A Young Soldier
in the Army of the Potomac

Diary of Howard Helman, 1862

When the siege of Richmond ended in the summer of 1862 and Union armies retreated northward, President Lincoln issued a call for 300,000 additional volunteers. The threat of imminent invasion of the North stirred a patriotic response to that call for troops, and actions were taken to implement it. On July 7, the Adjutant General of the United States Army requested Governor Andrew Curtin of Pennsylvania to raise twenty-one new regiments immediately. In a speech at a mass meeting held at Allegheny, Pennsylvania, on July 24, Governor Curtin implied that those in the North who had discerned success in General McClellan’s exploits in Virginia had only deluded themselves. The Union armies had been driven back to the gates of Washington, and, in this critical hour, he emphasized the need for a new effort to enlist men for the defense of the Union.

Recalling those days, one observer reported: “Many youths who had never hitherto entertained a thought of enlisting, suddenly felt themselves impelled to enroll.” A newspaper editor praised the noble example and the spirit manifested by young men between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one years who were responding to the call for troops. In Lewistown, county seat of Mifflin County, Joseph S. Waream, who had served in the Logan Guards, a militia unit from Lewistown which had been among the first to reach Washington in 1861 to defend the capital, made an appeal for volunteers. To the

2 Ibid., Preface.
3 Lewistown Gazette, Aug. 13, 1862.
4 Ibid., July 30, 1862.
patriotic challenge, he added the further inducement of a fifty dollar bounty per recruit, set by the county commissioners.\(^5\)

Young Howard Helman, a seventeen-year-old printer, responded to the call and joined Waream's group on August 2.\(^6\) Four days after enlistment, he entrained for Harrisburg, where, during the following two weeks, the recruits were given medical examinations and were outfitted. On August 19, the newly formed companies left Harrisburg for Washington, and the front.\(^7\)

The diary of Private Helman, who served nine months in Company K, 131st Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, begins on August 6, the day he left Lewistown, and concludes on November 30, except for a final account, dated December 15, of his participation in the Battle of Fredericksburg. Whether he continued his diary through the Battle of Chancellorsville, in which his company fought, is not known. The value of Helman's diary lies in its simple description of camp life and daily experiences, including the long march to Fredericksburg, and its revelations of the feelings of a very young and raw recruit. Like so many youthful enterprises, the diary begins in high spirits and ends in a muted recitation of facts.\(^8\)

On that morning \([\text{August 6, 1862}]\) there was an unusual stir in the borough of Lewistown; women hurrying to and fro, and men with their bundles, telling that there was something rare in the wind. True there was. On that eventful morning Capt. Waream\(^9\) was to leave for Harrisburg with a company of men to do battle for their country. The hour came for starting and a long line wended their

\(^5\) Ibid., Aug. 13, 1862.

\(^6\) Howard Helman was born in Hanover, York County, Pa., on Nov. 16, 1844. His enlistment papers are in the Pension Records, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

\(^7\) Lewistown Gazette, Aug. 27, 1862.

\(^8\) The editor wishes to thank Dr. Margaret Rickert, through whose family the original diary of her uncle, Howard Helman, has been preserved, for making the diary available to him. He also gratefully acknowledges the advice and assistance of Dr. Carrol H. Quenzel, librarian and professor of history at Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia at Fredericksburg, Mr. J. Martin Stroup, former editor of \textit{The Sentinel}, Lewistown, Pa., and Messrs. Ralph Happel and Albert Dillahunty, historians at the Administrative Headquarters, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Fredericksburg, Va.

way to the railroad, fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, sweethearts and wives all joined in the long procession with the young volunteers. After a long delay at the depot the train at length arrived, and then came the parting hour, the scene was almost indescribable, and we shall not undertake it, but the usual good wishes and kisses, and the hearty shake of the hand, and then amidst the hubbub and confusion could be heard the command “fall in men, fall in!” The cars at length started 'mid the wild huzzahs of the populace. We arrived safely at Harrisburg and the men were immediately marched out to Camp Curtin and there had a dinner of raw flitch, soft-bread, crackers, etc. We got our Sibley tents, all our cooking utensils and our clothing, and after a sojourn in Harrisburg for a short time we took the cars for Baltimore, in passing along the road we were cheered lustily and especially in the borough of Little York, where the people turned out en masse to see us and cheer us as we passed along. We arrived at Baltimore at an early hour, and got breakfast at the Union Volunteers Refreshment Saloon, when we got on the cars for Washington, we sat soft to Washington and got our Supper at the Soldiers Home, and then started for Arlington Heights. We arrived there in good time and pitched our tents, and spent a very happy time there for one week, our next trip was to our camp near Alexandria, we remained there for a few days, and took up our line of march for our camp near Fort Ward. It was here we spent the happiest time of all. We remained there about one week, and then went about a mile across the country, and done some picket duty;
our next march was to Washington via Georgetown, we came into Washington by night and took a good rest there for a couple of days and then came our forced marches to Antietam, hauling but once out of eight days at Monocacy Creek near Fredrick City for 24 hours. We started from Fredrick City one evening and marched to the other side of Boonsboro, by morning the distance of 28 miles. The next day we marched to the battle field, and for the first time found ourselves in line of battle, and all the men seemed willing to cast their lot with the foe. We moved on past the various battle fields, which were fought and won by our gallant volunteers, who marched through fire and blood to sustain that flag which descended from our forefathers as their birthright, and gallantly did they sustain it on the eventful days of the 16th and 17th of September. We have found at last a camp of rest after our toilsome marches, and the men are enjoying it finely.

September 29, 1862  
I got up this morning bright and early and got my breakfast of hard tack and coffee. The sun shone unusually warm, and all betokened a hot day, but toward evening heavy storm clouds are approaching, and rain seems almost inevitable. Capt. Waream has went to see some friends in the 83rd regs.

September 30, 1862  
We eat a hearty breakfast, and proceeded to our post on guard. To-day at 3 o'clock we had regimental inspection, and our company was praised for its cleanliness. Lieuts. Waters


16 The 131st Regiment was now part of the Second Brigade, Third Division, Fifth Army Corps. The division was commanded by Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys, and left Washington for Antietam at daylight, Sept. 14, 1862. Bates, IV, 225.

17 Frederick, Md.


19 Sept. 18, 1862. McClellan did not renew the Battle of Antietam, using as one of his reasons the late arrival of Humphreys' division, a reason challenged by Humphreys in his report to Secretary of War Stanton, Apr. 3, 1863. Ibid., 373.

20 The camp was located near Sharpsburg, Md. Bates, IV, 225.

and Weber are on the sick list. The Capt returned after a French leave from Lewistown.

October 1, 1862 The morn opened bright and pleasant, but towards evening we had a very heavy thunder shower, our day tents, did not prove themselves equal to the task, as the rain sifted through them, making our blankets wet. The company is improving very much, and all are in good spirits.

October 2, 1862 The greatest thing of to-day was the receiving of our mail, at regimental headquarters, we had not received any letters for nearly three weeks, and now they came all in one pile three oats sacks full, each man had a hand full, and a happier set of men we have never seen.

October 3, 1862 The sun rose bright and beautiful indicating a warm day. We were notified that we would be reviewed by the President, Gen. McClellan and staff, and were formed in line about 10 o'clock and marched to the review ground, and after waiting about five hours, the President and suite passed in review, he was cheered heartily while passing. Everything passed off pleasantly.

October 4, 1862 There was nothing of any importance going on to-day, till toward evening when the company was drawn out for picket, we proceeded to our post along the Potomac in a thunder storm, and for the first time the boys had to do the disagreeable duty of picketing. We got paid off to-day, $27 bounty and $2 premium.

October 5, 1862 This morning still finds us on picket. We started out to gather paupas [papaw, or papaya], and found them in great abundance and very ripe. The day has been remarkably fine and warm. We were relieved about 7 o'clock, and proceeded to our camp and after an oyster supper went to bed.

October 6, 1862 Morning broke bright and beautiful. There was nothing of any interest going on in camp. We have had battalion and

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22 1st Lt. Grant T. Waters and 2nd Lt. David B. Weber were both mustered into service Aug. 18, 1862. Waters was wounded at Fredericksburg, Dec. 13, 1862, and discharged, Mar. 7, 1863. Weber was promoted to 1st lieutenant, Mar. 8, 1863, and was mustered out with the company, May 23, 1863. Bates, IV, 241.

23 While encamped here, the 131st Regiment experienced much illness. At one time, almost one fifth of the regiment was on the sick list. Ibid., 225.

24 President Lincoln used his visit to urge the overcautious McClellan to take the initiative. O.R., XIX, Pt. I, 13.
company drill. Our Sutler is now selling his goods at the following prices: Bread, loaves as big as a fist 10 cts, Cheese 30 per lb., Raisens 30 per lb., ½ pint jelly $1.00, Tobacco $1. per lb. October 7, 1862 Morning very foggy. We had a breakfast of ham, bread and butter. As usual we had company and battalion drill. All is quiet about camp.

October 8, 1862 It has been very warm all day. The men took off their coats to go through with company and battalion drill. Nothing going on of any account.

October 9, 1862 I have been on camp guard all day, but for our officer everything would have passed off pleasantly. But he did not relieve us once on time making us stand 3 hours. I come off tomorrow morning. It has been exceedingly warm, making the men very lazy on their regular drills.

October 10, 1862 We had inspection to-day of our arms, haversacks and canteens by a regular officer. There were two guns in our company condemned for rustiness. O. P. Selheimers and H. C. Ties. We have had rain nearly all day.

October 11, 1862 It has been very disagreeable all day, raining all the time, and with a cold wind. The men put on their overcoats, and with them on felt comfortable. There has been no drill in consequence of bad weather, making camp very dull.

October 12, 1862 To-day being Sunday we had our regular company inspection, and our Col. told us we had the cleanest guns in the regiment. We started from our camp to our picket-line on the banks of the Potomac, and built ourselves cornstalk huts. It has been raining almost all day and has been cold.

October 13, 1862 It has been very disagreeable all day. It is raining, and we have no shelter to protect us from the water. We were relieved at dark.

October 14, 1862 This day had been singled out for inspection, but it did not come off. We policed our quarters and cleaned up

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25 Compare with prices charged later. See diary entries below for Nov. 14 and 25.
generally. We had battallion drill and dress parade. All well and quiet.

October 15, 1862  There was nothing going on of any account in camp. We had the usual battallion and company drill. It has been quite cold all day, and we can feel that winter is closely approaching.

October 16, 1862  The morning opened with indications of rain, and in the evening we were visited with a very heavy thunder shower. We tried to keep the water out of our tent, but to no avail. It came through on a rush, and we had to build a bridge of barrel staves to keep the water from running over our feet. We then slept soundly.

October 17, 1862  The morning sun shone out bright and pleasant, and we have all the indications of having a fine day. We have been detailed for camp guard to-day, and all passed off well. Lieut Weber is on the sick list. Our company went out on picket this evening.

October 18, 1862  I came off of duty this morning at 8 o'clock, and then helped to grade our company street, and make things look nice in general. We had some visitors to-day from Mifflin County. Mr. Stenelt, Mosses Miller, Mr. Brouer and some others.28

October 19, 1862  We had our usual Sunday inspection, and also this morning we had preaching, though but a small turnout. Dress parade closed our Sunday in the army.

October 20, 1862  The day passed off very quietly and company and battallion drill being the only thing that engrossed our attention. It is beginning to be very cold in the mornings, and immediately after roll-call we all rush for the cooks fire. The leaves on the trees are beginning to color, and some to fall, plainly indicating the reign of Jack Frost to be near at hand. The Captain's wife came here this afternoon.

October 21, 1862  To-day we received marching orders.29 We were told to be ready to move at a moment's warning, and immediately two days rations of meat and crackers were served out to us,

28 None of these is identifiable.
29 The march southeast through Maryland and Virginia to Fredericksburg did not begin until Oct. 31, 1862. See entry for that date below. Lincoln directed McClellan to cross the Potomac and engage the enemy or drive him south. Halleck to McClellan, Oct. 6, 1862, O.R., XIX, Pt. I, 10–11.
and of course we are all ready to go. The weather is very stormy, some of the tents blowing down. The Capt. is unwell.

October 22, 1862  It has been very cold all day, and the wind blowing almost a hurricane, so much so as to upset our tents and carry almost everything before it. We are still under marching orders. There was nothing done on account of the high wind and it being so cold.

October 23, 1862  We were detailed for guard this morning, but at guard mount was sent back there being too many on the detail. It has not been so cold to-day as yesterday, although we had very high wind. We are still under marching orders.

October 24, 1862  We brushed up for guard this morning again, and was lucky enough to be singled out as Adjutant's orderly. Two more out of our company was taken out. Robt. Junkin, being cl[ear] of duty, and Daniel Koons, Officer of the day orderly. Our regiment inspected to-day by Lieut. Col. Hayes.

October 25, 1862  There has been nothing occurring in camp of any account, and with the exception of the usual drills has been very dull. On a headboard outside of camp are inscribed the following words:—Here lies the remains of a venerable old mule, who died of starvation by the neglect of his driver, Emanuel Noll. Buried by the Corporal of the guard.

October 26, 1862  Throughout the day it has been very disagreeable. It has been raining all the day, and our shelter tents not being water proof, it is continually dripping inside. The wind is high and very cold.

October 27, 1862  When we arose this morning it was still raining but towards afternoon it cleared off. We drew some molasses from our comisary and proved quite a treat to the boys. There has been no drilling on account of the weather.

October 28, 1862  The day throughout has been very fine. It came our turn to go on camp guard, the night proved to be very cold, and James Ginifen and myself built a fire on our beat which kept us

31 Not identifiable.
32 Pvt. Emanuel Noll served in Company K the entire nine months. Ibid., 242.
33 Pvt. James Ginifen. Ibid.
comfortable through the night. We had a very heavy frost, also, our usual battalion and company drills.

October 29, 1862  We were discharged from guard this morning, and did nothing this day but drill with regiment and company. This is one of the coldest days we have had since we have been in the service.

October 30, 1862  There has been nothing going on in camp of any account. The boys succeeded in robbing an apple vendor, and after getting his horses in motion, pulled the spigot out of the barrel and ran the cider out. The day has been very fine.

October 31, 1862  Orders came at last to march, and at 12 o'clock we were all ready for the tramp. We started on the road to Harpers Ferry. We marched that day and part of the night, and bivouacked in a woods about 8 miles from the Ferry. The sun was very hot, and there were a great many stragglers. The boys left their old camp with some reluctance.

November 1, 1862  We started early on the march, long before the sun was up and reached Sandy Hook about 2 o'clock. Here we commenced to see the track of the desolaters—the rebels—all the government property was destroyed. We also had a good view of Maryland Heights, Louden and Boliver Heights; we then crossed the Potomac and Shenandoah, into Louden Valley. We marched about 5 miles on the other side of Harpers Ferry, and encamped for the night, in a beautiful field; we were very much fatigued, and after putting up our tent, went to bed.

November 2, 1862  We arose late this morning on account of our being very tired, and having received no orders to march, we lazied around camp all day; and, in fact, we had nothing to disturb our rest, but regimental muster for pay. We were very much surprised to see Mr. Galbraith, G. R. Frysinger and “Billy” Galbraith in our camp, they brought along some good things, and they were most welcome visitors. Through them we heard all the news from Lewistown. We are very sorry that they can’t stay with us any

34 Sandy Hook, Md., on the north side of the Potomac River, east of Harper’s Ferry.
35 The heights, Maryland, Bolivar, and Louden, surrounding Harper’s Ferry; Louden Valley was south of Harper’s Ferry, on the south side of the Shenandoah River.
36 George R. Frysinger was editor of the Lewistown Gazette. The Galbraiths are unidentifiable.
longer, as we have got orders to march at 5 o’clock to-morrow morning.

November 3, 1862 We had a very hard march of it to-day, marching about 18 miles, to Snicker’s Gap; the enemy left the gap as we came there, and they are now in force in Shenandoah Valley. We are encamped in a beautiful field, and are enjoying a little rest. Marching has been very hard. I have hardly any shoes on my feet. We slept in the open air last night, and got up very early on account of it being too cold to sleep. We were detailed for guard this morning but only stood one trick. There was nothing of any account occurring in the regiment to-day, and the men keep close to their quarters, passing the day in sleep. Sumner’s Corp passed us today on the road to Pleasentoon’s Gap.

November 4, 1862 The sun rose very warm this morning, and soon deprived the boys of their overcoats. We were inspected twice to-day, also, formed in hollow square and had numerous orders read to us. There was heavy firing to-day in the direction of Front Royal. Signal lights were going up all last night; and they looked very pretty. Everything is quiet about camp, and we expect to move any moment.

November 5, 1862 We started from our camp at Snicker’s Gap about 12 o’clock, and marched until 8 at night, when we haulted in a nice field, cooked our suppers, put up our shelters and went to bed. The march on my part was very disagreeable as the soles came off my shoes and the sharp stones cut my feet. It rained a little to-night. Our boys attacked a turkey roost and some made out to have a good supper.

November 6, 1862 We were roused up this morning about daylight; it was very cold. We had to start without breakfast and with

37 An important pass in the Blue Ridge Mountains, thirty miles south of Harper’s Ferry.
38 While the Union forces were marching southeast, the Confederate forces marched southwest on the other side of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Judson, 55.
40 Front Royal, Va., about twenty-two miles southwest of Snicker’s Gap.
41 The location was Middleburg, Va., about twelve miles southeast of Snicker’s Gap. Ibid., Pt. I, 341.
the pain that our new boots gave us made marching very uncomfortable. We stopped at the pretty little village of White Plains,\textsuperscript{42} encamped for the night in a large woods. It is very cold, but we have plenty of wood and big fires. Franklin's Corps lay across the railroad from us.\textsuperscript{43} Some of the 49th have been to see us.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{November 7, 1862}  We got up early this morning and made our breakfast, it was very cold, and I might say the only real winter day we have had, for it snowed to the depth of 4 inches. The boys stuck closely to the fires, and, in fact, we could not make them too big, the inclemency of the weather makes us think of winter quarters.

\textbf{November 8, 1862}  We struck our tents this morning and started through the snow. After a good deal of delay we got started, and marched about 1 mile on the other side of New Baltimore,\textsuperscript{45} where we halted for the night. We passed Sigel's Corps\textsuperscript{46} at New Baltimore. We were detailed for guard as soon as the regiment halted, and of course had to stand two hours in the cold without supper, and had no dinner, but such is a soldier's life.

\textbf{November 9, 1862}  We pulled up our tents this morning at 10 o'clock, and started on the road to Warrenton.\textsuperscript{47} We marched to within half a mile of our destination, and halted in a nice field about 2 o'clock p.m. We put up our shelter tent, and it looks quite comfortable, in fact comfortable enough to receive its inmates, Lieut. Waters, Saml. Chestnut,\textsuperscript{48} and myself. We have been marching for ten days in succession, and the boys are pretty well played out. Night cold. All quiet along the lines.

\textbf{November 10, 1862}  Our brigade was formed for review, and after waiting a long time the cavalcade appeared, and the commander of the army of the Potomac was brought forward by the

\textsuperscript{42} White Plains, Va., about twenty-two miles southeast of Front Royal.

\textsuperscript{43} Maj. Gen. William B. Franklin commanded at this time the Sixth Army Corps. Under the reorganization of Nov. 14, 1862, he became commander of the Left Grand Division, consisting of the First and Sixth Corps. \textit{Ibid.}, Pt. II, 583.

\textsuperscript{44} The 49th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, was attached to the Sixth Army Corps.

\textsuperscript{45} New Baltimore, Va., about five miles northeast of Warrenton, Va.


\textsuperscript{47} Warrenton, Va., was the gathering point for troops preparing to march on Fredericksburg.

\textsuperscript{48} Pvt. Samuel Chestnut served the entire nine months in Company K. Bates, IV, 241.
booming of cannon, and cheering of men.\textsuperscript{49} Everything was a decided success. Gen. Burnside now takes command of the army. Lieut. Waters and a couple of men went out to-day and brought in a sheep, he looking more like a butcher than a commander, but he is all right and we shall now live on mutton.

\textbf{November 11, 1862} We got up early this morning, and made our breakfast, having fried mutton, crackers and coffee. While toasting some crackers at the fire, we run a fork into our hand, it is quite painful. We had battalion drill this morning at 9 o’clock, the men being very tired from their previous marches, did not drill much. We had dress parade in the evening. Everything is going on quietly. Evenings and mornings cold.

\textbf{November 12, 1862} The only thing of any consequence to-day was the review of our brigade by our corps commander Gen T. J. Porter,\textsuperscript{50} and passed off very creditably. Everything is dull and monotonous in camp. We received a large mail to-day, by which we received some papers from home, they came good. Lieut. Waters is unwell, in fact he has not been well for the last few days. It has been very comfortable to-day.

\textbf{November 13, 1862} The day throughout has been very pleasant, and the men could keep comfortable without their overcoats on. Dress parade was the only duty we had to do to-day, and, in fact, the only thing the men have to do is cook and eat. Capt. Waream is one of the court of inquiry for trying stragglers, Lieut. Wilson and H. M. Hultz,\textsuperscript{51} both being under arrest, for straggling. All well and everything quiet.

\textbf{November 14, 1862} We were kept pretty busy to-day having a review and the removal of our tents, about 20 paces from our former site. The tents were formed into regular streets, and now they look something like an encampment. Lieut. Waters in his usual good way

\textsuperscript{49} He refers to Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, replaced as commander of the Army of the Potomac by Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside, who had assumed command, Nov. 5, 1862. This passage is testimony of the esteem in which the common soldier held McClellan. \textit{O.R.,} XIX, Pr. II, 545.

\textsuperscript{50} Maj. Gen. Fitz-John Porter was replaced as commander of the Fifth Army Corps on Nov. 10, 1862, by Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker. Porter was found guilty in a court-martial trial, November, 1862, of insubordination at the Second Battle of Bull Run, Aug. 27-Sept. 1, 1862. \textit{Ibid.}, 569.

\textsuperscript{51} Not identified with the 131st Regiment.
brought down from our Sutler's a large eel, which eat well, and also 1½ pounds of butter. The Sutler is reaping rich rewards, Butter 50 cts, Bread 25 cts per loaf and other things accordingly.

November 15, 1862 To-day was police day, and consequently there was a detail made of 20 men and a Sergeant and Corporal, with orders to cut down the briars and grade the street, which when done looked very nice. We had dress parade at the usual time, and after that supper, after supper we were at liberty to do what we pleased. It is quite cold in the evenings, and the boys consider the fire their best friend.

November 16, 1862 To-day, Sunday, we had inspection, and in the afternoon was reviewed by our corp commander, Gen. Hooker. He reviewed us, and we marched past him in review. We marched about two miles to the review ground. We keep a warm fire behind our tent, as it is too cold without. Lieut. Waters is some better these past few days.

November 17, 1862 We were ordered up this morning at 5 o’clock, and by daylight we were ready to move. We took up our line of march for Warrenton Junction, and on the road passed through the town of Warrenton, it is a very nice place, and it looked as though at one time it was flourishing. The march was exceedingly tedious, it was drizzling rain most of the day, and we marched very fast, almost on the double-quick. Our feet was very sore. It is still raining to-night.

November 18, 1862 Our second day’s march was the hardest we have had for a long time. Our regiment was wagon guard, and was kept on the run half the time; on account of the wagons, stopping or jamming, and would then start off on a trot, of course we would have to follow. Our regiment was tired out, most of the men being foot-sore, and could hardly get along. We are camped for the night. It was raining nearly all day.

November 19, 1862 Our third days march was very tedious, I suppose the men took it harder because it was raining all day and

52 Under the reorganization of Nov. 14, 1862, Hooker became commander of the Center Grand Division, comprised of the Third and Fifth Army Corps. Ibid., 583.
53 Located five miles southeast of Warrenton, Va., on the Orange & Alexandria Railroad, connecting Alexandria and Culpeper Court House.
54 The location of this camp was near Spotted Farm, Va. Ibid., Pt. I, 341.
the roads was very muddy. We were haulted about three hours to make coffee, or to wait until the trains could pass. To-night I don’t believe I slept 15 minutes, on account of having the rheumatism, and a severe pain across the lungs. I set up the greater part of the night. It is still raining very hard.

*November 20, 1862* To-day we was not called up as usual to march, I felt sore this morning of passing a sleepless night. It is still raining very hard, and the mud around us is shoe-top deep; making it very disagreeable to all. It has been raining now for four days steady, making the roads very hard for transportation. Our blankets are wet and also our overcoats, our tents wont keep out the water, and I must say we are laboring under difficulties.

*November 21, 1862* We got up this morning about daylight; it was still raining. The ammunition train tried to pull out, but the wagons sunk up to the hub, and it was not until after a great deal of labor were they extricated, and moved on top of a hill where the mud was not so deep. This is the second day we have been laying here and it is resting the men somewhat. The men are almost out of rations, but we drew 3 crackers and some meat for to-morrow.

*November 22, 1862* We got up this morning before daylight, as we had orders to march at 8 o’clock. We started at that time and marched pretty steady for awhile, but as the roads began to get worse, we would hault for a little while, not making it very fatiguing. We are now encamped on a nice piece of ground about 3 miles from Fredericksburg. The troops are still coming in, and appear to be massing here. We have nothing to eat, and dont know when we will get some.

*November 23, 1862* We all arose this morning very hungry. Some of the men having only one cracker for breakfast, but most of us none, crackers sold at from 2 to 5 cents a piece. It has been very cold all day, and the men, not having anything to do, carried wood all day and put it on the fires. We are in within a short distance of Fredericksburg, and we hear the rebs still hold the place.

*November 24, 1862* There was a large mail came to-day in which I received a couple of Gazetts which gave me all the news.

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55 The camp at the end of this day’s march was near Hartwood Court House, about ten miles northwest of Fredericksburg, Va. *Ibid.*

56 This was the end of the march, the camp near Potomac Creek, Va. Here the troops massed in preparation for the assault upon Fredericksburg. *Ibid.*
from Lewistown. We received some hard tack, and the boys walked into them like mince pies. The troops are still coming in in this direction. Everything is dull around camp, and nothing can be heard but the monotonous tap of the drum.

November 25, 1862  The only thing that occurred to-day of any account was the coming of the Sutler, who reaped a rich harvest. He charged most enormous prices and fairly embedded himself in greenbacks. He charged $2 for a plug of Navy tobacco, 12 cents per lb. for flour, 50 cents for butter, 35 for cheese; 25 for lard. He soon sold out of all things eatable. It rained nearly all night. It is getting cold.

November 26, 1862  It looked very muddy this morning, from the rain of last night, the heavens are still overcast with clouds. The men are all building rousing fires. The woods are getting pretty well thinned out, and if we stay here long we will be in want of that best comfort of soldiers—a good fire. I am writing to-day's events at Capt. Waream's log fire, which by the way is very comfortable.

November 27, 1862  To-day was thanksgiving day in the army, and the men were somewhat disappointed at not having their usual good things at home. Our Sutler having brought along a barrel of flour and some lard, I bought some flour, turned baker, and had a thanksgiving dinner of short cake, and molasses, for the latter I paid 25 cents per pint. The day passed off very well, and we hope our friends at home will enjoy their dinner as much as we did ours. Col. Chartz preached a sermon to the brigade to-day. A mail came also.

November 28, 1862  This morning was very cold with a high wind. There was nothing going on in camp to-day of any consequence. We have company drill three times a day. Guard mount in the afternoon at 3 o'clock, and dress parade in the evening. All quiet.

November 29, 1862  Morning very cold with indications of snow. There was a small mail came to-day. Three of us started out this afternoon and cut a big pile of wood, which comes good in these cold nights. There was 18 wagon loads of clothes came to-day, for the brigade, and enough I suppose to keep us warm for a time. There was an old horse brought in to-day by some of the teamsters, who ran through our fire, liking to spill Cap. Smith's supper, and put out the fire.

57 Not identifiable.
58 Not identifiable.
November 30, 1862  Morning very cold. Some of the men drew some clothing. I drew a pair of drawers, and a good woolen shirt. This is Sunday and of course nothing much going on. There has been some preaching. There has been no snow as yet although there is every indication of it.

At this point, the portion of Helman's diary still in existence ends. That he continued to write, at least through December, 1862, is evidenced by an excerpt from his diary published in the *Lewistown Gazette*, December 24, 1862. The excerpt, in the form of a letter which follows below, is signed only with the initials "H. H." The Lewistown editor states that the letter was from a member of Company K, 131st Pennsylvania Volunteers, and a survey of all available rosters for Company K indicates Howard Helman was the only member with those initials. Similarities in phrasing and composition are further evidence that the author of the diary and of the letter of December 15, 1862, are the same person.

December 15, 1862, Fredericksburg: We left our old camp on the 11th December, and proceeded towards Fredericksburg, and arrived opposite the town on the 13th. We were drawn up behind a hill the first day, while our batteries were shelling the rebel position. I will copy from my diary of Dec. 13. "We were ordered to the top of the hill, where we lay about 20 minutes. From the crest we could view the rebel position, and could plainly hear their batteries and musketry, which were very heavy. While we were on the hill our Brigadier and Colonel spoke a few encouraging words to the men, when we were ordered to cap our pieces, and then all started on a double quick for the field of battle. The men of our regiment started off finely, taking up a cheer. As we were passing along the road to the river, a cannon shot struck in a tree about 20 feet from the company, which made us dodge. We crossed the pontoon bridge, the rebels all the while shelling us, but we pushed on, and soon reached the town.

59 The headquarters of the Second Brigade was near the Phillips house. O.R., XXI, 443.
60 Col. Peter H. Allabach received his orders to advance on Fredericksburg in the forenoon of Dec. 13, 1862. Ibid.
61 The 131st Regiment used the pontoon bridge over the Rappahannock River at the foot of Hawke St. After crossing the river, the regiment marched west on Hawke St. to Princess Anne St., south on Princess Anne St. to Hanover St. and west on Hanover to the battlefield. Information obtained from military maps at the Administrative Headquarters, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Fredericksburg, Va.
We lay in the streets of the town until afternoon, manoeuvering around a good deal. While in one of the streets, a ball struck a warehouse under which our chaplain was standing, throwing pieces from the roof all over him. The rebels shelled the town very hard, and it was pretty dangerous passing through the streets, as balls and shells struck on every side, some of the shells bursting over our heads. We were formed, fixed bayonets and put on a double quick for the scene of action. Now came the time to try our “pluck”—we were approaching our foe, and began to smell powder. Our brigade was formed into two columns under a hill, where we unslung our knapsacks, the bullets whistling past our ears, making it very uncomfortable. The order came at last for the column in our front to charge up the hill, our regiment following. We went up the hill in splendid style, on a double quick, with a loud cheer, and were soon engaged. The men behaved very well under fire, and not until the brigade in front gave way and ran over our men was there any wavering in our line, but our men were soon rallied and went at them again, and fought very well until night put an end to the scene. I have often read in papers of bullets coming like hail, and I must admit they came very near like it. The artillery in our rear firing over our heads, with the whistling of bullets and screaming of shells, made the noise terrific. We were marched back a hundred yards for a little rest, when we gathered together some blankets and tried to get a little sleep. We nearly all lost our knapsacks and all that was in them. We are now lying in the streets of the town, being relieved after 24 hours duty on the battlefield: we were engaged about two hours and a half with the rebs.

Howard Helman survived the Civil War, although exposure which he suffered fording the Rapidan River at Raccoon Ford near Chancellorsville, Virginia, between May 1 and May 5, 1863, either caused or agitated a bronchial condition which completely disabled him in the last years of his life. He died on November 10, 1886.

Chicago, Ill. 

Arthur W. Thurner

63 Allabach’s report. Ibid., 443.
64 Report of Lt. Col. William B. Shaut, 131st Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers. Ibid.,
   445–446.
65 The attack was one of many made that afternoon in the futile attempt to storm Marye’s
   Heights. Ibid., 445.
66 Pension Records, National Archives.