on the most pleasant place on the heights." Lieutenant Griswold echoed the comment. "The prospect here," he wrote, "is very pleasant."<sup>5</sup>

A noteworthy Washington landmark was the unfinished Capitol. "We can see the Capitol very plainly from here," wrote Private John N. Porter of Company H. "It is a splendid building." Lieutenant Griswold offered more details. "The Capitol buildings are unfinished. The dome is not yet finished and those massive pillars in front not yet put up. A large number of men are at work about the building. The yards about the Capitol look like an immense marble factory." The officer also noted the stump of the unfinished Washington Monument and declared it "the principal object in view." Private Oscar

Wilber of Company G told his uncle, "We can see Washington city and old Abe Lincoln's house very plain." Wilber was impressed with the Executive Mansion. "Old Abe has got a very nice house," he thought. Private Ira Wood of Company A mentioned the shipping on the Potomac, and several men remarked on the Long Bridge. Private Barzilla Merrill of Company K noted the bridge had "a place fixed in it with a swing for vessels to pass," and Tom Aldrich enthused to his mother, "You ought to see the Long Bridge across the river at Washington. It is about a mile long and is a splendid thing."<sup>6</sup>

The Virginia side of the river presented a vastly different but equally awesome sight. "As far as the eye can reach," Tom Aldrich wrote, "there is nothing to be seen but the white tents of soldiers, and there is lots of forts in sight." Private George W. Newcomb of Company K wrote to his wife Ellen, "Well Ell, things look like war here. There is some 100,000 men camped here on about four miles square." "Right in sight of where I am writing," observed James Emmons, "there is four forts and a good number of breastworks." The surgeon of the 154th, Henry Van Aernam, elaborated on the defenses after mentioning the many forts. "Stretching along from fort to fort are strong rifle pits and entrenchments and stockades. Within that circle of forts and rifle pits the *new* recruits are encamped. At present there are as many as 100,000 or more, while just outside of the forts and rifle pits the old, battered and scarred veterans who have been in the storm of all the horrible and bloody battles are encamped." The well-manned and extensive defenses were reassuring to Private James D. Quilliam of Company E. "We are in no more danger of the Rebels here than at home," he declared, "for there are forts and earthen breastworks here extending for miles, which were built to defend Washington in the face of the enemy, and they know better than to come back."<sup>7</sup>

Some of the men wanted to visit the strongholds. "We tried to go in some of the forts but they would not let us in," reported Private Marcellus W. Darling of Company K. Oscar Wilber had a similar experience. "We can see the forts from the camp," he wrote. "I have been up to one of them but they would not let me in, only around the outside. It is a strong place. There is some cannon there that a man can crawl into." Marc Darling got his first look at the enemy during his tour of the defenses. "I have seen some Rebel prisoners," he wrote. "They looked like dogs to me! They looked mean you might believe, standing in a prison under guns."<sup>8</sup>

Although Camp Seward was a mile and a half from Arlington House, Confederate General Robert E. Lee's white-pillared mansion, it was rumored that the men were camped on Lee's land. So declared Surgeon Van Aernam and Privates James Emmons and Barzilla Merrill. While Emmons described the Lee property as a plantation, Merrill called it a farm — "or what was once a

farm," before the Yankee occupation brought desolation to it. Arlington House, however, still stood in stately splendor, Merrill noted. "I have seen a nice white house they say is his [General Lee's] house," he wrote.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the men commented on the widespread desolation of the Arlington countryside caused by the vast occupying army. "I would like to draw you a picture of how it looks here," Barzilla Merrill wrote to his wife, "but I can't. But I will sum it up by saying desolation and ruin. There seems to be plenty of men, guns, cannon, music, horses, wagons, and mules and tents in sight, which is about all that can be seen.... The fences are gone and the country around here is all stumped over and trod down.... Such is a short sketch of the place where I now live. Ain't it pleasant?" Tom Aldrich noted, "This is a hard looking country, I can tell you. There is nothing left here, not a fence nor hardly a house." George Newcomb agreed. "It is a sad looking country about here," he wrote. "The timber [is] all cut down and the land is growing up to brush." Oscar Wilber observed, "Where we are the farms look very desolate. Nothing has been raised on them since the war. I guess it is cut up very bad with rifle pits." William Charles agreed with that assessment but also criticized the local inhabitants. "This is the most barren looking country I ever saw," he declared. "War has made sad work with it. But they do not cultivate their land here as we do there." Barzilla Merrill also chided the Virginians. "The land don't look as I expected," he wrote. "It is rough here, and the Virginia folks are some time behind so far as the customs are concerned. They appear some[what] like the Dutch to [his home town of] Dayton." Merrill based his observations on the few families that had not left the area. "I haven't seen any plantations yet," he observed, "nor where anything grew the past summer."<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding the grim landscape, the men enjoyed sightseeing. "I and Edgar [Shannon] and [William H.] Bill Casten [both privates of Company B] went out the other day to see what we could see," recorded Marc Darling. "We went over to the bank of the river and saw the boats pass and repass. Then we went [al]most down to Alexandria ... [and to] Fairfax Seminary." Andrew Blood visited the seminary and Falls Church on separate occasions. He and several comrades from Company A devised a sly way to fool the guards without having a pass. They formed in two lines, marched up to the guard, and told him they were after a couple of men who had left the camp without a pass!<sup>11</sup>

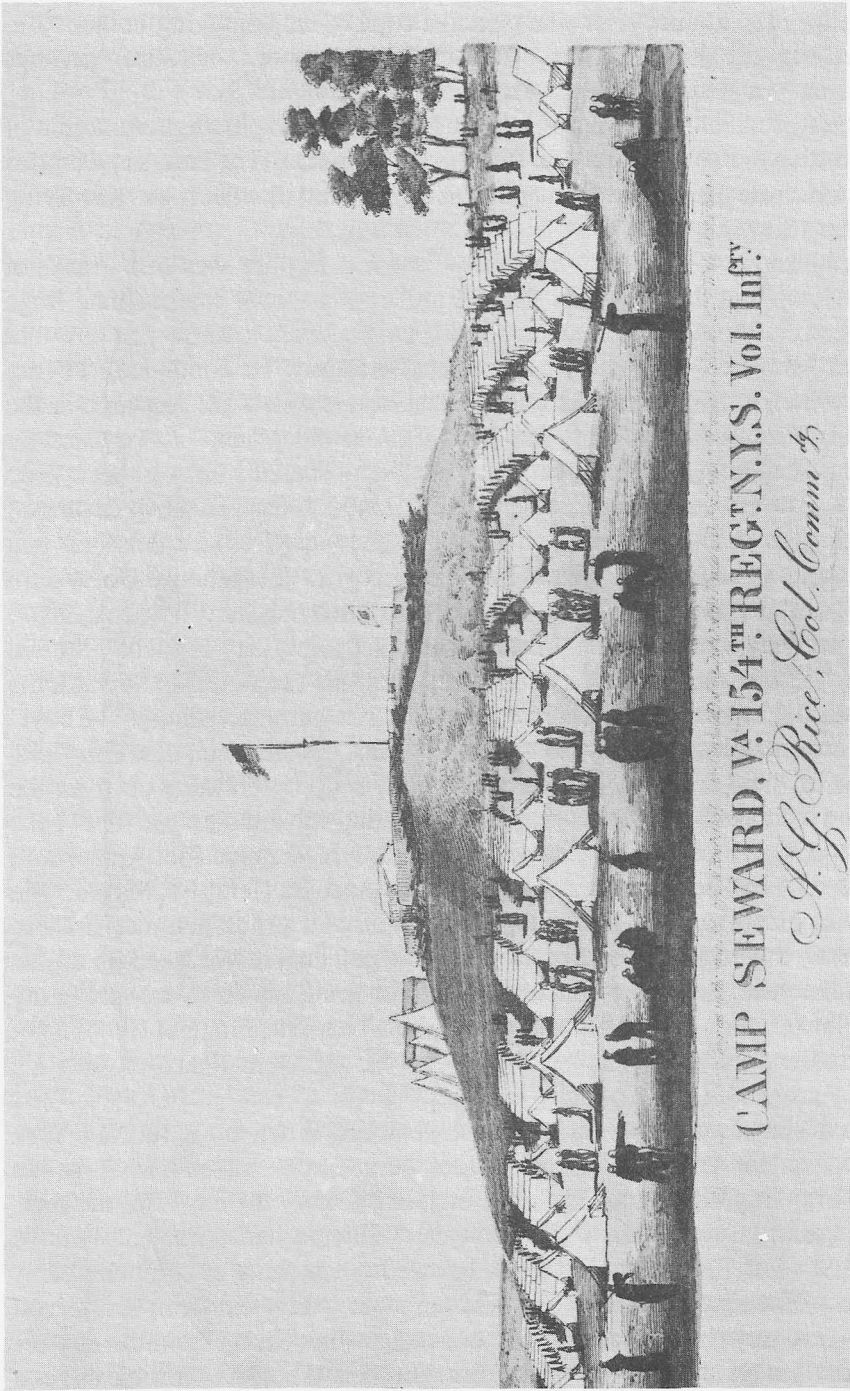
The Northerners tried to adjust to Virginia's climate. "The weather has been warm, uncomfortably so during the day," wrote Lieutenant Griswold, and George Newcomb wrote to his wife, "Well Ell, it is warm enough here today to go without clothes." Some of the men built a bower of oak brush, Newcomb

noted, under which “it is quite comfortable to lay around.” The nights, he noted, were quite cool, with very heavy dews. But the morning dampness soon burned off. “It is very dry and windy,” wrote Barzilla Merrill, causing “a perfect gale of dust.” Marc Darling complained, “The dust flies so it gets everything all dirt[y] and dirt[ier].” Finally, on the night of October 10, a rain shower settled the dust and cooled the temperature — and then the men were chilled. The following morning, Corporal George A. Taylor of Company F wore his overcoat to warm himself while he wrote a letter.<sup>12</sup>

Writing letters to the homefolk was a very popular pastime with the soldiers, often done under annoying conditions. “It is [a] rather hard place to write,” commented Private Henry Cunningham of Company K, “for we have to sit on the ground and lay our knapsack on our lap [for a makeshift desk].” Private Harvey Earl of Company H apologized in a letter to his brother, “This is badly scrawled up.” Ira Wood continued a deferred letter, “I have gone out to a Negro’s house to write the rest of my letter. If you can read this you will do well. I can’t write on my knees very [well]. I tremble so, I am so warm, with my coat off and my sleeves rolled up.” Marc Darling noted another hindrance to letter writing — his brother Delos Darling and their tentmate James Monroe Carpenter, both privates of Company K like Marc. “I cannot write much for Delos and Monroe are scuffling so much here in our tent,” he wrote. “I have no convenience to write with a pen and ink,” he apologized, and “the boys carry on so much.”<sup>13</sup>

Some of the men wrote home on special stationery with a standard woodcut of the United States Capitol, customized with a printed heading, “Headquarters 154th Reg’t N. York Vols., Col. A. G. Rice.” (Colonel Addison G. Rice, a Cattaraugus County lawyer and politician with no military experience, raised the 154th with the understanding he would transport it to the front and turn over the command to a veteran officer from the county.) Others wrote on stationery headed with a fine engraving of Camp Seward itself, and still others sent home that engraving in a hand-tinted version suitable for framing.

The Camp Seward engraving was produced by an enterprising Philadelphia firm, L. N. Rosenthal, as part of a series depicting regimental camps in the Washington defenses. Sergeant John W. Badgero of Company K was one who wrote home on the stationery. “I send you this picture of our camp not on account of its worth,” he wrote to his son, “but that you may know that your father thinks very often of you although I am a great many miles from you.... I have marked the tent with an X that [Private] George Bailey and I sleep in.” Private Devillo Wheeler of Company I sent a Rosenthal engraving home to his father with notations marking Fort Richardson and his company street, and an inscription on the back that read, “Old Allegany [his hometown] is the



CAMP SEWARD, VA 154<sup>TH</sup> REG<sup>T</sup> N.Y.S. Vol. Infy  
*A. G. Rice, Col. Comm<sup>d</sup>*

Camp Seward, Arlington Heights, Virginia, as depicted in the 1862 engraving by L.N. Rosenthal of Philadelphia. *Library of Congress.*



place for me.” John Porter also mailed a copy of the engraving home. “Enclosed I send Fannie a picture of our camp,” he wrote to his sister, perhaps referring to a niece. “Give my love to her.”<sup>14</sup>

The Rosenthal engraving provides a remarkable graphic representation of the 154th New York’s Arlington Heights encampment. The letters and diaries the men wrote there invite us into the picture and tell us what it was like living at Camp Seward.

“You know something [about] how *rough* camp life was in barracks at Jamestown, but that was only the beginning — a sort of intermediate stage between civilized life and real camp life. Do you want to know just how tent life is?” So wrote Surgeon Van Aernam to his family. He continued, “I being one of the field officers have a tent 9 feet square and 4 1/2 feet high at the eaves. It is, in fact, a little cloth house.” Four other men — two assistant surgeons, the hospital steward and a helper — shared Van Aernam’s little house. The enlisted men occupied smaller tents. Barzilla Merrill described his quarters to his two young children. “Nancy and Irving, I must tell you what kind of house I live in and how I came by it. It is a house Uncle Sam gave us. It is about 6 by 12 feet. It looks very much like snow houses that you have seen the school children make. It stands in a big city of such.” Merrill shared his quarters with three tentmates. After a week at Camp Seward, the soldiers began to make improvements in their living arrangements. “The boys’ tents are rather low, being what they call fly tents,” wrote Lieutenant Griswold. “Most of them are at work today raising them up by building up from the ground a little with boards or poles and putting the tents on the top.” Like Surgeon Van Aernam, Lieutenant Griswold occupied a nine-foot-square wall tent, but he had only one tentmate, Second Lieutenant Henry W. Myers. The captain of Company F, Thomas Donnelly, had a wall tent all to himself. Lieutenant Griswold described his sleeping arrangements. “We fixed up a pole bedstead, with poles for a cord and bushes for straw, on which we spread my bed blanket, for a bed. The bushes feel rather coarse at first, but [I] soon got used to them.” The men bathed in the Potomac and washed their clothes in a nearby creek.<sup>15</sup>

Novel shelter was accompanied by novel food. When the 154th New York first arrived on Arlington Heights, rations were scarce. “Live on what we can get, or nothing,” grumbled Newell Burch in his diary the day after the regiment reached Camp Seward. The same day William Charles wrote, “We have suffered some for the want of food, but we have nothing to complain of. A *Negro* woman gave me some rice and molasses today, and I can assure you that I was very thankful for it. But our food will come up from the city tonight. Then we shall have enough.” Barzilla Merrill noted, “We have enough

to eat when we can get it, but there is so many to serve that we don't get it very regular." He added, however, "There is a great deal wasted every day." Later in the 154th's stay, Lieutenant Griswold wrote, "The rations are now drawn with more regularity. They got soft bread instead of hardtack, beef or pork, beans or rice, coffee or tea, sugar with coffee, vinegar and salt." An unidentified member of Company K indicated some difficulties the men had regarding their rations. "I wish you could see us when we are trying to get our meals," he noted, citing the lack of utensils to cook with, and he added they had "nothing but the raw material without any spicing." He joked about worm-ridden rations, "Our meat we sometimes chain in order to keep it from running away." The bread he judged as quite good — "that's the only article that's decent." Sometimes soldiers felt queasy after eating their rations. "I ate some salt beef for dinner and it did not set very well on my stomach," Corporal George Taylor wrote, "but a good cup of strong tea and a slice of good dry toast has set me all right again."<sup>16</sup>

If they could, the men augmented their rations with special treats bought from sutlers. On his visit to Falls Church, Andrew Blood and some friends enjoyed "all the pie, beer and cigars that we wish for." Marc Darling wrote that while returning from a visit to Fairfax Seminary, "We came back where there were three Negroes making cider. We bought two pints for five cents a pint." Then, revealing the condescending prejudice that many Northern soldiers harbored, he added, "It tasted a little like old Cattaraugus cider, but it was made [by] Negroes."<sup>17</sup>

Poor rations were frequently washed down with poor water. "A few of the boys were rather unwell this morning," Lieutenant Griswold noted on the first full day at Camp Seward, "owing, I think, to the water they drank last night, as they were very thirsty when they got here, and it being dark they got some water that was very poor." Barzilla Merrill declared to his wife, "I would like to call to our house a while and have one drink of water out of our well. They don't have such water down here by no means."<sup>18</sup>

Poor water, poor rations, and poor sanitary conditions among over 900 men crowded together in an unaccustomed climate led to predicable results. Every morning at 8 a.m. the drum corps played the surgeon's call, and orderly sergeants from each company herded their sick to Surgeon Van Aernam for examinations. "You ought to see the line they form before his tent in the morning," Corporal George Taylor declared. "There is no company in the regiment that can show as many men as his list in the morn."<sup>19</sup>

Dysentery and diarrhea were the main complaints. William Charles and Henry Cunningham offered contradictory estimates of the prevalence of sickness in the regiment. "The boys are all pretty well," Charles wrote, "but some

of them are troubled with the bowel complaint." He himself complained of a bellyache. Cunningham declared, "I am well but half of the boys is sick, but not very dangerous." His unidentified friend in Company K wrote that he was sick with "chill fever," a severe cold, and "the cursed disease diarrhea." Lieutenant Griswold recorded, "I had a violent attack of camp sickness [diarrhea], which is prevailing to a considerable extent amongst the soldiers. I was very sick a few hours until the surgeon gave me a dose that relieved me. It left me rather weak, but [I] am getting better so that today I am feeling quite well." He was pleased to note, "The night I was sick the boys took some hay from the teams belonging to our regiment and put [it] into our beds, which made it very comfortable. (I think the boys will take good care of me when necessary.)"<sup>20</sup>

Men offered opinions of the reason for the sickness. Referring to his comrades of Company K, Marc Darling wrote, "Some of them are a little sick now and then, which we must expect of course allowing to the change of climate." Corporal George Taylor had a different diagnosis. "We have quite a large number among the sick list, most of them with dysentery and other bowel complaints, the greater part of which is caused by over indulgence. You may wonder how this can be, but it comes this way. The men do not get their provisions as regular nor in such proportions and kinds as they are in the habit of getting at home, and they get tired of it and go get provisions of their own and eat until they are sick." He recounted how a soldier in a nearby regiment had died after eating a pie purchased from a sutler. "The probability is that if he had eaten from the provision that was furnished, he would be alive and well," Taylor opined.<sup>21</sup>

Communicable diseases began to invade the ranks of the regiment. "I have had rather a dismal time coming down here, and after I got here likewise," Marc Darling wrote. "I caught cold with my mumps and underwent a good deal of pain." George Newcomb related that two members of Company K were in the regimental hospital with mumps. A variety of other ailments received the attention of the surgeons. Marc Darling noted of his brother, "Delos had a tooth pulled yesterday, which he said was a jaw-breaker."<sup>22</sup>

There was one sickness the surgeons could not treat. "Some of the boys are homesick," Marc Darling wrote, "but they will get over that soon. I am not, I can say." Other soldiers admitted otherwise. "I am not homesick yet," John Porter declared, "but if I *was* at home now, I should not be here at the same time." In a poignant passage, the thoughts of William Charles turned to his young son. "I hope little Tommy will not forget his father," he wrote, "for I think there never was a father that loved his child as I do him. It is only the Almighty Himself that knows how hard it was for me to part with him. Oh

my God, be Thou his protector.” Ira Wood observed, “There is some boys that is sick of it. One told me that he would give 100 dollars to be at home. But I told him that he must not feel so for he could not go home. There is no way to get away.”<sup>23</sup> Corporal George Taylor thoughtfully analyzed the reasons he missed home in a letter to his wife Ellen.

You want me to write how I feel and whether I am contented or not. I must say that I am homesick .... I came here expecting to stay as long as was necessary and intended to do my duty here, and as long as I have my health and can do my duty I do not expect to be discontented, but at the same time you will know it is not home. There are not the comforts nor the society of our home and families. We try and take it as agreeable as the circumstances will permit and are generally lively and partly happy. We are good companions and we could get [along] anywhere, but at the same time there is much going on in camp that is not intended to improve the morals nor the manners or the mind, and on the other hand there is a certain discipline that has to be observed which should have a good effect upon men and will upon some. Others will only be led to the other extreme when released from the restraint imposed upon them. I don't know yet how it will operate upon me, but I mean to avoid as much as possible all that which I would avoid at home, and cultivate a familiarity with what little good there is to be found in camp.<sup>24</sup>

While the men struggled to adapt to their new lives, the business of learning to be soldiers proceeded relentlessly. Lieutenant Griswold detailed the schedule. “Our daily routine of duties are about as follows. Fall in line for roll call at 5 A.M. 2 — Slick up the tents. 3 — Get breakfast. 4 — squad drill. 5 — Officer drill. 6 — Company drill, and next dinner. In the afternoon, battalion drill and dress parade .... Evening: Drill, dress parade and supper.” Progress was slow. “[I] will admit we have not got fairly settled,” wrote James Emmons, and Lieutenant Griswold observed, “Everything connected with camp life is new to us, and it takes us more time to get through with its daily routine than it would if we were used to it.” But after drilling several days for six hours a day, John Porter bragged, “I have learned to be quite a soldier.”<sup>25</sup>

Thoughts of the fledgling soldiers turned to the future, and to battlefields yet unnamed. Some men made flippant comments about the prospect of combat. “Tell Fannie that I have not scalped a Rebel yet, but as soon as I do I will send her a lock of his hair,” wrote John Porter. “There is a prospect of our having

some fun before long,” declared Corporal Amos Humiston of Company C. “The sooner the better.” Other men had more sober presentiments. Sergeant John Badgero wrote to his son, “I cannot tell how soon I shall be called upon to go into a battle, and if I do I may never come out alive .... If I do not, you must remember that your father died fighting for one of the best governments the sun ever shone upon.”<sup>26</sup> Ira Wood told his wife, “I guess we shall feel better when we have a fight with the Rebels.” But he went on to ask for prayers.

Now Hester Ann Wood, don't forget me at the saying of grace. You can pray in faith that I may come home and see you again. The Lord will hear you if you ask Him right; He will bring me home to clasp you again in my arms. But if it [is] not for me, it will be right .... I don't want you to think hard of me for asking you to pray for me. If anybody wants the prayers of Christian people it is the soldier, to keep him from danger. I hope I shall be able to do my duty in every place. If the officers would let us go, we would do the work for the Rebels and come home now.<sup>27</sup>

Some of the soldiers sensed the defeat of the Confederacy foretold in the military might that surrounded them on Arlington Heights. “In all probability,” wrote George Newcomb, “the war is near its end, for I don't think the Rebels can stand such a force as the North are sending against them. Every train of cars are loaded down with troops.” Surveying the vast force visible from Camp Seward, Barzilla Merrill declared, “From what I can see the Secesh is sick and won't live many months. I think there is men enough to bury the creature outright and have his funeral preached.”<sup>28</sup>

Some of the men voiced determination, some of them expressed discouragement. Some were ambivalent. The unknown member of Company K stated, “I want to fight if we have gone so far. I don't wish to be a soldier longer than is necessary. I either want to fight or go home. I don't want to live camp life long, I tell you.” Lieutenant Griswold wrote, “The boys begin to think that soldiering is not all fun, and if they were home they might [take their chances with the] draft and be d——d.” On the other hand, Marc Darling notified his parents, “I cannot begin to tell you what I have seen, but it is a good deal. I am glad that I enlisted, it is a good cause I am sure.” On another occasion Marc declared, “You tell Charley that we have as much fun as we did cutting oats on the hill when the spider crawled on Father's pie.” He continued, “I think my going to school in Randolph [New York, where he was about to attend an academy before he enlisted] turned out in [my] going to Rebeldom, which is very much better for the preservation of our Union.” Barzilla Merrill wrote pensively to his wife, “What awaits me in the future I don't know, but I leave all in the hands

of God, and I expect to go forth and try and do my duty at all times and in all places. Please remember me in your secret devotions."<sup>29</sup>

On Sunday, October 12, 1862, little more than a week after it had crossed the Long Bridge to Arlington Heights, the 154th New York left Camp Seward at noon and marched down the road toward Fairfax Court House. Left behind on Arlington Heights were varying amounts of inexperience, idealism and innocence. Ahead lay over two and a half years of arduous service with the Armies of the Potomac, the Cumberland, and Georgia. The fates of the random Camp Seward diarists and correspondents reflect the subsequent bloody history of the regiment as a whole. At the Battle of Chancellorsville, Thomas Aldrich was wounded, John Griswold was wounded and captured, Oscar Wilber was mortally wounded, and Barzilla Merrill was killed. Newell Burch, Harvey Earl, James Emmons, George Newcomb, John Porter, George Taylor, and Devillo Wheeler were captured at the Battle of Gettysburg. Burch was the only one who survived the subsequent imprisonment at Belle Isle and Andersonville. James Quilliam was wounded at Gettysburg; Amos Humiston was killed there. Ira Wood was discharged as disabled. John Badgero died of disease. Tom Aldrich was captured and James Quilliam was mortally wounded during the Atlanta Campaign. Henry Van Aernam was discharged and, in 1864, elected to Congress from the New York district that included the home counties of the regiment. Of the original 20 soldiers who left us their impressions of life at Camp Seward, only Andrew Blood, William Charles, Henry Cunningham and Marcellus Darling were still with the regiment when the 154th New York passed through Arlington again in 1865, crossed the Long Bridge, and marched in triumph along the avenues of Washington in the Grand Review of the victorious Union armies.<sup>30</sup>

### Notes and References

Mark H. Dunkelman is a student of the Civil War whose study focuses on a single regiment, the 154th New York Volunteer Infantry. In his childhood he heard family stories about a great-grandfather who was a corporal in Company H of the 154th New York. This piqued his interest in the wartime activities of the regiment, which he found had been neglected by historians. Mr. Dunkelman's pursuit of this interest has brought him access to more than 900 wartime letters, more than 20 diaries, and portraits of more than 150 members of the regiment. He is the author (with another) of a book on the 154th cited in the endnotes below and many previous articles in magazines, journals, newspapers, and newsletters. Mr. Dunkelman lives in Providence, Rhode Island.

---

- <sup>1</sup>For the organization and operations of the 154th New York, see Mark H. Dunkelman and Michael J. Winey, *The Hardtack Regiment: An Illustrated History of the 154th Regiment, New York State Infantry Volunteers* (East Brunswick, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981). For a brief history and description of the Long Bridge, see Robert L. Taylor, "The History of the Potomac Bridges in the Washington Area," *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1957, pp. 43, 46-47. The Long Bridge crossed the Potomac at the site of the present railroad bridge.
- <sup>2</sup>James D. Emmons to Dear Sister, Oct. 4, 1862, courtesy of Leslie R. Page, Auburn, N.Y.; John C. Griswold to My Dear boy, Oct. 3, 1862, courtesy of the Fenton Historical Society, Jamestown, N.Y.; Newell Burch diary, Oct. 2, 1862, courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul; Thomas R. Aldrich to Dear Mother, Oct. 6, 1862, courtesy of Patricia Wilcox, Fairport, N.Y.; Andrew D. Blood diary, Oct. 3, 1862, courtesy of Alan D. Henry, Temperance, Mich. Spelling and punctuation has been corrected in quoting soldiers' letters and diaries to improve readability.
- <sup>3</sup>Emmons letter.
- <sup>4</sup>William Charles to Dear Friends at Home, Oct. 8, 1862, courtesy of Jack Finch, Freedom, N.Y.
- <sup>5</sup>Emmons letter; Griswold letter.
- <sup>6</sup>John N. Porter to Dear Sister, Oct. 11, 1862, courtesy of Francis N. T. Diller, Erie, Pa.; Griswold letter; Oscar Wilber to Dear Uncle Nathan Wilber, Oct. 5, 1862, courtesy of George and Beverly Geisel, Hamburg, N.Y.; Ira Wood to my Dear Wife at home, Oct. 11, 1862, courtesy of the Cattaraugus County Historical Museum, Little Valley, N.Y.; Barzilla Merrill to Ruba, Oct. 5, 1862, courtesy of Doris Williams, Orange City, Fla.; Aldrich letter.
- <sup>7</sup>Aldrich letter; George W. Newcomb to Dear Wife, October, 1862, courtesy of the U. S. Army Military History Institute (USAMHI), Carlisle Barracks, Pa.; Emmons letter; Henry Van Aernam to My dear Dora, Oct. 15, 1862, courtesy of the USAMHI; James D. Quilliam to Dear Rhoda, Oct. 5, 1862, courtesy of the late Edith Nasca, Westfield, N.Y. The italicized word in this paragraph and italics in subsequent quotations reflect underscoring in the quoted letters or diary entries.
- <sup>8</sup>Marcellus W. Darling to Dear Parents, Oct. 11, 1862, courtesy of the University of Iowa Library, Iowa City, Iowa; Wilber letter; Marcellus W. Darling to Dear Parents, Oct. 5, 1862, courtesy of the University of Iowa Library.
- <sup>9</sup>Van Aernam letter; Emmons letter; Barzilla Merrill to my Wife Ruba, Oct. 11, 1862, courtesy of Doris Williams.
- <sup>10</sup>Merrill letter, Oct. 5, 1862; Aldrich letter; Newcomb letter; Wilber letter; Charles letter; Merrill letter, Oct. 11, 1862.
- <sup>11</sup>Darling letter, Oct 11, 1862; Blood letters, Oct. 7 and 9, 1862.
- <sup>12</sup>Griswold letter, Oct. 11, 1862; Newcomb letter; Merrill letter, Oct. 5, 1862; Darling letter, Oct. 5, 1862; George A. Taylor to Dear Ellen, Oct. 11, 1862, courtesy of the Chautauqua County Historical Society, Westfield, N.Y.
- <sup>13</sup>Henry Cunningham to Absant [sic] friend, Oct. 11, 1862, courtesy of the Cattaraugus County Historical Museum; Harvey Earl to Dear brother, October 5, 1862, courtesy of the late Hazel Carlson, Little Valley, N.Y., and Marguerite Whitcomb, Great Valley, N.Y.; Ira Wood to my Dear Wife at Home, Oct. \_\_, 1862, courtesy of the Cattaraugus County Historical Museum; Darling letter, Oct. 5, 1862.
- <sup>14</sup>John W. Badgero to My Dear Son, Oct. 11, 1862, courtesy of Mrs. Burnell Marble, New Port Richey, Fla.; Devillo Wheeler to William H. Wheeler, inscriptions on a copy of the Rosenthal Camp Seward print in the author's collection; Porter letter.
- <sup>15</sup>Van Aernam letter; Merrill letter, Oct. 5, 1862; Griswold letter, Oct. 11, 1862.
- <sup>16</sup>Burch diary, Oct. 4, 1862; William Charles to Dear Friends at Home, Oct. 3, 1862, courtesy of Jack Finch; Merrill letter, Oct. 11, 1862; Griswold letter, Oct. 11, 1862; unidentified to Dear Uncle and Aunt, Oct. 11, 1862, courtesy of the Cattaraugus County Historical Museum; Taylor letter.
- <sup>17</sup>Blood diary, Oct. 7, 1862; Darling letter, Oct. 11, 1862.
- <sup>18</sup>Griswold letter, Oct. 3, 1862; Merrill letter, Oct. 11, 1862.
- <sup>19</sup>Taylor letter.
- <sup>20</sup>Charles letters, Oct. 8 and 3, 1862; Cunningham letter; unidentified letter; Griswold letter, Oct. 11, 1862.
- <sup>21</sup>Darling letter, Oct. 11, 1862; Taylor letter.

<sup>22</sup>Darling letter, Oct. 11, 1862; Newcomb letter.

<sup>23</sup>Darling letter, Oct. 11, 1862; Porter letter; Charles letter, Oct. 3, 1862; Wood letter, Oct. 11, 1862.

<sup>24</sup>Taylor letter.

<sup>25</sup>Griswold letter, Oct. 11, 1862; Emmons letter; Porter letter.

<sup>26</sup>Porter letter; Amos Humiston to dear wife, Oct. 11, 1862, courtesy of Allan Cox, Watertown, Massachusetts; Badgero letter.

<sup>27</sup>Wood letter, Oct. 11, 1862.

<sup>28</sup>Newcomb letter; Merrill letter, Oct. 5, 1862.

<sup>29</sup>Unidentified letter; Griswold letter, Oct. 3, 1862; Darling letters, Oct. 5 and 11; Merrill letter, Oct. 11, 1862.

<sup>30</sup>Dunkelman and Winey, *The Hardtack Regiment*.