

Marc and Beth Storch Collection

Manitowoc County Historical Society

*The metamorphosis of James Anderson from young private to mature lawyer, judge, and community leader began during the Civil War, when Anderson's war experiences shaped his decisions about the future, and focused his goal to survive and to succeed.*

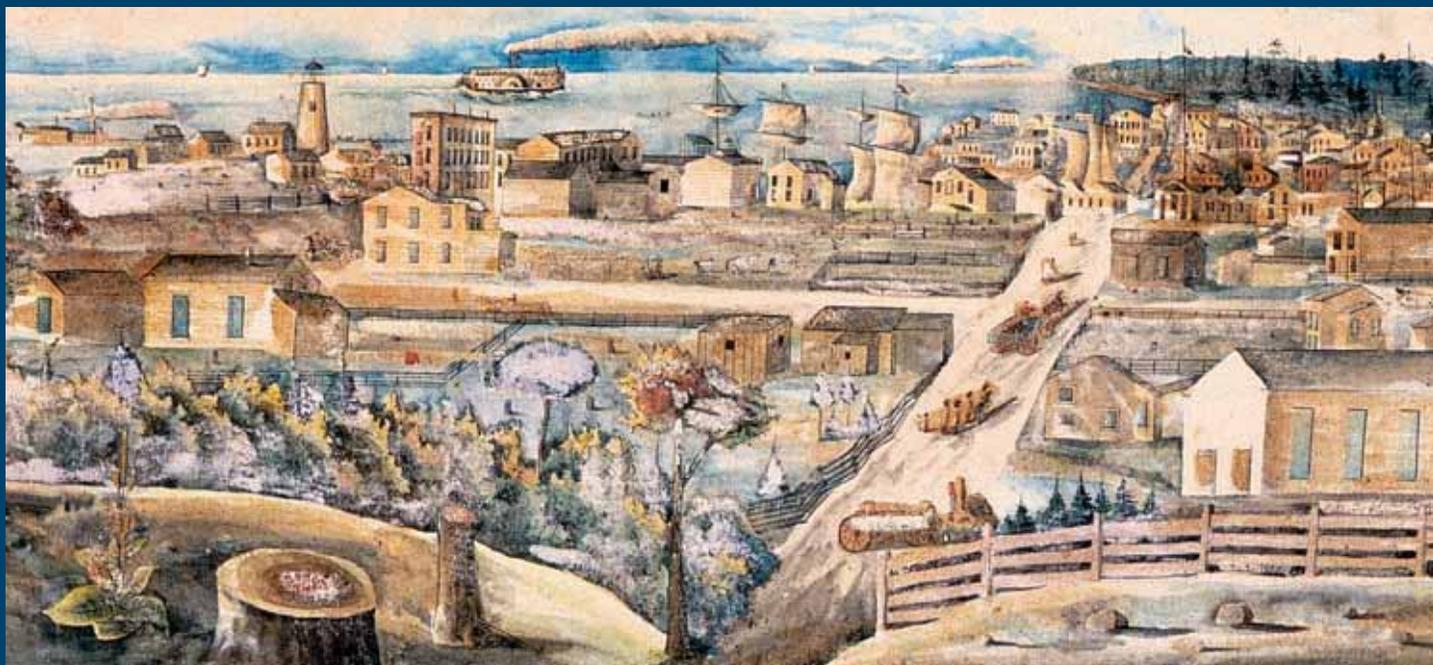
# James Anderson

## *Infantryman in Blue*

*By Norman K. Risjord*

**T**he young state of Wisconsin, which had entered the Union in 1848, was about as distant from the South and remote from slavery as any state in the nation. Yet in the first year of the Civil War, 1861, fourteen thousand men volunteered for military service. By the end of the war Wisconsin contributed more troops per capita to the Union army than any other state except Massachusetts. Why did young Wisconsin farm boys, most of whom had never met a black person and had only the vaguest notion of slavery, volunteer on such a scale and fight so valiantly? For that matter, why did ordinary men of meager education and little worldly experience go so eagerly to war in both North and South? Why did they willingly participate in infantry attacks that were patently suicidal? The answers to these questions can be found in the diaries and letters of soldiers themselves.

***This essay is based on a chapter in Professor Risjord's book, Representative Americans: The Civil War Generation.***



Rahr-West Museum

*"Manitowoc from the North Side" by G. Kirshtez captures the city's growth in the years before the war.*

One of the most remarkable of the collections of Civil War letters is that of James Anderson from Manitowoc. The collection, located at the Green Bay Area Research Center of the Wisconsin Historical Society, is remarkable because it consists of a diary, with almost daily entries over his entire period of enlistment, 1861 to 1864, as well as frequent letters to his family. Anderson was not given to boasting, and some of the horrors of combat that he experienced have to be inferred by reading between the lines of his letters. He survived the war, as so many of his comrades and other letter-writers did not. James Anderson's story provides a Wisconsin context for the broad questions of why men went to war in 1861 and fought so bravely for the next four years.

James Anderson was a tall, fair-haired Scottish boy who had been born in Glasgow on Christmas Day, 1841. The Anderson family fled this crime-infested city in 1852, journeyed to America, and followed a common immigrant route by steamboat into the upper Great Lakes. They disembarked in Manitowoc, a mill town on the Manitowoc River. Manitowoc was one of the many towns and cities that erupted into a volcano of oratory and recruiting rallies when the South fired on Fort Sumter in April 1861. Anderson noted in his diary that "nearly all labor was suspended [as] men gathered on street corners to discuss the situation." The consciousness of duty was prevalent in mid-nineteenth century

America, and many Union soldiers explained their reasons for enlisting as simply a "sense of duty" to defend the country. Duty was closely linked to honor, and its opposite, shame, both of which were key elements in the concept of masculinity in Victorian America. For young men in their upper teens, enlistment became a passage into masculine adulthood.

Other motives for enlisting included the opportunity for adventure, and perhaps even glory, instead of the drudgery and sameness of life on a backwoods farm. The government offered privates in the army thirteen dollars a month, with five dollars extra if they had families. Anderson's family was poor, his father employed only part-time, and James had little prospect of higher education. If he could save his army pay to "grub stake" an education, he could rise to wealth and respectability.

Within three weeks after Fort Sumter fell, ninety-six men in Manitowoc County had volunteered for the army. The volunteers simply organized themselves as the Manitowoc County Guards, and in the tradition of American militia, the company elected its own officers, including Temple Clark, a 34-year-old attorney, as Captain. For the next six weeks, the company, without weapons or uniforms, marched and drilled in a city park, until they were told to report to Camp Randall, in the capital city, where they were reorganized into Company A of the Fifth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

On July 24 the Fifth Wisconsin packed its gear, boarded railroad cars on tracks near the camp, and departed for Chicago amidst a mob of well-wishers. From Chicago, they headed east on the nascent railway lines of the mid-nineteenth century. Upon arriving in Baltimore, they were given a brief leave in which to sightsee, and Anderson had his first contact with blacks and slavery. He had been opposed to slavery in principle; encountering it in practice hardened his views. "I am more of an anti-slave man than ever," he informed his family. He reported that a black man "here is thought less of than a Horse or Ox and any white man [can] knock him down and maltreat him without fear of the consequence." He went out of his way to converse with black people on the street, and he discovered that they "could talk as intelligently about any subject as a majority of white man." The experience gave him a new, moral commitment to the Union cause.

In Washington, the Fifth Wisconsin then joined the Union army, grown to nearly one hundred thousand strong, and camped near Fairfax Court House in northern Virginia. In late September the Manitowoc boys got their first taste of combat. The Confederates had pulled an artillery battery within range of the Union camp, and the Wisconsin troops were ordered to push them back. The Confederate artillery opened up on them, and federal cannons answered back. "Their shells came humming over our heads in fine style bursting a short distance from [us] . . . throwing the dirt around us in a lively manner," Anderson excitedly wrote home. The Southerners retired, and no one was hurt. War was still fun.

The sport ended when the army went into winter quarters that autumn. Officers put the men to work cutting trees in the woods, where concealed Southern snipers fired upon them. In late October Anderson wrote home: "We have seen the hardest times the last week that we have seen so far. We would have to [be] out and chop hard all day and then

have to be down in the line of battle all night under heavy rain. Besides all this our rations did not reach us regular so we would be hungry, wet, and tired all at the same time."



**Fifth Wisconsin Volunteers,**

COL. AMASA COBB, Commanding.

*Camp Griffin Fairfax Co. Va. 1861*  
*Dec 8<sup>th</sup>*

*Dear Parents & Sisters*

*I got your letter this morning as I was awakened out of sleep by Fred Borchardt for Roll call, I am very glad to get so many letters from home and hope that you will keep on writing to me, It does us more good to get letters from home than you*

Green Bay Mss 133

*The Fifth Wisconsin Volunteers included the Manitowoc County Guards, under the command of Asa Cobb, who resigned after the battle of Chancellorsville.*



National Archives Photo, 111-B-514

*These Confederate dead behind the stone wall of Marye's Heights in Fredericksburg, Virginia, as photographed by Captain Andrew J. Russell, were killed during the battle of Chancellorsville, May 1863. It was there that Anderson's friend La Count was wounded and lost to him.*

*The sunken road at the front of the foot of the hill at Marye's House in Fredericksburg was much as soldiers would have viewed it after the bloody battle of Chancellorsville, where their victory would result in the Wisconsin Fifth's severe casualties.*



Wis Mss 9S

General George McClellan, commander of the Army of the Potomac, persuaded Lincoln in the spring of 1862 to let him mount a massive flank attack. McClellan would employ the Union navy to ferry his army down the Chesapeake Bay, and land on the peninsula formed by the James and York Rivers. That movement would place him at the rear of the unprotected Confederate capital, Richmond.

On April 9 the regiment was ordered into its first serious engagement—an assault on Confederate earthworks that were part of the Yorktown defense system. The infantry lay low while each side pounded the other with cannon fire. Ordered to attack, the regiment assaulted what Company A’s surgeon described as “great ridges . . . bristling with bayonets and covered with men.” Anderson later had little memory of the fight other than that he had become confused and nearly lost “in the midst of a terrible scene.”

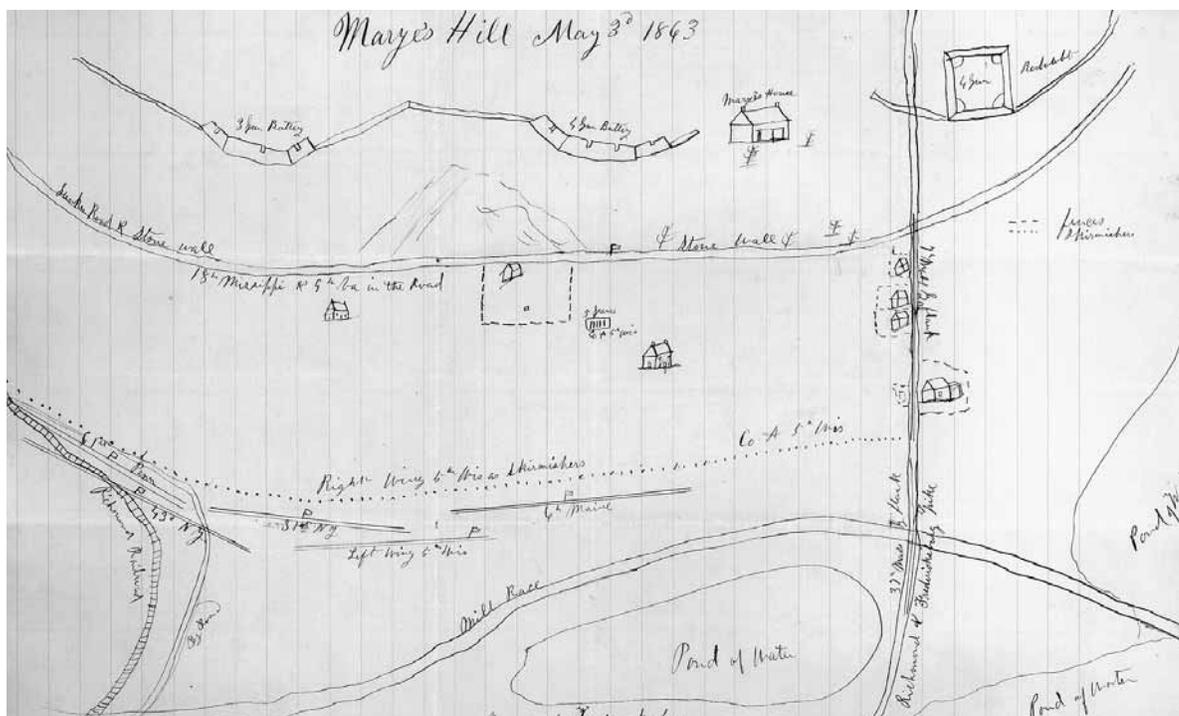
The first experience of fierce combat is a surprise and a shock to soldiers of every army in every time because there is no way of preparing for the emotional impact. After recovering from the shock, the next reaction of most northern soldiers, as recorded in their letters home, was that they never wanted to experience it again. Although most did return to battle out of a sense of honor and duty, they did it with a veteran’s solemnity. James Anderson did not record his reaction to his first combat experience even though the siege had stalled McClellan’s offensive for a month.

When McClellan finally resumed the offensive, the Fifth

Wisconsin was in the vanguard of the pursuit. At Williamsburg it encountered the Confederate rear guard commanded by James Longstreet. The Wisconsin boys attacked and then withstood a ferocious Confederate counterattack. When the Confederate withdrawal turned into a footrace, Union General Winfield Scott Hancock dubbed the regiment the “Bloody Fifth.”

In the course of the battle, Anderson and a friend became separated from the company and were taken prisoner by a troop of Georgia cavalry. The horsemen disarmed them and started them on the road to Richmond. Passing a thicket too dense for horses, Anderson and his friend darted into the underbrush and got free. Finding his way back to his unit at the end of the battle, Anderson was berated by his company commander for losing his rifle. Still exuberant over battle, despite this experience, and full of pride, Anderson wrote home: “Our boys fought like devils and have earned a name for themselves and their state. I do not think there was another regiment on the field fought so desperate as ours [and] even our best generals stood and looked on amazed at our bravery.”

The victory was expensive, for Company A suffered its first casualties. Three of Anderson’s friends were killed and two more wounded. Among the wounded was Captain Horace Walker, who had replaced Temple Clark as company commander. Nevertheless, morale improved as the rains ceased and the weather grew warm. On May 9 the regiment broke camp and started up



Green Bay Mss 133

*Anderson’s own sketch of Marye’s Hill Battleground suggests how thoroughly soldiers came to know the natural and built environments, and how simple farms and homes became the battlegrounds of history.*



*"We Conquer or Die," the regiment's motto, was not simply a tag phrase. The Fifth Wisconsin included veterans of some of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War.*

Green Bay Mss 133

the road to Richmond. "We are now within twenty-five miles of that city," wrote Anderson, "and I expect the next letter I send you will be mailed from that point."

Anderson's assumption that Union forces would soon capture Richmond might have been correct had he been serving under a more adventurous and imaginative commander than George McClellan. Ever cautious, McClellan moved forward slowly, and units like the Fifth Wisconsin, catching his mood, dug rifle pits for defense, rather than preparing for a quick-strike offense. McClellan seemed both numb and confused. Except for driving back a counterattack on May 31, McClellan's army sat still for another three weeks, during which Confederate General Robert E. Lee was reinforced by Stonewall Jackson's army from the Shenandoah Valley.

The campaign known as the Seven Days' Battle opened on June 26 when Lee attacked the right side of the Union line at Mechanicsville, several miles to the north of where the Fifth Wisconsin was camped. The attack was beaten back with severe losses, and although "bands were playing" in the Union camp, Anderson wrote that "Our reg[imen]t was silent as the grave. We had been deceived so

much that we all said, 'Wait and See.'" It had taken awhile, but the eager recruit was now a somber veteran.

The Wisconsin men were right to wait before celebrating. The following day Lee threw the main part of his army at the

Union forces camped at Gaines Mill. The fighting was intense, and the Fifth Wisconsin was right in the middle of it. The battle went on throughout the day and into the night, with both sides suffering the highest casualties yet experienced in the war. "The fight was continued long after dark and was one of the most splendid sights I ever witnessed," wrote Anderson, anxious that his family should be proud of his courage. But, he continued, "the illusion was dispelled by a musket ball which struck me in the leg just above the knee making a painful but not dangerous wound."

McClellan grew ever more cautious and abandoned the capture of Richmond. On the morning of June 28 the Fifth Wisconsin was roused at 4:00 AM and started to march at dawn. The men were bewildered by the southerly direction because they had been expecting to push on toward Richmond. Toward sunset the Confederates fell upon the retreating column, but they were again beaten back after a hot fight. Anderson, still nursing his wound, probably did not participate



Manitowoc County Historical Society

*The Manitowoc County Wisconsin Volunteers flag.*



Harper's Weekly, April 30, 1864

*Newspaper and magazine coverage of the Civil War depended both on reporters in the field, and on soldiers who wrote and sketched for their diaries and in letters home. There was no censorship of letters home and information that in later wars would never be allowed back home flowed freely.*

in the fight. Since he made no mention of being carried by wagon, he probably hobbled along with his company on foot.

Passing through Savage Station on the morning of June 29, the regiment saw other soldiers destroying an immense quantity of Union supplies and munitions to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. The only thing left standing were the hospital tents, where the regiment deposited its sick and wounded, leaving them to be taken prisoner by the Confederates. Three of Anderson's friends in Company A were left behind. He, apparently, was healthy enough to keep up with the retreating regiment.

The Fifth Wisconsin had moved about two miles south of the railroad, when, about sunset, the soldiers heard heavy gunfire behind them. The Confederates had attacked again, and the Battle of Savage Station was under way. The regiment took up a position along the railroad bed and withstood three waves of Confederate attackers. When the assault subsided, the regiment withdrew into the night. At 3:00 AM, wrote Anderson, "we threw ourselves down by the side of the road and slept till dawn when we was again aroused and marched to join the rest of the Brigade from which we had been cut off."

Later that day, June 30, the Union army fought another rear-guard action at the crossroads of Glendale. The Fifth Wisconsin was somewhere on the Union flank stationed in a thick woods. The day was hot, and men were dropping from exhaustion, among them Anderson. "My wounded leg had been troubling me and fatigue over-powered me and I fell

insensible in the road," he later wrote. Comrades poured water over his head to revive him, and the regiment, harassed by Confederates, continued its flight. Anderson was unable to keep up and was lucky to have escaped at all. "Some of the stragglers," he later recounted, "caught some mules that had been stampeded by the panic and hitched them to an empty wagon and about 20 of us proceeded in that way." "Had it not been for this," he added, "I should certainly have fallen into the hands of the enemy."

On July 1 the main part of McClellan's army fortified itself atop Malvern Hill and withstood waves of Confederate attacks in the final battle of the Seven Days. The Fifth Wisconsin rejoined the army while the battle was in progress and watched the slaughter in horror from a nearby hill.

The Fifth Wisconsin re-embarked on the troop transports, and it was back in Alexandria on September 2. The Wisconsin regiment was ordered to cross the Long Bridge into Georgetown and in Washington to board a train headed north. The men were utterly mystified by this sudden, and apparently purposeless, burst of activity. What they did not know was that Lee, following his victory at Bull Run, had decided to invade the North. On September 4 his army splashed across the Potomac some forty miles up-river from Washington and marched to Frederick, Maryland. McClellan had gathered and positioned the huge Union army between Lee and the capital, and the Fifth Wisconsin was among them.

As the Wisconsin regiment marched northwest through a

Camp near Fairfax, Va.  
June 11<sup>th</sup> 1863

Dear Parents & Sisters

I received a letter from Jennie last night and I thought I would drop you a few lines to let you know of my whereabouts and what we have been doing. We have had a terrible hard time for the last week we have been marching every day since the 12<sup>th</sup> and the first three days we marched day and night. We are now lying about a mile and a half from Fairfax Court House watching and waiting for the enemy who is said to be in force in the direction of Manassas. I must cut this short I am well. 6 of our men have been taken prisoners. Bill Creeper is one in fact

Your boy & Bro  
L. Anderson

Green Bay Mss 133

*Anderson's letters commented on the daily marches, the lengthy waiting periods between troop movements, and the status of prisoners. The high level of basic literacy among Civil War soldiers make their letters and reflections on daily life one of the best resources in American history to understand and assess a soldier's motivation to fight and to survive.*

Maryland countryside glorious in late-summer bloom, Dr. Alfred Castleman, the regiment's chief surgeon and inveterate diarist, noticed a change in the mood and demeanor of the men. The shame of the Peninsula Campaign had receded,

Potomac and escaped. The Union soldiers, who had hoped that this might be the final battle, realized that the war would go on. McClellan, fumed Dr. Castleman, "can be nothing short of an imbecile, a coward, or a traitor."

and the men were regaining some of their old confidence and sense of adventure. They marched, Castleman observed, with "the cool determination of veterans," and he added, "the camp at night, even after our long marches, resounds with mirth and music."

The Fifth Wisconsin was camped near Brownsville, about half way between Harpers Ferry and Sharpsburg, where Lee, having abandoned his plans to invade Pennsylvania, was preparing for battle. Anderson was put on picket duty for two days and two nights. Early on the morning of September 17, after his regiment had already departed, he was sent up the Hagerstown Pike to Sharpsburg and another mile beyond, where the armies faced one another on either side of Antietam Creek. When Anderson joined his company, it was on the front line and under heavy artillery fire. General Winfield Scott Hancock, commanding that part of the line, ordered the regiment to attack. The Fifth Wisconsin and Sixth Maine moved into a cornfield that lay between the armies, but at that moment McClellan countermanded the order and repositioned the two regiments between two of the Union artillery batteries. Although pinned down by Confederate cannon fire, the Wisconsin troops could observe from where they crouched the terrible bloodletting as wave after wave of blue- and gray-clad men crossed and recrossed the cornfield. At the end of that morning, when the fighting shifted to another part of the battlefield, "the wounded and the dead were strewn thick as autumn leaves after a storm." McClellan's order had almost certainly saved Anderson's life and allowed him to survive the war.

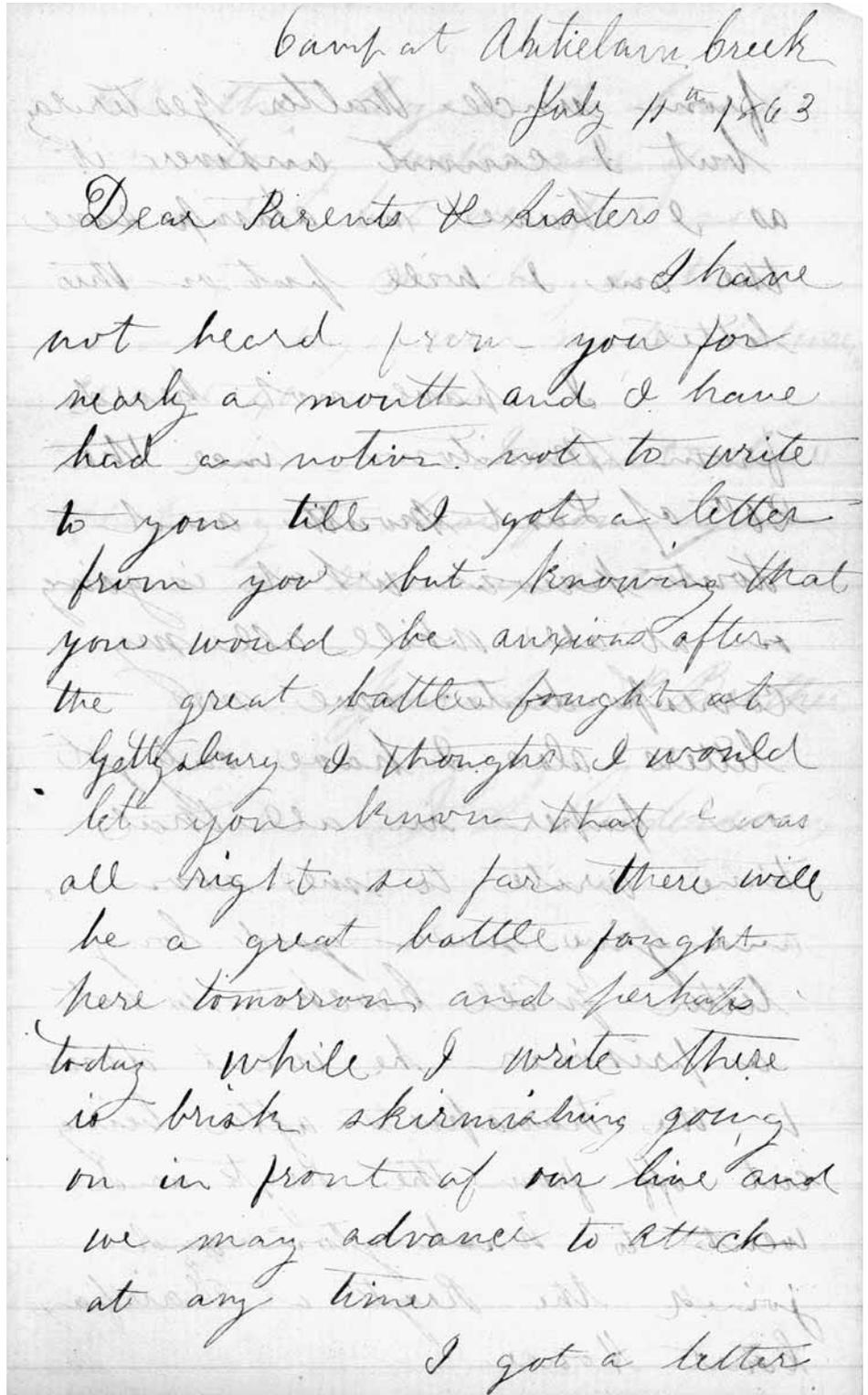
After a day of eerie silence in which Lee expected another attack and McClellan declined to move, the Confederate army slipped back across the

President Lincoln replaced McClellan with Ambrose E. Burnside in early November. If the new commander was a man with energy or even a plan, it was not evident. For a month the Fifth Wisconsin marched and camped, then, on the morning of December 11, they were awakened early and put on the road to Fredericksburg, scheduled to cross the Rappahannock River two miles below the city and form the main attack. Engineers worked all that day erecting the three pontoon bridges that General William B. Franklin's Grand Division was to use in crossing.

Early on the morning of the twelfth the Wisconsin regiment moved down to the bridges, each soldier carrying his own ammunition and three days of rations. Fog, mixed with smoke from the previous day's cannonading, shrouded their movements. With the Fifth Wisconsin and Fifth Vermont in the front, the division advanced to the Richmond Stage Road. At that point the sun broke through the fog, and, with bayonets glistening, forty thousand men charged forward to the railroad track that lay at the base of the hill where Stonewall Jackson had placed his Confederate troops. At that point Confederate skirmishers came out of a ravine on the regiment's flank, and the Fifth Wisconsin came under heavy cannon fire. "We again fell back across the [stage] road," Anderson wrote, "and lay behind a bank which was alongside. We lay there all day and night and the next morning was relieved by another reg[imen]t and put into the second line of battle."

Although Company A left the Fredericksburg battlefield without suffering any casualties, the Union army had taken a terrible beating. It had suffered thirteen thousand dead and wounded and gained nothing. The loss cut deep into morale. "There is no use dodging the fact," Anderson admitted, "the late Fredericksburg disaster disheartened our army greatly and there is not a man who does not dread the idea of going across the Rappahannock to attack the enemy in

their fortifications." The regiment's sensitive surgeon, Dr. Castleman, had seen enough useless bloodshed and quit the



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*Anderson's letter to his parents and sisters of July 11, 1863, written just days after Gettysburg, began with his chastisement of his family for not writing, and his threat of not writing to them as a punishment. At a time when his family would have naturally been concerned about his safety, it was bewildering that he would have penned such a message.*

my tent or Joe Cox's we would  
 have some good singing. Our  
 Glee Club consists of Joe Cox,  
 Will Turpin, Lieut Goodwin, Lewis  
 Lacount, two boys from Co "F"  
 and your humble servant  
 and occasionally some of the  
 other boys. We take quite  
 an interest in music and  
 I have improved so that I  
 can sing pretty fairly at sight.  
 I wish the girls would learn  
 to read music so that they  
 could sing at sight. It is  
 much better than singing by  
 ear. I must write more about  
 our glee club for I assure you  
 it is quite an institution in the  
 company. Cox and Turpin sing the  
 "treble" one of Co "F" the "Tenor," I  
 generally take the "alto," while Lieut  
 Goodwin, Lacount and Botchford of  
 Co "F" sing the "Bass". You see

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*Anderson's letter of April 12, 1864, written during some of the most violent days of the war,  
 spoke of music and singing societies.*

army. While ordinary soldiers had to serve out their three-year enlistments, officers were allowed to resign at any time. The doctor was a caring man, and Anderson was sorry to see him leave. Anderson was even more distressed by the departure of the regiment's commander, Colonel Amasa Cobb. Anderson regarded the colonel as "as fine a man as ever lived . . . brave as a Lion and he never asks a man to go where he would not

himself." Disgusted with the poor judgment of the army's commanding officers, Colonel Cobb had won election to the House of Representatives in November and resigned from the army after the Battle of Fredericksburg.

Combat had matured Anderson and improved his self-confidence. With little else to do in winter quarters, he pondered his future. He was determined "to succeed in life," he told his father, and he thought he had "both the talents and the energy to do so." He was saving his money so he could attend college, and then he thought he might study law. But first he must survive the war. And, as it turned out, the fortunes of battle broke in his favor.

While Anderson tried to look to the future, the men around him that winter wallowed in depression. "We have none of our original field officers left," complained one of Anderson's friends in January 1863, and "there are so many of the old hands leaving and new recruits coming in that it scarcely seems like the same regiment." The letters of soldiers, both Northern and Southern, indicate that the ability to stand up to the fear and stress of combat stemmed from the soldiers' dependence upon one another and pride in their unit. The same letters indicated that attrition and the replacement of familiar faces with new ones were gradually destroying unit cohesion, and with that the unit's fighting ability. Although the men of the Fifth Wisconsin were in a funk throughout the winter, spirits and self-confidence returned with the spring. When they were called upon to fight again, they fought hard and well. The regiment never again found itself in the front line of a major battle, but that was almost certainly not the result of conscious decisions by Union divi-

sion and corps commanders. It was the random fortune of a small cog in a mighty military machine.

When on April 30, 1863, the new Union commander, "Fighting Joe" Hooker, crossed the Rappahannock, Lee moved west to do battle at Chancellorsville. But with an army of only sixty thousand, Lee could leave only ten thousand in the defensive works at Fredericksburg. Union General John Sedgwick,

with the Fifth Wisconsin as part of his command, entered Fredericksburg and ordered an attack against St. Mary's Heights and the infamous stone wall beneath the hill, the "Slaughter Pen" of the previous December. Company A and four other companies of the Fifth Wisconsin were picked for the front line of the attack. On May 1, the men ran across the field through a storm of cannon fire, scaled the wall, and dropped onto the thin line of Confederates. "Our Boys dashed forward furiously," Anderson later wrote; "Bayoneted many of the Rebels where they stood and taking nearly all the rest prisoners." They then continued up the steep hill and captured the artillery batteries.

It was the regiment's first victory in a very long time, but it was a costly one for Company A. It suffered eight killed and fifteen wounded. Anderson told his family that Lewis La Count, one of his best friends, "was shot down by my side and cried out for me to help him back but I told him I could not then but would come back after we had carried the Heights." Although he did return, he could not find La Count, so instead he helped other wounded soldiers down the slope to a field hospital.

On May 5 the Fifth Wisconsin returned to its camp at White Oak Church. It remained there until June 11, when the men were roused from their tents and pushed into a series of forced marches northwards. The weather was oppressively hot, and the soldiers trudged silently down the dusty roads, not sure where they were going or why. Anderson thought June 14 "the most severe march I ever was on." Nine men in the brigade "dropped dead from exhaustion."

North along the Potomac the regiment tramped, and by July 1 they were in Manchester, Maryland, some thirty miles from Gettysburg, where the greatest battle of the war had already begun. They marched all night long and all the next day. By one in the afternoon they could hear the sounds of battle. They arrived on the field at five and were placed in reserve, ready to go into action should the Confederates break through the Union flank. The regiment remained in reserve through the following day, while the center of the Union line withstood Pickett's Charge. Although the Union army suffered more than twenty-three thousand casualties in the three-day battle, the Fifth Wisconsin came through unscathed.

By October 5, the Fifth Wisconsin was back in Virginia camped near Warrenton in the northern Piedmont. On November 7, the brigade of which they were a part was



U. S. Army Military History Institute

*Temple Clark, the 34-year-old local Manitowoc leader, received the support of the men and was elected Captain of the Manitowoc County Guards, in the traditional custom of the militia. The Union Army transferred Clark to the western theater within the first year of the war.*



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*Dr. Alfred Castleman, a physician for the regiment, kept a diary throughout his years of service, where he recorded his strong opinions about the leadership of McClellan and other generals, his concern about the wounded men, and his decision to leave the Army, as officers were allowed to do.*

ordered to assault the railroad that connected Alexandria with the Shenandoah Valley. The brigade commander considered the Fifth Wisconsin and the Sixth Maine his best regiments, and he ordered them to lead the attack. The Wisconsin and Maine boys had fought side by side since Antietam. "No better regiment than the 6th Maine ever marched," Anderson claimed, adding that "between them and the 5th Wisconsin there was a peculiar affection." Although ordered to attack with bayonets only, the Wisconsin veterans defiantly put bullets in their guns.

The two regiments flung themselves at the Confederate works and carried them after fierce fighting. Company A took fearsome casualties. Among those who had been with the unit from the beginning of the war, three, including Captain Walker, were dead and four were wounded. That engagement ended the regiment's fighting for the year. It went into winter quarters at Brandy Station, near Culpeper in the Virginia Piedmont.

Feeling entitled to a battlefield promotion, Anderson spent much of the winter angling for a commission as a lieutenant. He felt he had fought hard enough to deserve the promotion, it would bring in more money for his family, and it would enable him to "spite certain ones [among his friends in Manitowoc] who have twitted a little on my being in the ranks so long." He managed to obtain glowing recommendations from his superiors, both commissioned and non-commissioned officers, but to no avail. Apparently the only openings were in the "Colored Regiments," which the Lincoln administration was

belatedly forming among the black residents of the North. "I can get a recommendation for a Colored Regiment commission easy but I will put that off until last," Anderson wrote home, revealing the racial bias of most Northerners. He could be a strong opponent of slavery, but he was not at all eager to serve with black troops, even as an officer. Apparently there was no prestige in that at all. He remained a corporal and spent another glum winter.

His gloom deepened in April 1864 when the War Department, with neither warning nor explanation, arbitrarily extended the term of service for all soldiers in the Fifth Wisconsin for another two full months. This action meant that Anderson's period of enlistment, due to expire on May 10, was extended to the 13th of July. Anderson was outraged at the unfairness of it, especially after all he had endured. "It would not surprise me in the least," he grumbled, "if the Regiment would mutiny about it."

It was at this time that General Ulysses S. Grant, now in command of the Army of the Potomac, proposed to drive, bulldog fashion, straight upon the Confederate capital. The Fifth Wisconsin broke camp at Brandy Station, crossed the Rapidan River, and plunged into a cut-over area that Virginians called The Wilderness.

For three days the Union army advanced on a broad and ragged front, suffering seventeen thousand casualties in fighting that sometimes went from tree to tree. Anderson did not record the number of men lost in Company A; perhaps he lost track in the smoke of battle. On May 7 Grant shifted the army to the east in order to utilize the post road that led from Fredericksburg to Richmond. General Lee made a stand at Spottsylvania Court house, and for the next twelve days the armies savaged one another. General Sedgwick was killed by a musket ball in his head while exhorting his men to stand and fight. Anderson was more saddened by that than by the death of some of his Manitowoc friends. The general had personally

singled out Anderson for praise, and in letters home Anderson tried to explain the unusual bond that existed between an eminent if seldom-seen commander and his troops.

Although his main object in life now was to survive the war, Anderson was caught up in the spirit of combat. On May 12 the Fifth Wisconsin was in the thick of the fighting when Anderson, running out of ammunition, threw his rifle aside and dashed forward to seize an enemy cannon that had been abandoned. By his side was a member of another company of the regiment, and together they turned it about and fired into an advancing line of men from South Carolina. The gun must have been loaded with canister (light antipersonnel shot), for Anderson thought he leveled forty Southern boys with the first shot. After that, he reported home, "we worked the gun on them until we fired all the ammunition there was in two limbers and this at a distance of 10 rods from their rifle pits." After that, the regiment was replaced and sent to the rear for rest and recuperation.

On June 12, 1864, Grant made the last of his eastward flanking moves, descending on Petersburg, at the falls of the Appomatox River south of Richmond. Company A was by now so debilitated by casualty and sickness that it was no longer a fighting unit. Anderson scribbled in his diary on June 24, "hardly able to crawl I am so sick." He had been so worn out from battle fatigue and short rations that when the army had made its flanking movement, he had stayed behind. His only interest now was in survival. Finally, on July 13, he was able to write joyfully in his diary: "Our term of service is expired and we have bid farewell to our comrades." The following day he wrote his parents in triumph: "I thought I would drop you a line to let you know that I am still on this side of the 'Dark River' and with every prospect of soon being with you." On July 20 he boarded a northbound train, and by the evening of the next day he was in Chicago. They were home in Manitowoc by the end of the month, having been entertained in Milwaukee on the way. Only fifteen of the original ninety-six Manitowoc Volunteers survived to return home with Anderson. ❧

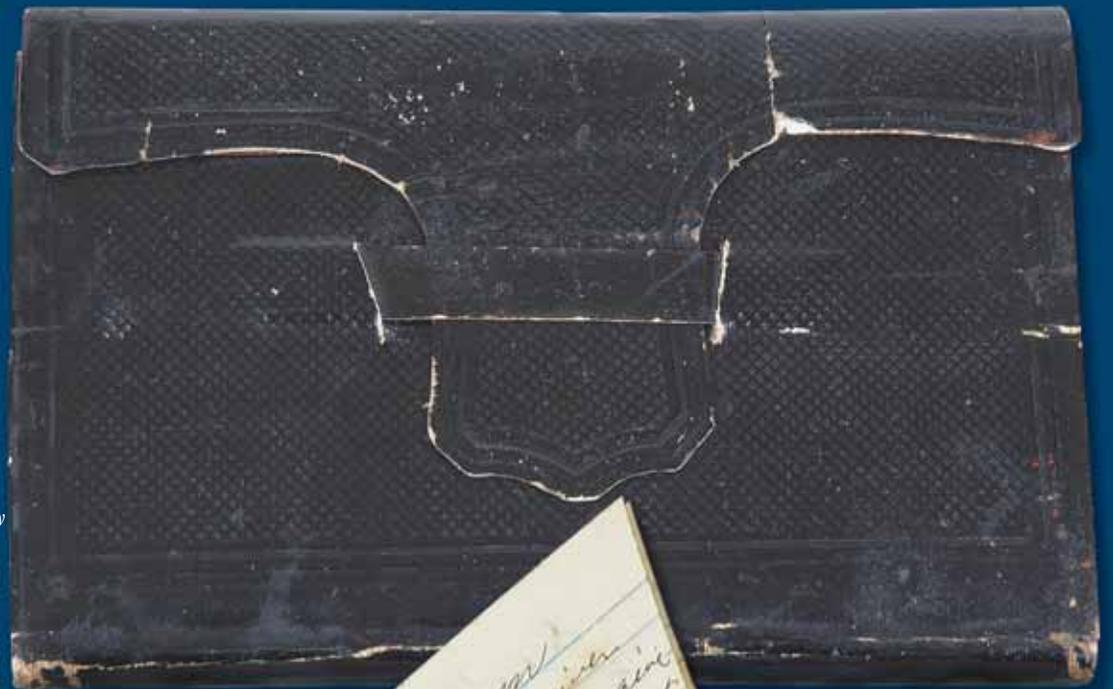
### About the Author

A native of Manitowoc, **Norman K. Risjord** earned his Ph.D. at the University of Virginia and joined the history department of the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1964. His lectures on American history were broadcast on public radio periodically from 1966 to 1989. He retired from teaching in 1993 and now writes history aimed at the general reader. His recent books include a biography of Thomas Jefferson (1994); *Wisconsin: The Story of the Badger State* (1995); and a series entitled *Representative Americans*, which currently numbers four books.



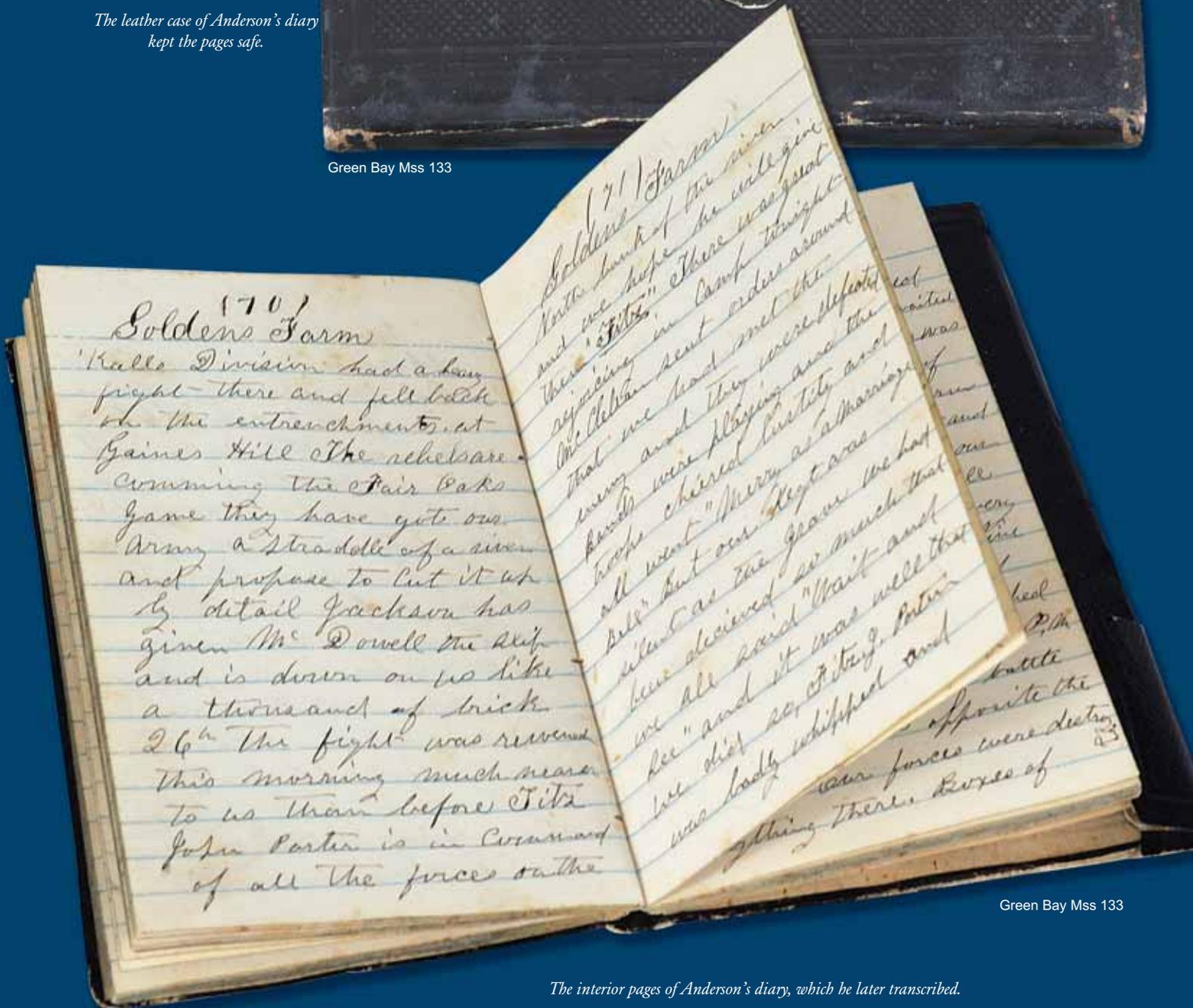
### Acknowledgments

Kerry A. Trask has done a splendid job of mining the Anderson papers for the story of this Civil War soldier, and the results of his scholarship are *Fire Within: A Civil War Narrative from Wisconsin* (1995). Civil War historian, James M. McPherson examined the letters of 1,076 soldiers, 647 from the North and 429 from the South, in an attempt to determine the soldiers' reaction to war. He quantified his data, compared it with the results of psychological tests conducted by the U. S. army during and after World War II, and published the results in 1997 under the title *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*. Also helpful in the creation of this article were the descriptions of military life drawn from the letters of soldiers in Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (1943) and *The Life of Billy Yank* (1952).



The leather case of Anderson's diary kept the pages safe.

Green Bay Mss 133



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The interior pages of Anderson's diary, which he later transcribed.