

Captain Joseph Deverell
and
The 108th New York Volunteer Infantry

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The 108th New York Volunteer Infantry and Captain Joseph Deverell of Company K demonstrate and reaffirm the traditional narrative of the Northern experience of the American Civil War. Deverell's records shed new light on mustering, desertion, honor culture, and medical treatment. While dueling, as it pertains to honor culture, typically falls under the Southern narrative, Deverell's records indicate that Northerners shared the South's sense of honor and determination to defend it to the death. Deverell's records, as well as the experiences of the 108th, provide a new perspective on the battles, presenting the soldiers as men who were more concerned with keeping their boots dry than necessarily attacking death head-on. Desertion, a major problem officers faced during the course of the war, occurs throughout Deverell's records. Finally, Deverell's records of his own wounds demonstrate the brutality of Civil War weapons and their lasting effects on soldiers. The 108th and Deverell reinforce the traditional Northern narrative of the war that James M. McPherson established in his work, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, and that Gerald F. Linderman established in his work, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*.

On July first, 1862, prompted by the governors of twenty Union states, President Abraham Lincoln called for an additional three hundred thousand men to enlist in the Union Army for a period of three years. Lincoln used the proclamation as a final appeal to the rebel states to return to the Union, writing, "I...do hereby proclaim to and warn all persons within the contemplation of said 6th section [of An Act to Suppress Insurrection, to Punish Treason and Rebellion, to Seize and

Confiscate the Property of Rebels, and for Other Purposes] to cease participating in, aiding, countenancing, or abetting the existing Rebellion, or any Rebellion, against the Government of the United States.”¹ On July second, Governor Morgan of New York “appealed to the citizens of New York to sustain the country’s defenders then in the field.”² Since each state was in charge of providing volunteers, and the “authority for filling existing units fell under Federal control, while recruiting new units was under the state’s,” New York State simply created new regiments, including the 108th based out of Monroe County.³ On July tenth, a committee in Rochester “authorized the enlistment of men, created a bounty fund, and established Camp Fitz John Porter on the west bluff of the Genesee River” for the mustered soldiers.⁴

Joseph Deverell, born in Ireland around 1831, became a United States citizen on June third, 1852.⁵ Other foreign-born volunteers in the 108th included Canadians and “several veterans of the Crimean War.”⁶ Deverell had prior military experience, serving as a private in 54th Regiment of the New York State Militia in 1855.⁷

Historian Ruth Marsh writes that, at the beginning of the war, “a strenuous effort

¹ George H. Washburn, *A Complete Military History and Record of the 108th Regiment New York Volunteers From 1862 to 1894* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010), 4.

² Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 4.

³ R. L. Murray, *Before the Appointed Time: The History of the 108th New York Volunteers at Antietam* (Wolcott, NY: Benedum Books, 2001), 6.

⁴ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 4.

⁵ Joseph Deverell naturalization form (June 3, 1852).

⁶ Murray, *Before the Appointed Time*, 15.

⁷ Militia Service Certification (September 15, 1855).

was made to raise an Irish Brigade in western New York.”⁸ Rochester newspapers ran advertisements enticing Irishmen to join in order that they may learn combat techniques with which they could return to Ireland and liberate it from English control. Deverell, being an Irish immigrant, took part in this effort to raise an Irish unit. Reportedly, Deverell went to St. Mary’s of the Assumption church in Scottsville where he “asked Father O’Donohoe to use the church for a war meeting, and if that were not possible, for the priest to encourage volunteers from the pulpit at Sunday Mass.”⁹ O’Donohoe did not encourage volunteers, but did allow the war meeting.

On July seventeenth, 1862, the Adjutant-General’s Office of New York authorized Deverell to enroll volunteers into the 108th Regiment.¹⁰ On July twenty-sixth, Camp Fitz John Porter held six hundred men. By August eleventh, Deverell had recruited eighty volunteers and the Adjutant-General’s Office formally granted him the rank of Captain of Company K, with First Lieutenant Patrick McCullen and Second Lieutenant Patrick H. Kavanaugh serving under him.¹¹ On August nineteenth, the 108th struck camp and departed for Albany and New York City. They arrived in New York around noon on the twentieth, after which Governor Morgan awarded the unit with “a special ‘prize banner’” for being among “the first four units

⁸ Ruth Marsh, “Rochester in the Civil War,” *The Rochester Historical Society Publications*, 22 (1944), 22.

⁹ *Courier-Journal* (August 9, 1978), 15. It is interesting that Deverell should have sought recruits at a Catholic church, being an Irish Protestant. The ferocity of the Protestant-Catholic animosity in the family was such that, when Deverell’s son converted to Catholicism, the boy’s mother disowned him, creating a lasting rift in the family.

¹⁰ General Head-Quarters, State of New York, Adjutant-General’s Office, Special Orders no. 132 (July 17, 1862).

¹¹ General Head-Quarters, State of New York, Adjutant-General’s Office, Special Orders no. 27 (August 11, 1862).

mustered for duty.”¹² Following receipt of the banner, the unit traveled by steamer to Philadelphia and then by train to Baltimore and Washington, D.C.¹³ The 108th, encamped in Washington, were aware of the Second Bull Run campaign and knew they did not have long to wait for battle themselves. The experiences of Captain Joseph Deverell and the 108th New York Volunteer Infantry are representative of the Northern experience of the American Civil War and provide a new perspective on the battles, Northern honor culture, and desertion.

Antietam

The 108th departed Washington, D.C. on September seventh, marching for Rockville, Maryland. Camped in Rockville on September eighth, the men “received word that they were now officially part of McClellan’s Army of the Potomac, being assigned to Major General Edwin Sumner’s Second Corps.”¹⁴ Over the course of the next week, the men moved through Maryland, camping in Frederick City and a short distance from Sharpsburg. Murray writes, “While the men camped on the evening of the 16th, the first phase of the Battle of Antietam was underway...After brief fighting, including artillery shells screaming through the 108th’s camp, darkness and quiet set in.”¹⁵ The 108th entered the Battle of Antietam on the morning of September seventeenth, 1862.

¹² Murray, *Before the Appointed Time*, 29.

¹³ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 17. Washburn cheekily refers to the unit’s stay in Philadelphia, writing, “Many fair noble hearted women of the city of ‘Brotherly Love’ were present to attend to the epicurean wants of the boys and cheer them on, with their gracious smiles.”

¹⁴ Murray, *Before the Appointed Time*, 42.

¹⁵ Murray, *Before the Appointed Time*, 48.

Washburn writes of the unit's approach to the battlefield,

The 108th were hurried into line and urged forward. Upon reaching Antietam creek where the water was about knee deep, several of the boys evinced no desire to go into battle with wet feet, and so stopped to pull off their foot-gear, rolled up their pants, forded the stream, and coolly sat down again to replace their pedal adornments, the officers in the meantime were shooting off red hot anathemas over such exquisite progressiveness.¹⁶

Linderman writes of soldiers' behavior in his book, *Embattled Courage*, "In the Civil War indiscipline was chronic" to the point that General Sherman "was appalled that individualism should threaten to dominate combat."¹⁷

Such indulgences notwithstanding, the 108th pressed forward, forming the left flank of Commander Dwight Morris's brigade, comprised of new recruits from the 130th Pennsylvania and the 14th Connecticut. Morris's brigade fell in behind General Max Weber's brigade and pressured General D.H. Hill's Confederate troops on the opposite side of the sunken road. Weber's brigade pressed over a hill, advancing on the Confederate line. Morris's brigade, including the 108th, watched as Confederate fire brought down over 400 of Weber's men before the brigade fell back.¹⁸

Morris's brigade next advanced on the hill, taking heavy fire. Murray writes, "The Confederates further down the line, with no federal troops as yet in their front, were able to turn and fire on the men of the 108th and Morris's other regiments."¹⁹ The 108th remained pinned down under heavy Confederate fire and artillery until Brigadier General Thomas Meagher's Irish Brigade advanced on the 108th's left,

¹⁶ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 24.

¹⁷ Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 36.

¹⁸ Murray, *Before the Appointed Time*, 49-56.

¹⁹ Murray, *Before the Appointed Time*, 57.

providing some relief from the Confederate crossfire. Around 12:30 PM, after nearly three hours of fighting, the 61st New York regiment relieved the 108th. Murray writes, “The 108th received credit for capturing a battle flag and 159 enemy soldiers” after the battle.²⁰

The 108th, having retreated to a meadow, continued to receive fire throughout the night. The unit’s surgeons, J. F. Whitbeck and W. S. Ely, used a barn at the foot of the sunken road as a field hospital and “were overwhelmed with wounded to care for, not only of the 108th, but of many other regiments.”²¹ Washburn writes that he and a fellow soldier, seeking a place to sleep, bedded down in some straw, only later discovering that a dead body lay under the straw. Washburn states, “Fatigue, however, was mastering us, and concluding the body would do for a pillow, we accepted the situation, and tumbled to it without any compunctions.”²² The battlefield was quiet the following day.

Captain Deverell writes in his record of lost matériel,

The regiment to which I belong was engaged in battle with the enemy at Antietam & there were killed & wounded three non-commissioned officers & nine privates whose arms were left upon the field & could not afterwards be recovered as the ground was occupied by sharpshooters.²³

According to his report of materials used, Company K under Deverell’s command fired 241,111 fifty-eight calibre elongated ball cartridges.²⁴ Washburn concludes, “To many a northern hearthstone, and the 108th particularly, the battle of Antietam

²⁰ Murray, *Before the Appointed Time*, 73.

²¹ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 25.

²² Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 25.

²³ Joseph Deverell, *Certificate of Stores Lost in Action at Antietam, Sept. 17th, 1862* (December 14, 1863).

²⁴ Joseph Deverell, *Abstract of Materials, &c., expended or consumed in Company K, 108 Regiment N.Y.V. Infantry during the 3rd quarter 1862* (1862).

brought desolation and death. It was the regiment's bloody baptismal in war's terrific ordeal."²⁵ Colonel Palmer, in his official report of the 108th in the Battle of Antietam, listed his "total loss in killed, wounded and missing" at 295.²⁶ McPherson writes, following the Battle of Antietam, "nearly 6,000 men lay dead or dying, and another 17,000 wounded groaned in agony or endured in silence."²⁷ The 108th contributed to the "strategic Union success" at Antietam, stopping Lee's invasion of Maryland and ensuring that "nearly one-third of the rebels who marched into Maryland became casualties."²⁸ Murray writes, "Soon after the battle the men were sent to the Federal garrison at Harper's Ferry and finally received their school of instruction – their proper training."²⁹ It is unclear how many of the men had any military training before the battle. Many may have served in the state militia like Deverell, but would likely not have seen action as part of this service.

Following Antietam, the 108th fought at Fredericksburg before settling down for the winter. The winter of 1862-63 brought its own casualties through disease. Washburn writes, "Typhoid fever broke out among the men fearfully, and there was a sorrowful season."³⁰ General Burnside attempted to attack the Confederates on January twentieth, but the effort failed due to the mud, which prevented the moving of men, horses, and artillery. Washburn cheekily wrote of the remainder of the

²⁵ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 25.

²⁶ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 29.

²⁷ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 544.

²⁸ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 545.

²⁹ Murray, *Before the Appointed Time*, 81.

³⁰ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 38.

winter, "We then passed the time peacefully until the great Chancellorville [sic] May party, in which the 108th was an active guest."³¹

Washburn writes of the first day of the Battle of Chancellorsville, May third, 1863,

If it should be any advantage to the accursed traitors of this once happy country, that the best blood on earth should drench her soil, then they must have been gratified, for to this moment 10,000 men had shed their blood in defense of a country we had sworn should be one and inseparable.³²

The remaining two days, the 108th held their line, though most of the fighting on the fifth involved small skirmishes. Washburn concludes, "We had whipped them in every fair fight, had inflicted a loss of 18,000 killed and wounded, and taken 5,000 prisoners, while our loss all told was only 16,700 men."³³ Washburn's claims, though unsubstantiated by secondary material, serve to demonstrate the soldiers' sense of honor and the need to quantify their bravery. The 16,700 Union losses do not represent a significant difference from the 18,000 rebel losses, yet Washburn happily qualifies the engagement as a success.

On May thirty-first, 1863, Captain Deverell charged Captain Eugene Fuller of Company H with three crimes arising from Fuller challenging another officer to a duel. The charges included violation of the Articles of War, conduct unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman, and conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline. Deverell writes,

Capt. Eugene Fuller...did enter the tent of Patrick H. Kavanagh [sic]...& did then & there repeatedly challenge said Kavanagh [sic] to fight him said Fuller in these words, or worst to that effect, "I challenge you to come with me to the creek & fight me with swords or pistols, God damn you." Said Fuller also strove to provoke said

³¹ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 39.

³² Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 44.

³³ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 45.

Kavanagh [sic] to accept his challenge by repeating these words or words to that effect, viz: "You are a god damd coward, You dare not go to the creek with me, You dare not fight me with swords or pistols, God damn you." Soon afterwards in the street said Fuller also challenged said Kavanagh [sic] to fight him with swords or pistols next morning at 6 o'clock & upbraided him, said Kavanagh [sic] with being a coward. All this at the camp of the 108th Regt. N.Y. Vol. near Falmouth Va, on the 29th day of May 1863.³⁴

The charge of conduct unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman stems both from the initial challenge and a later incident deriving from it:

On the 29th day of May 1863...Capt. Eugene Fuller of Co. H...did insult & abuse Capt. Joseph Deverell of Co. K...by approaching him said Deverell saying, "God dam you I can lick you!! You can kiss my ass" This because said Deverell told an enlisted man of said Fuller's Co. who waned to fight Lt. Kavanagh [sic] of said regt. For \$50, to keep still.³⁵

Fuller did not know when to walk away and approached Deverell again later, saying, "You are a god damd louse! You are a louse of the first magnitude!"³⁶ The following day, Fuller called out Kavanaugh for their duel. The only clue Deverell gives to its outcome is when he writes that Fuller "did go to fight a duel to his disgrace."³⁷ Though dueling was not as commonplace in the North at this time, it remained, in the words of political scientist Mika LaVaque-Manty, "a means by which claims of honor were made, maintained, and understood."³⁸ Though Deverell never wrote what prompted Fuller to issue a challenge to Kavanaugh in the first place, the meaning of the event would have been understood clearly by both men. LaVaque-Manty writes, "When someone successfully challenges [another's] claim to dignity, [the challenged party] must somehow demonstrate that [they] do indeed have it.

³⁴ Joseph Deverell, *Charges & Specifications preferred against Capt. Eugene Fuller Co. H 108th Regt. NY Vol. by Capt. Joseph Deverell of said regt.* (May 31, 1863).

³⁵ Deverell, *Charges & Specifications*. I have reprinted Deverell's original emphasis here in both the underlining and double exclamation marks.

³⁶ Deverell, *Charges & Specifications*.

³⁷ Deverell, *Charges & Specifications*.

³⁸ Mika LaVaque-Manty, "Dueling for Equality: Masculine Honor and the Modern Politics of Dignity," *Political Theory*, 34, no. 6 (2006), 716.

Not to do so would mean forfeiting it.”³⁹ Ironically, though Fuller was a captain and Kavanaugh a lieutenant, the challenge “implies a kind of respect” between the two and renders them relatively equal.⁴⁰ Linderman writes, “Manliness, godliness, duty, honor, and knightliness constituted in varying degrees the values that Union and Confederate volunteers were determined to express through their actions on the battlefield.”⁴¹ In this system, “fascination with the duel accentuated the attractiveness of individualized combat.”⁴² Linderman writes of “military courtesy” in which “privates often expressed their judgement of an officer by withholding their salutes.”⁴³ The enlisted man in Fuller’s company may have held Kavanaugh in low opinion due to a breach in military courtesy or have been a particularly ardent supporter of Fuller. Nonetheless, Fuller’s actions demonstrate that, while the traditional narrative of honor culture during the Civil War focuses on the South, the Union was an honor-bound society as well. Further evidence for this comes from Deverell’s preface to most of his paperwork, in which he states, “I certify on honor.”⁴⁴

Gettysburg

Colonel Thomas Smyth, of the First Delaware Infantry and commander of the Second Brigade, wrote of the action of the 108th, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Francis E. Pierce, at the Battle of Gettysburg. The Second Brigade marched

³⁹ LaVaque-Manty, “Dueling for Equality,” 721.

⁴⁰ LaVaque-Manty, “Dueling for Equality,” 721.

⁴¹ Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 16.

⁴² Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 16.

⁴³ Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 51.

⁴⁴ Deverell, *Certificate of Stores Lost in Action at Antietam*.

to Taneytown on the first of July, holding there until noon when it marched again for Gettysburg. At 4 AM on July second, the Second Brigade took position “on the hills overlooking the town” and held the position “until the termination of the action on the night of the 3rd.”⁴⁵ At 8 AM on the second, the 108th was “assigned to the support of Woodruff’s Battery.”⁴⁶ At 2 PM, the Confederates opened fire, but the Second Brigade pushed them back. Members of the 12th New Jersey Volunteers retook a barn 400 yards in front of the line, dislodging sharpshooters, and “capturing 92 prisoners, including 7 commissioned officers.”⁴⁷ Despite this effort, the Confederates retook the barn. Again, the 12th New Jersey took the barn before retiring. Smyth writes, “Firing ceased about 9 PM the remainder of the night being quiet.”⁴⁸

At 4 AM on the third, the Second Brigade woke to artillery from both the Federal and Confederate sides. Smyth writes, “Skirmishing with artillery and infantry continued all along the line until 10:30 AM, when a lull ensued, which lasted up to 2 PM.”⁴⁹ At 2 PM, the Confederates began firing cannon at the Second Brigade’s front “and continued without intermission until 5 PM.”⁵⁰ During this cannoning Smyth received a wound, surrendering command to Lieutenant Colonel Pierce of the 108th.⁵¹ Smyth writes,

The One Hundred and Eighth New York Volunteers rendered very efficient service while supporting Woodruff’s battery, and lost heavily, the casualties being about half of the regiment in action. The men assisted in manœuvering the guns when so

⁴⁵ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 55.

⁴⁶ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 55.

⁴⁷ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 55.

⁴⁸ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 55.

⁴⁹ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 56.

⁵⁰ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 56.

⁵¹ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 56.

many of the horses were killed that the guns, limbers, and caissons could with difficulty be moved.⁵²

Lieutenant Colonel Pierce describes the chaos of Gettysburg in a letter he wrote to his friend, Edward D. Chapin back in Rochester,

I wish you could be in a *big* fight. Niagara falls, or as good a view of thunder shower at a short distance create curious emotions in one – perfectly inexpressible, but think of the roar and booming of 150 cannon, the reports of shells exploding, the rending of huge trees and crashing fall of great limbs and treetops – the yell of the advancing enemy, the answering yells of defiance of the boys – the hurrying to and fro – the crashing of thousand of muskets, and various other scenes connected with a battle, and though it is only imagination with you, you cannot help seeing how inexpressibly grand the scene is.⁵³

Pierce continues his letter, describing a visit to a field hospital,

It is nothing to be wounded and get into a rich comfortable bed in a church or hospital in Washington where every care and attention is bestowed upon one – but as it was after Gettysburgh [sic] – where thousands of wounded men laid, during the violent rain and under the burning sun without a particle of shelter or a blanket, and nothing but the cold wet ground under him – there is the place to see condensed misery.⁵⁴

Pierce writes of the injured men's remarks, "all of them brave and full of pluck to the last."⁵⁵ Smyth, in his official report, wrote that Lieutenant Colonel Pierce, "throughout the heaviest of the fire, showed the greatest unconcern, passing along his line and encouraging his men."⁵⁶ Of approximately 200 men fighting in the 108th with Woodruff's battery, "16 were reported killed and 86 wounded."⁵⁷ Deverell's records indicate that one non-commissioned officer was "severely wounded" at Gettysburg on July second.⁵⁸ Company K fired 800 fifty-eight calibre elongated ball

⁵² Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 56.

⁵³ F. E. Pierce, "Letter Dated July 27, 1863," reprinted in *The Rochester Historical Society Publications*, 22 (1944), 171.

⁵⁴ Pierce, "Letter Dated July 27, 1863," 171.

⁵⁵ Pierce, "Letter Dated July 27, 1863," 171.

⁵⁶ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 56.

⁵⁷ Marsh, "Rochester in the Civil War," 41.

⁵⁸ Joseph Deverell, *Record of Arms Lost at Gettysburg* (November 22, 1863).

cartridges.⁵⁹ According to later family records, Deverell received a wound at Gettysburg on July fourth, but remained with the army and did not make a note of it.⁶⁰ McPherson writes, “The victory at Gettysburg was purchased at high human cost: 23,000 Union casualties, more than one-quarter of the army’s effectiveness.”⁶¹ Pierce’s remarks on the horror of the battlefield perfectly capture the nature of the carnage, with Deverell’s wounding reflecting the expectation of the soldier “to depart from the field courageously.”⁶² Linderman writes, the soldier “strove to defeat the enemy but also to attain the highest standard of courage; thus the military outcome of a particular engagement, while mirroring the effectiveness of his side’s participation, need not reflect the *quality* of his side’s performance.”⁶³ Following this criterion, “armies beaten in battles...could ignore the outcome as measured by traditional indices – the comparative numbers of dead and wounded, the army forced from the field – and stress instead the triumph of comportment to the exclusion of wills.”⁶⁴ Thus, Deverell’s failure to record his own wounding represented a moral victory in addition to the military victory his unit attained, further reinforcing the Northern narrative of the battle and the war as a whole.

Following Gettysburg, the 108th fought at Bristoe Station, Virginia in October 1863. Washburn summarizes,

⁵⁹ Joseph Deverell, *Abstract of Materials, &c., expended or consumed in Company K, 108 Regiment N.Y.V. during the Third quarter 1863* (1863).

⁶⁰ William F. Deverell, *Joseph Deverell, Capt. New York Volunteers Company K* (June 15, 1989, unpublished).

⁶¹ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 664.

⁶² Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 27.

⁶³ Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 62.

⁶⁴ Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 62.

The battle of Bristow [sic] Station was the last and only general engagement that grew out of Lee's advance northward, and probably decided the issue of the campaign. His attempt to flank the Union army and get between it and Washington was timely anticipated, and the recoil of the fortunes of the South, which began at Gettysburg, rolled steadily on, and the 108th was an active factor in administering the recoil.⁶⁵

While at winter quarters between 1863-64, men of the 108th observed a Confederate camp across the Rapidan River and placed a large log, with one end painted black, and two old wheels in position to "menace" the Confederates. The following morning, the Confederates had struck camp and dispersed, much to the delight of the 108th.⁶⁶

Deverell wrote in December about a deserter in the 108th. He writes in a letter to C. P. Eakin in the 1st U.S. Army,

Fred Rose enlisted at Rochester Aug. 5.62 & was mustered on the 16th or 17th Aug...Straggled on march & was taken prisoner about Nov. 1.62 on the road from Harpers Ferry to Falmouth Va. Was paroled & exchanged & joined his Company about the middle of March last & was paid to march 1st.63. Remained with the Co. until May 3 when he deserted from the battle field at Chancellorsville Va... He is for one of his age, the most accomplished liar and expert thief...He is stricken from the rolls & reported as a deserter. Be pleased to treat him as such and have him turned a prisoner to his regiment.⁶⁷

Rose is indicative of what McPherson terms "bounty jumpers." Bounty jumpers took the money and either deserted to repeat the process in another town, or "allowed themselves to be captured at the first contact with the enemy."⁶⁸ McPherson writes of other units' similar experiences, "A Connecticut soldier described new men in his regiment as 'bounty jumpers, thieves, and cutthroats'; a Massachusetts officer reported that forty of the 186 'substitutes, bounty-jumpers...thieves and roughs' who had been assigned to his regiment disappeared the first night after they

⁶⁵ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 60.

⁶⁶ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 64.

⁶⁷ Joseph Deverell, *Letter to C. P. Eakin, 1st Lieut. 1st U.S. Army*, December 11th, 1863.

⁶⁸ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 606.

arrived.”⁶⁹ Deverell’s opinion of Rose echoes the larger sentiments felt throughout the Union army. Rose was not the only deserter in Deverell’s unit, however. Deverell’s records indicate at least three more: William Greentree took his Springfield musket with him when he deserted in October 1863;⁷⁰ Private James Forrester, took with him a Springfield musket, ammunition, and additional supplies when he deserted on December thirty-first, 1863;⁷¹ finally, James Wilson deserted, though he was later captured and placed under arrest for desertion at Baltimore in 1864.⁷²

Desertion represented the greatest breach of honor, as soldiers who refused to fight were neither manly nor courageous. Deverell’s instructions to Eakin to treat Rose as a deserter, without honor, and return him as a prisoner reinforce officers’ low opinion of deserters throughout the war.

Cold Harbor

The Campaign of 1864 included the Wilderness Campaign, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor. In May, the 108th joined the Wilderness Campaign “to oust the enemy from their strongholds.”⁷³ Deverell writes of the Wilderness Campaign, “One non-com. officer was killed, one man severely wounded & one missing that has not since

⁶⁹ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 720.

⁷⁰ Joseph Deverell, *Statement of losses Charged on Muster & Pay Rolls, Co. K 108 N.Y.V., 3rd Qr. 1863*.

⁷¹ Joseph Deverell, *Statement of Charges on Muster and Pay Rolls, Company K, 108th Reg’t N.Y.V., 4th Quarter, 1863* (December 31, 1863).

⁷² Joseph Deverell, *Letter to Treasury Department, Second Auditor’s Office* (November 26, 1864).

⁷³ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 65.

been heard of.”⁷⁴ At Spotsylvania, “one serg’t was killed & one private dangerously wounded.”⁷⁵ The Second Corps, including the 108th, reached Cold Harbor at noon on June second. General Ulysses S. Grant chose the location to engage the Confederates and threaten “their outer line of defenses for Richmond” on the Chickahominy River.⁷⁶ During the course of battle on the first day, the Union and Confederate armies traded possession of the high ground. Washburn writes of the second day,

The usual ping ping, zip-zip was kept up, and soon after dark, a low fog prevailing, a fierce rush was made at Smyth’s Brigade, but the boys were on the alert, the alarm quickly spread, and the whole division sprang to arms, and poured into them a deadly fire of musketry, accompanied by artillery and coehorn mortars.⁷⁷

Despite laying low in the fog, “the glance ball found its victims” among the 108th.⁷⁸ Captain Deverell was among those injured at this battle. Washburn writes,

Soon after, Captain Joe Deverill [sic] (who, being senior captain, had commanded the regiment since Lieutenant Colonel Frank Pierce was obliged to leave us), came trotting along hurriedly. We said, “Hello Cap, what’s the matter?” “The devils have shot me in –.” He had one hand behind him and we could not repress a smile in bidding him good-bye, adding the sympathetic remark, “Hold on to it Cap, and shure you have got it.” He did not return to us, and Bill Dowd never had further orders “to lave hin that be gobs.”⁷⁹

Deverell, having been shot through the upper thigh, did not return to the battle.

Deverell’s records indicate, “two privates...were severely wounded” at Cold Harbor.⁸⁰ Deverell writes of officer casualties,

⁷⁴ Joseph Deverell, *List of Stores Lost at Battle of Wilderness, May 6th 1864* (August 1, 1864). Deverell wrote this in Buffalo, NY while recuperating from wounds he suffered at Cold Harbor.

⁷⁵ Joseph Deverell, *List of Ordinance Stores Lost in Action at Spotsylvania, Va. May 12, 1864* (August 1, 1864). Deverell wrote this from Buffalo, NY at the same time as his summary of the Battle of the Wilderness.

⁷⁶ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 79.

⁷⁷ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 79.

⁷⁸ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 79.

⁷⁹ Washburn, *The 108th Regiment New York Volunteers*, 80.

⁸⁰ Joseph Deverell, *List of Ordinance Stores Lost in Battle at Cold Harbor, June 3rd 1864* (August 1, 1864).

I certify on honor that after I was wounded at Cold Harbor, June 3.1864 and previous to any commissioned officer being assigned or promoted to the command of my company & up to June 9.1864, that one non-commissioned officer was killed.⁸¹

Deverell wrote of his injuries at the Officers' General Hospital in Annapolis, Maryland,

At Coal Harbor [sic], Va. on the 3rd June 1864, I received a musket shot wound through the right thigh – the ball having entered in the middle section & outer part thereof & taking a downward course passed out about four inches lower down on the inside & back part of the leg severely injuring the Cords.⁸²

Deverell received treatment at Armory Square Hospital in Washington D.C. from June eighth until July fourth before taking a leave of absence for thirty days. At the end of the leave of absence, he still suffered from his wound. He applied to a civilian physician for a twenty-day extension. The physician wrote,

Captain Joseph Deverell of the 108th Regt. N.Y. Vols. having applied for a certificate that he is suffering from a gun shot wound, I do hereby certify that I have carefully examined this officer and find that he has received a gun or rifle shot wound in the right thigh, the ball having entered in the outer & back part thereof about eight inches above the knee and taking an oblique downward course passed out about four inches lower down on the inside toward the back part of the leg, that said wound is still unhealed & sore, that said officer has, as I am informed & believe, suffered from its effects since June 3rd 1864 and that in Consequence thereof he is in my opinion unfit for duty & not able to travel.⁸³

Deverell still suffered at the end of the twenty days and again applied for an extension. An army surgeon in Buffalo recommended that Deverell go to the hospital in Annapolis. He concludes his report, "My wound is still unhealed & the cords of my leg somewhat contrasted and...I am yet unable to move but little without the aid of crutches."⁸⁴ Following this injury, Deverell was discharged from the Army.

⁸¹ Joseph Deverell, *List of Ordinance Stores lost Between the 3rd & 9th June 1864* (August 1, 1864).

⁸² Joseph Deverell, *Report from Officers General Hospital, Annapolis, Md.* (September 19, 1862).

⁸³ John C. Watson, *Report of Joseph Deverell Exam, Varysburg, Wyoming County, NY* (August 4, 1864).

⁸⁴ Deverell, *Report from Officers General Hospital.*

Linderman writes of the fear of wounding, “Wounds had the power to challenge courage in various ways: by testing the soldier’s responses to his own wounds, to the sight of others’ wounds, even to the prospect of a wound.”⁸⁵ Soldiers feared being wounded since “nearly every wound became infected – no surprise in a day when regimental surgeons commended a porous bag filled with fresh earth as ‘an excellent absorbent’ for suppurating wounds.”⁸⁶ Finally, field hospitals often caused more harm than good, being hotbeds of infection and wallowing death. Deverell was fortunate to be an officer and allowed to return home for recuperation rather than being sent to an Army field hospital.

Epilogue

Following discharge from service, Joseph Deverell aided the war effort on the homefront by collecting bounties and handling pensions and back pay for soldiers.⁸⁷ In 1866, the Rochester City Directory listed Joseph Deverell as, “Lawyer, over 90 Buffalo, also clerk Canal Collector’s office, h 23 Vienna.”⁸⁸ Deverell worked as a lawyer for six years after the war until his death on February ninth, 1870.⁸⁹ Following Deverell’s death, his widow, Elizabeth Deverell, sued the Federal Government to receive her widow’s pension. Elizabeth appeared before Justice of the Peace Thomas B. Husband and swore out a statement to prove the she and Joseph had been married, since the only record of the marriage existed in the family

⁸⁵ Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 129.

⁸⁶ Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 129.

⁸⁷ Deverell, *Joseph Deverell, Capt. New York Volunteers Company K*.

⁸⁸ *Boyd’s Rochester Directory, with a Business Directory and an Appendix of Much Useful Information, 1866-67* (Rochester, NY: Waite Brothers & Co., 1866), 108.

⁸⁹ Deverell, *Joseph Deverell, Capt. New York Volunteers Company K*.

Bible and the record of William Smith, the Baptist minister who performed the ceremony in Wyoming County on December ninth, 1861.⁹⁰ The sworn testimony of

Husband states,

On the 23rd day of September 1874 before me personally appeared Elizabeth Deverell who being by me duly sworn says that she is the pensioner...whose application for increase of said pension is now on file in the United States Pension Office; that she is the widow of Capt. Joseph Deverell, late of Company K, 108th Regt. N.Y. Vols. deceased & had not remarried since his death and is the mother of William Henry Deverell, Joseph Tarleton Deverell, who are now living, & of Robert Winifred Deverell, deceased, the only children of said Capt. Joseph Deverell deceased.⁹¹

Following her petition, Elizabeth successfully had her widow's pension increased to twenty dollars per month, which was paid to her until her death, March nineteenth 1902.⁹²

Captain Joseph Deverell's experiences with the 108th New York Volunteer Infantry provide a case study of the Northern experience of the American Civil War. His writings provide a new perspective on battles, Northern honor culture, and desertion. At Antietam, he fought with a mostly untrained unit that contributed the Northern victory. Although historical narratives of the Civil War often associate honor culture with the South, Deverell's records demonstrate that the North remained an honor-bound society. Despite having been trained by the time of Gettysburg, the brutality of the battle still had a strong effect on the men and Deverell was shot during the battle. Deverell's records uphold the traditional

⁹⁰ Deverell, *Joseph Deverell, Capt. New York Volunteers Company K*.

⁹¹ Thomas B. Husband, *Sworn Statement of Elizabeth Deverell* (September 23, 1874). Joseph Tarleton Deverell began a tradition in which he named his son Tarleton Joseph Deverell, who in turn named his son Joseph Tarleton Deverell, and so on. William Henry Deverell converted to Catholicism, creating a rift in the family that has never healed.

⁹² Deverell, *Joseph Deverell, Capt. New York Volunteers Company K*.

narrative of desertion. Finally, at Cold Harbor, Deverell joined the ranks of the wounded, but continued to work for the war effort on the homefront.

Deverell's records perfectly corroborate the Northern experience of the war and shed light on those fighting it. Deverell, born in Ireland, chose to become a United States citizen, serve in New York's militia, and raise a unit for service during the Civil War. It is very likely that he was shaped by the patriotic sentiments of Rochester during this period, when the city declared on April eighteenth, 1861,

...We, the citizens of Rochester, irrespective of party, have heard with deep regret, of the commencement of the hostilities by the traitors of South Carolina...and recognizing, as we do, the declaration of war by the Confederate forces of the Seceeded [sic] States against the government in this act, as the beginning of a causeless and aggressive civil war on their part, we hereby pledge ourselves to the support of the rightfully constituted authorities of the land, and to uphold and maintain, at every cost, the dignity, honor and greatness of these United States.⁹³

Viewed in this light, Deverell's records reinforce not only the greater narrative of the Northern experience of the war, but Rochester's involvement as well.

⁹³ Marsh, "Rochester in the Civil War," 4.

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