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With Banner, Gun, and Sword: Marshall Harvey Twitchell and the 4th Vermont Regiment Go to War

*Where are you going, soldiers,
With banner, gun and sword?
We're marching south to Canaan
To battle for the Lord!*

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

By TED TUNNELL

In the beginning, Walt Whitman wrote, most Northerners viewed the Southern Confederacy with a mixture of contempt and incredulity. In the summer of 1861, the largest army ever assembled in North America marched south into Virginia. Northerners rejoiced that the end of the rebellion was at hand. The headlines in the Brattleboro *Vermont Phoenix* caught the mood exactly: "Our Grand March on Richmond," "Fairfax Court House and Vienna Occupied," "Continued Flight of the Rebels," "Triumphal March of Our Grand Army." The ensuing Union defeat at the battle of first Bull Run was one of the profoundest shocks of the war. The *Phoenix*, like other Northern journals, found itself conducting a bitter postmortem. From Brattleboro the news from Virginia spread up the West River Valley to the farms and villages of central Windham County. In a farmhouse on the outskirts of Townshend, young Marshall Harvey Twitchell pondered the Union humiliation and decided to enlist.¹

There had been Twitchells in New England since the early days of the Massachusetts Bay colony. Marshall's branch of the clan settled in Ver-

mont about the time construction of the Erie Canal was finished. Born in 1840 to Harvey Daniel and Elizabeth Scott Twitchell, his was a strange destiny. After the war he would become an important Louisiana carpet-bagger, fighting on the losing side in the violent political wars that brought down the Reconstruction regimes in the South. In 1861, though, he was just another Vermont farm boy, teaching school, studying law, and dreaming of the future.²

Northern soldiers fought for complex reasons. In a vague way, most men were patriots fighting for the Union, but patriotism blended with myriad other motives. Men craved adventure; they longed for escape from farms, villages, jobs, fathers, wives—the tedium of daily life. For a few, slavery alone was cause enough to fight. “Thank God I enlisted when I did, and where I did!” a young Vermont abolitionist confided to his diary. “Thank God for the opportunity of preaching Abolitionism to slaveholders, and to slaves.” Even before bounties, some men were attracted by the thirteen dollars a month the government paid soldiers. Pay was an added incentive for Vermonters because the state promptly tacked on seven dollars in state pay. Peer pressure was a strong influence, too. It was hard for a young man to stay behind with the old folks when the other boys were dashing off to breathless adventure. A Vermont youth whose parents were too ill for him to leave home alone expressed his frustration to a friend who had enlisted: “Oh how I wish i could go I can’t hardly controll myself I here the solgers druming round. If you get your eye on old Jef Davis make a cathole threw him. I am agoing to join a training Company that they are getting up here so that I can realize a little of the fun that solgers have.” In Marshall Twitchell’s case, no single motive was decisive. He was patriotic and he was against slavery, too. The defeat in Virginia was a pretext for enlisting along “with the opportunity of visiting New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond at the expense of the government.” And despite the lesson of Bull Run, he still believed the war would be short and painless.³

His mother, Elizabeth, and his sisters, Helen and Belle, were aghast when they learned of his decision. Tearfully they begged him to change his mind. Little Kate, the youngest Twitchell, was upset by the turmoil that she did not understand. Twelve-year-old Homer probably wished that he were older so that he could go to war, too. Marshall’s father, Harvey Daniel, was silent at first. Then came the day in late August when it was time to go, and his father offered to drive him to the enrollment office. As the wagon wound up the West River road to Jamaica village, Harvey Daniel broke his silence and pleaded with his son to stay home. Marshall would not budge, but as he walked out of the recruiter’s office, he was taken aback by the tears in his father’s eyes. Hill country fathers ruled

their families with an iron hand. A daguerreotype of Harvey Daniel from just before the war reveals an imposing figure with silver-haired temples, a full gray beard, and the look of an Old Testament patriarch. The look was common to the age and so was the anxious awe such fathers instilled in their sons. Marshall had never seen his father display such emotion, and in that moment arose his first suspicion that fighting Rebels was going to be a tougher job than he expected.⁴

The infantry regiment was the clay from which Civil War armies were molded. Soldiers were recruited, mustered, transported, drilled, sent into battle, and finally disbanded in regiments. In mid-September, Twitchell rendezvoused with the 4th Vermont Regiment at Camp Holbrook, outside Brattleboro. Army records reveal that he had a light complexion, hazel eyes, sandy-colored hair, and stood five feet, seven inches, close to the average height of Vermont troops.⁵

He was enrolled as a private in I Company. I Company had 104 soldiers: a captain, two lieutenants, five sergeants, eight corporals, and eighty-eight privates. The regiment represented the entire state, but I Company was mainly from Halifax, Jamaica, Townshend, Wilmington, and the other villages of western Windham County. At this stage of the war, the men in the ranks elected their company officers; the men of I Company chose Leonard A. Stearns, a produce merchant, as captain and company commander. Within a few days, a regular army officer mustered them into the federal service and read the articles of war. It was a sobering moment because most infractions carried the death penalty.⁶

Military records are a storehouse of social data. The 1,006 enlisted men and thirty-six officers of the 4th Vermont were mostly farmers or, more accurately, farmers' sons. Sixty-eight percent of the men in Twitchell's company listed their occupation as farmer, and in only one of the regiment's ten companies did less than half the soldiers so identify themselves. In one unit, eighty-nine of one hundred men were husbandmen. The records also reveal the extent to which war was a young man's business. Seventy-one percent of the regiment was under twenty-five years of age, and eighty-eight percent was under thirty. Even most of the officers were quite young. On the other hand, nearly every company had three or four men over forty. In ethnic makeup, this was a solidly Yankee outfit. Seventy-one percent of the men were natives of Vermont, and most of the others were from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and New York. In an age of mass immigration from Germany and Ireland, there were fewer than thirty German or Irish-born in the entire regiment.⁷

The regiment also mirrored the class structure of rural New England. Apart from the preponderance of farmers, the men in the ranks were overwhelmingly laborers, mechanics, teamsters, shoemakers, clerks, drum-

mers, papermakers, harnessmakers, butchers, house painters, and other members of the rural working-class. By contrast, the regimental officers were mostly business and professional men as were the company commanders. The first lieutenants numbered three lawyers and the son of Vermont's governor-elect. In all, among the regiment's thirty-six officers were only three farmers. There is nothing mysterious about these findings. Prominent citizens were more active than ordinary folk in raising companies and regiments, typically with a tacit understanding that they would be elected (or appointed) as officers. Moreover, Americans have traditionally deferred to business and professional success in choosing leaders.⁸

The colonel was Edwin H. Stoughton, a twenty-three-year-old West Pointer with a reputation as a fencer. A month before Fort Sumter, he had resigned from the army to study law. Vermont governor Erastus Fairbanks put him back in uniform. One of the first things that Twitchell and his fellow recruits learned was Stoughton's Special Orders No. 1. Beginning with reveille and then early morning drill, the colonel's orders set a routine that governed camp life from before sunrise to taps after dark. After breakfast was police call, then guard mounting, surgeon's call, company drill, orderly call, dinner (lunch), and so on through the day. Part of a recruit's education was mastering the jargon of such orders. Reveille was a brassy wake-up call and early morning roll check. Police call, or fatigue duty, was cleaning up the camp. Parade was regimental roll call, inspection, and dress parade. Tattoo was company roll call and soldiers in quarters for the night. Taps was lights out. New soldiers also learned to recognize the distinctive bugle or drum "calls" that announced each period of the day.⁹

Stoughton's regimen was not engraved in stone. After a few days he changed it, starting afternoon drill earlier and making it for the regiment instead of by companies. At the same time, he moved parade from early evening to late afternoon. In the weeks and months to come, the weather, training needs, movement to Virginia, and, eventually, fighting brought more changes. What did not alter, however, was the basic idea of Special Orders No. 1: that the daily life of soldiers was carefully arranged from waking to sleeping. This fundamental would govern Twitchell and his mates for as long as they wore their uniforms.¹⁰

The first days of army life were like a plunge through December ice. Twitchell's first meal, for instance, was a breakfast of coffee in a tin cup, a bit of bread, and a slice of meat. Some men found the menu spartan.

"Cook, bring on the potatoes!"

"Hav'n't any."

"Bring on your butter for this bread!"

"Soldiers don't have butter."

"Where is the milk for this coffee?"

"You boys who are not weaned had better go home."¹¹

Twitchell was hungry and ate his food without complaining. Sleeping on straw with a single blanket, twenty men to a tent, was also unsettling. "Some were in doubt," he recalled, "whether the blanket was to go over or under us. It was the general opinion that if we were pigs we needed no blankets but more straw; if men, we wanted two blankets. But every one was allowed to consider himself as he pleased; there was no increase of either blankets or straw." It rained a lot, and the combination of wet weather, exposure, and a radically changed diet caused over one-fourth of the regiment to come down sick—or so contemporaries explained the phenomenon. As we shall see, Twitchell's generation had little understanding of the epidemics that swept through Civil War armies.¹²

The regiment's conical Sibley tents carpeted the floor of the Connecticut Valley at Brattleboro for a little over a week—precious little time for farm boys to learn soldiering, especially when most of the officers were raw, too. The 4th was the first Green Mountain regiment with uniforms—black hats, navy blue tunics, light blue pants—supplied by the army; previous units had been outfitted in gray by the state. Vermont boys were not the only ones sent to the front in uniforms likely to be mistaken for the enemy's. The predictable result was confusion and occasional tragedy. Twitchell's unit was also fortunate to receive English Enfield rifles instead of the smoothbore muskets issued to earlier Vermont troops. The difference between the two weapons was nothing less than a revolution in military technology. The smoothbore musket had been the basic weapon of foot soldiers for three centuries. It was not accurate beyond eighty yards, and over two hundred yards, soldiers might as well hurl imprecations. In the 1840s a French army captain named Claude E. Minié invented the minié ball, an oblong bullet fired from a rifled gun barrel. The result was a heavy caliber rifle that had the distance and accuracy, although not the rate of fire, of a twentieth-century weapon. In its Springfield and Enfield versions, it dominated Civil War battlefields the way the machine gun dominated the moonscape of World War I a half-century later.¹³

Excitement reigned the last night at Holbrook. In and about town were liquor and brothels, attractions irresistible to many soldiers. Trouble ensued and the guardhouse filled up with drunken, rowdy men. Timothy Kieley of E Company recorded the scene in his diary:

about 2 o'clock the Colonel of the Regt comes to the guard house. The prisoners were very Boisterous and insulting to the Colonel. The Colonel grasped up a gun and thrust at the most riotous of the prisoners and hit him on the side and it then glanced off and struck another man on the Rist inflicting a slight wound. A detachment of

the soldiers was sent to a house of ill fame to arrest one of our men. We surround the house But found none. We then searched another house with the same success as before. We was joined at the former place by the Adjutant and Quartermaster. We then marched to [a] place about 4 miles Distant called Algerre's to a Hotel to search for some of the soldiers but found none.¹⁴

In the twilight of a September Saturday, Brattleboro turned out to see the boys off. After several sweeps through the town, they boarded the train. Like Twitchell, most of them knew little except Vermont. As the cars rumbled south down the Connecticut Valley in the darkness, their thoughts turned to family and home and speculation about the unknown war ahead. At New Haven, Connecticut, they transferred to a sea-going steamer, which took them to Jersey City and another train. The people of Jersey City and Newark lined the tracks cheering as the train jolted past. That night the City of Brotherly Love welcomed them with a fine supper, appreciated all the more because they had eaten little but dry bread since Brattleboro. Twenty-four hours later the train pulled into Washington. After a night's stopover at Soldier's Rest, a reception center near the depot, the regiment pitched its tents on Capitol Hill.¹⁵

The men of the 4th looked out on the famous city and saw an overgrown, overcrowded village. Despite the proximity of nearly 100,000 Union troops, their tents ringing the city and filling the open spaces within, Washington retained a distinctly rustic ambience. It was malarial in the summer and a muddy bog after winter rains. From Capitol Hill the view was splendid. The huge Capitol building towering before the Vermonters was unfinished; the marble wings lacked steps and a scaffold and crane topped the structure where the dome would go. Looking west down the mall, they saw a mile away the Smithsonian Castle, and further on, the one-third completed obelisk of the Washington Monument. Apart from these, the only public structures in view were the Patent Office, the General Post Office, and the cluster of buildings around the executive mansion. The city's public edifices were so far apart that a disquieting emptiness seemed to fill the spaces between them. The idea of Washington as "a city of magnificent distances" was a subject of ridicule by European visitors. Losing oneself in the streets of Washington, Anthony Trollope wrote, was like getting lost in "the deserts of the holy land." The raw, unfinished city, to contemporaries and later historians, symbolized the unfinished quality of the nation.¹⁶

The new arrivals were probably struck most by the constant motion. "Who would have suspected that it was the Sabbath?" asked a doctor who arrived in the early hours of a Sunday morning. "Horsemen were galloping in every direction; long trains of army wagons rattled over the pavements at every turn of the eye; squads of soldiers marched here and

there; all was hurry, bustle and confusion." The city's low life also made a strong impression on country boys. "Washington was a very sink hole of iniquity," a Wisconsin officer recalled. "Thieves, speculators, gamblers and vile characters of all kind" thronged the streets. There were reportedly five thousand prostitutes in town.¹⁷

Yet, this rude city could inspire awe. From the 4th Vermont's encampment, Timothy Kieley looked west on the unfinished Capitol "with its thousands [of] sacred associations" and his thoughts turned to the nation's father, George Washington: "Me thinks that as he walks the Golden streets of Paradise, his proud spirit weeps as He see's the Happy Country which he fought for Now, standing in deadly array against each other and deluging the Continent with Blood and Misery. This Broad field, which was once happy and prosperous, is now one vast camp of men."¹⁸

To Twitchell and his mates, the encampment on Capitol Hill brought new and unwelcome experiences of army life. After pitching their canvas, they asked for straw only to be informed "we could not have none as there was not enough for the horses." The state had supplied their food at Holbrook; they now received their first rations from the army. A wagon lumbered up the hill and bacon sides were dumped on the ground outside the commissary tent. A guard was stationed over the meat. When his stint was up, he "informed the relieving sentinels that he did not know whether he was posted there to keep the bacon from running away or to keep the boys from getting near enough to be bitten by the maggots." Someone complained to Colonel Stoughton who, after inspection, judged the bacon unfit for Green Mountain consumption and ordered it carted away. Alas, no new meat replaced it and the regiment went hungry. "It was the first and the last time that the 4th Vermont refused its rations," Twitchell recalled. Thereafter, "we always kept all we had and got all we could."¹⁹

After a few days in the shadow of the Capitol, the regiment packed up and marched down Pennsylvania Avenue, through Georgetown, up the Potomac, and across Chain Bridge. Earlier in the month, Chain Bridge—a solid wooden structure mounted on brick pylons—had been the scene of an emotional incident that touched the hearts of Vermonters. William Scott, a young private in the 3d Vermont, had been posted as a guard on the bridge. An hour after midnight, on September 4, the officer of the guards' voice rang out: "I want a man out here! Your guard has gone to sleep and we have him under arrest." Despite the fact that Scott had stood guard the night before and was ill, his courtmartial the next day sentenced him to death. It should be remembered that, at this stage of the war, Rebels threatened Washington on three sides, and many Union soldiers pitched their tents within cannon shot of Confederate batteries. It was a big job imposing discipline on youth unaccustomed to

the harsh demands of army regulations. Bible in hand, Scott was blindfolded on September 9 and put before a firing squad of twelve men. The boy could barely keep his feet, and the men chosen to carry out the sentence were only slightly more composed. At the last moment an officer stopped the execution. At President Lincoln's request, Scott had been pardoned and spared the ignominy of being the first Union soldier executed for dereliction of duty. For Vermonters, the episode of the sleeping sentinel was among the most poignant moments of the war.²⁰

Just beyond Chain Bridge, in the wooded, rolling hills of Northern Virginia, was Camp Advance and the tents of the 2d, 3d, and 5th Vermont Regiments. The weather was cold and rainy, frustrating the officers who were anxious to train and drill their men. For Twitchell, the 4th's nearly two weeks at Camp Advance were eventful. He and his fellows gawked at their first sight of a soldier killed by the enemy — a cavalryman. Then there was a mail robbery and the companion rumor, reaching all the way back to Vermont, that Twitchell and another I Company soldier were involved. Captain Stearns published a letter in the *Vermont Phoenix*, explaining that neither man was implicated in the crime and neither had been "arrested or shot." Most memorable was a dark, still night when I Company performed its first picket duty. About midnight, a rumor made the rounds that a Confederate attack was imminent. Twitchell was on the company's right when the moon partially came out, revealing over the crest of the hill what appeared to be a company of Rebels crawling forward. He alerted the captain, and the line on the right was quickly strengthened. The bluecoats then waited for the rising moon to reveal the intruders more clearly. A half hour passed; then more minutes slipped by. Slowly I Company crept ahead. Twitchell heard rifle hammers cock along the line. "Our nerves were strung to such a tension that it would be a relief when the enemy sprang to their feet, but they never rose." Finally, the Federals advanced into the ranks of the silent Rebels and discovered themselves standing amid the mounds of a cemetery. The event passed into regimental lore as "Captain Stearns's graveyard scare." For as long as he remained in the army, Twitchell never mentioned his role in the affair.²¹

In early October the Union high command made a decision that affected most of the Vermont soldiers in the army. General William F. "Baldy" Smith, a West Point graduate and a native of St. Albans, Vermont, proposed forming the four Vermont regiments at Camp Advance (plus a fifth scheduled to arrive later in the month) into a single brigade. Smith's idea was that an all-Green Mountain brigade would have a special esprit de corps. The army was all for esprit de corps, but it recognized the existence of a strong counter-argument. In the event of military

disaster, Vermont could lose a generation of young men in a single battle. For this reason, brigades were almost always composed of regiments from two or more states. In this instance, one of the few times in the war, the army set aside its reservations and created the Vermont Brigade under the command of Brigadier General William Thomas Harbaugh Brooks, a West Pointer from Ohio. The new unit was assigned to Smith's Division of the Army of the Potomac.²²

The second week in October Smith's Division marched deeper into Virginia, to Camp Griffin outside the village of Lewinsville. The Rebel lines were a few miles beyond, and a dozen miles to the southwest was the main Confederate army between Centreville and Manassas. Camp Griffin was part of Washington's elaborate defenses, and the Vermont Brigade would spend the next five months here on the red clay soil of Smoot's Hill.²³



Encampment of the 4th Vermont Regiment at Camp Griffin, Virginia, 1861.

At Camp Griffin, Twitchell's officers finally found the time to turn him and his greenhorn companions into soldiers. By modern standards, simply firing and reloading a Civil War rifle was a complicated task. To load, a soldier

had to reach into his cartridge box and get a cartridge, which consisted of a charge of powder and ball wrapped in paper; place one end of the cartridge between his teeth and tear it open; empty the powder into the barrel and insert the ball with pointed end uppermost; draw the rammer out of its pipes beneath the barrel; ram the ball home; return the rammer; half-cock the hammer and remove the old cap; reach into the cap pouch, get a new cap, and press it down on the nipple.²⁴

Now the rifle could be raised, fired, and the process repeated. To do this two or three times a minute in combat with minié balls buzzing past like deadly hornets took training and more training. Hardee's *Tactics* and later training manuals broke the process down into nine steps, which soldiers practiced until it was as automatic as shaving or tying shoelaces. Even then, the training frequently failed in battle and soldiers stuffed their rifle barrels with unfired minié balls.²⁵

Marching drill was equally vital. When the weather allowed, Captain Stearns drilled the company in the morning; then Colonel Stoughton put the regiment through its paces in the afternoon. Eight or nine hundred marching men learned to respond instantly to commands such as: "Change front to the rear, on first company. Battalion, about—*Face*. By company, left half wheel. *March*"; or "Three right companies, obstacle. By the left flank, to the rear, into column. Double-quick—*March*." Precision marching was impressive on parade, but the real purpose of the drills was combat. Rushing into a fight, hundreds of men marching in a column of four had to break, on command, left or right into a two-tiered line of battle. They had to be able to reform ranks, maneuver over or around obstacles, and move to another part of the battlefield in a matter of minutes. Failure to master the drills was likely to produce confusion and defeat. The complicated choreography could only be learned through unrelenting toil, and Twitchell and the men in the ranks came to hate it and the men who made them do it. Seeing his colonel drill his men to exhaustion day after day, a sergeant in a Maine regiment concluded that the men hated their commander more than the enemy. "I swear they will shoot him the first battle we are in."²⁶

The drill field was soon eclipsed as a cause of discontent by more urgent matters. Twitchell remembered the long winter at Camp Griffin as one of the darkest times of the war and so did most of the men who were there. On Smoot's Hill the 4th Vermont met the deadliest enemy of soldiers before the twentieth century: disease. Every morning the adjutant at regiment collected the rolls from the first sergeants in the companies and tabulated the results for Colonel Stoughton's morning report. Thirty days, thirty morning reports. These dry standardized forms, the very epitome of army red tape, tell a grim story. At the start of October, thirty-one men were down sick, but day after day the figure climbed. By November it was 150, and the first week in December it soared to 342. It dropped off after Christmas and hovered around two hundred for the rest of the winter. In the beginning, measles and other childhood diseases were the chief maladies, but then typhoid fever swept the regiment. The probable cause was contaminated water. For two months prior to the regiment's arrival on Smoot's Hill, a thousand cavalry horses had occupied the slope

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above the stream from which the 4th took its drinking water. By the first of the year, twenty-eight men had died, mostly from typhoid. (In only one of the 4th's battles in the war would that figure be exceeded.) Many of those who survived never returned to duty. In a little over three months, without so much as a skirmish, the regiment's strength dropped from over a thousand men to only 660.²⁷

The melancholy at Camp Griffin extended home to the Green Mountains. "I visited your Camp with a Gentleman from my native town in Vermont who had been summoned on account of his son's illness," a man wrote Colonel Stoughton in November. "He arrived to[o] late his poor boy was already dead and his body had been sent to his former home. This was the third death from one tent within a few weeks, and these three were all from the same town and neighbors." Had the home folk been aware of the unfeeling conduct of Stoughton's fellow officers they would have been even more upset. Stoughton rebuked his men at Christmas:

The Commanding officer learns with deep regret that there are in his command, Officers who are so unmindful of the observance and rights due to the unfortunate who fall in our midst, victims not to the missiles [*sic*] of the enemy but to the unrelenting hand of disease, as that they allow those entrusted to their care by fin[e] friends and doting parents to be hurried to their last resting place on this earth with no drum to sound a last requiem nor chaplain to utter a last prayer for him whose loss is bewailed by as many and dear friends as those of us who are spared.

He warned against any repetition of such callousness.²⁸

The other Vermont regiments were also hard hit. Two weeks before Christmas, out of nearly five thousand men in the Vermont Brigade, over one thousand were down sick with measles, pneumonia, bronchitis, typhoid, dysentery, diarrhea, and other afflictions. All the Union forces suffered appallingly that winter, but the Vermonters had the highest ratio of sick men in the army. It was one of the war's ironies that boys from the pure air of the Vermont hills were more susceptible to disease than those from the North's consumptive cities.²⁹

Twitchell's generation blamed the epidemics that raged through both Northern and Southern armies on dirty, unsanitary army camps. It was a plausible explanation. As one soldier put it, "an army, any army does poison the air. It is a city without sewerage, and policing only makes piles of offal to be buried or burned." The contemporary explanation, however, failed to comprehend the real danger. Dirt or filth, in the common-sense usage of the words, were contributing factors, but the real problem was microbiological contamination, something beyond the medical knowledge of the day. The revolutionary discoveries of Louis Pasteur and Joseph Lister belonged to the future. In 1861 medicine had one foot in the modern

world and one foot in the Middle Ages. "In the Civil War," a distinguished surgeon recalled from the interplanetary distance of World War I,

we knew absolutely nothing of 'germs.' *Bacteriology*—the youngest and greatest science to aid in this conquest of death—*did not exist!* . . . we were wholly ignorant of the fact that the mosquito, and only the mosquito, spreads yellow fever and malaria; and of the role of the fly in spreading typhoid fever by walking on the excreta of those sick of typhoid and then over our food and infecting it with the typhoid germs which we swallow with our food.

In the surgical tent,

we operated in old blood-stained and often pus-stained coats, the veterans of a hundred fights. We operated with clean hands in the social sense, but they were undisinfected hands. To the surgeon, the spotless hands of a bride are dirty. We used undisinfected instruments from undisinfected plush-lined cases, and still worse, used marine sponges which had been used in prior pus cases and had been only washed in tap water. If a sponge or an instrument fell on the floor it was washed and squeezed in a basin of tap water and used as if it were clean.³⁰

Ignorance, in short, made it inevitable that disease organisms would triumph over the primitive medical science of the 1860s.

There were nearly four bouts of sickness for every man in uniform in the first year of the war. It was a statistical probability that Twitchell would have been ill at least once that grim winter on Smoot's Hill, but he was not. Instead of flux or fever, the young soldier's main concern in those troubled days was his relationship with Captain Stearns. How he came to be the company commander's clerk is unclear, but sometime in the fall he moved into the captain's tent. He handled official correspondence and wrote newspaper letters that the captain signed. Stearns was a young widower, and his clerk also carried on a suit in his behalf for the hand of a young woman in Stanstead, Quebec. "I was allowed to write these letters with no suggestions from the captain except that he wanted to marry her if he could." Stearns and the lady evidently found the epistles satisfactory because they were married in the spring.³¹

The friction between the two men arose over gambling. Twitchell was a stern Yankee moralist. He did not swear, drink, or gamble. Camp life on Smoot's Hill, in addition to being deadly, was dull, and the men gambled to relieve the monotony. They played poker (or bluff), faro, craps, twenty-one, and every game of chance known to nineteenth-century Americans, even some of their own devising. Twitchell visited the 2d Vermont one day and found soldiers gaming with their muskets. Using blanks, they put their pieces on the ground and pulled strings to discharge them, wagering on the distance the weapons recoiled. Poker was the captain's game, and it was more than recreation. He offered to teach his clerk the



Captain Marshall Harvey Twitchell, 1864. Courtesy of Laura W. Twitchell.

fine points of bluff, get him promoted to lieutenant, and then the two of them would play as a team against the other officers in the regiment, splitting their winnings. Twitchell was ambitious, but after thinking over Stearns's offer he rejected it. Gambling seemed a small matter in the army, he told his superior, but he believed the habit would be a liability when he returned to civilian life.³²

Stearns must have valued his clerk's services, because he swallowed the rebuke and even promised to promote him to corporal. The second week

in January, a corporal died of typhoid, opening up the rank for Twitchell. Yet, the weeks passed and no promotion was forthcoming. The clerk grew suspicious. His opinion of his captain's character slipped still lower ("he had only a small stock of gratitude and honor"). The young man from Townshend was not the sort to be put off. He waited until Stearns gave him another letter-writing assignment. He wrote the letter but, at the same time, wrote out his promotion. The captain rushed in from afternoon drill and found himself facing an ultimatum: no promotion, no letter. It must have been an important missive because Stearns, furious, gave in. About this time, however, Twitchell moved out of the captain's tent and went back on regular duty.³³

He had no sooner sewn his chevrons on than he almost lost them. One day in late winter, he was in charge of a picket post on the Fairfax road. A soldier suggested visiting a Southern woman beyond the Union line who would sing for them. Yielding to temptation, Twitchell and his companion left their posts, slipped down a gully through the line, and sought out this Southern nightingale, who proved more than willing to entertain them. Twitchell grew suspicious, however, when the woman insisted on seating them near the piano where they could not see out the window. The ruins of Virginia planters' mansions dotted the countryside thereabouts, and he found himself wondering why this Rebel lady was so accommodating. He slipped out of the house and saw horsemen thundering into view. "Get out of there; rebel cavalry!" he shouted. To take the ravine was too slow; the two soldiers raced for the line in the open. An officer caught them and ordered them to report to the captain of the guard under arrest. The captain of the guard, however, chose to overlook the incident unless the arresting officer made an issue of it. Twitchell kept his stripes and vowed to obey orders thereafter.³⁴

His resolve was shortly put to a severe test. Before the regiment left Vermont, the mother of Private William H. Miles, a schoolmate from Townshend, had charged him with the unwanted task of looking after her only son. One stormy night, the company was on picket and Twitchell was acting sergeant major at the main reserve. The officer in charge became ill (or so he said) and the task of making midnight grand rounds devolved on Twitchell. He reached Miles's post where he should have been challenged, but no challenge was forthcoming. Lightning ripped the sky and revealed his friend asleep at his feet. It was an agonizing moment. Despite the cold, he began to sweat. Regulations required him to take his friend's rifle and arrest him—a seized rifle was proof of sleeping on duty. Miles would then be courtmartialed and subject to the same penalty as William Scott, the sleeping sentinel at Chain Bridge. Twitchell reached for the weapon and lifted it. The wily Miles, however,

had tied the rifle to his boot. He snapped to his feet and blurted, "Who comes there?"

"Grand rounds," said Twitchell, releasing the rifle and jumping back.

"Advance grand rounds and give the countersign." Twitchell complied. He argued with his friend about sleeping on duty but finished his rounds greatly relieved.³⁵

Hours before sunrise on March 10, reveille blasted Twitchell and his comrades from their sleep. They had orders to pack their knapsacks and cook two days' rations. The regiment skipped out of Camp Griffin at dawn to the tune of "The Girl I Left Behind Me" and fell in with the brigade. "It was an animating spectacle," wrote a soldier in the 2d Vermont. "If the men had just been freed from prison their countenances would hardly have worn a more gleeful expression." They stopped a few days near Fairfax Courthouse and then headed for Alexandria in a cold, driving rain. After six hard months of drill, rain, mud, boredom, and pestilence, they were going to meet the enemy. The great Peninsula invasion of Virginia was underway. A week later they boarded transports for Fortress Monroe.³⁶

As Twitchell lay below deck in the night, listening to the ship's wash in the Chesapeake Bay, his father's farm, the West River, schooldays in Townshend — the world of his youth — must have seemed like another life. The first phase of his military education was over. The second was beginning. He and his mates had been drilled, marched, paraded, inspected, exhorted — all in preparation for this hour. Ahead lay fighting, at Dam No. 1, Williamsburg, the Seven Days, Crampton's Gap, Antietam, and these were only the 1862 clashes. Before it was over, Twitchell would fight in seventeen battles and the 4th Vermont in twenty-six. He transferred to the United States Colored Troops in 1864 and then, the summer after Appomattox, joined the Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana. For the men in his old regiment, the war ended when Lee surrendered, but Twitchell's greatest battles, against the Knights of the White Camellia and the Louisiana White League, started after the guns fell silent in Virginia.³⁷

NOTES

¹ Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days & Collect*. (Philadelphia: Rees Welsh & Co., 1882), 22; *Vermont Phoenix*, 25 July 1861.

² Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *Genealogy of the Twitchell Family* (New York: privately pub., 1929), 1-2; Ted Tunnell, ed., *Carpenter from Vermont: The Autobiography of Marshall Harvey Twitchell* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Ted Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction: War, Radicalism and Race in Louisiana, 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 181-209.

³ Rufus Kinsley Diary, August 25, 1862, Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier; Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 37-40; *Carpenter from Vermont*, 24.

- ⁴ *Carpetbagger from Vermont*, 24; Twitchell Family Scrapbook, in the possession of Peggy Twitchell, Burlington, Vermont.
- ⁵ Marshall Harvey Twitchell Compiled Military Service Record, RG 94, National Archives.
- ⁶ 4th Vermont Regimental Books, RG 94, National Archives; Wiley, *Billy Yank*, 24-25.
- ⁷ 4th Vermont Regimental Books.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 482-83; Dorothy Sutherland Melville, *Tyler-Browns of Brattleboro* (New York: Exposition Press, 1973), 5; 4th Vermont Regimental Books.
- ¹⁰ 4th Vermont Regimental Books.
- ¹¹ *Carpetbagger from Vermont*, 25.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 25-26; G. G. Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War* (Burlington: Free Press Association, 1886), I: 159.
- ¹³ Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, I: 158-59; James M. McPherson, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 193-94.
- ¹⁴ Timothy Kieley Diary, September 20, 1861, Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, September 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25, 1861; Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, I: 159-60.
- ¹⁶ Noah Brooks, *Washington, D.C., in Lincoln's Time*, ed. Herbert Mitgang (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 13-21; Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington, 1860-1865* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), 5-10.
- ¹⁷ George T. Stevens, *Three Years in the Sixth Corps* (Albany, N. Y.: S. R. Gray, Publishers, 1866), 7; Rufus R. Dawes, *Service with the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers*, ed. Alan T. Nolan (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1962), 33; Leech, *Reveille in Washington*, 261.
- ¹⁸ Timothy Kieley Diary, September 25, 1861.
- ¹⁹ *Carpetbagger from Vermont*, 26.
- ²⁰ Lorna Beers, "The Sleeping Sentinel William Scott," *New England Galaxy* 7 (1965): 3-14.
- ²¹ *Carpetbagger from Vermont*, 26-28; *Vermont Phoenix*, 31 October 1861.
- ²² Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, I: 235-37.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 237.
- ²⁴ John J. Pullen, *The Twentieth Maine: A Volunteer Regiment in the Civil War* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1957), 33.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 33-37; William J. Hardee, *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1971 reprint), II: 155, 169.
- ²⁷ 4th Vermont Regimental Papers, RG 94, National Archives; Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, I: 160-61.
- ²⁸ H. A. Willard to Colonel Edwin H. Stoughton, November 19, 1861, 4th Vermont Regimental Papers; Gen. Orders No. 11, December 26, 1861, 4th Vermont Regimental Books.
- ²⁹ Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, I: 237-38.
- ³⁰ *Carpetbagger from Vermont*, 28; Frank R. Freemon, "Lincoln Finds a Surgeon General: William A. Hammond and the Transformation of the Union Army Medical Bureau," *Civil War History* XXXIII (March 1987): 5-7; Paul E. Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War: Natural Biological Warfare in 1861-1865* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1968), 3-17; W. W. Keen, "Military Surgery in 1861 and in 1918," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* LXXX (November 1918): 11-22.
- ³¹ Wiley, *Billy Yank*, 124; *Carpetbagger from Vermont*, 28-30; Leonard A. Stearns Pension File, RG 15, National Archives.
- ³² *Carpetbagger from Vermont*, 28-30.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30-31.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31-32.
- ³⁶ Timothy Kieley Diary, March 10, 1862; Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, I: 161-62, 241-42.
- ³⁷ *Carpetbagger from Vermont*, 69, 80-98; Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, I: 178.