



The General Court-Martial of Charles G. Chandler

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Guy Chandler was clearly guilty of insubordination in the Tenth Vermont Regiment during the Civil War, and his behavior was clearly detrimental to discipline and morale. His commanding officer clearly detested him, and was determined to get him out of the regiment by way of a general court-martial. What is not clear is the credibility of Chandler's conviction on a charge of "misbehavior before the enemy" (a euphemism for cowardice).

By DAVID R. MAYHEW

Confederate troops under Lieutenant General Jubal A. Early were in line of battle on the west side of the Monocacy River. The greatly outnumbered Union troops under Major General Lewis Wallace were aligned on the east side of the river, except for approximately 275 men in a skirmish line facing the enemy on the west bank. The skirmishers, consisting of men from the Tenth Vermont Regiment and the First Maryland Regiment, Potomac Home Brigade, were under the command of the lieutenant colonel of the Tenth Vermont, Charles G. Chandler. In a curious reversal of roles, the major of the

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Tenth Vermont, rather than the lieutenant colonel, acted as the second in command of the regiment at the Battle of Monocacy on July 9, 1864.¹

Chandler, perhaps unwilling to relinquish his second in command status, decided to return to his regiment on the other side of the river, leaving the skirmish line in a precarious position without further instructions. First Lieutenant George E. Davis of the Tenth assumed command of the skirmishers, and when General Wallace ordered a turnpike bridge burned, evacuated his men over a railroad bridge as they were being flanked by Confederates. Lieutenant Davis, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for this action, described his predicament: "My orders in the morning were 'to hold the bridge over the railroad at all hazards.' I sent a soldier to wade or swim the river, and ask for instructions from Lieut. Colonel C. G. Chandler, in charge of the division skirmish detail. My soldier brought back no instructions, but the comforting intelligence that Lieut. Colonel Chandler supposed that we had retreated over the [turnpike] bridge before it was burned."²

A lieutenant colonel, the second in command of a regiment, would normally be in close proximity to the colonel of a regiment during a battle or when a battle was imminent, where he could quickly take command if the colonel was incapacitated. The fact that the regimental major was placed second in command and that Chandler was dispatched away from the regiment at Monocacy is an indication of the lack of confidence his colonel had in him.

Charles Guy Chandler was, if nothing else, a polarizing figure in the Tenth Vermont. On the one hand, officers such as Lieutenant Davis and the colonel of the regiment, William Wirt Henry, held him in disdain, while other officers willingly went along with his "town meetings" (as characterized by Colonel Henry) and petitions undermining Henry's authority.³ Even when Chandler was singled out for commendation by Brigadier General W. H. Morris for "courage and efficiency" during the Mine Run campaign in November 1863, the praise was not well received in the regiment, where the feeling was that other officers should have been mentioned also. Regimental historian E. M. Haynes commented, "the adverse current of conversation in the command regarding the omission of their names is distinctly remembered."⁴

Colonel Henry's problem with Chandler was compounded by Chandler's intemperate use of alcohol. Oscar Wait, a soldier in the Tenth, mentioned incidences of Chandler's drinking in his narrative, including the following passage: "Major Chandler is promoted again; he is now Lieutenant-Colonel. Well, let him climb. The higher he gets, the further he will drop, and drop he will, sooner or later. This promotion, like the other, is an automatic one. He is an excellent horseman, a fine-looking

officer, and can handle a regiment; but alas! His courage—the little he has—seems rather erratic; it goes in streaks, very much like the kind that comes in black bottles marked Bourbon.”⁵ Writing several years after the war, Lieutenant Thomas H. White blamed Chandler (perhaps unfairly) for the heavy casualties at the Battle of Cold Harbor: “Had the regiment been moved back from twenty to thirty feet, the loss would not have been one-fourth what it was, but Chandler was drunk or incompetent and allowed the regiment to remain where it was.”⁶ Colonel Henry’s attitude toward Chandler’s drinking habit may have been influenced by his own father, who was active in the temperance movement and preached “total abstinence.”⁷ In a letter to his wife in May 1864, Henry made the following promise: “I will bet something that I shall not be troubled with Major Chandler much longer for the very first time he gets drunk again (and that will be as soon as he can get whiskey enough) I shall prefer charges against him and get him out of the service.”⁸ The vow would prove prophetic.

THE POLITICS OF PROMOTION

A controversy over officer promotions in the Tenth Vermont first surfaced with the resignation of Lieutenant Colonel John H. Edson on October 16, 1862. Major William W. Henry was then promoted to the lieutenant colonelcy of the regiment, creating a vacancy for regimental major. Edwin B. Frost was senior captain in the Tenth, with a date of commission of July 7, 1862. Captain Charles G. Chandler had a date of commission of August 11, 1862, in the Tenth, but had previously served as a captain in the Fifth Vermont.⁹ Chandler was selected for promotion to major, and according to Haynes, “Captain Frost should have been raised to a field officer’s rank at the time of Lieutenant Colonel Edson’s resignation. He and his friends expected it, and were sore under the disappointment.” Haynes then wrote, “There was something said at the time about unredeemed pledges made to Chandler before he joined the regiment—that he should be appointed to the first vacancy of this kind that should occur, and this may have been true.”¹⁰

If lingering hard feelings had subsided a year and a half later, they were inflamed anew when Colonel Albert B. Jewett resigned on April 25, 1864. Lieutenant Colonel Henry was then promoted to colonel of the regiment and Chandler was made lieutenant colonel. (The date of the commissions was April 26, but the promotions were not issued until May 30.¹¹) Captain Frost again seemed in line for promotion to major. Indeed, Lemuel A. Abbott noted in his diary on April 29 that Captain Frost was acting major of the regiment. Frost is again identified as acting major on June 1 at Cold Harbor.¹² Although Colonel



Caught in the middle of the controversy over promotion to major in the Tenth Vermont: Edwin B. Frost (left) and Edwin Dillingham. VHS Civil War Officers Gallery.

Henry favored the more senior Frost for regimental major, Chandler favored Edwin Dillingham, and had several officers sign a petition recommending his promotion. Dillingham, whose father and brother would both serve as governors of Vermont, had a date of rank of August 4, 1862, as captain. He had been taken prisoner in the battle of Locust Grove in November 1863, was paroled in March 1864, and after being exchanged, rejoined the regiment at Cold Harbor on June 3.¹³

Colonel Henry wrote to the Adjutant and Inspector General of the State of Vermont, Peter T. Washburn, on April 27. He protested that Chandler, by actively promoting his own choice for major, undermined Henry's authority over other officers in the regiment. Bitterly denouncing Chandler, Henry wrote, "Major Chandler is at the bottom of this and means mischief . . . for God's sake do not allow me to be overruled in this matter . . . my command of this regiment would not be worth a straw. Major Chandler and myself never did agree very well and this is only the beginning of the end—one of us will have to leave this regiment before long, and I do not propose to be the one, so long as I am

backed at home—he is a cousin of Gov Smith I know, but I believe Gov Smith to be an honest man.”¹⁴

About this time, Chandler wrote to his cousin, Vermont Governor J. Gregory Smith, with his own recommendation for promotion to major, Captain Dillingham, and his opposition to Colonel Henry’s choice, Captain Frost. Apparently, Governor Smith became alarmed at what he perceived as a lack of discipline in the regiment, and on May 4 wrote a letter to Colonel Henry, declaring that the discipline of the regiment was not what it ought to be.¹⁵ In a letter to his wife on May 17, Colonel Henry wrote that Governor Smith had turned down all promotions because of Chandler’s objection to Captain Frost. “I do not think any of us will get a promotion,” he complained, declaring that it was “unjust of Governor Smith.”¹⁶

Colonel Henry wrote a reply to Governor Smith’s letter on May 20, in which he denounced Chandler for opposing his recommendation, for getting up a petition favoring Captain Dillingham, and for writing to the governor behind his back. Henry was smarting under a perceived censure by the governor, and his belief that the governor had upheld Chandler’s choice for promotion to major over his own.¹⁷ Captain Dillingham’s father was lieutenant governor at the time, and the ties to the governor’s office may have put additional pressure on Colonel Henry.

Captain Frost was killed on June 3, at the Battle of Cold Harbor. According to Haynes, Frost “endured five hours of extreme agony” before dying. Henry and Frost had been tent mates, and Henry would write of him, “In a two years’ acquaintance, I have found him the fast friend, the courteous gentleman, and I had come to love him as a brother.” In letters to his wife, Henry obviously missed Frost, describing him as his “noble friend.” Dillingham was promoted to major on June 20, and in a final tragic twist, Major Dillingham was killed at the Battle of Winchester on September 19.¹⁸

“HE HAS NOT GOT A FRIEND IN THE REGIMENT”

Colonel Henry wrote frequently to his wife, and between June 1864 and the Battle of Cedar Creek on October 19, his letters reveal not only a lack of confidence in Chandler, but an almost pathological hatred of him. He obviously wanted his men to share his lack of confidence and trust. Henry suffered a wound in the hand at Cold Harbor and was out of action for over two weeks, during which Chandler assumed command of the regiment. Writing to his wife on June 20, Henry gloated, “Lieutenant Colonel Chandler has got most all the officers down on him since he has been in command by the way he has managed. I am glad to see that some of them have got enough of him.” While recuperating in

the hospital from an injury, the colonel wrote, on June 28, "Lieutenant Colonel Chandler has got everybody down on him while he has been in command, and I am glad of it for I wanted them to know just what kind of a man he was." A letter on October 2 showed Henry still rejoicing over Chandler's unpopularity in the regiment: "Surgeon Childe came to see me today and asked my pardon for all he had ever said or done against me and talked the worst I ever heard anyone talk against Chandler. Says he has not got a friend in the regiment. All this as you know is very satisfactory to me."¹⁹

By the fall of 1864, Colonel Henry was determined to remove his subordinate lieutenant colonel from the regiment. It was no longer sufficient to isolate him by detailing him to take command of a skirmish line, as he had done at Monocacy. From letters to his wife, it is evident that Henry held Chandler in open contempt, and that he allowed and even encouraged his officers to ostracize Chandler, thereby compromising his ability to lead. All that was needed was a precipitating incident to bring on a court-martial.

CEDAR CREEK

At 5 A.M. on the 19th of October, Confederate forces under General Jubal Early launched a surprise attack on a totally unprepared Army of the Shenandoah near Cedar Creek, just south of Middletown in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Approaching from the south and east, the Confederates first hit the Union VIII Corps, which fled disorganized to the rear. The XIX Corps, with a little more warning, mustered a defense but was soon overwhelmed and routed. The VI Corps, which included the Tenth Vermont in the First Brigade of the Third Division, was encamped farther to the north and had more time to organize a line of defense. They too were driven back, but maintained an orderly retreat. The unexpected attack resulted in a chaotic situation on the battlefield, which was shrouded in a heavy morning fog. The divisions and brigades of the VI Corps were further thrown into confusion by troops of the VIII and XIX Corps fleeing through their lines.

Although he had been sick, Colonel Henry initially commanded the Tenth Vermont at Cedar Creek, but was "hardly convalescent from his fever."²⁰ One of the more notable accomplishments by the Tenth on that day, while the Third Division was retreating, was a successful counter charge to rescue the guns of McKnight's Battery, which had been abandoned and were in imminent danger of being captured by the advancing Confederate troops. It was an extremely hazardous mission, and the Tenth took casualties. It was generally acknowledged that Lieutenant Colonel Chandler took part in the rescue.²¹ Colonel Henry

also took part, and was later awarded a Medal of Honor for his action. His “strength gave out” and he had to be helped off the field as the regiment fell back, shortly after the guns had been drawn off by hand. Henry later resumed command, but again “yielded to fatigue and exhaustion.”²²

Lieutenant Colonel Chandler, by his later testimony, retreated with the regiment after the rescue of the McKnight’s Battery guns to a new defensive line about one-half mile north of the original position before the attack. It was here, he claimed, that he injured an ankle while leaping a ditch. He then took himself out of action, and commandeering a horse, eventually ended up at a field hospital a few miles to the rear in Newtown.²³

The VI Corps continued a somewhat orderly retreat and finally formed a defensive line about one and one-half miles north of Middletown. Major General Philip H. Sheridan, commanding the Army of the Shenandoah, arrived on the scene about 10:30 A.M. and, after repositioning his cavalry and rounding up scattered forces of the VIII and XIX Corps, mounted a counterattack around 4 P.M. The Confederate lines broke and fled in confusion to the rear. By nightfall, the Union forces had regained their old camps and had crushed General Early’s army. With both Henry and Chandler out of action, Captain Henry H. Dewey commanded the Tenth Vermont in the counterattack.²⁴

THE COURT-MARTIAL

In the weeks following Cedar Creek, although he wrote frequently, there is no mention of Chandler or any suspected malfeasance in Colonel Henry’s letters to his wife. Nor is there any mention of misconduct by Chandler in Henry’s after-action report to Adjutant and Inspector General Washburn.²⁵ What does become apparent in letters to his wife is that Henry was becoming increasingly ill, having suffered throughout the summer and fall from bouts of sunstroke, complications from a wound to the hand, “billious fever,” diarrhea, and colds. Much of August and September had found him either in hospital or recuperating back in Vermont. With Lieutenant Colonel Chandler also on sick leave, Major Dillingham commanded the regiment from August 21 until his death on September 19.²⁶

Henry wrote to his wife on November 14, and contemplated the possibility of leaving the service for medical reasons. He wanted to wait and see if Chandler “will not get sick and want to leave. The boys will make a big fuss if I go and leave the command in his hands.” On the next day, November 15, Chandler unwittingly provided the pretext Henry needed to get rid of him when he became intoxicated at an officer’s social

function. On November 30, Henry brought general court-martial charges against Chandler. Although Chandler had served honorably for over three years with three different regiments, and in the six months preceding Cedar Creek had participated in some of the bloodiest and most intense fighting of the war in battles such as Wilderness, Spotsylvania, North Anna, Cold Harbor, and Monocacy, Henry charged him with “misbehavior before the enemy” at Cedar Creek. Prior to the intoxication incident on November 15, there is no evidence that Chandler would be tried for misbehavior. In fact, as Chandler pointed out in his defense, he was given command of a battalion after Cedar Creek.²⁷ Henry also wrote to his wife on November 30, announcing that he had sent in his papers requesting a medical discharge. He then informed her, “This morning I preferred charges against Lt. Col. Chandler and probably the trial will come on tomorrow or next day and I think there is no doubt but he will be dismissed the service, so that will make that case alright with the Regiment. The officers refused to let me go until this was done.”²⁸

The court-martial convened at 11 A.M. on December 1, leaving Chandler just one day to prepare a defense. The first order of business after the swearing-in was to deny Chandler a postponement to prepare a defense. He was then arraigned on the following charges and specifications.²⁹

Charge 1st

Misbehavior before the enemy.

Specification,

In this, that the said Charles G. Chandler, Lieutenant Colonel of the 10th Regiment Vermont Volunteers, did on the forenoon of the 19th day of October 1864, near Cedar Creek, (so called) in the State of Virginia, his said Regiment being then and there engaged in battle with the enemy, without permission, and to avoid the dangers of said engagement, leave and abandon his said Regiment and did go to the rear and beyond the field of battle, and did so remain at the rear, away from his said Regiment, until night, and until the said engagement was over.

Charge 2nd

Conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.

Specification,

In this, that the said Charles G. Chandler, Lieutenant Colonel of the 10th Regiment Vermont Volunteers, near Kernstown, Virginia, on or about the 15th day of November 1864, and just after an Inspection and Review of the 1st Brigade, 3rd Division, 6th Army Corps, was grossly intoxicated, and did, in the presence of several officers, say “I was ashamed to have the General see me with such a damned lousy scurvy set as the 184th New York: damn them, they don’t know anything”, or words to that effect, the said Lieut. Colonel Chandler

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being then in command of a battalion of said 184th Regiment New York Volunteers.

Charge 3d

Conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline.

Specification,

In this, that Charles G. Chandler, Lieutenant Colonel of the 10th Regiment Vermont Volunteers, near Kernstown, Virginia, on or about the 15th day of November 1864, was grossly intoxicated, the said Lieut. Col. Chandler being then in command of a battalion of the 184th Regiment New York Volunteers.

Chandler pleaded not guilty to all charges and specifications. He essentially offered no defense to accusations of drunkenness, apart from establishing that the alleged offense occurred at a sanctioned social event, where alcoholic beverages were provided. He also offered the weak excuse that no officers or men from the 184th New York were present during his drunken tirade.³⁰ It seems unlikely that he would have known this for sure, and in any event, word would have gotten back to the 184th, and the result would probably have been “prejudicial to good order and discipline.”

The evidence for the charge of misbehavior proved to be more ambiguous. Witnesses for both the prosecution and defense generally acknowledged that Chandler behaved well during the charge on McKnight’s Battery. Of the witnesses who saw him after he allegedly hurt his ankle, most did not notice that he walked with difficulty, or that there was any change in his gait. In fact, assistant surgeon Almon Clark, testifying for the prosecution, stated that he was “amused” at one point that Chandler seemed to be favoring the wrong ankle at the field hospital in Newtown. Under questioning by the defense, Dr. Clark conceded that Chandler had a pre-existing condition in his ankle, brought on by a “severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism,” and that he had “frequently heard [Chandler] complain of weakness in that ankle.” The regimental surgeon, Willard A. Childe, also testified that Chandler was subject to recurring severe attacks of rheumatic gout which rendered him “entirely disabled from duty.” The attacks, he said, left the ankle “weak and ready to take on inflammation from any injury.” Dr. Childe prescribed liniment for Chandler on October 19, but neither doctor examined the ankle on that day.³¹

Despite only having one day to prepare a defense, some officers and men did testify in Chandler’s behalf. Captain John A. Salsbury testified that Chandler’s conduct in the morning of the fighting at Cedar Creek was that of a “brave and efficient officer.” He further testified, “I have seen him in several engagements before, Spottsylvania, Cold Harbor and other places, and never noticed anything different in his conduct

from that on the 19th of October last. He commanded the Regiment in most of the [e]ngagements during the summer, and particularly distinguished himself in my opinion at Cold Harbor on the 3d of June.”³²

The court adjourned at 8 P.M. on December 1, all testimony having been heard. It reconvened on the morning of the 2nd, and after deliberation, the court found Chandler guilty of all charges and specifications, sentencing him to be “dishonorably discharged the service of the United States.” The discharge became effective on December 24, and Chandler became the only field grade officer of a Vermont regiment in the Civil War to be dishonorably discharged from the service for cowardice.³³

Colonel J. Warren Keifer commanded the Third Division (including the Tenth Vermont) at Cedar Creek, and presided over the court-martial board. Officers in Keifer’s command constituted the board membership.³⁴ Keifer was undoubtedly aware of Henry’s impending resignation, and his desire to remove Chandler from the regiment. The objectivity of the board, under the circumstances, appears suspect. Colonel Keifer wrote an after-action report on Cedar Creek, and described Chandler’s conduct as follows: “It is painful to mention the bad conduct of Lieut. Col. Charles G. Chandler, Tenth Vermont . . . [who] shamefully deserted [his] comrades in arms, and went to the rear without authority or good cause.” The after-action report was dated December 15, two weeks after the court-martial, and nearly two months after the Battle of Cedar Creek.³⁵ The timing of the report makes it appear to be an after-the-fact attempt to memorialize Chandler’s “bad conduct” and to further validate the controversial verdict of the court-martial.

INSUBORDINATION IN THE VOLUNTEER REGIMENTS

On January 1, 1861, the United States Army consisted of barely 16,000 men, of whom less than 1,000 were officers. More than one-quarter of the officers would join the Confederacy. After the attack on Fort Sumter in April, the Union Army underwent rapid growth. By the end of the year, the regular army had expanded to 20,000 troops, but more than 600,000 men filled the new volunteer regiments. By the end of the war, over 2,000,000 men would serve in more than 2,500 state regiments in the Union Army.³⁶

The officer complement for the newly raised volunteer regiments came primarily from three sources: men who had on their own initiative raised companies and regiments, those who had received gubernatorial appointments, and those who had been elected by the men they commanded. At best, these men were educated leaders in their communities, and

had been wisely selected. At worst, they were glory-seeking beneficiaries of political patronage and popularity contests. In any event, officers and men alike shared the disadvantage of a lack of military training. Most officers in the new regiments had little or no previous military experience, yet they were rapidly promoted to fill vacancies in the field grade ranks.³⁷

Several authors have commented on the character of the American public at the time of the Civil War. Thomas Lowry writes of the “traditional disregard for central authority, discipline, and unwarranted restrictions.” James McPherson describes American white males as “the most individualistic, democratic people on the face of the earth in 1861. They did not take kindly to authority, discipline, obedience.” Elsewhere, he describes the volunteer soldier: “They came from a society that prized individualism, self-reliance, and freedom from coercive authority.” Frederick Shannon writes of volunteers having the “traditional American attitude of ingrained opposition to the army type of discipline.”³⁸

It would be remiss not to point out that in spite of the rapid expansion, inexperience, and relaxed discipline in an army of citizen-soldiers, the Union Army emerged in less than four years as one of the most powerful armies in the world. Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan, whose Civil War command included eight Vermont regiments in the Army of the Shenandoah, would serve as an observer of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870–71. He couldn’t resist a comparison of the Prussian Army, generally regarded as Europe’s premier professional fighting force at the time, with the troops he had commanded: “I think that under the same circumstances our troops would have done as well as the Germans, marched as admirably, made combinations as quickly and accurately, and fought with as much success. I can but leave to conjecture how the Germans would have got along on bottomless roads—often none at all—through the swamps and quicksands of northern Virginia, from the Wilderness to Petersburg, and from Chattanooga to Atlanta and the sea.”³⁹

In his book *Tarnished Eagles*, Lowry notes the disproportionately high number of general court-martial cases involving colonels and lieutenant colonels in the Civil War. Most of these cases involved inexperienced volunteer officers, and a common charge was insubordination. These officers would have been very aware of the experience, or lack of experience, of other officers in their regiments. They were also aware of their relative social standing as civilians in their prewar communities. Lowry comments, “Obedience was a bitter medicine for them and many colonels could never choke it down.” Too often, according to Lowry,

there were “jealous majors and lieutenant colonels, anxious to displace their leader and see silver eagles upon their own shoulders.”⁴⁰

The Chandler case appears to fit the insubordination model identified by Lowry. Chandler may have felt he was more qualified to be colonel of the Tenth Vermont than Colonel Henry, based on his prewar service in the Ransom Guard militia in St. Albans, and his service as a captain in the First Vermont and Fifth Vermont Regiments. By contrast, the younger Colonel Henry’s military experience before his commission as major in the Tenth Vermont was limited to being a first lieutenant in the Second Vermont for less than six months in 1861.⁴¹

Lieutenant Henry resigned from the Second Vermont in November 1861 because of illness, but by the following summer he was seeking a gubernatorial appointment as major in one of the Vermont regiments that were forming in response to President Lincoln’s call for 300,000 more volunteer troops in July 1862. His appointment by Governor Frederick Holbrook did not come through until the last week of August 1862. Chandler, meanwhile, had recruited a company from St. Albans, and had been captain of his company since August 11.⁴² Chandler was the only captain in the Tenth at its formation with previous experience in that rank, and was one of the very few company officers with military experience of any kind. If he had coveted the major’s slot in the regiment, he would have been unpleasantly surprised to find Henry in that position when the Tenth Vermont was mustered into United States service on September 1.⁴³ The cryptic “unredeemed pledges” mentioned by Haynes may have been promises made to placate a disgruntled Chandler.⁴⁴

Chandler may also have felt a sense of entitlement by virtue of being a cousin on his mother’s side to Governor J. Gregory Smith, who was elected in 1863 and 1864. The Smith family of St. Albans was one of the foremost families in Vermont at the time, and included among its members several military, political, business, and civic leaders.⁴⁵

Insubordination cannot be tolerated in a military organization, especially in time of war. At the level of a general officer, serving at the pleasure of the president, an insubordinate officer is expected to submit his or her resignation from the service, or be relieved by executive order. Insubordination at the level of a field grade officer of a regiment in the Civil War usually could not be dealt with as expeditiously. A commanding officer desiring to rid his regiment of an insubordinate officer had recourse to bring the officer up on charges in a general court-martial. From the courts-martial examined by Lowry, it appears that more egregious cases of insubordination than that of Chandler, even when augmented by charges of drunkenness, often resulted in little

more than a reprimand for the offender.⁴⁶ Colonel Henry was not interested in correcting Chandler's behavior, and had no interest in seeing him reprimanded. From letters to his wife, it is clear that Henry wanted him dismissed from the service.

Cowardice, or "misbehavior before the enemy," was one of the most serious breaches of discipline that could be committed by a Civil War soldier. Punishment for enlisted men could range from humiliation before the regiment to, in extreme cases, execution. For officers, the standard was even higher, and if an officer was convicted of a charge of misbehavior before the enemy, he received an immediate dishonorable discharge. Even the threat of a court-martial could prompt the resignation of an accused officer.⁴⁷ Colonel Henry may have been motivated to find an excuse to bring a charge of cowardice against Chandler and to embellish the specifications to achieve the desired end result.

AFTERMATH

Charles G. Chandler lived only another ten years after his discharge, most of that time in Keene, New Hampshire, where he was employed as master of transportation on the Cheshire Railroad. He left a wife and a fifteen-year-old daughter at his passing. During much of his post-war life, he suffered from a "severe and long continued rheumatic [affliction]."⁴⁸

The officers of the Tenth Vermont underwent a change of heart after the war. The Reunion Society of the Tenth Vermont Regiment passed a resolution in 1868, as follows: "Resolved—That the regimental association do hereby request that [the dishonorable discharge] be removed, and he receive an honorable discharge from the service of the United States." The resolution was referred to the judge advocate general, who decided, "In the absence of any evidence of his general character for courage and fidelity, that the testimony would not warrant an acquittal."⁴⁹

The Reunion Society of Vermont Officers (comprising officers of all regiments) passed a resolution to have the court verdict overturned in Congress, at their annual reunion held on October 19, 1875, on the anniversary of the Battle of Cedar Creek and eight months after the death of Chandler. Colonel Henry, now addressed as "general," a brevet rank conferred on him at his retirement, headed a committee to examine Chandler's record and the proceedings of the general court-martial. General Henry's committee concluded that Colonel Chandler "bore an excellent reputation for bravery, and had on several occasions distinguished himself" and was in all actions "prominent in courage and intelligence." The committee also concluded that the court was "too

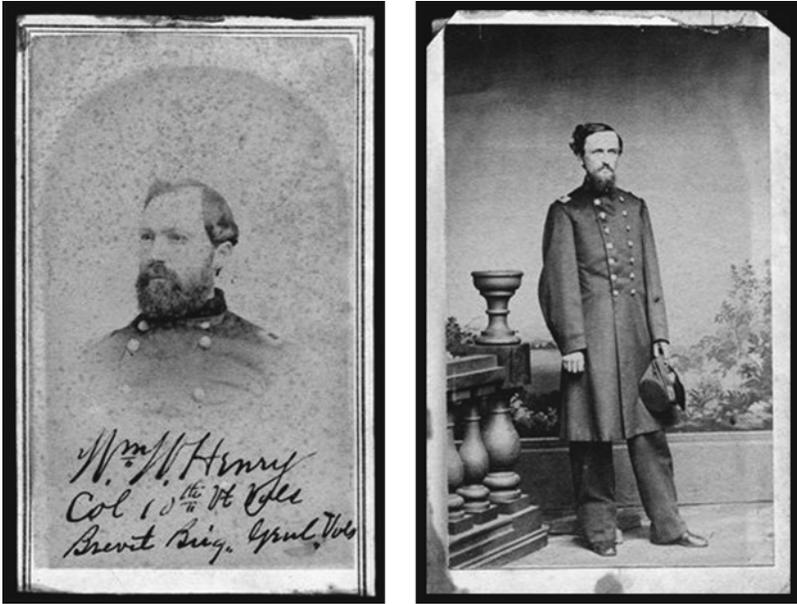
precipitate” in not allowing Chandler sufficient time to prepare a defense, and not allowing facts about Chandler’s previous record to come out. In a patronizing gesture, the committee pointed out that military tribunals were liable “in midst of active military operations to honestly err in judgment.”⁵⁰ The reunion proceedings describe Henry recounting, in what must have been an emotional moment at the reunion, that he “was glad shortly before Chandler’s death, to have Chandler grasp his hand and assure him that he had lately become satisfied from what others had told him that he had been all this while laboring under a misapprehension, and was now convinced that he, General Henry, was his friend.”⁵¹

The irony of a committee headed by General Henry essentially exonerating Chandler is inescapable. From the content of his wartime letters to his wife, Henry comes across as disingenuous. He knew that the court-martial would be “tomorrow or next day” after he preferred charges. His goal was to have Chandler removed from the service before his own retirement, which was imminent (his resignation was effective December 17),⁵² and he may have been in collusion with Colonel Keifer to expedite a finding of guilty on all charges and specifications. Congress never acted on the Reunion Society’s resolution.⁵³

DOCTOR CHILDE’S DEPOSITION

Louisa Gregory Chandler filed an application for a widow’s pension in 1878. The pension file includes several affidavits from doctors (including Charles Chandler’s eighty-five-year-old physician father). The gist of the doctors’ testimony was that Chandler was in good health prior to joining the army, that he first contracted rheumatic gout while assigned to Fort Marcy with the Fifth Vermont in the fall of 1861, and that the disease became progressively worse, finally leading to his premature death. Louisa Chandler was granted a widow’s pension, and continued to receive it until her own death in 1906.⁵⁴

The deposition of Dr. Willard A. Childe is particularly revealing. It was prepared in 1875, perhaps for another purpose, but is included in the Louisa Chandler pension file. Dr. Childe first knew Chandler when they served together in the First Vermont Regiment in 1861. He renewed the acquaintance when Chandler was a captain in the Fifth Vermont, at Fort Marcy on the Virginia side of the Chain Bridge over the Potomac River, in the fall of 1861. Dr. Childe was then a surgeon in the Fourth Vermont, in charge of the brigade hospital. He treated Chandler at that time for rheumatic gout in both ankles, Chandler claiming that he had contracted the disease as a result of exposure and insufficient shelter. Dr. Childe stated that Chandler would be “completely



Charles G. Chandler's nemesis, Col. William Wirt Henry (left), and his defender, Surgeon Willard A. Childe. There is no known photograph of Charles G. Chandler. VHS Civil War Officers Gallery.

prostrated with the disease.” Treatment for the condition would bring “temporary relief, to such an extent as to enable him to perform duty,” but the disease was never “eradicated from his system.” Dr. Childe “frequently prescribed for him,” the ankles being weak “ever after the first attack.” Dr. Childe went on to state that “any unusual exertion, mental excitement, exposure, or any general constitutional disturbance, would be very liable to bring on a lameness, which would unfit him for duty.”⁵⁵

Dr. Childe would serve with Lieutenant Colonel Chandler again in the Tenth Vermont. He stated in his deposition that during that time, he had “been a frequent eye-witness of Col Chandler’s bravery, courage and intelligent action in the face of the enemy, I never knew him to do any act, or neglect to do any act which he ought to have done, from which any one could charge him rightly with shirking his duty, on the contrary, I have at times kept him from his regiment against his will.” Dr. Childe was too busy with wounded at the field hospital during the Battle of Cedar Creek to examine Chandler’s ankle, but had his hospital steward “prescribe for him with the accustomed formulary used for Col Chandler.”

Dr. Childe had some choice words regarding Chandler's court-martial. He claimed that the "minutes are not a correct transcript of the proceedings so far as my testimony is concerned." He claimed that his testimony regarding his encounter with Chandler at the field hospital was incompletely transcribed, and that furthermore, the court did not permit him to "give such an explanation as I thought his case demanded. I believe Col Keifer, president of the court martial, to have been unduly prejudiced against Col Chandler, and I form this opinion from what I heard Col Keifer say prior to the time of trial, and from his conduct toward Col Chandler, in fact I am thoroughly under the impression that Col Keifer had previously preferred charges against him but nothing came of them." Dr. Childe went on to say, "There was in the Tenth Vermont Regiment, two factions of which Col Henry was the acknowledged leader of one, and Col Chandler the acknowledged leader of the other, at the trial the animosities and jealousies of the Regiment were all brought to bear upon him, the trial was conducted in extreme haste . . . the exigencies of the service did not require such immediate action, and I cannot but believe, that had the trial been conducted . . . with greater deliberation, and without the interference of the jealousies which had existed in the Regiment . . . the result . . . would have been favorable to the accused."

Dr. Childe concluded his deposition as follows: "Whatever may be the decision of the proper authorities I desire to say that, there is but one opinion among Vermont officers and soldiers, and that is that Col Chandler was a brave man and deserving of the highest honors at the hands of his government, he did so much to sustain."

NOTES

¹E. M. Haynes, *A History of the Tenth Regiment, Vermont Volunteers*, Second ed., revised (Rutland, Vt.: The Tuttle Co, Printers, 1894), 192, 194, 270; Lemuel A. Abbott, *Personal Recollections and Civil War Diary, 1864* (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Printing Co., 1908), 98–100, 105.

²George G. Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War: A History of the Part Taken by the Vermont Soldiers and Sailors in the War for the Union, 1861–1865* (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Association, 1888), 2:315.

³Kelly Nolin, "The Vermont Military Records Project: The Civil War Records," *Vermont History* 70 (Summer /Fall 2002): 161.

⁴Haynes, *History of the Tenth Regiment*, 56.

⁵Oscar E. Wait, *Three Years with the Tenth Vermont*, Don Wickman, ed. (Newport, Vt.: Tony O'Connor Civil War Enterprises, 2006), 95. The manuscript was developed around 1912 as an expansion of a wartime diary.

⁶Lieutenant T. H. White, "Tenting on The Old Camp Ground," Bradford (Vermont) *United Opinion*, 27 May 1892. This article was installment number 19 in a series of more than thirty installments published over a two-year period from 1891 to 1893. They provide candid insights not only into battles and troop movements, but more importantly into personalities and interpersonal relationships in the Tenth Vermont. Some back issues of the *United Opinion* exist on State of Vermont Public Records Division microfilm. Only about half of the "Tenting on The Old Camp Ground" installments are found on microfilm. Unfortunately, for purposes of this research, the missing installments include the critical period from the Battle of Cedar Creek to the Chandler

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discharge. The articles are not known to exist in any other venue, and may be irretrievably lost to history.

⁷Hiram Carleton, *Genealogical and Family History of the State of Vermont* [1906] (Baltimore, Md.: Reprinted for Clearfield Company by Genealogical Publishing Co., 2003) 1:387.

⁸Col. Henry letter to wife, 17 May 1864, William Wirt Henry Papers, Doc 527, Vermont Historical Society, Barre. Hereafter referenced as VHS.

⁹Theodore S. Peck, comp., *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers and Lists of Vermonters Who Served in the Army and Navy of the United States during the War of the Rebellion, 1861–1866* (Montpelier, Vt.: Watchman Publishing Company, 1892), 382, 384, 403.

¹⁰Haynes, *History of the Tenth Regiment*, 147–148.

¹¹Peck, *Revised Roster*, 382.

¹²Abbott, *Personal Recollections*, 41, 42.

¹³Haynes, *History of the Tenth Regiment*, 269; Peck, *Revised Roster*, 386; Carleton, *Genealogical and Family History of the State of Vermont*. 1:10, 13; Col. Henry letter to wife, 29 April 1864, 17 May 1864, Henry Papers, VHS.

¹⁴Letter of W. Henry, 27 April 1864, 10th Regiment Vermont Volunteer Infantry, correspondence, reel F26006, Vermont State Archives and Records Administration (VSARA).

¹⁵Letter from Chandler to Governor Smith and May 4 letter from Governor Smith to Henry have not been examined. They are described and paraphrased in letter from Henry to Smith, 20 May 1864, Henry Papers, VHS.

¹⁶Col. Henry letter to wife, 17 May 1864, Henry Papers, VHS.

¹⁷Col. Henry to Governor Smith, 20 May 1864, Henry Papers, VHS. The letter found in the Henry Papers is presumed to be a copy of the letter actually sent to Governor Smith.

¹⁸Haynes, *History of the Tenth Regiment*, 148, 255; Peck, *Revised Roster*, 382; Col. Henry letter to wife, 4 June 1864, Henry Papers, VHS.

¹⁹Col. Henry letter to wife, 20 June 1864, 28 June 1864, 2 October 1864, Henry Papers, VHS.

²⁰Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, 2:323.

²¹*Proceedings of the Reunion Society of Vermont Officers* (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Association, 1885) 1:249; *Proceedings of the General Court Martial of Lieutenant Colonel C. G. Chandler, 10th Vermont Infantry*, File #LL-2868 (12/1864), RG153: Records of the Judge Advocate General's Office (Army), Entry 15: Court Martial Case Files, 1809–94, 7E3: 13/28/01, Box #812 (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration), 11, 27, 30, 31. Hereafter referenced as “Chandler Court Martial Proceedings.”

²²Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, 2:323–325.

²³Chandler Court Martial Proceedings, Appendix B.

²⁴Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, 2:235.

²⁵Henry's after-action report is quoted in Haynes, *History of the Tenth Regiment*, 305–306.

²⁶Col. Henry letter to wife, 9 May 1864, 21 June 1864, 22 October 1864, Henry Papers, VHS; Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, 2:320; Haynes, *History of the Tenth Regiment*, 271.

²⁷Chandler Court Martial Proceedings, Appendix B.

²⁸Col. Henry letter to wife, 14 November 1864, 30 November 1864, Henry Papers, VHS; Chandler Court Martial Proceedings, 10. One interpretation of Henry's “the officers refused to let me go until this was done” might be that it was an attempt to share responsibility for bringing what he knew to be trumped up charges against Chandler.

²⁹Chandler Court Martial Proceedings, 2–4.

³⁰*Ibid.*, Appendix B.

³¹*Ibid.*, 22–27.

³²*Ibid.*, 27–28.

³³*Ibid.*, 31–33; Wait, *Three Years with the Tenth Vermont*, 136.

³⁴Chandler Court Martial Proceedings, 1.

³⁵United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1880–1901), ser. 1, vol. 43, part 1: chap. LV #49, 225.

³⁶James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 313; Thomas P. Lowry, *Tarnished Eagles: The Courts-Martial of Fifty Union Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1997), 1; James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 46; Frederick A. Shannon, *The Organization and Administration of the Union Army, 1861–1865* (Gloucester, Ma.: Peter Smith, 1965), 1:46, 158–161.

³⁷Lowry, *Tarnished Eagles*, 1, 219–220, 234; Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 20, 24; Shannon, *Organization and Administration of the Union Army*, 1:46, 158–161, 169–170.

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³⁸Lowry, *Tarnished Eagles*, 6; McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 47, 61; Shannon *Organization and Administration of the Union Army*, 1:166.

³⁹Philip H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1888), 2:451.

⁴⁰Lowry, *Tarnished Eagles*, 220–223, 1, 8.

⁴¹*St. Albans (Vermont) Messenger*, 8 February 1875, Chandler obituary. Peck, *Revised Roster*, 14, 147, 43.

⁴²Carleton, *Genealogical and Family History of the State of Vermont*, 1:387; Henry letter to wife, 13 August 1862, Henry Papers, VHS; Haynes, *History of the Tenth Regiment*, 1, 2.

⁴³The company officers in the Tenth Vermont at its formation are found in Peck, *Revised Roster*. Their prior military service, if any, can also be looked up in Peck. The search is facilitated by the “Search for a Soldier!” feature of the website vermontcivilwar.org.

⁴⁴Haynes, *History of the Tenth Regiment*, 148.

⁴⁵Carleton, *Genealogical and Family History of the State of Vermont*, 2:52–56.

⁴⁶Lowry, *Tarnished Eagles*, 11–73.

⁴⁷McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 51, 78–83; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 205.

⁴⁸*St. Alban's (Vermont) Messenger*, 8 February 1875, Chandler obituary. Also see the obituary in the *St. Albans Weekly Advertiser*, 19 February 1875, The *Weekly Advertiser* obituary states, “We believe he was always a sufferer from rheumatism and probably he died of this disease.”

⁴⁹*Proceedings of the Reunion Society*, 1:250.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 248–249.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 250–251.

⁵²Peck, *Revised Roster*, 382.

⁵³Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, 2:329.

⁵⁴Widow's pension file for Louisa Gregory Chandler, file no 236693, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, Doctor Willard A. Childe deposition. Applies to this and all following quotations.