

A SOUTHERN ILLINOIS FARMER GOES TO WAR:
SGT. WILLIAM S. BOLERJACK AND THE
29TH ILLINOIS VOLUNTEER INFANTRY,
JULY 1861 – JANUARY 1863.

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INTRODUCTION

William Shelby Bolerjack was a deeply religious farmer from southern Illinois, as well as a devoted husband, son, and brother. He was also a faithful diarist, a staunch Unionist, and a fourth sergeant in the 29th Illinois Volunteer Infantry during the American Civil War. William's journal and letters therefore provide several unique perspectives from which to examine the military expectations and experiences of common soldiers in the Union Army of the Tennessee during the period 1861-1862. The manuscripts' most compelling insights include Bolerjack's motivations for enlistment in the Union Army and subsequent adjustment to camp life, his first significant combat experiences at the Battles of Forts Henry and Donelson, and his capture and parole at Holly Springs, Mississippi, under the terms of the prisoner exchange cartel of 1862. This study will demonstrate how the descriptions contained in Sergeant Bolerjack's previously unpublished diary entries and correspondences supplement extant narratives of these events and episodes.

Chapter one will compare William's enlistment motivations and experiences, as well as his subsequent acclimation to army life, with those of other volunteers from the state of Illinois. Sergeant Bolerjack's journals are among only a handful of accounts penned by non-commissioned officers and enlisted men in the 29th Illinois, none of which have been previously published. In addition, William's diary and letters compellingly reflect the nationalistic patriotism that inspired many of his fellow southern Illinoisans to volunteer in the Union Army

during the conflict's early, desperate months. Bolerjack's own motives for enlisting clearly stemmed from a desire to help preserve the Union, and indeed trumped his own ambiguous feelings regarding abolition.¹ Peer pressure was surely also a factor, as William enlisted in the same company of the same regiment as five of his younger brothers. As a result, the Bolerjack manuscripts also depict the painful realities that faced Civil War families with multiple male relatives in the conflict.² William's narratives finally describe physical and emotional stresses of camp life in the western Union armies, as well as several of the coping mechanisms soldiers developed to distract themselves. For Sergeant Bolerjack, the former included the monotony of drills and military discipline, while the latter consisted chiefly of visits and letters from nearby friends and relatives, as well as the comforts of his religious beliefs and practices.

In addressing these themes, Bolerjack sheds additional light on avenues of research pioneered by authors such as James M. McPherson, Reid Mitchell, and James I Robertson, Jr. In *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (1997), McPherson describes three categories of attitudes and emotions that compelled Civil War soldiers to enlist and fight. These classifications include initial, sustaining, and combat motivation. "For Civil War soldiers," he contends, "the group cohesion and peer pressure that were powerful factors in combat motivation were not unrelated to the complex mixture of peer patriotism, ideology . . . and community or peer pressure that prompted them to enlist in the first place."³ In *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Experiences* (1988), Mitchell posits that most Federal troops who volunteered for military service did so to help preserve the Union. "Northerners professed the value of the

¹ William S. Bolerjack to Elizabeth Bolerjack, May 26, 1862, Bolerjack Papers, Currently in private possession, Donald C. Smith, Enfield, IL.

² J. W. Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois*, (Springfield, IL: H. W. Rokker, State Printer and Binder, 1886), 5:488-489.

³ James McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12-13.

Union almost as an article of faith,” he asserts. “The Union represented two interrelated things to them: the political and moral principles that set the United States apart from other nations, and the power necessary to defend those principles.”⁴ In *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (1988), Robertson enumerates several additional reasons that induced Northerners to enlist. These included political persuasion, state- and nation-centered patriotism and general “war fever,” as well as volunteers’ desires to secure steady employment or escape the stigma of conscription. “The Midwestern states, at the edge of America proper, responded to Lincoln’s call for troops with more alacrity and unanimity than did the East because of the newness of country and national ideals,” he concludes. “Yet the North had a number of inducements in its favor. Love for the Union was the most effective motivation for Northern soldiers.”⁵ Robertson also describes the myriad transformations that volunteers underwent when they arrived in camp. “The army camp was the place the recruit ceased to be a civilian and learned how to become a soldier,” he observes. “It was in camp that he was introduced to the mysteries of the army: bugle calls and drum beats, the military chain of command, discipline, the necessity of taking care of his equipment, and obedience to orders.”⁶

Chapter two will similarly illustrate how Sergeant Bolerjack’s firsthand depictions of the Battles of Forts Henry and Donelson complement the personal narratives and official reports authored by his soldiers in the First Division of the Army of the Tennessee. William’s journals describe the expectations and experiences of amateur troops experiencing combat for the first time, as well as the ways those encounters influenced enlistees’ intellectual and emotional appreciation of the conflict. The 29th Illinois served as a forward element of Colonel Richard J.

⁴ Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experiences*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), 11.

⁵ James I. Robertson, Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray*. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

Oglesby's First Brigade, and was the first Union infantry regiment to enter the surrendered rebel works at Fort Henry. The First Brigade also formed the extreme right of the Union position at Fort Donelson, and took part in the heaviest fighting of that engagement during the Confederate breakout attempt on 15 February 1862. As the 29th Illinois's sole documented non-commissioned diarist, William provides unique insights into common soldiers' first encounter with the deadly chaos and consequences of warfare, as well as the physical and psychological privations that accompanied fighting, eating, and sleeping on the battlefields of the Civil War.

In examining the combat expectations and experiences of ordinary enlisted men, Sergeant Bolerjack's writings supplement the scholarship of authors such as Earl J. Hess, Gerald F. Linderman, and Bell Irvin Wiley. In *The Union Soldier in Battle* (1997), Hess describes the jarring experience of Civil War combat and identifies various mechanisms that enabled soldiers to withstand it and continue to effectively serve their respective causes. "The factors that enabled those men to endure combat naturally varied from one individual to the next," he contends. "But they ranged from ideology to religion, from the comradeship of the army community to support from home, from the pragmatic habits of those who were nurtured in a working-class culture to successful efforts to overcome fear by comparing battle with typical peacetime experiences."⁷ In *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (1987), Linderman argues that many combatants' anticipations and experiences were shaped by antebellum moral and philosophical suppositions. "The young men of the 1860s carried with them into military life a strong set of values that continued to receive reinforcement from home," he posits. "In a day of simpler assumptions, when one's actions were thought to be the direct extension of one's values,

⁷ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*, Modern War Studies, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997), ix.

they attempted to apply their values in combat, in camp, and in hospital.”⁸ In *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (1952), recognized for decades as the preeminent examination of the lives of Federal enlisted men, Wiley argued that soldiers’ combat actions and experiences provided the most telling evidence of their martial and moral fiber. “Battle is the ultimate of soldiering. All else in warfare is but incidental to the vital closing of opposing forces in conflict,” he posited. “In the Civil War, however, fighting was an intimate, elemental thing, with infantry bearing the brunt, and artillery and horse-mounted cavalry fighting, normally in near support . . . contests usually culminated in head-on clashes of yelling, shooting, striking masses.”⁹

Chapter three will finally demonstrate how Sergeant Bolerjack’s descriptions of his company’s surrender during Confederate General Earl Van Dorn’s raid on Holly Springs, Mississippi, augment scholars’ knowledge of the make-up and experiences of the Federal forces captured and paroled there. William’s diary entries are among the very few combatant accounts and official reports of the engagement, and represent one of only two known narratives penned by captured Union enlisted men. Indeed, the Bolerjack journals provide the only firsthand evidence of the 29th Illinois’s presence at Holly Springs during Van Dorn’s incursion, and contain one of only two known period references to the regiment’s participation in the skirmish and surrender there. In addition, Bolerjack’s letters and journals also provide valuable insight into to the ordeal of Civil War combatants who were paroled and detained under the auspices of the conflict’s short-lived prisoner exchange cartel.

⁸ Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 2.

⁹ Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 66.

In uniquely describing the events, and consequences of Van Dorn's raid, as well as the workings of the prisoner exchange system in 1862, Sergeant Bolerjack's accounts complement the examinations of historians such as Edward G. Longacre, Charles W. Sanders, Jr., and Lonnie R. Speer. In *Mounted Raids of the Civil War*, (1975) Longacre demonstrates the startling effectiveness with which Van Dorn's cavalymen swept into Holly Springs and quickly overwhelmed its Union defenders, an action the author cites as a "major factor" in prolonging the struggle in the conflict's western theater.¹⁰ Longacre also describes the speed and efficiency with which Van Dorn's officers collected and paroled thousands of surrendered Union troops that the rebel forces were both unable and unwilling to carry into captivity. "Soon the lower echelon commanders were hustling about, directing the enlisted men to remove Federal prisoners and townspeople from the projected path of destruction," the author observes. "By sundown, the sacking of Holly Springs had been completed, and the Federals had been paroled as prisoners of war."¹¹ In *While in the Hands of the Enemy: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (2005), Sanders argues that high-ranking martial and political authorities in both the Union and the Confederacy conspired to neglect enemy prisoners of war. "What emerges is a chilling chronicle of military and civilian leaders who increasingly came to regard prisoners not as men, but as mere pawns to be used and then callously discarded in pursuit of national objectives," he contends.¹² Sanders also depicts the most notable exception to this policy, the exchange cartel of 1862. "Most [detainees] were rapidly repatriated, and soldiers captured while the cartel was in operation were promptly released on parole," he notes. "The numbers of prisoners in northern and southern camps dropped to a manageable level, and conditions in all installations improved

¹⁰ Edward G. Longacre, *Mounted Raids of the Civil War*, (Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1975), 64.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 57, 58.

¹² Charles W. Sanders, Jr., *While in the Hands of the Enemy: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 2.

dramatically.”¹³ In *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (1997), Speer argues that the prisoner exchange system imperfectly addressed the issues of overcrowding and neglect associated with Civil War prison systems, and notes that in cases of uneven exchange, paroled Union soldiers were dispatched to holding facilities at Annapolis, Maryland, Columbus, Ohio, and St. Louis, Missouri. “Federal officials created the detention, or parole, camps,” the author observes. “The prisoners stayed at these locations until they were officially exchanged on paper for a prisoner of equal rank or based on the higher-rank calculations of the cartel.”¹⁴

Thus, William S. Bolerjack’s Civil War writings during the years 1861-1862 supplement existing military scholarship in several significant areas. Sergeant Bolerjack’s diary entries and letters strengthen historians’ understanding of the enlistment motivations of southern Illinoisan volunteers in the Union Army, and complement previous examinations of common soldiers’ adjustments to camp life in the early years of the conflict. William’s firsthand descriptions of the Battles of Forts Henry and Donelson also supplement scholars’ awareness of the 29th Illinois’s role in those engagements, as well as historical evaluations of volunteers’ initial mental and physical responses to combat. The Bolerjack manuscripts finally offer exclusive perspectives on the costs and consequences of Van Dorn’s raid on Holly Springs, as well as William’s personal insights into the workings of the prisoner exchange cartel at the height of its efficiency and effectiveness. In each of the following chapters, therefore, this thesis seeks to elaborate the ways in which Bolerjack’s journals and letters inform historians’ interpretations of the expectations and experiences of common soldiers in the Army of the Tennessee during the period 1861-1862.

¹³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴ Lonnie R. Speer, *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1997), 104.

BIOGRAPHY

The Bolerjack/Bullitschek families belonged to a conservative Protestant German sect known as the *Unitas Fratrum* (Unity of Brethren), or Moravians. Fleeing religious persecution, the first Moravians immigrated to the American Colonies in 1734; the English theologian John Wesley was among their earliest shipmates and co-workers in the New World. Joseph Ferdinand Bullitschek, Sr., arrived in New York on 16 November 1754, and quickly matriculated to the Moravian colony of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.¹⁵ Bullitschek married Maria Charlotta Haller on 28 February 1762 in Litiz, Pennsylvania; their second son, Johannes Bullitschek, was born on 7 November 1764.¹⁶ The Bullitscheks moved to North Carolina in 1771, and formally separated from the Moravian church prior 1792. The source of the division is unclear, and may have been rooted in a business dispute rather than theological differences.¹⁷ In any case, many of Bullitschek's descendants retained ecclesiastical ties to conservative Wesleyan Methodism, down to the present day. Johannes married Mary "Polly" Forrest on 11 August 1786 in Surry County, North Carolina; their sixth child, Joel H. Bolerjack, Sr., was born on 11 July 1800 in Stokes County, North Carolina.¹⁸ Johannes died on in Stokes County on 17 April 1815; Polly relocated to southern Illinois shortly thereafter, accompanied by all but one of their children.¹⁹

William Shelby Bolerjack was born to Joel Henry Bolerjack, Sr., and Rebecca Forrester Bolerjack on 15 August 1821 in White County, Illinois.²⁰ Joel was a farmer, and he and Rebecca raised nine sons and two daughters, all of whom survived to adulthood. William Shelby was their

¹⁵ John W. Jordan, "Immigration to Pennsylvania, 1734-1765," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 33, no. 2 (1909): 243; Richard L. Soash, *Joseph F. Bullitschek: His Descendants* (Wichita, KS: Bolejack/Bolerjack Family Association, 1994) 1:10-11, 27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30-31; *Marriage Register of the Moravian Church, Litiz, 1743-1800* (Litiz, PA: Moravian Church, 1896), Soash, *Joseph F. Bullitschek*, 1:138.

¹⁷ Maurer Maurer, "Music in Wachovia, 1753-1800," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Series 3, 8, no. 2 (April 1951): 220; Soash, *Joseph F. Bullitschek*, 1:45-49, 52-53.

¹⁸ Soash, *Joseph F. Bullitschek*, 1:58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:58-59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:238.

eldest son, followed in succession by William C. Bolerjack, Joel H. Bolerjack, Jr., John E. Bolerjack, Harvey F. Bolerjack, Priestly F. Bolerjack, Henry J. Bolerjack, Thomas C. Bolerjack, Sarah C. (Bolerjack) Koonce, Margaret E. Bolerjack, and Marion H. Bolerjack.²¹ As the eldest son in an agrarian family, William likely received vocational instruction while working his father's farm; in any case, no records exist of a formal education. William was a clear and literate writer, however, and the ledgers that house his Civil War journals also include statistical tables, detailed payment schedules, and evidence of repetitive penmanship practice. William also supported religious education, and hosted the organizational meeting for the Cherry Grove Township Methodist Church in Hamilton County, Illinois, where he served on the Building Committee along with his younger brother, Harvey F. Bolerjack.²² William married Elizabeth Walters, a native Tennessean seven years his junior, on 19 March 1845 in White County.²³ After working borrowed holdings for nearly a decade, William and Elizabeth purchased forty acres of farmland near Norris City, Illinois on 6 June 1853.²⁴ The couple was childless, but periodically sheltered needy orphans and neighbors in their home. In less than a decade, however, the family's peaceful rural existence was shattered by the social and political turmoil that accompanied the coming of the Civil War in southern Illinois.²⁵

William S. Bolerjack joined the United States Army on 6 August 1861, scarcely two weeks after the conflict's first major engagement, the Battle of Bull Run. He was mustered into Company G of the 29th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment at Shadsville, Illinois on 28 August, accompanied by his younger brothers Preastly F. Bolerjack, Henry J. Bolerjack, and Thomas C.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1:236.

²² Soash, *Joesph F. Bullitschek*, 1:238; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for October 30, [1870?], Bolerjack Papers.

²³ Patricia S. Davis, *White County Illinois Marriages, 1816-1865* (Marion, IL: Patricia S. Davis, 1995), 9; *White County Marriage Record* (Carmi, IL: White County Clerk's Office, 1845), 166.

²⁴ Soash, *Joesph F. Bullitschek*, 1:238.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Bolerjack. William was subsequently elected the company's fourth sergeant.²⁶ A fifth brother, John E. Bolerjack of Springfield, Illinois, joined the unit on 28 August 1862; a younger cousin, William H. Bolerjack, enlisted in the 29th Illinois on 15 November 1864.²⁷ Two more brothers, Harvey F. Bolerjack and Marion H. Bolerjack served in the 13th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry Regiment; another cousin, John S. Bolerjack, enlisted in the 87th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment.²⁸ It was in the midst of tremendous personal, familial, and national upheaval, therefore, that Sergeant Bolerjack recorded his Civil War expectations and experiences. William completed a three-year term of service during the period 1861-1864, and his regiment participated in several major engagements, including the seizure of Fort Henry, the Battle of Fort Donelson, and General Ulysses S. Grant's first northern Mississippi campaign.

After declining repeated invitations to re-enlist as a veteran, Sergeant Bolerjack was mustered out of the Union Army on 27 August 1864.²⁹ Tellingly, none of the nine Illinois Bolerjacks re-enlisted in the Union Army. William S. Bolerjack and Henry J Bolerjack were honorably discharged when their initial term of service expired; Preastly F. Bolerjack and Thomas C. Bolerjack were both discharged for disability on 23 July 1862; Preastly succumbed to disease later the same year, but Thomas received a disability pension until his death on 25 April

²⁶ "Bolerjack, William S.; Preastly F.; Henry J.; Thomas C.," in *Illinois Civil War Muster and Descriptive Rolls Database*, (Springfield, IL: Illinois State Archives), <http://www.ilsos.gov/genealogy/CivilWarController> [accessed January 26, 2010]; <http://www.ilsos.gov/genealogy/CivilWarController>; *History of White County, Illinois* (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing, 1883), 392-393; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for January 1, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁷ "Bolerjack, John E.; William H.," in *Illinois Civil War Muster and Descriptive Rolls Database*, <http://www.ilsos.gov/genealogy/CivilWarController>; Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 2:488.

²⁸ "Bolerjack, Harvey F.; Marion H.; John S.," in *Illinois Civil War Muster and Descriptive Rolls Database*, <http://www.ilsos.gov/genealogy/CivilWarController>; *History of White County, Illinois*, 415; Janet B. Hewitt, ed., *The Roster of Union Soldiers, 1861-1865*, vol. 20, pt. 1, (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing, 1999), 106.

²⁹ "Bolerjack, William S.," in *Illinois Civil War Muster and Descriptive Rolls Database*, <http://www.ilsos.gov/genealogy/CivilWarController>; Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 2:488; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for August 29-31, 1864, Bolerjack Papers.

1925.³⁰ John S. Bolerjack was transferred to the invalid corps on 15 January 1864, and died of his wounds on 30 October 1864; John E. Bolerjack, William H. Bolerjack, Harvey F. Bolerjack, and Marion H. Bolerjack were mustered out at the conclusion of the war, before their three-year terms expired.³¹

Upon returning to civilian life, Sergeant Bolerjack was swiftly reunited with his beloved friends and family in southern Illinois. “We eat Supper at Earvin’s and started home at 8:30,” William’s final journal entry reads. “We got home at 12 OC in the morning of the 21st of September 1864 and found all well. I spent the day with friends.”³² Bolerjack survived the Civil War’s conclusion by more than twenty years, but eventually succumbed to pneumonia and catarrhal symptoms that had plagued him since his military service. William died at Belle City, Illinois, on 25 November 1886, at the age of sixty-five years.³³ Elizabeth died in 1908, and was buried beside her late husband at the Cherry Grove Cemetery in Hamilton County, Illinois.³⁴

SOURCES

More than two hundred pages in length, the William S. Bolerjack journals are remarkably well preserved despite the one hundred and forty years that have passed since William re-copied the contents of his service diaries into two oversize, leather-bound ledgers. Several additional accounts were jotted on spare bits of paper and placed at irregular intervals between the

³⁰ “Bolerjack, William S.; Henry J.; Preastly F.; Thomas C.,” in *Illinois Civil War Muster and Descriptive Rolls Database*, <http://www.ilsos.gov/genealogy/CivilWarController>; House Committee on Invalid Pensions, 51st Cong., *Report to Accompany H.R. 4306*, 1st sess., H. Rep. 958, 1890; Soash, *Joesph F. Bullitschek*, 1:303, 307-308.

³¹ “Bolerjack, John S.; John E.; William H.; Harvey F., Marion H.,” in *Illinois Civil War Muster and Descriptive Rolls Database*, <http://www.ilsos.gov/genealogy/CivilWarController>; Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General: Volume*, 2:488; Soash, *Joesph F. Bullitschek*, 1:183, 194e, 243, 288, 347.

³² William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for September 20, 1864, Bolerjack Papers.

³³ Michael Von Goebel and Lauire Selpien, “Cherry Grove Cemetery,” Illinois Genealogy Trails, <http://www.genealogytrails.com/ill/hamilton/cherry.htm> [accessed February 13, 2010] “William S. Bolerjack,” in *White County Register of Deaths* (Carmi, IL: 1886), 61; Soash, *Joesph F. Bullitschek*, 1:238.

³⁴ Von Goebel and Selpien, “Cherry Grove Cemetery,” Illinois Genealogy Trails, <http://www.genealogytrails.com/ill/hamilton/cherry.htm>; Soash, *Joesph F. Bullitschek*, 1:238.

volumes' lined pages. Sergeant Bolerjack's three-plus years of daily entries survive almost in their entirety, along with selected letters to his wife Elizabeth and several of their friends and family members in White County, Illinois.

The journals were discovered in a trunk among the possessions of Gertrude M. (DeBoard) Campbell Martin. Born on 27 March 1880, Gertrude was the great-niece of John S. Bolerjack, who fought and died in the 87th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, and a third cousin of Sergeant William S. Bolerjack, who served in the 29th Illinois.³⁵ Gertrude was unable to live alone following the death of her second husband, William H. Martin, and moved to Enfield, Illinois, where she lived with her daughter and son-in-law, Mary Edna and John R. Smith. Gertrude died on 15 February 1959, and Mary followed only three years later.³⁶ After his mother's death, Gertrude's grandson Donald Campbell Smith purchased the family home and its furnishings from his father, John. Father and son uncovered the William S. Bolerjack document collection for the first time in decades while cataloguing Gertrude's possessions prior to John's death in 1970. In years since, the ledgers have been loaned out sparingly for display and photo-preservation purposes; portions of the letters have also been transcribed and published in public Internet forums. For the most part, however, the Bolerjack documents have lain in the same farmhouse that has housed them for more than a half-century.³⁷

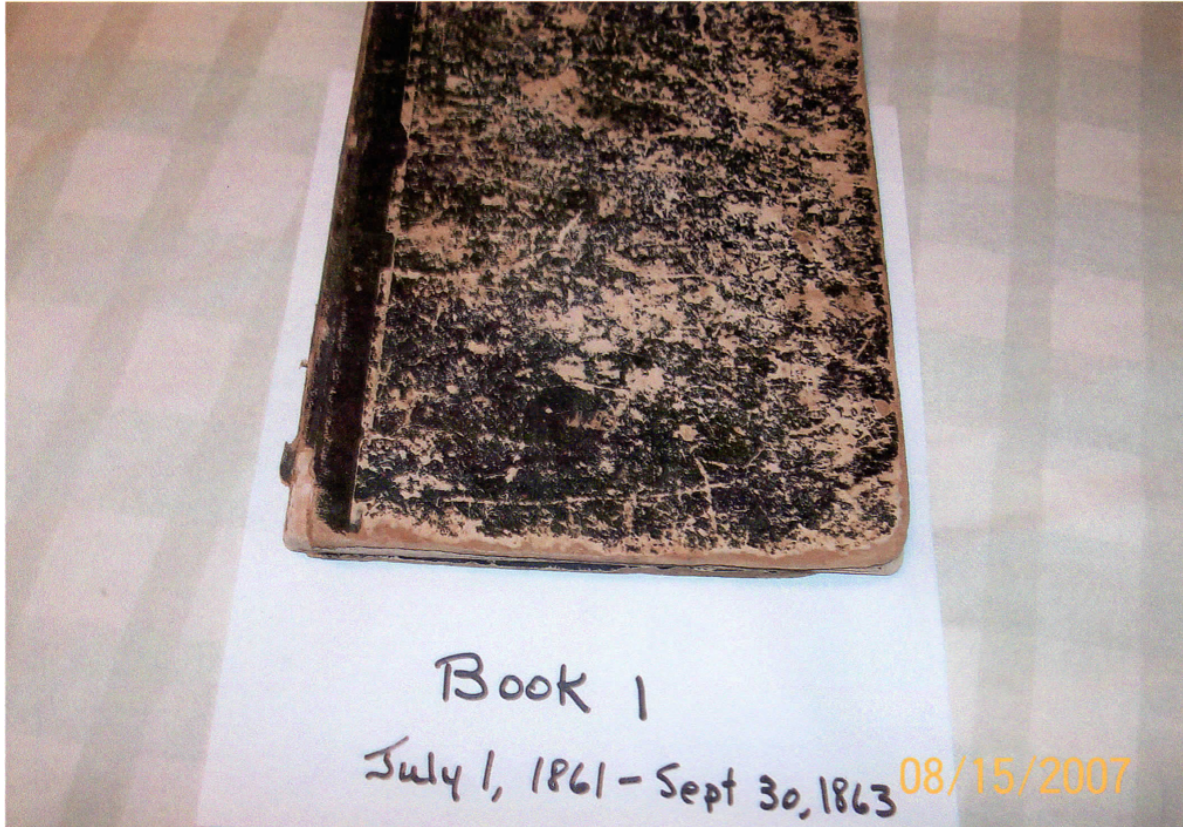
³⁵ Soash, *Joesph F. Bullitschek*, 1:182-183, 187.

³⁶ *Ibid.*; Donald C. Smith and Shirley Smith, interview by author, Enfield, IL, October 17, 2005.

³⁷ Donald C. Smith and Shirley Smith, interview by author, Enfield, IL, October 17, 2005; Shirley Smith, e-mail message to author, March 24, 2005.

FIGURE 1

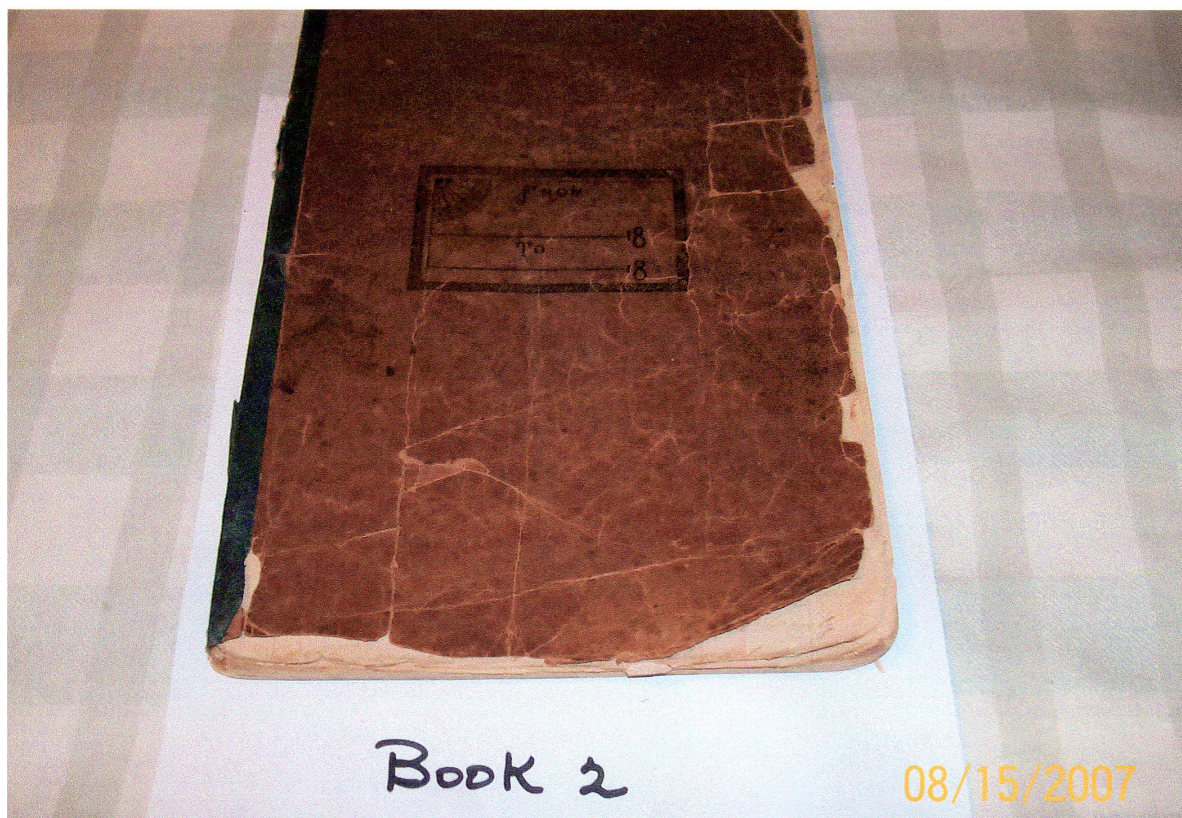
*William S. Bolerjack Civil War Journals, Vol. 1: 1 July 1861 – 30 September 1863*³⁸



³⁸ William S. Bolerjack, *Civil War Journals, Vol. 1: 1 July 1861 – 30 September 1863*, Bolerjack Papers.

FIGURE 2

*William S. Bolerjack Civil War Journals, Vol. 2: 1 October 1863 – 30 September 1864*³⁹



³⁹ William S. Bolerjack, *Civil War Journals, Vol. 2: 1 October 1863 – 30 September 1864*, Bolerjack Papers.

CHAPTER 1: ENLISTMENT AND CAMP LIFE

Among William S. Bolerjack's earliest and most formative experiences in the American Civil War were his enlistment in the United States Army and the subsequent pleasures and privations of camp life in the Army of the Tennessee. William's journey began with the state of Illinois's swift reaction to the Union military setbacks at Fort Sumter and the Battle of Bull Run, as well the responses of the citizens of Bolerjack's native region of southern Illinois, an area known as "Little Egypt." William's decision to enlist in the unit that became Company G of the 29th Illinois Volunteer Infantry took him first to Camp Butler, near the state capital at Springfield, Illinois, and later to the Union river stronghold at Cairo, Illinois. At Cairo, Bolerjack learned to endure the hardships and enjoy the simple diversions that accompanied life in a Union army encampment. In every circumstance, William carefully recorded his encounters and experiences in daily journal entries and missives to his friends and family member at home in southern Illinois.

In the hours and days that immediately followed the surrender of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, on 13 April 1861, soldiers and citizens of the state of Illinois quickly readied themselves for action. On 15 April, President Abraham Lincoln formally issued a call for seventy-five thousand volunteers to perform one hundred days of military duty. Later that evening, Illinois's self-styled "War Governor," Richard Yates, received a telegram from United States Secretary of War Simon Cameron requesting six regiments of state militia for

immediate service.⁴⁰ Yates was inundated with thousands of eager applicants. More than twenty thousand Illinoisans volunteered in subsequent weeks, a figure that represented roughly eighteen percent of the state's male population between the ages of eighteen and forty-five. As a result, the state legislature opted to accept ten additional regiments into the state service in anticipation of future federal calls for troops.⁴¹

Over the course of the Civil War, Illinois contributed 259,092 soldiers and officers to the United States Army, a figure that represented nearly fifteen percent of the young state's total population. These enlistees included 2,224 sailors and marines, as well as 1,811 African-American troops. In all, the Prairie State furnished the Union cause with 151 infantry regiments, 17 cavalry regiments, 2 light artillery batteries, and 8 independent artillery batteries.⁴² Among the Illinoisans who served in the Civil War, 34,834 did not survive the conflict, including William S. Bolerjack's younger brother, Preastly F. Bolerjack. An estimated 22,786 Illinois soldiers died of diseases related to unsanitary camp and hospital conditions, 5,874 were killed in combat, 4,020 died from wounds suffered in battle, and 2,154 died of other causes. Taken together with the tens of thousands of Illinois volunteers who wounded or permanently disabled during the war, the state's forces suffered casualty rates of approximately 13.5% during the period 1861-1865.⁴³

While many Illinoisans enthusiastically embraced the Union cause, there was initially considerable debate about the loyalty of citizens in the region of the state known as Little Egypt,

⁴⁰ Victor Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War* (Urbana, IL and London: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 1; Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 1:5.

⁴¹ I. N. Haynie, ed., *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois* (Springfield, IL: Baker, Bailhache, & Co., 1867), 1:270; Richard Yates and Catherine Yates Pickering, *Richard Yates: Civil War Governor*, ed. John H. Krenkel (Danville, IL: Interstate Printers & Publishers, 1966), 155; Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 1:5-6.

⁴² Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (1909; repr., New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 1:11, 14; Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War*, 4-5.

⁴³ Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 1:14; Roger Biles, *Illinois: A History of the Land and its People* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 104.

an area that included William's native Hamilton County and his friends and family members in neighboring White County. Little Egypt traditionally included Illinois's sixteen southernmost counties, and its boundaries encompassed roughly one fourth of the Prairie State's total acreage.⁴⁴ Many inhabitants of southern Illinois, including William S. Bolerjack's own family, were farmers and agricultural laborers that had immigrated to the area from the Southern Uplands of western Virginia and the Carolinas. As a result, many Egyptians were suspected to retain social and political allegiances to their former states.⁴⁵ From the outset of the war, Union military and political authorities feared the influence of Southern sympathies in Little Egypt, and acted swiftly to quash rumblings of rebellion there. Their anxieties were perhaps well founded, and a plethora of anti-Republican, anti-abolition, and anti-war political groups operated in the region during the period 1860-1861. Several counties even openly advocated secession and the formation of a Confederate state to be called "Egypt."⁴⁶ Despite these inclinations, however, many southern Illinoisans quickly rallied to the United States' defense, thanks in no small part to the efforts of formerly Pro-Southern Democratic politicians such as Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas and Representative John A. Logan. As a result, most Egyptians laid aside their social and political differences to join their fellow Illinoisans in lending moral, economic, and military support to the Union cause.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Richard Lyle Power, *Planting Corn Belt Culture: The Impress of the Upland Southerner and Yankee in the Old Northwest*, vol. 17 of *The Indiana Historical Society Publications* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Historical Society, 1953), 1-2; Singleton B. Bedinger, *Little Egypt: A Brief Historical Sketch of Southern Illinois* (Chicago: Adams Press, 1973), 27.

⁴⁵ Arthur Charles Cole, *The Era of the Civil War: 1848-1870* (1919; repr., Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 260-261; Jasper W. Cross, "Divided Loyalties in Southern Illinois during the Civil War." (Ph. D. diss. abstract, University of Illinois, 1942), 3; Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 23-24.

⁴⁶ Bedinger, *Little Egypt*, 28; Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 260-261; Weber, *Copperheads*, 35, 150; Wood Gray, *The Hidden Civil War: The Story of the Copperheads* (New York: Viking Press, 1942), 57-59, 70-71.

⁴⁷ James P. Jones, "Black Jack:" *John A. Logan and Southern Illinois in the Civil War Era*, vol. 51 of *Florida State University Studies*, ed. James A. Preu (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University, 1967), 87-90; John M. Landsden, *A History of the City of Cairo, Illinois* (1910; repr., Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), 129; Wood, *The Hidden Civil War*, 58-60.

In reality, southern Illinois counties proved at least as patriotic to the Union cause as their northern neighbors. Despite repeated accusations of secessionism and disloyalty, Little Egypt provided seven complete regiments to the Union Army, including William S. Bolerjack's 29th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, as well as numerous companies in other infantry, cavalry, and artillery units. Indeed, by 1863 the southernmost counties of Illinois had exceeded their enlistment quotas by as much as fifty percent.⁴⁸ "It is with pride, and in a spirit of exultation, that I refer to the patriotic response of the Southern Illinois to the late call made by me for troops," Governor Yates proclaimed. "From Southern Illinois the whole requisition could be filled."⁴⁹ Such enthusiastic volunteerism by Unionist Egyptians presented its own problems, however, as the enlistment of thousands of the region's most loyal citizens was allegedly accompanied by increased secessionist activities in the social and political vacuum that their departures created. "The Large number of men who enlisted in the Service of the U. S. last year from Southern Illinois . . . has left all that Region for the most part under the control of men not friendly either to your administration or the Government under it," Yates wrote President Lincoln. "Anxious as the Loyal portion of the people are to enlist . . . [there is] fear that if the Regiments be made up & ordered out of the State the traitors remaining behind in full control would almost certainly commence a System of persecution of Union men and families that were left at home."⁵⁰

In light of these challenges, the patriotism demonstrated by the citizen-soldiers of White and Hamilton Counties is even more impressive. At the outset of the war, White County claimed a population of 12,274, but by 1864 had enrolled 1,963 soldiers in the Union cause. This number

⁴⁸ James E. Jacobsen, *The Illinois/Kentucky Ohio River Civil War Heritage Trail Historic Corridor Survey Project: "Caught in the Middle; The Civil War Years on the Lower Ohio River"* (Springfield, IL: Illinois Historic Preservation Society; Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Heritage Council, 1998), 69; Robert P. Howard, *Illinois: A History of the Prairie State* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1972), 300.

⁴⁹ Frank, Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of Events, with Documents, Narratives, Illustrations, Incidents, Poetry, etc.* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1866), 2:533-534.

⁵⁰ Yates to Abraham Lincoln, Springfield, IL, n.d., in *Richard Yates: Civil War Governor*, 181-182.

represented approximately 6.25% of the county's total citizenry and an enlistment excess of 769 troops. William's native Hamilton County similarly claimed a prewar population of only 9,849 persons, but by 1864 had supplied 1,323 troops to Union military forces. The latter figure represented 7.5% of its entire citizenry, and surpassed the county's enlistment quota by no fewer than 260 persons.⁵¹

William S. Bolerjack left his native Hamilton County to join his brothers in enlisting with a volunteer infantry unit organized in neighboring White County, located on the Illinois-Indiana border. "I enlisted in the U. S. Survis the 6th of July 1861 at Shadsville White Co. Illinois," William recalled. "[A]bout the 8 the Company was organized at Shadsville."⁵² The company eventually formed part of the third wave of Prairie State regimental volunteers, a group whose enlistment was inspired in part by the Union army's ignominious defeat at the Battle of Bull Run on 21 July 1861, two weeks after William's own decision to volunteer, and only one week prior to the unit's formal muster into the Union army.⁵³ Even the most fervent volunteers, however, experienced moments of regret prior to their final enlistment. "The 15th of August I left Home for Shawneetown got Supper at the ____ House," William recollected of his unit's journey to their mustering-in destination. "[T]he Cos. that turned out, to be B, C, D, E, and G all staid in the Depo of all the nights for nois and fuss this Surely xcelled all, it Seemed as if men was trying to dround Sorrow with Yells and Horred Oaths."⁵⁴

Despite their eventual enthusiasm, it was not a foregone conclusion that William and his relatives would volunteer to fight in the conflict. The Bolerjack brothers came from a deeply

⁵¹ J. Robert Smith, Smith, *Sequicentennial, Carmi, Illinois: 1816-1966* (Carmi, IL: Carmi Sesquicentennial Commission, 1966), 14; T. M. Eddy, *The Patriotism of Illinois: A Record of the Civil and Military of the State in the War for the Union* (Chicago: Clarke & Co., 1865), 1:607-608.

⁵² William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for July 6, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

⁵³ Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War*, 2-3; Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 1:14.

⁵⁴ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 15, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

religious family, one with strong roots in the pacifist Moravian church. Indeed, the Moravians were routinely exempted from state and federal military duties in Georgia, the Carolinas, and Pennsylvania during the French and Indian War, American Revolution, and the War of 1812.⁵⁵ In the late 18th century, however, William's grandfather separated from the Moravian sect in Salem, North Carolina. Upon moving to Illinois in 1815, members of the Bolerjack family joined the Methodist Church, a denomination whose ministers were influential in arousing anti-slavery and pro-Union sentiment in areas of Little Egypt otherwise known for their southern social and political proclivities.⁵⁶ In any case, William's letters and journal entries provide no indication that enlisting and serving in the Union Army of the Tennessee troubled his religious conscience. In fact, Bolerjack's correspondences with friends and family members reveal both a profound concern for spiritual goings-on at home and the author's resolute faith in his own divine protection on the front lines. "[I] hope this may find you well and wish that you would write to me as soon as this comes to hand and let me know how things are going on both of temporal and Spiritual charictor," William wrote his mother shortly before the capture of Fort Henry.⁵⁷ "I have not time to rite to night as lenghly as I would wish," he similarly admitted to his wife three weeks after the Battle of Shiloh. "Asking that the Blessings of Almighty God may Rest on you and the children I commit all into his hands hoping soon to be permitted to rite again."⁵⁸

William also made his motivations for enlistment in the Union army perfectly clear in letters to his friends and relatives. Like many federal soldiers from border regions of the Union,

⁵⁵ C. Daniel Crews, *A Storm in the Land: Southern Moravians and the Civil War* (Winston-Salem, NC: Moravian Archives, 1997), 1-2; Peter Brock, ed., *Liberty and Conscience: A Documentary History of the Experiences of Conscientious Objectors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61-66.

⁵⁶ James Simeone, *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois: The Bottomland Republic* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000) 182-183, 186; Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 287-288; Steven E. Woodworth, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 94-95.

⁵⁷ William S. Bolerjack to Rebecca Forrester Bolerjack, December 7, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

⁵⁸ William S. Bolerjack to Elizabeth Bolerjack, May 26, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

he neither owned slaves nor was a fervent abolitionist. Bolerjack fought instead to subdue the Confederacy and preserve the United States government. “I was sorry to heare of the dissatisfaction of the neighbors with the administration whitch I belive my self is saying and doing too much about the Negro,” William confided to his wife in May 1862. “But the Governmen with me is parimont to the Negro.”⁵⁹ Like many other residents of the Old Northwest, Bolerjack stepped forward in response to President Lincoln’s call for seventy-five thousand volunteers following the Union garrison’s surrender at Fort Sumter. Along with thousands of his fellow southern Illinoisans William formally enlisted in the United States Army in the immediate aftermath of the federals’ defeat at the Battle of Bull Run. “July 21st saw the Union army beaten at Bull Run. The South was exultant and the North, for the moment, stunned,” Illinois native Cloyd Bryner recalled. “The panic in the north lasted but a couple of days. Volunteers offered their services by the thousands.”⁶⁰ Indeed, many Prairie State farmers enlisted early in the war, when the need was greatest and the prospect of victory and survival least sure. “Whether this rebellion is put down or not the time will soon come that we will meet on earth if life is spared and if death should be the lot of either of us,” Sergeant Bolerjack wrote his wife shortly after the 29th Illinois’s decimation at the Battle of Shiloh. “I have an abiding hope that we meet in heaven.”⁶¹

Before their individual companies could be assimilated into regiments of the United States Army, Illinois volunteers were subjected to physical examinations whose standards and administration were often less than rigorous. “On the 18th we were sworn into the State service.

⁵⁹ McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades*, 18-19; Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, 11-16; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 40; William S. Bolerjack to Elizabeth Bolerjack, May 26, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

⁶⁰ Cloyd Bryner, *Bugle Echoes: The Story of the Illinois 47th* (Springfield, IL: Phillips Brothers, 1905; Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War*, 1-2; Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 1:13-14.

⁶¹ Howard, *History of the Prairie State*, 298-300; William S. Bolerjack to Elizabeth Bolerjack, May 27, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

Here some were rejected on account of height and physical disability, five feet and six inches being the shortest to insure acceptance,” Illinois soldier Lucius Barber recorded.”⁶² Other enlistees endured even more primitive evaluative measures. “We reached Granville [IL] before dark and immediately enlisted,” Prairie State veteran Ira Blanchard recalled. “I turned the scale at 155 lbs. was five feet six inches in my stockings and could stand as hard a thump on the chest as any of them.”⁶³ Standing six feet, two and one-half inches tall, and weighing more than one hundred eighty pounds, William S. Bolerjack had no difficulty meeting either criteria.⁶⁴

Prior to their induction into the Union army, federal infantry companies also elected their own non-commissioned officers. In many units organized during the period 1861-1862, competition for such positions was fierce.⁶⁵ In Bolerjack’s own company, however, the process proved more straightforward. “[A]bout the 8 the Company was organized at Shadsville by Electing Solomon S. Brill Capt. Henry Wakeford 1st Lieut Theodore Millspauh 2nd Lieut. Wm. G. Gosset 1st Sgt Henry Milspauh 2nd Sgt R. N. Millspauh 3rd myself 4th Sgt,” William reported.⁶⁶ After this initial organization, companies were transported to federal mustering camps to take an oath of allegiance to the United States government and receive their first course of rudimentary military instruction. Sergeant Bolerjack’s unit was shipped via railroad to Camp Butler, outside the state capital of Springfield, Illinois. “17th we took the Cars for Camp Butler the Cars was oapen. I Sufferd with Cold Between Decatur and Camp Butler,” William recorded. “Early in the mourning of the 18th we Landed at Camp Butler. Situated 1/2 mile South of the

⁶² Lucius W. Barber, *Army Memoirs of Lucius W. Barber, Company “D,” 15th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, May 24, 1861 to Sept. 30, 1865* (1894; repr., New York: Time-Life Books, 1984), 13; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 23.

⁶³ Ira Blanchard, *I Marched with Sherman: Civil War Memoirs of the 20th Illinois Volunteer Infantry* (San Francisco: J.D. Huff and Company, 1992), 20.

⁶⁴ “Bolerjack, William S.,” in *Illinois Civil War Muster and Descriptive Rolls Database* (Springfield, IL: Illinois State Archives), <http://www.ilsos.gov/genealogy/CivilWarController> [accessed January 26, 2010].

⁶⁵ Blanchard, *I Marched with Sherman*, 21; Charles Wright Wills, *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier*, ed. Mary E. Kellogg (1906; repr., Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 8.

⁶⁶ Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 2:488; Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 13; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for July 6-8, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

Ohio and Mississippi R.R. 7 miles East of Springfield Illinois.”⁶⁷ After the Union defeat at Bull Run, it became apparent that the Civil War would be a longer conflict than was originally envisaged. Camp Butler was thus conceived as an alternative to Springfield’s previous mustering site, Camp Yates, one located much further outside the city limits at the request of the capital’s inhabitants. The site was chosen by United States Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, as well as Illinois State Treasurer William Butler, for whom the encampment was eventually named.⁶⁸ The two men selected a parcel of land more than six miles outside of the capital, south of Riverton, Illinois, and adjacent to Clear Lake in Sangamon County. Camp Butler was thus established in the first week of August 1861, and began receiving recruits almost immediately. Within a week, the camp housed fifteen hundred Illinoisan infantry and cavalry volunteers; two weeks later, its population had swollen to more than five thousand.⁶⁹

By the time Sergeant Bolerjack’s company arrived at Camp Butler on 18 August 1861, the weeks-old rendezvous site was already bustling with martial activities that were foreign to many of the volunteers who matriculated there. “Camp Butler to me presented quite a military appearance,” William admitted. “Tents, Commissary Stoves, Camp & Garrison Equipage Officers and Soldiers in full uniform was something I had never Saw before.”⁷⁰ Located on a forty-acre wooded tract well outside of Springfield, the site offered both advantages and disadvantages to the troops stationed there. Many of Camp Butler’s occupants enjoyed the opportunities for bathing and water sports provided by nearby Clear Lake and the Sangamon River. Other enlistees, however, lamented the distance separating the post from its principal food and water

⁶⁷ *History of White County, Illinois* (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing, 1883), 392-393; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 17, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

⁶⁸ Emma Eliza Parrotte, “History of Camp Butler” (master’s thesis, Butler University, 1938), 2-3; Camilla A. Quinn, *Lincoln’s Springfield in the Civil War*, vol. 8 of *Western Illinois Monographs Series* (Macomb, IL: Western Illinois University, 1991), 21.

⁶⁹ Biles, *Illinois: A History*, 103-104; John L Satterlee, ed., *The Journal & The 114th, 1861 to 1865* (Springfield, IL: Phillips Brothers, 1979), 1; Parrotte, “History of Camp Butler,” 11-12.

⁷⁰ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 17, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

supplies. “We carried bread from the Old camp, distant ¾ mile. The commissary is still over there,” complained James A. Black, Assistant Surgeon in the 49th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment. “We have to carry most of the water we use from Sangamon river one quarter of a mile.”⁷¹

Having passed physical examinations, elected their regimental officers, and assembled at designated mustering sites, volunteers were sworn into the Union Army. “On the 24th of May we were transferred and sworn into the U.S. service for three years, or during the war,” Lucius Barber recalled. “Our oath simply consisted in swearing allegiance to our Government and obeying all legal orders of our superior officers.”⁷² Having already been similarly enrolled in the state militia at Shadsville, Illinois, three weeks prior, Sergeant Bolerjack’s company was formally mustered into the Union Army on 28 June 1861. “The 28th my Co. was Sworn in to the U.S. Survis by Maj and assigned to the 29th Regt Ills Vols,” William remembered. “James Reardon Col., Dunlap Lieut. Col., M. Braman Maj. Capt. Ferrils Co. took the letter A, Capt. Mckenzie Co. B, Capt. Calicot, C, Capt. Whiteing, D Capt. ____ E, Capt. Hall F, Capt. Brill, G.”⁷³ Many of the Illinois infantry regiments that were organized at Camp Butler in its early days, including Bolerjack’s 29th Illinois, received brief courses of military instruction and performed their first squad and company drills on the camp’s parade grounds. “Drilled in squads as we will necessarily have to do for some time yet owing to the inexperience of the men and the carelessness with which some of them seem to drill,” Surgeon Black drolly observed in January 1862. “I imagine an awkward lot of recruits, going through the evolutions of drill would be

⁷¹ James A. Black, *A Civil War Diary, Written by Dr. James A. Black, First Assistant Surgeon, 49th Illinois Infantry*, ed. Benita K. Moore (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008), 23, 27; Quinn, *Lincoln’s Springfield*, 21.

⁷² Barber, *Army Memoirs of Lucius W. Barber*, 13; John D. Billings, *Hardtack & Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life* (1887; repr., Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 44; Samuel H. Fletcher and D. H. Fletcher, *The History of Company A, Second Illinois Cavalry* (Chicago: s.n., 1912), 13

⁷³ *History of White County*, 392; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 28, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

laughing stock for old Soldiers if there were any here to enjoy the sport.”⁷⁴ These initial forays into martial order and precision were sometimes as novel to the officers who directed the maneuvers as the enlisted men that performed them. “Too cold to drill to day except in quarters,” Black recorded a week later. “We have a few old guns and were drilled by the Serg’ts some of them about as green as the ballance of us.”⁷⁵ Many Prairie State troops were also hampered by the brevity of their period of instruction at Camp Butler, and the average stay of regiments organized there was less than six weeks.⁷⁶ Few units enjoyed such an extended stay before being deployed, however. Sergeant Bolerjack’s 29th Illinois remained at Camp Butler for only thirteen days before being transferred to Cairo, Illinois, for garrison duty and further instruction.⁷⁷

Cairo’s freshwater port was strategically located at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, two waterways that effectively separated the Upper, Lower, and Western Confederate states. Less than one week after the fall of Fort Sumter, Illinois’s governor Richard Yates ordered four hastily assembled regiments of infantrymen to seize Cairo and the surrounding peninsula at the behest of Secretary Cameron. “As quick as possible have as strong a force as you can raise, armed and equipped with ammunition and accoutrements, and a company of artillery, ready to march at a moment’s warning,” Governor Yates cabled General R. K. Swift in Chicago on 19 April 1861.⁷⁸ Less than forty-eight hours later, Swift’s motley band of 595 volunteers, armed only with four six-pound cannons and Chicago-area sporting goods stores’ entire stock of miscellaneous firearms, seized Cairo’s port and thus effectively halted Confederate commerce on the western Ohio and upper Mississippi Rivers.⁷⁹ In addition to

⁷⁴ Black, *A Civil War Diary, Written by Dr. James A. Black*, 23, 24; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 28, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

⁷⁵ Black, *A Civil War Diary, Written by Dr. James A. Black*, 25; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 25-26;

⁷⁶ Biles, *Illinois: A History*, 104; Bryner, *Bugle Echoes*, 30.

⁷⁷ *History of White County*, 393; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 28, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

⁷⁸ Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 1:7; Yates, *Civil War Governor*, 56.

⁷⁹ Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 8-9; Yates, *Civil War Governor*, 156

Cairo's strategic location at the juncture of the Ohio and the Mississippi, Union observers also recognized the port city's significance to the Confederate economy. "Throughout the whole Civil War, there was no single spot more useful to, and more used by, the Union than Cairo," Yates later opined. "Had we been deprived of it, the damage and loss would have been incalculable."⁸⁰

Given Cairo's importance to the Confederate cause and reputation as a hotbed for pro-southern political activity, the city's federal occupiers met with unsurprisingly hostile receptions from many of its inhabitants. "Our reception by the citizens was not the most cordial, and it was plainly evident that they would have been better pleased if the occupying forces had come from the opposite direction," Illinois artilleryman Charles B. Kimbell recollected. "However, we were there first, and there to stay."⁸¹ Additional regiments under the command of Brigadier General Benjamin Prentiss supplemented Swift's meager troops, and the rapid expansion and armament of Cairo's defenses persuaded all but the most rebellious residents of Little Egypt to support the Union cause. "I tell you what it is," one southern Illinois farmer remarked. "Them brass missionaries has converted a heap of folks that was on the anxious seat."⁸² The 29th Illinois arrived to reinforce the Union position at Cairo on 31 August 1861, and was assigned to fellow Egyptian Brigadier General John A. McClernand's First Brigade in the Army of the Tennessee. "The 18th, 27th, 29th, and 31st, was formed in to a Bigaid under Brig. Gen John A. McClernand." Sergeant Bolerjack recounted. "Capt.'s Ferrel Millington and [?] was appointed Drill Masters for Officers and Non Commishond officers."⁸³ By the fall of 1861, Cairo's defenses bristled with Union infantry and artillery positions on both the sides of the Ohio River, and federal gunboats

⁸⁰ Jacobsen, *Ohio River Civil War Project*, 105; Yates, *Civil War Governor*, 156.

⁸¹ Bedinger, *Little Egypt*, 25; Charles B. Kimbell, *History of Battery "A," First Illinois Light Artillery Volunteers* (Chicago: Cushing Printing, 1899), 16; Landsden, *History of Cairo*, 129.

⁸² Cole, *The Civil War Era*, 262; Eddy, *The Patriotism of Illinois*, 1:100; Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War*, 13.

⁸³ Frank Welcher, *The Western Theater*, vol. 2 of *The Union Army, 1861-1865: Organizations and Operations*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 88-89; *History of White County*, 393; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 30, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

patrolled the Mississippi River approach to St. Louis, Missouri. “[T]here is stirring scenes a going on here,” William wrote his nephew on 7 December 1861. “[Two] new gun boats came down from St. Louis last week there is some at Mound City will soon be done troops are coming and going continually.”⁸⁴

Despite its strategic importance, Cairo’s low elevation, torrid climate, and unimproved countryside combined to make the port city a physically demanding place to live, work, and drill. Both the town and the military camps that surrounded it were situated on a flat, triangular plain, enclosed on all three sides by fourteen-foot-high levees that abutted the Ohio, Mississippi, and Cache Rivers.⁸⁵ “The city of Cairo . . . was subject to overflows, the levees encircling the city being its only protection from inundation,” Union General John A. Logan’s wife Mary remembered. “Waters stagnated in every depression and were soon covered by a green scum, almost cutting it off from the highlands by that dismal swamp which extended nearly across the State a few miles north of Cairo.”⁸⁶ The Union encampment’s rustic setting and brutal weather conditions did not endear it to Illinoisans stationed there, many of whom spent their first few weeks in Cairo unloading supplies, constructing barracks, and clearing drilling grounds. “Here we found Burs of all Kinds growing in all the Back Streets to the very doors of the Scattered dwellings a filthy loathsome place,” Sergeant Bolerjack complained. “Here we had a great deal of fatigue Duty to do during Day. Large Stumps and Ditching drill ground, Loading and unloading Boats at the River.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Jacobsen, *Ohio River Civil War Project*, 105; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for October 15, 1861, Bolerjack Papers; William S. Bolerjack to “Nephew,” December 7, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

⁸⁵ *Cairo, Illinois*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Geological Survey, 1945) http://lib.utexas.edu/maps/historic_us_cities.html?p=print [accessed April 4, 2010]; Calvin D. Cowles, ed., *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* [hereafter referred to as *ORA*] (1895-1891; repr., New York: Barnes & Noble Publishing, 2003), 353; Landsden, *History of Cairo*, 134.

⁸⁶ Bedinger, *Little Egypt*, 24; Logan, *Reminiscences of a Soldier’s Wife*, 103, 102.

⁸⁷ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 30, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

Cairo's unhealthy climate, deteriorating sanitation conditions, and the physical exertion of constant drilling and instruction combined to decimate the health of many enlisted men stationed there during the warm spring and summer months. "This is a lovely place – a gorgeous hole," Illinois soldier Charles Wright Wills wrote to friends at home. "It smells just like that bottom below Dorrance's mill, and will breed fever and ague enough to disable all the men in this state."⁸⁸ The fields of mud and rank pools of standing water that surrounded the infantry encampments also proved an ideal breeding ground for insects and disease.⁸⁹ Overcrowded barracks, unsanitary hospitals, and unfamiliar surroundings additionally contributed to Cairo's deleterious health conditions. In the spring of 1861, a typhoid epidemic gripped the city; the following summer brought an unprecedented outbreak of measles in the surrounding Union camps. "[T]he weather was warm and Sickness Soon Set in, Dierahrer and fevers then Measles until thear was but few men able for duty," Sergeant Bolerjack recalled. "Surgeon Guard and assistant Surgeon Johnson was Bissy all the while and a great many was Discharged from the Regt. on Surgeon Certificate of disability."⁹⁰

In many ways, southern Illinois volunteers' experiences while stationed at Cairo provide a microcosmic insight into the larger ordeal of camp life in the Union Army of the Tennessee during the period 1861-1862. Civil War soldiers endured challenges that included long, hard hours of drilling and instruction, inadequate food, and the ever-present threat of sickness and disease. For many troops, such trials were mediated by periodic bouts of drunkenness, as well as

⁸⁸ Logan, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 102; T. K. Kionka, *Key Command: Ulysses S. Grant's District of Cairo* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 60-62; Wills, *Army Life*, 9.

⁸⁹W. S. Morris, L. D. Hartwell, and J. B. Kuykendall, *History: 31st Regiment Illinois Volunteers, Organized by John A. Logan* (Evansville, IN: Keller Printing & Publishing, 1902), 18; Wills, *Army Life*, 18, 23.

⁹⁰ Kionka, *Key Command*, 59-61; W. W. Patton and R. N. Isham. *U. S. Sanitary Commission No. 38: Report on the Condition of Camps and Hospitals at Cairo and Vicinity, Paducah, and St. Louis* (Chicago: Dunlop, Sewell, & Spalding, 1861), 4-5; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 30, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

visits to and from nearby family and friends when circumstances (and commanding officers) allowed.⁹¹

Within two days of being sworn into the Union army, Sergeant Bolerjack's 29th Illinois had already been assigned regimental drill masters for officers and non-commissioned officers. The unit drilled by squad and company during its brief stay at Camp Butler, and graduated to regimental and brigade drill while stationed at Cairo, Illinois.⁹² Out of necessity inspired by the riverine plans laid by Union generals Henry W. Halleck and Ulysses S. Grant, the 29th Illinois began its initial period of instruction during the harsh winter of 1861-1862. "[T]oday we commenced to soldier," William noted in his diary on 13 January 1862. "[C]old-snow falls one inch deep in the evening. . . Drilled some"⁹³ In the Union army, preliminary drills consisted chiefly of teaching large bodies of troops to march, wheel, and halt in uniform time and fashion. Federal infantry officers were schooled according to the principles of former West Point commandant and Union Major General William J. Hardee's *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics*, which they then attempted to impart to their green volunteers. "Company drill of one hour was one of the most important of all, for here the commanding officers were supposed to impart to their men complete instructions, according to Hardee, in all the maneuvers in military instruction," Thomas Jones observed. "This was not always done, for the officers, most of them, were only beginners in their military education, and, after they had acquired some knowledge, the putting into practice the different evolutions was in many cases a difficult task."⁹⁴

⁹¹ Fred A. Shannon, "The Life of the Common Soldier in the Union Army, 1861-1865," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 13 (March 1927): 478-482; .

⁹² *History of White County*, 393; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 30, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

⁹³ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for January 12-13, 29, 1862.

⁹⁴ Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 75; Thomas B. Jones, *Complete History of the 46th Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry* (Freeport, IL: W. H. Wagner & Sons, [1907?]), 9-10.

Early in the war, many Union regiments drilled almost incessantly between battles, beginning at daybreak and often proceeding periodically throughout the day. Mornings in most Civil War camps began early and methodically, accompanied by both the reveille of regimental musicians and the assorted rumblings of thousands of men grudgingly awakening and coming to attention.⁹⁵ “Morning breaks strangely and musically in camp. Not a familiar sound in it at all; no bells, no lowing herds, no cock’s shrill clarion, no rattling pavements, no opening doors,” Illinoisan Benjamin Franklin Taylor remembered. “All around you, as far as the eye can reach, it seems a badly harvested field that has grown a monstrous crop of men, now heads and points everywhere.”⁹⁶ Shortly after reveille, Union soldiers were called to breakfast. Most troops looked forward to meal times with particular relish, as they represented both the opportunity to eat and drink with comrades and a welcome respite from the seemingly endless cycle of drills and guard duties. In many federal units, companies were broken down into small groups of ten to twenty men each, referred to as “messes,” that cooked, ate, and cleaned together. “[O]ur mess have bought a Booth stove paid 18 dollars 1 dollars each, we have taken in Wm. Buttry and Wm. Gossett in our mess since you left,” Bolerjack wrote his wife on 30 November 1861. “[W]e are vary much [crowded] with the stove and 18 men in the smal room.”⁹⁷ The rations issued to Union soldiers during the first two years of the war were often found to be of insufficient nutritional value, inadequate supply, or both. Foodstuffs distributed to the 29th Illinois during this period consisted chiefly of coffee, hardtack, and bacon, a fact that perhaps contributed to an outbreak of scurvy in the regiment.⁹⁸ “[C]offee and hard bread for dinner,” Sergeant Bolerjack

⁹⁵ David Madden, ed., *Beyond the Battlefield: The Ordinary Life and Extraordinary Times of the Civil War Soldier* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2000); 61-62; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 45-46; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for July 5-16, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

⁹⁶ Benjamin Franklin Taylor, *Pictures of Life in Camp and Field*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: S. C. Griggs, 1875), 91.

⁹⁷ Madden, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 131; Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 65; William S. Bolerjack to Elizabeth Bolerjack, November 30, 1861, Bolerjack Papers.

⁹⁸ Billings, *Hardtack & Coffee*, 113-117; 121-123; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 230.

recorded in his journal on 13 January 1862. “[C]offee and a dodger of cornbread with some butter brought down by Mrs. Roper for our mess at supper.”⁹⁹ William’s experience was hardly unusual among Prairie State volunteers. “I shall never forget our first night in camp,” fellow Illinoisan Ira Blanchard remembered. “Our rations [consisted] of a little sour bread, a slice of bacon, and some coffee from a tin cup.”¹⁰⁰

Such unsavory and inadequate food supplies, taken together with unsanitary conditions born of ignorance and overcrowding, quickly produced an atmosphere of ill health and disease in Union army camps. “On account of changes from home life to that of camp and the inexperience of young men to observe the laws of health and use moderation in all their daily customs of camp life,” Thomas Jones recalled, “many took sick and soon the regimental hospital had its inmates.”¹⁰¹ Sergeant Bolerjack himself periodically suffered from digestive and excretory ailments that rendered him unfit for duty, including one extended episode that resulted in an eight-week recovery furlough that precluded William from service in the Battle of Shiloh. He soon recovered, however, and was able to rejoin his regiment. “Through God’s murcy I am well this morning, health is good in camps,” Bolerjack wrote his mother on 17 May 1862 after reaching his company’s encampment. “Theare has been an order made and read on dress parade that all soldiers at home on sick furlough able to walk that did not return imediately to their regiment would be considered deserters and treated as such.”¹⁰²

In the end, twice as many Civil War combatants were killed by sickness or disease than died of wounds received in battle. In many cases, surviving soldiers seemed to be more

⁹⁹ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for 13 January 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁰⁰ Blanchard, *I Marched with Sherman*, 21; Taylor, *Pictures of Life in Camp and Field*, 100.

¹⁰¹ Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle*, 32-33; Jones, *History of the 46th Illinois*, 10; Roberston, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 146-169. .

¹⁰² William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for February 18-26 and April 15-19, 1862, Bolerjack Papers; William S. Bolerjack to Rebecca Forrester Bolerjack, May 27, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

emotionally and philosophically affected by the deaths of their comrades who succumbed to illness or disease than by those who fell in combat. “The middle of October found thirty-eight in the hospital and the boys at night, sitting in their tents by the dim light of candles stuck in bayonets, spoke lowly and lovingly of [the dead],” Prairie State veteran Cloyd Bryner recollected. “The searing iron found its glow oftener in hospital than in the furnace of conflict. By January 1st twenty-four had died and the regiment had not yet faced the enemy.”¹⁰³ Two significant factors in soldiers’ preference to recuperate at home, when possible, were the inconsistent care and unsanitary conditions that plagued camp hospitals in both armies. Many troops also preferred the familiarity of their own makeshift regimental facilities to the unknown environs of the larger army hospitals that operated well behind the lines. Three of Sergeant Bolerjack own brothers fell ill late in the spring of 1862. “Thomas is vary porly in the hospital. tell henry he had better not come [back to the 29th Illinois] till he gets well,” Bolerjack informed his wife on 17 May 1862. “Preastly is very poorly the Capt. offered him a certificate of disability. The surgeon said he would have to treat the case before he would give one.”¹⁰⁴ William also wrote their worried mother ten days later. “[T]homas is at the [Brigade] hospital went theare the 22nd Inst and was worse yesterday,” he informed her. “I do not know how he is treated theare the treatment was bad enough in camps and in the Regimental Hospital, the hospital is at Monteray 5 miles.”¹⁰⁵ While Henry J. Bolerjack quickly recovered from his illness and rejoined the 29th Illinois, Preastly F. Bolerjack and Thomas C. Bolerjack were discharged

¹⁰³ Bryner, *Bugle Echoes*, 33; Edwin W. Payne, *History of the Thirty-Fourth Regiment of Illinois Volunteer Infantry* (Clinton, IA: Allen Printing Company, 1902), 2.; James M. McPherson, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 416.

¹⁰⁴ Kionka, *Key Command*, 63; William S. Bolerjack to Elizabeth Bolerjack, May 27, 1862, Bolerjack Papers; William S. Bolerjack to Rebecca Forrester Bolerjack, May 26, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁰⁵ William S. Bolerjack to Rebecca Forrester Bolerjack, May 26, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

from separate Union medical facilities on 23 July 1862. Preastly died at home in White County the next year; Thomas ultimately recovered, and survived the conflict by nearly six decades.¹⁰⁶

Civil War soldiers dealt with the privations of camp life in many different ways. Three of the coping mechanisms Sergeant Bolerjack regularly encountered in the Army of the Tennessee were alcoholism, religious fervor, and interaction with friends and family members from home. Of these pastimes, drunkenness was by far the most destructive to the Union war effort. “No one evil agent so much obstructs this army. . . as the degrading vice of drunkenness,” one Union general opined in 1862. “It is impossible to estimate the benefits that would accrue to the service from. . . total abstinence from intoxicating liquors. It would be worth 50,000 men to the armies of the United States.”¹⁰⁷ As a devout Methodist and teetotaler, however, William’s own experiences with alcohol were limited strictly to observing its deleterious effects on his fellow soldiers. “Major Millington charge for getting drunk while on duty,” he recorded on 17 July 1862. “John W Harvey [6th?] corporal co G was Reduced to ranks for disobeying orders and N.R. Lam appointed to fill the vacancy of Harvey.”¹⁰⁸ As a low-ranking non-commissioned officer, Sergeant Bolerjack also often stood guard over intoxicated soldiers while they awaited punishment. “Detailed for Brigaid guard more drunk men in the [8th Illinois Volunteer Infantry] than I ever saw and more trouble with drunk men in the guard house,” William wrote on 19 August 1862. “Relieved from guard by the 31st at 7. O.C. AM. feel well this morning the 8 is taken from our Brigaid the 63 takes its Place.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ “Bolerjack, Preastly F.; Thomas C.,” in *Illinois Civil War Muster and Descriptive Rolls Database*, <http://www.ilsos.gov/genealogy/CivilWarController>; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for July 24-25, 1862.

¹⁰⁷ Geoffrey Ward, Ric Burns, and Ken Burns, *The Civil War: An Illustrated History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 190; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 252.

¹⁰⁸ Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 488-489; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for July 17, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁰⁹ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for August 19-20, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

Attending religious exercises in army camps and nearby churches was an activity much dearer to Sergeant Bolerjack's heart. Regimental chaplains presented sermons after weekly inspections and the noon meal on most Sunday afternoons in the Union army, and William attended such services on virtually every occasion they were offered.¹¹⁰ "Sabbath Beautiful morning attend divine service 10 A.M. by chaplain I feel to trust in god today," William recorded on 21 September 1862. "[H]eard the chaplain of the 31st preach at night a good sermon¹¹¹ In addition to these worship opportunities, Bolerjack often attended two or three religious exercises on one Sunday, including services conducted in other regiments and surrounding villages. "Sabbath feel good deal Better go to church at town," Bolerjack wrote on 17 August 1862. "[H]ear a sermon in 31st Regt 3. O.C. P.M."¹¹² Like many Protestants in the Union army, William was particularly pleased by opportunities to attend services in churches of his own denomination. "Sabbath went to town to Methodis church," he recorded the next weekend in Jackson, Tennessee. "Large congregation good sermon."¹¹³ Sergeant Bolerjack also meticulously noted in his journals the Sundays on which no services took place, primarily during periods when Company G was on the march, detailed for guard duty, or actively engaged in combat. Indeed, such instances accounted for roughly one-half of William's available Sabbaths during the period 1861-1862.¹¹⁴

Another pleasant distraction from the hardships of camp life that Illinois soldiers enjoyed during the first few months of the conflict was frequent visitation by nearby friends and relatives. Such excursions were commonly undertaken by the acquaintances of troops from Little Egypt, whose homesteads were often less than one hundred miles from their first encampments in

¹¹⁰ Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 181-183; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 269-270.

¹¹¹ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for September 21, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹¹² William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for August 17, September 21, and September 28, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹¹³ Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 263, 271; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for August 24, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹¹⁴ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for June 8, June 15, and June 22, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

southern Illinois, eastern Missouri, and northern Kentucky. “The proximity of their homes, the frequent communications with friends, and many other features made the volunteer service at the beginning of the war almost ludicrous,” Mary Logan remembered. “Fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, wives, and sweethearts came sweeping down in caravans of carriages, wagons. . . pitching their tents and building their brush houses as near the regiment as the commanding officers would permit.”¹¹⁵ The 29th Illinois was no exception, and White County citizens frequently visited Sergeant Bolerjack’s unit while it was stationed in Cairo, Illinois. “I want you to come down after while if I don’t get to go home and bring the children,” he wrote Elizabeth on 22 January 1862.¹¹⁶ In addition to the simple comforts of conversation and companionship, friends and relatives also brought gifts of food, clothing, and other necessities. “Being in close communication with ‘God’s Country,’ as the boys reverently spoke of home, we fared much better, with the addition to our supplies of the good things received almost daily from the loved ones at home, than after we proceeded farther south, and our extra supplies were cut off,” Charles Kimbell remembered.¹¹⁷

Unfortunately for Sergeant Bolerjack and his fellow southern Illinoisans, their good fortune did not last for long. Almost seven months after arriving at Cairo, Company G received its last delegation of visitors from White County on 29 January 1862. Four days later, the 29th Illinois broke camp and boarded troop transports bound for Fort Henry on the Tennessee River.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Kionka, *Key Command*, 60; Logan, *Reminiscences of a Soldier’s Wife*, 109.

¹¹⁶ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for January 1 29, 1862, Bolerjack Papers; William S. Bolerjack to Elizabeth Bolerjack, January 22, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹¹⁷ Kimbell, *History of Battery “A,”* 19-20; Madden, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 214-215.

¹¹⁸ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for January 29 and February 2, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

FIGURE 2
*Cairo, Illinois*¹²⁰



¹²⁰ *Cairo, Illinois*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Geological Survey, 1945).
http://lib.utexas.edu/maps/historic_us_cities.html?p=print [accessed April 4, 2010].

CHAPTER 2: FIRST COMBAT AT FORTS HENRY AND DONELSON

Sergeant William S. Bolerjack's Civil War experience was also profoundly shaped by his combat expectations and encounters in the Union Army of the Tennessee. Following an initial enlistment and instruction period, the 29th Illinois Volunteer Infantry was transferred to the federal river stronghold at Cairo, Illinois, on 31 August 1861. In the months that followed, William's regiment participated in several riverine and overland expeditions. The most significant offensive was General Ulysses S. Grant's joint assault against the twin Confederate river strongholds of Forts Henry and Donelson in February 1862. Immediately after the campaign, however, Sergeant Bolerjack became seriously ill. He was eventually granted an eight-week furlough to recover at home in Hamilton County, Illinois, and thus narrowly avoided action at the Battle of Shiloh on 6-7 April 1862. Throughout the 29th Illinois's participation in the Union capture of Fort Henry, the regiment's initial exposure to enemy fire at the Battle of Fort Donelson, and his own subsequent illness, William continued to record his encounters and observations in daily journal entries and letters to his friends and relatives in southern Illinois.

As the sole recognized diaries penned by an enlisted soldier in the 29th Illinois, Sergeant Bolerjack's journals present narrative perspectives that both confirm and contrast with previous analyses of Civil War troops' responses to the physical and psychological trials of combat. Although prevented from engaging the Confederate garrison themselves, Bolerjack's regiment witnessed the devastation of Fort Henry by Union gunboats on 6 February 1862 firsthand. The 29th Illinois was the first Union regiment to enter the Confederate stockade after its surrender,

and it was at Fort Henry that William and his comrades observed the grisly aftermath of battle for the first time. Unlike many of his fellow soldiers, however, Sergeant Bolerjack was not overly anxious to get into the battle at Fort Henry, nor was he personally moved by the Union bombardment's devastating effects on the rebel fort or its fallen defenders.

From their position at Fort Henry, the 29th Illinois joined Grant's forces moving overland against Fort Donelson, and Sergeant Bolerjack's regiment tasted combat for the first time on 12 February 1862. Like many of his enlisted peers, Bolerjack vividly recalled the chaos and confusion of his first battle, and he was tested by the same inadequate supplies, inclement weather, and disease that plagued combat veterans in both armies. William's journal entries also depicted the 29th Illinois's actions during the heaviest fighting of the battle on 13-15 February, as well as his company's gratitude of learning of the Confederates' surrender on the morning of 16 February. Unlike many Union diarists at Fort Donelson, however, Sergeant Bolerjack and his fellow soldiers in the 29th Illinois were repeatedly exposed to friendly fire during the first few days of fighting, and Company G participated in the federal right flank's wild flight from the battlefield on the morning of 15 February. In addition, William's diaries also hinted at the origins and nature of the illness that precluded him from serving at the Battle of Shiloh alongside his fellow veterans of the Twin Rivers campaign.

General Grant's western forces scored their earliest successes at the Battles of Forts Henry and Donelson. The dual strongholds held considerable military and economic significance for the Confederate States, and were both highly regarded and heartily desired by strategists in both armies.¹²¹ On 1 February 1862, Sergeant Bolerjack's company received its first indication that an expedition against the river forts was imminent. "I was on Guard. orderd to march to

¹²¹ Hattaway and Jones, *How the North was Won*, 64-66; Marion Morrison, *A History of the Ninth Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry, with the Regimental Roster* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 21; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 392-393.

morrow 2 P.M.,” he noted in his diary.¹²² Roughly one-half of Bolerjack’s unit left Cairo the following afternoon via riverboat for destinations unknown. “3 officers. 4 Sergeants 40 privats of G left quarters 2 P.M. in a shower of Hail and Sleet,” William recorded. “[M]arched to the River. at dark went aboard the [steamer] Emerald quarterd on the cabin deck. lay all night at the wharf.”¹²³ In the next three days, Union transports ferried thousands of infantry, cavalry and artillery troops up the Tennessee River to landing points near Fort Henry. Several days of heavy precipitation, however, delayed Grant’s intended offensive. “There had been much rain, the streams were overflowing, and the deep mud greatly impeded our progress,” Illinois cavalryman Samuel Fletcher remembered. “We had hoped to arrive at the fort on the fifth; but the condition of the roads made it impossible.”¹²⁴

The combined Union naval and land-based forces, including Sergeant Bolerjack’s 29th Illinois, finally moved to encircle Fort Henry on 6 February 1862. The 29th Illinois was assigned to Prairie State native Colonel Richard J. Oglesby’s First Brigade, as a part of fellow Illinoisan General John A. McClernand’s First Division.¹²⁵ “Orders to march at 9 OC with 2 days Rations in Haver-sacks. left according to order going up the River,” Sergeant Bolerjack recorded in his journal. “18th advance Guard next 29th next 30th next 31st was the order we marched in wading Small Creeks and Branchs which was all full.”¹²⁶ Union infantrymen and artilleryists waded through the mud and marshes that surrounded the stockade all morning, searching

¹²² William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 1, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹²³ Robert N. Scott, ed., *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* [hereafter referred to as *OR*] (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 7:125-126; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 2, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹²⁴ Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson: The Key to the Confederate Heartland* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 101; Fletcher, *History of Company A*, 27-28; Steven E. Woodworth, *Nothing but Victory: The Army of the Tennessee, 1861-1865* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 71-73.

¹²⁵ Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 101-103; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 244; *OR*, 7:129; Stephen D. Engle, *Struggle for the Heartland: The Campaigns from Fort Henry to Corinth* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 57; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for February 5-6, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹²⁶ W. J. Tenney, *The Military and Naval History of the Rebellion in the United States* (1866; repr., Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003) 125-126; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 6, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

fruitlessly for an overland approach to Fort Henry. As the afternoon wore on, federal soldiers anxious to get into their first real battle bemoaned their lack of progress. “The troops seem eager for the fray, but it is evident the way the artillery is miring down, that it will be only a naval battle,” Prairie State native Lieb Ambrose observed. “Shot and shell, like living monsters, are now flying over and into Fort Henry.”¹²⁷ Indeed, Union gunboats under Commodore Andrew Foote began shelling the Confederate fort in the early afternoon. “Gun Boats Commenced fiering on the Ft 1 PM Ceased at 2 P.M.” William recalled. “[W]e Could hear the Balls and Booms Whizzing and Screaming through the air.” The flotilla’s devastating, close-range fire quickly reduced the half-submerged Confederate defenses without the aid of land-based troops, and federal naval officers accepted Fort Henry’s surrender.¹²⁸

In the meantime, Union infantrymen struggled vainly to trap Fort Henry’s defenders before they could escape to Fort Donelson. “[O]rdrs came to Double quick that the Rebbles was leavng,” William noted.¹²⁹ Circumventing the heavily wooded hills and overflowing marshes that surrounded Fort Henry, however, proved nearly impossible. The existing roads were quickly churned to mud, and ordnance wagons and artillery pieces bogged down in the quagmire. “All day we keep winding around through the woods, seeking to get to the rear of the Fort,” Ambrose recalled. “It being impossible for the advance troops to get to the rear in time to cut off the retreat, they now move up and take possession of the works.”¹³⁰ Many Union soldiers begrudged the warships’ speedy victory, and several expressed dissatisfaction with missing out so narrowly on their first opportunity to meet the enemy in battle. “We were tramping along in

¹²⁷ D. Lieb Ambrose, *From Shiloh to Savannah: The Seventh Illinois Infantry in the Civil War* (1868; repr., De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 22

¹²⁸ Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 107-109; Engle, *Struggle for the Heartland*, 58.

¹²⁹ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 6, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹³⁰ Ambrose, *From Shiloh to Savannah*, 22; W. S. Morris, L. D. Hartwell, and J. B. Kuykendall, *History: 31st Regiment Illinois Volunteers, Organized by John A. Logan* (Evansville, IN: Keller Printing & Publishing, 1902), 32.

the mud when a messenger passed along the line announcing the capture of the fort by the gunboats,” Illinois veteran Wilbur Crummer remembered. “Some of us cheered, but others were silent and really felt sore at the sailors for their taking of the fort before we had a chance to help them.”¹³¹ Sergeant Bolerjack did not share such sentiments, however, and was pleased to find Fort Henry’s defenders gone and their possessions scattered when federal troops finally reached the stockade. Among the dozens of Union infantry, artillery, and cavalry units converging on the fort, the 29th Illinois was the first regiment to reach the captured Confederate stockade and embrasures. “[F]ound the Rebs gone,” William gratefully noted in his diary. “8 field pieces 17 Large Guns in the Fort good maney Small but Inferior armes about 100 prisnors.”¹³² Indeed, Fort Henry’s garrison suffered twenty-one casualties and surrendered only ninety-four men, including sixteen rebel prisoners too ill to be evacuated. The balance of Confederate General Lloyd Tilghman’s 2,500-man force successfully escaped to Fort Donelson.^{133 134}

Upon entering Fort Henry, members of the Union First Brigade closely observed the devastation of battle for the first time. During the federal bombardment, several of the post’s heavy guns exploded, killing or wounding their entire crews. Many Union soldiers registered shock and revulsion upon viewing the effects of sustained artillery fire and the shattered corpses of slain enemy combatants firsthand. “The scene within the fort, about the barracks and the camp, was one of destruction and ruin. Bloody and mangled bodies were scattered about the

¹³¹James J. Hamilton, *The Battle of Fort Donelson* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1968), 28; Wilbur F. Crummer, *With Grant at Fort Donelson, Shiloh, and Vicksburg* (Oak Park, IL: E. C. Crummer & Co., 1915), 21.

¹³²Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 3:1057-1058; *History of White County*, 393; *OR*, 7:130; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 6, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹³³*OR*, 7:125; Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, (1885; repr., Harrisburg, PA: The Archive Society, 1997), 1:292; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 6, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹³⁴William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 6, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

guns,” one member of the 31st Illinois recollected.¹³⁵ “I am perfectly satisfied from the looks of the fort quarters &c. that I will never have any desire to be in a camp when it is shelled,” another Prairie State veteran echoed in his journal. “Saw four men that was killed, an awful sight. their Bodies were horribly mangled.”¹³⁶ Sergeant Bolerjack, by contrast, took the deaths and destruction seemingly in stride. “I saw 4 men that was killed in the fort,” William laconically noted in his journal on 6 February. “Some Commisarys was the fruits of the victory.”¹³⁷

In addition to Fort Henry’s stockade and remaining arsenal, Sergeant Bolerjack’s unit also helped recover a large quantity of foodstuffs and other supplies hastily abandoned by fleeing Confederates. Members of Fort Henry’s garrison evidently received very little warning before evacuating to Fort Donelson, and left evidence of their hasty departure strewn about the enclosure, much to the delight of its Union captors.¹³⁸ “[F]ound the Rebs gone log Huts tents camp kettles plats Cups knives forks, Blankets, mattresses, Clothing (some fine mostly bark [Jeans]),” William observed in his diary. “[P]ots of coffee on the fier dough on the Table and every thing as though they was on Dres Parad.”¹³⁹ After filling their stomachs and haversacks with confiscated rebel goods, the men of Oglesby’s brigade bedded down for the night in sleeping quarters recently vacated by the fleeing Confederates. Some, like Sergeant Bolerjack, managed to secure a berth in the fort’s log barracks; others sought shelter in captured tents pitched inside the stockade. “Arrived at dark & learned that the 1st Brigade occupied all the

¹³⁵ Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 106; Morris, Hartwell, and Kuykendall, *History: 31st Illinois*, 32; Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative* (New York: Random House, 1958), 1:189-190; Stanley F. Horn, *The Army of Tennessee* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 83.

¹³⁶ James W. Jessee, *Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee, 1861-1865*, ed. William P. LaBounty (Normal, IL: McLean County Genealogical Society, 1997), 5.

¹³⁷ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 6, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹³⁸ Allen Morgan Geer, *The Civil War Diary of Allen Morgan Geer, Twentieth Regiment, Illinois Volunteers*, ed. Mary Ann Andersen (Denver: Robert C. Appleman, 1977), 17; Charles Carleton Coffin, *Four Years of Fighting*, ed. Charles Gregg (1866; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1970), 78; Kimbell, *History of Battery “A,”* 37-38.

¹³⁹ Engle, *Struggle for the Heartland*, 59; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 6, 1862, Bolerjack Papers; Woodworth, *Nothing but Victory*, 77-78.

quarters,” one disappointed Second Brigade infantryman remembered. “We then went back on the hill & camped.”¹⁴⁰

In the days immediately following Fort Henry’s surrender, Sergeant Bolerjack’s Company G participated in several one-day excursions against Confederate-held positions up the Tennessee River, including the destruction of the Memphis and Ohio Railroad Bridge.¹⁴¹ By 10 February, however, it was apparent to many Union soldiers that Grant was massing troops for a larger offensive. “Troops are Still arriveing it is Supposed thear is 60 000 Troop hear,” Bolerjack overestimated in his journal.¹⁴² On the afternoon of 11 February, Colonel Oglesby’s First Brigade began marching overland towards Fort Donelson, located twelve miles east of Fort Henry. “Orders to march at 4 p.m. with 2 days Rations & coffee pots,” William recorded. “The first [Brigade] Start taking a direction a little South of East over high Broken Country covered with pine.”¹⁴³ Despite their best efforts, Union forces making their way across the damp, uneven ground made slow progress. The 29th Illinois marched through the afternoon and into the evening, and covered nearly six miles before halting. “Night came on the moon Shone Bright,” Sergeant Bolerjack remembered. “The whole Collum moved on with profound Silence except now and then the Click of a tin cup against a Bayonet.”¹⁴⁴ Bolerjack’s unit broke camp early on the morning of 12 February, and quickly resumed its march toward Fort Donelson. “Aroused early this morning by the Sound of the drum,” William noted in his diary. “Start 7 1/2 OC persue

¹⁴⁰ Geer, *The Civil War Diary of Allen Morgan Geer*, 16; Jessee, *Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee*, 5; Kimbell, *History of Battery “A,”* 38; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 6, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁴¹ Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:293; Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 67-68; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 7, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁴² The actual number of Union troops in the vicinity of Fort Henry on 10 February 1862 was less than 17,500. Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:298; *OR*, 7:159 William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 10, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁴³ Black, *A Civil War Diary, Written by Dr. James A. Black*, 32; Geer, *The Civil War Diary of Allen Morgan Geer*, 17; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 11, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁴⁴ Crummer, *With Grant at Fort Donelson, Shiloh, and Vicksburg*, 32; Hattaway and Jones, 70-71; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 11, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

the same course.”¹⁴⁵ Before nightfall, the 29th Illinois tasted combat for the first time in the woods outside Fort Donelson.¹⁴⁶

Fort Donelson represented perhaps the most crucial stronghold in Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston’s entire Western Department. Located on the west bank of the Cumberland River in northwestern Tennessee, Fort Donelson helped guard the river systems that linked Confederate garrisons at Columbus and Paducah, Kentucky with the Tennessee state capital at Nashville.¹⁴⁷ The fort’s river batteries also commanded an approach to the railroad bridge that connected Johnston’s command center at Bowling Green, Kentucky with the vital port of Memphis, Tennessee. Along with Fort Henry, Fort Donelson additionally protected the most productive agricultural and industrial regions of Kentucky and central Tennessee, which supplied the Confederacy with vast quantities of grain, horses, iron, and munitions. Recognizing the stronghold’s strategic and economic significance, Fort Donelson’s defenders had enhanced the stronghold’s formidable physical location with additional breastworks, entrenchments, and artillery positions. “The main fort was situated on a high bluff and its guns commanded the river for a mile or more each way.” Prairie State veteran Lucius Barber recalled. “Nature had made its defenses very strong, and with its heavy earthworks the place seemed impregnable.”¹⁴⁸

Nevertheless, General Grant was determined to capture or destroy Fort Donelson when Union forces commenced operations against the river stronghold on 12 February 1862.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ *OR*, 7:170, 183; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 12, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁴⁶ *OR*, 7: 171; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 12, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁴⁷ Basil W. Duke, *Morgan’s Cavalry* (New York: Neale Publishing, 1909), 28-29; Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:295-298; Hamilton, *Battle of Fort Donelson*, 20-22; Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 64-65.

¹⁴⁸ Barber, *Army Memoirs of Lucius W. Barber*, 43; Kendall D. Gott, *Where the South Lost the War: An Analysis of the Fort Henry-Fort Donelson Campaign, February 1862* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 19-20; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 393; Thomas Lawrence Connelly, *Army of the Heartland: The Army of Tennessee, 1861-1862* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1967) 4-12.

¹⁴⁹ Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:297-299; Hamilton, *The Battle of Fort Donelson*, 18-22; *OR*, 7:124-126.

After marching more than seven miles on the morning of 12 February, Sergeant Bolerjack's 29th Illinois encountered enemy troops for the first time early that afternoon. "20 minutes till one P.M. our advance Guard encountered Donelson Rebel Pickets and considerable resistance," William entered in his journal. "Canon is Brought up and fierd a few times. John Sheard Slightly wounded first Blood of the 29th."¹⁵⁰ After this initial exchange of gunfire, the men of Oglesby's brigade were ordered to throw down their knapsacks, form lines of battle, and prepare to engage the enemy. The 29th Illinois formed part of the Union army's advance guard, and maneuvered within eyesight of Fort Donelson's outer defenses. "[W]e was marched up in Sight of Rebel works [and] took another position," William recorded. "[C]ould See them forming lins of Battle Officers and Orderlys riding in great host."¹⁵¹

Following this brief encounter, however, the 29th Illinois's first day of combat devolved into deadly chaos and confusion. On the evening of 12 February, the First Brigade was shifted to the Union army's far right flank in an attempt to cut off Fort Donelson's defenders from their supply base at the nearby town of Dover, Tennessee. In doing so, the Sergeant Bolerjack's regiment clashed sharply with a body of Confederate cavalry under the command of Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest near the Wynn's Ferry Road. "[A]t dark our [Brigade] was moved to the Right. while halted at cross Roads a Boddy of cavalry dashed through the 29th Killing three wounding two Badly [three] Slightly," William recorded in his journal. "So Sudden was the assault and great the Supprise that disorder was created. I got over a fence near by fierd my piece at about the distince of twenty paces."¹⁵² In the growing darkness and uncertainty, several Union regiments mistakenly fired on the 29th Illinois. "Skirmished till dark then flanked them on the left

¹⁵⁰ *OR*, 7: 171; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 12, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁵¹ Black, *A Civil War Diary, Written by Dr. James A. Black*, 32; Geer, *The Civil War Diary of Allen Morgan Geer*, 17; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 12, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁵² Morris, Hartwell, and Kuykendall, *History: 31st Illinois*, 33-34; Mark A. Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter: Governor Richard J. Oglesby* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 69; WSB, 2/12

and laid on our arms all night,” 8th Illinois infantryman James Jessee recalled. “[O]ur plan was some frustrated by the 29th Reg firing on ours through mistake.”¹⁵³ Colonel Oglesby, however, faulted the other regiments of his brigade for the tragic error. “In attempting to draw my line back an unfortunate discharge of musketry into the ranks of the Twenty-ninth Regiment killed and wounded several men of that regiment,” he noted in his battle report. “Permission was given to Colonel Rearden to move the Twenty-ninth to the left of the brigade for the night to dispose of his wounded men.”¹⁵⁴ Sergeant Bolerjack’s Company G retreated one half-mile to the main Union lines, where they bedded down for the night without retrieving their knapsacks, food, or blankets. “Some Raked up leaves an Sleep in them all without Haversack or Grub having Eat nothing Since morning,” William noted in his diary. “Beautiful warm day.”¹⁵⁵

After a brief rest, the 29th Illinois was called up early on the morning of 13 February to help shield Battery D of the 2nd Illinois Light Artillery from Confederate infantry assaults. “Orderd to Support Dressers Battery they took position opened with three pieces on the Rebbles. whitch Soon drew the Rebble fier,” William recorded. “[T]he Sollid Shot flew high and thick Rebble Battery Silenced.”¹⁵⁶ Having helped neutralize one battery near the center of the rebel lines, the Union infantry and artillery units were ordered to repeat the process against another rebel battery near the far right flank of the Union lines. As the Illinoisans made their way back to Company G’s position from the previous day, however, the federal units were exposed to close-range fire from the Confederate gunners. “[We] then moved to the Right Set and opend again we are now in Range for grape and Canister and it fell and passed thick and fast in our midst,”

¹⁵³ Black, *A Civil War Diary, Written by Dr. James A. Black*, 32; Jessee, *Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee*, 6.

¹⁵⁴ Morris, Hartwell, and Kuykendall, *History: 31st Illinois*, 34; *OR*, 7:184; Plummer, *Lincoln’s Rail-Splitter*, 69.

¹⁵⁵ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 12, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁵⁶ *OR*, 7:184, William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 13, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

William wrote that evening. “Capt. Brill wounded. rebel Battery Silenced. Infantry advanced several rounds retreated done the same thing three times through the day.”¹⁵⁷

After the 29th Illinois retreated for a third and final time, the entire First Brigade was redeployed on the extreme right flank of the Union army. Meanwhile, regiments from the First Division’s Second and Third Brigades assaulted Confederate infantry and artillery positions in the center of Fort Donelson’s outer works and sustained numerous casualties.¹⁵⁸ Cavalryman Samuel Fletcher witnessed the carnage firsthand. “McLernand’s division attempted to capture a battery which held a strong position near a line of rifle-pits,” he confirmed. “The slaughter was terrific and our men were forced to give it up. The 11th Illinois Infantry and the Chicago batteries, A and B, suffered severely.”¹⁵⁹

For soldiers in the First Brigade of the Army of the Tennessee, the evening of 13 February represented one of their most trying nights in the armed service. The spring-like temperatures that had warmed Sergeant Bolerjack only the day before disappeared, replaced by bitter winds and icy precipitation. Perversely, many federal units had once again been ordered to discard their tents, blankets, and haversacks earlier that morning, and brigade and division commanders had not adequately provided for their re-supply. The situation was complicated by General Grant’s order forbidding campfires that he feared might illuminate Union positions to Confederate observers, a sensible directive that nonetheless further taxed the morale of his shivering army.¹⁶⁰ “Darkness has come, and we bivouac for the night; soon it commences to rain; then changes from a cold rain to sleet and snow,” Illinoisan Lieb Ambrose recorded. “We

¹⁵⁷ *OR*, 7:184; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 13, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁵⁸ Black, *A Civil War Diary, Written by Dr. James A. Black*, 33; *OR*, 7:202, 212-213; Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:300; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 13, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁵⁹ Fletcher, *History of Company A*, 33; Jessee, *Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee*, 6; *OR*, 7:202, 212-213.

¹⁶⁰ Engle, *Struggle for the Heartland*, 70; Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:299; Kenneth P. Williams, *Grant Rises in the West: The First Year, 1861-1862* (1952; repr., Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) 234-235; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for February 12-13, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

dare not build any camp fires. . . what a long and cheerless night; and with what anxiousness the soldiers wait for morning's dawn."¹⁶¹ For the troops of the 29th Illinois, this misery was further compounded by the previous day's maneuvers, which had carried their regiment more than a mile away from rations and other supplies stored near its earlier campsite. "[I]n the Evening Orderly Gossett and others went for our Blankets and Grub," William sullenly recorded. "Rains - Turns cold Snows - no fires allowed - I was on guard and passed one of the most disagreeable nights I ever Saw."¹⁶² To make matters worse, Fort Donelson's defenders continued to shell the center and right flank of the Union lines until after midnight. From their location on the extreme right, the men of Company G and the artillery battery they guarded were particularly exposed to rebel gunners. "Firing Commenced at 9 OC was called to armes and this was Repeated Several times through the night. ten men at the guns all the time," Sergeant Bolerjack recorded. "Six Gun Boats came up the River."¹⁶³ Indeed, help had once again arrived in the form of Union Commodore Foote's rebuilt gunboat squadron.¹⁶⁴

14 February dawned cold and quiet. Across the battlefield, half-frozen Union soldiers roused themselves after a short night's sleep. In the daylight, at least, campfires could be lighted again.¹⁶⁵ Aside from the extreme weather conditions, the day passed uneventfully for the Union troops in the field. Several regiments, including the 29th Illinois, seized the opportunity to reinforce the earthworks shielding nearby federal artillery pieces. "One Section of [Schwartz's] Battery put in position in front of the 29th," Sergeant Bolerjack noted in his diary.¹⁶⁶ In keeping with Grant's orders to avoid a general engagement until after the gunboats' attack, many federal

¹⁶¹ Ambrose, *From Shiloh to Savannah*, 26; Woodward, *Nothing But Victory*, 89

¹⁶² Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 147; Jessee, *Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee*, 6; *OR*, 7:184-185; Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 69; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 13, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁶³ *OR*, 7:184-185; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 13, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁶⁴ Engle, *Struggle for the Heartland*, 70; Williams, *Grant Rises in the West: The First Year*, 235.

¹⁶⁵ Ambrose, *From Shiloh to Savannah*, 26-27; Woodworth, *Nothing but Victory*, 90.

¹⁶⁶ Black, *A Civil War Diary, Written by Dr. James A. Black*, 33; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 14, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

units did not move from the previous day's positions at all, and the few who did were recalled before encountering the enemy. "At one time during the day the [First] brigade was massed against the Confederate left and moved up close to the works among the fallen timbers, so close that the enemy could be plainly seen, drawn up in line behind his rifle pits," one Illinois veteran remembered. "The purpose was apparently to assault, but fortunately the troops were withdrawn and went into camp where they remained during the night."¹⁶⁷ For most Union and Confederate soldiers, the day was spent observing the federal gunboats' unsuccessful duel with Fort Donelson's river batteries. "The Gun Boats Bombard the Fort all day," Sergeant Bolerjack recorded in his diary.¹⁶⁸ Commodore Foote's flotilla was unable to replicate its success at Fort Henry against the more formidable defenses of Fort Donelson, however. Foote steamed up the Cumberland with four ironclads and two timberclad gunboats with which to shell the fort. After less than two hours of fighting, all four ironclads had been disabled and the rebel artillery position remained. Union casualties included eleven men killed and forty-three wounded; the Confederates lost only a single man.¹⁶⁹ As if heartened by the river batteries' success in repelling the Union gunboats, Confederate artillerists in and around Fort Donelson resumed their own bombardment of the federal lines.¹⁷⁰

In many places the rebel barrage did not let up until after nightfall. Indeed, in some regiments of the First Brigade, it was suggested that the prolonged bombardment was designed to mask a potential Confederate breakout attempt. "All night long, more or less firing could be heard, and the noise in and about Dover and the landing, plainly indicated some unusual

¹⁶⁷ Hamilton, *The Battle of Fort Donelson*, 126-127; Morris, Hartwell, and Kuykendall, *History: 31st Illinois*, 35.

¹⁶⁸ Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 159-160; Foote, *The Civil War*, 1:203; Hamilton, *The Battle of Fort Donelson*, 126-127; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 14, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁶⁹ Engle, *Struggle for the Heartland*, 71-72; *OR*, 7:166-167; Williams, *Grant Rises in the West: The First Year*, 238.

¹⁷⁰ Black, *A Civil War Diary, Written by Dr. James A. Black*, 33; Jessee, *Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee* 6; William W. Cluett, *History of the 57th Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry* (Princeton, NJ: T. P. Streeter, 1886), 7.

commotion within the enemies' lines," one veteran of the 31st Illinois opined.¹⁷¹ There was considerable evidence to support theories of a Confederate exodus. Rebel prisoners had reputedly been captured with haversacks filled with food, indicating a getaway in the near future. A captain in the 2nd Illinois Cavalry also sent word to Grant's chief of staff of unusually high levels of activity taking place opposite his position on the far end of the Union right flank.¹⁷² Despite such warnings, however, Grant wrote later that he "had no idea that there would be any engagement on land unless I brought it on myself."¹⁷³

For the soldiers of McClelland's First Division, the morning of 15 February was marked by a series of unpleasant surprises, followed by a desperate struggle to maintain their lines. Confederate skirmishers attacked the federals' right flank at daybreak, and rebel canoneers shelled Sergeant Bolerjack's Company G and the artillery position it supported. "The Rebels came out and attacked the 18th on our Extreme Right at Sun Rise," William recalled in his journal. "Swartes Batery or guns was used on a batery in front of us and they in turn used theirs on us doing considerable damage."¹⁷⁴ All along the Union right flank, Fort Donelson's defenders struggled to dislodge Oglesby's First Brigade (First Division) and General John McArthur's First Brigade (Second Division) from the rebel forces' most plausible route of escape. The fleeing Confederates ran headlong into the 9th Illinois, 12th Illinois, and 41st Illinois regiments of McArthur's brigade, as well as several units of Kentucky and Indiana infantry. "[T]he 8th Ills 25th Ky 10th [Indiana?] was driven Back," William recorded. "[T]hey fell upon the 29th."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Hamilton, *The Battle of Fort Donelson*, 154; Morris, Hartwell, and Kuykendall, *History: 31st Illinois*, 35.

¹⁷² Crummer, *With Grant at Fort Donelson, Shiloh, and Vicksburg*, 31; Fletcher, *History of Company A*, 34; Foote, *The Civil War*, 1:208; Geer, *The Civil War Diary of Allen Morgan Geer*, 18; Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:307.

¹⁷³ Foote, *The Civil War*, 1:207; Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:305; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 400.

¹⁷⁴ *OR*, 7: 176-177, 186; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 15, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁷⁵ Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War*, 36-38; Morrison, *History of the Ninth Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry* 22; *OR*, 7:174-178, 185-187; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 15, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

As the Union right flank began to crumble, the 29th Illinois was subjected to a deadly crossfire from three separate Confederate positions, and the 31st Illinois rushed to reinforce them. In the midst of the confusion, Sergeant Bolerjack's regiment was once again mistakenly fired on by another Union unit, the 25th Kentucky. "31st [Illinois] changed front on first Co. and was in good deal better position to Receive the Enemy then 29th," William drolly observed, "with perhaps less loss from the fact that the 29th was fiered upon the flank."¹⁷⁶ Assailed from all directions, and running short of ammunition with which to hold off their encircling foes, pieces of Oglesby's overwhelmed brigade abandoned their positions in confusion. "Retierd from the field in rather Bad order about 10 O.C . . . Retreated to whear we had left our Bagage all day and night ambulances and waggons was running carrying the [wounded] one mile beyond whear we lay," Sergeant Bolerjack admitted. "I might have said when I left the field I followed my Commanding Officers."¹⁷⁷ As the remnants of Company G fled the battlefield, William turned to fire a parting shot at their Confederate pursuers. In doing so, Bolerjack received an inglorious wound that he described as the freak deflection of a spent bullet. "[O]n leaving the field I endeaverd to fire my piece from a Sapling at Standard [bearer] at about 30 paces distant," William feebly explained. "Throwing my Gun on my Sholder a ball Struck my Back just missing my left Sholder whitch evidently had Struck the Sapling."¹⁷⁸ In other words, Sergeant Bolerjack was shot in the back while fleeing the battlefield before a victorious enemy.

Despite the morning's setbacks, the Union right flank still tenuously held its position astride the roads leading away from Fort Donelson. Despite successfully driving the federal lines back by nearly five hundred yards, Confederate generals John B. Floyd and Gideon J. Pillow

¹⁷⁶ Hamilton, *The Battle of Fort Donelson*, 203; Jessee, *Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee*, 6; *OR*, 7:177, 186; Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 70; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 15, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁷⁷ *OR*, 7:186; 178, William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 15, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁷⁸ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 15, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

proved unable or unwilling to press the breakout attempt beyond the battle lines established earlier in the day. In the meantime, McClelland scrambled to stabilize and reinforce his division's withdrawn position with fresh troops and artillery batteries.¹⁷⁹ General Grant spent the morning of 15 February conferring with Commodore Foote aboard a Union gunboat, more than seven miles from the fighting on McClelland's right. When the commanding general received word of the Confederate breakout attempt, however, he returned immediately to coordinate a counteroffensive. "Some of our men are pretty badly demoralized, but the enemy must be more so," Grant told his staff. "The one who attacks first now will be victorious and the enemy will have to be in a hurry if he gets ahead of me."¹⁸⁰ Grant skillfully directed a two-pronged federal retaliatory action. General Charles F. Smith's Second Division assaulted the works around Fort Donelson on the rebels' right flank, while McClelland's First Division fought to regain their original position opposite the Confederates' left flank.¹⁸¹ By nightfall, Union troops had successfully penetrated Fort Donelson's outer defenses and largely reestablished their position parallel to the rebels' left flank. "There was now no doubt," Grant wrote later, "but that the Confederates must surrender or be captured the next day."¹⁸²

The night of 15 February passed very differently in the Union and Confederate camps. Inside the federal lines, exhausted troops once again steeled themselves against the bitter cold and the possibility of an all-out assault against Fort Donelson in the morning. "A charge on the rebel works was contemplated by Gen. Grant," Illinois veteran Thomas Jones recalled. "Thus ended the day and the cold long night came on, with no cheerful camp fire to light the gloom or

¹⁷⁹ Connelly, *Army of the Heartland*, 121-123; Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr., and Roy P. Stonesifer, Jr., *The Life and Wars of Gideon J. Pillow* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 226-232; *OR*, 7:177-180.

¹⁸⁰ Fletcher, *History of Company A*, 40; Foote, *The Civil War*, 1:208; Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:307.

¹⁸¹ Foote, *The Civil War*, 1:208-209; Geer, *The Civil War Diary of Allen Morgan Geer*, 18; *OR*, 7:182, 201-202.

¹⁸² Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:308; John H. Brinton, *Personal Memoirs of John H. Brinton* (1914; repr., Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996) 128-129.

warm the stiffened limbs of the weary soldiers.”¹⁸³ Inside the rebel works, generals Floyd, Pillow, and Simon Bolivar Buckner debated their remaining chances of victory and escape. After agreeing that Fort Donelson could not hold against its Union besiegers, nor could its garrison be safely evacuated, Pillow and Floyd began to plot their personal escapes. Responsibility for surrendering the fort and its defenders thus passed to Buckner, who argued that “the general officers owed it to their men...to obtain the best terms of capitulation possible for them.”¹⁸⁴ After allowing Floyd and Pillow to depart, Buckner sent a message to Grant inquiring about the capitulation terms his former West Point classmate would require of Fort Donelson’s garrison. “No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted,” Grant brusquely retorted. “I propose to move immediately upon your works.”¹⁸⁵ Disappointed by Grant’s “ungenerous and unchivalrous” terms, Buckner nonetheless relinquished his command on the morning of 16 February 1862.¹⁸⁶

News of Fort Donelson’s capitulation surprised and delighted the Union troops preparing to assault its defenses. At daybreak on 16 February, the 29th Illinois was ordered to advance from the regiment’s rallying point behind the federal lines to its original position on the Union right flank. As they approached Fort Donelson, the men of Sergeant Bolerjack’s Company G spied a welcome signal atop the Confederate works. “[W]hen we got in Sight of the fort white flag was displade from Every Corner,” William recorded in his diary. “Gen. Grant had demanded and

¹⁸³ Cluett, *History of the 57th Regiment*, 8; Hamilton, *The Battle of Fort Donelson*, Jones, *History of the 46th Illinois*, 153; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 401; Woodworth, *Nothing but Victory*, 113.

¹⁸⁴ Hughes, Jr. and Stonesifer, Jr., *Gideon J. Pillow*, 234-236; *OR*, 7:334; Simon Bolivar Buckner, “Official Report of Operations,” 11 August 1862, In *Official Reports of Battles, as Published by Order of the Confederate Congress at Richmond* [Hereafter referred to as *CORB*] (1863; repr., New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1970), 108.

¹⁸⁵ Buckner, “Official Report of Operations,” 11 August 1862, *CORB*, 112; Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:311-312; Julian K. Larke, *General Grant and His Campaigns* (New York: J.C. Derby & N.C. Miller, 1864), 73-74; *OR*, 7:161.

¹⁸⁶ Buckner, “Official Report of Operations,” 11 August 1862, *CORB*, 113; Foote, *The Civil War*, 1:212-213.

obtained an unconditional Surrender of men Camp and garrison Equipage.”¹⁸⁷ Elsewhere in the Union ranks, news of the rebels’ surrender was met with uninhibited jubilation. “Then went up a long shout, which, taken up by regiment after regiment, as the exciting news traveled around the line, shook the heavens,” Prairie State veteran Thomas Jones recollected. “Till at least it reached the division of Wallace on the extreme right, about ready to move forward to the assault, and here the 46th Ill. gave their grand old cheer, U-N-I-O-N forever.”¹⁸⁸ After Fort Donelson was secured and its garrison disarmed, the victorious Union troops paraded past rebel prisoners assembled in the streets of Dover, Tennessee. Afterwards, the cold and weary federals helped themselves to the contents of captured Confederate storehouses. “The Butternuts was drawn up in long lines [and] We marched between them through Dover County Seat of Stewart County,” William recalled. “Gatherd up the tents and Blankets and fared Better.”¹⁸⁹

With victory and shelter thus secured, Union soldiers spent the next several days visiting wounded comrades, burying the dead, and exploring Fort Donelson’s dearly purchased defenses. “I Examined the battle field The scene is past my description,” Sergeant Bolerjack recorded. “[F]ound nine of Co G 29th dead one wounded mortaly 7 lightly one missing The numbers of prisoners taken not known at this time.”¹⁹⁰ The 29th Illinois’s assignment guarding a forward artillery battery, as well as its repeated exposure to friendly fire meant that William’s Company G experienced disproportionately high losses in the engagement. The 29th Illinois suffered 99 casualties out of an effective strength of 400 fighting men during the assault on Fort Donelson. These losses included 1 officer and 24 enlisted men killed, 3 officers and 57 enlisted men

¹⁸⁷ Barber of *Lucius W. Barber*, 43; Engle, *Struggle for the Heartland*, 80; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 16, 1862, Bolerjack Papers; Woodworth, *Nothing but Victory*, 118.

¹⁸⁸ Cluett, *History of the 57th Regiment* 9; Coffin, *Four Years of Fighting*, 80; Crummer, *With Grant at Donelson, Shiloh, and Vicksburg*, 43; Jones, *History of the 46th Illinois*, 153; Woodworth, *Nothing but Victory*, 118.

¹⁸⁹ Black, *A Civil War Diary, Written by Dr. James A. Black*, 33; Geer, *The Civil War Diary of Allen Morgan Geer*, 19; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 16, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁹⁰ Hamilton, *The Battle of Fort Donelson*, 336; Jessee, *Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee* 6; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for February 16-17, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

wounded, and 1 officer and 13 enlisted men missing in action.¹⁹¹ Colonel Oglesby's First Brigade similarly sustained a total of 853 casualties, including 9 officers and 175 enlisted men killed, 26 officers and 577 enlisted men wounded, and 1 officer and 65 enlisted men missing in action.¹⁹² In all, General McClelland's First Division suffered 1,552 casualties, including 14 officers and 297 enlisted men killed, 53 officers and 1,005 enlisted men wounded, and 3 officers and 180 enlisted men missing in action. Indeed, the brigades of McClelland's division sustained higher losses at the Battle of Fort Donelson than those of the other two Union divisions combined.¹⁹³ In the end, however, the costly Union triumph at Forts Henry and Donelson represented a significant strategic victory for Grant's Army of the Tennessee, one that permanently altered the course of the Civil War in the conflict's western theater. Control of Kentucky and the western half of Tennessee passed to Unionist political authorities, and the Tennessee and Cumberland river systems were immediately opened to northern troop transports and commercial shipping.¹⁹⁴

For Sergeant Bolerjack, the thrill of victory was short-lived. On the same day that the 29th Illinois marched triumphantly through the streets of Dover and secured adequate food and shelter, William began to feel seriously ill. "I am very unwell," he noted in his diary on 16 February, a complaint he echoed for the next ten days.¹⁹⁵ Bolerjack did not specifically identify his ailment in his journal, possibly out of politeness, but a diagnosis of persistent cholera or dysentery is suggested by William's inconsistent appetite and recurring bouts of weakness. His condition certainly was not helped by the three consecutive nights Company G spent in the

¹⁹¹ *History of White County*, 393; *OR*, 7:182.

¹⁹² *OR*, 7:167-169, 180, 182; Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 71-72.

¹⁹³ *OR*, 7:167-169, 180; Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 72; Richard L. Kiper, *Major General John Alexander McClelland: Politician in Uniform* (Kent, OH and London: Kent State University Press, 1999), 89.

¹⁹⁴ Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 177; Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 74-77.

¹⁹⁵ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for February 16-26, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

wintery precipitation and sub-freezing temperatures outside Fort Donelson, a period that included one night spent outdoors without overcoats or blankets and two nights without tents.¹⁹⁶ In any case, Sergeant Bolerjack's condition was critical enough to require hospitalization on 19 February and transfer to a Union medical transport vessel four days later. "[A]t 1 o'clock the sick and wounded was aboard the [steamer] John Warner and started down the river [with] We men and women from all parts of [Illinois] Iowa Indiana," William recorded on 23 February. "[I]f womens soft hands I needed in affliction it is now."¹⁹⁷ In the aftermath of Fort Donelson, however, many Union hospitals in the region overflowed with wounded soldiers. Upon reaching southern Illinois, however, Sergeant Bolerjack had difficulty obtaining medical attention. "I feel better this morning we land at Mound City Ills No room at the Hospital," William noted on 24 February. "[G]o down to Cairo no room."¹⁹⁸ The next day Bolerjack applied for and received permission to recover at his own home in Hamilton County, Illinois. "Went aboard the [steamer] bay city," he recorded. "[F]urloughs were given to many I got a furlough."¹⁹⁹

The terms of Sergeant Bolerjack's medical leave of absence entitled him to an eight-week visit home, contingent upon William's prompt return to his regiment after fully recovering his health. Bolerjack departed Cairo with four comrades on 26 February and arrived home two days later, too weak to stand. "Got in Henry Rices wagon got home at 7 o'clock P.M.," he recalled in his diary. "Very poorly not able to walk from gate to house."²⁰⁰ After reaching home, Sergeant Bolerjack required more than six weeks of recuperative care, including nearly three weeks of bed rest. After a fortnight of consistent good health, William departed Hamilton County to rejoin the

¹⁹⁶ Jessee, *Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee* 6; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for February 12-26, 1862, Bolerjack Papers; Woodworth, *Nothing but Victory*, 121-122.

¹⁹⁷ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for February 19-23, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

¹⁹⁸ Brinton, *Personal Memoirs of John S. Brinton*, 126, 134; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 24, 1862, Bolerjack Papers; Woodworth, *Nothing but Victory*, 121-122.

¹⁹⁹ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for February 25, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁰⁰ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for February 26-28, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

29th Illinois on 15 April 1862. He reached his regiment four days later, less than two weeks after its decimation at the Battle of Shiloh. Six weeks after the 29th Illinois suffered ninety-nine casualties at Fort Donelson, the regiment lost another one hundred men killed and wounded at Shiloh, a total that represented one-fourth of its effective fighting strength. “[T]he 29 [was] recovering from a severe battle fought the 6 and 7,” Bolerjack wrote later. “[T]he graves are numerous.”²⁰¹

In describing his regiment’s initial combat experiences in February 1862, Sergeant Bolerjack’s journal entries and letters both substantiate and supplement historians’ understanding of common soldiers’ reactions to the mental and physical stresses of warfare. At Fort Henry, many Union troops, including members of William’s 29th Illinois, witnessed the deadly consequences of combat for the first time. Unlike many enlisted men however, Bolerjack was not particularly anxious to get into the battle, nor was he awed by the federal gunboats’ devastation of the Confederate fort or the mangled bodies of its slain defenders. After moving overland to assault Fort Donelson, Sergeant Bolerjack’s regiment went into combat for the first time on 12 February. Like many untested units, the 29th Illinois was initially overwhelmed by its first chaotic encounter with the enemy, and inadequate supplies, harsh weather conditions, and disease additionally thinned its ranks. Unlike many Union regiments blooded at Fort Donelson, however, the 29th Illinois’s first combat experience was aggravated by repeated incidents of friendly fire, and the regiment’s reputation was temporarily stained by its wild flight from the battlefield on the morning of 15 February. In addition, Sergeant Bolerjack’s own military service was interrupted by the physical ailment that prevented him from serving alongside his fellow veterans at the subsequent Battle of Shiloh, an illness that was unquestionably exacerbated by the

²⁰¹ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 31, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

brutal conditions in which the Union enlisted men fought, ate, and slept on the battlefield at Fort Donelson.

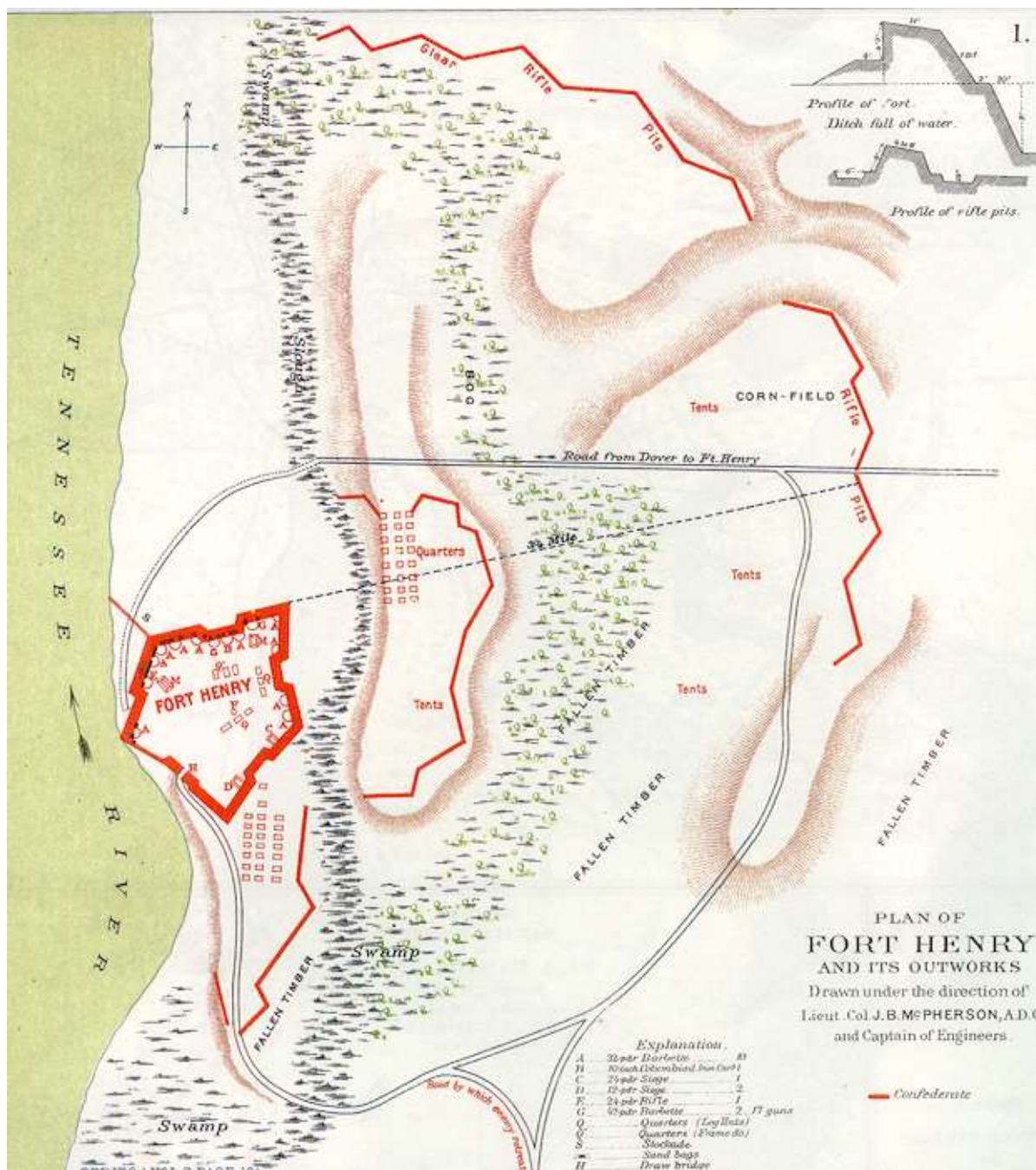
After the Battle of Shiloh, the 29th Illinois performed intermittent duty in western Tennessee and northern Mississippi during the period April-December 1862. Sergeant Bolerjack returned to his regiment in late April, and the 29th Illinois participated in the siege of Corinth, Mississippi, the following month. The regiment returned to Corinth shortly after the Union triumph there on 4 October, and spent the balance of October and November assigned to garrison duty near Jackson, Tennessee.²⁰² On 7 December 1862, however, eight companies of the 29th Illinois, including Sergeant Bolerjack's Company G, were detailed to guard General Grant's forward supply depot at Holly Springs, Mississippi.²⁰³

²⁰² Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 3:1057; *History of White County*, 393; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for November 11 and December 31, 1862, Bolerjack Papers

²⁰³ Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 3:1057; *History of White County*, 393-394; *OR*, 17:477-478; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for 7 December, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

FIGURE 3

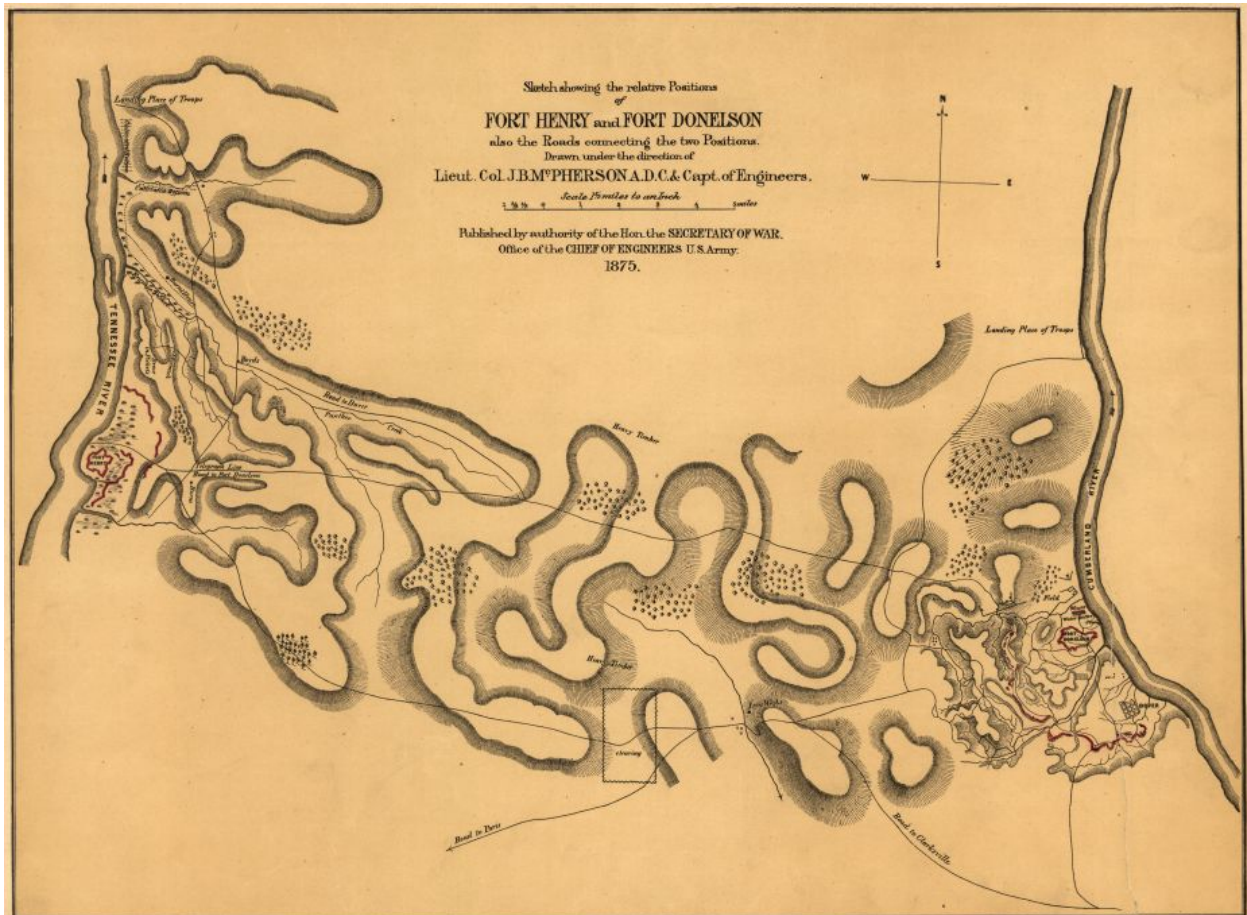
Plan of Fort Henry and its Outworks²⁰⁴



²⁰⁴ Cowles, *ORA*, 62. http://www.civilwaralbum.com/donelson/donelson_map2.htm [accessed February 2, 2009].

FIGURE 4

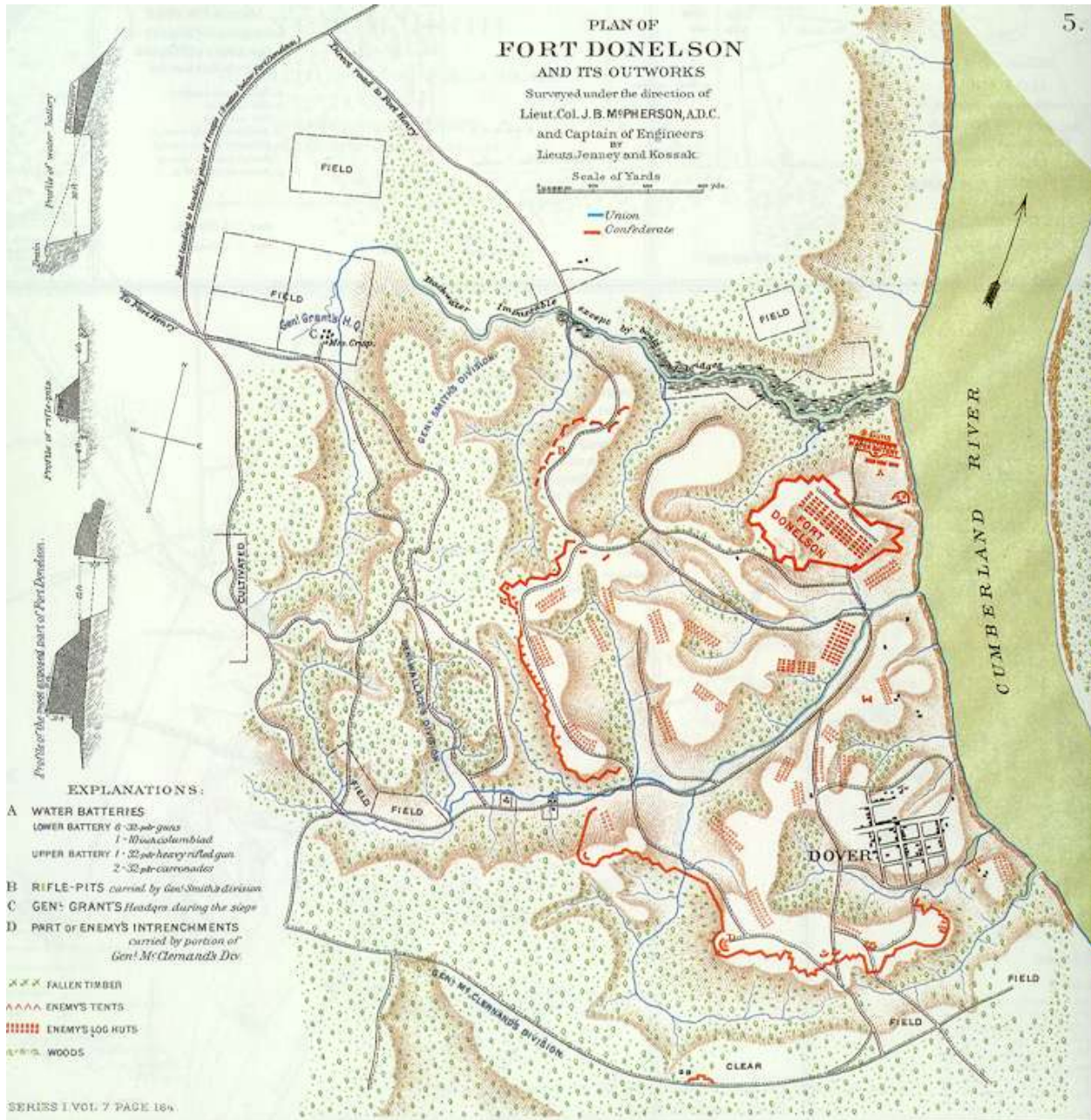
*Sketch Showing the Relative Positions of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson*²⁰⁵



²⁰⁵ Cowles, *ORA*, 62-63. http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/sources/sources_imgzoom.cfm?pagetitle=Plate%20Number%200 [accessed May 6, 2009].

FIGURE 5

Plan of Fort Donelson and its Outworks²⁰⁶



²⁰⁶ Cowles, *ORA*, 62. http://www.civilwaralbum.com/donelson/donelson_map3.htm [accessed February 2, 2009].

CHAPTER 3: SURPRISE, SURRENDER AND PAROLE AT HOLLY SPRINGS

Sergeant Bolerjack was unquestionably influenced by his enlistment and instruction period in the Union Army of the Tennessee, as well as his regiment's formative combat encounters at Forts Henry and Donelson. In addition to these factors, however, William's Civil War expectations and experiences were also shaped by his company's capture and parole during Confederate General Earl Van Dorn's raid on Holly Springs, Mississippi, on 20 December 1861. The incursion resulted in the capture of more than one thousand Union infantry and cavalry troops, including eight companies of the 29th Illinois.²⁰⁷ Paroled under the terms of the Dix-Hill prisoner exchange cartel of 1862, the weary soldiers were eventually transported to the federal parole camp at Benton Barracks, outside St. Louis, Missouri.²⁰⁸ Throughout this tumultuous period, William vividly described his company's resistance, surrender, and parole, as well as the recriminations that followed, in daily journal entries and letters to his friends and relatives in southern Illinois.

Sergeant Bolerjack's account of the Confederate assault on Holly Springs is a particularly significant one. As the 29th Illinois's only known non-commissioned journalist, William provides an unexplored perspective of his regiment's arrival, duties, and capitulation at Holly Springs. Indeed, the roles that soldiers of the 29th Illinois played in resisting Van Dorn's raiders are wholly ignored in every other primary and secondary description of the attack, including those

²⁰⁷ Arthur B. Carter, *The Tarnished Cavalier: Major General Earl Van Dorn, C. S. A.* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 138-143; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 20, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁰⁸ Edwin C. Bearss, *Decision in Mississippi: Mississippi's Important Role in the War Between the States* (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States, 1962), 155-156; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1: 513-516; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 31, 1862-January 7, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

contained in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*.²⁰⁹ Indeed, the regiment's presence at Holly Springs is alluded to in only one period account, a report filed by Union General Stephen A. Hurlbut's regarding the parolees' ill behavior as they passed through Memphis, Tennessee, on 30 December 1862.²¹⁰ Two postwar compilations, Frederick Dyer's *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (1886) and Illinois Adjutant General J. W. Vance's *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois* (1909) briefly mention the 29th Illinois's capture and parole at Holly Springs, but do so without providing contextual details or factual attribution.²¹¹ Historian Arthur B. Carter also notes the 29th Illinois's presence at Holly Springs in his excellent secondary work, *The Tarnished Cavalier: Major General Earl Van Dorn, C.S.A.* (1999), but does not describe the regiment's actions in the engagement and lists General Vance's report as its sole verification.²¹² In addition to uniquely documenting the events of 20 December 1862, Sergeant Bolerjack's journals also compellingly describe the garrison's parole and captivity under the terms of the Dix-Hill prisoner exchange cartel. Indeed, William's journal entries represent one of only two documented narratives that describe the aftermath of Van Dorn's raid from the perspective of a captured Union enlisted man, and depict the parolees' journey to the federal parole camp at Benton Barracks and subsequent incarceration with unusual candor and clarity.

Sergeant Bolerjack returned to the 29th Illinois from a recuperative medical furlough less than two weeks after the regiment's costly engagement at the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862. After numerous changes in regimental and brigade leadership, the 29th Illinois participated in several incursions into western Tennessee and northern Mississippi during the subsequent

²⁰⁹ *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:477-516.

²¹⁰ *OR*, 17, Pt. 2:507

²¹¹ Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 3:1058; Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 4:268, 5:596-597.

²¹² Carter, *The Tarnished Cavalier*, 134; Vance, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 4:268, 5:596-597.

summer.²¹³ Following several stints in the Union lines around Corinth, Mississippi, the regiment was finally assigned to garrison duty near the Union-held town of Jackson, Tennessee. During a period of six weeks spanning from mid-October to late November, the men of the 29th Illinois enjoyed an Indian summer of socializing with loyal Tennesseans and harvesting local fruits and vegetables.²¹⁴ By early November, the soldiers had begun constructing permanent quarters where they hoped to pass the coming winter. “Commenced to build barracks in the Fort,” William noted in his diary. “Went on the east side of town to get timber this side is pretty well fortified.”²¹⁵ The inhabitants of the nearby countryside shared the Illinoisans’ sentiments, perhaps out of appreciation for the relative safety and stability that the Union troops provided. “We are all still here at turkey creek Post,” Bolerjack recorded on 17 November 1862. “The citizens Send up a petition to gen Lawner for Co g to remain all winter.”²¹⁶ Unfortunately for William and his comrades, work on the barracks was nearly complete when the 29th Illinois was reassigned to garrison duty near the Army of the Tennessee’s supply depot at Holly Springs, Mississippi.²¹⁷

Sergeant Bolerjack’s regiment received its marching orders on 1 December 1862, and began the journey from Jackson to Holly Springs the next morning. “Start Early stop within three miles of Holly Spring this is as far as the road is repaired,” William recorded in his journal. “[T]he Supplies for Grants army are wagoned from here.”²¹⁸ After a halting six-day expedition, all ten companies of the 29th Illinois finally reached Holly Springs, the county seat of Marshall County, Mississippi. “2200 votes are polled here,” Bolerjack noted upon his unit’s arrival.

²¹³ Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 3:1057; *History of White County*, 393; Leone Schmidt, *For the Honor of Our Flag: The Life of Gen. Mason Brayman, 1813-1895* (Warrenville, IL: Warrenville Historical Society, 2004), 95; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 31, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²¹⁴ *History of White County*, 393-394; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for October 17-November 17, 1862.

²¹⁵ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for November 3 and November 6, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²¹⁶ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for November 17, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²¹⁷ Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 3:1057; *History of White County*, 393-394; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for November 22, December 1, and December 31, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²¹⁸ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for December 2-4, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

“[S]ome fine Buildings U.S. armory here 2 cannon made by Secesh.”²¹⁹ The Union army’s railroad depot at Holly Springs was indeed impressive, and housed millions of dollars’ worth of food, supplies, and equipment stockpiled for General Grant’s contemplated offensive against Vicksburg, Mississippi. As Grant’s temporary headquarters, the northern Mississippi town also briefly hosted the commanding general’s wife, Mrs. Julia Dent Grant. “I Spend most of the day in examining the armory and Foundry the Rebels were manufacturing arms here,” William recorded during his first week in Holly Springs. “Gen Grants Family are here.”²²⁰ After acquainting themselves with Holly Springs and its environs, Union infantry and cavalry troops were assigned to a trio of outposts guarding the town’s warehouses and railroad depot, as well as its northern, eastern and western approaches. The post’s commander, Colonel Robert C. Murphy of the 8th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, organized the piecemeal defenses. “[O]rdered to move companies E K 2 PM Camp on west side of town Com A, B, C Gard the east side of town,” Bolerjack noted on 13 December 1862. “Charles H. Fox Provost Marshall Col Murphy Commander District of Tallehasse.”²²¹ On 15 December, Sergeant Bolerjack commanded a squad of pickets entrusted with guarding a western approach to Holly Springs. Curiously, the unit was principally charged with examining the credentials of civilians attempting to flee the town, rather than keeping watch for approaching Confederate forces. “Detailed for picket Gard have charge of 9 men on a road leading west,” William wrote in his journal. “[None] are allowed

²¹⁹ Robert G. Hartje, “Van Dorn Conducts a Raid and enters Tennessee,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1959): 126; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for December 2-8, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²²⁰ James C. Bates, *A Texas Cavalry Officer’s Civil War: The Diary and Letters of James C. Bates*, ed. Richard Lowe (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 211; Longacre, *Mounted Raids of the Civil War*, 58; William B. Hamilton, *Holly Springs, Mississippi, to the Year 1878* (Holly Springs, MS: Marshall County Historical Society, 1984), 40; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for December 9-14, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²²¹ Robert G. Hartje, *Van Dorn: The Life and Times of a Confederate General*. (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 260-261; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 13, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

to Pass out unless [they] take the oath and have a pass from Col Murphy.”²²² Three days later, Lieutenant Colonel Loren Kent returned to Jackson with Companies D and K of the 29th Illinois and left the regiment’s eight remaining companies behind to help man Holly Springs’s meager defensive positions.²²³

The Union outpost at Holly Springs presented a dual temptation to Confederate General Earl Van Dorn in December 1862. On one hand, the vast federal supply depots afforded him an opportunity to wreck Grant’s forward base of operations and communications in northern Mississippi, as well a chance to re-provision Van Dorn’s own hungry, ill-supplied troops. On the other hand, a successful raid on Holly Springs would help reestablish Van Dorn’s military and social standing in the area after his errors during the Confederate defeat at the Battle of Corinth two months previous.²²⁴ “Never was a general more disappointed than Van Dorn,” Confederate officer Dabney H. Maury wrote after the setback at Corinth. “But no man in all our army was so little shaken in his courage by the result as he was.”²²⁵ The opportunity for redemption at Holly Springs proved too attractive for Van Dorn to pass up. Shortly after the debacle at Corinth, he presented his analyses to his commanding officer, General John C. Pemberton. “Gen. Van Dorn, commanding the cavalry division, represented to Gen. Pemberton that within a week his position would be stormed by superior forces under Grant,” Van Dorn’s sister Emily recalled. “There were but two courses to pursue, one to fall back on Jackson, or by a bold stroke to capture Holly Springs and destroy [the Union army’s] supplies.”²²⁶ A trio of Van Dorn’s superior officers

²²² Bearss, *Decision in Mississippi*, 100; Hartje, “Van Dorn Conducts a Raid,” 125-126; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 15, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²²³ Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 3:1058; *History of White County*, 394; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for December 18-20, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²²⁴ Bates, *A Texas Cavalry Officer’s Civil War*, 212; Longacre, *Mounted Raids of the Civil War*, 49-51.

²²⁵ Dabney Maury, “Van Dorn, the Hero of the Mississippi,” in *The Annals of the Civil War*, ed. Alexander McClure (1879; repr., New York: De Capo Press, 1994), 464.

²²⁶ Carter, *The Tarnished Cavalier*, 127-128; Emily Van Dorn Miller, ed., *A Soldier’s Honor: with Reminiscences of Major General Earl Van Dorn* (New York: Abbey Press, 1902), 231.

approved the plan, and the disgraced general agreed to execute it if he was allowed to choose the regiments that made up his command. With this permission secured, the Confederate cavalryman began planning his attack on the Holly Springs at approximately the same time Sergeant Bolerjack and eight companies of the 29th Illinois arrived to reinforce the federal garrison there.²²⁷

The Confederate offensive began several days before Van Dorn's cavalry columns descended on the Union supply depot. Three brigades of Texas, Missouri, Tennessee, and Mississippi troopers, numbering approximately three thousand five hundred in all, followed Van Dorn on a circuitous ride northeast from Grenada, Mississippi toward the Union outpost. For four days, the rebel cavalrymen captured, killed, evaded, or outran Union pickets they encountered along the way, but remained unaware of their own final destination.²²⁸ On 19 December, however, Van Dorn hinted for the first time at their raid's true objective. "In order to assuage the stomachic gnawings of the hungry Texans . . . Van Dorn promised that on the morrow we should have rations in abundance," Mississippi veteran J. G. Deupree remembered. "And so the impression was produced that Van Dorn had big game in sight."²²⁹ That evening Van Dorn divided his command into two separate columns, each charged with a specific task for the next day's raid. In one column, the Mississippi and Missouri troops prepared to sweep through Holly Springs from the northeast, while the Tennessee cavalrymen awaited a counterattack from Union troops stationed at Bolivar, Tennessee, to the north. In a second

²²⁷ Hartje, *Van Dorn*, 254-255; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for December 6-8, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²²⁸ Hartje, "Van Dorn Conducts a Raid," 123-126; J. G. Deupree, "The Noxubee Squadron of the First Mississippi Cavalry, C. S. A., 1861-1865," in *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, ed. Dunbar Rowland (Madison, WI: Democrat Printing Company, 1918), 2:60-61; Longacre, *Mounted Raids of the Civil War*, 51-53.

²²⁹ Carter, *The Tarnished Cavalier*, 133; Hamilton, *Holly Springs, Mississippi, to the Year 1878*, 36.

column, Texas units bypassed Holly Springs in order to take up defensive positions east of the town against potential federal reinforcements from the garrison at Oxford, Mississippi.²³⁰

The Confederates struck at daybreak. Van Dorn's Mississippians charged through the streets of Holly Springs at a gallop, screaming and wildly firing their weapons. Indeed, many residents and Union soldiers heard the rebels coming before they could see them. "I had a feeling of security, similar to that I enjoyed before leaving my Illinois home," federal teamster John Potter remembered, "when suddenly, at early dawn, on the 20th of December, 1862, we were startled by the noted rebel yell and the rapid discharge of hundreds of firearms near the depot."²³¹ The 1st Mississippi largely ignored the infantrymen whose camps they passed through, intent on reaching the federal cavalry units quartered at the fairgrounds outside town. The 2nd Missouri followed hot on their comrades' heels, dismounted at the edge of town, and charged into the chaos of the infantry encampments. In the confusion, many Union soldiers caught completely unaware by the attack were forced to surrender for want of proper clothing or loaded firearms.²³² "The whole street was full of mounted rebels, and seemingly all over the town, and not an armed force of ours visible anywhere," Potter recalled. "We could neither fight nor run."²³³

Several infantry units, including Sergeant Bolerjack's Company G, attempted to fight off the Confederate raiders. Unlike many Union soldiers at Holly Springs, William heard the rebels coming in time to sound a brief call to arms. "I arise very early this morning I hear a gun fire with a Savage war hoop and another gun fires which Satisfies us that the Rebels are upon us," Bolerjack wrote on the evening of 20 December. "I immediately arouse all the drummers

²³⁰ Bates, *A Texas Cavalry Officer's Civil War*, 215; Deupree, "The Noxubee Squadron, Mississippi Cavalry," 61.

²³¹ John Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States* (Oskaloosa, IA: Globe Presses, 1897), 35; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 20, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²³² Bearss, *Decision in Mississippi*, 104; Hartje, *Van Dorn*, 261-262; Longacre, *Mounted Raids of the Civil War*, 55.

²³³ Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States*, 35, 36.

commence beating reveille Lieut Gossett orders the long role beat.”²³⁴ Three companies of the 29th Illinois were stationed on the west side of Holly Springs, furthest from the invading rebels, and were thus afforded a few extra minutes to prepare a hasty defense under the direction of Captain Solomon Brill. “Co F, G, H which are here on the west side of town under command of Cap Brill as gen Capt fall on him,” William noted. “Co G Double quicks up the first street dont like the position where we are found by H, F, [I?] we then go to first Hill North of us.”²³⁵ The men of Companies F, G, and H had unwittingly maneuvered even closer to the oncoming Missourians, and Sergeant Bolerjack and his comrades realized that the companies of 29th Illinois stationed across town had likely already been killed or captured. “[T]he Rebs are seen near the public Square thought to be our men,” William recorded. “[B]y this time it is evident that A, B, C was on east-side of town where the Rebels come in [and] are taken.”²³⁶

Nevertheless, most of the Union troops who were logistically equipped to battle Van Dorn’s raiders chose to do so. Soldiers in both armies singled out for praise the determined resistance of the 2nd Illinois Cavalry regiment, for example, who briefly fended off an onrushing rebel cavalry column despite being armed only with sabers. “It may be said that the First Mississippi in the Second Illinois met foemen worthy of their steel,” one Confederate veteran wrote later, “for as great nerve was required to make as to receive that charge.”²³⁷ As the skirmish wore on, however, many of Holly Springs’s defenders recognized the long odds facing them. Several companies of federal cavalry gave way, while others abandoned the fight and desperately cut their way to freedom. Many startled infantrymen, terrified of being ridden down

²³⁴ Bearss, *Decision in Mississippi*, 104; Longacre, *Mounted Raids of the Civil War*, 56; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:508-509, 512; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 20, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²³⁵ *History of White County*, 394; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 20, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²³⁶ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 20, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²³⁷ Carter, *The Tarnished Cavalier*, 140; Deupree, “The Noxubee Squadron, Mississippi Cavalry,” 62; Kenneth P. Williams, *Grant Rises in the West: From Iuka to Vicksburg, 1862-1863* (1956; repr., Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 197; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:512-516.

by the rebel cavalry, offered their surrender to the first Confederate soldier who would accept it. “As soon as [the rebels] caught a glimpse of me, several shots were fired, but, providentially, I was unharmed,” one Illinois veteran recollected. “An officer, seeing I was completely at their mercy, prevented any more firing at me, and I became a prisoner of war.”²³⁸

Companies F, G, and H of the 29th Illinois were still searching for a place to make a stand when Confederate troops surrounded them in the streets of downtown Holly Springs. “By this time th[e]y are coming down the street and the cavalry are retreating and the rebs get in behind us,” William wrote later. “[They] come in hearing distance and order a Surrender.”²³⁹ The Illinoisans were turned over by captains Edward Pendergast of Company F, Solomon Brill of Company G, and Robert Collins of Company H, who grasped the futility of the situation more quickly than their enlisted men. “Capt Collins in very [premature] manuver orders the men not to fire then ask Capt Brill (what do you say about surrendering),” Bolerjack disgustedly recalled. “I did not hear the answer by this time Capt Pendegrass had surrendered greatly against the will of the privates.”²⁴⁰ Upon their capitulation, Union officers and enlisted men were escorted to the Holly Springs railroad depot, where a company of Confederate troops guarded the captives while the rest of Van Dorn’s raiders pillaged and destroyed the federal storehouses. The rebels’ haul included hundreds of infantry and artillery troops, including the post’s two highest-ranking Union officers, Colonel Murphy and Provost Marshall Charles Cox. “The depot [was] their temporary headquarters,” one veteran of the 101st Illinois glumly recalled. “Here we found the

²³⁸ Longacre, *Mounted Raids of the Civil War*, 55; Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States*, 36.

²³⁹ *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:512-513; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 20, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁴⁰ *History of White County*, 394; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 20, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

commander of the post, Col. Murphy; Col. Fox, of our regiment, and four companies of the 101st all prisoners, with some of the 2nd Illinois Cavalry and 26th Illinois Infantry.”²⁴¹

Having temporarily secured Holly Springs against Union resistance, Van Dorn’s cavalymen set to work seizing all of the federal supplies they could carry. The rebel troops worked quickly, inspired by the knowledge that the main body of General Grant’s army was nearby, and that the town could not be held for more than a few hours without additional Confederate reinforcements. “Holly Springs and its immense stores were entirely in our possession; but we knew only too well that we must do our work quickly,” J. G. Deupree remembered, “and we grimly set about the task before us with the determination to do it effectually.”²⁴² The rebels first looted the Union arsenal, from which they carried off thousands of rifles, side arms, and ammunition superior to those issued to by the Confederate government. Next, the raiders ransacked the federal dry goods warehouses, from which they procured much-needed soft goods such as trousers, overcoats, tents, and blankets. Soldiers from several Texas regiments also exchanged their worn-out horses for fully outfitted mounts captured from the 2nd Illinois Cavalry. The rebels finally turned their attention to the shops and wagons of northern sutlers, from whom they seized non-essential luxuries such as hats, boots, cigars, and liquor.²⁴³

After securing all of the goods and provisions that their horses could bear, the wary Confederates raced against time to destroy the immense stockpile of Union supplies that remained. “After appropriating all we could use or arrange to carry away, the work of destruction was pressed with vigor,” one Mississippi veteran recollected. “From about 7

²⁴¹ Ambrose Armitage, *Brother to the Eagle: The Civil War Journal of Sgt. Ambrose Armitage, 8th Wisconsin Infantry*, ed. Alden R. Carter (Bangor, ME: Booklocker.com, Inc., 2006), 210; Carter, *The Tarnished Cavalier*, 141-143; Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States*, 36-37.

²⁴² Hamilton, *Holly Springs, Mississippi, to the Year 1878*, 39; Hartje, *Van Dorn*, 263-264.

²⁴³ Bearss, *Decision in Mississippi*, 107-109; J. H. Greene, *Reminiscences of the War: Bivouacs, Marches, Skirmishes, and Battles* (Medina, OH: Gazette Print, 1886), 39; Longacre, *Mounted Raids of the Civil War*, 57-58.

o'clock A.M. 'till about 4 o'clock P.M., we were engaged in burning this immense collection of army stores. Depots of provisions were first plundered and then burned."²⁴⁴ Just outside the railway station, rebel troops tore up large sections of the track, burned an entire train of boxcars loaded with rations and clothing, and destroyed thousands of bales of cotton bound for northern markets. In Holly Springs itself, the Confederates tore down telegraph lines, set a federal hospital ablaze, ransacked the post office, broke open the town jail, and burned a waist-high pile of coffee, hardtack, and other rations that stretched for nearly a mile.²⁴⁵ "The raid into Holly Springs was capitally done," Illinois veteran Charles Wills admitted three days later. "The Rebels made a No. 1 haul. Immense stores of clothing, commissaries and ordnance fell into their hands, all of which, however, they were obliged to destroy, save what they could carry away on their horses."²⁴⁶

By mid-afternoon, however, General Van Dorn knew that time was running short. Before his troops could escape back to the Confederate lines near Grenada, however, the rebel commander had to dispose of approximately one thousand five hundred Union prisoners. In the end, Van Dorn elected to parole his captives in accordance with the provisions of the Dix-Hill prisoner exchange cartel, negotiated by Union General John A. Dix and Confederate General Daniel H. Hill the preceding summer.²⁴⁷ Under the terms of the agreement, paroled soldiers in both armies were immediately barred from all military duty until an enemy combatant of corresponding rank was similarly captured, paroled, and "exchanged" for the original parolee. Due to the detailed paperwork required by such a system, granting individual paroles to the large body of federal captives at Holly Springs was a lengthy ordeal. "It was impossible to get us away

²⁴⁴ Hamilton, *Holly Springs, Mississippi, to the Year 1878*, 39; Hartje, *Van Dorn*, 263-264.

²⁴⁵ Bates, *A Texas Cavalry Officer's Civil War*, 215; Greene, *Reminiscences of the War*, 38.

²⁴⁶ Wills, *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier*, 137; Woodward, *Nothing but Victory*, 265.

²⁴⁷ Julia Dent Grant, *The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant*, ed. John Y. Simon (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 107; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:512-515; *OR*, Series 2, 4:265-268; Wills, *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier*, 137.

to their lines, so we were paroled,” Prairie State native John Potter recollected. “It took about all day to go through this process, and a little before nightfall they left us where they found us, but in great humiliation at what had occurred.”²⁴⁸ Between 1,400 and 1,500 Union prisoners were officially paroled at Holly Springs on 20 December 1862, including Sergeant Bolerjack and eight companies of the 29th Illinois Infantry.²⁴⁹

Military and civilian observers alike blamed the Colonel Murphy for the capitulation of the Union garrison at Holly Springs, and variously accused him of incompetence, cowardice, and sedition. Murphy, it was alleged, received warning from General Grant of a possible Confederate cavalry raid on his outpost on the evening of 19 December, yet did nothing to warn his subordinates that commanded the town’s isolated defensive positions before retiring for the evening. “Our troops came on in hot haste, exasperated beyond measure and rightly so,” Grant’s wife Julia wrote from his headquarters in Oxford, Mississippi. “Colonel Murphy, commanding officer at Holly Springs, had received General Grant’s telegrams and, quietly putting them in his pocket, went to dine with a citizen of the town, so that our troops were surprised.”²⁵⁰ As a result, hundreds of startled Union officers and enlisted men were seized in their billets and boarding houses, and several were arrested while still in their nightclothes. Murphy also failed to direct any sort of coordinated defense of the Union troop encampments or supply warehouses, but claimed to have been on the verge of sending for reinforcements when the rebel cavalry struck. Despite the commander’s attestations, however, many observers remained unmoved. “These successful raids of the enemy almost make me sick,” one Illinois veteran hyperbolized. “If our

²⁴⁸ *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:477; Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States*, 38, Robert Ould, “The Exchange of Prisoners,” in *Annals of the Civil War*, 32-33; Speer, *Portals to Hell*, 102-103.

²⁴⁹ Carter, *The Tarnished Cavalier*, 143; Hartje, “Van Dorn Conducts a Raid,” 129; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:478, 503, Pt. 2: 507; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for December 20, 31, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁵⁰ Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant*, 108; Morris, Hartwell, and Kuykendall, *History: 31st Illinois*, 52; Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States*, 37; Wills, *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier*, 138

men would only be on the alert so that they could make something of a fight, I wouldn't care a d—n. But to lose a thousand prisoners without the enemy's having one killed, makes me disgusted with the army."²⁵¹ General Grant had the last word on Murphy's conduct during the Confederate raid, however. In Grant's judgment, Holly Springs's former post commander ignored Grant's warning of a likely attack, failed to warn his subordinate officers about the potential threat, inadequately defended the vital Union storehouses, and accepted disadvantageous surrender and parole terms on behalf of the town's garrison. "The capture was a disgraceful one to the officer commanding but not to the troops under him," Grant concluded, and immediately dismissed Murphy from the Union army.²⁵²

Monetary valuations of the federal property confiscated or destroyed at Holly Springs varied widely. Five days after the raid, Grant optimistically assessed his command's losses at less than half a million dollars. "Our loss here will probably amount to \$400,000 of property and 1,500 men taken," he wired Washington on Christmas Day, 1862.²⁵³ Van Dorn placed a somewhat higher price on the supplies his men wrecked or captured. "I surprised the enemy at this place at daylight this morning; burned up all the quartermaster's stores, cotton, &c. – an immense amount," he wired his superiors on the morning of 20 December 1862. "I presume the value of the stores would amount to \$1,500,000."²⁵⁴ Two Union and Confederate eyewitnesses, however, estimated the value of the federal property destroyed at of "[no] less than three or four million dollars" and "between \$2,000,000 and \$4,000,000," respectively.²⁵⁵ Regardless of their precise economic value, the rations and other supplies seized by Van Dorn's raiders were sorely

²⁵¹ Bearss, *Decision in Mississippi*, 104-105; Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant*, 108; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:508-509; Williams, *Grant Rises in the West: From Iuka to Vicksburg*, 197; Wills, *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier*, 138.

²⁵² Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:432; John M. Williams, "The Eagle Regiment," *8th Wis. Inf^{ty} Vols.* (Belleville, WI: "Recorder" Print, 1890), 15; Morris, Hartwell, and Kuykendall, *History: 31st Illinois*, 52; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1: 516.

²⁵³ Carter, *The Tarnished Cavalier*, 145; Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:232-233; Hartje, *Van Dorn*, 264; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:478.

²⁵⁴ Hartje, "Van Dorn Conducts a Raid," 129; Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 331; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:503.

²⁵⁵ Hamilton, *Holly Springs, Mississippi, to the Year 1878*, 40-41; Wills, *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier*, 137-139

missed by the Union troops for whom they were intended. Without the captured foodstuffs, the main body of Grant's army exhausted its principal reserves in less than a week. "Altogether there has been a d---l of a time," Illinoisan Charles Wills wrote. "When Van Dorn had finished his little bonfire at Holly Springs, this army was left with about five day's rations, which we have to make do 15 at least."²⁵⁶

While detached onlookers assigned blame for the capitulation at Holly Springs or estimated the raid's economic and strategic toll, Sergeant Bolerjack and the rest of the town's paroled garrison waited anxiously to learn their fate. In the wake of the Confederates' departure, responsibility for registering, transporting, and detaining federal parolees fell to the Union general staff. "I spent the day in visiting the wounded in Hospital went out on the field where the Second Cavalry fought found two Secesh that was not buried," William wrote two days after Company G's surrender. "[O]ur officers are waiting orders from gen Grant."²⁵⁷ On 23 December, Grant commissioned Special Field Orders No. 33, decrying the Holly Springs garrison's surrender, deploring their acceptance of paroles, and informing the captives of their future assignment to federal parole camps. "It is with pain and mortification that the general commanding reflects on the disgraceful surrender of this place, with all the valuable stores it contained . . . without any resistance except by a few men," the commanding general opined. "The conduct of the officers and men in accepting paroles under the circumstances is highly reprehensible and, to say the least, thoughtless."²⁵⁸ Grant unrealistically argued that Colonel Murphy and his command ought to have recognized that Van Dorn's raiders could not possibly transport them, refused parole, and thus been set free upon the Confederates' departure. "The

²⁵⁶ Morris, Hartwell, and Kuykendall, *History: 31st Illinois*, 52; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 335; Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States*, 40; Wills, *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier*, 139.

²⁵⁷ *History of White County*, 394; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:515-516; Sanders, *While in the Hands of the Enemy*, 116; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 22, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁵⁸ Grant, *Memoirs*, 1:435; Hartje, "Van Dorn Conducts a Raid, 129; *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:515.

general commanding is satisfied that a majority of the troops who accepted a parole did so thoughtlessly and from want of knowledge of the cartel referred to,” Grant maintained, “and that in the future they will not be caught in the same way.”²⁵⁹

On Christmas Day, the officers and enlisted men of the 29th Illinois finally received comprehensive instructions for their departure. The surrendered troops were attached to an extended Union wagon train detailed to retrieve much-needed rations from the federal warehouses at Memphis, Tennessee. “This day is spent in suspense waiting,” Sergeant Bolerjack noted in his diary. “Orders this evening to march to Memphis Tenn with two days ration warm cloudy Christmas.”²⁶⁰ Early the next morning, the federal caravan converged on the Pigeon Roost Road near Holly Springs, where it was joined by the men of the 29th Illinois and their fellow parolees. “We get up at 2 O.C. Get Breakfast and go to the yellow church Roll is called,” William recorded. “[W]e start for Memphis Tenn with a train of wagons Rainy Muddy,” he wrote. “[F]ined we are wrong road [and] turn south get on the Pigeon Roost Road 7 miles we camp.”²⁶¹ Over the course of four days, the Union convoy traveled more than forty miles over coarse, damp roads. The column’s stragglers finally reached Memphis early on 30 December. “[W]e are in the rear Start at 12 O.C. fine country good dwellings fine farms,” Bolerjack wrote on the morning of 29 December. “[W]e get to Memphis at 3 O.C. A.M. Camp in the fort there is strong earth works here.”²⁶² The Union military authorities that received the parolees at Memphis, however, were unimpressed with the manner and punctuality of the surrendered troops’ arrival. “I regret to report that the paroled prisoners arrived here in the wildest disorder,”

²⁵⁹ *OR*, 17, Pt. 1:516; Woodward, *Nothing but Victory*, 264-265.

²⁶⁰ *OR*, 17, Pt. 2:485; Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States*, 41; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 25, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁶¹ *OR*, 17, Pt. 2:485; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 26, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁶² *OR*, 17, Pt. 2:507; Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States*, 41; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for December 29-30, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

the post's commander, General Stephen A. Hurlbut, wrote to his superiors in Washington, D. C. "Colonel Ferrell of the Twenty-Ninth Illinois . . . exercised no authority over his officers and men," Hurlbut complained. "Officers and men came in squads and parties and spread all over the city. I was compelled to order the provost-guard to arrest all officers and men and force them to the fort."²⁶³ After several days' detention, Sergeant Bolerjack reflected on his previous year of service in the Union army. "This has been a year of danger," William wrote in his journal on New Year's Eve, 1862. "I have saw many of my fellow Soldiers dead on the battle field I have heard the balls whistle," Bolerjack elaborated. "I have been weary without rest I have been wet without means of drying Thirsty without water Cold without fire," he concluded. "But not withstanding all this I have had some peaceful hours."²⁶⁴

The terms of the Dix-Hill exchange cartel stipulated that captive troops were "to be transported to the points mutually agreed upon at the expense of the capturing party," whereupon the prisoners would "be exchanged or paroled in ten days from the time of their capture, if it be practicable."²⁶⁵ The unusual circumstances of the Holly Springs garrison's surrender, however, compelled Union army officials to question the legitimacy of their paroles. Concerned that war-weary troops might use Colonel Murphy's capitulation as an excuse to prematurely terminate their periods of service, federal authorities in Memphis required each prisoner to furnish proof of his individual capture, surrender, and parole at the hands of Van Dorn's raiders.²⁶⁶ "9.O.C. AM we are ordered to the uper landing here we go aboard the [steamer] City Belle," Sergeant Bolerjack recorded in his diary on New Year's Day, 1863. "Each parole is examined and every

²⁶³ *OR*, 17, Pt. 2:507.

²⁶⁴ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 31, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁶⁵ *OR*, Series 2, 4:266-267; Ould, in *Annals of the Civil War*, 32-33; William Best Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1930), 32-33.

²⁶⁶ Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States*, 43; Sanders, *While in the Hands of the Enemy*, 133-134, 138; Speer, *Portals to Hell*, 104; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for December 31, 1862, Bolerjack Papers.

one that has not got a separate parole witnessed was sent back to the Service 3 O.C. PM.”²⁶⁷ After verifying the terms of their individual paroles, Van Dorn’s former captives immediately departed for the Union parole camp located outside St. Louis, Missouri. “On the 1st of January,” Illinois prisoner John Potter recalled, “all the men who could satisfy the authorities that they were actually paroled, were ordered to Benton Barracks, St. Louis.”²⁶⁸

The Union captives’ journey via riverboat from Memphis to St. Louis took more than a week. After departing on the afternoon of 1 January 1863, The *City Belle* had been under way for less than five hours when she struck a submerged obstacle on the Mississippi riverbed. “[A]bout 7 O.C. P.M. She runs aground Remains 2 hours find a hole in the Hull Ties up and report,” Sergeant Bolerjack recorded. “[D]ay light finds us ten miles from Memphis By water the River is very crooked here.”²⁶⁹ After the grounding incident, however, the federal steamer made consistent progress. On the afternoon of 3 January, the *City Belle* came across a disabled troop transport filled with paroled Illinoisans from the Holly Springs garrison similarly bound for Benton Barracks. “1.O.C. Comes in sight of Steamer aground which proves to be the Steamer Belle Creole freighted with the 101 Regt,” William wrote in his journal. “[T]hey ask for relief we are put ashore our Boat then goes to her relief then Both boats endeavor to get her off in vain,” he noted. “[T]he City Belle Puts the passengers of the City Carole ashore then takes her own crew [and] Runs all night.”²⁷⁰ Following several more days of halting progress, the *City Belle* docked at Cairo, Illinois, the midway point in her journey from Memphis to St. Louis. The parolees of the 29th Illinois were overjoyed to return to their native Egypt, and many sought

²⁶⁷ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for January 1, 1863, Bolerjack papers.

²⁶⁸ Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States*, 43; Roger Pickenpaugh, *Camp Chase and the Evolution of Union Prison Policy* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 48.

²⁶⁹ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for January 1, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁷⁰ Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, 41-43; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for January 3, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

permission from the Union authorities to visit nearby loved ones. “[T]he boys rush for Shore and many get passes from Gen Tuttle [commander] of the Post and go off on the 4 OC Train,” Sergeant Bolerjack wrote on 5 January.²⁷¹ Other federal troops, however, once again displayed the base motives and disorderly behavior that marked their previous visit to Memphis. Shortly after going ashore, a crowd of drunken parolees looted parts of downtown Cairo. “Some Scatter over town drink and break open a Grocery . . . Col Williams commands Paroled Prisoners he sent to Gen Tuttle for Gards,” William recalled. “The Boat is shoved out and anchored The Soldiers come aboard in skiffs . . . many Broke through the gard they have quite a time.”²⁷² After collecting the wayward parolees, the *City Belle* once again ran all night to make up for lost time. After one final day on the Mississippi, Sergeant Bolerjack and his fellow parolees arrived at St. Louis on the morning of 7 January. “Day finds us in sight of [Carondelet] land at 9. O.,” William noted in his journal. “[G]o ashore start for Benton Barracks.”²⁷³

The federal parole camp at Benton Barracks was located near the fairgrounds outside St. Louis, several miles from the military docks along the Mississippi River. Indeed, Union troops disembarking at St. Louis were often dismayed to learn that a long march through the city’s downtown streets awaited them after coming ashore. “The regiment embarked upon the steamer David Tatum, for St. Louis, and towards night-fall landed at the levee,” one Illinois veteran recollected. “A march of four or five miles after dark brought the tired column within the limits of ‘Camp Benton,’ or ‘Benton Barracks.’”²⁷⁴ St. Louis was the first large city many rural Illinoisans had ever seen, however, and less jaded troops enjoyed the metropolitan sights and

²⁷¹ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for January 5, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ *History of White County*, 394; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for January 7, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁷⁴ Charles M. Clark, *Yates Phalanx: The History of the Thirty-Ninth Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Veteran Infantry in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (Chicago: s.n., 1889), 5; Stillwell, *Story of a Common Soldier*, 26.

sounds on their way to the encampment.²⁷⁵ “I had never been to St. Louis before, nor seen Barracks on such an extensive scale, and was much impressed by what I saw,” one Prairie State veteran admitted. “Some of our boys took special delight in reading the signs out loud as we passed through the business part of the city.”²⁷⁶ Benton Barracks was an immense compound, one that served as a camp of instruction and rendezvous point prior to its incarnation as the United States Army’s westernmost parolee detention facility. The post’s namesake wooden barracks formed an immense, enclosed square, one whose center held a one hundred acre parade ground intended to inspire martial discipline among its federal inmates.²⁷⁷ Upon their arrival at the camp, parolees were anxious to obtain the basic necessities required for an extended stay. As his squad’s ranking member, Sergeant Bolerjack helped secure food, fuel, and shelter for his fellow enlisted men. “We find good quarters water in the yard wood and coal is Brought,” William recorded on Company G’s first day at Benton Barracks. “I make out a requisition for clothing.”²⁷⁸ Bolerjack’s penultimate duty upon arriving at the parole camp was to see that soldiers of the 29th Illinois, who had not been paid since 31 October 1862, were fully compensated for their last two months of service. “Muster for pay,” he recorded on 8 January. “[T]ake names of all parole prisoners all that are absent mark them so drew five days rations.”²⁷⁹

With money in their pockets, food in their stomachs, and their native Egypt easily accessible from St. Louis via steamer, the southern Illinoisans detained at Benton Barracks began to drift away shortly after payday. Sergeant Bolerjack and his fellow parolees first attempted to secure furloughs that would officially allow them to return home until they were exchanged and

²⁷⁵ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for January 7, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁷⁶ Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, 43; Stillwell, *Story of a Common Soldier*, 26.

²⁷⁷ Clark, *Yates Phalanx*, 5-6; Elsa Vaught, ed., “Diary of an Unknown Soldier” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1959): 53; Stillwell, *Story of a Common Soldier*, 26; *The Story of the Fifty-Fifth Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry* (Clinton, MA: W. J. Coulter, 1887), 38.

²⁷⁸ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for January 7, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁷⁹ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entry for January 8, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

sent back to the Union army, but their requests were categorically denied. Undeterred by this refusal, Illinois troops departed the loosely guarded federal parole camp by the hundreds. “We learned, somehow, if we took French furlough to our homes we would not be regarded as deserters, so nearly all left for their homes,” one Prairie State veteran acknowledged. “We were careful to be at the barracks when it was time to muster for pay, which was every two months. The days of our pleasant captivity continued about six months.”²⁸⁰ Sergeant Bolerjack took his own unauthorized “French leave” from Benton Barracks only a few short weeks after arriving at the loosely guarded compound. After recovering from a brief bout with bilious fever, William set out for a four-week furlough on Sunday morning, 25 January 1863. “Sunday Get up at one o clock to start for Home in company with A Davis and E. L. Magee Start at day light,” he recorded.²⁸¹ Sergeant Bolerjack’s route was complicated, and included stages covered by streetcar, river ferry, express train, wagon, stagecoach, and on foot. “[G]et a pas go to [the] half way house get aboard the [street] cars ride to the middle ferry go acros for 5 cts,” he wrote in his diary. “[F]ind the expres train start in 35 minutes after 4 in the evening get a ticket for Oden pay \$2.30 for Said Ticket get to oden a little after dark.”²⁸² Sergeant Bolerjack finally arrived in Hamilton County on 28 January 1863. “I get my napsack hawled by a pedler the ground is firm,” he gratefully recorded. “[G]et Home 4 o clock P.M. find all well.”²⁸³ For the first time in more than ten months of arduous and eventful service in the Union Army of the Tennessee, William was finally home.

²⁸⁰ Pickenpough, *Camp Chase and the Evolution of Union Prison Policy*, 47, 58-59; Potter, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, 45; William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for January 10-21, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

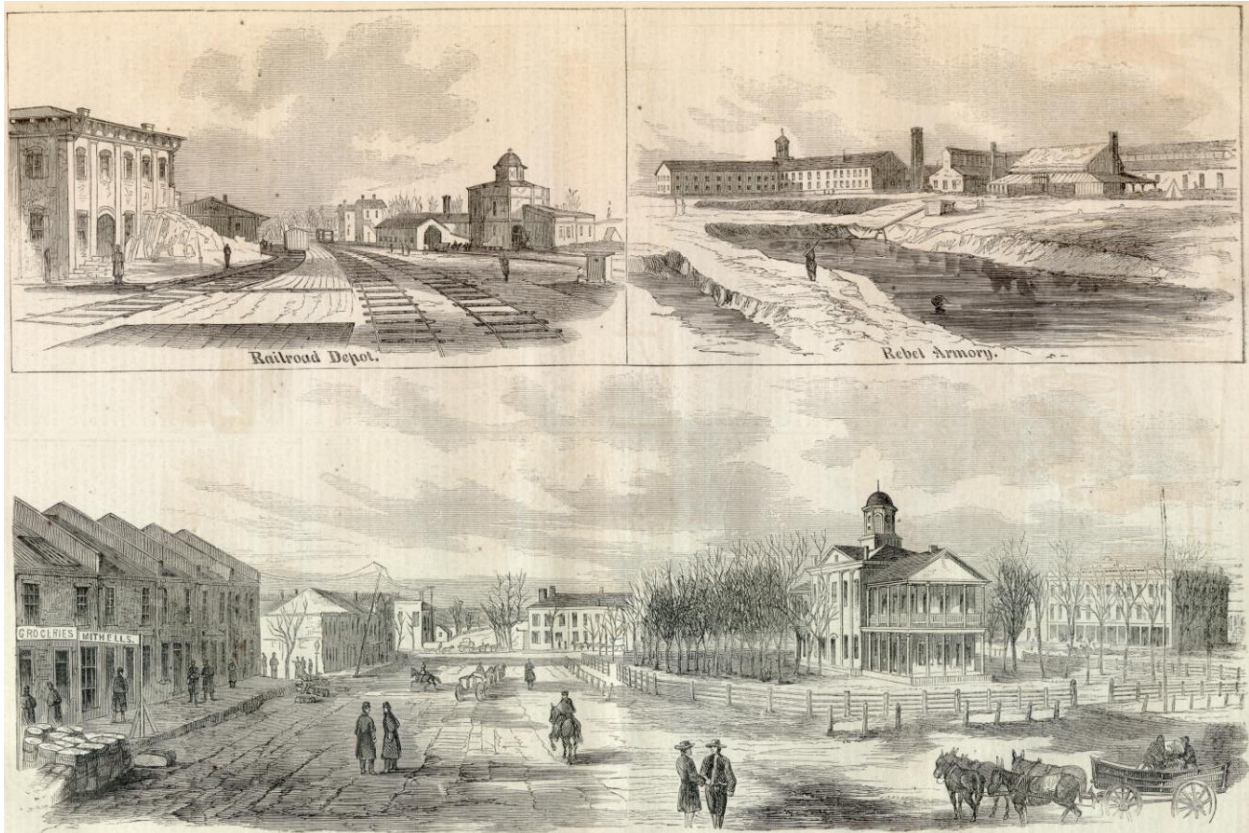
²⁸¹ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for January 22-25, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁸² William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for January 25-27, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

²⁸³ William S. Bolerjack, Journal entries for January 28 and December 31, 1863, Bolerjack Papers.

FIGURE 6

*Holly Springs, Mississippi*²⁸⁴



²⁸⁴ "Holly Springs, Mississippi," *Harper's Weekly* 7, no. 315 (January 10, 1863), 29.
<http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/civil-war/1863/battle-of-fredericksburg.htm> [accessed April 4, 2010].

FIGURE 7

*Benton barracks, St. Louis, Mo.*²⁸⁵



²⁸⁵ Hadley, Charles W. *Benton barracks, St. Louis, Mo.* s.n.: n.p., [1862?]. <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/diaries> [accessed April 4, 2010].

CONCLUSION

Sergeant William S. Bolerjack's first eighteen months in the Union Army of the Tennessee inspired hundreds of daily journal entries and dozens of letters to his friends and family members in southern Illinois. In describing his own enlistment circumstances, camp life, and combat actions, William's observations both substantiate and supplement historians' previous assertions regarding the expectations and experiences of common soldiers in the American Civil War. In recounting the actions of the 29th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, including Company G's capture and parole at Holly Springs, as well as its members' subsequent detention and exchange at Benton Barracks, however, the Bolerjack manuscripts also convey a unique perspective into the everyday lives and extraordinary encounters of enlisted troops in the Union Army of the Tennessee during the period 1861-1862.

Sergeant Bolerjack's experiences in the conflict's western theater were in some respects typical for the time and place. William's writings illuminate several motivations that inspired federal volunteers during the earliest months of the conflict, including nationalistic patriotism, religious fervor, and peer pressure. Like many citizens of the Old Northwest, Bolerjack enlisted in the Union army shortly after the Battle of Bull Run, received a brief military education at a Union rendezvous camp, and was eventually transferred to a more permanent outpost to perform garrison duties and undergo further instruction. The Bolerjack narratives also poignantly depict the pleasures and privations that accompanied camp life in the Union army; the former included benefits such as accessible religious services and frequent visits from nearby friends and

relatives, while the latter comprised evils such as overcrowding, malnutrition, and disease. Sergeant Bolerjack's journals also confirm previous interpretations of the ways in which enlisted men responded to the physical and psychological demands of warfare, particularly during their initial combat encounters. Like many soldiers in the Army of the Tennessee, Bolerjack performed his first military duties on scouting expeditions up and down the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, and tasted combat for the first time at the Battles of Forts Henry and Donelson. William endured the sharp fighting, brutal weather conditions and poor supply system that plagued members of the Union First Brigade during the latter engagement, and shared in his fellow soldiers' elation and reflection when the Confederate surrender was announced. Like many veteran regiments of the Twin Rivers campaign, Sergeant Bolerjack's 29th Illinois was also posted throughout western Tennessee and northern Mississippi prior to the federal garrison's capitulation and parole during Van Dorn's raid on Holly Springs.

Beyond these affirmations, however, Sergeant Bolerjack's manuscripts also provide several insights into previously overlooked aspects of service in the Civil War. Bolerjack's journals and collected letters call attention to the singular motivations and misgivings of Union volunteers from allegedly disloyal border counties in southern Illinois. The Bolerjack journals describe the patriotism and devotion to the federal government that inspired William's own decision to volunteer for military service, a decision taken despite strong regional social and political prejudices, as well as the Bolerjack family's pacifistic religious heritage and William's own professed reservations regarding abolition. Composed by a longtime resident of Little Egypt, Bolerjack's journal entries and combat narratives additionally demonstrate the author's familiarity with the topography of southern Illinois and eastern Missouri, as well as the waterways of western Kentucky and Tennessee. The result is an accurate and informed

description of Union forces' operations in the war's western theater during the years 1861-1862, including the Army of the Tennessee's riverine campaign against Forts Henry and Donelson. Sergeant Bolerjack's manuscripts also represent the only documented firsthand narratives authored by an enlisted man in the 29th Illinois, and therefore considerably enhance scholars' understanding of the regiment's actions and activities during the conflict. William's journals recount his unit's induction into the Illinois state militia and the Army of the Tennessee in meticulous detail, and additionally provide the only known participant accounts of the 29th Illinois's role in the seizure and occupation of Fort Henry and the regiment's first encounter with enemy troops at Battle of Fort Donelson.

Perhaps most significantly, Sergeant Bolerjack's diary entries furnish a rare primary account of the Confederate attack on Holly Springs, Mississippi, on 20 December 1862. William's observations and recollections are among only a handful of participants' descriptions of Van Dorn's incursion, and Bolerjack's narrative represents one of only two known firsthand descriptions of the engagement penned by a captured Union enlisted man. After returning to his regiment, Bolerjack was one of only a few hundred federal infantrymen who actively resisted Van Dorn's attack on Holly Springs, where William suffered the unusual ignominy of being surrendered against his will by a commanding officer. Sergeant Bolerjack's journals contain one of only two known contemporary references to the 29th Illinois's presence at Holly Springs during Van Dorn's raid, and provide the only documented description of the regiment's actions in the engagement. In addition to recounting the hasty capitulation of the startled Union garrison, however, Bolerjack's manuscripts also offer a rare insight into substance and sequence of the federal infantry's abortive resistance efforts. William's Company G was among the few Union infantry units stationed on the west side of Holly Springs that attempted to defend the town and

its supply depot against the Confederate raiders. Despite being outnumbered, surrounded, and surrendered, in his diary entries William echoes his fellow soldiers' displeasure with their commanding officers' swift capitulation.

In addition to describing his company's engagement and capture at Holly Springs, Sergeant Bolerjack's journals also provide an unusually candid glimpse into the workings of the Dix-Hill prisoner exchange cartel at the apex of its effectiveness and efficiency. Indeed, William's depiction of the Holly Springs garrison's parole and eventual exchange represent one of only two known accounts written by captured Union troops, and the only one penned by a member of the 29th Illinois. When the Union commanders at Holly Springs surrendered to Van Dorn's raiders, they accepted individual paroles under the terms set forth by the Dix-Hill agreement, which guaranteed that prisoners would be immediately exempted from military service and transported by their captors to designated holding facilities to safely await exchange. It is in light of these provisions, therefore, that William describes the uncertainty that gripped the Union prisoners when the Confederates rode away from Holly Springs on the evening of 20 December, leaving their paroled charges behind. The Bolerjack manuscripts entries also contain a fascinating narrative of the surrendered garrison's roundabout journey to a federal detention facility near St. Louis, and provide one of only two documented firsthand accounts of that expedition. William's account finally concludes with the captives' arrival at the Union parole camp at Benton Barracks, and depicts the alacrity and efficiency with which he and his fellow detainees promptly escaped to visit their homes, friends, and relatives in nearby southern Illinois.

In the end, Sergeant William S. Bolerjack's wartime journals and collected letters both confirm and complement historians' understanding of the experiences of ordinary enlisted men in the Civil War. Bolerjack's narratives generally corroborate scholars' traditional interpretations

regarding Union volunteers' enlistment motivations, the challenges of life in a military camp, and troops' responses to the mental and physical stresses of combat. In addition to these validations, however, William's accounts also enhance historians' appreciation of several specific experiences and events that shaped the lives of common soldiers in the Army of the Tennessee during the first two years of the conflict. William's narratives not only illuminate the enlistment inspirations of southern Illinoisans, they also provide a chronologically and geographically accurate description of Union movements in the western theater during the first year of the conflict. Bolerjack's narratives are among very few primary accounts of the 29th Illinois's wartime actions and encounters, and also contain an exceptionally rare firsthand description of Van Dorn's raid on Holly Springs. William's manuscripts additionally provide a uniquely personal examination of the federal parole system in 1862, as well as the conditions and circumstances in which Union parolees were detained at Benton Barracks. In these and many other respects, therefore, Sergeant William S. Bolerjack's journals and collected letters lend new perspectives and suggest new interpretations regarding the expectations and experiences of Illinois soldiers in the Union Army of the Tennessee during the years 1861-1862.

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Scope and Method of Study: This thesis examines Sgt. William S. Bolerjack's Civil War expectation and experiences in the 29th Illinois Volunteer Infantry regiment during the period 1861-1862. William's diary entries and collected letters represent the only documented firsthand accounts of the 29th Illinois's wartime activities and actions penned by a common soldier in that regiment. In this study, therefore, the Bolerjack manuscripts have been supplemented and substantiated by other Illinois soldiers' journals and letters collections, postwar memoirs, and unit histories, as well as by United States and Confederate States government documents and related secondary texts, journals articles, theses, and dissertations.

Findings and Conclusions: Sergeant Bolerjack's wartime journals and collected letters both confirm and complement historians' understanding of the experiences of ordinary enlisted men in the Civil War. William's narratives not only illuminate the enlistment inspirations of southern Illinoisans, they also provide a chronologically and geographically accurate description of Union movements in the western theater during the first year of the conflict. The Bolerjack manuscripts are among very few primary accounts of the 29th Illinois's wartime actions and encounters, and provide a rare firsthand description of Van Dorn's raid on Holly Springs from a captured federal's perspective. William's manuscripts also provide a uniquely personal examination of the Dix-Hill prisoner exchange system of 1862, as well as the conditions and circumstances in which Union parolees were detained at Benton Barracks. In these and many other respects, Sergeant William S. Bolerjack's diaries and letters collection lend new perspectives and suggest new interpretations regarding the expectations and experiences of Illinois soldiers in the Union Army of the Tennessee during the years 1861-1862.

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