CAMP WILKINS, MILITARY POST, 1861

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When President Lincoln on 15 April 1861 issued his first call for 75,000 militia “to repossess the forts, places and property which had been taken away from the Union,” the response of the people of the city of Pittsburgh was electric. The city’s already organized military companies answered to such an extent that there were more than enough to meet the initial quota assigned to the Pittsburgh area. Enthusiasm to defend the Union was widespread throughout the area. Even before the formal call for recruitment was under way, volunteer companies from outlying regions of Western Pennsylvania started to converge on Pittsburgh.

Many companies on arrival were without means of support. Not being officially enrolled, they could not draw upon military funds. To accommodate incoming recruits, a committee “for quartering troops and furnishing providence” was organized under the chairmanship of Samuel McKelvy on 27 April 1861 at the Board of Trade rooms, 78 Fourth Avenue, “to make arrangements of different volunteer companies who are ready to enter the service of the government.”

Headed by Judge William Wilkins, the Citizens Committee of Defense, of which McKelvy’s committee was a part, appealed to Governor Andrew G. Curtin of Pennsylvania to permit the military

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1 Pittsburgh Post, 16 April 1861.
2 Pittsburgh Gazette, 16 April 1861.
3 Pittsburgh Post, 18 April 1861.
4 One of Pittsburgh’s most distinguished civic and political leaders of the day. At the time of the outbreak of the Civil War Wilkins was the Chairman of the Committee of One Hundred, which directly assumed provisioning and quartering all volunteers. Wilkins was born in Carlisle 20 December 1779, was President of the Common Council of Pittsburgh, served in the State Legislature, was Judge of the Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania, appointed Minister to Russia, appointed Secretary of War from 15 February 1844 to 4 November 1845, and in 1855 elected to the United States Senate. He was the first President of the Bank of Pittsburgh. One contemporary newswriter described him thus at the time of crisis: “With his silvery locks, his animated eyes, his clarion voice, his patriotic fire which eighty winters failed to lay chill, he exhorted his fellow citizens to lay aside all former differences and rally around the President.” Pittsburgh Gazette, 16 April 1861.
companies "now here to form a camp under the direction of the military department." Governor Curtin's first reply, however, stated that he was in no official position to give any orders until he was fully authorized to do so by the Legislature, which was scheduled to convene the following Tuesday.6

In the meantime the Citizens Committee sought accommodations for the volunteers at the Fair Grounds7 which were located on the south side of Penn Avenue between the present 29th and 32nd Streets and extended to the Pennsylvania Railroad in Lawrenceville. Mayor George Wilson of Pittsburgh wasted no time in contacting Governor Curtin. He asked the governor formally to establish a military camp in the city in order to take care of the incoming concentration of volunteers and particularly to secure payments for accommodations and provisions.

On Saturday evening 27 April Mayor Wilson and Mr. McKelvy left for Harrisburg on behalf of the Committee on Troops and Provisions following receipt of this telegram dated 27 April 1861:8

MAYOR WILSON: On further consideration I have concluded to form a military camp at Pittsburgh. You will please have the companies marched into the camp immediately. I will name a commanding officer today. /s/ A. G. Curtin

The news was received with unbounded enthusiasm, especially by the Citizens Committee, which was entrusted with providing facilities and provisions to the men. The Pittsburgh Gazette had editorialized earlier that "it would furnish an opportunity for testing the realities of camp life and acquiring more proficiency in military discipline." The writer went on to take the liberty of naming the Fair Grounds area "Camp Wilkins and let it be the camp of the West."9

The local Committee on Troops immediately issued the following order:10

Pittsburgh, April 27, 1861
The respective companies who have reported to the Committee as ready to render their services to the Government will assemble at the Fair Grounds on Monday morning April 29th at 10 o'clock to be formed in camp by the commanding officer.
S. McKelvy, Chairman

5 Pittsburgh Catholic, 20 April 1861.
6 Pittsburgh Post, 18 April 1861.
7 The Fair Grounds proper were owned by the Harmar Denny estate.
8 Pittsburgh Gazette, 29 April 1861.
9 Ibid., 16 April 1861.
10 Pittsburgh Post, 29 April 1861.
A telegram the next day, however, changed the situation and consequently created much confusion and consternation among the local military units.\textsuperscript{11} It read as follows:

John W. Riddle: An officer appointed by the Governor will arrive at Pittsburgh tomorrow to organize Camp Wilkins. Allow no troops to go into Camp until he arrives.

George Wilson  
Samuel McKelvy  
By order of the Governor

The newly appointed officer was Colonel Phaon Jarrett, and upon his arrival on 29 April immediately set out to make the Fair Grounds acceptable quarters for the incoming troops, thereby gaining much praise for his promptness and efforts.\textsuperscript{12} However, the local committee became indignant when it was announced by Colonel Jarrett on 1 May 1861 that only six companies from Allegheny County would be accepted.\textsuperscript{13} Twenty-eight additional companies had been alerted by their respective leaders and were ready to report to Camp Wilkins, and the Citizens Committee felt it was an undue burden to feed and clothe the uncalled volunteers. A special committee headed by ex-Governor William F. Johnston\textsuperscript{14} and Thomas M. Howe\textsuperscript{15} was formed to seek arrangements for those who were recruited and not called. Disgruntled, many recruited companies voted to disband and returned home.

The hectic activities and agitations surrounding Camp Wilkins did not deter Colonel Jarrett from organizing the camp into a respectable military establishment. As of 3 May 1861,\textsuperscript{16} Camp Wilkins

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. Also printed in the Pittsburgh Gazette, 29 April 1861.  
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{13} They were the Garibaldi Guards commanded by Captain Francis Hardtmeyer; Duncan Guards commanded by Captain John W. Duncan; Chartiers Valley Guards commanded by Captain Charles Barnes; Pittsburgh Rifles commanded by Captain Lewis W. Smith; Anderson Guards commanded by Captain George S. Hays; and the Iron City Guards commanded by Captain Charles M. Gormly. Pittsburgh Gazette, 2 May 1861.  
\textsuperscript{14} He was Governor from 26 July 1848 to 20 January 1852.  
\textsuperscript{15} Banker, industrialist, philanthropist, civic leader, Howe served in Congress 1851-1853, was President of the Exchange Bank 1852, and President of the Chamber of Commerce. He was very active during the Civil War period, named chairman of centralizing the recruitment of volunteers and later named as acting Adjutant General. Camp Howe, in the Oakland district, was named after him. His leadership and activities on behalf of enlisting recruits proved very effective, especially in 1862 when ardor to enlist was at its lowest. In private life he was secretary and treasurer of the North Cliff Mining Company and C. G. Hussey and Company, and of James Childs Company. History of Allegheny County (A. Warner & Co., Chicago, Ill., 1889), 239.  
\textsuperscript{16} Pittsburgh Post, 2 May 1861.
contained sixteen companies (about 1200 volunteers) including ten companies from Erie under command of Colonel John W. McLane\(^7\) and Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Grant. The recruits slept four abreast in the cattle stalls, using straw for bedding and knapsacks for pillows.

The following regulations and training orders were put in effect by Colonel Jarrett:

**ORDER NUMBER 1**

First: Accepted troops arriving at Camp will be escorted to their respective quarters by assistant Quartermaster.

Second: As soon as troops are admitted in the camp, a guard will be placed at the gate to prevent persons from entering the grounds who are not connected with the camp.

Third: At 5 o'clock A. M. reveille will beat, the companies form in their respective streets and the roll will be called.

Fourth: From 5\(^{1/4}\) to 6\(^{1/4}\) A. M. Company drill.

Fifth: Breakfast at 7 o'clock; Guard mounting at 8 A. M.

Sixth: Between 9 A. M. and 12 M — The captains will devote their time principally to instructing the respective commands in the Schools of Soldier and Company.

Seventh: Dinner at 1 P. M.

Eighth: Between hours of 3 and 5 P. M. the captain will instruct the companies as instructed in No. 6.

Ninth: Between drills the Captains will detail men for Police Duty. Particular attention to this order is enjoined.

Tenth: Supper at 6\(^{3/4}\) P. M.

Eleventh: Tattoo at 9\(^{3/4}\) P. M. Roll called.

Twelfth: At 10 P. M. Taps, when the lights will be put out, except in the officer's quarters and no loud talking or disorder of any kind allowed.\(^8\)

The Commissary was in charge of Major Henry A. Weaver,\(^9\) who was credited with being a very energetic and enterprising procurement officer and who was purchaser of rations for the camp. Those consisted of salt beef, bread, crackers, coffee and sugar, which he was able to get in abundance.

Dr. Franklin Irish\(^10\) received the appointment of Surgeon to Camp Wilkins. Later he served with the Pennsylvania 77th Infantry.

One of the first public requests made by Colonel Jarrett was for a camp flag.\(^11\) Although he had tried to purchase one, none was

\(^7\) Pittsburgh Gazette, 2 May 1861.
\(^8\) Pittsburgh Post, 3 May 1861.
\(^9\) Pittsburgh Gazette, 3 May 1861. He was Mayor of Pittsburgh 1857-1859.
\(^10\) Pittsburgh Post, 29 April 1861.
\(^11\) Ibid.
available at any price, and he referred the matter to a local women's patriotic committee headed by Miss Lizzie Johnston.

On Sunday 3 June 1861 the formal flag presentation from the committee was made in a manner befitting the occasion. The ceremony took place at four o'clock, and the flag was presented to Colonel Jarrett by former Governor Johnston. The crowd was estimated by the newspapers to be 8,000, not counting those "on the hillside in the rear which was also covered with spectators." 22

On Saturday 4 May 1861 Governor Curtin paid a formal visit to Camp Wilkins on his way to Harrisburg following a conference at Cleveland 23 with the governors of New York, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. At the time of the governor's visit, 24 companies were in the Camp Wilkins area. 24

On 9 June Colonel Jarrett received his orders to return to his regiment, the Eleventh, stationed at Camp Wayne, West Chester, Pennsylvania, and Colonel McLane was put in command of Camp Wilkins. 25

Colonel McLane lost no time in issuing his first order forming the companies and regiments into two battalions. The First Battalion under command of Colonel L. W. Smith, Lieutenant Colonel C. F. Johnson, and Major Robert Anderson consisted of the Pittsburgh Rifles, Chartiers Valley Guards, City Guards Company B., Meadville Volunteers, Iron City Guards, Garibaldi Guards and Allegheny Rangers. The Second Battalion included the Anderson Cadets, Fayette Guards, Armstrong Rifles, Duncan Guards, Jefferson Guards, Clarion Union Guardsmen, McKeesport Union Guards, and Jefferson Riflemen and was commanded by Colonel George S. Hays, Lieutenant Colonel S. D. Oliphant and Major John W. Duncan. 26

Despite the unbounded enthusiasm on the part of the male populace to enlist as volunteers to fight for the preservation of the

22 In the rear was the present lower part of Herron Hill below Brereton Avenue originating just above the 28th Street bridge and generally referred to as the Polish Hill; also in the same immediate area the Western Pennsylvania Hospital was located where the Citizens Committee on Public Safety procured "an apartment for use and occupancy of sick soldiers at Camp Wilkins." Pittsburgh Gazette, 6 June 1861.

23 The Governors present were Curtin of Pennsylvania, Denison of Ohio, Randall of Wisconsin, Blair of Michigan, Morton of Indiana. They met in Cleveland on 3 May. The purpose of the meeting was to reach an agreement for common defense against Confederate invasion. Pittsburgh Catholic, 11 May 1861.

24 Pittsburgh Post, 9 May 1861.
25 Ibid.
26 Pittsburgh Gazette, 20 May 1861.
Union, the Pennsylvania State Legislature was slow to make provision for Camp Wilkins. Consequently many companies were without uniforms, arms, ammunition and even shoes. Some of the companies, such as the Anderson Infantry, provided entertainment to raise funds for uniforms and other military needs.

Many local citizens and congregations became sponsors and benefactors. For instance, friends provided uniforms for the crack outfit of the Garibaldi Guards, who were well trained and disciplined but without any military dress. They were purchased through Messrs. J. & J. Vogel on Liberty Street at eight dollars per suit. Dinners were prepared and served by local women's societies of Pittsburgh and various church organizations which adopted different military regiments. For instance, “the Ladies of the Liberty Methodist Episcopal Church on Saturday evening presented the Erie Regiment at Camp Wilkins with 500 pies which were distributed at a rate of fifty to each company.” Also a public appeal had to be made for shoes, “as there are 50 to 60 men who were barefooted.”

In a few days the people of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County began to bring loads of provisions, blankets, stockings, underclothes, in short, everything that was calculated to add to the comfort and gratification of the regiments. For these kindnesses a strong feeling of friendship grew between the men of the regiment and the local citizens.

In fairness to Governor Curtin, it can be said that, despite his best efforts, there was little he could do to alleviate the existing chaos in Camp Wilkins since legislative action was necessary. Until such action was taken, all he could offer was consolation and hope to those local military units. The following letter, dated 18 May 1861, was sent from “a committee of gentlemen” who wished to obtain more definite “information in reference to securing the acceptance of the numerous volunteer companies now organized in this vicinity”:

To His Excellency A. G. Curtin, Governor
Sir:

The undersigned, in connection with Captains Smith, Jackson and Snodgrass (now absent at Camp Scott), came home today as a Committee (at the request) of Col. McLean [McLane] at Camp Wilkins

27 Ibid., 14 May 1861.
28 Captain A. M. Judson, History of the Eighty Third (B. F. H. Lynn, Erie, Pa., no date), 22.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Pittsburgh Gazette, 21 May 1861.
to ascertain from you the prospects of the Companies which we have the honor to Command; and as you will leave for Chambersburg before we can have a satisfactory interview, we beg leave to ask the following questions, viz: What Companies and what number of companies will you be likely to muster into the service of the United States, in the State of Pennsylvania, from Allegheny County? Is it the intention of the Commander in Chief to remove Camp Wilkins from the present situation? We have heard, with regret, rumors to this effect, and desire to urge upon Your Excellency the propriety of continuing to hold this, in our opinion, very eligible situation for a camp.

Would it not be in your power to take at least two regiments from Allegheny County, as they could be very promptly furnished, of well disciplined and well behaved troops?

At what time may the Companies selected expect to be armed and equipped?

We remain with great regard your very humble servants,
Geo. S. Hays, Captain Anderson Cadets
John W. Duncan, Captain Duncan Guards

The Governor, in his reply on the same day to the Committee, indicated that the number of companies from Allegheny County had been designated in official order as eight. He pointed out that they were to be used for the service of the state and that he had no authority to call for any more troops for the national government. "As to precise location of such Camp, I will be advised by Major General McCall who will in a few days make the necessary examination for that purpose." The Governor, in closing, reminded the Committee that it would be a long struggle and therefore cautioned them to be patient lest their spirits might become dampened.

After a time unrest grew among the local people about the location of the camp. It appears a fact that there were a number of valid reasons advanced by the press for removal of Camp Wilkins to a more suitable site. The papers pointed out that the Fair Grounds were too small to drill the 2,000 troops; that the proximity of the camp to the city had a demoralizing effect; that it was impossible to enforce proper discipline while the facilities for reaching the city were easy and available; that drunken brawls and fierce assaults were not infrequent among the volunteers, and that the area was unsanitary.32

Later that month General George A. McCall recommended removing Camp Wilkins to Hulton Station on the line of the Allegheny Valley Railroad, a little west of Hulton Station on lands belonging to Edward Grier. Influencing his decision was the fact that "the men will have every facility for bathing in the pure waters of

32 Pittsburgh Gazette, 22 May 1861 and Pittsburgh Post, 3 May 1861.
the Allegheny.” He also thought that the training grounds would be more suited to military demands than those of Camp Wilkins. The new military facility was named Camp Wright after John A. Wright, Governor Curtin’s Military Aide and Consultant.

One of the first military units to be moved from Camp Wilkins to Camp Wright was the Erie Regiment under the command of Colonel McLane. However, the opening of Camp Wright did not diminish the military activities at Camp Wilkins, and after all, by 18 June 1861 nine companies were at the latter. As of 2 August 1861 Camp Wilkins took on a Federal status as indicated by the following letter to the Honorable Thomas M. Howe, Chairman of the Committee for Subsistence of Soldiers:

War Department August 1st, 1861

I am instructed to direct you to receive and muster into service at Pittsburgh in squads of 50 or more volunteers for three years service. These volunteers when mustered in, will be sent you to Camp Wilkins and be there subsisted by the Government with a supervision of yourself and officers.

I am Colonel your obedient servant

Geo. D. Recoles, Assistant Adjutant General

This letter was also addressed to the commanding officer of the Third Cavalry, Lieutenant Colonel Emory, who was recruiting here.

Of special interest is this particular advertisement which appeared under the Military Notices:

The Company of the undersigned having been accepted in the Kentucky Cavalry Regiment Colonel W. H. Young now in Washington, will leave to join that Regiment as soon as the Company is full. Twenty men are wanted to fill it. Pay commenced as soon as the men are enrolled. Apply to the undersigned at Camp Wilkins.

S. B. M. Young, Captain.

The months of August and September were the busiest in Camp Wilkins’ existence, and some of Western Pennsylvania’s best outfits were going there. Among those bivouacking at Camp Wilkins at this time was the Dunlap’s Creek Cavalry raised in Fayette County.

33 Pittsburgh Gazette, 22 May 1861.
34 Ibid., 27 May 1861.
35 Ibid., 18 June 1861.
36 Ibid., 13 June 1861.
37 See footnote 15.
38 Pittsburgh Gazette, 8 August 1861.
39 Pittsburgh Gazette, 2 September 1861.
40 Evening Chronicle, 27 July, 5 August and 27 August 1861. It is almost impossible to trace the first names of some of the "officers" mentioned. Apparently they were organizers who were never commissioned. There were many such.
and commanded by Captain J. B. Davidson, First Lieutenant David Gilmore, and Second Lieutenant W. Brown. The Company was sworn into United States service by Lieutenant Hutchings of Colonel Emory’s Third Mounted Regiment. Another body of well-trained troops numbering 670 men awaiting call was under command of Colonel Daniel A. Leasure. However, the most spectacular as well as best known outfit of its day was Colonel Amos A. McKnight’s Regiment, “The Wildcat,” which within its organization included the following companies: 41 Mahoning Rifles commanded by Captain John Hastings from Punxsutawney, Jefferson County; Ringgold Artillery, Captain John A. Frease, Ringgold, Jefferson County; Brookville Rifles, Captain John Dowling, Brookville, Jefferson County; Washington Guards, Captain Artemus H. Tracy from Jefferson County; Union Guards, Captain James D. Kirk from Indiana and Jefferson Counties; Perry Rifles, Captain Hovey, Clarion County; Limetown Guards, Captain C. A. Craig, Greenville, Clarion County; Jackson Blues, Susquehanna River, Clearfield County. Others that were ordered to report included the Company from Sewickley Township, Westmoreland County, Captain Mungo M. Dick; Simpson Light Infantry, Captain Alexander Hay; Lawrence Grays, Lieutenant James L. Banks; and also six companies totaling 540 men under command of Lieutenant Colonel Scott Carter. On 4 September 1861 a Fire Company of Volunteers from McKeesport under charge of Captain J. Whighan also reported at Camp Wilkins ready for active duty.

The Colonel Alexander von Schemmelfinnig 42 Regiment of Philadelphia, later to be known as the Pennsylvania 74th Regiment, mustered into service 14 September 1861, was rated as the best trained and disciplined. Colonel George S. Hays, M.D., of Allegheny County, during the month of September departed from Camp Wilkins with 500 men to join the forces of General George McClellan. Colonel Hiram Hultz was in command of four companies. Also reporting

41 See the Pittsburgh Post, 30 and 31 August 1861.
42 Alexander Schemmelfinnig was born in Germany in 1824. He fought in the Hungarian Wars for independence under Kossuth and upon capitulation came to the United States. Commissioned Colonel 23 July 1861, he commanded the Third Division in Battle of Gettysburg. His forces were the first to enter Charleston on 18 February 1865 and also to take possession of Forts Sumter and Moultrie. He died at Minersville, Pa., 7 September 1865. He was mustered out with a rank of Brigadier General of volunteers and rates as one of the better field generals of the Army of the Potomac. Samuel P. Bates, Martial Deeds of Pennsylvania (T. H. Davis and Co., Philadelphia, 1876), 643.
at Camp Wilkins were the Agnew Guards, named after Judge Daniel Agnew of Beaver Falls, who were slated to join up with Colonel Wilson’s Regiment.  

As of 27 September 1861 Colonel James A. Elkin of United States Quartermaster Department was named the commander of Camp Wilkins while Colonel Schemmelfinnig and Colonel Hays were in command of Camp Wilkins at various periods. During the month of October 1861 the following commanders and their troops were recorded in the Camp Wilkins area and were forming units of General James S. Negley’s Brigade: Colonel Frederick S. Stumbaugh of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, 77th Pennsylvania Volunteers Infantry; Colonel Henry A. Hambright of Lancaster, 79th Pennsylvania Regiment; Colonel William Sirwell, 78th Pennsylvania Regiment, and Captain H. L. Vanolove of Lancaster, Cavalry Company Body Guard.

It was at this time that Secretary of War Simon Cameron on his tours paid an official call to Camp Wilkins and made an inspection of its facilities and 3,000 ready-to-serve militia and, according to contemporary accounts, “was duly and favorably impressed with camp’s general appearance.”

The use of Camp Wilkins as a rendezvous for incoming troops began to wane as Secretary of the Commonwealth Eli Slifer called

43 Pittsburgh Post, 9 October 1861.
44 Ibid., 11 October 1861.
45 James S. Negley of Pittsburgh was born 26 December 1826. Enlisted as a private in War with Mexico and, upon termination, returned to engage in horticulture. As a civilian he rendered important services in organizing and training local military companies in Allegheny County and at the time the Civil War broke out he already was in command of a brigade. He was frequently consulted by Governor A. Curtin on military affairs. For valor displayed at Cedar Forest, Negley was made Major General of the volunteers. In 1869 he was elected to Congress and twice re-elected. Bates, op. cit., 949.
46 Frederick Shearer Stumbaugh, born in Franklin County, Pa., 14 April 1817. His regiment took part in battles under Buell in Kentucky, in support of Grant at Shiloh. Nominated by President Lincoln as Brigadier General, resigned his commission following a lingering illness in December 1862. Later served as a member of the Pennsylvania Legislature. Bates, op. cit., 881.
47 William Sirwell was born in Allegheny Arsenal 10 August 1820. Entered military service in 1839 and was in command of Pittsburgh Blues, Washington Blues, Brady Alpines, and Kittanning Yeagers. Brigade-Inspector of Armstrong County. Married to Miss Elizabeth McCandless on 6 November 1840. For distinguished military services during the Civil War was made Provost Marshal and later placed in command of Second Brigade, Fifteenth Division of the Fourteenth Corps. He was mustered out 4 November 1864. Bates, op. cit., 931.
48 Presbyterian Banner, 26 October 1861.
upon all commanders of companies to report immediately to the headquarters at Harrisburg that means of transportation might be provided for them.\textsuperscript{49} Governor Curtin immediately followed with another order that all recruiting be stopped as Pennsylvania quotas had been met.\textsuperscript{50}

With the need of trained troops on the battlefields and particularly in face of the Confederate advances and Union casualties, there was a mass movement of all available man power from Camp Wilkins.\textsuperscript{51} By 31 December 1861 Camp Wilkins and Camp Wright were no longer mentioned in the local news accounts. In fact, General Negley's bodyguard from Camp Wilkins consisting of forty men and one hundred horses from Kentucky were the last troops to be mentioned in local newspapers. When General Negley's Brigade left, there were apparently no other troops stationed at Camp Wilkins.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{49} Pittsburgh Catholic, 24 August 1861; Pittsburgh Post, 1 February 1862; Ibid., 3 February 1862. Camp Wright was sold at public auction 3 February 1862.
\textsuperscript{50} There were officially five State Military Camps organized by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as of 1861, \textit{viz}: Camp Curtin near Harrisburg; Camp Washington at Easton; Camp Wayne at West Chester; Camp Wilkins at Pittsburgh; Camp Wright at Hulton, Pa.
\textsuperscript{51} Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle, 10 December 1861. Ibid., 18 December 1861.
\textsuperscript{52} Pittsburgh Post, 3 December 1861.