To Bleed for a Higher Cause:

The Excelsior Brigade and the Civil War

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Joseph Hopkins Twichell, the Chaplain of the Excelsior Brigade, wrote that as he saw the destruction caused during the Battle of Williamsburg all he could think was, "'sin entered into the world and death through sin."[1] The Civil War was the bloodiest conflict in American history; it was a war that claimed the lives of nearly 700,000 Americans and came close ripping the nation asunder.[2] Describing why men volunteered to fight and die during this bloody war, Abraham Lincoln stated that the Civil War soldier served because of his "patriotism, political bias, ambition, personal courage, love of adventure, [and] want of employment."[3] Indeed, during the Civil War, the armies of the Union and the Confederacy were fed most often by volunteers. It were these men who enlisted at the war's inception, and reenlisted when their terms of service expired, who did most of the fighting and dying on the Civil War's many sanguine battlefields. As James McPherson states, internal motivations such as patriotism, a sense of duty and honor, courage, moral convictions, or want of adventure had to be powerful inspirations for the Civil War soldier to volunteer since the majority of Civil War soldiers chose to fight. [4] Once in the army, Civil War soldiers were continually motivated and supported by the bonds that they shared with each other, by their Christian faith, and by the inspiration of brave officers.[5]

By analyzing who the men of New York's Excelsior Brigade, comprised of the 70th through 74th New York volunteer regiments, were and what they experienced during the war, it is possible to understand how patriotism, duty, and faith inspired soldiers to serve and how faith, camaraderie, courage, connection to home, and inspiring leadership enabled these soldiers to

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[1] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, May 9, 1862, , *The Civil War Letters of Joseph Hopkins Twichell*, eds. Peter Messent and Steve Courtney (Athens, GA and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 125.
[2] James McPherson (ed.), *The Atlas of the Civil War*, (London and Philadelphia: Running Press Book Publishers 2005), 9.
[3] John Nicolay and John Hay (eds.), "Opinion on the Draft never Issued or Published by the President," *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works, Comprising his Speeches, Letters, and Miscellaneous Writings*, vol. 2 (New York: The Century Company, 1894, 1922), 388.
[4] James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5-6.
[5] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 53-54, 62-63, 80-81.

continue fighting. The Excelsior Brigade is a particularly fitting unit to study since its men came not only from New York, but also from across the North. In addition, this unit was as ethnically, demographically, and religiously diverse as it was geographically. The soldiers who fought and died in the Excelsior Brigade represent a broad spectrum of the people living in the North when the Civil War began. Throughout their service, the Excelsior Brigade performed admirably on the field of battle and became one of the veteran brigades in the Army of the Potomac. These men fought in almost every major engagement in Virginia. [6] The Brigade's participation in the war's catastrophic Virginia campaigns makes the Excelsior Brigade a microcosmic example through which we can analyze the question of why men fought and what kept them fighting during the American Civil War. While this paper discusses the Excelsior Brigade, only brief historical background will be provided when necessary. This is not a regimental history. For those interested in such a work, Henri Le Fevre Brown's history on the Third Excelsior, 72nd New York, is a useful resource.

Behind the formation of the Excelsior Brigade was the infamous Democratic politician Daniel Edgar Sickles. An influential member of the Tammany Hall Democratic machine in New York City and an active public servant, Sickles had ended his first and only term as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives as tensions between the North and South escalated.[7] The youthful Sickles had ended his political career because of the scandal surrounding his murder of his wife's lover, Philip Barton Key, the son of Francis Scott Key, in the middle of Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C. [8] While Sickles was exonerated for his crime under the defense of temporary insanity, his forgiveness of his young wife, Teresa Sickles, did not sit well with the

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[6] Henri Le Fevre Brown, *History of the Third Regiment Excelsior Brigade, 72nd New York Volunteer Infantry, 1861-1865*, (Jamestown, NY: Journal Printing, Co., 1902), 7

[7] Thomas Keneally, *American Scoundrel: The Life of the Notorious Civil War General Dan Sickles*, (New York and London: Nan A. Talese Doubleday, 2002), 2

[8] Thomas Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 125-129.

American people and his electorate.[9] It was not in the capacity for his constituents to forgive their representative for murder and to also accept his forgiveness of the adulterous Teresa Sickles.[10] In fact, Joseph Hopkins Twichell, the Brigade's chaplain, refused a carriage ride with Teresa Sickles noting in a letter to his father that he "preferred not to see her in so close proximity as the same carriage."[11]

War presented Sickles with the opportunity for political resurrection and Sickles set his mind to raising, funding, and outfitting a regiment. [12] To raise and outfit his new regiment, Daniel Sickles used much of his personal fortune to advertise and recruit volunteers. Sickles's original goal was to raise one regiment; however, as recruits eagerly enlisted, Sickles received permission from New York's governor, Edwin Morgan, to raise a brigade. Enthused by the prospect of leading a contingent of five thousand men and receiving a brigadier general's star, Sickles recruiting efforts continued. [13] Soon, the Excelsior Brigade, named after New York State's motto, was born.[14]

Upon undertaking the challenge of raising a brigade, Daniel Sickles and his fellow recruiting partner, Captain William Wiley, a friend and political ally from Tammany Hall, realized that it would be impossible to find five thousand recruits to fill the ranks of the Excelsior Brigade in New York City alone.[15] Even though New York was the nation's most populous city at the time and was in the process of becoming the Union's main naval yard and supply depot, there were

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[9]Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 197-200, 203-204.
[10] Christopher Ryan Oates, *Fighting for Home: The Story of Alfred K. Oates and the Fifth Regiment, Excelsior Brigade*, (Charlotte, NC: Warren Publishing Inc., 2006), 2-3. This paper will sometimes cite two different Oates from the same source. Christopher Ryan Oates is the biographer of Alfred K. Oates's war experience. Any citation of Alfred K. Oates comes from a letter provided by Christopher Oates in *Fighting for Home*.
[11]Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, May 12, 1861, 24.
[12] Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 3-4.
[13] Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 3-4.
[14] Jas Stevenson, *The History of the Excelsior or Sickles' Brigade*, (Patterson, NJ: Van Derhoven & Holms, Book and Jobs Printer, 1863), 6-7.
[15] Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 220.

just not enough men to fill the ranks of the Excelsior Brigade and all the other regiments simultaneously being raised in the city. In spite of the lack of local New York City men, New York's role as the main Northern port made it the hub of supply and recruitment in the Northeast and the city attracted eager volunteers wishing to enlist in whatever regiments they could find.[16] Consequently, by the time of the brigade's official formation, the Excelsior Brigade boasted companies not only from New York, but also from Pennsylvania, Michigan, New Jersey, and Massachusetts.[17] Among these soldiers were recruits for the Excelsior Brigade such as James Niblock and Alfred Oates, volunteers from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania who came to serve the Union cause.[18] Thus, the brigade's geographic diversity not only represented the Empire State, but also the rest of the Union as well.

In addition to the brigade's geographic diversity, the Excelsior Brigade was representative of the various socio-economic and ethnic groups in nineteenth century America. The men who served in the Excelsior Brigade were native-born Americans and English or Irish immigrants. Native-born Americans, such as Lucius Jones Jr., a young seventeen year old recruit from Chautauqua County, hailed from small, rural communities in the Midwest and upstate New York. However, the recruits from New York City and other urban centers such as Pittsburgh were mainly Irish and English immigrants. In fact, the esteemed Congregationalist Chaplain of the 71st New York Volunteers, Joseph Hopkins Twichell, wrote in a letter to his brother, Edward William, that "at least half, I might say two thirds, of my men are Irish Catholics alone."[19] Consequently, the Excelsior Brigade comprised of men who came from all social strata and

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[16] Edward K. Spann, *Gotham at War, New York City, 1861-1865*, The American Crisis Series: Books on the Civil War Era (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002), 57-58, 67-68.
[17] Oates, Fighting for Home, 5-7.
[18] Ruthanne Hariot, "Discord in Civil War Units," *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 63, no.4 (1980): 367; Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 16.
[19] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward William Twichell, June 22, 1863, *Letters Twichell*, 34.

ethnic backgrounds and, as a result, the motivations these men had for fighting were as diverse as their places of origin before the war.

The Irish were a particularly unique group in the Excelsior Brigade. Men such as Twichell had initial reservations about the "rough and wicked men" he intended to serve because of the religious and ethnic prejudices of the day.[20] Irish immigrants occupied one of the lowest rungs on the social ladder in the United States during the nineteenth century. They were not considered white like other immigrants from the British Isles and Germany and were suspected because of their Catholicism. As a result of this prejudice, faced job and housing discrimination throughout the nation.[21] Most male Irish immigrants worked as laborers during the day while women worked as domestic servants or in the textile factories throughout the north in order to help support the meager income their families received. While the Irish immigrants lived in their own separate communities in New York City, up until the Civil War they were looked down upon with ambivalence at best and outright contempt and hatred at worst.[22]

When war broke out in 1861, the Irish, although staunch Democrats opposed to abolitionism and eager to keep racial distinctions between blacks and Irish explicit, saw in the war an opportunity to claim the identity of white American manhood and citizenship.[23] In addition, a large number of Irishmen enlisted for the pay. Men such as Thomas Meagher, the eventual leader of the Irish Brigade, also saw the Civil War as an opportunity to train Irish troops for a future revolution against Great Britain. [24] Thus, many Irishmen fought to support their families and gain

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[20] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, April 22, 1861, *Letters Twichell*, 16-18.
[21]Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship during the Civil War Era*, (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 15-16.
[22] Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 17-18.
[23] Iver Bernstein, "The Volcano under the City: The Significance of the Draft Rioting in New York City and State, July 1863." in *State of the Union: New York and the Civil War*, Harold Holzer, ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 21-22; Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 27.
[24] Samito, *Becoming American under Fire,"* 103-105.

experience to free their homeland from oppression.[25] In combination with these other inducements, the hope that military service for the Union would solidify the Irishman as a true American inspired many Irish immigrants to enlist so that they could eventually claim the right to legitimate citizenship based upon their wartime service.[26]

Twichell's transition from a man with Yankee prejudices against Irish Catholics to a man more accepting of different faiths and people demonstrates how effective Irish service in the Civil War was at securing and solidifying Irishmen's position as American men and citizens. In fact, while Twichell at first commented that he was "prepared for rude repulses if not abuse" from the men he served, by September 1862, Twichell told his father that he doubted "whether a Protestant religious teacher ever had such a foothold in the midst of a Catholic community."[27] Consequently, the overall bravery of the Irish soldier, in combination with the Irish community's ability to publicize that service, enabled Irish immigrants after the war to identify themselves and be identified as not only "white" but also as "Americans."[28]

Despite the patriotic and adventurous call that Lincoln asserted many men answered at the outset of the war, the Excelsior Brigade, as like most Civil War units, was not free from the problems of dissension in and desertion from the ranks. Early on in the brigade's formation, a company of U.S. Zouves cadets from Pittsburgh decided that it did not want to serve under Sickles any longer. The men of this company claimed that they were neglected by the Brigade's officers and inadequately supplied. They sought to leave the Excelsior Brigade and head back to Pittsburgh. Among the men from U.S. Zouves Cadet Company who wanted to leave the Excelsior Brigade was James Niblock. While intending to return home and reenlist in a regiment

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[25]Samito, *Becoming American under Fire,"* 30-31.
[26] Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 27.
[27] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, May 21, 1861, *Letters Twichell*, 28; Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, September 21, 1862, *Letters Twichell*, 180
[28] Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 185-186.

from his native state, Niblock and his companions repeatedly tried to escape, forcing Sickles to imprison them in the camp guardhouse until their discharges were approved. However, these Pittsburgh men felt that the hardships that they faced on Staten Island were too much to bear and many deserted. Included in that group was Niblock, who, on July 1, 1861, jumped out of a window in the guardhouse and got on a barge headed for New York City. While he eventually reenlisted in the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteer Regiment, Niblock and his companions are indicative of the fact that the realities and monotony of army life oftentimes sucked the patriotic fervor out of volunteers. [29]

This incident demonstrates that strict discipline and absolute obedience to officers was not something that was common in the Civil War regiment.[30] Duty and belief in the cause had to be powerful and every present motivators that compelled the Civil War soldier to remain in the ranks. Without a sense of commitment or purpose, soldiers like Niblock would leave. The Excelsior Brigade, just as in many Civil War regiments, North as well as South, was plagued by the problem of desertion. Consequently, because desertion was relatively easy and discipline lax, the internal compulsions that had inspired Civil War soldiers to enlist and needed to remain strong to enable them to face the deadly realities of the battlefield.[31]

Alfred K. Oates and Lucius Jones Jr. are emblematic of such soldiers who volunteered and fought because of a strong sense of duty and patriotism. Alfred K. Oates was an English immigrant from Pittsburgh who volunteered to serve in the 74th New York Volunteer Infantry, the 5th Excelsior. When war broke out, Oates traveled to New York City where he enlisted in the Excelsior Brigade, eager to defend his adopted country and the Union cause.[32] Lucius Jones Jr.,

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[29] Hariot, "Discord in Civil War Units," 367, 369-370.
[30] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 5-6.
[31] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 48-49, 61.
[32] Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 14-16, 22.

the son of a farmer in Chautauqua County, enlisted in the 72nd New York at the regiment's recruiting station in Dunkirk, New York. While Jones never explicitly stated his reason for volunteering in his memoir, it is evident that he felt compelled by his own sense of duty, by his longing to prove his manhood, and by his patriotism to enlist.[33] Therefore, for Oates and Jones, duty compelled them to fight. It was this feeling of one's obligation to fight that further enabled Oates to persevere through the trials of combat to protect his adopted country and gave Jones the ability to prove his worth and patriotism to his fellow comrades by bravely fighting on the battlefield.[34]

Duty and patriotism were not the only forces driving the Civil War soldier. God played a role as well. God was an essential part of life for almost all Nineteenth century Americans. Their faith was the product of the Second Great Awakening, a period of religious revivals that spread across the country during the early 1800s. To the Civil War soldier, faith not only sustained them in battle, like duty, patriotism, or camaraderie, but it also helped them wrestle with their own mortality and face the knowledge that any bullet could bring about their out death. [35] For some men who served the Union, such as Joseph Hopkins Twichell, faith augmented their patriotism and sense of duty and infused them with a hatred of slavery. As one of the most prolific writers from the Excelsior Brigade, Joseph Hopkins Twichell stated in a letter to his father Edward Twichell that he volunteered because he desired to help "soften the asperities of war" for the men whom he served.[36] Twichell wanted to serve because he saw in the war an opportunity to truly discern his calling to be a Congregationalist minister.[37] In addition, Twichell was an ardent abolitionist; he saw his service in the war as part of a crusade to end slavery. When he learned of

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[33] Lucius Jones Jr., *In the War of Rebellion from 1861 to 1865* (Fredonia, NY: 1912), 1-3, 37-39.
[34] Jones, *In the War of Rebellion*, 1-5; Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 14-15.
[35] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 62-63, 71.
[36] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, April 22, 1861, *Letters Twichell*, 16-18.
[37] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, April 22, 1861, *Letters Twichell*, 18.

Copperhead opposition to the war effort, he condemned it and told his father that he would pray ardently for "the 'great day' which will blow the trumpet of Freedom for the oppressed, and proclaim to the world that the Republic is not a failure."[38]

The combination of religious faith and war created a sense of fatalism in many Civil War soldiers. They resigned themselves to death and understood each bullet's path was determined by God.[39] Joseph Hopkins Twichell expressed such sentiments during the Battle of Fredericksburg. As he watched Union troops charge Confederate fortifications on the heights above the town, he remarked that he "felt all free America beating in my one heart, as I saw our standards plunged in the smoke of battle, rising and falling...From it too, I looked up and in the clear, peaceful sky seemed to see God regarding this contending swarm of dust-worms with infinite Calmness and infinite Pity, Himself only seeing the end and the beginning of all things…"[40] Such language encapsulates the fatalism which appealed to many soldiers who came to believe that God ordained the path of each bullet and one's death in battle was unavoidable, but chosen by God. [41]

Other soldiers in the Excelsior Brigade, such as Alfred K. Oates, heard their friends and comrades ascribe to the fatalist creed. One such soldier in Oates's regiment had enlisted underage and his mother was attempting to force him out of the army. Angered, he wrote home telling his mother to cease her efforts and attempting to console her fears by writing, "[i]f it be my lot thus to fall, than I am ready; if to go safe through the war, then I shall be safe."[42]

Other soldiers saw their faith as a way of securing protection in battle and embraced a more positive fatalism, viewing God as the agent of their survival rather than the orchestrator of their

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[38] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, June 12, 1862, *Letters Twichell*, 140.
[39] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 62-63.
[40] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Sara Jane Twichell, December 17, 1862, *Letters Twichell*, 200.
[41] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 62-63, 71.
[42] Winfield Scott Guerney to Mrs. Guerney, September 7 1861, *Fighting for Home*, 22.

demise.[43] Twichell noticed this among the soldiers he served during the Battle of Malvern Hill. As the fighting intensified along the line, a soldier shouted to him that, "Some one must be praying for us, Chaplain!" and Twichell replied, "I know of one!"[44] The soldier's comment and Twichell's reply demonstrate how faith was viewed as both a protection against the fear of death and death itself. Civil War soldiers understood the risks of war and their faith enabled them to cope with loss, struggle with their fear of death, and persevere through the grueling months of devastating warfare that robbed them of their comrades-in-arms.[45] It is because of God's prevalent role in the lives of these soldiers that the duties of a Civil War chaplain were among the most important. The chaplain was a resource to whom soldiers could turn in their distress before and after they had suffered the "asperities of war."[46]

In addition, since Twichell's role as a spiritual mentor for the troops not only consoled his men before an imminent battle and after its conclusion, but also sustained them men through long months of warfare, the role of the chaplain transcended religious differences among. Men who lost their comrades or prayed for safety in battle did not particularly worry about what religion the chaplain was who administered to their spiritual needs. In fact, Twichell's comment to his father about the warm reception the Catholics he served gave to him when he preached demonstrates how the stress of being on the frontline eroded old religious prejudices for Chaplains and worshippers alike.[47] For example, Twichell became close friends with the Catholic chaplain in the Excelsior Brigade, a Jesuit priest named Joseph O'Hagan. He even shared a blanket and bed with O'Hagan as they slept in a Union hospital while they tended wounded soldiers at the Battle of Fredericksburg, something O'Hagan stated would never have

[43] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 65.
[44]Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, July 5, 1862, *Letters Twichell*, 157.
[45] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 71.
[46] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, April 22, 1862, *Letters Twichell*, 16-18.
[47] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, September 21, 1862, *Letters Twichell*, 180.

happened if the two had not been serving in the war.[48] In this sense, the war was transformative because it helped to break down prejudices between the different Christian denominations whose adherents fought together on the battlefield.[49]

After the First Battle of Bull Run, the Excelsior Brigade set out for Washington D.C. to bolster the defenses of the nation's capital.[50] Once the Excelsior Brigade arrived in the capital, the brigade spent the majority of its time drilling and bolstering the fortifications around Washington, D.C.[51] However, unlike many of the other units in the Army of the Potomac, one of the regiments in the Excelsior Brigade, the 74th New York, experienced combat when it was deployed to clear Confederates out of a fortification at Matthias Point, a small peninsula that jutted into the Potomac River where Confederate troops had placed cannon to disrupt Union supply ships traveling to Washington.[52] With the aid of the *Freeborn*, a Union gunboat, the 74th New York raided Matthias Point and succeeding in neutralizing the Confederate position there. As stated by Alfred K. Oates, the 74th New York performed a job "the Government was going to do at the expense of a million and a half dollars…to send 4000 men & 15 Gun boats to do what 400 of us & one gun boat had accomplished…"[53] This initial combat experience for the 74th New York, along with other smaller raids performed by the rest of the Excelsior Brigade, helped to create an early sense of camaraderie and group cohesion in the ranks beyond the companionship the men had developed from training with each other since April 1861. Moreover, it was

[48] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, October 7, 1861, *Letters Twichell*, 71; Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Sarah Jane Twichell, December 17, 1861, *Letters Twichell*, 201.
[49] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 68-69.
[50] Le Fevre Brown, *History Third Regiment Excelsior*, 16-17.
[51] Le Fevre Brown, *History Third Regiment Excelsior*, 17-18.
[52] Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 26-28.
[53] Alfred K. Oates to John and Sarah Oates, November 12, 1861, *Fighting for Home*, 28.

camaraderie that solidified the duty the men felt to defend the Union and would help give each unit the strength to fight together in the future battles.[54]

One of the reasons that group cohesion and comradeship were such important motivators for Civil War soldiers is that many Civil War units were recruited from the same community. The men one fought beside in battle were one's neighbors and childhood friends. While the Civil War soldier inevitably forged bonds with fellow soldiers he met after his regiment was recruited, the bonds of one's home community remained in the theater of war. The presence of the home community in Civil War regiments had several effects on the soldier and his community. First, it helped inspire soldiers to fight for their comrades-in-arms with increased fervor since enemy bullets were not just killing new friends, but close family friends and relations. Second, it helped soldier's who would otherwise flee and panic in battle find the resolve to fight so that they would not be branded a coward at home and on the battlefield. Third, if a regiment performed particularly well on the battlefield, it created a sense of communal pride at home, but also devastated the community if the regiment received high casualty rates in a particular battle. [55]In a war where somewhere between 23 and 24 percent of all soldiers were casualties, whether from disease or a wound on the battlefield, war deprived many communities of their young men.[56]

Coupled with the group cohesion that training created between the men of Civil War regiments was also the fear many Civil War soldiers had concerning their future performance in battle. Many soldiers dreaded being labeled a coward and the anxiety of expected battle drove Civil War soldiers to often question whether or not they would be able to withstand the trials of combat. More often than not this fear of cowardice gave Civil War soldiers the courage to

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[54]Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 29.
[55] McPherson, For Cause and Comrades, 80-81.
[56] Steven Mintz and Sarah McNeil, "Civil War: Casualty and Costs of the Civil War," *Digital History*. Last Update November 29, 2012. Retrieved 29 November 2012 from http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/us20.cfm/

fight.[57] As described by the biographer of Alfred K. Oates, his descendant Christopher Ryan Oates, Alfred Oates was troubled by "how he would act when he faced combat, bravely or cowardly…"[58] However, despite his reservations about his own capacity for bravery, Alfred Oates, like many other Civil War soldiers, fought with courage throughout the war.[59]

The Excelsior Brigade had these levels of community involvement and comradeship just like any other unit. In the 72nd New York, Companies D, E, and H were composed of 289 men from Chautauqua County, a county bordering Lake Erie in Western New York. These men participated in some of the hardest fighting of the war and suffered horrendous casualties. At the end of the conflict, only about 30 of the original 289 volunteers returned home to Dunkirk, the town where they had all gathered for recruitment.[60] The bonds of home community bolstered these soldiers' feelings of patriotism and duty and enabled these men and witness the devastation of war without becoming disillusioned with the higher cause for which they were willing to die. As one soldier in the 72nd New York from Chautauqua remarked, "we had left our homes cheerfully at our country's call, and we will remain until it no longer needs us, but not a day- not an hour longer."[61]

Lucius Jones expresses a similar sense of friendship and devotion to his comrades-in-arms in his memoir when he discusses the death of his fellow soldiers. It is evident from Jones's writing that the deaths of his friends and fellow soldiers affected him for his entire life, especially since he wrote his memoir many years after the Civil War ended. For many of his close companions, Jones mentions who they were, where they were from, and when they died. For example, when

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[57] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 77-79.
[58] Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 52.
[59] Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 124.
[60] Kerry R. Tocin, "To Hell and Back: Companies D, E, and H; 72nd New York Volunteers Dunkirk, New York (1861-1864), *Niagara Frontier*, 21 (Winter 1974), 86.
[61] McKinstry Letter to *The Censor*, Qtd. in Tocin, "To Hell and Back," 86.

discussing the Battle of Chancellorsville, Jones recounts the death of "…Henry Heyl, of Dunkirk- a fine young man," who was shot as the brigade rushed to fill the gap created by the retreating Eleventh Corps. His mention of these men and their deaths indicates how the bonds he shared with his friends were very strong and how the death of a comrade was a great emotional blow to Civil War soldiers.[62]

Home was also integral to sustaining and uplifting soldiers at war as men oftentimes remembered those they left behind and eagerly awaited news from relations.[63] Joseph Hopkins Twichell wrote to his father frequently and his letters are full of questions asking about home and detailing everything that he had done since his last letter. Indeed, Twichell proves how important home was to the soldier in a letter to his sister on New Year's Eve 1863. He writes how "[b]etween goblins without and mournful thoughts that thronged within, a weird, unearthly feeling began to creep over me, as if there was a corpse in the tent, and I craved company- yours, Sis, upon reflection, hence I have chosen it…"[64] Joseph Twichell is clearly despondent and, by writing home, he is able to feel some connection to those he loves and longs for. In addition, this letter is also demonstrates how Twichell's longing for home increased after the unexpected death of his father. In this letter, Twichell goes on to write how "[w]hatsoever thing I do, whatsoever thing I purpose, he [his father, Edward Twichell] is in the reckoning thereof."[65] Thus, home serves as a refuge for Twichell, who in his despondency and grief, he can reach back to in his letters and mentally reconnect with those now gone and those he has not seen.

In addition to group cohesion, individual fear of cowardice, and connection to home that united the Civil War soldiers and kept them sane throughout the war, it was also incredibly

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[62] Jones, *In the War of Rebellion*, 13.
[63] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 132.
[64] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Sara Jane Twichell, December 31, 1863, *Letters Twichell*, 288.
[65] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Sara Jane Twichell, December 31, 1863, *Letters Twichell*, 289.

important to them that their officers lead them with distinction and bravery. Since many officers in both the Union and Confederate armies were inexperienced, the commitment that Civil War officers showed to their men and their bravery in battle were the two most effective ways that Union and Confederate officers could solidify their position as effective leaders in the eyes of the men they commanded.[66] In the Excelsior Brigade, as in many regiments, the quality of officers varied. Lucius Jones Jr.'s company captain, S.M. Doyle, was a brave man who cared for and was adored by his men. Sadly, he was rewarded for his bravery with a mortal wound during the battle of Williamsburg. Doyle inspired his men since he refused to leave the field of battle after a bullet pierced his right leg and shattered the bone, but was soon after killed when "a ball clipped his skill…"[67] As was the case with many brave officers, leading from the front led to death or incapacitation. Jones admired Doyle and his loss deeply affected Jones and the soldiers in his company; Doyle was "mourned by the soldiers who loved him and whom he loved." [68]

On the other end of the spectrum of effective commanders, Daniel Sickles embodied the supreme essence of the controversial officer. While brave on the battlefield, Sickles's leadership on the battlefield was questionable. After arriving in Washington, D.C., Daniel Sickles was faced with the pending Senate confirmation of his commission as a brigadier general.[69] To secure it, Sickles traveled into Washington to push for the confirmation of his commission.[70] In his absence, Colonel Nelson Taylor, "a most able officer," according to Twichell, and the commander of the 72nd New York, assumed the duties of command.[71] The crisis, however urgent in Sickles's view, was not resolved and General Joseph Hooker, Sickles's immediate superior,

[66] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 53-54.
[67] Jones, *In the War of Rebellion*, 10.
[68] Jones, *In the War of Rebellion*, 10.
[69] Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 233.
[70] Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 235.
[71] Joseph Hopkins Twichell to Edward Twichell, April 8, 1862, *Letters Twichell*, 108.

removed Sickles from command just before the Peninsula Campaign. As a result, Sickles was forced to remain behind in Washington, D.C. and wait out the Senate debate about his confirmation while the Excelsior Brigade engaged in its true baptism of fire and bloodiest confrontation of the entire war: the Battle of Williamsburg.[72]

Eventually, Sickles was given his commission and the command of the Excelsior Brigade, but he missed the Second Bull Run and Antietam since he was recruiting for the Excelsior Brigade.[73] Up to this point in the war, Sickles had made no major blunders, but he lacked the command experience afforded to other officers who fought in the largest engagements of the war. This fact did not prevent Sickles from being promoted and he was given the command of the III corps.[74] Sickles initially created problems when he moved the majority of his corps at Chancellorsville and isolated the XI Corps from the rest of the army. This action contributed to the rout of the XI Corps by Stonewall Jackson's troops since the Sickles was not readily available to support the collapsing XI Corps and stave off Union defeat.[75] Sickles became embroiled in more controversy at Gettysburg after his decision to again move his corps without orders exposed the left flank of the Union Army, crippled his command, and cost him a leg.[76]

After Gettysburg, Sickles's actions and the loss of his leg necessitated change and the III corps was dissolved. The Excelsior Brigade became part of a larger brigade in the II Corps where it served the remainder of its time in the Army of the Potomac.[77] After recovering from his wound, Sickles pushed for his reinstatement to command, but his testimony before Congress blaming other generals for the fiasco created by his maneuver at Gettysburg inhibited his return

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[72] Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 241.
[73] Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 61, 90, 95-100, 103-104.
[74] Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 116.
[75] McPherson (ed.), *The Atlas of the Civil War*, 114.
[76] McPherson (ed.), *The Atlas of the Civil War*, 121.
[77] Jeffrey D. Wert, *The Sword of Lincoln: The Army of the Potomac*, (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 329.

to the battlefield.[78] Throughout the rest of his life, Sickles vehemently disputed claims that his actions at Gettysburg nearly cost the Union army the battle and he championed his role as the savior of the Union cause.[79] Historians today still debate this issue and the legacy of his command.

After the Battle of Gettysburg, the Excelsior Brigade as part of the II Corps fought alongside throughout the arduous Overland Campaign of 1864 in the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Courthouse, Cold Harbor, and in the initial assaults around Petersburg.[80] This warfare was brutal and gruesome and surpassed any horrors the Excelsior Brigade had experienced up that that time. Soldiers fighting at this time faced the prospect of battle everyday and the Army of the Potomac was constantly on the move. Commenting in his diary on the Battle of the Spotsylvania Courthouse, Frank Ridgway, a surgeon in the 73rd New York Volunteers, the Fourth Excelsior, stated that "the battle is one of the fiercest of the war, as severe as the entire battle of the 5th, 6th, and 7th [the Battle of the Wilderness]…The charges and counter charges [are] perfectly desperate and hundreds and thousands lie stretched upon the field."[81] It was in this grueling warfare that Ridgway operated almost daily on soldiers wounded in the dangerous and extremely costly fighting. By the time that the Army of the Potomac reached Petersburg, the Union Army had suffered 65,000 casualties since the opening of the campaign six weeks prior.[82]

At the end of this brutal campaign and the beginning of the siege of Petersburg, the Excelsior Brigade came to an end. The terms of enlistment for the Brigade had expired and its ranks had

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[78] Robert P. Broadwater (ed.), *Gettysburg as the Generals Remembered It: Postwar Perspectives of Ten Commanders*, (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Company Inc., 2010), 55; Jeffrey D. Wert, *The Sword of Lincoln*, 329.
[79] Broadwater (ed.), *Gettysburg as the Generals Remembered It*, 53-55.; Wert, *The Sword of Lincoln*, 287.
[80] Le Fevre Brown, *History Third Regiment Excelsior*, 125-137.
[81] Frank Ridgway, Diary Entry, May 10, 1864. Qtd in. James J. Heslin "From the Wilderness to Petersburg: The Diary of Surgeon Frank Ridgway." *The New York Historical Society Quarterly*. 45, no.2 (April 1961): 124.
[82] McPherson (ed.), *The Atlas of the Civil War*, 142.

been depleted from the original 5000 soldiers to around 2000 soldiers.[83] Most of the soldiers, such as Alfred K. Oates and Joseph Hopkins Twichell, left the army at the expiration of their terms of service. Some others, such as Lucius Jones Jr., remained to wait out what was left of their enlistment or reenlisted to see the war to its fruition. Those soldiers who remained were dispersed into other New York regiments, such as the 120th New York, where they fought until Appomattox.[84] Thus, with the coming of July 1863, the Excelsior Brigade was no longer part of the Army of the Potomac and its soldiers and officers went back to the lives they had left behind to serve their nation in war.[85]

The lives that the men of the Excelsior Brigade returned to were as varied and unique as the lives they lived before the war. Daniel Sickles remained active in politics and served as an ambassador to Spain, where he, true to form, had an affair with the former Queen of Spain during his time there. He also served a term in Congress and was the principal orchestrator for the dedication and commemoration of Gettysburg as a national park. He claimed that the entire battlefield was his monument and for the rest of his life defended his actions at Gettysburg. He died in 1914.[86] Lucius Jones, Jr. left the army after the surrender at Appomattox and returned home to Fredonia, New York in Chautauqua County. He remained active in the veterans organizations formed after the war and was Quartermaster for Pierce Post No. 439 of the Grand Army of the Republic. In 1881, Jones received his pension for asthma and heart disease and on July 4, 1893 he received a Gettysburg Medal of Honor. Jones, Jr. died in 1926.[87] Alfred K. Oates

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[83] The brigade received reinforcements during the war to replace early casualties. The total casualties for the brigade were 2997, respectively broken down as follows: 70th New York: 679; 71st New York: 483; 72nd New York: 675; 73rd New York: 635; 74th New York: 525. "Sickles or Excelsior Brigade." New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs: Military History,http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/brigades/metropolitanBrigade.htm (accessed 12/1/2012).
[84] Jones, *In the War of Rebellion*, 28-36.
[85] Oates, *Fighting for Home*, 162.
[86] Broadwater, *Gettysburg as the Generals Remembered It*, 53-54.
[87] Jones, *In the War of Rebellion*, i,-iii, 38-39

returned home where he married and had several children. Eventually making his way to Ohio, he died in 1907 at the age of 71 in a veteran's home.[88]

Joseph Hopkins Twichell returned to Connecticut and married Julia Harmony Cushman, a cousin of one of his close friends who died in the war. He became pastor of the Asylum Hill Congregationalist Church in Hartford and soon forged a close and personal friendship with Samuel Clemens, already known as the American icon, Mark Twain. He continued his close friendship with Joseph O'Hagan until the Jesuit's death in 1878 and remained in contact with many of the men he served as Chaplain, promoting tolerance between Protestants and Catholics throughout his life. A community leader, prolific writer, and tolerant man, Twichell ministered to his congregation and community throughout the tumultuous decades following the Civil war as Hartford was transformed from a small city into a bustling industrial center. At the age of 80, Twichell died in Hartford in 1918.[89]

In 1892, John Coyne, the Colonel of the 1st Excelsior, as he addressed his troops at a reunion, captured the legacy of the war for these veterans when he stated that the they could never let their "…hearts cease to hold in warm remembrance…the comrades who marched and fought… with us through the campaigns of the Army of the Potomac."[90] Exemplifying why men served in the Civil War, the Excelsior Brigade's soldiers, officers, chaplains, and surgeons fought because they chose to and volunteered out of a sense of duty and patriotism. Their faith in God, the bonds of friendship they forged with each other, the connection they maintained with home, and the inspiration of their officers helped these men cope with the horrors of war.[91] Fighting in every major eastern campaign until Petersburg, the Excelsior's soldiers experienced some of the war's

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[88] Oates, *Fighting for Home,* 165-166.
[89] Messent and Courtney, *Letters Twichell,* 7-8, 312-318.
[90] John N. Coyne "The 70th N.Y. The First Regiment of Sickles' Gallant Excelsior Brigade." *National Tribune*. April 21, 1892, p. 4. Address given April 4, 1892, Newark, NJ.
[91] McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*.

most intense combat.[92] In spite of these overwhelming battlefield conditions, the soldiers found in each other and in their own selves the ability to overcome fear and despair. When the war ended, these men went their separate ways and reentered their ordinary lives. They did not, however, forget the men with whom they served or what they experienced. They had fought for a cause that they believed was just and that duty compelled them to defend. Through their struggle, the men of the Excelsior Brigade lost friends and comrades, but in spite of the hardships of war, they still fought and died each time it was required of them, driven by their conviction in the cause and their faith in God, their leaders, and each other.

[92] Le Fevre Brown, *History Third Regiment Excelsior*, 28-137.

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