General Heintzelman's Third Corps had been so badly mauled in the battles on the Peninsula under McClellan and in the Second Bull Run campaign under Pope that the whole Corps had to be detached from the Army of the Potomac for rest and recuperation. The three divisions of the Corps were assigned to that quiet sector known as the Defenses of Washington. General Hooker's old division, the Second, was placed temporarily under the command of General Grover while Colonel Nelson Taylor commanded the Excelsior Brigade, subject to General Sickles' return.

Early in September 1862, the Excelsior regiments were encamped about two miles southwest of Alexandria near Fort Lyon. They had fallen back from the Chantilly battlefield and as William Wiley of the Friend Rifles describes it, "We only went a short distance beyond that field when we again laid on our arms, and it was raining and very cold. No sleeping was done that night. The next morning we got a loaf of bread and started off again towards Fairfax and then left it and went out scouting through the country until dark when we camped again on a beautiful farm and where we lived well for that night on corn, potatoes and apples. At daylight, the morning of the 3rd, we were on the move towards Alexandria . . ." ¹ The column moved through thickly wooded country toward the Potomac at Pohick Church and by early afternoon the troops were on the river road which skirted Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon had become something of a sanctuary and was off bounds for soldiers of both armies. "There was no fighting there, and we were not allowed into the grounds." ² Before nightfall on September 3rd the

¹ Letter dated Sept. 4, 1862. William Wiley served with the Friend Rifles until wounded at Gettysburg. His Civil War letters are in the possession of his granddaughter, Mrs. Russel Snyder of Pittsburgh, who very kindly put them at my disposal.

² David B. Parker, A Chautauqua Boy in '61 . . . (Boston, 1912), 23.
Excelsiors were encamped near Fort Lyon, within sight of Alexandria and Washington.

Fort Lyon was one of a chain of strong earthwork defenses that had been erected shortly after the fall of Fort Sumter for the protection of Washington. It mounted 26 guns and controlled the terrain where the Old Fairfax Road and Telegraph Road formed a junction. Although wood was scarce the campsites between the Fort and the city of Alexandria were pleasantly located and it was a relief to the men to know that they were in for a short breathing spell.

The Excelsiors were in desperate condition. They had packed and marked their knapsacks at Harrison's Landing several weeks before and, with only light field equipment, had served as rear guard on the weary march to Yorktown. There they were jammed into the transport Vanderbilt and shipped to the aid of General Pope. Wiley summed up the whole miserable campaign in a few words. "We never slept in a tent and had nothing but our gum blankets with us. We have never had a change of clothing and the most of us threw our underclothes away some time ago. I threw mine away as it had become too filthy to use any longer. I have no shirt to my back . . . . we lived on raw pork and crackers, as we had no kettles along, nor had time to cook even if we had them along. In those eighteen days we travelled over one hundred miles and engaged the enemy three different times, and our Brigade lost over five hundred men." 

The plight of the Excelsior Brigade was recognized, especially in New York. On September 2nd the Tribune reported that all of the officers of Company F, Fifth Excelsior, with the exception of Lieutenant Squier, had been killed or wounded and added, "The Regiment numbers scarcely a company." Yet it was getting increasingly difficult to find replacements. No longer could volunteers from states other than New York be depended upon. Communities such as Pittsburgh were busily raising regiments for Pennsylvania brigades and had no men to spare for the battered regiments of other states.

The first replacements to arrive came as a complete regimental unit. The Ulster Regiment, organized in Kingston, New York, was mustered into Federal service on August 22, 1862, as the 120th Regiment, New York Volunteers. On September 6th they joined the Excelsior Brigade at Alexandria. Later, when they had proved themselves in combat, they were accepted by the veterans as the Sixth Excelsior Regiment.

Even though the opposition to General Sickles, which had been strong in New York the previous year, had turned to admiration, he had trouble finding willing volunteers for his Brigade. Susquehanna, in northeastern Pennsylvania, reported that the war spirit was high and that enlistment was going on rapidly for the Sickles Brigade, but in New York City Sickles, "still endeavoring to fill the ranks of his Brigade," was making little headway.\(^4\) Governor Morgan of New York, formerly an enemy, tried to come to the rescue. He authorized Sickles to accept companies from any part of New York State and he requested that the War Department assign New York regiments to Sickles' command "wherever practicable."\(^5\) The city of New York offered a special $50 bounty to all who would join the Excelsior regiments, and all slightly wounded and convalescent Excelsiors were ordered to rejoin their units. In spite of all this effort the Brigade numbered only 2300 effectives by October 20th.\(^6\) Chaplain Twichell informed his father that the Brigade was beginning to look well again, "but still very small, although some recruits have arrived."\(^7\) Later, after Fredericksburg, the Brigade was further reenforced when on January 20, 1863, the 163rd Regiment, New York Volunteers, was transferred in its entirety to the Fourth Excelsior Regiment at Falmouth, but never again were these fine regiments to be at full combat strength.

Meanwhile, the early days of September were busy ones and the soldiers of the Excelsior regiments were not sure what was in store for them. Wiley wrote that they were all "in a fever of excitement and unrest" because they were constantly on the move though no move was ever more than two miles in any direction. "We keep three days rations cooked all the time to be ready for any emergency."\(^8\) They did receive wedge tents which added to their comfort, and camp rumor had it that they were to be outfitted in French Zouave uniforms, the gift of Emperor Napoleon III to the Brigade that had most distinguished itself, which added to their \textit{esprit}, but Wiley's uncertainty and resentment was shared by many. "I think the Government must be hard up for troops when they must keep a

\(\text{\footnotesize{\cite{4} New York Tribune, September 8, 1862.}}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize{\cite{5} New York Tribune, September 18, October 6, 1862.}}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize{\cite{6} Ibid., October 20, 1862.}}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize{\cite{7} The letters of Joseph Twichell are in the Yale University Library. Letter, September 21, 1862.}}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize{\cite{8} Wiley, \textit{op. cit.}, September 12, 1862.}}\)
Brigade of five regiments numbering about seven hundred men, all
the time on the move and in every fight that takes place." 9

Fortunately, the government was not as "hard up" as Wiley
feared and the Excelsiors were spared the bloody Antietam campaign.
Brannigan was amused to note that the home papers gave them
credit just the same. "I see by the Pittsburgh Chronicle that Sickles' 
Brigade did some desperate fighting at the Battle of Antietam. I
verily believe that if a battle took place in Australasia we would
be mentioned in connection with it . . . . I thought we were still in
Alexandria takin' our aise." 10 "Our aise" consisted of work on the
fortifications, picket duty, drilling recruits, regimental drills and
brigade reviews. General Sickles, now in command of the Second
Division of the Third Corps of which the Excelsiors formed the
Second Brigade, inspected his troops at regular intervals, but the most
important and colorful review of all was conducted on October
22nd before a staff of generals, President Lincoln and a large gather-
ing of spectators from Washington. Despite the cold and the dust
and the wind the troops performed well.11 Sickles was popular with
his old brigade but there was almost a veneration for General Hooker.
"We are sorry to part with 'Fighting Joe' . . . . Since Kearney is no
more he is the only General I have implicit confidence in. I wish he
was at the head of the army." 12

McClellan was still in command of the army, however, and was
to remain its head until November 7th. After the Battle of Antietam
he dallied in Maryland until the 26th of October and then advanced,
by leisurely stages, toward Warrenton and Culpeper where Long-
street's Confederates were encamped. It looked like another campaign
in the making and on October 31st the Excelsiors broke camp at
Fairfax Seminary near Alexandria and proceeded to Annandale
where they bivouacked for the night. The next day they moved
through Fairfax Court House to within two miles of Centerville
where Twichell reported " . . . we are here just behind that line of
rebel works which frowned toward Washington during the winter
of 1861-62, holding a vast army in staring disgrace." 13 That night

9 Wiley, op. cit., September 12, 1862.
10 The Civil War letters of Felix Brannigan are in the Manuscript Division of
11 Warren H. Cudworth, History of the First Regiment Massachusetts Infantry
(Boston, 1866), 299.
12 Brannigan, op. cit., September 20, 1862.
13 Twichell, op. cit., November 2, 1862.
the Brigade crossed Bull Run at Blackburn's Ford and camped very near the spot where they had passed the day after the Battle of Bristoe Station. Some of the men were looking forward to the campaign. "The fighting Division (it is Sickles' now) is again in the field . . . although containing but a small leaven of its original members . . . . The next two or three weeks may be decisive." 14

Nothing very decisive happened. Sickles' Division was scattered along the Orange & Alexandria R.R. from Fairfax Station to Warrenton Junction. Sickles had sent his Third Brigade under General Patterson southward to Warrenton Junction but they retired shortly after contacting the enemy, which so enraged Sickles that he placed General Patterson under arrest. On the night of November 7th he sent his own Excelsior Brigade to do what Patterson had not done. In cold, driving sleet they marched to Warrenton Junction but the enemy had gone. The Third Regiment stayed at the Junction, the First and Fifth with the Friend Rifles and Zouave Cadets went to Bristoe Station, while the Fourth and Sixth (120th New York Volunteers) returned to Manassas Junction. There had been no contact with the enemy but there had been some rough soldiering.

The Excelsiors were not equipped for winter campaigning. They had nothing but shelter tents, "pocket handkerchiefs" as William Wiley called them, and the regulation gum blanket, and many of the men developed severe head and chest colds. Wiley was not exaggerating when he wrote to his brother, "We have not very good Doctors [Surgeon McGowan of the Fifth Excelsiors was dismissed for intemperance and neglect of duty on November 23rd according to the New York Tribune of November 25th], and a person has to go a long time and be pretty bad before they can get a discharge . . . . I have pains in my breast too much. I will not go to a hospital until I can't help it, for I have seen too much of fellows that have been to hospitals." 15 All sorts of devices were used to escape the cold, including burrowing into the railroad bank, which proved fatal to Henry Bailey of the First Massachusetts Regiment when the cave collapsed and smothered him. 16

Illness did take its toll in this autumn of 1862 and not all of the men were able to continue, despite pains and aches, as Wiley did.

16 Cudworth, op. cit., 305.
Thomas Patchell and William Perman of the Zouave Cadets were discharged for illness in late December 1862. Edward Gilmore and John B. Lucas, from Tidioute, were discharged from the Fairfax Seminary Hospital in December. Three men from the Friend Rifles, William H. Barckley, John M. Campbell and Augustus Dungan, were discharged from hospitals near Alexandria, as were William C. Frith and George E. Pitcher from Susquehanna. Wiley’s family wanted him to apply for a disability discharge and must have pointed out to him that other members of the Friend Rifles had thus honorably been able to leave the service, and did specifically cite John Campbell, but Wiley’s laconic reply was, “The young fellow by the name of Campbell that is in Pittsburgh is from our Company.”

General McClellan, now superseded by General Ambrose Burnside, reviewed those troops available at Warrenton before embarking for Washington on a special train. He was still popular and at each station was cheered by the troops. The Excelsiors were now at Fairfax Station, and on November 12th had the opportunity not only to cheer the outgoing chief, but to welcome even more boisterously the incoming Hooker whose Antietam wound was nearly healed and who was held in the greatest esteem by most of the Brigade. Since the campaign had not materialized and since the new commander had his eyes on Fredericksburg as the gateway to Richmond, Sickles’ Division with the Excelsior Brigade moved to an encampment at Wolf Run Shoals, a small branch of the Occoquan, about six miles from Fairfax Station. The weather was foul most of the time and the confusion attending the change in strategy only added to the misery of the men. The change of the base of operations to the north bank of the Rappahannock opposite Fredericksburg had begun on November 15th and once again the Excelsior regiments were the last to leave the scene of possible action.

General Sickles, fearing a Confederate attack on the railroad, moved to Manassas Junction where he had his men build fortifications out of the wealth of supplies around the depot — boxes of crackers, barrels of pork, bales of hay — and when the order came to rejoin the army all that could not be carried away was burned. The march of the Excelsiors from Manassas Junction, via Fairfax Station, to Falmouth opposite Fredericksburg, was a bitter one. It took the better

17 Wiley, op. cit., December 4, 1862.
18 James Stevenson, History of the Excelsior Brigade (Paterson, N. J., 1863), 36.
part of two days and nights and the heavy rain did not stop for an instant. Some of the men were without shoes and the cold, swollen streams which had to be forded were strewn with rounded, slippery stones. By Sunday, November 30th, they were safe in camp near Falmouth “almost a mile from the river and about as far above Fredericksburg,” but Twichell observed, “The boys are tired and not altogether cheerful as usual.”

General Burnside’s reorganization of the Army of the Potomac and his projected strategy impressed few, least of all the private soldier. The Center Grand Division was commanded by the popular General Hooker. General Stoneman was given the Third Corps, General Sickles the Second Division of that Corps, while the Second Brigade of that Division, the Excelsior, was under Colonel George B. Hall. Colonel Farnum had the First Regiment, with the Friend Rifles, and Colonel William H. Lounsbury commanded the Fifth Regiment with the Zouave Cadets. The commanders were well enough liked but the slowness with which General Burnside developed his strategy was obvious to everyone. Wiley thought that Burnside was “fooling away some very fine weather.”

From where we are encamped it is only a short distance to where we can see Fredericksburg and I can throw a stone and hit the Rebels. There is no picket shooting allowed and the pickets talk and laugh together. There is a large army of ours but I don’t believe there is a very large force of Rebels and when the time comes our Generals will find out that they were badly fooled. They have their Camp too much exposed and there is too many soldiers running around the bank of the river as if they wanted to show off. If they intended a resistance there would not be so much show. It will take a pretty smart man to make head or tail of their movements now. Everything seems to be at a standstill. I have been around the troops a good deal and I find that there is a good deal of grumbling and dissatisfaction at the thin way things are going. The men as a general thing are anxious and willing to move on and fight if necessary. They want to finish the war up this winter and get home . . .

The waiting was nerve wracking but there were compensations. General Hooker reviewed his old Division on December 4th. The men were pleased when he pointed out to his staff the bullet-torn flags of the several regiments. There was visiting around the different camps. The Roundhead Regiment (Colonel Daniel Leasure’s 100th Pennsylvania Volunteers) which had been recruited in Western Pennsylvania had many men well known to the Friend Rifles and Zouave Cadets of the Excelsiors. The two outfits had been close together at

19 Twichell, op. cit., November 30, 1862.
20 Wiley, op. cit., December 4, 1862.
Warrenton Junction just before Second Bull Run and now once again their encampments were within easy visiting distance. William Wiley was saddened by the death of Captain William Templeton, a Washington, Pennsylvania boy who had been killed at Bull Run on August 29th but was pleased with the new shoulder straps of Edwin Bausman, who had been promoted to Second Lieutenant on November 28th. Oscar O. Sutherland, elder brother of Henry Bruce Sutherland, formerly a newspaper man in New Castle but now a Sergeant Major with the Roundheads, was able to swap family news with the young Zouave Cadet. This may have been the last time the brothers met, in this Falmouth Camp, because the Roundhead Regiment was moved to the Western theater early in 1863 and Sergeant Major Sutherland died of an operation for quinsy while home on veterans' furlough March 6, 1864.21

Neither reviews nor visiting, however, could entirely ease the misery of the men as they waited in their encampments for the impending battle to open. Chaplain Twichell gives a graphic account of the state of the Excelsior regiments as of Sunday, December 7th, when the men were trying to make the best of a bad situation in Camp Sickles:

Winter is upon us savagely. Snow lies on the ground and our water pail was frozen over this morning. We are ill prepared to meet it and our condition would not make a bad show compared to Valley Forge. The men are badly off for want of shoes and the little shelter tents not much better than nothing. We have no stoves and have to rely on camp fires which are only a mitigation. If we stay here, a few days will remedy these ills for the most part, but if called upon to move we shall have the chance to earn the name of "suffering patriots." 22

The men were called upon to move but the Excelsior regiments in general and the Friend Rifles and Zouave Cadets in particular were spared most of the horrors of the Battle of Fredericksburg, except as spectators. This strangely inept and awful battle proved little except the heroism of the Army of the Potomac. The fight for Fredericksburg opened officially at daylight on December 11th when the engineers began to lay the pontoon bridges over the Rappahannock at the designated places. The troops had been getting ready for several days. The Excelsior Brigade had been on the alert since December 9th. Men unable to march ten miles, and there were 200 of them, were hospitalized in the Fitzhugh Mansion near Camp Sickles. An additional

21 Wiley, op. cit., December 4, 1862.
22 Twichell, op. cit., December 7, 1862.
2000 men were unprepared to march for lack of shoes until midnight on the 10th.\textsuperscript{23}

At four o'clock on the morning of the 11th the Excelsior regiments were aroused, tents were struck, wagons loaded and by 7 o'clock the Brigade was in line on the undulating plain which stretched toward Fredericksburg. The column moved to the line of timber in the rear of General Sumner's headquarters at the Lacy House, where in happier days Robert E. Lee had courted his bride-to-be. The day was misty and the men rested on their arms awaiting the completion of the pontoon bridges. They remained there until the morning of the 12th, when they advanced about half a mile and remained awaiting orders until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The orders directed them to proceed to the support of General Franklin's Left Grand Division, some four miles down the Rappahannock, and that night after trudging down the rutted Telegraph Road, they bivouacked on a ridge overlooking the river.

On Saturday the 13th at noon the Fifth Regiment, with the Zouave Cadets, was ordered to support the batteries of Captain Gustavus De Russy on the extreme left of the Federal line. These batteries were to cover the crossing of General Franklin's troops at the lower bridges. Colonel Lounsbury reported that the batteries, mostly Parrott 20 pounders, were in position and engaging the enemy "about 2 miles down the left bank of the river, opposite the Massaponax River . . . . There I posted my command . . . . placing 2 companies with a section on the left in a field to the rear of Gray's mansion, and 2 companies, under the command of Captain Purchase, on the heights in our rear, a portion of which was extended as a picket to the river."\textsuperscript{24}

The men were comparatively safe although there was much shelling. The Federal batteries were not hit but Henry Bruce Sutherland received a painful but not serious contusion wound as a result of the shellfire. Brannigan was both nonchalant and caustic in his brief description of the action. "The 5th Regt. was not across the river at all but did good service on the extreme left of our line supporting a battery of long range Parrott guns. So they were safe from minnies. The new troops were shoved to the front to earn their bounties and did not hold their ground with much tenacity. The Rebel position

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Official Records}, Ser. 1, Vol. 21, 387.
was impregnable — except to a desperate charge a la bayonet, many of which were attempted but none succeeded. I firmly believe that Hooker's old Division with old "Joe" at the head could have carried any point of their lines, with less loss than many divisions suffered in half hearted charges . . ." 25

The Fifth Excelsior Regiment remained on the north bank of the Rappahannock covering the extreme Federal left until the morning of December 16th. Informed that the batteries had moved to the rear of Pollock's Mill, Colonel Lounsbury recalled his pickets and prepared to follow. Failing to make contact with the batteries the command waited at Pollock's Mill until noon and then proceeded to Camp Sickles near Falmouth.

Meanwhile, on Saturday the 13th, the other Excelsior regiments had crossed the river, and during the late afternoon and evening were in line of battle south of the crossing and between the Richmond Stage Road and the tracks of the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac R.R. As Twichell describes it, "After we crossed the bridge, there was no delay, but the division was immediately pushed out to the extreme front to our overwearied part of the line. The enemy had driven us from the woods that had once been carried, and under a considerable fire of artillery, we were formed in a wide field \( \frac{1}{4} \) mile from the rebel front." To this he added, "The musketry had entirely ceased in this neighborhood, save occasional exchanges between the pickets . . . and I may here state, that with the exception of the pickets, our Division came away Monday night [Dec. 15th] without having been actually engaged at all. Our few wounded received their injuries while standing in the line inactive." 26

Members of the Friend Rifles, serving as Provost Guard, were to have even a less active part. As Wiley explained it, "we were back a good piece from the battle line and we could see the fight going on [in] several places." He was impressed by the heroism, "our men never fought better in this war than they did here," but he was equally impressed by the chivalry displayed by the Rebels.

On Monday [December 15th] the persons connected with the Ambulance Corps commenced to venture out a short distance beyond the line where our Division was picketing. The Rebels noticed it and would not fire and at last spoke to our boys and told them that if our pickets would not fire they would not, and commenced to stand up and show themselves, and told our boys that there was a lot of wounded up there and for them to come and

25 Brannigan, op. cit., December 29, 1862.
26 Twichell, op. cit., December 17, 1862.
get them. In less time than it would take me to tell it, our boys and the Rebels were laughing and talking and shaking hands, trading coffee for tobacco and doing everything they could for one another. A person to look at them would never suppose they had been enemies . . . . They were most all North Carolina troops, and were gentlemen and admitted more and done less blowing than any set of men that I have seen. 27

The Generals put a stop after a while to this fraternization and that night the Excelsior Brigade recrossed the river and were back in their old camp at Falmouth the next day. The First Excelsiors had had one officer and three enlisted men wounded. Twichell estimated the wounded for the entire Division as “about 100” all of whom were taken to the Fitzhugh House, “where they were comfortably bestowed in warm rooms and have since been carefully attended.” 28

The two weeks following Fredericksburg were full of uncertainties and discomfort. Wiley reported that “By present appearances I would say that there is no intention of doing anything here. Everybody seems to be waiting for ‘something to turn up.’ What that something is nobody seems to know.” 29 Brannigan found conditions extremely disagreeable. The men had nothing but shelter tents, had to do their own cooking, and “carry wood half a mile, and drill and march a good deal.” By Christmas day, however, Brannigan and his mess mates had built a neat log hut, put up beds and on the whole were well fixed, although Christmas delicacies were nonexistent. The weather had turned mild and thoughts of a return to Alexandria, or better still, a furlough tended to be cheering. 30

The whole question of furloughs was a sticky one. Some men got them, some did not; some could not afford to go anywhere and some merely took French leave. This condition existed all during the fall and well into the spring of 1863. Elliott McGinness of the Friend Rifles had gone to Washington, Pennsylvania, in November where he had visited the Wiley family and had been very much taken with sister Jennie. He returned on December 2nd, was put under arrest, “but there will not be anything done with him as he has the documents that will clear him of all blame.” 31 George Rinehart of the Zouave Cadets had gone to Pittsburgh for Christmas, taking with him “relics from Fredericksburg captured by George Whitesides and [Felix Brannigan] while the Rebel batteries were

27 Wiley, op. cit., December 18, 1862.
28 Twichell, op. cit., December 17, 1862.
29 Wiley, op. cit., December 26, 1862.
30 Brannigan, op. cit., December 29, 1862.
31 Wiley, op. cit., December 4, 1862.
shelling the place,” but Brannigan could not make it himself owing to the “nonarrival of Green-backs.” He cheerfully prophesied, however, that “When they come there will be quite a delegation from Company A to Pittsburgh.” 32

Camp rumors persisted that the army would fall back on Alexandria or Manassas, or even that the Peninsula might be tried again. The Excelsiors had received a new commander late in December, General Joseph W. Revere, formerly Colonel of the Seventh New Jersey who succeeded Colonel Hall, but General Burnside was still in command of the army. Most of the men thought that there would be no general move until spring. The brigade had moved to better winter quarters where there was “plenty of oak for fires” and the men were not disturbed by the rumor that Hooker’s whole Grand Division might be sent to the support of General W. S. Rosecrans in the west. Since Pittsburgh was on the direct route to the West the men from the area hoped that the rumor was true. 33

It was a time of low morale and idle gossip. When Brannigan heard that Lieutenant Milton B. Miller, who had been wounded at Bristoe Station, was coming back to the Zouave Cadets he snarled, “He is so contemptable that the whole company petitioned that he should not be appointed to Co. A . . . .,” and threatened to transfer to Company I where his Pittsburgh friend, Francis Tyler, was captain. 34 Brannigan need not have worried for Miller was discharged for wounds April 7, 1863. Wiley was bitter because his request for a furlough had been disapproved and for the moment was fed up with the Company, the Brigade, the slackers and Copperheads at home, and was now convinced that the war would not end before the expiration of his enlistment. Yet his patriotism never faltered and he was vehement in his faith, “I will live through it all though and will see the ‘old flag’ all right yet.” Nor would he consider temporary desertion, “I will never go home on the French leave [even though] there is a great many men leaving this way.” 35

The infamous Mud March did not improve morale. General Burnside had determined on one last lick at the Confederates. His plan called for outflanking Lee’s forces on the heights west of Fredericksburg. The Union troops were to cross the Rappahannock

32 Brannigan, op. cit., December 29, 1862.
33 Brannigan, op. cit., January 13, 1863.
34 Brannigan, op. cit., January 13, 1863.
35 Wiley, op. cit., February 1, 1863.
at Banks Ford, about eight miles west of Fredericksburg, early on the morning of January 21st with Hooker’s Grand Division on the right and Franklin’s on the left. Consequently, the Excelsior Brigade broke camp on January 20th, formed columns, and marched about two miles up the Rappahannock. Here they halted to permit General Franklin’s Grand Division to pass, and were forced to return to their old camp in a heavy downpour. The next day they started out again, marched eight miles in the mud and rain to near Banks Ford, where they made camp, such as it was, in a wood. The rain continued day and night. During the afternoon of the 22nd and the morning of the 23rd the Excelsiors served as pioneers, building corduroy roads so that the artillery and wagons could move. The afternoon of the 24th they were back in their old camp near Falmouth, filthy, exhausted and bitter. The whole campaign had to be called off because of the mud.

The Mud March was General Burnside’s last official act as commander of the Army of the Potomac. On January 26, 1863, President Lincoln dispatched the famous letter to General Hooker naming him commander of the army. The forces inherited by Hooker were as nearly demoralized as an army can be, yet he proceeded with energy and intelligence to rebuild, showing amazing competence at organization. Nearly half of the army had taken what Wiley called “the French leave.” To mitigate this, Hooker instituted a more lenient furlough system and, the better to connect soldiers with their units, he created the Corps Badge. General Kearney had used the famous “Red Patch” as a morale builder. Now, all units of the Army of the Potomac were to have a distinguishing and distinctive badge.

The government had no intention of providing insignia — this was left to the ingenuity of the men. The Excelsior regiments, being members of the Second Division of the Third Corps, had as their symbol the white diamond which was to be worn on the cap. The original idea may have been to identify men unofficially absent from their units but the men regarded the badge as an object of pride. Brannigan gave his sister explicit instructions as to how to make badges for Tom Patterson and himself. “I enclose you a pattern for a diamond which I wish you to cut out in strong paper, very stiff. Cover with white satin and work round the edge in the manner of button-hole stitch with gold thread . . . . Let the back of it be lined

36 Henri Le Fevre Brown, History of the Third Regiment, Excelsior Brigade (Jamestown, N. Y., 1902), 83.
tightly so that I can pin it on and take it off in wet weather.”  

Henry Bruce Sutherland, and others presumably, simply hammered badges out of silver coins. It was one and three-quarter inches high and one and one-quarter inches wide, diamond shaped, with scroll work and “74th New York Vol” scratched on the surface. A pin was soldered to the reverse side.

Keeping the men on their toes was another Hooker device for building morale, or at least eliminating the boredom that stems from idleness. Wednesday, February 4, 1863, was so bitter cold that Father Joseph B. O’Hagan, S.J., chaplain of the Fourth Excelsior Regiment, found it too severe to stir from bed. “A Buffalo-robe is a friend with whom it is hard to part — such a morning.” Nevertheless, that night at 11 o’clock marching orders came to the camp of the Excelsior regiments and the troops were in an immediate ferment preparing rations and preparing to march. The next morning they started on a reconnaissance, in support of cavalry action, in weather that was abominable. Father O’Hagan’s mind was on the men. “The storm all day has been frightful — first snow, then sleet, now a cold freezing rain. Our men are out in all — deep in the mud, without tents, good shoes or anything! How they must suffer!”

The Brigade returned from its “bridge burning and general destroying expedition” on February 7th, looking “as wretched and woebegone as men could look and live,” after covering about 45 miles in two and a half days through mud and sleet. They had gone up the Rappahannock to the vicinity of Deep Run Ford and had accomplished exactly nothing.

On February 22nd the Excelsiors were out again in another snowstorm. “Late last night,” wrote Twichell, “the order came to make ready for three days picket duty. It was a bitter thing to march this morning but they did it — with more cheerfulness than you would suppose.” On the color line they stamped their feet and rubbed their hands, jokes were flying as thick as snowflakes, and there was grumbling, but little anger, even though the men knew they were in for a bad time. “Three days picket in such weather involves formidable hardship. A long line of outposts is to be maintained

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37 Brannigan, op. cit., letter fragment, undated.
38 Father Joseph B. O’Hagan, S.J., chaplain of the Fourth Excelsior Regiment, kept a diary from February 1 to February 19, 1863, which is now in the archives of the Divand Library at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Mass., where Father O’Hagan was President from 1873 to 1878.
and no fires are permitted except in the rear where the 'relief' is stationed."  

As was to be expected sickness plagued the camps even though food and shelter had improved. Twichell reported the death of Martin V. White, a Coudersport, Pennsylvania boy in Co. H. of the Second Excelsior, whom he had known from hunting days in Potter County before the war. The Zouave Cadets lost Alexander R. Black, March 27th, and Edward Fiathkowsky, January 16th, through disability and Joseph Kuntry, April 17th by desertion. Disability removed Charles Manning, March 8th, Charles McClure, January 22nd, William B. Palmer, March 2nd, and Joseph B. Zeigler, February 5th, from the ranks of the Friend Rifles. The Tidioute contingent was hard hit. Captain William M. Mew, February 7th, Tobias Swaggett, January 17th, Nathaniel Williams, January 22nd, and Daniel McClintic, February 11th, were all given disability discharges, as were Hosiah Crisel, February 23rd, and Henry K. Marks, January 7th, from Susquehanna.

Some effort was made to lighten the burden of life in winter quarters. On March 3rd the Third Excelsior Regiment held a shooting bee. The weapons were Springfield muskets, the judges were the regimental chaplains, the target was six feet by 22 inches and was 300 yards away. The prizes were twenty-five, fifteen and ten dollars respectively and were awarded to John Bourne, Co. D., Horace Wilcox, Co. E., and E. F. Merrill, Co. I., privates all. General Sickles tried one shot but won no prizes.  

Most of the men had been roughened by army life although few wrote home about this aspect of their experience. It was no accident that the term "hooker" was synonymous with both prostitute and a shot of whisky. Chaplain Twichell was afraid that the new chaplain of the Fifth Excelsiors, Mr. Littler, was a little too unworldly for the task confronting him. "Utter simplicity will not do, in fishing for such wily gudgeons — regular sharpers — as abound in the Excelsior Brigade . . ." Father O'Hagan, after a visit to Washington where the amenities of civilized life still existed, could not forbear comparisons. "How grateful to me in my position, continually in contact with dregs of human nature now in our army — forced to associate with them — to a certain extent and to dissimulate my disgust . . .,"

40 Twichell, op. cit., February 22, 1863.
41 Le Fevre Brown, op. cit., 84-5; Twichell, op. cit., March 8, 1863.
42 Twichell, op. cit., January 4, 1863.
yet he felt that he could still "effect some good among them." Nor was it the rank and file alone that bothered the chaplain. The shenanigans of the officer corps were notorious throughout the Falmouth camps.43

As spring progressed the weather improved, the roads dried out and the spirits of the troops rose accordingly. The irrepressible Brannigan summed up the month of April. "We have had Patrick's days, hurdle races, sack races, army weddings, serenades, speeches, Copperheads warnings, furloughs, amnesties to absentees . . . [Brannigan himself had been absent without leave, and had commented "I expect they will only take my pay for the time I was absent." ] President's reviews, camp visits . . . . and lastly though not leastly plenty of soft tack, fresh beef and vegetables. There is the secret of it all. Who could be dull or dispeptic here. How I commiserate poor miserable male citizens. They don't know anything about the joys of a 'bould sojer boy's life' . . . ." 44

The highlight of the month of April was the visit of President Lincoln and his family to Falmouth. On the 8th he reviewed five corps of the army, about 80,000 men. It took the troops about six hours to pass, all of which time the President remained uncovered. Wiley was moved by the careworn appearance of the President. "I really pitied him, and today I have a greater love and respect for him than I ever had before, and I think he should have the hearty support of all men. As my love for 'Old Abe' increases so does my hate for the Copperheads, and I only hope that they may be the first ones drafted . . . ." 45 The day the Presidential party left, the Third Corps turned out, without arms, to pay tribute to the man they recognized as a real leader.

General Hooker had tightened security regulations from the moment he assumed command. Colonel George H. Sharpe of the Sixth Excelsiors (120th New York) was appointed chief of the Military Information Bureau where he did an excellent job. Pickets were no longer permitted to swap supplies and military information; news reports had to be signed by the individual reporters so that they could be held responsible. Hooker's passion for secrecy was carried so far that even the corps commanders did not know what the plans for the spring offensive were in detail. It is not surprising

43 O'Hagan, op. cit., February 18, 1863.
44 Brannigan, op. cit., letter fragment, undated.
45 Wiley, op. cit., April 10, 1863.
then, that individual units did not know what was in store for them.

On the very day that the Excelsior Brigade was ordered to move, April 28, 1863, Brannigan was writing, "For the last week we have had very little time to ourselves. Reviews, Drill and guard was the order of the day. It seems that the soldiers must . . . march past every man of note who takes it into his head to come down here. We are heartily tired of it. But it seems as if we are to have an end of this soon: for the third time this Spring the Army of the Potomac has received orders to march and the greater part of it is now actually on the move. The 3rd Corps is to follow in a day or two. I suppose something decisive is about to be done." 46 That night the Third Corps marched down the Rappahannock to below Fredericksburg where it took a position near Franklin's Crossing to serve as support for the First and Sixth Corps. They had rations and ammunition for eight days which was a strong indication that they were to be used elsewhere.

General Hooker's strategic plan had much to commend it. The right wing of the army, three corps, was to move west up the Rappahannock, cross at Kelly's Ford, then move southeast and cross the Rapidan at Ely's and Germanna Fords. Now south of the Rappahannock they could proceed toward United States Mine Ford and Banks Ford and thus protect the crossing of additional Union troops. They were then to proceed to Chancellorsville where, with a force of about 60,000 men, they would be in the rear of Lee who was still at Fredericksburg. Meanwhile, the left wing of the army under General Sedgwick, with three corps, was to cross the Rappahannock below Fredericksburg and make a demonstration in force.

Hooker, however, had not reckoned on the daring, the luck or the genius of the Confederate General Jackson. In a strong position at Chancellorsville, facing east the Union troops were waiting to be attacked from the front by Lee's forces. The night of May 1st Lee and Jackson conceived their daring flank movement. On the morning of the 2nd Jackson started his twelve-mile march around the right flank of the Union Army, using the little known Furnace and Block Roads through the wilderness. By midafternoon Jackson had reached the Old Orange Turnpike, to the west and in the rear of the Union Eleventh Corps. He then turned east toward Chancellorsville and by five in the evening was in a position to attack.

46 Brannigan, op. cit., April 28, 1863.
Meanwhile, the Excelsior Brigade, temporarily with the left wing at Franklin's Crossing, received orders to join the right wing of the army. They started in the early afternoon of April 30th, marched twelve miles up the Rappahannock and bivouacked for the night. Starting at 6 o'clock in the morning of May 1st they continued on until they reached United States Mine Ford where they crossed the Rappahannock about midday. They marched the long four miles to Chancellorsville by way of Mineral Springs Road.

The Second Division of the Third Corps was now commanded by General Hiram Gregory Berry, with General Joseph Revere in charge of the Excelsior regiments. The Excelsiors did not fight with Sickles at Hazel Grove and Catherine Furnace on May 2nd. They were held in reserve near Hooker's headquarters at Chancellorsville until 5 p.m. of May 2nd when they were sent on the double-quick, west on the Orange Plank Road, to the aid of the broken Eleventh Corps.

A fragment of a letter written by Felix Brannigan between November 6, 1862, and January 1863 strikes a prophetic note. For him a military genius was one who could meet the foe in the open, dispose his forces to the best advantage and fight with chesslike precision. This was the European way. What actually happened in the wooded country of Virginia was that you had to close with an unseen enemy whose line of battle was not discernible and with no way of knowing whether the foe was weak or in overwhelming numbers. Probing skirmishers could be thrown out but it was more a gamble than a military manoeuvre. Suddenly,

Cracking peals of murderous musketry awake the sleeping echoes and the forest rings with shrieks of dying men, heard loud over the roar of artillery and infernal din of battle. Our skirmishers never return to tell the tale of their sad fate . . . . Still the shouts proclaim the conflict as it shifts from left to right and now the centre is waverling and like the sound of distant waters come on the yelling foe to the charge with bayonets flashing like ten thousand meteors through the darkness . . . . many elect to mass before living storms of grape, canister and shrill pinging minnies — "thug" "thug" "thug" every bullet finds a billet, and every instant you are losing a comrade who stood beside you in many a joyous frolic as well as bloody field . . .

Thus "fields are lost and won" and won and won and lost again — with us. The physical nature of the country is not adapted to European tactics and consequently I contend you cannot draw parallels of ability between either Napoleon or Wellington and the idol of all true American soldiers, Major General Joe Hooker, or as we love to call him, "Old Fighting Joe with the stand up collar." 47

47 Brannigan, op. cit., undated fragment.
Between Wilderness Church and Chancellorsville the Orange Plank Road and the Old Orange Turnpike were the same road. It was in the triangle formed by Bullock Road and the Orange Plank Road, with a dirt road called Mountain Road, starting at the apex of the triangle and traversing it until again rejoining the Orange Plank Road, that the Excelsiors did all of their fighting. As they advanced toward the enemy on that evening of May 2nd, exhorted and led according to Wiley by General Hooker himself, “It was their that ‘Old Joe’ galloped up and called for his old Division,” they met demoralized elements of the retreating Eleventh Corps, artillery trains, wagon trains and droves of cattle which seriously impeded their progress and had to be forced aside at the point of the bayonet. Soon, however, they were in contact with the enemy. “In a few moments we were in sight of the Rebels coming down chasing the Eleventh Corps, and screaming and yelling like a set of deamons let loose from the Infernal Regions. ‘Old Joe’ then gave our Division the words Charge boys, and it was a charge that awakened [in] the Rebs the knowledge that they had something else to deal with beside a lot of demoralized Dutch. We stopped them handsomely and had a nice little brush their for an hour or so when they retired.”

That night was one of uneasiness and watchful waiting. The Excelsiors threw up breastworks of logs and brush knowing full well that there would be a heavy attack in the morning. It was essential that information about the strength and disposition of the enemy troops be gathered. About midnight General Revere rode down the line and stopped where the Fifth Excelsiors were resting on their arms. He spoke to Captain Francis E. Tyler and, informing him that it was of the utmost importance to ascertain what was going on out in front of the breastworks, ordered Tyler to pick some trusty men and send them out to discover what they could. As Tyler reported it,

I went to my old company (A) [Zouave Cadets], and called for Felix Brannigan, who had been with me all during the war, and whom I knew from long experience to be a cool, courageous, intelligent soldier. I told him what I wanted, gave him my ideas as to how to get out of the lines and what to do, and suggested the other men whom he should take along. They went in twos, each in a different direction, having to pass our own pickets and presumably those of the enemy, make their way stealthily through the thickets and swamps and go until they found troops in front; either ours or the enemy. They had all returned by daylight, coming in at different times, the last man coming in being Jos. Gion, who was out so long I feared

48 Wiley, op. cit., undated fragment.
his death or capture. They reported that they had gone a considerable distance when they came to "an open" which was occupied by a large body of troops; by laying low and getting as near as possible to the troops, who were camped close to the woods, they found that they were Stonewall Jackson's men ....

The Fifth Excelsiors who participated in this dangerous mission were Sergeant Major Jacobson, Felix Brannigan, Henry Bierman, Joseph Gion and Gottlieb Luty — the latter four being members of the Zouave Cadets. All were awarded Congressional Medals of Honor.

There was uncertainty and uneasiness in both camps that night. General Jackson, with some of his staff, rode out on a personal reconnaissance and started up the Mountain Road, the dirt path which started at the Junction of Bullock Road and the Orange Plank Road. Here his party was fired on by troops from Pender's North Carolina Brigade and the general received the wound that was to prove mortal. So close were the Union and Confederate units, however, that Warren Cudworth, chaplain of the First Massachusetts Regiment which had served throughout the war with the Excelsiors, was sure that General Jackson had been wounded by fire from the Massachusetts men. "Stonewall Jackson, with several members of his staff, rode along about nine o'clock, in the bright moonlight, to reconnoitre the locality. The soldiers of the First Regiment saw the group of horsemen approaching, — not knowing that Stonewall Jackson was one of them .... and greeted them with a volley ... and he being severely wounded the whole group turned and fled." 

By the morning of May 3rd the uncertainty was gone. Jackson's troops, now under General J. E. B. Stuart, attacked at daylight and the brunt of the attack was borne by General Berry's Second Division with the Excelsior Brigade in the middle. "As soon as it was clear daylight," reported Wiley, "the rattle of musketry on the left of the line commenced, and in a few minutes our skirmishers commenced, and were soon inside of our breastworks. It was not long before we could see the grey-backs advancing in solid columns. It was then the Colonel gave the word 'fire.' We poured in an awful volley, that swept them down but on they came, and we kept it up firing as fast as we could ram the cartridges down. The engagement had now become general, and the roar of musketry and cannon was so loud that it almost shook the earth." 

50 Cudworth, op. cit., 363.
51 Wiley, op. cit., undated fragment.
General Berry was killed by a sharpshooter while crossing the road to confer with a brigade commander and this led to the only disgraceful battle incident in which the Excelsior Brigade was ever involved. Their commander, General Joseph W. Revere, assuming that he was now the senior officer, inexplicably ordered the withdrawal of the Brigade from the battle line. "The line fell back in good order, the Rebels following pretty fast but the boys would turn and let them have a volley which helped to check them. We fell back to an open field where the First Army Corps took our place and held the Rebels in check . . ." 52 The career of General Revere was ruined. Sickles ordered a court-martial, but the disgraced general was permitted to resign from the service and quietly withdraw from the war.

It may not have been all General Revere's fault. Few participants knew what had actually happened. Wiley claimed that the First Massachusetts Regiment had broken and exposed the Excelsiors' flank and rear. Colonel John Coyne of the First Excelsior stated that it was the Third Maryland Regiment that had broken. Edward Stackpole, with the advantage of hindsight, opined that it was "a regiment composed almost wholly of recruits, on the extreme right of Slocum's line" 53 that had given way. Whatever the true story, the Excelsiors never forgave General Revere. " . . . we were not allowed to remain, as our commander, General Revere, notwithstanding our earnest protest, marched us to the rear. It was the only instance in our history of our having been marched from the field while under fire." 54 Colonel Farnum of the First Excelsiors replaced General Revere and the regiments once again headed for the front but the battle was over for them. The intensity of the fighting is indicated by the experience of Sergeant Thomas Auldridge, Co. K of the Third Excelsiors, who, finding himself surrounded, tore the flag from the staff, stowed it inside his blouse, and carried it safely to the rear. 55

During the afternoon of May 4th and the morning of May 5th the troops cut roads for their respective corps toward United States Mine Ford. A heavy rain mired the roads and the river rose until the pontoon bridges were nearly awash, but the retreating Union

52 ibid.
53 Wiley, op. cit., undated fragment; John Coyne, Oraison (1893); Edward Stackpole, Chancellorsville (Harrisburg, Pa., 1958), 292.
54 Coyne, op. cit.
55 Le Fevre Brown, op. cit., 88.
troops crossed in safety. This was not a beaten army as Gettysburg was to prove, yet the men were sad as they returned to their old camping grounds at Falmouth.

The Excelsior regiments had suffered nearly 200 casualties. The Friend Rifles had no men reported killed or wounded. The Zouave Cadets, however, had four wounded and their Colonel, William Lounsbury, had been badly hurt. Lieutenant Charles Preston, who had suffered at Bristoe Station, was again wounded, as were William De Zouche, John Lawton and James Swan. Swan could not rejoin his unit because of his wound so he entered the Veteran Reserve Corps. Richard Finigan from Susquehanna was captured during the action and John Stokes from the same community was missing and presumed dead.