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The Mobilization of Pennsylvania Militia and the Actions of an Independent  
Harrisburg Cavalry Company during the Confederate Advance of September, 1862

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The prospects of a Confederate occupation of Pennsylvania led to a major mobilization of volunteers for both the defense of the state and the prosecution of the war against the rebellion in the late summer of 1862. Pennsylvania faced a serious threat of invasion with the success of the Confederate Army in the Second Battle of Bull Run and their subsequent move northward in the late summer of 1862. Under the leadership of Governor Andrew Curtin, volunteers statewide mobilized for defense against an enemy army of occupation. General Lee sought to carry the war into the North and for good reason. The Virginia landscape had been ravaged by war, and now for Lee this was a great opportunity to replenish and sustain his army by living off the land, the Northern land, for a much needed change. Lee hoped to capitalize on his recent victory at Manassas by reaping the bountiful resources of Pennsylvania. Pursuing the war on Northern soil and defeating the Union Army on its own turf could conceivably have had even greater implications. The South calculated that this might lead to political recognition of the Confederacy and, perhaps, helpful intervention on the part of England, which was feeling the economic effects of the Union blockade of Southern ports, a strategy which had seriously undermined her textile industry for want of cotton. Further, the Confederates' very presence in Pennsylvania would seriously demoralize the Union cause, or so they thought, and help bring about a negotiated peace.

While the Battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862 effectively dashed the Confederacy's high hopes of changing the face of the war, the general topic of this paper is with Pennsylvania's reaction once her borders were threatened by Lee's army. The focus is specifically on the activities of one of the many short-term militia units organized for the home defense as related in the diary of one of its members. Because this journal spans a period of but two weeks, it provides a unique "snapshot" of common attitudes and perceptions, as well as events, at the time of a statewide emergency. This is the tale of the efforts of a small group of Harrisburg men who left their homes and work more intent on keeping the Confederates out of Pennsylvania than on crushing them.

Governor Andrew Curtin took action almost as soon as Lee's army crossed the Potomac. Curtin's involvement in the Union cause actually began with the war itself, at which time he petitioned the State Legislature for the better organization of the militia and sought an appropriation of \$500,000 to prepare the state for war.<sup>1</sup> By late summer of 1862 Pennsylvania had fielded an estimated 120,000 men, and within the few weeks preceding the Confederate move across the Potomac another estimated 30,000 men had been mobilized for war.<sup>2</sup> On September 4, Curtin issued a proclamation, published in newspaper across the state and calling on the citizens to organize and prepare for defense under the provisions of the Militia Act of 1858, with the state distributing the arms. Curtin recommended that all businesses close at 3 P.M. each day for purposes of drilling and instruction "...so that persons employed therein may...be at liberty to attend to their military duties."<sup>3</sup>

The reports of the Harrisburg Daily Telegraph help to contextualize Curtin's proclamation

and the ensuing events. Although this was a staunchly pro-Union newspaper, through its political dogma does it also provide an accurate gauge of the popular sentiment in Pennsylvania in September of 1862?

While the more desperate of the tainted leaders of the Democratic party are attempting to galvanize its organization, and breathe the breath of life into its stinking carcass, a cotemporary (sic) reminds the loyal men of the Union of an important coincidence in the history of that party, namely: That the point at which its visible decline began, is the point at which the organization of the first political anti slavery party was affected. From that period the fall of one corresponds with the rise of the other.<sup>4</sup>

Although the most pressing issue of the day in Pennsylvania was the mobilization of militia for home defense, the Daily Telegraph reminded its readers that slavery was the cause of the war and now its local repercussions:

It was the principle of the Democratic party, more than its masses, which brought about the rebellion. That principle is slavery - and as slavery originated and supports treason, so must slavery be restricted and shorn of its political force, before this Union can be restored to its former peace and power. In other words, the Democratic leaders must not be permitted to succeed. In Pennsylvania these leaders make the issue that slavery has its Constitutional rights simply because that is the only means they have left of aiding the rebellion. If they can maintain these rights - if they can deceive the people and attract them from the struggle for the Union and the Government, of course that Union and Government must become more imperilled (sic), and the the chances increased that both will be eventually destroyed. Let the people remember this, that slavery by its

uses of the leaders of the Democratic party, is the cause of the rebellion, the cause of the bloodshed and the cause of the mourning which shrouds thousands of northern homes.<sup>5</sup>

While slavery was indeed the ultimate cause of the current situation, it is likely that the willingness of the common person to take up arms was more a reaction to the threat of a Confederate army of occupation than anything else. Reports on the effects and intentions of Lee's army excited a sense of impending crisis in Pennsylvania as the following report from Leesburg, Virginia notes:

Union people were leaving the town as fast as possible. Many of the farmers, who lost all their personal property over a year ago, with their farms desolated by the rebels, but were enabled during the past season to, to again rebuild their fences, refurbish their houses, and plant their crops, find themselves once more obliged to let fall all in the hands of the devastating enemy. The rebels exhibit great boldness. They declare their purpose of marching into Pennsylvania, to give that state a taste of the horrors of war.<sup>6</sup>

The prospects of this alarmed all Pennsylvanians, but Harrisburg felt particularly vulnerable:

Remember free men of Dauphin county, if invasion should come to Pennsylvania, the worst and its first terror would be visible in Dauphin county. On our territory is located the centre of travel and the diverging lines of railroad, to the north and the south, the east and the west, and that if the enemy should come, with fire and sword, it would be here that he would vent his fury and wreak his bloody revenge. It is here that the archives are preserved - our political authority represented, and the majesty and might of the commonwealth centered in the person of its Chief Magistrate.<sup>7</sup>

The commentary on Curtin's proclamation in the September 4 edition of the Daily Telegraph conveys the sense of emergency facing Pennsylvanians with patriotic rhetoric:

"While the danger is not actually at our doors, or the heel of a haughty foe does not really press our soil, there is no telling when both danger and foe may overwhelm and destroy the commonwealth. It must be remembered that a portion of the Commonwealth borders on the territory of a state not too loyal - that this border is unprotected - and that should danger become imminent, the defence of the state must depend entirely on the citizens themselves. This fact, alone, should have long since suggested that such a movement as the Governor now proposes, and staring us in the face as it does now, it must and will arouse our noblest energies. It was the birth place of liberty, and if Pennsylvania is to made the battlefield for its defense, let it be so, but let our people also be prepared to make these battles at once the noblest struggles for a noble triumph."

Like communities across Pennsylvania, Harrisburg responded enthusiastically to Curtin's proclamation. A war rally occurred the next day on the Capitol grounds, where the volunteers were addressed by Governor Curtin, former Governor Porter, and clergymen. The content of these speeches convey the popular mood. Every man had not only a patriotic, but a religious duty to perform in the face of treason:

"...the duty before the men of the nation was not only of a patriotic, but a Christian character. The success of our cause involved a triumph of religion as well as liberty. If we failed to crush the rebellion, if we were not successful in restoring peace to the country - our personal interests, our domestic security and our religious prosperity

would all perish in the same storm that made a wreck of the government."<sup>8</sup>

Although one reporter called for all persons neglecting to report for duty to be fined, the editor of the Daily Telegraph felt that given the willingness with which the people of Pennsylvania to embrace the Union cause, such steps would not be necessary.<sup>9</sup> Reflecting on Curtin's directive several months later, one volunteer wrote, "we, in response to that call, rallied and went immediately to defend the honor of our glorious old Commonwealth."<sup>10</sup>

The paper did, however, carry a story on how the imposition of Curtin's proclamation on residents of Maryland was also justified:

"It seems that some of the good people of loyal Maryland do not relish the idea of entering the federal army for the purpose of assisting to put down the rebellion.

Those who are averse to such service, imagine that, if they escape from the limits of the state of their residence they are freed from the draft. In this they are mistaken, as the following incident shows. Charles Johnson and John Cranson, belonging to the State of Maryland, were arrested on Wednesday last, by D.S. Yanger, at Hanover, York county, and brought to this city, the nearest military depot, where they were delivered to Captain Dodge, who as commanding officer at this post, at once put them to military service. These birds of passage are now at Camp Curtin, where the cool breezes from the Susquehanna will have an influence of arousing their ardor for the country, and reminding them of their folly in attempting to escape the draft."<sup>11</sup>

The Daily Telegraph noted the willingness with which Pennsylvanians from all walks of life volunteered and further called for the general training of all men from 16 to 45 years of age. The quota of volunteers needed from the six wards of the city of Harrisburg amounted to 273 men. \$50

bounty would be paid by the county for each volunteer before the draft in addition to the government bounty and pay in advance of \$41.<sup>12</sup>

Reports of the condition and objectives of the Confederate army appeared in the Harrisburg press on the very day of Curtin's call for volunteers. The description of a small party of the 49th Georgia Volunteers captured September 2 may have been typical of large parts of the Confederate Army:

"But two out of the nineteen rebels taken had shoes upon their feet, seventeen of them having marched for three days with their feet tied up in rags! and so slashed by pieces of rock and stubble that these very rags were clotted together with blood."

One of the prisoners, Adjutant Quidno, gave assurance "...that the rebel army had subsisted itself in its recent marches almost entirely upon green corn, which they call 'roasting ears' in the South, and in consequence of their self-denial, in enduring every hardship and privation, that they were more confident of success." This reporter added that, "the rebels are heartily sick of the war, but say they are determined to achieve their 'independence!'"<sup>13</sup>

A similar account was given in another report:

"The rebels are poorly clothed, many of them being bare-footed, and seemed quite destitute of provisions. They did not hesitate to say that they were tired of the war, but are determined to fight until their independence is acknowledged. They are in high spirits over the recent battles. They talk of marching into Maryland as a thing determined upon."<sup>14</sup>

Although reports of a Confederate move across the Potomac into Maryland were initially

dismissed as improbable rumours, the event was soon verified by their presence in Frederick. They reportedly seized and killed the cattle of the farmers in the vicinity.<sup>15</sup> Their visit to Frederick also did not go unnoticed:

"...the rebels were making large purchases, but...they paid for all their goods in rebel scrip, and not United States Treasury notes and would not receive any other money in change except United States Treasury notes, thus virtually robbing the citizens of their property under the pretence of paying for their goods in rebel money, which is everywhere in Maryland regarded as worth less."<sup>16</sup>

According to another report:

"It is said that the entire stock of boots and shoes in Frederick were bought out by the rebels, who left behind them some good money and some shockingly bad money. The storekeepers, of course, did not dare to refuse what was offered them."<sup>17</sup>

On the day of his occupation, Confederate Colonel Bradley T. Johnson offered the people of Maryland the following proclamation:

"After sixteen months of oppression more galling than the Austrian tyranny, the victorious army of the South brings victory to your doors. Its standard now waves from the Potomac to Mason and Dixon's line. The men of Maryland, who during the last long months have been crushed under the heel of this terrible despotism, now have the opportunity for working out their own redemption, for which they have so long waited, and suffered and hoped.

The government of the Confederate States is pledged... never to cease this war

until Maryland has the opportunity to decide for herself her own fate, untrammelled and free from Federal bayonets.

The people of the South, with unanimity unparalleled have given their hearts to our native state, and hundreds of thousands of her sons have sworn with arms in their hands that you shall be free.

You must now do your part. We have the arms here for you. I am authorized immediately to muster in for the war companies and regiments. The companies of one hundred men each. The regiments of ten companies. Come all who wish to strike for their liberties and homes. Let each man provide himself with a stout pair of shoes, a good blanket and a tin cup - Jackson's men have no baggage.

Remember the cells of Fort McHenry! Remember the dungeons of Fort LaFayette and Warren; the insults to your wives and daughters, the arrests, the midnight searches of your houses!

Remember these, your wrongs, and rise at once in arms and strike for liberty and right."<sup>18</sup>

The people of Frederick, and Maryland in general, did not receive the Confederate Army as their saviors from Northern oppression. Lee's Special Orders No. 191 of the next day reflects Frederick's response to Johnson's proclamation:

"I. The citizens of Fredericktown being unwilling, while overrun by members of this army, to open their stores, in order to give them confidence, and to secure to officers and men purchasing supplies for benefit of this command, all officers and man of this army are strictly prohibited from visiting Fredericktown

except on business, of which case they will bear evidence of this in writing from division commanders. The provost-marshal in Fredericktown will see that this guard rigidly enforces this order...." (Luvaas,p.8)

While this was going on in Maryland, the Daily Telegraph dismissed any possibility of the Confederate army moving into Pennsylvania, although Harrisburg was a hub of military activity with forces parading, training and mobilizing for just such an occurrence:

"Rumor was busy yesterday. Her thousand tongues seemed all to be wagging at the same time, each telling a different story, and all esaying to excel in extravagance. The rebels have neither attempted, nor do they want to get into Pennsylvania. All the rumors of a march on the capitol of the state, are foolish and mischievous, and whenever any of our readers hear any man retailing rumors such as were flying through the streets yesterday, let them regard the retailer as knave or fool."<sup>19</sup>

This was the opinion of the Daily Telegraph, although the same edition of the paper is full of notices for the formation of volunteer units organized on city, township, or state levels. One of these announces a meeting for the following morning, Tuesday, September 9, to form the First City Cavalry, later referred to as The Dauphin County Cavalry and Capt. Eby Byers Company in Rawn's Diary, which relates this Harrisburg militia unit's activities in response to the encroaching Confederate presence. There is also a recruiting notice for Anderson's Cavalry, also known as the 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry, the larger unit with which Byers Company would take action in Maryland.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to notices for the formation of troops, the Daily Telegraph was filled with advertisements addressing the needs of the soldiers. These include ads for writing implements,

second hand clothing, boots, shoes, horses, rifles, and more recruits. A Harrisburg lawyer also offered his services in helping soldiers receive their just pay from the government.<sup>21</sup> Uncle Tom's Cabin was playing at Sanford's Opera House on Third Street below Market.<sup>22</sup> These various advertisements help to convey the war-oriented atmosphere in Harrisburg in early September of 1862.

Perhaps the Daily Telegraph intentionally downplayed the reports of the Confederate's activity out of concern that the sensationalism of the situation might create a panic. Yet at the same time, it expressed its confidence in the consequences and character of war in Pennsylvania:

"We honestly believe that this war would be shortened materially if its battles were transferred to free soil, because here the loyal men who profess devotion to and do support the government, have no property which they value higher than the Union. But one policy would suffice for a campaign in the north. Instead of protecting the property of rebels or their sympathizers, our armies and our people could engage and annihilate the rebels themselves!"<sup>23</sup>

"If the rebels should invade Pennsylvania we have no fear of the result. Annihilation will be the watchword, and we guarantee its being carried out. The rebels may enter our rich valley, but their dead bodies will be left to enrich its soil."<sup>24</sup>

By September 10, Curtin had begun to receive what he felt to be reliable reports of the size of the Confederate force. A loyal infiltrator into the Confederate camps estimated this to be at least 120,000 men not including the portion of the army traveling with Lee. Southern officers boasted that their forces in Maryland would exceed 200,000 men.<sup>25</sup> Curtin promptly forwarded this intelligence to McClellan, who replied that his sources corroborated this information. He directed

Curtin to call out the militia, particularly cavalry, to impede the Confederate advance by attacking its flank and destroying any property that may come into their possession. McClellan added that it was "...as much my interest as your to preserve the soil of Pennsylvania from invasion, or failing in that, to destroy any army that may have the temerity to attempt it."<sup>26</sup>

Curtin complied with McClellan's wishes and acting as Commander-in Chief of Pennsylvania, he on September 10 issued General Order No. 35:

"In view of the danger of invasion now threatening our State, by the enemies of the government, it is deemed necessary to call upon all the able bodied men of Pennsylvania to organize immediately for the defence of the State, and be ready for marching orders upon one hour's notice, to proceed to such points of rendezvous as the Governor may direct....Organizations called into the field under this order will be held for service for such time only as the pressing exigency for state defence may continue."<sup>27</sup>

Although the Harrisburg press expressed its confidence in the will of Pennsylvanians to defend her borders, Curtin, while perhaps equally confident, also saw it prudent to request additional troops from President Lincoln. He asked that at least 80,000 disciplined troops as well as all available men from New York and States east be concentrated at Harrisburg, adding that this was "...our only hope to save the North..." and that the time had come "...for decided action by the National Government...."<sup>28</sup> Lincoln replied that he didn't have 80,000 troops to spare, but he did sanction Curtin's call for the militia and received them into the service and pay of the United States.<sup>29</sup>

On September 12, the Daily Telegraph reported that the Governor's late order was for

50,000 men and admitted that a crisis was at hand:

"There is no disguising the fact the enemy has invaded our state; commenced the destruction of the railroad from Hagerstown to Chambersburg, and we have no doubt, if not checked will soon lay our homes desolate; but we have an abiding confidence in the people of Pennsylvania, they are now rising in their might, from all parts of the country we hear the noble response.

We advise every man, woman and child to keep calm, assist their husbands and brothers to prepare for the meeting of the enemy. We have nothing to fear if our people do their duty, and we have no doubt of the result." <sup>30</sup>

On the same day, Harrisburg Mayor William H. Kepner issued the following proclamation to the citizens and others now within the city of Harrisburg:

"...I hereby forbid every able bodied man from leaving the bounds of this city, upon the pain of being arrested and held in charge by the military authorities under the instructions given to them for that purpose by the Governor.

All railroad companies and their agents, located at this city are also hereby notified and positively forbidden to carry off...any and all able bodied men from this city." <sup>31</sup>

Although both Curtin's and Kepner's actions suggested the emergence of a military dictatorship in Pennsylvania, there appears to be no evidence to indicate any organized opposition to this among the civilian populace. It was under these circumstances that the militia unit known as Byer's Cavalry was formed.

Byer's Cavalry was one of dozens of independent companies responding to Curtin's call for militia units. This command was made up of 66 men including officers (1 captain, 2 lieutenants, 5

sergeants, 8 corporals) and 47 privates. A quartermaster, a surgeon, and a bugler are also listed on the company roster.<sup>32</sup>

## Notes

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1. Daily Telegraph, Friday, September 12, 1862.
  2. Daily Telegraph, Thursday, September 4, 1862.
  3. Daily Telegraph, Thursday, September 4, 1862.
  4. Daily Telegraph, Friday, September 5, 1862.
  5. Daily Telegraph, Saturday, September 6, 1862.
  6. Daily Telegraph, Friday, September 5, 1862.
  7. Daily Telegraph, Friday, September 12, 1862.
  8. Daily Telegraph, Saturday, September 6, 1862.
  9. Daily Telegraph, Friday, September 5, 1862.
  10. The War Of The Rebellion: A Compilation Of The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I - Volume XX, Part II - Correspondence, Etc. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887, p. 353.
  11. Daily Telegraph, Friday, September 5, 1862.
  12. Daily Telegraph, Thursday, September 4, 1862.
  13. Ibid.
  14. Daily Telegraph, Friday, September 5, 1862.
  15. Daily Telegraph, Monday, September 8, 1862.
  16. Ibid.
  17. Daily Telegraph, Tuesday, September 9, 1862.
  18. Daily Telegraph, Thursday, September 11, 1862.
  19. Daily Telegraph, Monday, September 8, 1862.

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20. Ibid.
  21. Patriot Union, Monday, September 15, 1862.
  22. Daily Telegraph, Tuesday, September 9, 1862.
  23. Ibid.
  24. Daily Telegraph, Thursday, September 11, 1862.
  25. The War Of The Rebellion, Volume XIX - Series I - Part II, p. 248.
  26. The War Of The Rebellion, Volume XIX - Series I - Part II, pp. 248-49.
  27. Daily Telegraph, Thursday, September 11, 1862.
  28. The War Of The Rebellion, Volume XIX - Series I - Part II, p. 268.
  29. The War Of The Rebellion, Vol. XIX - Series I - Part II, p. 267.
  30. Daily Telegraph, Friday, September 12, 1862.
  31. Ibid.
  32. Samuel P. Bates, History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861 - 65, Vol. V (Harrisburg: B. Singerly, State Printer, 1871),p. 1218.