

Philadelphia's Free Military School and the Radicalization of Wartime Officer Education, 1863–64

ABSTRACT: In 1863 leading voices from Philadelphia's antislavery circle aligned with veteran Union officers to establish a school that would prepare white soldiers for officer examinations with the United States Colored Troops. The Philadelphia Free Military School offered a stark partisan contrast to the prevailing military education model at West Point, an institution maligned for supposedly failing to inculcate proper notions of political loyalty. The FMS succeeded in training enlisted men and noncommissioned officers in the art of command by drawing heavily from specific units with strong pro-Republican pedigrees.

COLONEL JOHN H. TAGGART had no time for nonsense. "You God-damned son of a bitch," he allegedly screamed to an unruly recruit in August 1861, "If you don't shut your glab, I'll have you in chains in less than five minutes!" When the volunteer refused to comply, Taggart reportedly assaulted him to make an example of anyone who refused to take soldiering seriously. Despite going on to lead the Twelfth Pennsylvania Reserves regiment during Maj. Gen. George McClellan's Peninsula Campaign, Taggart resigned when charges finally caught up with him. Frustrated by his exile from the army but desperate to contribute somehow, Taggart instead followed the troops of his old command as a war correspondent for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. He was an experienced newspaperman, having worked stints before the war with John W. Forney's Republican-supporting *Philadelphia Press* and later as publisher of the *Sunday Mercury*, a role he discontinued when his financial partner hoisted

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the flag of contempt for the Lincoln administration. In December 1863, Taggart accepted his most important position yet for furthering the Union war effort—that of “chief preceptor” for a program called the Philadelphia Free Military School (FMS).¹

From its inception in December 1863 until its funds expired in September 1864, the FMS educated white soldiers of lower ranks interested in applying for officer positions in the United States Colored Troops (USCT). The school offered approximately one thousand soldiers and civilians the opportunity for swift promotion by offering to lead African Americans. Its application records, which survive in the Abraham Barker Collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, show how Philadelphia’s Republican benefactors utilized the mounting radicalism and organizational expertise from the Union army—especially the Army of the Potomac—to form perhaps the nation’s first officer candidate school.² This institution, established at the height of the Northern debate over loyalty and emancipation, attempted to break down the traditional paradigm of military education in the United States as represented by West Point. By 1863 the Union war effort had shifted, adding to its goals the abolition of slavery as well as the use of freed slaves in USCT regiments as a means to achieve its ends. This shift required, in the opinion of many Northern Republicans leading the war effort, a radicalization of the military education model from one focused primarily on command training to one that also emphasized political reliability. The result was a school that tested Republican loyalty, weeded out those who harbored reservations about its radical agenda, and encouraged active political participation.

Applications to enroll in the FMS poured in from the most conspicuously pro-Republican units in the Union army. Men may have desired pay, the prestige of wearing shoulder straps, or even a simple furlough away from the front lines, but they applied in large numbers in the first

¹“General Orders No. 55,” in *Index of General Orders, Army of the Potomac, 1861* (Washington, DC, 1862); Thomas P. Lowry, *Tarnished Eagles: The Courts-Martial of Fifty Union Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels* (Mechanicsburg, PA, 1997), 208–12; Martin D. Hardin, comp., *History of the Twelfth Regiment Pennsylvania Reserve Volunteer Corps . . .* (New York, 1890), 196–99. The *Press* characterized Taggart’s private and military experience: “Col. Taggart is a Philadelphia printer, and has seen much service in the Army of the Potomac. The power to impart knowledge is a prominent characteristic of Col. Taggart. In fact he was the military reporter for a number of years in Philadelphia before the rebels raised their bloody arms against the ensign of the nation.” See “Military Instruction,” *Philadelphia Press*, Dec. 29, 1863.

²Registration Volume, Abraham Barker Collection on the Free Military School for Applicants for the Command of Colored Regiments (Collection 1968), Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter Barker Collection, HSP).

place because Republicans in the army and at home had successfully radicalized many outfits, convincing soldiers by mid-1863 that emancipation was a necessary cornerstone of hard war.³ Once enrolled in the school, students confronted a rigorous curriculum aimed at testing their loyalty to the emancipationist agenda and filtering out anyone who might embarrass the USCT experiment.

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African American regiments formed the Civil War's most revolutionary military project, one that recruited, trained, and deployed nearly two hundred thousand men of color. Naturally, this endeavor saw its share of false starts and difficulties. White prospective officers faced a maze of army bureaucracy, at the end of which lay a stern examination administered by Brig. Gen. Silas Casey's staff in Washington. Men who led USCT regiments must know their business even better than their counterparts in white regiments, officials believed, because African Americans would require exceptionally trained commanders to keep them in line on the battlefield. Editorialists who observed the process agreed. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Colonel Taggart's old journal, asserted that "colored troops require better officers than the regiments of white soldiers. The former have in the great majority of instances been deprived, by the spirit of slavery, of the opportunity of acquiring the simplest rudiments of education."⁴

³The preeminent work on the subject of white officers in the USCT remains Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York, 1990). In his measured analysis, Glatthaar acknowledges the role of abolitionist sentiment but also emphasizes the allure of higher pay and promotion. He also insists most officers, like the rest of the country, were largely racist before the war (see *Forged in Battle*, 11, 40–41). James M. McPherson takes issue with this latter portrayal and highlights the great number of officers who had espoused abolitionism before the conflict; see *Drawn with the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War* (New York, 1996), 90–91. On white attitudes toward black soldiers, the key works are McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York, 1997), and Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York, 2007), which generally view white soldiers' acceptance of black comrades; and Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA, 2011) and Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge, 2014), which collectively offer a reminder that most soldiers viewed racial issues through the lens of restoring the Union. On the topic of political culture more broadly in the North during the conflict, see Mark E. Neely, *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015).

⁴Frederick M. Binder, "Philadelphia's Free Military School," *Pennsylvania History* 17 (1950): 284–85; Keith Wilson, "Thomas Webster and the 'Free Military School for Applicants for Commands of Colored Troops,'" *Civil War History* 29 (1983): 103; "Officers of the Colored Troops," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Apr. 19, 1864. Binder's and Wilson's articles are the only other essay-length studies of the Free Military School. For a brief contextualization of the school within the wider USCT project, see

The process of applying for a USCT commission was protracted and stressful for ordinary soldiers in the Union army, and it was meant to be. After all, inconvenience and anxiety mitigated the number who tried to transfer simply for an easy chance at higher rank, a problem that marred the endeavor at its inception. When one of Pvt. Oliver Wilcox Norton's tentmates left in February 1863 to assume command of an early black regiment, for example, Norton sneered privately that "friends got him the commission . . . [and] if our negro soldiers are officered by such men, I'm afraid they won't amount to much." Levi Duff of the 105th Pennsylvania agreed. "I am conscious," he opined early on, "that many officers are now appointed to the command of 'Colored Troops' who have no confidence in or fellow feeling for that unfortunate race and I am sure such officers will fail in their endeavors to make them appear respectable soldiers."⁵ A central problem for USCT commissioners and examiners was how to find men who could command effectively while representing the controversial project maturely.

After a short trial period of examinations in mid-1863, General Casey and his colleagues determined that only half the men they examined could satisfy the board's strict requirements. Casey had written the army's standard text on small-unit tactics, so soldiers who lined up for examination were shocked to find that the board tested their liberal arts educations as much as their command expertise. The general and his radical Republican compatriot, Col. Samuel M. Bowman, quizzed veteran soldiers on such topics as European history and the great captains of antiquity. One veteran of the famed "Iron Brigade" even had to explain why he failed to sport the clean white collar and fresh haircut of a proper gentleman for his appearance before the board; Casey and Bowman expected applicants for the politically sensitive USCT positions to invest in their outward appearance, after all.⁶ "[T]he tests were not practical, but scholastic and theoretical," complained a soldier from the Twenty-Second Massachusetts after the war, "and men whose records would secure commissions in their regiments

Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861–1865*, repr. (Lawrence, KS, 1987), 217–21. The politics of the *Inquirer* were moderate by the standards of the day, given that the paper eventually accepted the emancipation policy; see William Dusinger, *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia, 1856–1865* (Philadelphia, 1965), 147.

⁵ Oliver Willcox Norton, *Army Letters, 1861–1865* . . . (Chicago, 1903), 140, 184; Levi Bird Duff, *To Petersburg with the Army of the Potomac: The Civil War Letters of Levi Bird Duff, 105th Pennsylvania Volunteers*, ed. Jonathan E. Helmreich (Jefferson, NC, 2009), 172; Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 43, notes that some officers sought simply to "dump" bad men from their own white regiments.

⁶ Michael E. Stevens, ed., *As If It Were Glory: Robert Beecham's Civil War from the Iron Brigade to the Black Regiments*, repr. (Lanham, MD, 2007), 152–56.

if vacancies existed failed to pass examination." The Bay Stater was particularly irked over Casey's demand for a classical education as the mark of a reliable gentleman officer. Practical experience in the field should count for more than a soldier's "knowledge relative to the color of Julius Caesar's wife's hair," he griped. In the minds of board members, however, corporals and sergeants who understood company drill could be found practically anywhere by mid-1863. The prerequisite of an academic education appeared elitist to critics, but examiners seemed to believe it offered the best guarantee of respectable motivations among candidates.⁷

In addition to the demands of officers overseeing the project in Washington, red tape within the army slowed an already protracted process to an agonizing crawl. The difficulties in Cpl. Robert K. Beecham's experiences applying from the Second Wisconsin demonstrate the tangled web of bureaucracy and conflicting partisan loyalties that retarded progress. In May and June 1863, the *Washington Chronicle*, one of the most widely distributed papers in the army, printed War Department Orders 143 and 144, outlining the adjutant general's stipulations for examining white officers. One of these announcements caught Beecham's eye. Noting that "testimonials from his Commanding Officers" would be necessary for any man wishing to face the examination, Beecham applied to Capt. Nathaniel Rollins of Company H for permission. Rollins, a former lawyer who contributed regularly to the antislavery *Wisconsin State Journal*, hastily forwarded Beecham's application to regimental commander Col. Lucius N. Fairchild, soon to emerge as a leader of the Republican Party in Wisconsin. Fairchild sent these materials to Brig. Gen. Solomon Meredith, a prewar Democrat who had switched to attend the Republican State Convention of Indiana in 1860 despite personally opposing abolition. The moderate Meredith dutifully passed Beecham's papers along to Brig. Gen. James S. Wadsworth, abolitionist First Division commander and former Republican candidate for governor in New York. Finally, Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds's staff forwarded Beecham's application, and in late June 1863 the young corporal received a notice from Secretary Stanton's office to present himself for examination as soon as he could obtain an appropriate leave of absence from corps headquarters. By the time Beecham was able to request leave, however, the Battle of Gettysburg intervened and bled much of the Republican leadership out of the First Corps. Maj.

⁷ Edwin C. Bennett, *Musket and Sword, or the Camp, March, and Firing Line in the Army of the Potomac* (Boston, 1900), 315–16.

Gen. John Newton, an ersatz commander brought in to replace the fallen General Reynolds, filed away Beecham's request. Newton was a conservative Democrat who proclaimed after the war that "in argument" he saw the Rebels on firmer ground, admitting, "had I been influenced by that, I should have been a confederate." He was not a favorite among First Corps troops, and Beecham had little use for the uninspired outsider. Frustrated by headquarters' inattention, the young Iron Brigade man confronted the major general in his tent, where Newton coldly replied that further red tape stood in Beecham's way. The exasperated corporal tore his papers in the general's face, brushed past a provost marshal, and boarded the next train for Washington.⁸

The USCT application process needed an instrument to mediate its difficulties, impart the necessary knowledge to command, and ensure the political reliability of those who were interested. Philadelphia's Republican elite rose to the challenge, forging a civilian-military alliance that worked to ease General Casey's burden and, in the process, upset the prewar military education paradigm. Spearheading the effort was the Union League of Philadelphia, which had sprung to life after Republican electoral setbacks in the midterm elections of 1862. It provided an outlet for pro-administration passions among the most well connected of the city's patriciate and mobilized public support for the war. Philadelphia Republicans, including some in the Union League, faced an uphill battle during the war because of the city's close economic ties with the South. Antislavery voices before the conflict had "watered down" their rhetoric to appeal more broadly to these interests, and Democrats who had gone into hiding for the first year and a half of the struggle reemerged in the heady late summer of 1862 to denounce emancipation. In mid-1863, undeterred members of the Union League established the Supervisory Committee for the Enlistment of Colored Troops to raise African American regiments and offer white officers the tools necessary to lead these units into combat.

⁸"Official . . . General Orders No. 143," *Washington (DC) Evening Star*, May 28, 1863 (2nd ed.), p. 1; US War Department, *The War of the Rebellion; A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser. 1, vol. 29, part 2 (Washington, DC, 1890), 26–27; Stevens, *As If It Were Glory*, 145–51; Alan D. Gaff, *If This Is War: A History of the Campaign of Bull's Run by the Wisconsin Regiment Thereafter Known as the Ragged Ass Second* (Dayton, OH, 1991), 59–60, 328; William B. Styple, ed., *Generals in Bronze: Interviewing the Commanders of the Civil War* (Kearny, NJ, 2005), 167; Stephen W. Sears, *Controversies and Commanders: Dispatches from the Army of the Potomac* (Boston, 1999), 142; on Solomon Meredith's politics and that of his Nineteenth Indiana, see Craig L. Dunn, *Iron Men, Iron Will: The Nineteenth Indiana Regiment of the Iron Brigade* (Indianapolis, IN, 1995), 4–5; and Alan D. Gaff, *On Many a Bloody Field: Four Years in the Iron Brigade* (Bloomington, IN, 1996), 214–15, 329, 391.

Over one hundred “wealthy and influential” citizens funded the committee with donations ranging anywhere from two to five hundred dollars. Their names and contributions graced the pages of the *Philadelphia Press* (a “belligerently enthusiastic advocate” of emancipation, as historian William Dusinger has described it). The cornerstone of the committee’s effort was the Free Military School on Chestnut Street, a classroom designed to train interested white soldiers in the art of command ahead of their examinations. To fulfill the leadership role at the school, the committee hired former Republican newspaperman Colonel Taggart.⁹

With its role in filtering out politically unreliable candidates, the FMS stood atop two years of radical efforts to impugn the prevailing educational model represented by the United States Military Academy. Since the war’s onset, Republicans in Congress had launched repeated attacks against West Point as a bastion of pro-Southern, proslavery sentiment. President Lincoln’s first secretary of war, Simon Cameron, led the initial charge against the academy after losing numerous graduates to Southern loyalties. For an institution aimed in part at fostering a sense of national identity among the officer corps, the large number of Southern defections must represent “a radical defect in the system of education,” he declared. Senator Henry Wilson wanted the corps of cadets refilled with loyal Northern men, while Lyman Trumbull of Illinois derided West Point as little better than a national trade school, a drain on public coffers where young men went to learn how to build fortifications but nothing else that would prepare them for high-toned careers. Senator William P. Fessenden agreed, adding that its curriculum neglected ethics for the sake of a “narrow, exclusive, miserable spirit.” Not to be outdone, Senators Zachariah Chandler and Benjamin F. Wade called for the academy to be abolished altogether, Chandler even crying that it had produced more traitors than “all the institutions of learning and education that have existed since Judas

⁹ Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence, KS, 2002), 98–128; Dusinger, *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia*, 148, 156, 168; “United States Colored Troops,” *Philadelphia Press*, Feb. 4, 1864. Historians have debated whether the rise of the Union Leagues in cities across the North indicated a specifically pro-Republican movement or simply a means of addressing the revulsion to partisan fissures. Mark Neely states that the leagues were convenient for the Republican message but did not have their roots in “cynical” tactics to win elections; see Neely, *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 48–49. William A. Blair identifies two strands of Union Leagues: the smaller, more rural organizations raised as “vigilante committees” to patrol treason among Democrats and the more sophisticated leagues in metropolitan areas aimed at supporting the war effort financially. Philadelphia’s Union League led the pack among the latter. See Blair, *With Malice toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2014), 202–3.

Iscaiot's time." The charges were patently unfair in many respects—West Point graduated a majority who remained loyal to the Union and more than a few who embraced abolitionism—but the war was blurring lines of nuance in Northern politics.¹⁰

Supervisory Committee Chairman Thomas W. Webster, who led the effort to establish the FMS, relied on the support of such radical senators as Wilson and Wade. Strengthened by these connections, Webster decided the FMS should be more than just a classroom in which to memorize battalion drills or learn the science of tactics; it should combine the rudiments of military education with a refresher course in basic liberal arts. In this way, the school would resist the West Point model, where the "liberal and humanitarian sentiments" went unexplored, and where, radicals believed, imbuing loyalty in its pupils took a backseat to imparting an unimaginative scientific curriculum. In addition to tactics and the art of war, therefore, the Supervisory Committee focused the school's curriculum on the liberal arts by furnishing students with textbooks on "Mathematics, Arithmetic and History, and Maps and Atlases for instruction in Geography."¹¹

The committee also expressed a clear expectation that applicants would use the opportunity to internalize whatever Republican rhetoric they encountered. In addition to preparing men for their examinations, the goal of the FMS was to test applicants' wartime radicalization and foster it even further, providing the sort of reward for Republican loyalty that, radicals believed, had been absent from the army for too long. In late 1863 an announcement circulated to Union armies stating that men who felt they were "making a sacrifice" to transfer into the USCT had no place in the experiment. The opportunity to lead black troops was an opportunity to give "Liberty to Slaves, and Manhood to Chattels, as well as Soldiers to the

¹⁰ T. Harry Williams, "The Attack upon West Point during the Civil War," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 25 (1939): 491–504; James L. Morrison Jr., "The Best School in the World": West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833–1866 (Kent, OH, 1986), 131–33; Lori A. Lisowski, "The Future of West Point: Senate Debates on the Military Academy during the Civil War," *Civil War History* 34 (1988): 5–21; Carol Reardon, *With a Sword in One Hand and Jomini in the Other: The Problem of Military Thought in the Civil War North* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012), 55–88. Ironically, West Point had adopted a five-year course just before the war aimed precisely at expanding beyond its engineering-based curriculum, but this initiative received such strong backlash from administrators and students alike that it collapsed by 1861; see Morrison, "The Best School in the World," 114–25. On the issue of West Point cadet loyalty and the outbreak of the war, see Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh, *West Pointers in the Civil War: The Old Army in War and Peace* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009), 91–111.

¹¹ Henry Wilson to Benjamin F. Butler, May 18, 1864, and Benjamin F. Wade to Benjamin F. Butler, May 18, 1864, both in Barker Collection, HSP; Silas Casey to Thomas W. Webster, Jan. 28, 1864, quoted in Wilson, "Thomas Webster and the 'Free Military School,'" 108; *Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops* . . . , 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 1864), 22.

Union.” The Supervisory Committee’s allies in Washington agreed that broad identification with the antislavery message should be a prerequisite for command, and General Casey noted “it would be perfectly proper” to examine the “morality” of students at the school. Students followed the committee’s wishes and imbibed the views of Philadelphia’s antislavery element wherever possible. When the abolitionist Rev. Joseph Parrish Thompson lectured on the evils of the Confederacy at the Academy of Music, for example, FMS students joined him onstage in a gesture of support, since Thompson had lost his eldest son in the war, while a second son commanded black troops in the Seventh USCT. The result of all these efforts was what one supporter called a “Colored West Point School,” an academy to elevate white volunteers “of liberal education, culture and excellent social position” to positions as politically reliable and competent junior officers.¹²

Advertisements for the FMS proliferated in late 1863 and 1864. The *Philadelphia Press* flooded its classified page on a weekly basis with news of the school’s progress, while the *Free Press* of Burlington, Vermont, relayed the recommendation of an officer from the Army of the Potomac: “We have received such endorsement of [the FMS] from a most experienced and capable soldier . . . that we commend it to the notice of those who are looking for [a] military position.” A first edition printing of the school’s recruiting pamphlet ran out after eight thousand copies found their way into Union soldiers’ hands. Taggart and the Supervisory Committee appealed to the egalitarian virtues of the American volunteer by advertising that “every candidate stands upon his merits—the most obscure corporal or private stands an equal chance with the most favored and influential citizen.” Even though private funds paid for much of the school’s overhead, soldiers who wished to attend the “free” school had to find room and board elsewhere. But the benefits of attending were great, as the vast majority of those who finished their coursework passed the USCT officer examination.¹³

¹² Ira Berlin et al., eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*, ser. 2, vol. 1, *The Black Military Experience* (New York, 1982), 406n2; Casey to Webster, Jan. 28, 1864, quoted in Wilson, “Thomas Webster and the ‘Free Military School,’” 108; John M. Forbes to Benjamin F. Butler, Apr. 11, 1864, and Thomas W. Webster to Edwin M. Stanton, Apr. 22, 1864, both in Barker Collection, HSP; “Rev. Joseph Parrish Thompson,” *Philadelphia Press*, Feb. 11, 1864.

¹³ *Free Military School*, 5; “Military Notices,” *Philadelphia Press*, Dec. 28, 1863; “Officers for Colored Troops,” *Burlington (VT) Free Press*, Jan. 8, 1864; George L. Stearns to Horatio Seymour, June 16, 1863, in New York State Adjutant General’s Office Correspondence and Petitions, New York State Archives; Thomas W. Webster to J. W. Phelps, Jan. 8, 1864, quoted in Wilson, “Thomas Webster and the ‘Free Military School,’” 106; *Free Military School*, 3, 5.

Liberal arts aside, the rudiments of effective company and battalion drill would still be paramount. Colonel Taggart convinced the Supervisory Committee that ideological agreement with the USCT project alone was insufficient if African American troops were to be entrusted to ambitious white officers: "No sympathy for the colored race, unless attended with military knowledge, and power to command men in battle, can avail." An ability to command effectively in combat was a political imperative, as the USCT experiment would only be successful if it acquired battle honors. To that end, Taggart convinced the committee to hire Col. Albert L. Magilton, a West Pointer from the famous class of 1846, to act as professor of military tactics. Magilton, a veteran of commanding Pennsylvania Reserves, trained his soldier-students in infantry tactics, army regulations, and "general information," which included European military history. Under his tutelage, the men faced strict evaluation from the minute they stepped into the school on Chestnut Street. Those deemed worthy of First Class status could expect training in the art of brigade maneuver, while those of the Second, Third, and Fourth Classes gained expertise in the school of the battalion, the company, and the soldier, respectively. Once enrolled, students attended classes three times daily (except Sundays) for thirty days.¹⁴

Classroom lectures on European history were well and good, but Taggart wanted to open his students' eyes to the realities of leading African Americans. Shortly after the school opened, he secured an agreement with Col. Louis Wagner, the commander of USCT training exercises at nearby Camp William Penn, for prospective officers to interact with black enlistees for the first time. Colonel Wagner was a veteran of extensive service in the Eighty-Eighth Pennsylvania, an Army of the Potomac outfit from the division of antislavery commander Abner Doubleday. Wagner and his younger brother had emigrated from Germany after the failed European liberal upheavals of 1848. The officer took a bullet to the leg on Chinn Ridge at Second Bull Run while leading the Eighty-Eighth in battle. In February 1863, still smarting from the wound, the twenty-four-year-old volunteered to lead Philadelphia's USCT training ground at Camp Penn, which became the official outdoor classroom for the FMS.¹⁵

Wagner was an activist as well as an officer, and under his leadership Camp Penn gained a reputation as the radical twin to the FMS proj-

¹⁴ *Free Military School*, 5.

¹⁵ Jeffry D. Wert, "Camp William Penn and the Black Soldier," *Pennsylvania History* 46 (1979): 340–41; Roger D. Hunt and Jack R. Brown, *Brevet Brigadier Generals in Blue* (Gaithersburg, MD, 1990), 640.

ect. While commanding the camp, Wagner rattled the political scene in Philadelphia by hosting Frederick Douglass and insisting USCT recruits disregard notices excluding them from railroad cars. Later, when a black sentry at the camp fired on a white assailant from nearby Norristown and citizens insisted on a civil trial, young Wagner refused to relinquish the marked soldier. As new regiments completed their training, the lieutenant colonel led them in parades down Broad Street past the Union League, even when, in one instance, a white civilian tried to "snatch the color away" from a black sergeant. Pvt. George W. Beidelman, a self-proclaimed Jacksonian Democrat from the Seventy-First Pennsylvania, recorded his political conversion to suspicious family members back home while serving as the camp's quartermaster and Wagner's liaison to the FMS. "Thank God, the inhuman and hell-begotton [*sic*] prejudices, which would deprive these people of the dearest privileges of men and citizens, are fast disappearing," he observed. Army of the Potomac veterans like Taggart, Wagner, and Beidelman proved indispensable to the civilian-military alliance working to radicalize military education.¹⁶

Sensing its political importance as the vanguard of the USCT enterprise, critics targeted the FMS from all sides. The conservative *Daily Ohio Statesman* sarcastically savaged the school (which it incorrectly claimed had been "established at the national expense") for failing to educate blacks for command positions even as the antislavery voices in the Philadelphia Union League espoused racial equality. African American civil rights proponents in the opposing corner leveled the same criticism without the mockery. In July 1864 they assembled at Sansom Street Hall and published resolutions denouncing the school as an agent of prejudice. "We look upon the establishment of a military academy in our midst," the citizens proclaimed of the FMS opening its doors only to whites, "as one of the surest and best ways of continuing this prejudice." Of course, responsibility for prohibiting black officers lay ultimately with those in Washington's high corridors of power, not the classrooms of Philadelphia's school or the meeting halls of the Union League.¹⁷

¹⁶ Donald Scott, "Camp William Penn's Black Soldiers in Blue," *America's Civil War*, Nov. 1999, 48–49; Martin W. Öfele, *German-Speaking Officers in the United States Colored Troops, 1863–1867* (Gainesville, FL, 2004), 44; *Free Military School*, 8, 26; Catherine H. Vanderslice, ed., *The Civil War Letters of George Washington Beidelman* (New York, 1978), 183–96. Louis Wagner continued his radical efforts after the war, making it part of his policy as a commander of the Grand Army of the Republic to incorporate black veterans; see Barbara A. Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011), 119.

¹⁷ "Free Military School for Officers of Negro Troops," *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Jan. 10, 1864; "The Colored Mass Meeting," *Philadelphia Press*, July 28, 1864.

Although army regulations forbade black junior officers, USCT enlisted men could still rise to noncommissioned officer ranks. Col. Samuel Bowman, a strong supporter of the FMS and a member of Casey's examination board, found when he assumed control of recruiting that most African American enlistees were woefully ill-equipped to perform the duties of a corporal or sergeant. In early 1864, therefore, he proposed sending the more ambitious of these enlisted men to Philadelphia for training in Taggart's school. At least twenty-one African Americans—"active, intelligent, educated young men"—responded to the invitation and journeyed to the FMS. There, the school's senior-most white students and prospective officers set aside time for an "auxiliary school" to tutor the USCT enlistees on the basic duties of platoon drill. By the time this project took hold, Supervisory Committee Chairman Webster wrote to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton that FMS students "are enthusiastic in their views regarding the duties of the colored race to the government in this war and the duties of the people and the government to this race."¹⁸

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The FMS emerged from unique cooperation between Republican elites on the home front and antislavery army officers. Its large applicant pool and success rate were the results of a rising tide of pro-emancipation sentiment in many units throughout the Army of the Potomac in particular. Men in these regiments had arrived at this sensibility after months of witnessing slavery in the South firsthand and, even more importantly, after staging a vociferous backlash against peace activists at home who attacked the war effort, the administration, and the president's controversial policies. If the war were to be won, soldiers in these units believed, it would require obedience to the administration and ready acquiescence to the policy of emancipation; when calls for peace at home grew louder, soldiers' willingness to fight for the freedom of slaves as a part of "hard war" grew stronger.

When the Union Army first learned of the experiment to raise black troops in early 1863, derision in the ranks ran high. As if swallowing the Emancipation Proclamation had not tested patience enough—and its adoption had indeed exposed deep rifts in the army—news of the wide-

¹⁸ *Free Military School*, 12–13; Samuel M. Bowman to Thomas W. Webster, Feb. 11, 1864, and Webster to Stanton, Apr. 22, 1864, both in Barker Collection, HSP.

spread use of African Americans as soldiers was simply too much for some. A surgeon of the 105th Pennsylvania declared in early February, "I am speaking the true sentiment of the Army of the Potomac when I say not one Officer in twenty can be found willing to accept command in these Regts." Although his men opposed the conservative peace faction in the Democratic Party, the surgeon's unit also refused to embrace any radical talk of colored troops: "Place a black Regt. side by side with the 105th and this Regt., though composed almost entirely of Republicans, would charge and drive them with more delight than they would the rebels." Pvt. Oliver Wilcox Norton of the Eighty-Third Pennsylvania wrote home about this same phenomenon, relating that Pvt. Joseph H. Hatch of the Twentieth Maine, a neighboring regiment, faced laughter and contempt for transferring to an early black regiment in January 1863. The officer class of Norton's Fifth Corps was notoriously conservative in its view of the war's conduct, and the Pennsylvanian wrote that "poor Joe Hatch had to hurry his departure to avoid the ridicule and jeers everywhere heaped on the 'nigger officer.'"¹⁹

The course of 1863 changed everything, however. By the end of the year, Private Norton had transferred to the USCT while observing proudly that "the sentiment of that part of the army [the Fifth Corps]" had changed dramatically "in regard to colored soldiers." Cruel jibes in camp gave way to grudging, almost solemn admiration, and men by the hundreds volunteered to lead African Americans into battle. Even when USCT officers returned on their free time to old regiments in the Army of the Potomac, previously prejudiced comrades were eager to listen. When Oliver Norton visited his old unit after receiving a commission, he met with a "hearty welcome" and congratulations from his approving friends. Another member of Norton's brigade, Pvt. Robert Tilney of the Twelfth New York, summarized his experiences returning to camp after attending the FMS: "[M]y reception by both officers and men was cordial."²⁰

The political shift Norton and Tilney observed in the army was striking. It emerged as soldiers followed political developments on the home front and realized the utility of emancipation. As early as 1862, the Union ranks had been arguing for "hard war" against the slaveholding Confederacy. After the modest resurgence of Democrats in some leg-

¹⁹ Paul Fatout, ed., *Letters of a Civil War Surgeon* (West Lafayette, IN, 1961), 53; Norton, *Army Letters*, 284–85.

²⁰ Norton, *Army Letters*, 284, 290, 294; Robert Tilney, *My Life in the Army: Three Years and a Half with the Fifth Army Corps, Army of the Potomac, 1862–1865* (Philadelphia, 1912), 65–66.

islatures and governors' mansions throughout the North and the disaster at Fredericksburg in December 1862, a peace faction known as the "Copperheads" emerged in several key parts of the North. Copperhead influence waxed and waned as Union forces struggled in the field, but Union soldiers in every major field army believed these Democrats were dangerous to the survival of prowar sentiment at home. In early spring 1863, Union soldiers in every theater launched a public war of words against disloyal voices on the home front. Whole regiments and brigades published official resolutions accusing the Copperheads of cowardly, unholy offenses. Nowhere was this onslaught more pronounced than from regiments in the Army of the Potomac—no doubt troubling its traditionally conservative leadership, considering how the movement threatened to malign the entire Democratic Party. Then, in the fall of 1863, Democrats in Ohio and Pennsylvania committed the grave error of nominating unpopular choices from the antiwar wing as their gubernatorial candidates. Clement Vallandigham lost a bitter Ohio contest against moderate War Democrat John Brough. Likewise, George Woodward gained public scorn from countless Pennsylvania soldiers for his campaign against Andrew Curtin, a "conservative" Republican who had thrown away his old party label to embrace the new Union Party.²¹ To soldiers observing politics in 1863, the takeaway was obvious—sticking with the Democratic Party and resisting the administration's policies meant flirting with treason. What changed over the course of 1863 was certainly not that racism disappeared from the army, but instead that a willingness arose to accept the utility of black soldiers in the struggle to preserve the Union, root out slavery, and humiliate the peace faction at home. Historians are thus correct to note that the presence of a

²¹ Frank L. Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago, 1960) downplays the threat the antiwar faction posed, a tack historians have generally consented to follow. In contrast, Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York, 2006) concludes that the threat was more real than imagined. On the subject of Andrew Curtin and his success adopting the Union Party label, see Sean Nalty, "'Come Weal, Come Woe, I Am with the Anti-Slavery Party': Federalism and the Formation of the Pennsylvania Union Party, 1860–1864," in *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Political History*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher and Rachel A. Shelden (Charlottesville, VA, 2012), 144–66; Jack Furniss, "Andrew Curtin and the Politics of Union" (master's thesis, University of Virginia, 2014); and Furniss, "Andrew Curtin and the Politics of Union," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 141 (2017): 145–76. For brilliant analyses of attitudes in the Army of the Potomac toward the Copperheads in 1863, see Timothy J. Orr, "Pennsylvania Soldiers Confront the North's Antiwar Movement," in *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Aaron Sheehan-Dean (Lexington, KY, 2007), 171–98; and John J. Hennessy, "Evangelizing for Union: The Army of the Potomac, Its Enemies at Home, and a New Solidarity," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4 (2014): 533–58.

Copperhead threat at home tended to radicalize the army's sentiment regarding emancipation.²²

By the spring of 1864, the FMS's reputation started to flourish as interest in USCT commands gained new respectability from the ranks of the Union army. Among the troops the applicants left behind, the shift toward accepting the usefulness of the USCT project made converts of even the staunchest conservatives. Lt. George Breck of Battery L, First New York Light Artillery, had gained a reputation of flirting with "Copperheadism" because of his pro-Democratic diatribes to a hometown newspaper. By early May 1864, Breck observed that "a large number in the army have applied for admittance into the Philadelphia academy." Although he retained doubts about how well black soldiers would fight, the lieutenant nonetheless opined that battle-tested common soldiers of the Army of the Potomac would prove an asset at the head of USCT regiments. "Inasmuch as negro troops are employed and they must have white commanders, it is certainly a good plan appointing such officers from the rank and file of the army," he decided.²³

The surviving record books for the FMS provide an indispensable glimpse into the average soldier who applied, and they also offer signif-

²² Historians have debated how much revulsion toward Copperheadism translated into pro-emancipation sentiment. Joseph Allan Frank, in his insightful *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers* (Athens, GA, 1998), states that his sample yielded a specific "seventy-one percent" of Union soldiers who "favored freeing the blacks and enlisting them in the war effort" (67), a close alignment with the army's 1864 voting average for Lincoln; he ties this attitude to political awareness gained through waging a war of words with Copperheads at home. Likewise, Manning's *What This Cruel War Was Over* agrees that most Union soldiers adopted an anti-slavery stance as the war progressed. Steven J. Ramold, in his brilliant work *Across the Divide: Union Soldiers View the Northern Home Front* (New York, 2013), notes that resistance to the perceived threat of Copperheads at home "further radicalized the political system with soldiers rallying to the defense of the President and the Republicans in large numbers" (116). Gary Gallagher's *The Union War* and Jonathan White's *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* collectively offer a thought-provoking counterattack against the notion that soldiers who identified as anti-Democratic actually adopted widespread emancipationist attitudes. Historians should see this specific debate as part of the wider discussion over whether the Republican Party simply rebranded itself for political expediency by 1864 or actually morphed into a completely new political movement with its adoption of the Union Party label. See Michael F. Holt, "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Union," in *Abraham Lincoln and the American Political Tradition*, ed. John L. Thomas (Amherst, MA, 1986), 111–41; and Adam I. P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York, 2006). For an example of the desire to pursue hard war as early as summer 1862, see J. Franklin Dyer, *The Journal of a Civil War Surgeon*, ed. Michael B. Chesson (Lincoln, NE, 2003), 32.

²³ George Breck to *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, May 1, 1864, trans. Bob Marcotte, First New York Light Artillery, Battery L file, New York State Unit History Project, New York State Military Museum (NYSMM), Saratoga Springs, <https://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/artillery/1stArtLt/1stArtLtBatLBreckChap25Stand.htm>.

icant insights into the political culture of certain units that supported the FMS and its radicalization of education. Committee Chairman Webster advertised the FMS in newspapers across the North, specifically asking for “young men having a fair common school education” or those who demonstrated “true military genius.” Not surprisingly, the overall picture that emerges of the average applicant shows that he was better educated than the vast majority of Union soldiers and much younger than most of the officers who already wore the shoulder straps he desired. Among all Union soldiers who fought in the war, only about 5 percent enlisted with more than a common school education. In contrast, more than 20 percent of the applicants to the FMS had advanced beyond common school; in addition, they were almost four times as likely to have attended high school as their counterparts elsewhere in the army, and over five times as likely to have attended college. At least 455 privates and 319 noncommissioned officers enrolled, while 49 junior officers (lieutenants and captains) and 5 field grade officers (majors and lieutenant colonels) attended. As for these junior and field officers, those wanting USCT commissions were substantially younger than their fellow commanders elsewhere. Approximately 42.9 percent of men with shoulder straps who applied to the Philadelphia school were below the age of twenty-four, as opposed to just 24.4 percent of officers in the army overall. Among all 1,029 applicants, including enlisted men, the percentage below age twenty-four seeking a commission was 62.8, well over twice that of the outside officer corps.²⁴

The records of the FMS also offer an account of how many men from each particular unit in the Army of the Potomac applied to the school. Practically every brigade sent at least one or two soldiers to Philadelphia, but eleven regiments in particular contributed five men or more—the Eighth Illinois Cavalry; Forty-Fourth and Ninety-Fourth New York and Second New York Cavalry; Eighty-Third, Ninety-Ninth, 118th, 140th, 141st, 143rd, and 148th Pennsylvania; Twelfth US Infantry; and Sixth Vermont. Several of these regiments, prodded by Republican officers, spearheaded the army’s public campaign against antiwar Democrats at home in 1863 and voted overwhelmingly for Republican and Union Party candidates in gubernatorial contests and the presidential election of 1864.

²⁴“New Advertisements,” *Harrisburg (PA) Evening Telegraph*, Jan. 6, 1864; “Officers of Colored Troops,” *Cleveland Morning Leader*, Apr. 19, 1864; Benjamin Apthorp Gould, *Investigations in the Military and Anthropological Statistics of American Soldiers* (Cambridge, MA, 1869), 570–71; Registration Volume, Barker Collection, HSP; Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 12–13. Gould’s study remains one of the most useful reference works on the social composition of the Union Army.

Thus, the soldiers who volunteered for the FMS from those units were far from the only politically astute soldiers in the ranks. Instead, the officers in command of these regiments fostered cultures of radicalism and encouraged exactly the sort of political engagement that brought awareness of the USCT endeavor. Furthermore, application to the FMS demonstrated belief in the viability of entrusting freed slaves with matters of life and death, a powerful example for fence sitters in the fractious Union Army.²⁵

Members of the Eighth Illinois Cavalry had been ironclad in their antislavery views since the beginning of the war. The cavalrymen gained political inspiration from Republican congressman John F. Farnsworth, who first commanded the regiment and delighted in its sobriquet from

²⁵ My methodology for ascertaining unit politics prioritizes three sources: 1) soldiers' private correspondence home and to officials such as governors and state adjutants general; 2) voting behavior in wartime elections, especially the 1863 gubernatorial races and the 1864 presidential contest; and 3) the unit's willingness to publish political material, especially in wartime newspapers. The most problematic is 1864 voting behavior. Many regiments faced annihilation in the Overland Campaign and were brought to full strength by hundreds of draftees, late enlistees, and substitutes who frequently resisted a unit's prior political culture. With this in mind, I began with the many Army of the Potomac regiments in the Second, Fifth, and Ninth Corps that forwarded tabulations for the 1864 election, made available in US War Department, *War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, vol. 42, part 3 (Washington, DC, 1893), 560–61, 574–78. Collectively, those totals indicate an army-wide average of 72.2 percent for Lincoln and the Union Party. However, after adding 30 more regimental voting totals absent from the War Department's official records but printed in newspapers across the North, I arrived at a lower army-wide average of 68.3 percent for Lincoln's party; in fact, the army's total Republican percentage may have been slightly lower than that because of so many late enlistees and draftees in New York regiments (units that sent votes directly home without being tabulated at the front). Nonetheless, it was then straightforward to determine which regiments prominent on FMS rolls also voted heavily for Lincoln and his policies. For instance, the Ninety-Fourth New York, which contributed five soldiers to the FMS, voted 74 (Lincoln) to 7 (McClellan) in 1864 (91.4 percent Lincoln); see "How the New York Soldiers Vote," *Potsdam (NY) Courier Freeman*, Nov. 2, 1864. The Eighty-Third Pennsylvania, which contributed nine soldiers to the FMS, voted 120 (Lincoln) to 32 (McClellan) (thus, 78.9 percent Lincoln) and dedicated its 1865 regimental history to those who died "in behalf of the great principles of human freedom"; see "The Election, Returns from the Pennsylvania Soldiers," *Philadelphia Press*, Nov. 11, 1864; and A. M. Judson, *History of the Eighty-Third Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Erie, PA, 1865). The 140th Pennsylvania published anti-Democratic resolutions in the spring of 1863, contributed 10 soldiers to the FMS, and later voted 147 (Lincoln) to 55 (McClellan) (thus, 72.8 percent Lincoln); see US War Department, *War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, vol. 42, part 3, 561. The 141st Pennsylvania contributed six soldiers to the FMS and voted 195 (Lincoln) to 5 (McClellan) (thus, 97.5 percent Lincoln); see US War Department, *War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, vol. 42, part 3, 560. The Sixth Vermont contributed five soldiers to the FMS and voted 132 (Lincoln) to 43 (McClellan) (thus, 75.4 percent Lincoln); see "Vote of the Vermont Brigade," *Burlington (VT) Free Press*, Nov. 18, 1864. Voting records for the Twelfth US Infantry, which contributed five soldiers to the FMS, were not located. However, Sgt. Charles T. Bowen wrote that the unit harbored but a few critics of black troops, and as for himself, "I only hope Congress will give them all the privileges [sic] of white troops. . . . This army is fast coming to a knowledge that its colored troops are an honor to it"; see Charles T. Bowen to mother, June 25, 1864, in *Dear Friends at Home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry First Battalion, 1861–1864*, ed. Edward K. Cassedy (Baltimore, 2001), 508–9.

President Lincoln, “Farnsworth’s Big Abolitionist Regiment.” Under Farnsworth, politics saturated the camp. For the first months of the conflict, the men spent their free time forming a debate society, using a portable library donated by citizens of Chicago. Months before Lincoln broached the topic with his own cabinet, the officers and men of the Eighth circulated a petition urging the president to issue an immediate emancipation proclamation. Once Lincoln issued his final edict on January 1, 1863, the Illinois men rejoiced and rode to nearby plantations to bring word to as many slaves as they could find. Later, while conducting a raid in eastern Virginia after the Chancellorsville Campaign in May 1863, the troopers liberated nearly one thousand slaves. “It was one of the greatest sights that I have ever [seen],” recalled Peter Triem of Company K. The regiment’s official history proudly recalled how the cavalymen, dubbed “Illinois Emancipators,” took delight in making secessionists “pay dearly” during the raid for their offenses. The next month, as the regiment cantered into Pennsylvania during the Gettysburg Campaign, Lt. Marcellus Jones beamed with pride that he had crossed the Mason-Dixon Line after months of fighting on the “slavery-accursed and God-forsaken soils of old Virginia.” In the 1864 election, the regiment gave fully 94 percent of its votes to Lincoln. Eight privates and one corporal put forth their names for Taggart’s school, and five of them earned shoulder straps in the USCT. They transferred no doubt anxious for promotion, but they left a unit that applauded the emancipationist agenda.²⁶

Like the Eighth Illinois, the Fifth Corps brigade originally commanded by Maj. Gen. Daniel Butterfield yielded numerous transfers, particularly from the Eighty-Third Pennsylvania and Forty-Fourth New York regiments. Nine privates from the Eighty-Third enrolled in the FMS, while others, including Private Oliver Norton, transferred directly into the USCT. The Forty-Fourth New York probably led the army in the total number of its officers and men who gained entry into the USCT. Col. James C. Rice rose to command the regiment not long after pledging himself publicly at

²⁶ David E. Mass, *Marching to the Drumbeat of Abolitionism: Wheaton College in the Civil War* (Wheaton, IL, 2010), 103–7, 15; A. T. Andreas, *History of Chicago: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1885), 2:261; Peter Triem diary entry for May 17, 1863, in Civil War Document Collection, United States Army Heritage and Education Center (USAHEC), Carlisle, PA; Abner Hard, *History of the Eighth Cavalry Regiment, Illinois Volunteers, during the Great Rebellion* (Aurora, IL, 1868), 241; Eric J. Wittenberg, *“The Devil’s to Pay”: John Buford at Gettysburg. A History and Walking Tour* (El Dorado Hills, CA, 2014), 33; “Sentiments of Illinois ‘Disfranchised Soldiers,’” *Boston Evening Transcript*, Nov. 12, 1864. The author thanks J. David Petruzzi for his helpful insight into the Eighth Illinois.

the war's outset to the destruction of slavery. Raised in September 1861 to avenge the death of Lincoln confidant Elmer Ellsworth, the Forty-Fourth sent three privates, two corporals, and two sergeants to Philadelphia for training. In addition, another twenty-four bypassed the school and transferred straight into USCT commands. These men came from all but two of the regiment's companies, and clusters of seven men came from both Companies D and E, showing that peer solidarity was central to taking the plunge. Some of these New Yorkers transferred as privates, but an impressive seventeen already bore the chevrons or shoulder boards of higher rank. They were the veterans of long service with the Fifth Corps, and nearly a quarter of them took with them the scars of battle wounds from Malvern Hill, Second Manassas, and Little Round Top at Gettysburg.²⁷

Many in the Butterfield brigade had exhibited political acuity since the war's early days and spouted anti-Democratic views once the peace faction emerged to oppose the administration. General Butterfield himself counted radical politicians among his closest confidants. In mid-1862, he assured Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase that new officers should spurn the model of other brigade commanders who taught their men to adore George McClellan, the idol of conservative Democrats. Butterfield's philosophy for instituting a unit-wide political culture was simple: "They are to serve their country and not to uphold any particular general." Both the Eighty-Third and Forty-Fourth, dubbed "Butterfield's Twins," quickly started camp debate societies to argue the merits of leading editorialists, whose columns they read voraciously. In March 1863, the Forty-Fourth helped lead the army's political counterattack against anti-war Copperheads at home by publishing a resolution in Northern newspapers that cheered the "holy cause" against the Confederacy. Even after being promoted, Butterfield maintained such strict political control over his old brigade that his successor complained bitterly to archconservative Gov. Horatio Seymour of New York of having lost his command due to closely held "Democratic principles." Butterfield's two favored regiments were precisely the sort of outfits from which Casey and Taggart expected men to apply.²⁸

²⁷ The regiment's history, written by Eugene Nash, lists thirty-one men who entered from the Forty-Fourth, but three of these could not be verified by the author. Nash himself received a lieutenant colonel's commission in the Twenty-Third USCT but could not muster because of wounds; see Eugene Arus Nash, *A History of the Forty-Fourth Regiment, New York Volunteer Infantry, in the Civil War, 1861–1865* (Chicago, 1911), 261, 312–13.

²⁸ Daniel Butterfield to Salmon P. Chase, July 12, 1862, in Salmon P. Chase Papers (Collection 121), Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Norton, *Army Letters*, 40; T. B. W. Stockton to John T.

The 140th Pennsylvania, which sent ten men into Taggart's school, was another solidly Republican outfit. Colonel Richard P. Roberts had actively supported Lincoln's 1860 candidacy from his community in Beaver County, and as the nation dissolved in the next year, Roberts offered an impassioned speech to his hometown outlining the reasons "for opposing slavery and secession." On March 27, 1863, his regiment assembled to adopt anti-Copperhead resolutions. The resulting document noted: "[W]e heartily approve of all the measures adopted by the government for the suppression of rebellion and treason, North and South, and trust no measures within its power will be left unemployed for the speedy accomplishment of that end." Even so, Alexander "Sandie" Acheson of the 140th belittled his regiment for not voicing its radicalism all the more firmly. "Oh! how 'milk and water' like!" he complained. The 140th voted as staunchly as it published political rhetoric. After thirty-eight soldiers from the regiment fell into rebel hands at Gettysburg and marched to Richmond as prisoners, they followed the gubernatorial race between Curtin and Woodward closely enough from Southern newspapers to hold a mock election at Libby Prison. Curtin won the contest easily. During the 1864 contest, Democratic agents offered pro-McClellan ballots to the veteran soldiers of the 140th encamped at Petersburg. Rather than accept the tickets, the men immediately threw them in a campfire and shouted to party officials that "[if] they did not get out of ther[e] in less than 5 minutes we would ride them out on a rail." Company-level voting details sent home by one soldier showed that Companies C and H, which collectively had forwarded six of the regiment's ten men to the FMS, went decidedly for Lincoln.²⁹

Not to be outdone as one of the most radicalized regiments in the army, the Sixth Vermont also unleashed its rhetorical musketry against the Democrats at home in early 1863. In the New Englanders' resolutions, the soldiers affirmed allegiance to the president and his party's policies, "includ-

Sprague, Sept. 2, 1863, and H. S. Lansing to John T. Sprague, Sept. 20, 1863, both in New York State Adjutant General's Office Correspondence and Petitions, New York State Archives.

²⁹ Gregory J. Bell, "In Defense of Colonel Richard P. Roberts, Commanding Officer of the Pennsylvania 140th Regiment" (master's thesis, Marshall University, 2004), 7–8; Alexander "Sandie" Acheson to Jane Acheson, Mar. 24, 1863, and Apr. 4, 1863, quoted in Sara Gould Walters, *Inscription at Gettysburg: In Memoriam to Captain David Acheson, Company C, 140th Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Gettysburg, PA, 1991), 69–70, 76–77; "From the 140th Regiment Pa. Volunteer's [sic]," *Washington (PA) Reporter and Tribune*, Apr. 29, 1863; Travis W. Busey and John W. Busey, *Union Casualties at Gettysburg: A Comprehensive Record*, 3 vols. (Jefferson, NC, 2011), 2:938–46; Wilson N. Paxton Diary, entries for Oct. 12–13, 1863, Civil War Document Collection, USAHEC; Joseph Smith Graham to Ellen Lee, Nov. 7, 1864, in Janet Bartlett Reeder McFadden, ed., *Aunt and the Soldier Boys from Cross Creek Village, Pennsylvania, 1856–1866 . . .* (Santa Cruz, CA, 1970), 152–53.

ing the celebrated proclamation of Jan. 1st, 1863.” Writing opinion pieces to the *Rutland Herald* in early 1864, Lt. Albert A. Crane described the process by which his soldiers gained radical sensibilities. Thanks in large measure to the availability of such Republican newspapers as the *Washington Chronicle*, a luxury unknown to the regiment during George McClellan’s tenure, the Vermonters exhibited “a great revolution in political sentiments.” Like the Eighth Illinois, Eighty-Third Pennsylvania, and Forty-Fourth New York, the Vermont Brigade passed the time by forming “literary societies” to read and debate such questions as “Ought the property of the rebels to be confiscated?” and “Is there more to admire than condemn in the life and character of John Brown?” The Sixth forwarded five volunteers to the FMS before voting three-to-one for Lincoln over McClellan in November 1864.³⁰

* * *

Soldiers who crowded into the FMS classroom came from regiments that had spearheaded the army’s counterattack against the Copperheads

³⁰ “The Sixth Vermont on Copperheads,” *Montpelier (VT) Green Mountain Freeman*, Mar. 31, 1863; Donald H. Wickman, ed., *Letters to Vermont: From Her Civil War Soldier Correspondents to the Home Press*, 2 vols. (Burlington, VT, 1998), 1:186–87, 192; see “Vote of the Vermont Brigade,” *Burlington (VT) Free Press*, Nov. 18, 1864. In the Army of the Potomac, the Eleventh Corps was markedly underrepresented in the FMS. These figures in part reflect the corps’ transfer to Tennessee in late September 1863, but ethnic culture also seems to have accounted for the low turnout of USCT hopefuls. Whole units in the Eleventh were noted for their German, Swiss, or Polish heritage. Martin W. Öfele has analyzed the experiences of German Americans who enrolled as officers in the USCT to show that many were not emancipationist ideologues but simply patricians who sought a more professional command structure and class distinction in their service than what they found in white regiments. The only regiment of the Eleventh Corps to forward a significant number to the FMS was the 157th New York, a unit not known for a strong European provenance. Thirteen officers and men successfully transferred into the USCT from the 157th, including three who passed through Taggart’s FMS. As with similar regiments, the commanders were outspoken emancipationists. Lt. Colonel George Arrowsmith, who died at Gettysburg, had expressed frustration in a prewar address that the North would be made subservient to the slaveholding South. “Is that old monster slavery to rear its black and grizzly [*sic*] form over the fair North,” he had wondered, “and vomit up pollution over the verdant hills and people of New York?” Adjutant Joseph T. Heney, also a Gettysburg casualty, was a close confidant of abolitionist leader Gerritt Smith, who offered the young officer’s eulogy. Company G of the 157th hailed from Madison County, “fertile ground” for “anti-slavery agitation,” and the company’s postwar history draws a stark contrast between the cause of the Confederacy, “human slavery,” and the cause for which the New Yorkers fought—“freedom.” See Öfele, *German-Speaking Officers in the United States Colored Troops*, 14–21, 30–31, 83–112; Christian B. Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory* (New York, 2007), 10–17, 26–27; Registration Volume, Barker Collection, HSP; John S. Applegate, *Reminiscences and Letters of George Arrowsmith of New Jersey, Late Lieutenant-Colonel of the One Hundred and Fifty-Seventh Regiment* (Red Bank, NJ, 1893), 17; untitled newspaper clipping, Aug. 3, 1863, 157th New York regimental file, NYSMM; A. R. Barlow, *Company G: A Record of the Services of One Company of the 157th N.Y. Vols. in the War of the Rebellion . . .* (Syracuse, NY, 1899), 19, 225.

and any critics of the administration's policies. This political activity, much of it performed in the public eye, contributed to the army's radicalization in 1863 and 1864 by linking Union loyalty to an acceptance of black participation in the war. By the time FMS graduates earned their shoulder straps and marched south to Petersburg, the Carolinas, or wherever the war took them, the USCT experiment had gained respectability in the eyes of many white soldiers.

The Philadelphia school established by Chairman Webster and Colonel Taggart taught white privates and noncommissioned officers from these regiments how to lead African Americans in the war's most revolutionary enterprise. The first task of the FMS was to train ambitious young men in the tactical art. The second and far more involved task was to test soldiers' loyalty to the radical prosecution of the war—to test, in fact, how willing soldiers were to put Republican words into action. Responding to General Casey's examination requirements, the FMS even sought to expand the military education curriculum into the humanities as a means of cultivating soldiers' moral suitability to represent the project. This politicization of military education for radical ends defied decades of civil-military tradition represented by West Point. As the vanguard of the war's most radical project, the tiny classroom on Chestnut Street matriculated 561 men, "humane, educated and skilled," who stood ready for General Casey's examination board and whatever lay before them on southern battlefields.³¹

United States Military Academy, West Point

ZACHERY A. FRY

The views expressed above do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Army, the Department of Defense, or the US government.

³¹ Registration Volume, Barker Collection, HSP.