

The recruits of 1861 who answered the romantic call of flag and country were no better prepared for the everyday realities of war than they were for the shock of combat. Few of them had ever before gathered by the thousands in camps, slept under canvas or the stars for months at a time, marched in step, followed obscure orders or lived constrained by rigid discipline. On the eve of the Civil War, the U.S. Army had a total strength of 16,000—barely enough, as one observer noted, to police New York City. Nearly half of the men who donned the blue had been farmers, and almost two-thirds of the Confederate recruits traded the plow for the gun. The remainder entered the service from any of a multitude of trades: more than 300 different occupations were represented in the Federal Army, and more than 100 in the Confederate. The majority of the soldiers on both sides were white, native-born, Protestant, unmarried—and young. The minimum age for enlistment on either side was 18, and four out of five were between that age and 29. Private Edward Black joined the 21st Indiana as a musician at the age of 9. In 1862, North Carolinian E. Pollard gave his age as 62 when he joined up, although he was probably over 70 and was soon discharged since rheumatism prevented him from performing his soldierly duties. The oldest soldier, Curtis King, enlisted in the 37th Iowa Infantry in November 1862 at the age of 80. King served nearly 6 months before being discharged for disability. His regiment, which was nicknamed the “*Graybeards*,” had 145 soldiers aged 60 or older.

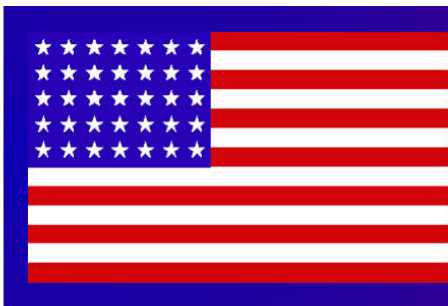
Military units were made even more diverse by the intermingling of recruits from different regions and varying nations. Company H of the 8th Michigan, for example, had only 37 Michiganders in its ranks; the remainder comprised 47 New Yorkers, 26 from other states, 7 Canadians, 5 Englishmen, 4 Germans, 2 Irishmen, 1 Scotsman, 1 Dutchman, and one mysterious individual who listed as his nationality “*the ocean*.”

The average Civil War soldier stood between 5' 4" and 5' 9" tall. The shortest Federal on record enlisted in the 192nd Ohio Infantry, at 3 feet 4 inches. The tallest Federal was David Van Buskirk of the 27th Indiana. Standing 6' 10 ½" Van Buskirk weighed in at a whopping 380 pounds. He became a sort of celebrity when he was captured and advertised by the Confederate press as “*the biggest Yankee in the World*.” When taken to Richmond, Van Buskirk was even visited by President Jefferson Davis. Davis was taken somewhat aback as the gigantic prisoner claimed that when his six sisters bade him farewell back home in Bloomington, “*they leaned over and kissed me on top of the head*.” No matter the size, shape, or age, the Civil War soldier was arguably one of the finest fighting men in American History. He marched hundreds, maybe even thousands of miles; ate horrible food, lived in the toughest conditions, and fought some of our bloodiest battles, taking the most casualties. The despicable Braxton Bragg saw the valor in the common soldier when he noted: “History will yet award the main honor where it is due—to the private soldier.” Perhaps Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., spoke for many when he stated: “*I started in this thing a boy; I am now a man*.”

On **MONDAY, AUGUST 27**, the MRRT welcomes a special guest speaker, Dr. William M. Anderson, who will present “*The Mind of the Soldier*.” Dr. Anderson’s program will focus on the common soldier’s “motivation to serve, correspondence, relationships with women and the enemy, his attitudes about the great issues of the war, and finally, the ultimate sacrifice that so many made.” Dr. Anderson retired in 1998 following a 33-year career in higher education. He served as college president at Carl Sandburg College for 21 years, and in August of 2001, he was appointed by Governor John Engler as the founding director of the Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries. He has continued in this capacity under the administration of Jennifer Granholm. Dr. Anderson is a Civil War and baseball historian, authoring/editing seven books and seventeen published articles, including *They Died to Make Men Free: History of the 19th Michigan Infantry* and *The View from the Dugout: The Journals of Red Rolfe*. He is an accomplished and popular speaker whose resume is far too vast to mention in a newsletter.

You’ll certainly want to be in attendance for this amazing presentation. Mark your calendars now....

The Michigan Regimental extends its thanks to last month’s speaker, Larry Hathcock, for his excellent rendition, “Civil War Sharpshooters.” Numerous questions and positive comments indicated the interest piqued in the audience.



FALL FIELD TRIP: The Gettysburg Trip, scheduled for the weekend of Saturday/Sunday, October 20-21, is getting close. Bus deposits have been turned over to Treasurer Carroll Tietz, so the blank space in your checkbooks should be filled in. Last month, many of the dinner deposits (\$37) were handed over as well. **THE REMAINDER OF THESE DEPOSITS SHOULD BE TURNED IN AT THIS MONTH’S MEETING.** Dinner choices include:

- Slow Roasted Prime Rib Au Jus
- Chicken Jean Marie: Chicken Breast Sauteed with Sun-Dried Tomatoes, Garlic, Fresh Parmesan, Basil and Olive Oil Tossed with Penne Pasta
- Fresh Broiled Teriyaki Glazed Salmon
- Vegetarian Plate

The cost includes tax, gratuity, and the fee for the room. Dinner will be preceded by a CASH BAR.

QUIZ: Questions pertain to the Common Soldier

1. Which veteran Confederate soldier was the last to die? And, which Union soldier was the last to die?
2. What were “Whangs”? And, what were “Western Pioneer,” “Wood Chuck,” “Rapid Ann,” and “Mule”?
3. What was commonly called “Devil’s Half-Acre”? And, what was the most photographed regiment of the war?
4. Which Confederate was the tallest in the war? And, who was the youngest Civil War soldier, actually a drummer boy?
5. What was the “Bohemian Brigade”? And, what was a musket load of 3 large buckshot, bound on top of a .69 caliber smoothbore bullet, called?
6. What ages of men were susceptible to the first Confederate conscription law? And, what was the final limit of ages eligible for the draft later in the war?
7. Which Union general was responsible for instituting Corps Badges? And, what was the design of the II Corps badge?
8. What did the term “running the guard” mean? And, what was another common name for this?
9. What was the word for an area of a defensive line or fortification that protruded beyond the main works? And, what was the common punishment called whereby the offending soldier was bound with his arms and knees tied around a stick or rod?
10. What was the standard daily ration of beef per day for a Union soldier? And, what was “Hay foot, Straw foot”?

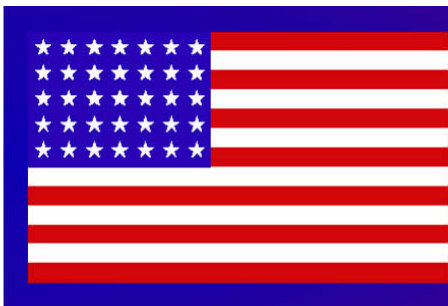
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Soldiers’ views on some Civil War topics.....

TENTS: John D. Billings, a Massachusetts artilleryman, declared that to enter a Sibley tent on a rainy morning “*encounters the night’s accumulation of nauseating exhalations from the bodies of twelve men and an experience which no old soldier has ever been known to recall with great enthusiasm.*”

CAMP LIFE: “*The majority of soldiers are a hard set,*” remarked an Iowa soldier. “*They have every temptation to do wrong and if a man has not firmness enough he will soon be as bad as the worst.*” A Vermonter lamented that “*I will be a perfect Barbarian if I should stay here 3 years.*”

FURLOUGHS: “*If our brave soldiers are not permitted to visit their homes,*” commented Confederate General D.H. Hill, “*the next generation in the South will be composed of the descendants of skulkers and cowards.*” One frantic private approached Federal General George Thomas, stating, “*I need a furlough, my wife just had a baby and I haven’t seen her in two years.*” Thomas denied the request.



RELIGION: Some preachers delivered sermons from civilian life not tailored to the needs of soldiers in the field. “*The preacher took an old piece of faded yellow manuscript and began the sermon,*” Lt. Samuel Craig complained, “*discussed infant baptism and closed with an earnest appeal, touchingly eloquent, to mothers! I’m sure there wasn’t a mother in the regiment,*” he went on, “*and not more than two or three infants.*”

GAMBLING: Dice, card games, races, cockfights, boxing matches, baseball games, raffles, and other games, such as “*Chuck-a-Luck,*” took up much of a soldier’s time. Invariably, some of these outdrew the chaplain’s services. A colonel of the 7th Wisconsin noted wryly: “*I think this unfair as the church runs only once a week but the game goes on daily.*” Jacob E. Hyneman of Grant’s army penned in his diary: “*Down in the mouth. Only paid a week ago and have not a cent now, having bluffed away all that I did not send home. I don’t think I will play poker any more.*”

BATTLE: “*When the fight was over and I saw what was done the tears came free,*” a soldier wrote home to his wife. “*To think of civilized people killing one another like beasts, one would think that the supreme ruler would put a stop to it.*” Another soldier of the 6th Georgia expressed his poignant indictment of battle: “*None can realize the horrors of war, save those actually engaged. The dead lying all around, your foes unburied to the last, horses and wagons and troops passing heedlessly along. The stiffened bodies lie, grasping in death, the arms they bravely bore, with glazed eyes, and features blackened by rapid decay. Here sits one against a tree in motionless stare. Another has his head leaning against a stump, his hands over his head. They have paid the last penalty. They have fought their last battle. The air is putrid with decaying bodies of men and horses. My God, My God, what a scourge is war.*”

QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Texan Walter Williams died on December 19, 1959, at 117 years, 1 month, 5 days and Albert Woolson of Minnesota died August 2, 1956, at 109 years, 5 months, 22 days
2. Another name for army shoes and names of camp newspapers
3. A notorious gambler’s den near Fredericksburg and the 4th Michigan Infantry
4. 7’ 7 ¼” Henry Thruston of Texas and Charles Knecht of Missouri (enlisted as a drummer boy at age: 7 years, 10 months, 14 days)
5. Nickname for a group of Northern war correspondents and “Buck and Ball”
6. 18-35 and 17-50
7. Phil Kearny and a three-leaf clover
8. An unauthorized absence or desertion and “flanking the sentinel”
9. Salient and “Bucking and Gagging”
10. One pound, four ounces and a method used by drill sergeants to designate left from right feet to teach marching techniques

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Don’t forget to circle the date—**MONDAY, AUGUST 27**—for **Dr. William M. Anderson’s** distinctive presentation, “*The Mind of the Soldier.*” The meeting, as usual, will be held in the Farmington Public Library (Grand River and Farmington Road), starting at 6:30 P.M. It promises to be an unforgettable night.

Also try our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>.