

Answering the Call:

The New York State Militia Responds to the Crisis of 1861

by Gus Person



Coat of Arms, Crest, and Motto of the New York State Militia

New York State General Headquarters, *General Regulations for the Military Forces of the State of New York* (Albany, NY: Adjutant General's Office, 1858), 256–57.)

Ranking first in population and wealth among the states of the Union in the 1860s, New York maintained the nation's largest and most carefully organized state army. In 1850, the New York State Militia contained fifty-one active uniformed regiments and a number of independent companies. By that time, the state had completely eliminated its antiquated “enrolled” militia structure, and by a wide and radical re-organization in 1846–48, forced hundreds of hitherto independent, uniformed Volunteer Militia companies into regimental groupings.¹

By 1858, this Volunteer Militia force had increased to sixty-seven regiments assigned to twenty-eight brigades and assembled into eight divisions. The composite strength was 16,434 officers and men. Additionally, there were thirty-six general officers to command this force. By January of 1861, this total had risen to 19,189—making the Volunteer Militia larger than the United States regular army.²

Until 1865, the regiments of New York were numbered in a single series that included all branches. The regiments varied considerably in strength and effectiveness; those in the 1st Division in Manhattan had, as a rule, from six to ten active companies, while some regiments located in predominately rural areas were little better than paper organizations. Except for four (the 1st, 3rd, 4th and 70th), all the regiments served as infantry of some sort, although tradition, armament and the

Mobilization

kind of drill manual employed indicated some variation. Thus, one finds regiments in the annual adjutant general's reports of the 1860s as "Rifles doing duty as Light Infantry," or "Artillery doing duty as infantry," or merely "Artillery" only to discover that they were all essentially in the same branch of service. Additionally, regiments often contained troops of multiple branches.³

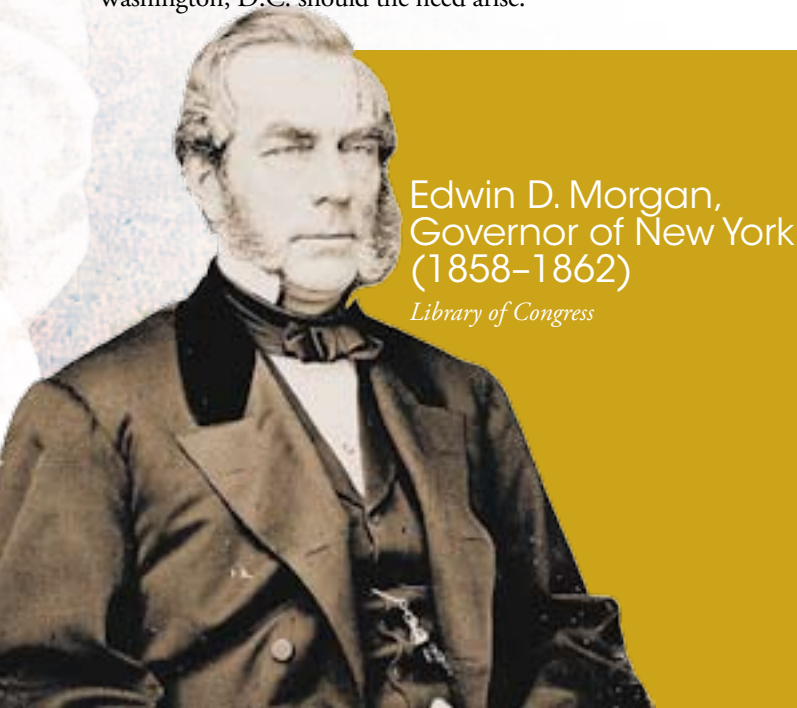
New York regiments deviated widely in such characteristics as wealth, traditions, and national origins. At the top, the 7th Regiment (National Guards) recruited conservative, affluent Protestants. The older corps tended to be native-born American in composition, and many took their membership from the wealthier classes of society. Regiments more recently formed, especially in New York City, were often heavily or completely foreign in personnel, language, and institutions. The Irish 69th Regiment was the prime example of a "foreign" unit. William H. Russell, correspondent of the London *Times*, visited the 12th Regiment (Independence Guards) in its camp in Washington, D.C. following the outbreak of the war. He examined some statistics compiled by Colonel Daniel Butterfield, and discovered that of twelve soldiers, selected at random, only two were native-born American. The rest were Irish, German, English, or generally European-born.⁴

By January of 1861, genuine public anger in the North exploded as news came in about states seceding and the seizure of Federal forts, arsenals, and other property. In this atmosphere, the Board of Officers of the 7th Regiment met on January 14 to discuss the situation. It was resolved to offer the services of the regiment should exigencies arise. Brevet Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, the army's general-in-chief, courteously turned down the offer three days later in a letter to Governor Edwin D. Morgan. Two weeks later, however, another scare—caused by the counting of the electoral votes in the recent presidential election—prompted Major General Charles W. Sandford, commanding the 1st Division in Manhattan, to assemble the officers of the regiment to brief them on Governor Morgan's plan to dispatch eight hundred militia to Washington, D.C. should the need arise.⁵

The fall of Fort Sumter on April 13 removed all uncertainty as to what the future held, and the involvement of the state militia began as soon as President Lincoln's proclamation calling for the mobilization of 75,000 troops was announced on April 15. In Albany, the legislature was still in session, and it acted promptly to create a State Military Board composed of the governor, the lieutenant governor, the secretary of state, the comptroller, the state engineer, and the state treasurer. The board acted to accept into the service of the state, in addition to and as initial part of the militia, thirty thousand volunteers for two-year enlistments (for the purposes of this article, old-style Volunteer Militia units will be referred to as such, while the wartime volunteer regiments, such as the new thirty-eight regiments, will bear the designation "Volunteers"). These volunteer infantry regiments, which were numbered in a new sequence commencing with "1," began the volunteer series that totaled 194 in the end. The resultant duplication of regimental numbers between militia and volunteers caused some confusion and much vexation, especially in those pre-war militia regiments that were forced to give up their old designations when they later volunteered for three-years' active service. Thus, the 8th New York Militia Regiment served alongside the 8th New York Volunteers at First Bull Run. The confusion that situation caused can be easily imagined. The operation of organizing those new volunteer units, however, would take time, and Governor Morgan now had to decide how best to carry out the president's immediate requirement for seventeen militia regiments from New York.⁶

On April 16, the legislature passed "An Act to Authorize the Embodying and Equipment of a Volunteer Militia and to Provide for the Public Defense." In this first increment, only eleven regiments of the state militia mobilized with an aggregate total of 7,334 officers and men.⁷

Some serious problems presented themselves to the State Military Board, since only two militia organizations were fully equipped and ready to march: the 5th and 7th Regiments. The remaining units were generally insufficiently uniformed and equipped. For example, the 69th Regiment—scheduled to depart on April 23—had only 380 uniforms for 1,050 men. Even the 7th Regiment required assistance, and on April 17 the merchants of New York City met in their Chamber of Commerce, where thirty-one gentlemen each pledged \$100 for the "equipment of the Regiment for active service." At this meeting the New York Stock Exchange also contributed \$1,000. The designated militia regiments were gripped by great excitement. Regiments turned away significant numbers of willing recruits as the war fever overwhelmed the city, already dazzled by a number of mass patriotic rallies.⁸



Edwin D. Morgan,
Governor of New York
(1858–1862)
Library of Congress



The 7th Regiment departs for the war, April 19, 1861

New York Historical Society

Colonel Marshall Lefferts, commander of the 7th Regiment, directed his unit's departure for April 19 following a requisition for additional camp equipage, baggage, and sufficient ammunition to furnish each man with twenty-four rounds. The regiment's marching orders required each man to assemble in gray fatigue uniform, sky-blue greatcoat, and knapsack with one rolled blanket. Each soldier carried suitable underwear, an extra pair of ankle boots, mess utensils, waistbelt, and cap pouch. In one of its first official duties, the veterans of the 7th Regiment—the forerunners of the State Home Guard Force— assembled to guard their Tompkins Square Armory in the regiment's absence.⁹

On April 19 the 8th Massachusetts Regiment marched through the city, accompanied by Benjamin F. Butler, brigadier general of all Massachusetts Volunteer Militia troops. At about 3:00 P.M., startling news arrived from Baltimore that the 6th Massachusetts Regiment had been attacked by a pro-Southern mob in that city. The regiment sustained some casualties, and had to fight its way across town to the railroad depot. Later that afternoon, to tumultuous acclaim, the dandy 7th Regiment marched down Broadway to embark at the ferry slip for Jersey City, and the first leg of its journey to the capital.

The 7th eventually boarded a train for Camden, New Jersey, where, on April 20, it was ferried across the Delaware River to Philadelphia.



A private in the 3rd Company,
7th Regiment dressed in gray
fatigue uniform. He is equipped
in full marching order, and
armed with the Model 1855
Springfield Rifle-Musket.

*United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle,
Pennsylvania*



Two weighty problems now presented themselves. Mindful of the recent riots in Baltimore, Lefferts began to explore an alternate route to Washington, D.C. to avoid that trouble spot. He eventually decided against the overland route by boarding the steamer *Boston*, which would carry the unit to Annapolis, Maryland. Lefferts considered it prudent not to sail any further south since it was reported that Confederate naval forces threatened the Potomac River.

In Philadelphia, a bitter feud erupted between Lefferts and Butler. The general was a brilliant, highly talented attorney, but his career was marked by a series of quarrels and wrangling due to his aggressive manner and obstinacy. Butler believed that under the Articles of War, the senior officer present should command when two or more units occupied the same location. However, neither the 8th Massachusetts nor the 7th New York had as yet been mustered into Federal service. They still operated under the orders of the governors of their respective states, and therefore they could—with justification—disregard orders from higher-ranking officers on their way to the capital.¹⁰

Lefferts resolved to maintain his own independence. Arriving in Annapolis on April 23, the regiment bivouacked on the grounds of the Naval Academy. Lefferts had already used his own funds and credit to purchase supplies and charter the steamer. Having discovered that local pro-Southern sympathizers had torn up rails and bridges on the proposed route, Lefferts planned to march his regiment the forty miles to Annapolis Junction, where it could board a train for the last

leg of the journey to Washington, D.C. Just before leaving, the soldiers cheered the arrival of the *Baltic*, the *R.R. Quylar*, and several other vessels at Annapolis, carrying the 6th, 12th, and 71st New York Militia Regiments. Those transports had left New York Harbor on April 21 amid a rapturous sendoff. With reinforcements not far behind, the march could continue. The 7th pushed forward with the thermometer above 90° F. The heat had great effect upon the young and inexperienced soldiers, already

debilitated by the confinement on the steamer *Boston*, the change in diet, and the lack of rest.¹¹

Mustering-In

Meanwhile in Washington, D.C., General Scott managed to assemble a motley array of government clerks, laborers, foreign residents, and even War of 1812 veterans—besides a few companies of regulars—to hold off an enemy attack. The 6th Massachusetts Regiment had arrived at the capital with some Pennsylvania militia, but it was the arrival of the 7th New York at the railroad depot that electrified the city. Having been ordered to report to the president, Colonel Lefferts paraded his regiment down Pennsylvania Avenue where it was reviewed at the White House by the chief executive, an admiring group of cabinet members, and an enthusiastic crowd.

On Friday afternoon, April 26, the regiment formally mustered into the service of the United States by Major Irvin McDowell, soon to be a brigadier general of volunteers. The regulations for mustering into Federal service had been issued in 1848 and covered in precise detail the entire procedure for making up muster rolls, interview of candidates, inspection and enumeration of companies, and the administration of the oath. Although the troops called for under the president's proclamation were supposed to be mustered in for three months (as mandated by the Federal Militia Act of 1792), the 7th received special consideration since it had departed for the capital immediately upon notification. Because of the special urgency of the situation, the entire regiment had dropped everything with little or no opportunity for the men to arrange personal affairs. Members anticipated that they would serve for one month until their places could be taken by other volunteer units. A number of members actually faced financial ruin. Even so, a number of the regiment's members left by early May to accept commissions elsewhere. First Lieutenant Noah Farnham of the 2nd Company accepted the post of lieutenant colonel in the 11th New York Volunteers (Fire Zouaves), and Schuyler Hamilton—who had served as aide-de-camp to General Scott in the Mexican-American War, and was currently a private soldier in the 6th Company—was again appointed military secretary to Scott with promotion to lieutenant colonel on May 9. After their arrival, the New York Militia regiments quartered themselves in various government installations throughout the city. The 7th shared accommodations with the 6th Massachusetts at the Capitol, and the 25th New York from Albany, under Colonel Michael Bryan, occupied the Casparis House, following its arrival on April 29. The 71st New York guarded the Washington Navy Yard where it spent its time in drill and other training. Colonel Butterfield's 12th New York garrisoned the Assembly Rooms, and in their spare time the men marveled at the inventions on display at the nearby Patent Office.¹²



Officers and soldiers of the 71st Regiment, Company C, at the Washington Navy Yard. This is the uniform worn at Bull Run. *United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania*

The 69th Regiment initially engaged in guarding the railroad between Annapolis and Annapolis Junction, where the men made a favorable impression on the local populace. Following the regiment's arrival in Washington, D.C., Scott sent ten West Point cadets to drill the regiment at its bivouac on the campus of George Washington University in Georgetown. The regiment mustered-in as a three-month regiment on May 9. Sixteen soldiers refused to be mustered, and were ceremonially drummed out of camp. Most of the members were laborers or mechanics, and their families suffered in their absence. A family fund for their relief had collected \$1,663 by May 13.¹³

The 79th Regiment, a unit claiming Scottish heritage and commanded by James Cameron, brother of the Secretary of War, received an impressive silk regimental color from the Union Relief Committee on April 30, prior to its departure from New York. After the regiment's arrival in the capital, the men cheerfully went into bivouac where they were plagued by frequent alarms in camp, nervous sentries, and boisterous officers. The 9th Regiment had been sponsored by the Union Defense Committee, which furnished knapsacks, blankets, equipage, and clothing. On May 22, the regiment's 840 members paraded down Broadway, fully equipped but without weapons. Fortunately, they were not molested en route through Baltimore, and they arrived in Washington, D.C. on May 30, where they marched to the Federal arsenal to receive Harpers Ferry muskets.¹⁴

A first sergeant of the 79th Regiment, in a Scottish glengarry cap. The 79th was commonly known by a number of nicknames, such as the "Highlanders," "Cameron Highlanders," "Highland Guard," and "Bannockburn Battalion."

*Michael J. McAfee
Collection*



A corporal of the 9th Regiment, with knapsack. His dark blue uniform and forage cap are trimmed with red.

Michael J. McAfee Collection



The 20th Regiment had enrolled for three-months' service in the first quota of eleven regiments. Four local banks offered to put up a total of \$8,000, since the unit was so deficient in equipment. The regiment left Kingston on May 7 aboard the steamer *Manhattan*, and arrived in Baltimore where the men formed part of the garrison to calm secessionist tendencies.¹⁵

On May 21, Major General Sandford arrived in Washington, D.C. with his staff. He reported immediately to the president and Winfield Scott, and, by general orders of the following day, accepted command of all militia regiment from the State of New York. Some thought had been given to bestowing command of all Federal forces in the capital and Virginia on Sandford, but he was disqualified because of his status as a militia general. An attorney in civilian life, he had been commissioned in 1837, and devoted most of his attention and free time to the state militia. Sandford held a very important position in that organization, and he continued to exert a strong influence throughout the Civil War.¹⁶

Preliminary Operations

The first increment of eleven regiments of the New York State Militia had arrived in Washington, D.C. in response to the president's proclamation of April 15, 1861, calling for the federalization of 75,000 militia for ninety-days' service. The first of many New York two-year wartime volunteer regiments were not far behind.

To provide protection to the capital, General Scott decided to occupy Alexandria, and the southern and western approaches to the capital, on the night and early morning of May 23–May 24. Major General Sandford described this operation in his after-action report:

"I accompanied the center column which crossed the Potomac by the Long Bridge on the morning of the 24th instant assuming command of the troops on the Virginia side. On the right, the 69th New York Militia, which crossed the Potomac Aqueduct, was posted near the canal culvert. The other two regiments of that wing (the 28th NYSM and the 5th NYSM) were thrown forward on the road to Leesburg about two miles from the river. In the center the 7th NYSM was placed at the head of the Long Bridge. The 25th NYSM was posted at the toll-gate and Vose's Hill, on the Columbia Turnpike. Three regiments of the New Jersey Brigade, under Brigadier General Runyon, together with the 12th NYSM occupied the Alexandria road as far as the Four-Mile Run; the pickets of the 12th extending as far as the point where the canal crosses the Alexandria Road. The left wing, consisting of the 11th New York Volunteers and the 1st Michigan, occupied the city of Alexandria, supported by the United States steamer *Pawnee*."¹⁷



"The Advance Guard of the Grand Army of the United States crossing the Long Bridge over the Potomac at 2 a.m. on May 24, 1861."

Harper's Weekly, June 8, 1861; Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection,

Brown University Library

Having pushed a short distance into the countryside to give themselves some room to maneuver, the troops immediately began to entrench. The 69th set to work with such enthusiasm that by June 1, they had constructed a major fortification which they named Fort Corcoran, after their colonel.¹⁸ The reach into Virginia was claimed such a great success that Colonel Samuel Heintzelman, inspector general of the Department of Northeastern Virginia, said that the movement

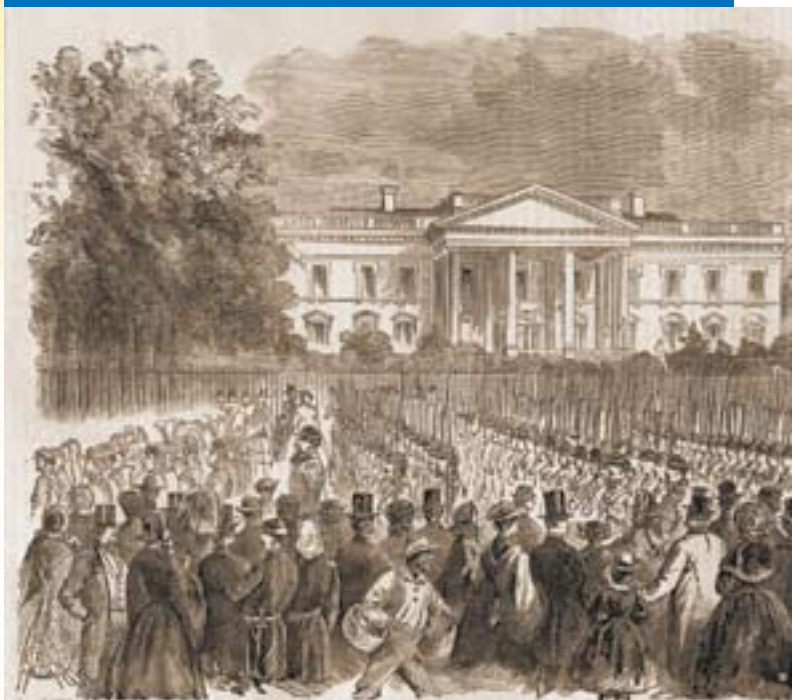
“...been made so quietly, that the troops had stacked arms an hour before the inhabitants were aware that we had crossed the river. The rebel troops occupying Alexandria, some 700 infantry, had received notice of our coming and escaped on the Orange and Alexandria Railway, burning the bridges behind them.”

The only unfortunate incident of the operation occurred when Colonel Elmer Ellsworth of the 11th New York Volunteers was shot and killed by the proprietor of a hotel in Alexandria when Ellsworth attempted to take down a Confederate flag flying over the building.¹⁹

Sandford occupied Arlington, and with it the Custis-Lee mansion overlooking the Potomac. It was at that time the residence of Robert E. Lee. Sandford made the home his headquarters in order to protect it from possible vandalism.²⁰

By May 28, Brigadier General Irvin McDowell took command of the new Federal Army of Northeastern Virginia, and began his preliminary planning of operations. He soon came under intense political and public pressure to mount a major offensive toward Richmond. Claiming a shortage of supplies, transport, and especially the lack of training and organization for his amateur troops, McDowell attempted to resist these pressures as long as possible to gain the maximum amount of time to turn his 35,000-man army into an effective and cohesive force. No one in the army had ever managed such a large force in one body in America, certainly not McDowell, and even Scott had never commanded such a large force in the field.²¹

On April 27, Major General Robert Patterson of the Pennsylvania Volunteers had received command of the new Department of Pennsylvania. He soon moved his headquarters to Chambersburg, where he began organizing a force for the invasion of Virginia. After an advance to Martinsburg, at the northern end of the Shenandoah Valley, he sent urgent requests to Scott for re-enforcements. Patterson received directions to take such steps as necessary to prevent Confederate General Joseph Johnston, who commanded in the Shenandoah, from re-enforcing Brigadier General P.G.T. Beauregard at Manassas behind Bull Run. On June 15, Johnston evacuated Harpers Ferry and fell back to a position north of Winchester. After some skirmishing with the Confederate forces, Patterson settled down again at Martinsburg to await developments.²²



“Review of the New York Troops at Washington by General Sandford in presence of the President and Cabinet, July 4, 1861.”

Harper's Weekly, July 27, 1861; www.sonofthesouth.net

Meanwhile, New York militia and volunteer regiments continued to arrive in the capital. On the 4th of July, Major General Sandford and President Lincoln took the salute at a grand review of these troops on Pennsylvania Avenue before the White House. Three days later, perhaps to ensure that a “good account” did come out of the Shenandoah, Scott sent Sandford and two regiments (5th and 12th Regiments, New York State Militia) to assist. The 19th and 28th New York Volunteers had already arrived, and Sandford assumed command of the 3rd Division (7th and 8th Brigades) under Patterson’s command. The 9th New York Militia had arrived earlier after being mustered-in on June 8 for three-years’ service as the 83rd New York Volunteers. Sandford formally reviewed the various New York State units at Harpers Ferry. Owing to the variety of uniforms, all soldiers received a strip of white cloth to be worn as a recognition symbol on their left sleeves, and to serve as a bandage in case of wounds.²³

Patterson advanced to Bunker Hill on July 15, but the next day, instead of turning toward Johnston at Winchester, he moved west and marched to Charles Town (now part of West Virginia), leaving Johnston free to leave the Valley and re-enforce Beauregard. Johnston arrived at Manassas in time to participate in the battle there on July 21. Sandford had been briefed earlier by Secretary of State William Seward on the possibility of replacing Patterson should that officer prove too slow and hesitant in engaging Johnston. Yet Patterson let this opportunity



slip by, and he was relieved from duty on July 25. Sandford, who had had considerable excitement during this period, relinquished command on July 29 at his own request, and returned to his post in Washington, D.C. where he served until the expiration of his term of duty on August 15. He then returned to New York to resume command of the 1st Division.²⁴

McDowell finally got his army on the move on July 16 toward Manassas. The historian of the 79th New York Militia later described the regiment's progress:

"At 2:00 P.M. in 'light marching order' the march began; our knapsacks containing our uniform jackets and tartan pants, as well as other extras, having been packed and left in camp. Light marching order consisted of arms and accoutrements while our blankets with a single change of underwear rolled therein were slung over the shoulders. There was considerable straggling and aides were dispatched up and down the column to enforce discipline."²⁵

Their Corps of Engineers, uniformed in reddish-gray flannel blouses, led the 69th New York Militia. Ten drummers, the oldest being twenty and the youngest only eight, provided the music along with three fifers. The regiment moved down the Columbia Turnpike past Falls Church until they were four miles from Fairfax when they turned left and hastened to Vienna, where they bivouacked in a swampy field by simply wrapping themselves in their blankets. The soldiers had already experienced considerable discomfort from thirst.²⁶

Because of inexperience, indiscipline, and hot weather, it took the Federal forces until the morning of July 18 to reach Centreville, seven miles from the Confederate base at Manassas Junction. The concentration of troops and arrival of the supply wagons required a lengthy wait.

While McDowell set off from Centreville to reconnoiter to his left, he directed Brigadier General Daniel Tyler of the Connecticut Militia to send a detachment from his 1st Division to demonstrate toward Blackburn's Ford on Bull Run Creek. Beauregard had already arranged his forces in an arc, six miles long behind Bull Run. On that hot afternoon, Colonel William Tecumseh Sherman moved his brigade forward in a reconnaissance-in-force. The men of the 69th Militia doffed their coats and advanced toward the ford. They were ordered to lie down under heavy artillery fire before they were driven from the fields around the ford after a sharp skirmish.²⁷

A new problem arose on July 20. Along with the stifling heat, the expiration of the enrollment of some of the ninety-day militia had arrived. Two units—the 4th Pennsylvania and the artillery battery of the 8th New York Militia—refused to extend. Their enrollments expired on July 21, and they would not stay a moment longer. McDowell later blamed the repulse at Blackburn's Ford on the action of these units. The two units prepared to return to Washington, D.C. on the following day.²⁸

First Bull Run

In his battle plan for July 21, McDowell planned to use Tyler's division to demonstrate in front of the Stone Bridge that carried the Warrenton Turnpike over the Bull Run Creek. Tyler would initially place Sherman's brigade on the right of the pike and Schenk's brigade on the left, both facing west. Colonel David Hunter's division, followed by that of Heintzelman, would lead a turning movement to the right. Hunter was prepared to march by 2:00 A.M. to the north, crossing Bull Run at Sudley Springs Ford, and then falling on the Confederate left flank. Hunter, however, was delayed by Tyler's troops in his front, and his leading brigade did not arrive at the ford until 9:30 A.M. Colonel Dixon Miles' division, and that of Brigadier General Runyon, remained near Centreville during the entire day and did not take part in the battle.

Colonel Nathan Evans, commanding a small Confederate brigade at the Stone Bridge, was alerted to McDowell's movements to his left and—recognizing Tyler's activities as a feint—marched northward to meet Hunter and Heintzelman.²⁹

Shortly after reaching Sudley Springs Ford, Colonel Ambrose Burnside's brigade advanced south on the road to Manassas. After proceeding about one mile, Burnside came under fire from Evans' Confederates on Matthew's Hill. A brigade inspector in the 1st Division later described the progress of the battle:

"An officer of the 79th New York Militia, while waiting for orders to make a forward movement, climbed to the top of a tree on the edge of the woods that overlooked that part of the battlefield occupied by the 71st Militia (Burnside's brigade). He never felt such a glow of pride for the City of New York as when he witnessed the terrible fire of this regiment or the coolness with

which it advanced in line of battle and hastened to deliver its fire. At each discharge he could see numbers of the opposing enemy regiment fall, never to rise again.”³⁰

Heavy fighting continued along the Federal right flank with both armies feeding re-enforcements into the line. By 10:00 A.M., parts of the Confederate brigades of Bee and Bartow, men whom had arrived from the Shenandoah Valley, marched to Evans’s assistance. About noon, the Confederate line gave way, and retired south of the Warrenton Turnpike to the vicinity of the Henry House Hill.

About the time of Evans’ collapse, Sherman’s brigade crossed Bull Run at a nearby ford and moved onto the battlefield. Captain James Kelly of the 69th Militia described his regiment’s advance:

“The Regiment numbered one thousand muskets and was attended by one ambulance only, the others having broken down. The 69th had good reason to complain that whilst other regiments of other divisions were permitted to have baggage and other wagons immediately in the rear, the regiment was peremptorily denied any facilities of the sort. The consequence was that the 69th arrived on the field of action greatly fatigued and harassed, and but for their high sense of duty and military spirit, would not have been adequate to the terrible duties of the day.”³¹

Colonel Sherman continued the narrative:

“Early in the day, when reconnoitering the ground, I had seen a horseman descend from a bluff to a point across the stream (Bull Run), and show himself in the open field. I sent forward one company as skirmishers and followed with the whole brigade, the 69th New York leading. We found no difficulty in crossing over and met with no opposition in ascending the steep bluff, but it was impassable to the artillery. Advancing slowly with the head of the column to give time for the regiments in succession to close up . . . Lieutenant Colonel Haggerty of the 69th rode over without orders and was shot down while trying to intercept the retreat of an enemy party.”³²

While Evans, Bee, and Bartow retreated before the advance of Hunter and Heintzelman, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson’s brigade of Johnston’s army arrived on the Henry House plateau. A new line was anchored on that high ground.

Between 1:00 and 2:00 P.M., a lull settled over the fighting as McDowell’s troops advanced south and then reorganized along the Warrenton Turnpike in preparation for an attack on the Henry House Hill. Colonel George Lyon’s 8th New York Militia, which had already been badly broken in the earlier fighting, turned back and took no further part in the battle that day.³³

On the Federal right, a force consisting of the 11th New York Volunteers, the 14th New York Militia (popularly known as the 14th Brooklyn), and the 27th New York Volunteers was sent to support the two artillery batteries on the plateau. A Confederate cavalry charge down the Sudley/Manassas road routed the Fire

Zouaves. Then a flank attack by the 33rd Virginia Regiment fired into the remnants of the 11th and 27th New York Volunteers, and drove them off. The 11th retreated through the ranks of the red-legged 14th Brooklyn, and that regiment was also broken as it deployed into line. Colonel Alfred Wood, the regimental commander, was wounded and later captured while riding in an ambulance.³⁴ For the next two hours, there was heavy and confused fighting on the plateau, largely for possession of the two Federal artillery batteries commanded by Captains Charles Griffin and James Ricketts, which changed hands at least six times.



A private in the chasseur uniform of the 14th Regiment. The regiment paraded for the first time in this uniform, provided by the borough of Brooklyn, on April 18, 1861.

Michael J. McAfee Collection

Meanwhile, Sherman—who had marched his brigade to the Federal right—had begun putting his regiments into the fight for the hill. Sherman attacked with one regiment at a time, and each in turn would be driven back, and forced to seek shelter under the crest of the hill.

Sherman had first sent the 2nd Wisconsin Volunteers into the fight, where it suffered terribly in a fratricidal incident, since the men were wearing gray uniforms. Then the 79th New York Militia advanced to the edge of the plateau where the men traded volleys with the enemy. Colonel James Cameron was killed in this severe fire while attempting to rally his regiment. The Highlanders halted, then began to fall back. A soldier later remarked, “. . . as we passed down we saw our Colonel lying still in the hands of Death.”³⁵

That left the 69th Regiment. Twice the men charged up the slope. Twice they were repulsed, in part they claimed, because of

the demoralization of the Highlanders before them. With two companies dressed in gray, they received fire from other Federal units. Confederates captured the 69th's National Color, but it was retaken by Captain Wildly of the 11th Fire Zouaves. Their Colonel Corcoran, who had been separated from his regiment after falling from his wounded horse, was captured around 3:30 P.M.³⁶

By 3:45 P.M., the Confederates launched a final attack, and within an hour the last of McDowell's troops had retreated from the field. The Federal withdrawal began in fairly good order, but it soon degenerated into panic-stricken flight. Colonel Henry Martin of the 71st New York Militia related that his regiment

“. . . retired in line of battle in common-time and not one man running.” Lieutenant Colonel Edward Fowler of the 14th Brooklyn, however, later described how “leaving the battlefield at Bull Run was not a retreat or a falling back, it was a stampede.”³⁷



Colonel James Cameron, 79th Regiment; killed on Henry House Hill at Bull Run.

Louise Euker Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania

Lieutenant Colonel Edward B.
Fowler, 14th Regiment

*Roger D. Hunt Collection, United States Army Military
History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania*



The regimental historian of the 79th Highlanders remembered that

“rain soaked us to the skin and a more bedraggled, demoralized and woebegone looking lot of men I never saw before nor since than we who plodded along through mud and slush towards our haven of rest.”

Sherman’s brigade and Major George Sykes’ battalion of regulars were detailed to cover the retreat of the army, and at one point they formed square to repel Confederate cavalry. By 7:30 P.M., the last of the fugitives had finally passed through Centreville, and streamed in disorder through Fairfax Court House toward the Potomac.³⁸

No one substantially faulted McDowell’s generalship or his battle plan. He had devised an excellent plan, missing only the strong defensive position open to the enemy at the Henry House Hill, and this he could not know because of the faulty maps available. Except for the inexperience of the troops and excessive delays, the outcome might have been far different.³⁹


Certainly, the New York Militia units had acquitted themselves as well as could be expected under the circumstances. No others had done better, and the casualties were a measure of their efforts. The 79th Highlanders alone lost 198 men, 115 of them captured or missing. Besides their colonel and second-in-command, the 69th sustained losses of 41 officers and men killed, 85 wounded and 60 captured.⁴⁰

Mustering-Out

Coming to the end of their three-month active service, it now remained for the New York State Militia regiments to muster-out and return to their inactive duty status. The 7th New York had already been released on June 3, 1861 after transferring all their camp equipage to the 9th Regiment.⁴¹ The Battle of First Bull Run, considered a disaster in the North, did not stop the return of these ninety-day units. On July 26, the 8th Regiment arrived by ferry at Cortland Street in New York City with a mount of the Confederate Black Horse Cavalry as a trophy. Later that same day, the 71st Regiment arrived on the steamer *John Potter*. Crowds jammed the piers on the Hudson River, and traffic came to a halt on West Street. The 8th Regiment’s (Washington Grays) Home Guard unit fired a welcoming salvo with six howitzers, and the uniformed juvenile corps of the Ellsworth and Anderson Zouaves joined Governor Morgan in a reception that gave the appearance of the return of victorious, rather than defeated, troops. The wounded of the 71st were carefully placed in carriages, and the regiment marched up Broadway. Flags flew from almost every window, and as the troops passed Barnum’s Museum, the Barnum Band played “The Bold Soldier Boy.” Members of the various Irish societies met at the Hibernia Hall to plan a welcome for the 69th, but the regiment did not show up until the following day. Crowds repeated their greetings as the

Irish soldiers marched up Broadway to Union Square, and down Fourth Avenue and the Bowery to their headquarters at the Essex Market Armory. The shabby men wore a variety of hats and shirts and carried heavy knapsacks.⁴²

The 69th did not officially muster out until August 23. Each private soldier received \$29.88 in wages after waiting another month. The soldiers also discovered that the government had deducted \$2.20 for a new pair of boots, and forty-eight cents for two pairs of socks from the pay of each man. Patriotic fervor, however, still remained strong as evidenced by the volunteering on August 30 of nearly every officer and soldier for three-years’ service in the new 69th New York Volunteers. An inspection of the militia unit on October 18 at its armory revealed that 252 members were either absent on active service or casualties at Bull Run. The inspecting officer removed 300 muskets from a heap where they had been thrown on the return of the regiment in July. Those remaining in the pile were in such a rusted condition as to be unserviceable.⁴³

The defeat at Bull Run convinced Northerners that the Civil War was not to be short-lived. It now remained for the Federal government and, more importantly, the state governments, to mobilize their forces to fight. The New York State Militia had played its part in the spring and summer of 1861. Members of the militia units would continue to contribute toward the suppression of the rebellion as the Civil War dragged on. 

Certainly, the New York Militia units had acquitted themselves as well as could be expected under the circumstances.



Notes

- ¹ Frederick P. Todd, *American Military Equipage, 1851–1872, Volume II: State Forces* (n.p.: Chatham Square Press, Inc., 1983), 1007.
- ² New York State, *Annual Report of the Adjutant General* (Albany, NY: 2 February 1858), 26 (Hereinafter cited as *AG*).
- ³ *Ibid.*, 30–31.
- ⁴ William H. Russell, *My Diary, North and South* (New York: n.p., 1863), 143; H. Charles McBarron, Jr. and Frederick P. Todd, “12th Regiment, New York State Militia, 1861–1869,” *Long Endure: The Civil War Period, 1852–1867* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 58.
- ⁵ William A. Swinton, *History of the Seventh Regiment, National Guard* (New York: Charles T. Dillingham, 1876), 23. In 1917, the 7th Regiment was mobilized for service in World War I. Its title changed officially to the 107th United States Infantry; a title it retained until its disbandment in the early 1990s. The New York State Militia officially changed its title in April of 1862 to the New York National Guard.
- ⁶ William J. Roehrenbeck, *The Regiment That Saved the Capital* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), 51; Todd, *American Military Equipage*, 1011, 1031.
- ⁷ *AG*, 1862, 8.
- ⁸ Swinton, *Seventh Regiment*, 24.
- ⁹ Roehrenbeck, *Regiment That Saved Capital*, 61; see also Kenyon B. Fitzgerald, Jr., “Overcoats Were Worn!—Or Were They? The Departure of the Seventh New York in 1861,” *Military Collector & Historian* Vol. 52, No. 2 (Summer 2000): 51–55. Although Thomas Nast, in his famous painting of the departure of the 7th Regiment for Washington, D.C. on April 19, 1861, depicted the soldiers wearing gray greatcoats, the author has made a strong case that the soldiers were actually wearing the standard army sky-blue kersey greatcoat. Nast later admitted using the color gray for artistic effect.
- ¹⁰ Roehrenbeck, *Regiment That Saved Capital*, 71; Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 60–61; see pp. 332–33 for a biography of Governor Edwin Morgan.
- ¹¹ Roehrenbeck, *Regiment that Saved Capital*, 105, 111; *Harper’s Weekly*, May 4, 1861.
- ¹² Frank J. Welcher, *The Union Army, 1861–1865, Organization And Operations, Volume I: The Eastern Theater* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 160.
- ¹³ Daniel P. O’Flaherty, “History of the 69th Regiment N.Y.S.M.,” PhD Diss. (University of Michigan, 1966), 240, 243.
- ¹⁴ William Todd, *The 79th Highlanders, New York Volunteers 1861–1865* (Albany, NY: Press of Brandow, Bartow & Co., 1886), 12. Later that summer, the 79th volunteered for three-years’ service, and changed its title to the 79th New York Volunteers. John Jaques, *Three Years Campaigning with the 9th Regiment N.Y.S.M.* (New York: Hilton & Co., 1865), 11. Also known as the “City Guard,” the 9th Regiment was originally formed in 1847 of a number of old Volunteer Militia companies in New York City. See also William Todd, ed., *History of the Ninth Regiment* (New York: n.p., 1889).
- ¹⁵ Theodore Gates, *Ulster Guard (20th Regiment N.Y.S.M.)* (New York: Benjamin H. Tyrell, Printer, 1879), 75. The 20th Regiment, which later that summer volunteered for three-years’ service as the 80th New York Volunteers, still survives as the 1st Battalion, 156th Field Artillery, New York Army National Guard. This unit is the oldest military organization in New York State with a continuous history. It traces its lineage to the “Trainband of Wiltwick” which was raised in Kingston in 1660.
- ¹⁶ *AG*, 1862, 110; George Wingate, *History of the 22nd Regiment NYSNG* (New York: C.S. Westcott & Sons Printer, 1901), 150–51. The 22nd Regiment soldiers were known as the “Strawberry Grays” from the color and trim of their uniforms.
- ¹⁷ UNITED STATES War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), Series I, Vol. 2, 38 (Hereinafter cited as *OR*; all citations are from Series I).
- ¹⁸ O’Flaherty, “History of the 69th,” 252.
- ¹⁹ *OR*, 2:40–42
- ²⁰ William C. Davis, *Battle at Bull Run* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1977), 9.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ²² Welcher, *Union Army*, 73.
- ²³ Davis, *Bull Run*, 87; George Hussey, *History of the 9th Regiment N.Y.S.M. (83rd Volunteers)* (New York: J.S. Ogilvie Press, 1889), 61; *Harper’s Weekly*, July 27, 1861.
- ²⁴ *AG*, 1862, 111.
- ²⁵ Todd, *79th Highlanders*, 20.
- ²⁶ O’Flaherty, “History of the 69th,” 31; Thomas Francis Meagher, “The Last Days of the Sixty-Ninth in Virginia,” *The Sentinel*, Buffalo, NY, August 18, 1861. After Bull Run, Meagher rose to command of the famous volunteer Irish Brigade.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, August 25, 1861; William Root, *69th Regiment in Peace and War* (New York: Blanchard Press, 1905), 12.
- ²⁸ Davis, *Bull Run*, 154.
- ²⁹ Welcher, *Union Army*, 633.
- ³⁰ *AG*, 1862, 122.
- ³¹ *OR*, 2:372.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 2:369.
- ³³ Welcher, *Union Army*, 635; *OR*, 2:388.
- ³⁴ Charles Tevis, *History of the Fighting 14th Regiment NGSNY* (New York: Brooklyn Eagle

- Press, 1911), 21. The 14th wore a *chasseur*-style uniform, inspired by the French Army. Because of their red trousers, they were nicknamed the “Red-legged Devils.”
- ³⁵ Todd, *79th Highlanders*, 42; John P. Severin and Frederick P. Todd, “79th Regiment, New York State Militia, 1860–1861, *Long Endure: The Civil War Period, 1852–1867* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 66; Davis, *Bull Run*, 218; *OR*, 2:369.
- ³⁶ Root, *69th in Peace and War*, 13; *OR*, 2:370.
- ³⁷ Henry Whittemore, *History of the 71st Regiment N.G.S.N.Y.* (New York: Willis McDonald & Co., 1886), 56. The 71st Regiment, known as the “Ameican Guard,” had been raised in October of 1850 in response to the “Know-Nothing” movement in America. Being chiefly men of the mechanic class, they avoided the conservative gray uniforms of the 7th and 8th Regiments, and opted for the more modern dark blue frock coat for full dress. Tevis, *Fighting 14th Regiment*, 233.
- ³⁸ Todd, *79th Highlanders*, 47; O’Flaherty, “History of the 69th,” 289.
- ³⁹ Davis, *Bull Run*, 253.
- ⁴⁰ Todd, *79th Highlanders*, 47; O’Flaherty, “History of the 69th,” 302.
- ⁴¹ Jaques, *Campaigning with the 9th Regiment*, 22.
- ⁴² Ernest A. McKay, *The Civil War and New York City* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 91.
- ⁴³ O’Flaherty, “History of the 69th,” 302; Root, *69th in Peace and War*, 18; *AG*, 1862, 125. The 69th still serves today as the 1st Battalion, 69th United States Infantry (M), New York Army National Guard. The unit served in Iraq in 2004–2005.



About the Author

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