

## *Rich Man's War, Rich Man's Fight: Class, Ideology, and Discipline in the Union Army*

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In September 1861, for three successive days, an officer of the 2d Massachusetts tied a private to a tree for one hour. A courts martial had found the man guilty of drunkenness and insubordination. Regiments encamped near the Second noticed this punishment and disapproved. On the third day, as the man hung bound to the tree, a large crowd gathered around the edge of the Second's camp. Hurling insults at the officers, many men in the crowd took up a cry of "cut him down!" The crowd quickly became a mob that was not easily subdued. After this incident, officers from several regiments approached Colonel Gordon, commander of the Second, and asked him to punish the man in a more private place. Gordon refused. Wilder Dwight, the Major of the 2d Massachusetts, commented bitterly to his family that the Second was the only regiment that attempted to maintain discipline. "Even the officers among our neighbors discountenance the severity which alone insures our discipline," he lamented. "To-day our army is crippled by the ideas of equality and independence which have colored the whole life of our people. When this defect is cured, and men recognize authority and obey without knowing why, we shall begin to get an army. In war, *one will* must act through all the others."<sup>1</sup>

The 2d Massachusetts was not a typical volunteer regiment in the early stages of the Civil War. Its West Point commanders intended to model the

1. Wilder Dwight, *Life and Letters of Wilder Dwight* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1868), 93–97.

regiment after the regular army. Its junior-level officers were disproportionately the Harvard educated sons of Massachusetts' most elite families. This distinctive upper class also contributed officers to several other Massachusetts, New York, and, later in the war, African American regiments. All of these regiments, like the 2d Massachusetts, would be noted for their discipline and combat effectiveness. They achieved distinction at least in part because of their leadership. Their volunteer officers brought unique class attitudes to training camp and battlefield, and these attitudes produced particular leadership styles and particular methods of discipline. For historians to better understand discipline and leadership at the regimental and company level in the Union army, it is important to consider how the class background and ideological assumptions of officers affected these important elements.

There is no systematic study of discipline within the Union army, but scholars have still reached several conclusions about this aspect of a soldier's military experience. Historians who study the Union army and its soldiers in general echo Dwight's assessment that initially a lack of discipline reigned and that ideals of democracy inhibited military discipline. Democratic Northern soldiers resented military hierarchy, did not respond well to officers who violated their sense of social equality, and resisted coercion or the enforcement of petty regulations. Rather than organizational and institutional discipline, the Union army relied on pervasive cultural ideals of duty, self-control, and self-discipline to keep the men in line and fighting. Officers had to earn obedience rather than compel it. But over time, the army improved institutional discipline as it weeded out incompetent officers and as the men became combat veterans who recognized the need for discipline, especially after the infusion of conscripts who did not share the ideals or self-motivation of the veteran volunteers. Historian Gerald Linderman believes that the veterans themselves had lost their earlier ideals of courage and self-discipline, and that their disillusionment necessitated harsher discipline after 1863. Scholars find that discipline was still uneven in Union armies during the last year of the war, however, and that most regimental officers still accommodated in some way the democratic assumptions of their men.<sup>2</sup>

2. Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1997); Hess, *Liberty, Virtue, and Progress: Northerners and Their War for the Union* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1988); Randall C. Jimerson, *The Private Civil War: Popular Thought during the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1988); Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Larry M. Logue, *To Appomattox and Beyond: The Civil War Soldier in War and Peace* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997); Reid

Not all Northerners shared the democratic assumptions that seemed to pervade the volunteer army. Despite the widespread belief in cultural values such as republicanism and equality, class cleavages cut across northern society at mid-century. As volunteers from different social classes joined the army, these cleavages entered the volunteer army and affected its shape. This was readily apparent in Massachusetts, a state with a distinctive upper class unified by a clearly defined ideology. These Boston Brahmins, a product of early-nineteenth-century mercantile success, had solidified their position atop the political and social hierarchy of New England by the Civil War. The founding group of merchant princes had invested their wealth in transportation and manufacturing while creating educational and philanthropic institutions that expanded their influence throughout society. They perpetuated and consolidated upper-class status through marriage. Kinship ties united the elite families of the state into a coherent set. Guided by an ethic that emphasized the public-servant ideal, elite families viewed themselves as leaders with a special calling to minister to society. Assuming that talent and work ensured success in republican America, they viewed those at the top of society as naturally selected leaders with a duty to shepherd the community. These families worked through a variety of institutions to bring certain cultural values—such as education, self-discipline, order, and cleanliness—to the lower classes. They were simultaneously strong proponents of “the people” and suspicious of “the rabble.” Thus, politically, they sought enlightened men who would lead the public and seek the best interest of the people without catering to the masses or being swayed by the excesses of democracy.<sup>3</sup>

This class in Massachusetts played a vital role in the Union war effort. On the home front, men like John Murray Forbes, the railroad entrepreneur, created brokerage groups to recruit regiments, provided equipment to transport troops, and worked with Lincoln’s cabinet to develop financial policy.<sup>4</sup>

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Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Viking, 1988); Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1952).

3. E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia: Two Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Class Authority and Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1979); Robert F. Dalzell Jr., *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987); Betty G. Farrell, *Elite Families: Class and Power in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1993); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979); Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War* (Lexington, Ky.: D. C. Heath, 1973); Ronald Story, *The Forging of an Aristocracy: Harvard and the Boston Upper Class, 1800–1870* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1980).

4. Sarah Forbes Hughes, *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), 182–271; John Lauritz Larson, *Bonds of Enterprise: John Murray*

They also sent the younger generation to serve. As Forbes put it, "I have everything at stake in the army. All the young men that I love or value are there or incapacitated."<sup>5</sup> Young men of this class were bound to one another through kinship or through membership in elite institutions like Harvard, and as they volunteered they enlisted in the same regiments as their kin and fellow classmates. When Charles Russell Lowell was appointed colonel of the 2d Massachusetts Cavalry, two of his officers, Will Forbes and Henry Sturgis Russell, were his cousins. Later Russell would command the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry, an African American regiment, and pepper its officer corps with men like Charles Francis Adams Jr. Harvard classmates were particularly attracted to the 2d Massachusetts and the 20th Massachusetts Infantry. Russell began his war career in the Second, as did Robert Gould Shaw, Henry Lee Higginson, Wilder Dwight, Greely Curtis, and Charles Fessenden Morse. Officering the ranks of the 20th Massachusetts were James Jackson Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Henry Livermore Abbott. Others from this peer group served as aides, notably Theodore Lyman to Gen. George Meade, Stephen Minot Weld to FitzJohn Porter, and John Chipman Gray to Gen. George H. Gordon. Later Weld became lieutenant colonel of the 56th Massachusetts Infantry. A few found positions in other state regiments. Francis Channing Barlow enlisted as a private, rose to command the 61st New York Infantry, and was later promoted to brigadier general in the Army of the Potomac.

This group of young men shared a set of assumptions about class and society that informed their leadership style within the army. While applying ideals of courage, self-discipline, and duty to other officers, they used organizational and institutional discipline both to control men and to impose a set of values on them. Just as in civilian life, these officers envisioned the role of their class as that of shepherds to sheep and they worked hard to care for the emotional and physical needs of their men. But at the same time, they maintained a strict line of separation between men and officers, easily transferring the class distinctions of civilian life to the army.

The Civil War presented a prime opportunity for these young Brahmins to fulfill class ideals of leadership. Before the war, most had struggled to find a career path and a purpose. Charles Russell Lowell spent two years waffling between scholarly pursuits and mathematics before accepting positions in John Murray Forbes's railroad companies. Robert Gould Shaw thought about moving west to try farming, but he was working unhappily in his uncle's

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*Forbes and Western Development in America's Railway Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), 98–102.

mercantile office in New York when the war started. Henry Lee Higginson, defying his father's command to join the family mercantile business, spent three years in Europe trying to pursue a musical career, but he finally returned to the states unemployed. When Lincoln called for volunteers, Charles Francis Adams Jr. was a miserable law student searching for an alternative career. Henry Livermore Abbott had graduated from Harvard in 1860 with a dismal record of misbehavior and neglect of his studies. He told his mother after he received his commission in the 20th Massachusetts, "I felt that I had never done any thing or amounted to anything in the whole course of my existence, & that there was no better prospect in view for a long time, if at all."<sup>6</sup>

For these young men, war was a chance to redeem the past and implement class ideals of duty and service to the community. Charles Russell Lowell told his fiancée that the war exploded the selfishness he had disguised as theories of self-culture. "Now I feel every day more and more that a man has no right to himself at all," he wrote her. Dwight never felt happier or more earnest than when serving his regiment. "I never realized more fully the best significance of life," he informed his parents. "Self is thrown into the background." In later years, Higginson spoke to a Harvard audience about the lives of his friends who had died in battle. They had taught him "the beauty and holiness of work and of utter, unselfish, thoughtful devotion to the right cause, to our country, and to mankind."<sup>7</sup>

Service was a calling of their class, but class also shaped these young men's vision of what they were called to do. A clear set of values guided them. At the forefront were order and efficiency, values forged in the elite families that had shaped the economic modernization and centralization of the Northern economy. The kinship network of these young men extended through the cornerstones of New England's legal, mercantile, and industrial foundations.

5. Hughes, *Forbes*, 103, 114.

6. Henry Livermore Abbott (HLA) to his mother, July 11, 1861, in Robert Garth Scott, ed., *Fallen Leaves: The Civil War Letters of Major Henry Livermore Abbott* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1991), 34; Charles Russell Lowell (CRL) to his mother, Aug. 16, 1857, May 13, 1858, May 27, 1858, in Edward W. Emerson, *Life and Letters of Charles Russell Lowell* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1907), 143, 159, 160–61; Robert Gould Shaw to Francis George Shaw, Mar. 24, 1858, Robert Gould Shaw Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, shelf mark bMS Am 1910(28–58); Sarah Blake Shaw, "Robert Gould Shaw," *Harvard Memorial Biographies*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Sever and Francis, 1867), 182; Bliss Perry, *Life and Letters of Henry Lee Higginson* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), 81–92; Worthington Chauncy Ford, ed., *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861–1865*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1920), ix.

7. CRL to Josephine Shaw, June 17, 1863, *Life and Letters*, 259; Dwight, *Life and Letters*, 50; Henry Lee Higginson, *Four Addresses* (Boston: D. B. Updike, Merrymount Press, 1902), 10, 22.

Before the war, Henry Sturgis Russell and Robert Gould Shaw worked for international mercantile firms. Charles Russell Lowell held positions in the railroad industry and iron manufacturing. Barlow, Weld, Dwight, and Adams practiced law.<sup>8</sup>

A lesson learned from these endeavors was that centralization enhanced efficiency. Charles Fessenden Morse believed the weakness in the Northern prosecution of the war was states' rights, which allowed state governors to interfere with federal policies. Dwight constantly set forward to his family the need for plan, system, and order (something that was lacking early in the war) in the federal government and the military. While single individuals were capable of moving in the paths of duty and self-sacrifice, Dwight argued, the mass of men needed system and discipline to achieve those ends. He suggested a plan for reorganizing army hospitals that abolished regimental hospitals in favor of a centralized system with specialized doctors.<sup>9</sup>

Related to centralization and efficiency was order. Men of this class worried about the instability of lower-class Americans, but they valued order in and of itself. Henry Livermore Abbott's reaction to the 1863 New York City draft riots exemplified this attitude. Abbott, an ardent Democrat, who spent much of the war attacking Lincoln's infringement of civil liberties, wrote that his fellow officers would feel delight in charging the mobs who were resisting the draft: "It isn't, of course, the desire to suppress the mob merely, in which everybody agrees, but it is the intense delight professed at the chance of opposing their organized skill & strength against the anarchy of the mob, & seeing how quickly the side of order would prevail. It is a professional feeling."<sup>10</sup>

Abbott's description of the rioters as a mob, which they were, also fit these young men's attitudes toward the lower classes of society. Like others of their circle, they used upper-class values such as cleanliness and education to judge others and assumed that it was their duty to teach these values to those less fortunate than themselves. A friend recalled that Lowell had great sympathy with the workmen at a mill where he supervised—"He cherished the hope of helping them to have richer and nobler lives." Lowell organized singing classes and passed out novels to replace "the wicked trash they had."

8. Emerson, *Life and Letters*, 14–20; Dwight, *Life and Letters*, 1–25; *War Diary and Letters of Stephen Minot Weld, 1861–1865*, 2d ed. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1979), 10–21; "Henry Sturgis Russell," *Sons of the Puritans: A Group of Brief Biographies* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1908), 155–62; Edwin Hale Abbott, "Francis Channing Barlow," *Harvard Graduate's Magazine* (1896): 16.

9. Charles Fessenden Morse, *Letters Written During the Civil War, 1861–1865* (Boston: T. R. Marvin & Son, 1898), 119; Dwight, *Life and Letters*, 70–72, 162.

10. HLA to his father, Aug. 7, 1863, *Fallen Leaves*, 197.

As aide on Maj. Gen. George Meade's staff, Theodore Lyman echoed this belief in the upper classes serving as guide to the masses. After running into a sentry reading on duty, he commented on the man's strength, respectful mien, and docility. "The man could not have been better," Lyman said, "but no one had ever taught him. It was a clear waste of fine material, left in all its crudity instead of being worked up." The problem as Lyman saw it was that the upper class in America could not produce all the officers in the army. He noted that regiments under the command of "educated gentlemen" had "invariably" performed well.<sup>11</sup>

Lyman and his cohort believed in uplifting the masses and that the masses needed to be uplifted. While proclaiming great faith in the people and in their letters sincerely praising the character and virtues of the average soldier, they also distrusted and maligned those in a different class from themselves. Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., who usually wrote in a self-mocking tone during the war, told his sister, "While I'm living *en aristocrat* I'm an out-and outer of a democrat in theory, but for contact, except at the polls, I loathe the thick-fingered clowns we call the people." Those who could not meet certain standards faced scorn from Holmes's set of young aristocrats. On the staff of Brig. Gen. George Gordon, John Chipman Gray made fun of officers who could not spell and sent extracts of their letters home to his family. Higginson separated the men of the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry into "good men" and the "tough set of men of all sorts of occupations, among them prize-fighters, barkeepers and the like." He contrasted the tidiness and cleanliness of his men, whom he sent to bathe three times a week, with the "pigs" of a neighboring regiment. "You'd be surprised to find how little our intelligent Yankees know of caring for their own health," he told his family. "They eat and drink all sorts of things." When he was hospitalized with dysentery, Holmes found himself indifferent to the death of the men around him. "They are apt to be so dirty it seems natural—'Dust to Dust.'" Weld also valued cleanliness, education, and progress, something he believed that Southern towns and people lacked. He denigrated the "poor whites and farmers" because they were "ignorant, and as superstitious as the people of a hundred years ago." Abbott described Pennsylvania and New York regiments as "half-clad savages" and mocked their "unsophisticated" questions about the outside world.<sup>12</sup>

11. Emerson, *Life and Letters*, 13, 371; George R. Agassiz, ed., *Meade's Headquarters, 1863–1865: Letters of Colonel Theodore Lyman from the Wilderness to Appomattox* [1922] (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 207.

12. Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (OWH) to Amelia Holmes, Nov. 16, 1862, and OWH to his mother, Dec. 15, 1862, in Mark DeWolfe Howe, ed., *Touched with Fire: Civil War Letters and*

These attitudes led to a feeling of exclusiveness that would ultimately show in their leadership and discipline style. A telling example of the underlying feeling came when Abbott had occasion to enter the home of a poor white Southerner with seven or eight children. One of the children so resembled Abbott's young brother Grafton that Abbott was startled and discomfited. Later he felt embarrassed about his reaction. "It would be strange if a man of that social condition could have a child that looked like Grafton," he wrote his mother. This sense of separation from those of a different class led these young men to socialize nearly exclusively with those they called "gentlemen." As attrition destroyed the officers of the 2d Massachusetts, Gray found his friends there dispirited because "the newcomers are not generally men with whom they care to associate." Francis Channing Barlow, apart from his circle in a New York regiment, found it "tedious" to live so many months "with men who are so little companion for me as our officers are." He had no one in the regiment with whom he was intimate. He told his mother, "I have not seen one person in Washington who was above the rank of Commonplace & should like to get into the society of intelligent people."<sup>13</sup>

Exclusiveness veered into dislike and distrust when these young men confronted foreigners and black people. They harbored typical contemporary stereotypes about African Americans. Gray summarized the attitude found in every one of these young men's letters: "We have a heap of them about us in one capacity or another, a dirty, lazy, docile, laughing set who vex and amuse us alternatively." Despite their prejudice, elite young men from this class—notably Robert Gould Shaw, Henry Sturgis Russell, and Charles Francis Adams Jr.—eventually commanded African American regiments. Racial and class attitudes reinforced these men's belief in the utility of black troops. Charles Fessenden Morse argued that "any men who have understanding enough to obey orders implicitly, where they are led by brave officers, can make good soldiers. I think negroes could be more easily disciplined than most white men." Shaw echoed this assessment as he trained the 54th Massachusetts. His men would be even more soldierly than white volunteers because it was so "easy to control and discipline them." But some of the very

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*Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., 1861–1864* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1946), 71, 78; John Chipman Gray (JCG) to Elizabeth Gray, Jan. 2, 1863, in *War Letters, 1862–1865, of John Chipman Gray and John Codman Ropes* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1927), 58; Perry, *Henry Lee Higginson*, 157–59; SMW to his father, June 5, 1862, in *War Diary and Letters*, 112; HLA to his father, Sept. 11, 1861, in *Fallen Leaves*, 44.

13. HLA to his mother, Dec. 13, 1861, *Fallen Leaves*, 84; Morse, *Letters*, 70; JCG to JCR, Nov. 13, 1862, in *War Letters*, 23; Francis Channing Barlow (FCB) to Almira Barlow, July 5, 1861, Francis Channing Barlow Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; FCB to Edward Barlow, Apr. 18, 1862, FCB Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

same assumptions caused others to oppose black regiments. Gray conceded that with careful discipline an African American regiment might do as well as a poor white regiment, but black troops would require better discipline than most regiments received or they would be “useless.” Lyman, who spoke to his servant “in that fatherly voice that should always be used to a very black nig,” was troubled by the sight of black troops at the Wilderness. “Can we not fight our own battles without calling on these humble hewers of wood and drawers of water, to be bayoneted by the unsparing Southerners?” he asked.<sup>14</sup>

Officers from this class reserved their worst suspicions for foreigners. In this, as in their attitude toward blacks, they differed little from other native-born Americans. As officers, though, their assumptions would dictate how they led and disciplined their men. In tune with other commentators of their day, Abbott, Lyman, Barlow, and Gray believed the immigrant conscripts who entered the army in 1863 were worthless fighters who could not be disciplined. They praised the spirit and capability of the Irish but heaped vindictiveness on the heads of the Germans and Italians. Abbott made the clearly biased statement that desertion in the field was almost unknown before the jumble of “French, Italians, Germans, & in some cases, *Chinese*, came to us.” He told his mother that they were “more stupid than it is possible for an American who has never seen them to conceive of.” His rule of thumb: “the more foreign a regiment is, the more cowardly it is.” Referring to Germans and the “offscourings of great cities,” Lyman proclaimed that the trouble was that the army did not “have the machinery to work up *poor material*. They won’t let us shoot the rascals, and few regiments have the discipline to mold them into decent troops.” Barlow, famous throughout the Army of the Potomac for his ability to discipline troops, was given a division filled with Germans in hopes his strictness would improve the notoriously poor regiments. After the disastrous performance of the division at Gettysburg, Barlow wrote that he was convinced that the army could do nothing with the German regiments—they simply would not fight.<sup>15</sup>

These common assumptions about race, class, and society created a definite leadership style among this group of officers. They implemented system and efficiency both to care for their men and to demand that their regiments adhere to a set of values characterized by order and cleanliness.

14. JCG to JCR, Nov. 13, 1862, and Aug. 19, 1863, in *War Letters*, 24; Morse, *Letters*, 119; RGS to Annie Haggerty, Mar. 14, 1863, in Russell Duncan, ed., *Blue-Eyed Child of Fortune: The Civil War Letters of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1992), 308; Agassiz, *Meade’s Headquarters*, 274, 102.

15. HLA to his father, Sept. 4, 1863, HLA to his mother, Feb. 8, 1864, *Fallen Leaves*, 205, 237; Agassiz, *Meade’s Headquarters*, 208–9; FCB to Moses Blake Williams, Aug. 5, 1863, FCB Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Suspicious of lower-class and immigrant privates, they separated themselves from their men and used coercion to impose the discipline they assumed these classes lacked.

In their quest for discipline, these elite officers did not neglect the needs of their men. Dwight recognized that health and a full belly were important components of morale, discipline, and fighting, so he spent long nights making sure that his men had what they needed. Officers of the Second contributed their own money to provide stoves and flooring for the regiment's winter camp. Dwight commented that if officers expected a great deal from their men, then they should give the men their entitlement. Stephen Minot Weld, as lieutenant colonel of the 56th Massachusetts, tried to ensure that his men lived in a comfortable camp. He reported proudly to his father that there were cookhouses and cookstoves for every company and that most men had floors for their tents. Barlow also worked overtime to care for his men. One of the privates in Barlow's regiment had lost track of his seven-year-old son, who had been placed in a state institution. Barlow used his contacts to find the boy and monitor his situation. After the battle of Fair Oaks, Barlow made sure he visited all the men who were hospitalized.<sup>16</sup>

Organization and system were important components of effectively caring for, and disciplining, the men in these regiments. Dwight and Barlow applied the business methods they had learned in civilian life. Dwight created a system within the Second to distribute food and clothing more efficiently. Barlow wrote his own set of rules and regulations and made sure they were implemented from the highest to the lowest levels of the Sixty-First. Whenever Barlow took over a new command, he established schools for commissioned and noncommissioned officers. Classes would learn methods of teaching drills and would have to recite tactics to Barlow himself. The West Point commanders of the 2d Massachusetts established similar schools at the regiment's Brook Farm training grounds. Junior officers had to report for instruction and recite lessons in the drill and control of men, the feeding of the men, and other small points of discipline.<sup>17</sup>

The system was designed to train the men in standards of order and cleanliness as well as preparation for battle. Elite officers equated cleanliness, neatness, and order with discipline, a view that was not universal in the

16. Dwight, *Life and Letters*, 65, 173–74, 249; SMW to his father, Apr. 2, 1864, *War Diary and Letters*, 267; FCB to Edward Barlow, May 15, 1862, FCB to Almira Barlow, June 3, 1862, FCB Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

17. Dwight, *Life and Letters*, 73–75; Charles A. Fuller, *Personal Recollections of the War of 1861* (Sherburne, N.Y.: News Job Printing House, 1906), 10; FCB to Almira Barlow, Dec. 14, 1861, Jan. 18, 1863, FCB Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Perry, *Henry Lee Higginson*, 147–49.

volunteer army. John Codman Ropes, the close friend and correspondent of Gray, viewed the 20th Massachusetts as a model regiment because its tents were neat and there was an absence of noise and disturbance within the camp. Abbott, as major of the Twentieth, revealed his class assumptions when he equated cleanliness with morale. In an August 1862 letter, Abbott contrasted the morale of the Army of the Potomac with the Army of Northern Virginia. "The rebels, with their vile butternut clothes, illmade & illfitting, their wretched food, & personal filthiness, can't be in as good spirits as we are," he told his father. This group of officers focused on the minor details of cleanliness, perhaps because it was such a struggle to get the men to meet their standards. Lowell commented that it was "astonishing how much easier it is to make men do their military duty than it is to make them appreciate neatness and cleanliness." Faced with this resistance, nothing escaped attention. Charles Francis Adams performed daily inspection of the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry to check the hair length of the men and the soil level of their clothes. Barlow laid out his regiment's camp in regular streets, conforming exactly to military rules.<sup>18</sup>

When he was a captain in the 20th Massachusetts, Abbott enforced standards of conduct on his men that went beyond what was required. The chaplain of the regiment read prayers every Sunday, but the colonel had clearly told the men that they were not required to attend. Over time, the audience for prayers dwindled, although Abbott's company continued to turn out. One morning, three of Abbott's men did not fall in for prayers. Abbott could not ostensibly punish the men after the colonel's orders, but he made the three men do all the water carrying during the service and for two hours afterward. After that, no one from his company "availed himself of the col.'s permission to stay away from religious services." Lowell also sought to instill righteousness in his men. Disturbed by the prevalence of profanity among his men, he issued a general order to quell the practice. He admitted that he had not set the best example for his men, but swore to his fiancée that he would personally desist and enforce the Articles of War against his men if necessary.<sup>19</sup>

None of these men went farther in viewing the army as an opportunity to elevate the lower classes than Charles Francis Adams Jr. Late in the war he was an officer in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry, an African American

18. JCR to JCG, Mar. 17, 1864, in *War Letters*, 302; HLA to his father, Aug. 10, 1862, *Fallen Leaves*, 133; CRL to Josephine Shaw, June 1, 1863, *Life and Letters*, 251–52; CFA Jr. to CFA, May 24, 1863, *Cycle of Adams Letters*, 2:15–16; FCB to Edward Barlow, July 18, 1861, FCB Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

19. HLA to his father, Dec. 16, 1861, *Fallen Leaves*, 86; CRL to Josephine Shaw, Sept. 10, 1863, *Life and Letters*, 301.

regiment. Adams wrote his father that the army could become a school for the black race as well as an engine of war, as blacks in the army would learn skilled labor and self-reliance. He induced his close friend, Col. Henry Sturgis Russell, to use discipline to “cultivate forms of industry” and enthusiastically discussed his “philanthropic” plan of attaching schoolmasters to every regiment. He believed his men were slovenly and approached tasks hastily, but he intended to “break” them and ingrain habits of craftsmanship and pride in work as they became builders, carpenters, and mechanics through their experience in the army.<sup>20</sup>

In order to better enforce the myriad expectations set for the men, these officers attempted to maintain a strict distinction between officers and privates. Their concern was authority, not sociability. Charles Fessenden Morse was amused that the 2d Massachusetts had earned the name of “the stuck up” regiment. “Others think we cannot get along well with our men, as they never see them sitting around in our tents smoking and joking with us,” he said. “We let them think so.” Morse implied that social segregation did not imply lack of respect between the officers of the Second and their men. He recognized that earning respect was an important element in successful leadership, something he had witnessed among Massachusetts’ elites. No one better exemplified this than Charles Francis Adams Jr. He wrote his father that he could feel the Adams family traits emerging in him as he commanded his men. His men had no great personal attachment to him and found him cold, reserved, and formal. But he had something better—the confidence of his men. Adams found that they sought him out to decide their bets and settle questions for them. They believed in his integrity and his ability to accomplish results. In 1864, when the men of the regiment had to decide whether to reenlist, a group of them approached Adams to make sure he would remain in the regiment as well. They told him they could recruit reenlistments in the regiment better if he did not take his leave of absence until he personally saw that all the men who reenlisted were allowed to go home for the promised furlough.<sup>21</sup>

Other officers sought more of a balance between respect and affection. In his earliest days in the army, Barlow announced that he had no “desire to make the damned scoundrels like me & I do not think they do especially.” But later in the war he frequently commented to his family that he thought his men liked him, a sure sign that he wanted this affection. Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. also expressed hope that his men “liked him.” This desire for what

20. CFA Jr. to CRA, Nov. 2, 1864, *Cycle of Adams Letters*, 2:217–19.

21. Morse, *Letters*, 24; CFA Jr. to CFA, Jan. 16, 1864, *Cycle of Adams Letters*, 2:118–19.

Adams would call the “attachment” of the men partially stemmed from a genuine feeling for their men on the part of these officers. The men’s progress in drill and discipline, their courage in battle, and the shared hardships of the campaign created an affection between officers and men that is commonly found in war. As early as September 1861, Abbott had high praise for the men of his company. He admitted that he was attached to them and found it harder to “rough them.” He found himself rebuking men in a “pleasant, goodnatured way, instead of the proper short, sharp, curt, military style. One can’t help it; they are such a fine set of fellows.”<sup>22</sup>

Seemingly the men went through a similar reversal of feeling. At first they chafed under the strict discipline these officers enforced. Charles Humphreys, the chaplain for Lowell’s 2d Massachusetts Cavalry, recalled that the severity of military discipline was the men’s chief complaint. “It was hard for a free man nourished in independence to submit absolutely to the will of another,” he later wrote, “to make himself part of a machine without questioning any of its adaptations or uses.” Charles Fuller, in his memoirs of the 61st New York, noted that Barlow was at first hated for his exacting requirements and his severity. But over time this animosity turned to confidence and admiration when the men saw that Barlow knew what he was doing, made every effort to ensure their welfare, and led by example. Indeed, in all these regiments the men learned to take pride in the distinctive discipline of their regiments. As early as December 1861, under the severe but just leadership of Frank Bartlett, acting as lieutenant colonel, Abbott reported that the men of the 20th Massachusetts changed from a “pack of Broad St. & Northstreet roughs who are just working along as little as possible for their pay and kept under by discipline.” Thanks to Bartlett, the men were “actually vying with each other who shall be the best soldier, most tidy in his equipments & most active in his duty. All this done with very little punishment.” Leadership would not be the only reason for this transformation. Veteran experience in camp and battle taught the men the advantages of discipline and the military system.<sup>23</sup>

And the men had to endure harsh discipline if they were in regiments commanded by Brahmin officers. In August 1861, Dwight and other officers of the 2d Massachusetts found the initial enthusiasm for war wearing off

22. FCB to Edward Barlow, May or June 1861 and Dec. 28, 1861, FCB to Almira Barlow, Apr. 9, 1864, Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; OWH to his father, June 13, 1862, *Touched with Fire*, 53; HLA to his father, Sept. 25, 1861, *Fallen Leaves*, 51–52.

23. Charles A. Humphreys, *Field, Camp, Hospital, and Prison in the Civil War, 1863–1865* [1918] (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 7; Fuller, *Personal Recollections*, 10; HLA to his father, Dec. 31, 1861, *Fallen Leaves*, 94–96.

under hard work, homesickness, and soldier's fare. "The only remedy for the trouble is to bring the men to their duty with a strong hand," he decided. "The *voluntariness* has died out of the volunteer. He finds himself devoted to *regular* service. A *regular* he must be made, and the rules and articles of war, in all their arbitrary severity, will not sit lightly upon him."<sup>24</sup> In the 20th Massachusetts, First Lieutenant Abbott relied on his sergeant, Leander Alley, who had been first mate on a whaler, to enforce obedience through a long flat stick known as "Alley's Spanker." Hard cases in the Twentieth faced being tied up by their thumbs or being kept in a cell on a diet of bread and water. In the 56th Massachusetts, Weld kept the difficult men among his prisoners on a platform built twenty feet high.<sup>25</sup>

Partially because of their class attitudes, elite officers were willing to use violence to enforce obedience. Lowell convened an illegal "drumhead court-martial" to try a deserter who had joined Confederate irregular John Mosby. Afraid that President Lincoln would pardon the offender, Lowell again violated regulations and carried out the execution the following day. While many officers and soldiers in the Union army believed that desertion should be met with certain punishment and death, Theodore Lyman wished to apply the death penalty to cowards and stragglers. "People must learn that war is a thing of life or death," he wrote. "If a man won't go to the front he must be shot." Disgusted with stragglers who committed "outrages" in the rear of the army, Lyman wanted to "hang the perpetrators by the road where the troops pass, and put a placard on their breasts." He wondered if the Confederate army, with its ability to make sudden movements, had better discipline on the "essential point—I fancy they shoot a man when he ought to be shot, and we do not." Charles Francis Adams also wanted to apply the death penalty to stragglers, to whom he attributed most of the army's pillaging.<sup>26</sup>

Officers also used coercion to enforce discipline during battle. Suspicious that lower classes did not have the character traits necessary for courage and self-discipline, Holmes used force to ensure that his men would fight. After action in June 1862, Holmes reported to his parents that his company, "although roughs and poor material," fought splendidly. But he attributed this to his file closers, whom he had given orders to shoot any man that ran in battle. During the fight they had bayoneted several faltering soldiers, and Holmes

24. Dwight, *Life and Letters*, 66–67.

25. HLA to his father, Dec. 16 and 31, 1861, *Fallen Leaves*, 86, 95–96; SMW to his father, Mar. 29, 1864, *War Letters and Diary*, 265.

26. Emerson, *Life and Letters*, 450–51; Agassiz, *Meade's Headquarters*, 99, 117; CFA Jr. to his mother, Aug. 9, 1863, *Cycle of Adams Letters*, 275.

had personally rapped a cowering private with his sword, pulled his revolver, and swore to shoot any man who fired against orders. At Fair Oaks, Abbott reported that some of his men had used deep mud as an excuse to falter, but that file closers had pricked the men with bayonets to keep them moving.<sup>27</sup>

Barlow was the master of these tactics and had the opportunity to employ them on a large scale as a division commander. On the march, he established a provost guard to follow behind the column and drive all stragglers with the bayonet. Barlow personally beat soldiers—punching them with his fists and kicking them wherever he could hit—who straggled or attempted to leave the field of battle. At Cold Harbor, he put stragglers into an open field under the fire of Confederate shells. Stephen Minot Weld, using an old technique of the British regulars, forced all the men of the 56th Massachusetts to take the caps off their guns before a charge. With caps, he believed, they would charge to a few yards of the objective, fire, and run. Without caps, they would have to rush over the enemy works.<sup>28</sup>

Adams used force against soldiers of a different regiment than his own, a picket reserve he found fleeing down a Virginia road. They were new recruits who had never been under fire before. He managed to rally half of them, but when he attempted to lead them in a forward movement, they began to walk away. Enraged, Adams rode his horse over one man and cut two others with his sword. His actions temporarily halted the departure, although Adams could not get these strangers to fight. Later he wondered why he had not shot one of the men as he left the field of battle.<sup>29</sup>

Both Weld and Lowell personally shot men who disobeyed their orders. When the newly formed 56th Massachusetts reached its camp in Annapolis in 1864, many of them hit the town on a drinking binge. Weld ordered one of the offenders, a man named Casey, to be tied by the thumbs and gagged with a bayonet. Casey kicked the officer attempting to administer the punishment. Weld told Casey that he would shoot him. At that moment, another officer walked by and Casey tried another kick. Weld drew his pistol and fired twice, hitting Casey's arm and the bayonet tied into his mouth. The bayonet saved the drunken soldier's life. "I meant to kill him," Weld said. "And was very sorry I did not succeed." But he found the incident still worked

27. OWH to his parents, June 2, 1862, *Touched with Fire*, 51; HLA to his father, June 6, 1862, *Fallen Leaves*, 128.

28. Agassiz, *Meade's Headquarters*, 157–58, 189; Fuller, *Personal Recollections*, 50; Thomas B. Buell, *The Warrior Generals: Combat Leadership in the Civil War* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997), 333; Weld Diary, June 17, 1864, *War Letters and Diary*, 311–12.

29. CFA Jr. to CFA, Mar. 8, 1863, *Cycle of Adams Letters*, 2:258, 262.

its purpose. "The shots had a wonderful effect on quieting the men, and I had very little trouble with them after that." Lowell killed his man. He was in Boston recruiting for the 2d Massachusetts Cavalry. When he checked in at the recruiting station early one morning, he found a small squad of new recruits in a state of mutiny. The sergeant had ordered a man to be handcuffed, but the recruits felt this was unjust and resisted. Lowell informed them that the order must be obeyed. He would hear their side and decide the case on its merits, but the order should be obeyed first. "God knows, my men, I don't want to kill any of you," Lowell said. "But I shall shoot the first man who resists." When the sergeant stepped forward with the irons, the recruits rushed forward and Lowell shot the leader.<sup>30</sup>

As members of an elite class with long experience in leadership, these men knew that it took more than a strong show of authority to claim obedience. They balanced strict discipline with leadership methods that employed incentive and reward. Weld, for example, followed up with the man he had shot. He believed he could distinguish between the "totally bad" and those "temporarily led astray." Weld called Casey into his tent and told him he would forgo a court-martial if Casey promised to give up liquor. Weld proceeded to treat Casey just as he did the other men, and "tried to reform him by showing that I had confidence in him." This method worked for four months, as Casey reformed his behavior and was promoted to first sergeant. Later Casey fell off the wagon and Weld busted him back to private, but Weld still worked with the man and had confidence in his eventual reformation.<sup>31</sup> Abbott and Lowell also employed incentives for their men. Abbott believed that the best regiments in the army should earn additional leaves, furloughs, and privileges. He identified the "spirit of emulation" as the "most powerful governing spirit of American troops." Lowell, hoping that a show of trust would stimulate good behavior, removed his camp guards and allowed his men more freedom of movement.<sup>32</sup>

Brahmin officers claimed obedience in battle through personal example as well as coercion. As did men from every class in American society, they believed that courage and performance of duty were integral parts of manhood. Battle would test and draw out these qualities. These elite young men viewed their behavior in battle not only as a measuring stick of their character but also as an

30. SMW to his father, Mar. 25, 1864, *War Diary and Letters*, 262; Emerson, *Life and Letters*, 374-75.

31. SMW to his father, Apr. 2 and July 29, 1864, *War Diary and Letters*, 268, 351-52.

32. HLA to George Perry, Mar. 10, 1863, *Fallen Leaves*, 170; CRL to Josephine Shaw, June 3, 1863, *Life and Letters*, 252-53.

essential tool to inspire appropriate battle discipline in their men. In his first battle, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. positioned himself in front of the men to encourage them forward. When he was hit by a spent ball, he started to crawl to the rear but realized his injury was not severe enough to excuse him. He leapt up, returned to the front, waved his sword, and asked his men to follow him. He was then shot again. Even toward the end of the war, Lowell made sure his men saw him coolly and calmly riding his horse in exposed places along the line of battle. He wore a bright crimson sash in battle, even though he believed it made him a target, because it was “good for the men to have me wear it.” When the 54th Massachusetts, under Col. Robert Gould Shaw, prepared for its charge on Fort Wagner, the commanding general called out the color-bearer and asked, “If this man should fall, who will lift the flag and carry it on?” Shaw responded, “I will.” He was killed standing atop the parapet of Fort Wagner, waving his men forward with his sword. At Fredricksburg, Holmes reported that Abbott led two platoons into a slaughter pen “with the same indifferent air that he has when drilling a [battalion].” Abbott had a double motivation for his battle persona. “It would be hard to be frightened when men whom you are accustomed to think more ignoble than yourself are cool all around you,” he told his father after his first battle.<sup>33</sup>

The class assumptions these Brahmin officers brought into the war clearly affected their style of discipline and leadership. In some ways, this style was unique. These men used coercion to enforce discipline in battle from the earliest year of the war. Historians have found that in most regiments this was not the case. In the first two years at least, officers generally relied on personal example and the soldiers’ own conceptions of courage. Only after 1863 did more regiments begin employing file closers and issuing orders to open fire on broken units. By 1864 the Union army had assigned designated units of Provost Guards to drive brigade stragglers into line. It is significant that Brahmin officers used these tactics from the start of the war.<sup>34</sup> Nor did most officers in the early years of the war maintain such strict segregation between themselves and their men.<sup>35</sup> Of course officers throughout the army, and from every social class, shared many leadership characteristics with these

33. OWH to his mother, Oct. 23, 1861, *Touched with Fire*, 13–18; Emerson, *Life and Letters*, 42–43; Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment: History of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863–1865* [1894] (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 77–81; OWH to his father, Mar. 29, 1863, *Touched with Fire*, 90–91; HLA to his father, Nov. 7, 1861, *Fallen Leaves*, 73–74.

34. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 48–51; Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 43–56, 171.

35. Logue, *Appomattox and Beyond*, 32; McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 53–57; Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 229.

elites. They too saw that their men were properly supplied, supervised the cleanliness and order of their camps, and used prewar professional experience to guide them in handling soldiers.<sup>36</sup>

Brahmin officers were distinct precisely where they believed they were implementing the standards of the regular army—in their strict discipline and strict segregation of officers and men. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the most famous commander of black troops during the war, was one of these Brahmin officers. In 1864 he published an article in *Atlantic Monthly* comparing regular and volunteer officers. He boldly announced that regiments commanded by regular army officers clearly outperformed the volunteers. He attributed this to the unique nature of the army, for which there was no civilian counterpart that could adequately prepare a man. Higginson equated an army to an aristocracy that could not operate effectively on democratic principles. An army functioned well only when commanders could impose *implicit* obedience, a concept most volunteers found hard to swallow. Higginson suggested that volunteer officers could be successful only if they adopted the mind-set of professional soldiers. This applied not only to discipline but to administrative matters within the army. If volunteer officers would learn the value of the army's myriad rules, regulations, and forms, they would see that the army had created an efficient machine able to govern, supply, and coordinate larger bodies of men than any civilian organization. Higginson asked his fellow officers to devote themselves to the army just as they would devote themselves to their lifelong professions. If volunteer officers did this, the lack of discipline and waste that characterized the Union war effort would largely dissipate.<sup>37</sup>

Higginson spoke for the young men of his class. It was easy for them to call on volunteers to be more like regulars because the values they identified in the army matched so closely the values of their own class. Comfortable with hierarchy and assuming they were born to command, they imposed harsh military discipline on their men and used coercion within battle to keep their men in line. Their families had embraced modern values of organization and efficiency before the war started, and they found it easy to transition to the machinelike quality of army administration. Many factors can explain the uneven levels of discipline between regiments in the Union army, and there are many reasons why some regiments followed strict military discipline and others did not. But certainly the class background of the volunteer officers is one of them.

36. Hess, *Liberty, Virtue, and Progress*, 63–64.

37. T. W. Higginson, "Regular and Volunteer Officers," *Atlantic Monthly* 14 (Sept. 1864): 348–57.

These Brahmin officers sincerely believed that by implementing their class ideals they created better Civil War regiments. Other Union officers in their official reports frequently commented on the bravery of these elite officers and on the effectiveness of the units they commanded. But many regiments without elite officers performed equally well in battle and also maintained orderly camps. In the Civil War, the assumption that strict military discipline created superior regiments was not necessarily justified. Elite officers also believed they were instilling qualities and values in their enlisted men that would be useful to these men after the war. At its best, this belief led to a zealous effort to care for the welfare of the men and an honest attempt to set an example worthy of emulation. At its worst, this attitude led to snobbery and the harsh repression of volunteers who refused to become like regulars. Either way, it is difficult to tell whether the mass of men in the Brahmin-led regiments ultimately embraced the values their officers tried to impose.

Only scattered clues reveal the extent to which these elite officers achieved their objective in regard to the enlisted men. Some of them, notably Adams, Barlow, Dwight, and Lowell, won the confidence and respect of many soldiers, who came to appreciate the order, discipline, and efficiency of the units in which they served, and who came to believe in the sincerity of their leaders. But men in other Brahmin regiments clearly rejected the lessons of their officers, and even came to doubt their right to lead. This happened in the 20th Massachusetts, where the class-consciousness of a conservative clique of officers that included Henry Livermore Abbott undermined morale in the regiment and led the soldiers to embark on a formal protest. In early June 1863, 210 enlisted men signed a petition to the governor that claimed they were “subjected to a tyranny worse than African slavery.” The tyrant was a recently commissioned second lieutenant with no military experience who had been twice suspended from Harvard. The men demanded that the officer be removed from command and claimed that he had been promoted only because of his family connections.<sup>38</sup>

Similar to the Union army as a whole, with its mixed record regarding discipline and leadership, the Brahmins were not uniformly successful when it came to uplifting the masses. But this class did produce an unusual number of good and brave officers who willingly risked, and in many cases sacrificed, their privileged lives in the service of their country. The Civil War tested the service ethic of this class, and whatever else they achieved, these young men fulfilled that aspect of the ideal that guided them.

38. Richard F. Miller, “The Trouble with Brahmins: Class and Ethnic Tensions in Massachusetts’ ‘Harvard Regiment,’” *New England Quarterly* 76 (Mar. 2003): 38–39.