

GIVEN FOR WHAT WE GAVE: DISABLED SOLDIERS IN THE AMERICAN MILITARY

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in History  
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## **ABSTRACT**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in History to the office of Graduate and Extended Studies of East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania

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Military History has often focused on the battles and successes of able-bodied soldiers throughout all of warfare. The stories that fall to the wayside are those of the disabled soldiers who are a byproduct of those battles and wars. The Invalid Corps, a relatively unknown institution, arose as a result of all the wounded and disabled of combat. While its creation stemmed from the armies of Europe, it was the Union Army of the American Civil War that took this idea and maximized its potential. By analyzing twelve primary sources, as well as 27 secondary sources the author validates his statement that the Union Army truly took the concept of the Invalid Corps to its full potential.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	i
INTRODUCTION.....	ii
Chapter	
I.    TRACING THE ROOTS.....	1
II.   AN AMERICAN INVALID CORPS.....	9
III.  OUTBREAK OF THE CIVIL WAR.....	28
IV.  RECREATING THE INVALID CORPS.....	35
REFERENCES.....	62

# LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1. The Invalid Corps Song and Chorus.....	46
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# **GIVEN FOR WHAT WE GAVE: DISABLED SOLDIERS IN**

## **THE AMERICAN MILITARY**

The retired Reverend Michael Mann stated in *The Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* that “little attention has been given to the history of the Corps of the Invalids.”<sup>1</sup> Although he was referencing the British armed forces, the statement that he made back in 1988 still holds true today. What makes his statement even more poignant is the fact that Rev. Mann only found two articles that he considered “authoritative accounts” of the British Corps of the Invalids.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately for scholars, this neglect of a segment of British military history carried over to its American cousin as well.

When looking at American military historiography, there are only a few mentions of the Invalid Corps in the United States when compared to its contemporaries. Historians like Dr. Paul Cimbala, Dr. William R. Feeney, and Dr. Michael Gray have made headway into the field of disabled military studies, however, the primary coverage of the Invalid

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<sup>1</sup> Mann, M. (1988). THE CORPS OF INVALIDS. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 66 (265), 5-19. Retrieved August 12, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/44229751](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44229751)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Corps remains relegated to the American Civil War. What is generally neglected is the entire history of a military unit that was created as part of the Colonial Military, that served throughout the American Revolution, and ultimately saw more recognition in American society after its contributions to the American Civil War.

The term “invalid” has a negative connotation to it. It often is associated with being wrong or imperfect in some way since imperfections also come to mind when mentioning this word. In the late eighteenth century, and throughout most of the nineteenth, the term invalid referred to physical imperfection. To lose a limb or be crippled by a disease would make someone an invalid, often changing that person in the eyes of the rest of society. Although some would look at the invalid and see weakness, others would see capable people, ready to adapt and move on to overcome whatever afflictions they had. The people that society labeled “invalid” were also ones who helped war efforts on numerous occasions throughout time. But all too often they are overlooked for their services and are left in the shadows of history. The use of “invalids” was a practice that the United States employed in two of its greatest conflicts, The American Revolution and the Civil War. In both wars a Corps of the Invalids was created and although they were separated by decades both iterations mirrored each other in form and function, however each also yielded vastly different results.

In order to be an invalid, one had to have a visible physical ailment. Whether it was scoliosis, a birth defect, or a missing limb, there were a variety of ways to fall into this category. Those who had lost a limb tended to be labeled an invalid. A place where the loss of limbs is often prevalent is throughout times of war. As often was the case, if a bullet wound was deemed too risky to extract, the only other alternative was amputation. Once a soldier had an amputated limb, that soldier was considered unfit for service and was placed into the “invalid” category.

Many Revolutionary and Civil War soldiers would suffer this fate, due to the medical practices of the day, but even though they may have suffered, even lost a limb, they still wanted to contribute to the fight. Unfortunately for them, spirit alone was not seen as enough for a soldier to carry out his duty, so once the amputation had taken place the soldier would have no other alternative but to be discharged. However, the creation of the Invalid Corps created a purpose for disabled soldiers in the military.<sup>3</sup>

The Invalid Corps was a standard infantry unit. It had the same command structure and layout as any other infantry unit in action. The only difference was that the Invalid Corps was comprised of men who were considered to be less effective in combat than completely healthy troops, often due to a missing limb, impairment of vision, or other handicaps. Its intended purpose was not to serve on the front lines. Rather, it would be a support unit serving as rear echelon troops. Although they were part of the army, rear echelon soldiers were never meant to actively combat enemy soldiers, instead their primary function was guard duty. Eventually the responsibilities grew to other non-combat positions such as orderlies and clerks. Some would question as to why these men should serve in the military, but over the years they proved their worth on and off the battlefield. However, bringing those actions to the forefront of history does come with a degree of difficulty.

Before an accurate assessment can be made regarding the usefulness of the Invalid Corps in the United States, it is important to look at its roots which, as with much of America's military structure, stemmed from Europe. Several European nations such as Great Britain, France, and

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<sup>3</sup> O. Diefendorf and T. O. O'Brien. *General Orders of the War Department, Embracing the Years 1861, 1862 & 1863 Adapted Specially for the Use of the Army and Navy of the United States. Chronologically Arranged in Two Volumes with a Full Alphabetical Index.* Volume 2 (Vol. 2). (Little, Brown & Co., Boston; J.B. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia; Hudson Taylor, Washington; J.S. Waters, Baltimore; Robt. Clark & Co., Cincinnati; J.P. Morton & Co., Louisville; Keith & Woods, St. Louis; S.C. Griggs & Co., Chicago; H.H. Bankcroft & Co., San Francisco, 1864), 543.



Prussia utilized the Invalid Corps.<sup>4</sup> However, the degree to which the “invalid” soldiers were used varied depending on the nation. When the Continental Army first used the Invalid Corps they based their system on the Corps used by the British and Prussian Armies. While the Prussian Invalid Corps seemed to be more of a byproduct of the state, rather than a unit created out of necessity, the British utilized their Invalid Corps primarily as a reserve force for garrison duty.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it was the European Invalid Corps model which America looked to in order to alleviate its dire need for manpower.

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Duffy, *The Army of Frederick the Great* (New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1974), 62.

<sup>5</sup> A.S. White, “GARRISON, RESERVE AND VETERAN BATTALIONS AND COMPANIES.” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, vol. 38, no. 156, 1960, 156.

## CHAPTER I: TRACING THE ROOTS

War in Europe throughout the Eighteenth Century was a gentleman's war. Firing lines were used on a set field of battle, which was an area that was agreed upon where the battle would be held, similar to a field of play in modern sports. Command headquarters and officers were not to be shot at. In many nations the military was an honored and respected institution. For some countries the military became an all-consuming aspect of the community. Such was the case in Eighteenth-Century Prussia. Daily life in Prussia was one of hardship for those of the middle and lower class. Military service was an option for a profitable career. This made for a steady flow of recruits to fill the ranks of the military. With so many men attempting to join the military and so much funding to fuel the war machine, an ever-growing schism was created between social classes.<sup>1</sup>

Prussian society was severely fractured in the Eighteenth Century. One of the Prussian leaders who was a proponent of its problems was Frederick the Great. A prime example of this was on display during the Seven Years War where Frederick the Great added middle-class officers to his military only out of necessity. After the war ended,

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<sup>1</sup> Armstrong Starkley, *War in the Age of the Enlightenment, 1700-1789* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 93.

Frederick the Great “purged” the officer corps, leaving only aristocrats.<sup>2</sup> Frederick believed himself to be an “enlightened” leader, he was a composer of music and also wrote poetry and philosophical pieces.<sup>3</sup> Even though he was such a cultured and refined man, that did not change the fact that he, just as with most of the upper class, was still devoted mainly to the military. According to historian Armstrong Starkley, Frederick saw that “there was no finer, more useful art, than the art of war when conducted by decent men.”<sup>4</sup> This mindset placed the military as a priority. As a result, the general public suffered while the leadership of the military, which was made up of the elite, became wealthier.

The life of a Prussian peasant was a hard one. Jobs held by commoners often paid very little. Prussia had a stifling paternalistic society that did not offer much to the peasantry outside of a military career. Therefore, the career options for the average Prussian were limited if one wanted to make a reasonable living. To make matters worse, in Frederick’s Army, the peasantry was not only supposed to supply the food but also recruits who would eat it. Much was demanded from the commoner, yet little was given in return. However, the peasantry was not the only class to suffer.<sup>5</sup>

It was the upper class of society that comprised most of the officer corps. As Frederick held his peasantry to high standards in terms of military service, so too did he expect much from his officers. Frederick required above all else in his officers a sense of honor and to bear

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<sup>2</sup> Starkley, *War in the Age of the Enlightenment*, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1955), 18, 17.

hardships without flinching. Orders were to be carried out without expectation of reward.<sup>6</sup> The only rewards that officers could count on were the pay that they received from their service.

Such was the dismal state of affairs in Prussia. The Army molded the state to its needs. The inferior classes accepted apathetically the conditions that were imposed upon them. All the while, the educated and upper classes thought that the existing system of government was the most efficient and enlightened in Europe. Social schisms aside, Prussia nevertheless called for a strong military. After all, Eighteenth-Century Europe was rife with military conflict.<sup>7</sup>

Warring throughout Europe took its toll on Prussia. As casualties mounted, programs were put into effect by the state to take care of those injured in battle, but were still willing to fight. One such institution was the Invalid Corps. It was a way for the military to maintain manpower, and to minimize the impact of casualties. Although the American system did not focus on the longevity of a soldier's service, age was another factor taken into account when the Invalid Corps was created. An aged soldier may not be as combat effective as youthful one, but that did not discount him from being of some value to the military. There were several factors that played into who was accepted into the Invalid Corps but when the program was implemented every regiment in the Prussian Military had an *Invaliden* Company.<sup>8</sup>

The notion that every Prussian military regiment was augmented with an Invalid Company for support appeared to be a good idea. Additional manpower in reserve just in case of some unforeseen catastrophe is beneficial in many military situations. If ever the need arise, Invalid Troops could be repurposed, reequipped, and therefore would free up other fighting forces for further duty. Such was the idea with the Invalid Corps conception, but that was not the

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<sup>6</sup> Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>8</sup> William O. Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms* (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1966), 32.

case when it came to life. What could have been a fully equipped and useful support force, turned into a mere shell of what it was initially supposed to be.

As years passed, the Invalid Corps of the Prussian Military seemed to be more detrimental than beneficial. The unit was outfitted with outdated equipment, it was deemed useless for combat, and it was often underappreciated, leaving a state of low morale among the troops. But men continued to fill the ranks of the Invalid Corps, because the alternative if they ever left the military was the dismal civilian life.<sup>9</sup> The bleakness of life outside of the military kept many soldiers on as long as possible. Since so many men clung onto their military careers for as long as they could, many of them were reassigned to the Invalid Corps, due to the fact that old age was also an acceptable factor for admission into the Invalid Corps.<sup>10</sup> Under Frederick the Great alone there were enough men in the Invalid Corps to create twelve battalions made of “invalids and the other refuse of the army, which served most unwillingly.”<sup>11</sup>

Military life was not the easiest career path, either, but most soldiers accepted that rather than the alternatives. Most officers opted to join the Invalid Companies due to insufficient public funding for old soldiers.<sup>12</sup> These men were content living their lives paid, uniformed, and fed.<sup>13</sup> But military service did not mean that a soldier was on active duty constantly. Some soldiers also feared that if their health worsened they would be forced to live in the care of the government, which seemed to care about its retired veterans as much as it did about its civilians.

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<sup>9</sup> Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Duffy, *The Army of Frederick the Great* (New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1974), 60.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 70.

<sup>13</sup> Duffy, *The Army of Frederick the Great*, 62.

The care for invalid veterans in the Prussian state was very poor. Men who had given so much for their country were shown a minimal amount of appreciation for their sacrifice. It seemed as though the greatest appreciation for a soldier came when he was healthy and on active duty. After that, he was no better than the average citizen. Still, the Prussian government did show some appreciation, even if it was just for show.

Prussia may have been in an economically challenging state, but the Prussian crown still showed some gratitude to soldiers for their service. Although the economic gap between classes was rather large, the Prussian king did acknowledge that his troops were to be rewarded for their service. So, different programs were put into place which attempted to aid soldiers in their lives outside of the military.

When it came time to take care of its veteran soldiers, the Prussian government took different approaches toward giving their soldiers some decent compensation. One such program mandated that when men had to leave the army due to their age or infirmity they were to report their name to the king. Once their name was submitted, the soldier had to wait as a potential option for their future was determined. The noncommissioned officers and “more deserving soldiers”, who were fortunate, were found jobs within the state. Others were found jobs in the tobacco trade. Less fortunate were those who were forced to settle in the wastelands as colonists. But for those soldiers who were not deemed “deserving” other options awaited them.<sup>14</sup>

The worst fate that could befall a soldier who left the military was unemployment. That was what awaited numerous soldiers who left the Prussian military. Many soldiers attached themselves to their military life and found it hard to move on afterward.<sup>15</sup> One option that many

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<sup>14</sup> Duffy, *The Army of Frederick the Great*, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Dennis E. Showalter, *Soldiers' Lives Through History: The Early Modern World* (Greenwood Press, 2007), 137.

turned to was begging. Former soldiers turned beggars were said to have swarmed towards camp during military maneuvers. Frederick the Great was noted as saying “drive that scum away” when military beggars appeared while he was running training exercises.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, the issue of beggars became so rampant in Prussia that the king had to issue a license to beg for former soldiers. He took matters further by expelling from Prussia any invalid foreigners. Begging was not the only alternative to life outside of the military, the Prussian state made some progress towards helping invalid veterans.

A place to live was another issue that arose for some invalid veterans. Over the years, however, different steps were taken to rectify the situation. One step happened in 1730 when the Island of Werder was given to four hundred and eighty invalid veterans to live on. Here the men had land that they were free to settle upon and use as they saw fit. Even though over four hundred invalid men and their families had a shining opportunity presented in front of them, there were still several thousand invalid veterans in need.<sup>17</sup>

Another project to help invalid veterans was put into action in Berlin. In 1748, the Invalid House was opened to invalid veterans. Over six hundred married invalid veterans and their wives were granted rooms in the massive house.<sup>18</sup> The conditions of the house were almost a reflection of just how much the government truly cared about their invalid veterans. Couples there lived in warrens. Civilians said that the house was simply awful and stank terribly. Most invalids might starve if they did not find a job or escape from there altogether.<sup>19</sup> Such was the

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<sup>16</sup> Duffy, *The Army of Frederick the Great*, 62.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

sad state of affairs for the invalid soldier in Prussia. Even so, the Prussian Military utilized an Invalid Corps for decades.

Throughout the 1700's and 1800's the Prussian Military used an Invalid Corps. Although they were never on par with a fully equipped fighting unit, they did serve a purpose as a garrison or guard force. As Prussia's military evolved, the need to keep the Invalid Corps remained. By 1805 Prussia still had 3,596 men in fifty eight Regimental Invalid Companies. It also had another 2,529 troops in seventeen Provincial Invalid Companies.<sup>20</sup> Of course, of all the invalid troops, 2,900 of these men were useless for combat.<sup>21</sup>

Whether they were combat ineffective or not, the Invalid Corps survived in the Prussian military for years. In its lifespan, it faced hardship and neglect and still managed to exist. Prussian troops joined the Invalid Corps for several reasons. For some it was just a way to avoid poverty, others could show their patriotism, and for a certain few it was still a chance to show their mettle. Some invalid troops performed well enough to be placed in the Land Reserve Troops.<sup>22</sup> In times of low enrollment some captains were given "direct recruiting" privileges. This meant that they could resort to kidnapping, or violence if need be, in order to strengthen their numbers.<sup>23</sup> But where the Prussian military contributed the most to the American Invalid Corps was through its pension system.

As much as the American Invalid Corps followed the Prussians when it came to setting up a pension system for taking care of its disabled soldiers, ultimately, the form and function of the Invalid Corps stemmed from Great Britain. Dating back to the reign of King Charles II, the

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<sup>20</sup> Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 80.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 35.



British Corps of the Invalids had been part of the British Military for hundreds of years before its American variant first appeared.<sup>24</sup> Similarly to the Prussians, the British Empire created an Invalid Corps which provided for and utilized its invalid soldiers. The rationale to implement this system was empathetic, economic, as well as strategic.

As the British Empire expanded and maintained its empire, the various global conflicts resulted in a steady stream of wounded soldiers being sent back to the British home islands. After being admitted to the Royal Hospital in Chelsea, soldiers were evaluated to see if they were fit for the Corps of the Invalids.<sup>25</sup> The evaluation process determined whether or not soldiers were fit for garrison duty, which was the primary function of the Corps. Upon being admitted to the Corps of the Invalids soldiers were deployed to the various forts and castles which defended the British Empire.<sup>26</sup> Whether it was a testament to the financial might of the British Empire, or sign of respect to their soldiers, at its inception British invalid troops were armed like the regular British infantry units. By 1718 the British Corps of the Invalids had a total of twenty-eight companies, garrisoned from the home islands to some of the farthest reaches of the British Empire including the Caribbean, Canada, and the American Colonies.<sup>27</sup> While the Invalid Corps had different iterations throughout Eighteenth-Century Europe, this concept soon made its way overseas. The American Colonies soon found themselves in need of an Invalid Corps of their own.

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Mann, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Spring 1988, Vol. 66, No. 265, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Captain C. G. T. Dean (1946) The Corps of Invalids, Royal United Services Institution. *Journal*, 91:564, 584-589, DOI: 10.1080/03071844609433975

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 282.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Mann, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 9; Walter T. Dornfest, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, SPRING 1969, Vol. 47, No. 189, 59.

## **CHAPTER II: AN AMERICAN INVALID CORPS**

In the 1760s, the rumors of separation from Britain had spread among the Colonies. The idea of independence from the British Empire permeated through the Colonies due to the various taxes and acts placed upon New England by King George III. As the decade progressed, numerous catalysts made revolution seem all the more inevitable. The political tension evolved into armed conflict when the Colonial militia opened fire on British soldiers at Lexington and Concord. These shots set off the armed conflict of the American Revolution.

The fight for independence was a grizzly one. In order to defeat the juggernaut that was the British Army, the Colonials needed a large amount of manpower. Lacking professional military manpower, the Colonials looked to recruiting the inexperienced and attempted to go face to face against a battle-hardened military force. The style of warfare at the time was to go muzzle to muzzle and line up in firing lines. This resulted in large amounts of dead and wounded. Unfortunately for the Colonials, the ability to replace a downed soldier with another trained one was easier for the British. The sheer size of the British army made it possible to bring experienced soldiers to the front with less trouble. The Continental army, however, would have to invest time and effort in recruiting a man,

training him, outfitting him for battle, and shipping him out. But in 1777 the Continental Army received some much needed support in the form of the Invalid Corps.<sup>1</sup>

Originally, having an Invalid Corps was not a plan of the Continental Army. The idea for the creation of the Corps came from the need to protect the Colonial capital of Philadelphia. From a military standpoint Philadelphia was very lightly guarded. There were no trained guard forces so any attackers, namely the British, who were very well equipped, could easily march in and occupy the city. Most of the city's defenders were old men who were not used to combat. Because of this, there was no reliable defense for the city.<sup>2</sup> The request was made for a proper garrison force and Congress soon responded. Although protecting the capital city of the Colonies was a pressing matter, the need for manpower on the battlefield and the ability of the Colonial leadership to move meant that Invalid Corps first assignment was to guard the Continental capitol.

The Invalid Corps was created in order to serve as a garrison force. While the main function of the Invalid Corps was guard duty, it was also supposed to be the starting point of young soldiers' careers as it also served as a military school.<sup>3</sup> If possible, it was to recruit more soldiers for the Continental Army as well. Throughout the war, the hope was that any wounded Colonial soldiers potentially facing discharge would funnel into the Invalid Corps instead, where they would continue serving the Continental Army.

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<sup>1</sup> William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Robert F. Haggard, "The Nicola Affair: Lewis Nicola, George Washington, and American Military Discontent during the Revolutionary War," "vol. 2 of *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* (2002), 148.

<sup>3</sup> Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States*, 21.

The only condition that had to be met in order to join this newly formed Invalid Corps was that the soldier applying could not have more than one amputated limb.<sup>4</sup> Having so few restrictions truly in order to join the Invalid Corps showed the how dire a need for soldiers the Colonial Army was experiencing. While the Colonial Army struggled in its opening years against the British, Continental General George Washington did rely on the Invalid Corps to make sure the supply problems the Continental Army experienced did not worsen.

Ironically, the officer who was in charge of the Corps was a former British officer, Lewis Nicola.<sup>5</sup> It was Nicola's idea to create a corps of invalid Continental veterans and place himself in charge. According to him, the invalid veterans deserved some compensation for their services and to deny them was "inhuman."<sup>6</sup> He realized that invalid soldiers could still perform most of the noncombat duties of regular soldiers. According to Nicola it was because of this reason that so many countries in Europe used invalid soldiers for garrison duty. Along with his request for the creation of the Corps, he also wanted to be given a rank in the Continental Army. He wanted to make sure that when he was carrying out the duties of a soldier he was recognized as such.<sup>7</sup> Lewis Nicola was granted the rank of Colonel and from there on out was made commanding officer of the Invalid Corps of the Continental Army. The creation of the Corps meant that more necessary funding could be allocated towards the war effort the war effort. In order to keep the Corps more viable, the Continental Army still needed proof that the Invalid Corps was a worthy endeavor.

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<sup>4</sup> Byron Stinson, "The Invalid Corps," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, May 1971, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Haggard, *The Nicola Affair*, 148.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

The Corps' usefulness was brought to George Washington's attention by Edward Hand. In his letter to George Washington, Hand stated the purpose of the creation of the Corps.<sup>8</sup> The Invalid Corps attempted to provide some manpower to the Continental Army, not necessarily to serve as a front line fighting force; rather, it tended to focus on non-combat matters such as police work, enforcing the draft, and guard duty.<sup>9</sup> This allowed the more able bodied men to mobilize and fight when needed. Freeing up these men would allow for the replacement of fallen Continental troops with trained soldiers. Although the creation of the Invalid Corps attempted to alleviate the situation with manpower or lack thereof, it saw its share of critics too. General Henry Knox found the Corps unable to fulfill its duty and requested its disbandment.<sup>10</sup> At one point in time Benjamin Lincoln, the Minister of War, attempted to disband the Invalid Corps altogether. Colonel Nicola wrote to General Washington in response to this, attempting to prove the usefulness of his men and the numerous ways in which they served the Continental cause.<sup>11</sup>

The fight for freedom against the most powerful military in the world at the time was not going to be an easy one. It required all the able-bodied men of the Colonies to step forward and fight. However, not everyone did. Loyalist supported the British cause and therefore deprived the Colonials from much needed troops. To alleviate that problem, the men of the Invalid Corps were put to use to garrison, guard cities, and protect arsenals, hospitals, and magazines.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, *Calendar of the Correspondence of George Washington with the Continental Congress* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 1760.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 2252-2253.

<sup>10</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Calendar of the Correspondence of George Washington with the Continental Congress*, 2252.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 2277.

<sup>12</sup> Haggard, *The Nicola Affair*, 148.

potential of the Corps was well received by General Washington. So, in 1777, Congress made it mandatory that all soldiers requesting discharge from the military first had to be examined to see if they could be assigned to the Invalid Corps. Any soldier that incapable of serving in the field and was wishing to be discharged but was seen as fit for garrison duty was immediately transferred. Commanders were also told to send any troops that they felt needed reassignment for evaluation for the Invalid Corps.<sup>13</sup> The call by Washington for more troops was answered and the Colonial Army received a desperately needed support.

The Invalid Corps of the Continental Army was created on June 20, 1777. The Corps was to be comprised of eight companies. Each company included one captain, two lieutenants, two ensigns, five sergeants, six corporals, two drummers, two fifers, and one hundred men.<sup>14</sup> Of course, upon creation the Invalid Corps was not tested in any way. It would take time for the men of the Invalid Corps to prove their worth. Throughout the course of the war the Invalid Corps existence was challenged by both the British and from within the command staff of the Continental Army; nevertheless, it managed to carry on just like its European counterparts.

Use of the Invalid Corps by the Colonials was very similar to that of the British. Like its European cousin, the Colonial Invalid Corps was mainly used for guard duty. Most notably, in the American Revolution, the Invalid Corps guarded Philadelphia. With the British marching all over the Eastern Seaboard, the American Congress and the nation's capital needed protection. Philadelphia was chosen to be the capital city of the Colonials, and there to protect it was its major, Colonel Lewis Nicola, who just so happened to also be in charge of the Invalid Corps.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Haggard, *The Nicola Affair*, 148.

<sup>14</sup> Fred A. Berg, *Encyclopedia of Continental Army Units: Battalions, Regiments and Independent Corps* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books., 1972), 54.

<sup>15</sup> Haggard, *The Nicola Affair*, 149.

Along with Philadelphia, another high priority assignment that the Invalid Corps undertook was guarding Boston, albeit towards the end of the war.

Throughout the American Revolution a few opportunities presented themselves to show the value of the Invalid Corps as a guarding force. In 1777, when the British were enjoying relatively sweeping successes in their campaigns, British General William Howe was tasked with taking Philadelphia. Colonel Nicola heard of this and prepared the city for an attack. Even though Colonel Nicola wanted to defend his city, he was ordered to withdraw, and no fighting was conducted there by any Invalid Corps troops.<sup>16</sup>

Several times over the forced relocation of Invalid Corps troops took away the opportunity for them to prove themselves as capable defenders. All these relocations happened for several reasons. Among these were the amount of sick among the Corps, the lack of supplies, and simply just to keep the men from falling into British hands. These withdrawals did not detract from the value of the Corps. General Washington himself wrote to Colonel Nicola and stated that he depended on him and his men to guard high value targets. The importance of the Invalid Corps slowly became more evident. In time it even showed that it was capable of more than just retreating from place to place.<sup>17</sup>

Trenton, New Jersey was the target of General Washington's famous surprise attack on Hessian forces. A lesser known fact, however, was that it was also the site of a proactive act by the Colonial Invalid Corps. While the fighting continued throughout the Colonies, supplies became of greater importance. Early on in the war the British controlled the seaways around America. Also, in 1777 there was no French fleet backing the Colonial Army to punch a hole

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<sup>16</sup> Haggard, *The Nicola Affair*, 149.

<sup>17</sup> National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-11-02-0374>.

through British armada to establish supply lines. Therefore, guarding what little supplies the Colonial Army had was a high priority. When Colonel Nicola was ordered to move his troops to Trenton, he received information that a ship carrying Colonial supplies was in danger of being captured. Hurriedly, he dispatched thirty troops under his command to secure the cargo.<sup>18</sup> Through the efforts of the Invalid Corps, the contents of the ship were never taken by the British. This act, although arguably trite, proved that the Invalid Corps was not an incompetent unit, but instead was one that knew what it was tasked with and sought to carry out its duty even in the face of being under equipped versus British troops.

Modern munitions were not the only supplies that the Invalid Corps was lacking. As the famous winter of 1777 and 1778 set in, the Corps, which was in need of winter clothing, was ordered to move into Allentown, Pennsylvania. Before they could make it to Allentown, the Corps was redeployed to guard hospitals and military stores in Easton and Bethlehem. There they stayed for the duration of the winter, because it was common practice at the time for units not to move during the winter season. For the time being, the threat of British attack was lessened. However, it was not the British muskets that posed the greatest threat.<sup>19</sup>

Suffering and hardships that General Washington's troops endured at Valley Forge were shared by the men of the Invalid Corps. The towns of Easton, Bethlehem, and Allentown did little to offer shelter for the men on duty. Several of the homes, churches, and even mills were converted into hospitals.<sup>20</sup> This was all done to take in the wounded from the hospitals of

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<sup>18</sup> National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-11-02-0374>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Francis S. Fox, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Ordeal of the American Revolution in Northampton County, Pennsylvania*. (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2000), 132.



Philadelphia after its evacuation. Lacking in winter gear, which several of the Continental Army units were, the men of the Corps braved the elements and waited for winter to pass.<sup>21</sup>

The winter of 1777 and 1778 was not the only one in which the men of the Invalid Corps suffered. Throughout the duration of the war they were constantly under-supplied. In the winter of 1780, a few French-Canadian visitors to a Continental military camp, stated that it was the clothing of the invalid men that was “truly invalid.” The visitors stated that the men were not covered, even by rags, some men close to only showing their courage and patience.<sup>22</sup> Exposed to the elements of the brutal winter, the men of the Invalid Corps continued their essential guard duty of Continental soldiers and supplies.

Another valuable act that the Invalid Corps performed was by simply accepting prisoners. Even though a soldier were to obey orders, and not question their predicaments, that did not mean that they are lacking their own opinions. After fighting in several battles and no clear outcome, and with the fight turning into a war of attrition the morale of British soldiers declined. Hessian forces also started to question whether their pay was worth dying for in a conflict that did not directly involve their nation. British and Hessian deserters alike were taken under arrest by Colonel Nicola’s forces. The Colonel then took any intelligence that he could gather from the prisoners and forwarded it to his superior officers.<sup>23</sup> The act of acquiring enemy intelligence is very valuable in times of war, and so the Invalid Corps did receive some recognition for this contribution. Consequently, the Corps did run into its fair share of trouble while trying to perform its duties.

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<sup>21</sup> Fox, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 132.

<sup>22</sup> Martin I. J. Griffin, *Catholics and the American Revolution*, vol. 1 (Ridley Park, PA: Published by Author, 1907), 310.

<sup>23</sup> Haggard, *The Nicola Affair*, 151.

Colonel Nicola was a man who cared for his troops. He felt it was right that his troops should be paid for the service they put in. However, the Continental Army was short on funds, and paying the Invalid Corps troops was not a high priority. This became a problem when the Invalid Corps was called to move out of Philadelphia. The order came in that the Invalid Corps was to garrison West Point. Normally, an order to relocate would not have been a problem. Nicolas' men were reluctant to move due to lack of pay. The men of the Invalid Corps were owed pay for ten months of service, however they only received the pay of a month and a half.<sup>24</sup>

Luckily for the Invalid Corps, Colonel Nicola not only cared for his men, but he was also willing to negotiate. The Invalid Corps was needed at West Point, but it seemed as though it would never get there. Congress could not get the funding, due to the poor financial situation it was in. Colonel Nicola managed to negotiate and secure six months pay.<sup>25</sup> However, even this was not enough to quell some soldier's anger and they refused to march. The promise of better supply lines due to the proximity to Boston made some men change their minds. Eventually, the march got underway, but still it was impeded by lack of vehicles. Although his men were delayed, the Invalid Corps managed to make its way up to West Point. The capability of the Corps was questioned several times over, and still it had managed to reasonably perform its duties. Even so, transportation issues were not the only nuisances that plagued the Corps.<sup>26</sup>

Dissension and desertion were problems that the entire Colonial Army had to deal with. The Invalid Corps was among the units that had dissenters from within. Colonel Nicola was one to avidly fight for his troops. As any good commanding officer would do, he requisitioned supplies at every turn to make sure that his men were not lacking. He fought constantly to prove

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<sup>24</sup> National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-06490>.

<sup>25</sup> Haggard, *The Nicola Affair*, 152.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

the value of the Invalid Corps. Yet, to a captain within the ranks, Colonel Lewis Nicola was a swindler.

John David Woelper was a captain under Colonel Nicola's command. In a letter sent to General Washington he demonized his commanding officer. He accused Colonel Nicola of committing several transgressions committed against the invalid soldiers. One set of accusations that Woelper made was that Colonel Nicola was misappropriating funds. The captain stated that money was not distributed accordingly to the men. He went on to say that Colonel Nicola was guilty of hedging funds and keeping them for private use, as well as accepting bribes. To make matters worse, he also claimed that Colonel Nicola was not reporting accounts of desertion among the men, and instead was taking the pay. This claim certainly went against the rather altruistic character that Colonel Nicola had displayed, but it was not the only allegation that the captain had made.<sup>27</sup>

Other claims that Captain Woelper made against Colonel Nicola were just as bad, if not worse than thievery. Woelper accused the Colonel of discharging men from the Invalid Corps when they were still able to perform their duties. Lastly, Captain Woelper stated transgressions that Colonel Nicola committed against him, in that Colonel Nicola allegedly kept him from commanding his own company of troops. With all of these allegations against him, Colonel Nicola just wanted the matter dealt with no matter what the outcome.<sup>28</sup>

The charges were brought before Congress and the result was very favorable for the Colonel. He was acquitted of all charges. Oddly enough, Captain Woelper still remained with the Invalid Corps under the Colonel, even though, according to Woelper, conditions in it were

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<sup>27</sup> Haggard, *The Nicola Affair*, 153.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

terrible.<sup>29</sup> But the name of the Colonel was cleared. While the Colonel's reputation was spared, the reputation of the invalid soldiers was being tarnished, not for inability to perform their duty, but because of their behavior.

As if having his reputation as a commanding officer were not bad enough for Colonel Nicola, accusations were also being made against his men. War time looting tempted many soldiers. While being stationed in Easton, several townspeople made claims that the men of the Invalid Corps were committing robberies.<sup>30</sup> With all of the trouble that the Invalid Corps faced, in terms of validating its existence and also with its commanding officer under investigation, the inability to maintain discipline did not help the cause. Stealing from the locals meant that the Continental troops would lose support in the area. That was something that Colonel Nicola could not afford, especially since he had another problem to deal with.

When the Invalid Corps was created it was supposed to have eight full companies of troops. Unfortunately for the Invalid Corps, filling the ranks was a rather difficult task. Instead of having eight companies ready for action, Colonel Nicola only had three companies and a few men who made up part of a fourth.<sup>31</sup> This was a major hindrance to the capability of the Invalid Corps because it limited its range of use. A shortage of officers further limited what Colonel Nicola could accomplish with his men. Nevertheless, the Colonel made due with the men he had, and attempted to complete his duty to the best of his ability throughout the war.

In the end, with a help from the French, the Continental Army was the victor. As the American Revolution resolved, so did the time of the Corps, and on May 1, 1783 it was

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<sup>29</sup> Haggard, *The Nicola Affair*, 154.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 154.

<sup>31</sup> National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-08484>.

disassembled.<sup>32</sup> With independence in hand, there was only one duty left for the Corps. That was the manner in which the pensions for those who served in the Corps would be distributed.

After the American Revolution the men of the Invalid Corps were not forgotten by the government. These men were valued for their services so much so that even General Washington thought that the Invalid Corps would not be disbanded after the war. After the war, Colonel Nicola, in a rather fitting manner, became responsible for distributing pensions to the men he commanded. The men, who were seen as inferior, yet endured the same hardships as the able-bodied soldiers of the Continental Army, were taken in by the government.<sup>33</sup>

Since 1776 soldiers of the Invalid Corps received a pension if the soldier was deemed unable to maintain a livelihood on their own upon discharge.<sup>34</sup> Any soldier, including any officer, who was part of the Invalid Corps, was to receive half their monthly pay. A retroactive resolution was also created for the sake of fairness to those who had served prior to the institution of the Invalid Corps. All people who fought for the common defense of the Colonies, even under emergency call, were to be covered by the pension system.<sup>35</sup> This program served as the only means of income for many soldiers due to their disabilities, which prevented them from joining the work force. It seemed that even if invalids were not seen as fully productive members of society, they were nevertheless soldiers and patriots that required care. The

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<sup>32</sup> Berg, *Encyclopedia of Continental Army Units*, 55.

<sup>33</sup> Haggard, *The Nicola Affair*, 161.

<sup>34</sup> Mayo, R. and F. Moulton. *Army and Navy Pension Laws, and Bounty Land Laws of the United States Including Sundry Resolutions of Congress, from 1776 to 1852: Executed at the Department of the Interior. With an Appendix, Containing the Opinions of Attorneys General of the United States, With the Decisions, Rules, and Regulations, Adopted by Different Secretaries, Relative to the Execution of those Laws.* (Washington: JNO. T. Towers, 1852), 8.

<sup>35</sup> Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States*, 21.

American government may have provided for the troops of the Invalid Corps, but the issue of their pension was another battle that they had to face.

Distribution of pensions to the soldiers of the Invalid Corps was not a simple matter. Initially, during the fighting of the American Revolution, the pension program for the soldier depended on the injury and the length of service that they performed after receiving the injury. This pension, although never exceeding half the soldiers' original pay, was better than the alternative of attempting to make a living in society. The pension system that was established in 1776 worked well throughout the war, but in 1782 Congress started making a series of revisions that subverted the systems' original purpose.<sup>36</sup>

On April 23, 1782 Congress restructured the pension program of the Invalid Corps to a flat five dollar per month rate. The benefit of this revision is questionable because there were such varying degrees of injuries.<sup>37</sup> Since the pension of the soldier depended originally on their injury some men benefited while others took a cut. The choice of making an even pay for all Invalid troops may seem like a detrimental step, but in the following years numerous revisions were made that showed just how much the American government, as well as the people, cared for their soldiers.

Almost eight years after the five dollar pension was established for invalid soldiers, it was revised. One major change was the fact that it was the President of the United States that had direct say of what the pensioner was going to receive. Again, the pension for regulars did not exceed five dollars. The pension rate for officers, however, changed so that they could receive more money than regular invalid soldiers, but they never received more than half their

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<sup>36</sup> Mayo and Moulton, *Army and Navy Pension Laws, and Bounty Land Laws of the United States Including Sundry Resolutions of Congress, from 1776 to 1852*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

original monthly pay.<sup>38</sup> Two years after these changes were made a very monumental modification occurred for the care of the invalid troops.

March of 1793 marked two very important changes in the pension program for invalid troops. First, the American government finally assumed responsibility for paying the pensions. This eased the financial burden which was originally placed solely on the state where the pensioner lived. The second revision that was a major progression was that the pensions were guaranteed to the pensioner for life. The only condition under which the pensioner could lose their benefits was if they recovered from their disability.<sup>39</sup> As revisions to the pension system were made, it seemed that there was a constant push to show appreciation to the disabled men who served in the military. This was no different at the turn of the century.

At the beginning of the Nineteenth Century several veterans of the American Revolution were still alive. The matter of their pensions was not forgotten either. Public sympathy for disabled veterans kept the pension issue relevant and keeping them in view of the public kept the issue of veteran pensions from fading away. This sentiment carried on for decades after the American Revolution. But the issue of disabled veterans, and thereby former soldiers of the Invalid Corps, came when America scuffled with the British Empire yet again.

The War of 1812 brought the issue of injured soldiers back into the public consciousness by providing renewed images of what some soldiers lost serving their country. Fighting another war once again created a large amount of casualties for the American military. In this war, however, the order to create an Invalid Corps was not placed. Nevertheless, as the fighting continued many wounded soldiers sought aid from the government. After the war, with the

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<sup>38</sup> Mayo and Moulton, *Army and Navy Pension Laws, and Bounty Land Laws of the United States Including Sundry Resolutions of Congress, from 1776 to 1852*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

country making repairs from the fighting, the matter of caring for disabled soldiers became a pressing matter.

When the fighting stopped in 1815 a massive patriotic resurgence happened. Andrew Jackson's overwhelming success at the Battle of New Orleans served as a catalyst for the new rush of patriotism. This was a turnaround from the dismal outlook that prevailed throughout the war. As fervor spread with the intention of bringing back the "Spirit of '76" the disabled soldiers of both the American Revolution and the War of 1812 became a focal point of society. This public movement was very beneficial to the invalid soldiers because it was the support of the people that was a major factor in the next evolution of the pension program.<sup>40</sup>

Public opinion served to influence Congress' decision to restructure veteran pension programs in 1816. Just as in years before, the question came up of how exactly to compensate military veterans? Some politicians viewed the debt owed to the disabled soldiers as paid by 1783. Others felt that continued pensions were necessary to compensate for the sacrifices that the men and woman (That being Mary "Molly Pitcher" Hays) endured.<sup>41</sup> Before Congress could make a decision it started receiving letters from the citizenry about how they viewed army veterans. All over America, the appreciation of veterans was shown, which made blatantly obvious what the next steps should be.<sup>42</sup>

The image of a soldiers' sacrifice became a key motivator in the public push for better support of injured and disabled veterans. Sympathetic veterans were found all over society due to the recent fighting of the War of 1812. With many family members, neighbors, and

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<sup>40</sup> John P. Resch, *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiment, and Political Culture in the Early Republic* (University of Massachusetts, 1999), 87.

<sup>41</sup> Mary "Molly Pitcher" Hays was the only woman who was given a pension for her service during the Battle of Monmouth during the American Revolution.

<sup>42</sup> Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 87.



acquaintances all affected by the war, many communities were filled with reminders of their soldiers sacrifices. One example of peoples positive viewpoint was when an editor of the *Boston Patriot* stated that the veterans of both the Revolution and War of 1812 were deserving of admiration.<sup>43</sup> Magazines spread stories of soldiers to the masses which helped to generate favorable opinion. These publications were only part of a much larger movement that swept the nation.

A massive movement to help and honor war veterans spread throughout the American public in 1816. Several factors played into this movement to sway public opinion. One reason was the fact that America was running out of Revolutionary War veterans to honor. This created a sense of urgency to show appreciation for the remaining veterans while it was still possible.<sup>44</sup> Veterans became somewhat of a national treasure due to the fact that they were thinning in number. But the issue of lessening Revolutionary War veterans was not the only contributing factor to the increase in public sentiment toward them.

The War of 1812 brought British troops into America once again. Washington D.C. was trampled by British soldiers. Slowly the morale of Americans dropped as news from the varied fronts was dismal. As the war continued American forces managed to hold and eventually the fighting subsided. Nevertheless, America was given a grim reminder of how close the fledgling nation was to nonexistence in decades prior. So Americans placed more emphasis on the importance and gravity of the American Revolution.

Many times throughout history major conflicts bring about feelings of significance to an event. Both World Wars hold distinction in history as monumentally influential events. During

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<sup>43</sup> Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 88.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

the early 1800's the American Revolution reached a point where it was deemed the Revolutionary Era made other eras look "relatively insignificant." That statement was taken very seriously by the people. So, several projects were created to honor Revolutionary War veterans.<sup>45</sup> The feeling of indebtedness helped veterans greatly because so many opinions were swayed in their favor. Some of these opinions were those of Congressmen. The influencing of these individuals was instrumental in the creation of a very important committee that controlled the future of soldier's pensions.

When the House of Representatives created a seven man committee to oversee veteran pension policy they made a very crucial appointment. Joseph Bloomfield was a major in the Continental Army during the American Revolution. He was one of seven men who were appointed to oversee veteran pension policy making. What made him so important to the committee and to veteran pensioners was that he fought at the Battle of Brandywine. Moreover, he was wounded in battle there.<sup>46</sup> A veteran of who knew what some were suffering through was a major advantage for soldiers when it came to pension policy making.

Joseph Bloomfield, along with the rest of the pension committee, five others of whom were also Revolutionary War veterans, had the mindset of making certain that all soldiers who served in the Continental Army were cared for. Poverty, which affected many invalid soldiers in the Prussian military, affected many Revolutionary War veterans. Preventing veteran poverty became a top priority for the committee. Thanks to the actions of those seven individuals, veterans were spared the embarrassment of begging to stay alive. Again, having the press on their side publishing stories and images of suffering soldiers, the committee was able to pass

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<sup>45</sup> Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 88.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

pension legislation with relative ease. Certainly the men of the Invalid Corps benefitted from these men's actions. The continued appreciation of veterans virtually assured that the men of the Invalid Corps would not go wanting. Although they made sacrifices for the good of the nation, it was the grateful American public that made sure that they were not meaningless.

War with Britain presented the American Colonies with a very difficult challenge. They had declared independence from the British Empire and were ready to accept the consequences. What stood in their way was the greatest military power in the world. The Continental Army needed what manpower they could muster in order to finally be rid of British rule. This necessitated the Invalid Corps. The same institution that was utilized by so many European nations was now activated against one. Just as with their European cousins, the Invalid Corps faced uncertainty and scrutiny. Fighting all across the American Colonies provided ample opportunities for the Invalid Corps to show their worth. However, the shortage of manpower limited the exposure the Corps received not only in combat, but also in the public eye.

Lewis Nicola was chosen to lead the newly formed Invalid Corps. He was burdened with the tough task of providing support where needed, while being undermanned and under equipped. Under his command the Invalid Corps performed their duties as best they could. Luckily, in return the Corps had a commanding officer that cared and fought for his men. The Invalid Corps endured the same horrors of war as the regular soldiers, at times guarding valuable supplies that they themselves never got to use. They protected hospitals, ensuring that men who could fully recover and fight had a chance to do so. When the fighting stopped, their small pensions were a meager sign of gratitude from the country that they helped establish.

It took decades of revision and another war to see a growth in the appreciation for what the men of the Invalid Corps went through. Within the years between 1783 and 1817 pensions

significantly increased, which greatly helped disabled veterans who would otherwise be hard-pressed to find jobs. Unfortunately for older military veterans, this wave of renewed value for military veterans came at a time when there were very few living veterans of the Invalid Corps. However, it was the progress that was made in those years that was carried over into future conflicts.

The War of 1812 and the Mexican-American War did not call for the creation of an Invalid Corps. Pensions were created to care for disabled veterans from those conflicts, but in both wars America was not pressed to a point where manpower was scarce.<sup>47</sup> As America grew so did its military strength. After the Mexican-American War America's military was nothing to be scoffed at. Although not the strongest military in the world, it proved itself combat capable. However, it was not a foreign threat that was the most traumatic to America's military, rather it was domestic. A war of rebellion created the need for America to assemble its first Invalid Corps, and it would be another war of rebellion that would call for it again.

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<sup>47</sup> Mayo and Moulton, *Army and Navy Pension Laws, and Bounty Land Laws of the United States Including Sundry Resolutions of Congress, from 1776 to 1852*, 50, 464.

## CHAPTER III: OUTBREAK OF THE CIVIL WAR

In the 1860s, another grand conflict would plague America. This time the argument was not about freedom from a foreign nation. This issue, among others, pitted brothers, cousins, and friends against one another. It almost led to the dissolution of the Union that nearly a century ago was brought into existence.

In the early months of 1861 while more Federal possessions were falling into the hands of the Rebels, negotiations were underway in order to avoid war. Abraham Lincoln pledged to preserve the Union. Jefferson Davis, in turn, vowed to use force if necessary in order to preserve the intentions of the Confederacy.<sup>1</sup> The answer that the Union would receive from the Confederates would come in April of 1861. With numerous Southern states seceding and tensions growing ever higher, the siege of Fort Sumter occurred. The Civil War had begun.

In the early stages of the Civil War, the way in which warfare was conducted resembled the style in which it was carried out during the Revolution. Muskets were still

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<sup>1</sup> William C. Davis, *Rebels and Yankees: The Fighting Men of the Civil War* (New York: W.H. Smith Publishers Inc., 1989), 9.

the primary weapon of most soldiers, however, the lethality of these weapons increased drastically with the adoption of rifling and percussion caps. At the start of the war most of the muskets (also known as muzzleloaders) were loaded from the tip of the barrel. The use of artillery and battle lines had not changed either. Battle tactics still consisted of motioning the lines of soldiers into a good enough firing position to fire one simultaneous shot, also known as a volley, at the enemy. Hopefully for those firing, if the volley inflicted enough casualties on the intended target the men of the defending side would lose morale and run away. Quick movements and attempts to outflank the enemy contributed to the ever increasing casualty rate. From its basic principles the conduct of warfare looked similar to that of the Revolution, but there were stunning differences too, which led to enormous casualties.

In decades before the Civil War, manufacturing boomed, especially in the North. Munitions was one such. Military firearms improved over the previous decades with the advent of rifling. This increased the range and accuracy of the rifle, making the previously used smoothbore muskets obsolete. Accuracy and range were not the only improvements to firearms of the time. Percussion locks were also slowly incorporated into firearms. This slowly eliminated the use of muzzle loaders because percussion locks offered an increased rate of fire. The primary arms of soldiers were improving from the models previously used in the Mexican-American War, but there was another field that prospered even more than the small arms industry.<sup>2</sup>

This was the artillery industry. Demand for artillery pieces rose greatly early in the war. The number of Napoleon cannons, the most advanced cannon used by American forces during

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<sup>2</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 317; Davis, *Rebels and Yankees*, 50.

the Civil War, surged from four to well over 1,000 in the Union Army.<sup>3</sup> Efficiency in production led to Northern forces having 432 artillery batteries by war's end.<sup>4</sup> An artillery piece would regularly be manned by a six to seven man crew. But the advantage of being out of the direct line of fire did not remove hazards for the crew. As different models of artillery pieces were constructed, flaws in the manufactured product brought unseen dangers to the crews. One infamous cannon was designed by a man named Robert Parrott. His model had the tendency to explode at the breech.<sup>5</sup> This spelled disaster for anyone in the vicinity and the wounded required medical attention almost immediately.

The medical practices in the military during the Civil War had not been all that different from its predecessors in the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Similar to the procedures during the Revolution, wounds in certain areas were only treatable by amputation. Medical advancements were made during that hundred year span. However, the fact of the matter was that medical treatment on the battlefield and even sometimes off the battlefield during the Civil War had stunning similarities to previous wars. This war would also bring in its stock of wounded soldiers, but unlike the American Revolution, the casualties would mount at a more substantial rate.

After the successful attack on Fort Sumter, more states joined the rebel states of the South. One of these states was Virginia and for this reason, eventually, the capital was moved to Richmond. What made this choice problematic was the fact that it was so close to the Union. In the same respect, the danger of the Northern capital of Washington, D.C. being so close to the Confederacy, was in the minds of Northerners. So it was believed, by both Union and

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<sup>3</sup> Davis, *Rebels and Yankees*, 106.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

Confederate generals, that the quickest way to finish the war would be to capture the opposing side's heavily fortified capital city. With their objective made clear, each side prepared for an advance on the other so that there would swiftly end the war.

When the war broke out in 1861, the Union knew that it had one key advantage that the Confederacy did not have; that was the luxury of manufacturing. The agrarian South had an economy that was predominately fueled by its exports. It had very few manufacturing cities. Meanwhile, the Union, with all of its factories and production centers, could provide a steady stream of supplies to its soldiers. Exploiting this weakness was important to the Union and they would enact the famous Anaconda Plan in an effort to blockade all of the major Southern ports.<sup>6</sup>

While the navy was attempting to encircle the Confederacy, the leader of the Union army, George McClellan, pressed forward in an effort to capture the Confederate capital. With Union forces pushed back to Washington, D.C., after the Battle of Bull Run, otherwise known as the First Battle of Manassas, it was decided that the wiser choice would be to advance on Richmond from the sea.<sup>7</sup> The chosen point of insertion to attack was the Virginia Peninsula. McClellan planned to unload his troops on the peninsula and march to an unsuspecting Confederate garrison at Richmond. The only problem he did not consider was being halted at Yorktown by General Joseph Johnston.<sup>8</sup> What was conceived as a quick Union victory in 1862 started to look very different with the wounding of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston. After Johnston's injury, the Confederate government placed the revered General Robert E. Lee in a field commander role.

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<sup>6</sup> The Anaconda Plan was a plan to stop Confederate shipping by blocking off all vital ports to the Confederacy.

<sup>7</sup> In the North it was more common to refer to a battle by a terrain feature that would be near it. The South, however, would name battles after the nearest town.

<sup>8</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 426-27; Davis, *Rebels and Yankees*, 4.



Union campaigning in the East was halted for the time being, but the Union war effort in the West was a bit more fruitful. Ulysses S. Grant, then a general, pushed down from the north and captured Forts Henry and Donelson. These forts were crucial for access to the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, which, once in Union hands, fractured parts of the Confederacy.<sup>9</sup> As per the Anaconda Plan, it was thought that the Mississippi River and its tributaries were the keys to controlling the war on the western front. While Grant was enjoying successes in the northern part of the western campaign, the Union Navy was making its way into the Gulf of Mexico, and was slowly pushing towards New Orleans.

When the war broke out, the armies on land were not at a loss for finding troops. But when the Anaconda Plan called for naval action, the 7,600 sailors that the Union army had in service were not enough to man the number of ships that were needed to effectively enact the plan.<sup>10</sup> As old Union vessels were being refitted for service again, the call for sailors went out as well. The navy would not see as many enlistments as the army, but the number of sailors over the course of the Civil War would exceed 100,000.<sup>11</sup>

With McClellan's march grinding to a virtual standstill and Richmond being relatively secure, the Confederate forces knew that it was the opportune time to strike. General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson was threatening the Northern capital with invasion, which led many to fear what the near future had in store if Richmond was not captured soon. General J.E.B. Stuart led his cavalry against Union forces on numerous occasions over one hundred and fifty miles and lost only two soldiers in the process.<sup>12</sup> Much to the dismay of Northerners, General Robert E.

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<sup>9</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 396-97; Davis, *Rebels and Yankees*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Davis, *Rebels and Yankees*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

<sup>12</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 561.

Lee overcame the challenges laid before him, even when being outmanned at a ratio of two to one.<sup>13</sup> The apparent superiority of the Confederate army gave Rebel forces the much needed morale to fight on even though they were outnumbered and Robert E. Lee could see the end of the war looming just across the Potomac.

In the fall of 1862, the Confederates were on the march. In General Lee's eyes, it was the opportune time to push onto Washington. Lee ran into Northern forces again at Manassas, for a second battle, with the outcome of this Bull Run being the same as the first, a Confederate victory. Emboldened with yet another success over Union forces, the Confederates were more than willing to keep pushing forward. The Northern Army, on the other hand, attempted to pursue Lee and eventually caught up to him at Sharpsburg. This led to the bloodiest day of the entire Civil War known as the Battle of Antietam.<sup>14</sup>

Over twenty thousand casualties occurred on September 17, 1862.<sup>15</sup> The fighting took a tremendous toll on both sides. The one thing that Lee did not expect was losing so much of his army. Ever cautious, General McClellan refused to commit his entire force into the attack. So even though General Lee was technically outnumbered yet again, he could move his forces to where they needed to be in order to fend off Union advances.<sup>16</sup> But what was becoming more evident, more so after every battle, was that factor of manpower yet again.

Just like when the Continental army faced the British, the issue of manpower hindered the Confederates when facing the Union. Even though McClellan attacked Lee numerous times across the Eastern Theater, he never used his entire force in combat. So Lee could take his

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<sup>13</sup> Davis, *Rebels and Yankees* 49.

<sup>14</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 540; Davis, *Rebels and Yankees*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 544.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 543.

successes, but when it came down to the issue of soldiers, the Union had the clear advantage in numbers. The North started to see this, and saw it as an opportunity to achieve victory over the South. Unfortunately for the North, its losses in terms of soldiers often exceeded those of the Confederates. Although the enlistments were more numerous at the beginning of the war, as the public became more aware of the horrors of the battlefield, the rate slowed dramatically.<sup>17</sup> So the issue was raised of how the Union would continue to outnumber Rebel forces, all the while keeping trained troops coming to the front lines.

Finding frontline soldiers proved to be a bit of a problem. Recruiting from the civilian population was standard practice, however the call to arms was at times answered begrudgingly. Many able bodied soldiers were already committed to the various theaters of the war effort. The need for sailors in the expanding navy siphoned troops that were frontline capable. Both the Eastern and Western theatres were swallowing vast amounts of manpower. Needing more frontline troops, the War Department turned towards the rear guard. It was here that the potential frontline soldiers could be found, but they were being utilized in so many other jobs. Some were already serving as prison guards, while others served in the military police. So, another alternative came to mind. If their jobs were too valuable to be outright lost, then they would simply have to be replaced. In 1863, the Department of War issued an order that would expedite the Union Army's rate of reinforcement.

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<sup>17</sup> Davis, *Rebels and Yankess*, 34.

## CHAPTER IV: RECREATING THE INVALID CORPS

Once again, the “invalid” soldier was called to action. General Order 105 officially recreated the Invalid Corps.<sup>1</sup> But even though formal orders were given for the Invalid Corps creation, it had yet to be properly organized. Officers and regular soldiers had to be recruited first in order to fill the ranks. With the mass numbers of recovering wounded readily available, the sorting process began to see who was still fit to serve in a line of duty. Whether they volunteered or not, soldiers underwent medical examinations to see if they still had a position in the Union Army.

The creation of the Invalid Corps gave injured men who were to be sent home a chance to remain in the army. The Corps also gave honorably discharged veterans an opportunity to return to the service. Once the selection process began, chances were that an injured soldier who had been sent home under regular circumstances was instead called back and reexamined to see if he was fit for service once more. The War Department strictly forbade “the discharge of any man upon surgeon’s certificate of disability who may be fit for service in the Invalid Corps,” with the exception being

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<sup>1</sup>Diefendorf and O’Brien, *General Orders War Department, Embracing Years 1861, 1862 1863*, 2:139.; From this point the terms Invalid Corps and Veteran Reserve Corps, or VRC, will be used interchangeably.

officers.<sup>2</sup> Officers did, however, have the right to request a transfer to the Corps once they were deemed unfit for active duty. They too went through the same evaluation process as regular soldiers, requiring a surgeon's validation for service.<sup>3</sup> For discharged veterans, having another source of income yet again was a relief. Having the benefits or pensions previously promised by the government was an enticing offer to the disabled who were struggling to find pay elsewhere. But the government did not create the Invalid Corps in an act of sheer desperation; applicants had to pass a vetting process in order to serve.

When General Order 105 was passed, the initial duty to fill the ranks of the Invalid Corps fell upon the regimental commanders. Each commander was ordered to acquire medical records from all their surgical and medical staff. Once the paperwork had been compiled, the commanders were asked to add to the list any names that they could think of. When the list was completed, it was to be sent in for evaluation.<sup>4</sup>

An enlisted soldier who was to be evaluated for service in the Invalid Corps had to meet certain criteria. First and foremost, he would have to show proof that he was unable to serve in the active field of duty. This had to be certified by a medical officer after a personal inspection. Next, he would have to show that he was fit for garrison duty.<sup>5</sup> Again, proof was required by means of a medical officer's examination. Lastly, in the eyes of his commanding officers he had to be seen as meritorious and deserving of

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<sup>2</sup> Diefendorf and O'Brien, *General Orders*, 2:198.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 412.

<sup>4</sup> Diefendorf and O'Brien, *General Orders*, 2: 120.

<sup>5</sup> Garrison duties included the ability to fire a weapon and be able to be stationed as a capable guard.

service. For former soldiers wishing to return to service, the previous requirements were to be met, with the addition of proof of an honorable discharge from service.<sup>6</sup> Whether it was an enlisted man (currently serving in the military, but not an officer), or a former soldier wanting to return to service, the person wishing to serve in the Union Army again had to pass through the medical examination phase.

When attempting to join the Invalid Corps the fate of a soldier often rested with the medical officers conducting the physical. In 1863, in accordance with the creation of the Corps, the *Manual of Instructions for Military Surgeons on the Examination of Recruits and Discharge of Soldiers* was published and was to be referenced when medical officers examined applicants. This manual went into great detail about the criteria that soldiers were supposed to meet in order to be considered fit for service. In a step by step process the administering doctor would consult the manual to ascertain what deficiencies the person in question had.

Starting off the examination, the person was inspected for general appearance. As per law, the examined would have to stand upright in the nude while being scrutinized. The doctor simply had to look at the man and determine if he had any visible deficiencies. Obvious “faults” that disqualified an applicant were insanity, paralysis of lower extremities, or even epilepsy.<sup>7</sup> If the person in question did not appear to have any “obvious faults” during the visual scan, the doctor was then reminded to look for “less obvious deficiencies” such as acute or organic diseases of the brain and spinal cord.<sup>8</sup> If

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<sup>6</sup> Diefendorf and O’Brien, *General Orders*, 2: 120, 121.

<sup>7</sup> John Ordranax. *Manual of Instructions for Military Surgeons on the Examination of Recruits and Discharge of Soldiers, 1863* (New York: Trubner and Co., 1863), 223.

<sup>8</sup> Ordranax, *Manual of Instructions for Military Surgeons...*, 224.

the soldier passed that phase of the examination, the doctor would proceed with a more detailed examination of the patient from the head down.

When the medical officer finished the general examination, the applicant was then reexamined under greater scrutiny. Medical officers were told to examine candidates for anything that may impede the person from performing military duties. The loss of speech, sight, and hearing were immediate grounds for discharge. But there were other deficiencies deemed acceptable in joining of the Invalid Corps. Although paralysis was considered to be a very serious ailment, if it was localized to the upper left portion of a man's body, he was still deemed fit for service.<sup>9</sup> Some attempted to use the excuse of missing teeth to get them out of service. Unfortunately for them, missing teeth were grounds for dismissal from the military but it would deem a soldier good enough to serve in the Invalid Corps.<sup>10</sup> Even if a soldier was missing limbs, he could still perform in the Union Army in a non-combat role such as a clerk or an orderly. When attempting to choose men for the Corps, it came down to whether or not the person could be utilized in a military position. Granted, he would have to do his job effectively, but once cleared by the medical examiners, and with the recommendation of his superior officers, the soldier would be assigned to the Invalid Corps. That person would then be set to serve the Union Army for three years, as per standard enlistment procedures.<sup>11</sup>

Once a soldier was selected for service in the Corps he was to be outfitted for duty. Standard military issue brogans and forage caps were given to the Invalid men.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ordranaux, *Manual of Instructions for Military Surgeons...*, 224.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>12</sup> A brogan was a leather shoe that was standard issue footwear for soldiers of the Union Army.

To differentiate regular soldiers from those of the Invalid Corps the latter's uniform was a sky blue jacket and trousers. This uniform was sewn in the fashion of the cavalry, even though the Invalid Corps was still an infantry unit.<sup>13</sup> The strange hue of the uniforms drew mockery from soldiers of other regiments. In response, some invalid soldiers attempted to find uniforms that looked more like that of the regular infantry. However, this did not deter other soldiers from jeering at the men of the Invalid Corps, even though soldiers of the Invalid Corps were combat veterans themselves. The derisive comments from their fellow soldiers affected the morale of Invalid Corps soldiers to the point where they resented the Corps.<sup>14</sup> This derision led to several soldiers requesting to be sent back to their original units instead of continuing service in the Corps.<sup>15</sup> Proving themselves capable to their peers was a daunting task on its own, but it was far from the only adversity the Invalid Corps faced.

When it came time to arm the soldiers the men of the Invalid Corps were split into two battalions.<sup>16</sup> First Battalion was comprised of men who were able to use a weapon. The men were armed with outdated muskets that were considered obsolete on the battlefield.<sup>17</sup> As a testament of their grit, the men of the Invalid Corps were still willing to use them. Second Battalion consisted of men who were missing limbs and were

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher J. Daley. "A study of Enlisted Invalid Corps jackets 1863-1866." 2008. <http://www.cjdaley.com/vrc.htm> (accessed September 15, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> James R. Hall, *Den of Misery: Indiana's Civil War Prison* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company), 49.

<sup>15</sup> Elihu Root, Fred C. Ainsworth, and Joseph K. Kirkley. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington Government Printing Office, 1899. Ser. 3, Vol. 3, 552).

<sup>16</sup> A battalion usually consisted of around one thousand to one thousand five hundred men.

<sup>17</sup> Davis, *Rebels and Yankees*, 171.



unable to utilize muskets, they were armed instead with swords and revolvers.<sup>18</sup> This addition of soldiers gave the Union army valuable flexibility in terms of manpower allocation. The Invalid Corps provided the Union Army a proper and capable rear guard which were now ready for tasking. With the ferocity of the Civil War raging and the need for manpower not slowing down, the men of the Invalid Corps were brought into action almost immediately.

Once brought into service, the men in the Invalid Corps were reacquainted to a soldier's life. For some, as they marched back into camp and awaited deployment it felt as though very little had changed. As Colonel Charles F. Johnson of the 18<sup>th</sup> Regiment Invalid Corps wrote to his wife: "here goes for a Barrack's life...Reveille-Tattoo-drill &c. the same old thing, except being shot at."<sup>19</sup> From the onset, the life of soldiers in the Invalid Corps did not seem all that glamorous. Most of the men who were able to use muskets and could march were stationed in guard and provost positions.<sup>20</sup> These were duties that followed them throughout most of their careers in the Invalid Corps.

The First Battalion of the Invalid Corps was tasked with a multitude of important duties. A majority of the work assigned to First Battalion were variations of guard duty. If a unit of the Invalid Corps was stationed to guard a prison, an extended duty was to patrol the towns or cities where the prison was located in case of any escapes. Throughout the course of the war Confederate prisoners continued to be sent north. In Elmira Prison, the First Regiment of the Invalid Corps was an instrumental group in the

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<sup>18</sup> Root, Ainsworth, and Kirkley, *Official Records*, 1000.

<sup>19</sup> Charles F. Johnson, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson, Invalid Corps*, ed., Fred Pelka. (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 209.

<sup>20</sup> Provost positions were considered the military police of the time. They dealt primarily with military related police matters.

guarding between 10,000 to 12,000 prisoners. The guards at Elmira performed their job admirably, only allowing only one successful escape attempt.<sup>21</sup> The men of the Eight Regiment aided in guarding between 9,000 to 11,000 prisoners at Camp Douglas in Chicago with only 8 successful attempts.<sup>22</sup> One of the most impressive feats of the Invalid Corps was carried out by the Eleventh Regiment which guarded 22,000 Confederate prisoners in Point Lookout, Maryland with only 650 men. Under harsh conditions, the men of the Eleventh, in conjunction with the Fifth Massachusetts Colored Cavalry, also guarded prisoners while they were on work detail on the wharves and fortifications of the surrounding area. The Twentieth Regiment, which was in charge of 16,000 prisoners posted no escapes throughout the duration of the war.<sup>23</sup> Among all of this, the various regiments of the Invalid Corps were also in charge of escorting prisoners to various camps and exchangers, all the while having minimal escapes. Throughout the duration of the war the First Regiment of the Invalid Corps proved its value as prison guards and escorts. Even though they performed their task with distinction the Corps was assigned with other guard duties that proved to be more hazardous.

When Union and Confederate forces started fighting at the onset of the Civil War, the call for service was answered by a multitude of volunteers. The amount of volunteers was not enough to satiate the large amount of manpower that the war effort demanded. That is when the Union Army turned to drafting new recruits. Once a citizen was drafted they were required by law to carry out their civic duty to the Union Army. Draftees had to report to rendezvous areas where they were then marched off to get outfitted for

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<sup>21</sup> Root, Ainsworth, and Kirkley, *Official Records*, 560.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 561.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 562.

combat. To offer an alternative of being drafted, the Union government did offer a bounty for those who volunteered for service on top of the regular soldiers pay that they received. The procedure of getting these new recruits combat ready did not always operate smoothly. "Draft dodgers" and "bounty jumpers" were a common occurrence behind Union lines. It was the duty of the Invalid Corps to escort future soldiers to the rendezvous points for organization and to round up any deserters, "jumpers," or "dodgers." Time and again the Invalid Corps proved more than capable at handling their duty. The Third Regiment of the Invalid Corps during their stay in Washington D.C. had anywhere from 300 to 5,000 soldiers march through the area that they were charged with guarding. One of the more notable cases of desertion came from the Ninety-Third Regiment New York Volunteers who had over 400 deserters. The Third Regiment aided a detachment of the Pennsylvania Bucktails in apprehending the deserters sending the Ninety-Third off to the front with over one thousand men.<sup>24</sup> Rounding up deserters was a hazardous task in and of itself. While patrolling for deserters in the mountains of Pennsylvania, the Sixteenth Regiment of the Invalid Corps had to search for an armed group of deserters who had around five hundred to six hundred men. This group of deserters was hostile, having killed enrollment officers and provost marshals. Braving the harsh Pennsylvania winter, the Sixteenth Regiment dispersed the group of deserters arresting hundreds at the cost of one of their own. The Sixteenth continued their duty of capturing deserters throughout the course of the war and captured over six thousand more deserters before the wars end.<sup>25</sup> Apprehending deserters, draft dodgers, and bounty

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<sup>24</sup> Root, Ainsworth, and Kirkley, *Official Records*, 561.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 563-564.

jumpers put the Invalid Corps in harm's way, however their duty as provost guards, at times, proved just as dangerous.

To keep the peace on the home front, the Invalid Corps was also used as a provost guard. During provost duty the Invalid Corp essentially acted as military police. One of the more famous instances in which the Corps was used as a police force was during the Draft Riots in New York City. Opposition to the draft in New York escalated to the point of violence. It was assumed that a military presence could dispel the rioters, as it had worked to break apart resistance in the Pennsylvania wilderness. Unfortunately for the Invalid Corps, the results which the military officials hoped to attain were, in fact, quite the contrary. When the Invalid Corps was brought in, its objective was to disperse the mob of draft rioters. The order was given to fire a volley into the crowd, with hopes that the shots would be enough of a deterrent to scatter the mob. As a result of that volley, and much to the chagrin of the men who fired, the mob did not disperse but instead attacked. The men of the Corps fled, leaving their weapons behind, and were "hunted like dogs" throughout the streets.(Place Footnote) After this fiasco, the soldiers recovered and continued to police the town. Eventually, the mob was quelled and the riots subdued. The *New York Times* wrote after the riots that whoever was responsible for the creation of the Invalid Corps had a debt of gratitude owed him. Even though these disorders were contained, other police matters arose that called for the Corps' services.

On numerous occasions, the provost guards of the Invalid Corps protected private and federal property throughout the Union. Similar to their Colonial predecessors, detachments of the Invalid Corps guarded storehouses and supply depots as well as

people's homes in cities like Cincinnati and Washington D.C.<sup>26</sup> In Indianapolis men of the Seventeenth Regiment were on guard duty at times as long as sixty hours, protecting the general population.<sup>27</sup> Protecting the citizenry of the Union was a vital effort by the Invalid Corps due to the value it provided on the home front. A benevolent and professional Union Army presence improved the view that locals had not only on the Union Army but on the Invalid Corps itself. At times, Union Army troops who were on leave became disorderly. When that happened, the Invalid soldiers who were stationed on guard duty had to act. They were under orders to arrest any soldiers they found disturbing the peace. Curfews were also to be enforced by the Invalid Corps guards. Any soldier caught in a saloon after nine o'clock at night was supposed to be arrested. Drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and even uses of foul language were a few arrest-able offenses as well. So, in effect, the men of the Invalid Corps were asked to perform double duty in guarding the citizenry from both friend and foe. However, there were more tasks that the Invalid men were asked to perform beyond guard duty.

While a majority of the fighting was held on the battlefields across the Union, both Union and Confederate forces were always trying to subvert the enemy in as many ways as they could. With Northern forces pushing farther and farther away from their supply lines, the men of the Corps were charged with guarding the valued resources. In some instances, they had to fend off and pursue guerrilla fighters who hoped to raid supplies. They were tasked with recovering those stolen goods, if at all possible. Invalid troops were assigned to guard the ever vital railroad lines which kept the war effort

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<sup>26</sup> Root, Ainsworth, and Kirkley, *Official Records*, 560-561.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 564.

moving. It was only a year into its existence, and the Invalid Corps was already proving its usefulness to an all the more appreciative Union. Espionage, guerilla, and raiding efforts were a common occurrence within the heartland of the Union and Confederacy, as well as along state borders. While already completing arduous tasks for the Union Army, the Invalid Corps was deployed to stop these covert actions. Once Alexandria, Virginia fell to the Union in 1861, the Twelfth Regiment of the Invalid Corps was deployed to stop guerrilla actions in the area.<sup>28</sup> In Chicago, Illinois troops from the Fifth and Fifteenth Regiments of the Invalid Corps broke up a plot by disloyal men to mutiny.<sup>29</sup> The Eighth Regiment also helped protect Chicago by stopping one hundred Confederate guerrillas from infiltrating the city, who planned to start a prison uprising among other covert actions.<sup>30</sup> Communities along the northern borders of the Union were not spared from the Confederate guerrilla efforts. Confederate raiders and sympathizers harassed the locals, including robbing three banks.<sup>31</sup> The Invalid Corps deployed forces from Rochester, New York to Saint Albans, Vermont, winning over the support of the local populace.<sup>32</sup>

As the war progressed the men of the Invalid Corps were not excluded from the fighting. In 1863, as Robert E. Lee pushed northward into Pennsylvania, the Invalid Corps was called in to defend Harrisburg.<sup>33</sup> Although the Battle of Gettysburg had a much grander impact in the minds of the Union, the people of Harrisburg felt safer and

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<sup>28</sup> Root, Ainsworth, and Kirkley, *Official Records*, 562.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 561, 563; George Levy, *To Die in Chicago: Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas 1862-65*. (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1999.) 87, 90.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 561-562.

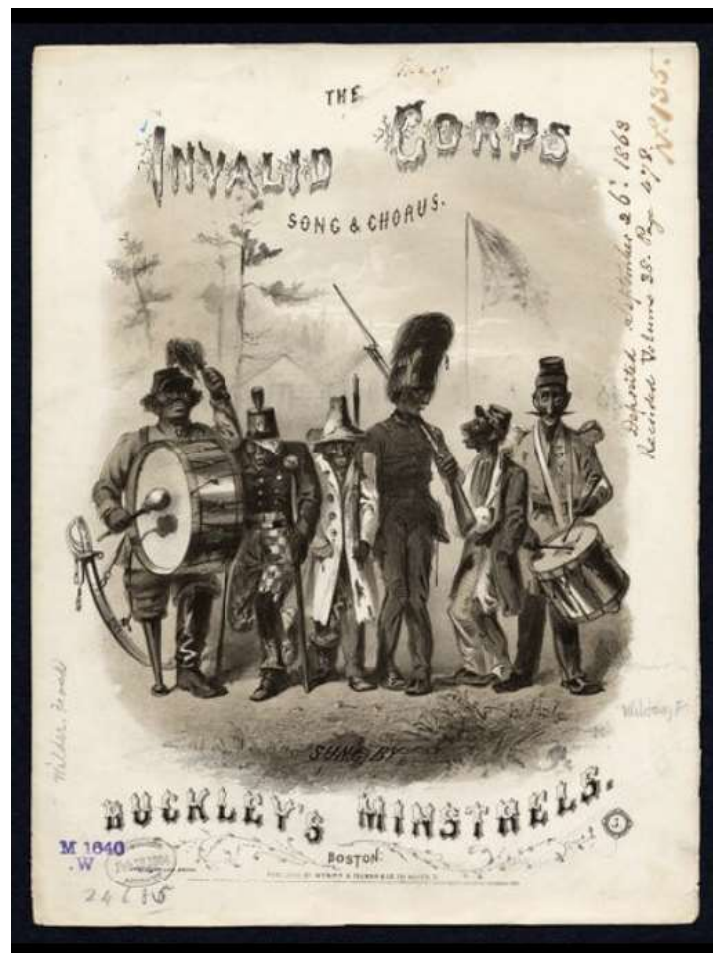
<sup>31</sup> Paul Cimballa and Randal Miller, eds., *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments* ( New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 194.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 187.

had more of an appreciation of the presence of the Invalid troops.<sup>34</sup> The use of the Invalid Corps was not limited to the confines of garrisons and fighting.

By 1864 the Invalid Corps had been widely implemented by the Union. Their services were felt from the front lines to the home front. Just as with their predecessors from the American Revolution, the public started generating sympathy for the Invalid Corps. Some still continued to view the men of the Invalid Corps as inferior and treated them unkindly. The derision escalated to such an extreme degree that an official song was created to jeer the men of the VRC.



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<sup>34</sup> Cimballa and Miller, *Union Soldiers...*, 187.

<sup>35</sup> Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ihas.200002281.0/?sp=1>

“I wanted much to go to war, And went to be examined.  
The Surgeon looked me o’er and o’er, my chest and back he hammered.  
He said, “you’re not the man for me, Your lungs are much affected.  
And likewise both your eyes are cocked, and otherwise defected.  
So now I’m with the invalids, I cannot go and fight, sir!  
Doctor told me, so you know, Of course it must be right sir!”

-Frank Wilder, *The Invalid Corps*<sup>36</sup>

But, these “Condemned Yankees” as one Confederate prisoner called them, were starting to see some appreciation for the sacrifices that they had made, and the courage they possessed in their continued service.<sup>37</sup>

The name “Invalid Corps” may appear harmless at first glance. However, when looked at contextually relative to the time frame of the Civil War there is a more sinister undertone to the name. Men of the Invalid Corps had suffered through mocking, heckling, and jeering throughout their service but the name “Invalid Corps” was part of the derision. The initials IC were synonymous at the time with not only the Invalid Corps, but also with the phrase “inspected and condemned” which was placed on government property, be it land or livestock.<sup>38</sup> So, the phrase “inspected and condemned” was taken by some troops and used to mock the men of the Invalid Corps. In 1864 steps were taken that made sure the men of the Invalid Corps did not have to see the name of their unit as a burden.

General Orders 111 was an action taken by the government to rename the Invalid Corps. On March 18, 1864, the name of the unit was officially changed to the Veteran

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<sup>36</sup> Frank Wilder, *The Invalid Corps*. (Boston: Henry S. Tolman & Co., 1863.)

<sup>37</sup> David. S. Heidler, Jeanne T. Heidler, & James. M. McPherson. *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History (Reissue ed.)*. (W. W. Norton & Company, 2002.), 1035.

<sup>38</sup> D. Heidler, J. Heidler, and McPherson, *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War*, 1035.



Reserve Corps, or simply VRC.<sup>39</sup> After years of service, the men of the VRC did not have to be ashamed of the title that they possessed. But a title change was not the end of the overhaul, as General Orders 111 also ordered other reforms.

What distinguished the men of the Invalid Corps from regular field troops for so long had been their sky blue uniform. This added to the list of things that the men of the Invalid Corps were mocked for. Once the Invalid Corps became the Veteran Reserve Corps the change was made to bring back the standard issue blue uniforms that most of the men originally served in. It also helped to deter the heckling from other troops.<sup>40</sup> The restructure of the Veteran Reserve Corps also allowed for the recruitment of soldiers that did not have physical disabilities. All of the changes that occurred to the Invalid Corps helped it to blend in, but it was a little known battle at the end of the war that helped the Veteran Reserve Corps to stand out.

Almost a year had passed since the Battle of Gettysburg had blunted the offensive capacity of the Confederacy. Following the battle, the Confederacy slowly started to collapse both militarily and politically. The war effort continued to worsen for the Confederacy and by July of 1864 the Union Army, under the command of Ulysses S. Grant, was threatening Robert E. Lee's forces in the Eastern Theater.<sup>41</sup> Grant's advance on Richmond was stalled at the Battle of Cold Harbor, which forced him to reconsider his plan of attack. Instead of risking another frontal attack, Grant opted to take Petersburg,

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<sup>39</sup> Newton T. Colby, *The Civil War Papers of Lt. Colonel Newton T. Colby, New York Infantry* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.), 241.

<sup>40</sup> Bruce Catton, *A Stillness at Appomattox* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 144.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Leepson, *Desperate Engagement: How a Little-Known Civil War Battle Saved Washington, D.C., and Changed American History* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press), 152.

Virginia. This rail hub served as a vital supply line to Richmond.<sup>42</sup> Just as he did with the Siege of Vicksburg, Grant was going to starve out the opposition.

General Lee knew that in order to buy precious time a great diversion was necessary. What he devised was a plan to strike at the Union forces that threatened encircled him, and then move onto Washington, D.C. to further apply pressure. This move was risky because General Lee knew that if General Grant received word that Lee had lost a part of his force, the offensive minded general would not hesitate to push on Lee's soldiers once again.<sup>43</sup> After assessing the risks, General Lee decided that there was no other alternative. He needed some way to relieve to pressure on his troops, and Lt. General Jubal A. Early was going to make the relief a reality.

At first Lee's gamble paid off. Lt. Gen. Early managed to break out and headed towards Washington D.C. Grant acted the way that Lee had intended.<sup>44</sup> As Union forces pushed into the Confederacy the campaigns demanded a high amount of man power. Even the troops that guarded Washington D.C. were pulled into the fray. So when Lt. Gen. Early broke out past the Union containment, the only forces that were left guarding the nation's capital were only temporary troops from Ohio and the men of the Veteran Reserve Corps.<sup>45</sup>

While Early was marching towards Washington, D.C. the Veteran Reserve Corps stationed there had little time to prepare. The sudden advance caused some concern, considering some VRC troops were still using outdated equipment. As if it were a link

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<sup>42</sup> Leepson, *Desperate Engagement*, 152.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

across time, the VRC troops were using old Prussian muskets, just as their Prussian Invalid Corps predecessors used outdated weaponry in their time.<sup>46</sup> To make matters worse, each soldier of the VRC was only issued thirty five rounds of ammunition. With an attack by the Confederates imminent, the men were told to sleep in uniform in case marching orders were given suddenly.<sup>47</sup> With outdated equipment and short on munitions, the men of the VRC were tasked with preventing the Confederacy from taking the nation's capital. Approaching them were fifteen thousand Confederate troops who were fighting to desperately keep General Lee from capture.<sup>48</sup>

When the fighting started, the men of the VRC served as garrison forces, not part of the action. While serving at the few forts that blocked Lt. Gen. Early's advance, the VRC was part of the last line of defense for Washington, D.C. If the guard forces that tried to stop Lt. Gen. Early's march failed, it was on the shoulders of the VRC, along with their fellow soldiers in the fort, to make sure that Confederates did not take the Union's capitol.

The forward protection against the Confederate advance did not hold. With the Union forward defenses outmatched and very few capable defenders standing in the way, the Confederate victory looked assured. Both sides were aware of the odds of the last line of defense holding. In Washington, crowds panicked about the advancing Rebels. Confederate soldiers, with the dome of the Capitol Building in sight, mused as to which monuments in Washington to deface and which to leave standing.<sup>49</sup> All that was left

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<sup>46</sup> D. Heidler, J. Heidler, and McPherson, *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War*, 1035.

<sup>47</sup> Leepson, *Desperate Engagement*, 153.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret E. Wagner, Gary W. Gallagher, Paul Finkelman, and James M. McPherson. *The Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference (Illustrated ed.)*. (Simon & Schuster, 2002.), 442.

<sup>49</sup> Leepson, *Desperate Engagement*, 177.

keeping Lt. Gen. Early from Washington was Fort Stevens, which did not seem like a match for his forces. After all, it was only supposed to be a smattering of volunteers and invalids that were standing in the way.

By the time Early's forward troops had reached the forts that guarded the capitol the garrison had already prepared for an assault. Union artillery opened fire on the advancing Confederates halting their progress. A few skirmishes broke out around the forts, most of which included men from the VRC, but even though the Union men were beaten back into the confines of the forts, the defenses themselves were never broken. During the fighting President Lincoln visited Fort Stevens to observe the skirmishing and came under fire from Confederate sharpshooters.<sup>50</sup> Early later admitted that he advanced too quickly and did not fully analyze the situation, but the damage was already done.<sup>51</sup> General Grant, who learned of the Confederate plan, sent reinforcements to aid in the defense of Washington. Lt. Gen. Early never ordered a full assault of Fort Stevens. Lee's gambit had failed, and Early's men withdrew back to Virginia.

The failed Confederate assault on Washington was the last Rebel push into the North. It was also the VRC's finest military success. This was a major morale boost for the men of the VRC. For some soldiers, it was a reminder of days past and reaffirmed their value as soldiers. Private Alfred Bellard said "with the burning houses, the bursting of the shell, and the rattle of small arms, it looked and sounded very much like old times."<sup>52</sup> The day may have meant much to the soldiers of the VRC but it also reaffirmed

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<sup>50</sup> Colby, *The Civil War Papers of Lt. Colonel Newton T. Colby*, 263.

<sup>51</sup> Leepson, *Desperate Engagement*, 181.

<sup>52</sup> D. Heidler, J. Heidler, and McPherson, *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War*, 1035.

their worth. They had helped hold off a superior enemy force that threatened to overrun the nation's capital. Their actions had consequences that severely impacted the war.

Since the Union was successful in holding off Early's advance on Washington Grant did not have to further support defenses of the city. Since a Confederate occupation of the city never happened, it is unknowable how long it would take for Union forces to retake the city. Nevertheless, a Confederate taking of Washington would be a major setback in the Union war effort. The Union capitol was successfully defended leaving General Grant to continue his assault on Lee's forces.

About three hundred and fifty Confederate prisoners were taken after the battle and the VRC was tasked with guarding them. One prison that the VRC was in charge of guarding was the Old Capitol Prison, named so because the building was originally used as the Capitol Building in the War of 1812. The refitted structure relied more on the prowess of the guards than the strength of the bars, as Lt. Col. Colby, who was in charge of the prison, had recollected.<sup>53</sup> Conditions of the deteriorating building aided in the mischief that the prisoners committed. On one occasion the guards were given orders to shoot any prisoner who got unruly, due to an incident where captives threw bricks at the guards for amusement.<sup>54</sup> Guard duty was something that the VRC had done before, so they were adept at keeping order around the grounds, but they took to other familiar tasks as well.

After the attack on Washington, the VRC was put back to assignments that were commonplace to them. Supply depots were also in need of guarding, so VRC troops were

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<sup>53</sup> Colby, *The Civil War Papers of Lt. Colonel Newton T. Colby*, 268.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 269.

stationed there to protect them from other potential raiders just as in years before.<sup>55</sup>

Other VRC soldiers resumed the original police work that they were accustomed to. The threat of the Confederacy was diminishing, but the Union was not taking any chances, and the VRC was there to maintain order on the home front yet again.

As with the Union, the Confederacy created their own Invalid Corps. Unlike the Northern Invalid Corps, this was a unit that did not have a significant impact. The Confederate Invalid Corps was created in 1864. Often, it was just a unit that was a temporary stop for disabled Confederate soldiers. During their appointment soldiers were often subjected to light duty. Once they were deemed “fit for duty” again, they were sent back to their original units.<sup>56</sup> The Confederate Invalid Corps did not see the extended service that the Union VRC did. Unfortunately for the Confederacy, by the time their Invalid Corps was created it was already a fight that was turned against them.

In the spring of 1865, the Army of Northern Virginia under Robert E. Lee surrendered. The war was finally over. Rumors started circulating as to the fate of the VRC. Just as with the Corps origin, the arguments for and against its existence sprang up. But while the arguing in Washington began, the VRC had one final duty to perform for the United States.

On April 14, 1865 Abraham Lincoln was attending the play *Our American Cousin*. What should have been a pleasant evening for the President, instead turned into a tragedy that was forever made infamous in American History. John Wilkes Booth, a Confederate sympathizer, shot the President in the back of the head, mortally wounding

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<sup>55</sup> Colby, *The Civil War Papers of Lt. Colonel Newton T. Colby*, 263.

<sup>56</sup> Root, Ainsworth, and Kirkley, *Official Records*, 442.

him. The nation mourned as Abraham Lincoln succumbed to his wound and passed away the following day.

The final notable act of the VRC was to escort the body of Abraham Lincoln to Springfield, and serve as the honor guard.<sup>57</sup> It was only fitting that the men who had guarded the nation's capital, ensuring the president's safety, saw him to his final resting place. So, on April 20, 1865, the order was given to have three men from the VRC accompany the President's body.<sup>58</sup> That was the last great service the men of the VRC performed.

When the war ended, the debate as to what to do with the VRC began. Ultimately, it was decided that even though the Corps proved to be useful, the need for it had diminished. In July of 1866, the VRC was officially disbanded.<sup>59</sup> The Corps contained 764 officers and 28,738 men, when it was dismissed.<sup>60</sup> Just as their predecessors had done in the American Revolution, the men of the VRC suffered through the same hardships as regular soldiers. But, they also had to suffer through the indignities and derision that were forced upon them by others. Similarly, just as in decades prior, the people had not forgotten about the services of the men of the VRC and were determined to help them in any way they could.

Support for disabled soldiers had come from a variety of sources, both public and private. There were still soldiers who were wounded and disabled from the wars of decades prior. The Civil War just added to the amount of disabled soldiers that needed

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<sup>57</sup> Johnson, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson*, 30.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>60</sup> James Grant Wilson and John Fisk, eds., *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company), 38.

care. Grizzly fighting left no shortage of maimed soldiers on the battlefield. Many of these wounds were debilitating, leaving soldiers not only scarred, not only physically but also mentally. Luckily, public sympathy that was generated during the period between the War of 1812 and the Civil War still held a place in some hearts and minds. Philanthropists from all over America stepped up to aid the soldiers that had done their duty for their country.

There had been several efforts following the War of 1812 to care for the disabled soldiers of both the War of 1812 and the American Revolution. This sentiment was not lost during the Civil War. Emotions were stirred up as injured men were sent behind the lines to recover. Constant reminders of the sacrifices that these men made led some people to take it upon themselves to help.

One of the most generous ways in which people cared for disabled veterans was the House for Discharged Soldiers. The goal of this house was to try and help disabled soldiers make a living. It provided care for around 600 soldiers. What made the House for Discharged Soldiers unique was the fact that it was established solely by private funding. So it was the people, not the government, which took charge in caring for disabled soldiers. The original house was established in Boston, but as the amount of those admitted became too much to bear, new ones were established in the surrounding suburbs.<sup>61</sup> These houses personified the spirit of their predecessors that took it upon themselves to take care of those who gave so much for the defense of the country. Individual citizens did act selflessly and cared for disabled veterans, but the government eventually stepped in and started helping past just the distribution of pensions.

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<sup>61</sup> Johnson, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson*, 10.



In 1865, the government started opening “soldier homes” for disabled veterans as well. Several of these homes were created around the country. At the height of their admittance the “soldier homes” cared for around 30,000 individuals. Families of the soldiers were allowed to stay in the homes as well, which added to their overall occupancy.<sup>62</sup> Having wives and children living with them was a relief to many soldiers. So the houses became places of both physical and mental healing. Many men of the VRC were cared for by public and private institutions, but the pension system was still an option which several soldiers chose.

While several veterans chose to live in the many aid houses that were available throughout the country, others tried to make a living out in society. Just as they tried to stay associated with their old units during the war, they also tried to integrate, attempting to feel more included in daily activities. Finding jobs may have been hard for some disabled veterans. They did, nonetheless, have a source of income to rely on. The pension system for disabled soldiers during the Civil War had not changed much from that of the Mexican American War. All pensions were still dependent on the injury. As per usual, the pay of the pensions was increased, to accommodate for the changing value of the dollar.<sup>63</sup> Pensions ranged from eight to thirty dollars a month, depending on rank and injury.<sup>64</sup> It may not have been much, but for some it was enough to keep them motivated to stay out of the aid houses. There were efforts to care for the men of the VRC, but these men still faced adversity even after the war.

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<sup>62</sup> Johnson, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson* 35.

<sup>63</sup> Root, Ainsworth, and Kirkley, *Official Records*, 322.

<sup>64</sup> Johnson, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson* 35.

When the men of the VRC served in the Civil War they were taunted and ridiculed even though they tried to serve as best they could. The harassment was too much for some soldiers, as men pleaded to be sent back to their old units instead of being labeled invalids.<sup>65</sup> In a fitting statement to how the Veteran Reserve Corps was treated throughout its existence, men of the VRC served as Abraham Lincoln's honor guard, but were not allowed to march in the two day victory parade in Washington, D.C.<sup>66</sup> This showed that disabled soldiers were still not seen as equals even after their service. Life after the military may have seemed bleak for some soldiers, but others did not let adversity keep them down.

Men of the VRC were subject to tough times, this did not mean that they were all doomed to lives of dependence. Some of the men who served in the VRC still went on to have prominent careers. Duties that they performed while serving, became useful when finding jobs in everyday life. Serving as orderlies and clerks gave some soldiers opportunities in hospitals or banks.<sup>67</sup> For others, a career in politics awaited. Veteran soldiers went on to make a powerful political force, influencing military policy making and compensatory decisions.<sup>68</sup> The world of politics, that had decided the fate of the VRC, was also the battleground on which the matters of their pensions were fought over.

Bipartisan politics created problems for the pension system which cared for disabled soldiers. Differing views began springing up about disabled veterans. Some still thought of these veterans as soldiers who served their country bravely and were to be

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<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson*, 14.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>67</sup> Colby, *The Civil War Papers of Lt. Colonel Newton T. Colby*, 323.

<sup>68</sup> Jacqueline Vaughn Switzer, *Disable Rights: American Disability Policy and the Fight for Equality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press), 46.

honored. Others saw them as nothing more than dependents who were never going to be able to use the pensions that were designed for them. These differing viewpoints both had several supporters, each of which looked for some way to gain an edge on the opposition.

Supporting the cause for the disabled soldier's pensions were many sympathetic people who viewed the system as compensation for the sacrifices those men made for the sake of the country. These people were proactive in the policy making for disabled soldiers. Among them were politicians, such as James Tanner, who was Commissioner of Pensions in 1889. Sharing in the pain of most disabled veterans, he was a double amputee of the war, losing both of his legs in the service. If there was ever a proactive advocate for veteran soldiers it was him. He constantly lobbied Congress on behalf of disabled soldiers. Through his efforts, two houses for veterans were established, one for Union soldiers, another for Confederates.<sup>69</sup> These actions, when seen in the public eye, could have help win over support for the cause. The story of a man who not only fought for disabled soldiers, but was one himself, and who was also succeeding in his efforts, was a very remarkable story. Especially since people still held reservations about physical and mental disabilities at the time. So even after all of the fighting that people like James Tanner did for disabled soldiers, opposition was ever present.

As the supporters continued to fight for increased benefits for disabled soldiers, there was also an opposing force standing in the way. More conservative politicians were not as eager to increase benefits for disabled veterans. They figured that the pension system was degrading. Instead of being just compensation for soldiers, they viewed it as

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<sup>69</sup> New York Times, *Corporal Tanner Improving*, Feb. 1894.

derision on American independence.<sup>70</sup> Views like this were spread throughout America, presenting the question of whether or not disabled veterans actually personified the spirit of American independence. Other means of creating opposition for the pension system were stories about the abuse of it. Stories about the exploitation of the system ranged from people feigning the severity of their injuries in order to receive a pension, to the corruption of the Commissioner of Pensions himself.<sup>71</sup> These attacks did take their toll. Claims of Tanner's misconduct did reveal that he was pressing his department over the budget. This forced his resignation and was a disadvantage against those who fought for veteran pensions.<sup>72</sup> Regardless, the efforts of both sides never secured final victory. The issue of Invalid pensions continued on without end, but the memory of the VRC faded from the public mind.

Eventually, the public memory of the VRC slowly crept away. With the changing times, newer, more vibrant issues overshadowed that of disabled soldiers. Fighting still remained between those for and against the pension system, but it never grew to a major scale as to grab headlines. The mortality rate of soldiers in the VRC as opposed to healthier men also made it difficult to keep public knowledge of the VRC around. Also working against it was the fact that the uncomfortable feeling of being in the VRC still lingered with some men. So, instead of acknowledging the fact that they had served in the VRC, they identified themselves with their original units.<sup>73</sup> These factors all contributed to the fall of the VRC into relative obscurity, but that did not change the fact

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<sup>70</sup> Johnson, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson*, 35.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>72</sup> *New York Times*, *Exit Corporal Tanner Improving*, September 1889.

<sup>73</sup> Johnson, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson*, 38.

that the men of the Veteran Reserve Corps were still soldiers who fought and did their duty in one of the darkest times in American History.

Ever since the American Revolution, the Invalid Corps was an ever valuable support to the war effort. Stemming back to 1777, men deemed invalid for regular service in the army still showed their value in a multitude of ways. At surface value, it was their ever valuable service that allowed other soldiers to be utilized on the front. Their service in the Continental Army limited the amount of combat that the Corps experienced, but guarding valuable supplies and vital locations such as Philadelphia. After the Revolutionary War the men of the Invalid Corps continued fighting, this time it was over their benefits and pensions. Although the service of the Invalid Corps had its share of supporters, ultimately the Corps was disbanded. The United States fought through two wars before it called upon the Invalid Corps again. Demand for troops skyrocketed with the due to the outbreak of the Civil War. Soldiers, artillery crews, and sailors were needed for the war effort and any method to get able bodied soldiers on the front lines was not overlooked. With advances in weaponry and the dangers of the battlefield, casualties depleted the ever precious soldier count at a tremendous rate. In the United States military the Invalid Corps had not been used since the American Revolution, but it produced the desired results that the Union looked for. The order for the creation of an Invalid Corps during the Civil War had its skeptics. Clad in sky blue, the men of the Invalid Corps took on the same roles as their Revolutionary War counterparts. From its inception the Invalid Corps faced derision just like in years past. Some called it the “Infidel Corps.”<sup>74</sup> Others sang the derogatory song entitled “The Invalid Corps.” But as

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<sup>74</sup> Johnson, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson*, 133.

the Civil War progressed the Invalid Corps showed its validity as a useful military entity. Unlike in the American Revolution, the use of the Invalid Corps in the Union military was widespread. Just as in the American Revolution, the Invalid Corps during the Civil War guarded valuable supplies and the nation's capital as well. However, the Civil War showed just how versatile the Invalid Corps truly was. From guarding the home front and national borders to guarding prisoners and enforcing military regulations, the Invalid Corps provided invaluable services all throughout the Union. As the Corps proved its value time and again, it was renamed the Veteran Reserve Corps, partly to combat the stigma that it received. After the Civil War, just like with the Revolutionary War, the necessity of the Corps was called into question. Regardless of public support or the praise from military leaders, the VRC was disbanded yet again. The Veteran Reserve Corps has not been called into service since the Civil War, but the services that it provided from the American Revolution to the Civil War are undeniable. From its creation and throughout some of its darkest times, the United States owes a debt of gratitude to the unsung heroes of the Veteran Reserve Corps.

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