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THE ROAD TO MURFREESBORO: THE ELEVENTH MICHIGAN VOLUNTEER INFANTRY FROM ORGANIZATION THROUGH ITS FIRST BATTLE

by

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A thesis presented to the
Faculty of the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 1963

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INTRODUCTION

This is a history of the Eleventh Michigan Volunteer Infantry. It was never a famous regiment; it never did much out of the ordinary, and participated in few major battles. If there is anything to distinguish this regiment, it is that it is not distinguished. What happened to the Eleventh Michigan happened to countless other regiments both North and South. In a sense a study of one regiment provides a study of all.

The Eleventh tried to be different. It almost caught John Hunt Morgan in Kentucky. At Murfreesboro it made a desperate charge to retake the Cedars. It was the first to march into the valley south of Chickamauga. It claimed to be the last to leave the Chickamauga battlefield, and that after dark. This regiment swore with its dying breath that it was the first to reach the top of Missionary Ridge. But try as it might, the Eleventh wasn't much different from its brother units.

In the years after the war, as one by one the veterans departed this life, the survivors began to sense their true place in history. They realized their single deeds meant nothing - that they had all been part of one massive army in which individual identification had been lost. And here was where they realized their importance. They were little people in a large army, but without the little people, there never would have been an army.

So the regimental reunions gradually became reunions for all the old soldiers. It was no longer really important what had been a

man's unit. Although the old men would still gather with their regimental comrades of the past, others were welcomed, until in time the reunions became simply the coming together of old soldiers.

All the men who fought the Civil War are now dead. In the last years of their lives, many of them sat down to write their memories. These accounts usually took the form of regimental histories, hundreds of which now gather dust on the shelves of our major libraries.

Today, if one finds a recently written regimental history, it is almost always because this particular unit was somehow noteworthy. But the Eleventh Michigan Infantry was not a famous unit, and no old soldier ever wrote its history. This account is an attempt to remedy that omission.

The Eleventh Michigan was originally known as Colonel May's Independent Regiment, and later was absorbed into the State forces. This paper is not a chronicle of its entire life. It examines the regiment's history from its birth in the spring of 1861 through the conclusion of its first major battle at Murfreesboro.

The Eleventh Michigan knew frustration. After its organization in early August, 1861, it waited more than sixteen months for its baptism of fire - sixteen months of agony and uncertainty as to how it would perform in battle. But when battle finally came it acquitted itself well, and brought great credit to Michigan.

CHAPTER I

IT WAS NOT EASY TO GET IN THE ARMY

The history of a regiment cannot start with the first recorded information about it. Its ancestry must be examined. Such is the case with the Eleventh Regiment Michigan Volunteer Infantry.

The beginnings of this regiment date from the firing upon Fort Sumter. This act of violence against the flag of the United States united previously divided Northern opinion; to the loyal people of the North, there was now one common goal toward which they could all strive. Somehow or other, and no matter what the cost, the Union must be saved. This over-riding determination was the driving force which resulted in the formation of the Eleventh Michigan.

On April 15, 1861, President Lincoln called upon the governors of the loyal states to furnish him with 75,000 three-month volunteers, and on May 3, for 42,000 to serve three years. No one in Washington or in any state capital was prepared for the overwhelming response to these calls. Northern enthusiasm brought in so many volunteers that the War and Treasury Departments were faced with the unexpected necessity of discouraging enlistments. It was not so much a question of how many would go to the fight, as who would get the chance.

In almost every sizable village or township, local military companies were formed. As soon as they had any semblance of organization, they would appeal for a place in the proposed regiments.

The state adjutant generals' offices were deluged with these requests; they had the difficult problem of deciding which companies to accept. The companies not chosen would clamor for the next chance. As one Wisconsin soldier put it, "We thought the rebellion would be over before our chance would come."[1]

Most of the states filled their early regiments with existing militia companies. Each regiment required only ten companies, and Michigan's quota under the three-months call was one regiment. But even when the Second, Third, and Fourth Michigan regiments were formed after the call of May 3, there were many disappointed units.

Michigan's governor, Austin Blair, was a loyal Republican. He was quite willing to accept the volunteer companies as fast as they were offered. Unfortunately, the War Department did not support this policy. On May 11, 1861, Secretary of War Simon Cameron instructed Governor Blair to reduce the number of regiments then being formed. Cameron wrote: "Let me earnestly recommend to you, therefore, to call for no more than four regiments, of which only three are to serve for three years, or during the war; and if more are already called for, to reduce the number by discharge."[2]

Governor Blair did not follow the War Department's recommendations. Not sharing Secretary Cameron's belief that the war would require so few troops, the Governor took it upon himself to

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[1]Henry Steele Commager (ed.), The Blue and the Gray (2 vols.; Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1950), I, 76.

[2]John Robertson (comp.), Michigan in the War (rev. ed.; Lansing: W. S. George & Co., 1882), p. 220. Cited hereafter as Michigan in the War.

recruit three additional regiments in addition to the required four. These three became the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Infantry.

Even with Blair's liberal policy, more companies were volunteering than there were regiments to accommodate them. The State Adjutant General's Office was compelled to spend much of its time deciding which companies to accept. The experiences of four companies will illustrate the frustration men encountered in their attempt to join the fight. Parts of these companies, and others like them, formed the nucleus of May's Independent Regiment, which would in turn become the Eleventh Michigan Volunteer Infantry.

In Three Rivers, Michigan, the President's first call arrived by telegraph on April 16, 1861. The wires had hardly stopped humming before Samuel Chadwick, lawyer, politician, and former officer in the Mexican War, was displaying the flag on the street. Confident that his help would be accepted, Chadwick at once began to organize a company. On April 18 he wrote to Governor Blair that he had forty men enrolled and would soon have a full company. He wanted to know what he should do with them. Receiving no response (the Governor was out of town), he wrote on April 22 to Adjutant General John Robertson at Detroit for instructions; his men were anxious.[4] Robertson's office answered on April 24 that the two

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[3] Ibid., p. 221.

[4] Michigan Historical Commission Archives (Lansing), Records of the Michigan Military Establishment (Records Group 59-14), Regimental Service Records of the Eleventh Michigan Volunteer Infantry, Samuel Chadwick to Adjutant General John Robertson, Adjutant General's Office, Detroit, Apr. 22, 1861. Cited hereafter as Regimental Service Records.

regiments called for were already filled. But if Chadwick offered a full company later, it might be accepted.[5]

Apparently no formal call was ever sent for the Three Rivers company. But when a call was sent to Constantine, Chadwick released his men to join that unit. Soon after he went to Washington to work as a clerk in the War Department.[6]

On April 25 the Adjutant's office received a letter from William L. Stoughton, a Sturgis lawyer and captain of the local militia. He had a company, most of them new recruits, not drilled, but anxious for a chance. They had forty musketoons,[7] unfortunately not in the best condition. Stoughton's letter was carried to the Adjutant General by Sergeant Homer H. Packard, who was empowered to answer any questions the General might ask.[8]

Communication between Sturgis and Detroit was certainly fast, for on the next day Stoughton wrote to General Robertson that he was sorry to learn his company couldn't become a part of the first two regiments, but perhaps they might be needed later on.[9] Time passed and no call came. On May 15 Stoughton telegraphed to ask if the Peninsula Guards would be accepted. He said he couldn't hold the

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[5]Heber LeFavour to Chadwick, Apr. 24, 1861, Ibid.

[6]The Three Rivers Reporter, Aug. 21, 1869, p. 1. Cited hereafter as Reporter. Chadwick's recruits probably formed part of Company G, Second Michigan Infantry. Michigan in the War, p. 188.

[7]Musketoons are short muskets.

[8]William L. Stoughton to Robertson, Apr. 25, 1861, Regimental Service Records.

[9]Stoughton to Robertson, Apr. 26, 1861, Ibid.

company together much longer without some encouragement.[10] Five days later General Robertson accepted Stoughton's company in the new Fourth regiment. For some reason Stoughton did not enter the service with his company.[11] Perhaps he was holding out for a higher rank than captain.

At Quincy, Melvin Mudge was organizing a company. On July 22 he wrote: "A better Company of boys never was raised. If there is or as soon as there is a place, give it to us and oblige the Quincy Rifles."[12] The news of Bull Run must have reached him soon after, for the next day he wrote: "Some of our brothers and neighbors of this place were in the late battle and we must avenge their deaths. Let us in if there is a possible chance."[13]

Time passed and no chance came. On July 29 Mudge wrote asking why his company couldn't be accepted: "A better set of men never was brought to-gether. Tough hardy farmers all of them." He complained that while he had received encouragement on a visit to Detroit four weeks earlier, he hadn't heard anything since then. "We think there will not be much chance for us for the fact that we have no Ex Governor [sic] or Congressman or any other wire working politician to interceed [sic] for us. Yet we did cast our vote for Governor Blair . . . ."[14] A few days later, Captain Mudge and his Quincy Wolverines joined Colonel May's Independent Regiment.

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[10]Stoughton to Robertson, May 15, 1861, Ibid.

[11]Michigan in the War, p. 222.

[12]Melvin Mudge to Robertson, July 22, 1861, Regimental Service Records.

[13]Mudge to Robertson, July 23, 1861, Ibid.

[14]Mudge to Robertson, July 29, 1861, Ibid.

Writing from Morenci on June 3, Sylvester B. Smith offered a company that had already found the Fourth Michigan full. The Morenci volunteers wanted to keep their organization and to be informed when new regiments were planned.[15] On June 4 the Adjutant General advised Smith to keep up his organization for later call.[16]

On June 18 Captain Smith wondered why he had not heard something when the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh regiments were being organized. Was there a place for his company in the Seventh?[17] The Adjutant General's Office replied that the three regiments had the needed companies, and it was impossible to say whether more troops would be needed.[18]

The persistent Captain Smith again wrote on June 24. He realized he had to be patient, that other men understood the situation better than he; nevertheless, the Morenci Guards did not feel they had been treated justly. If an eighth regiment was formed, they certainly expected to be part of it. Smith now offered the services of ". . . an excellent Brass Band . . ., that would like an opportunity to go into one of the Regts as a Band. There are but few better in the country. They are uniformed in good style, Blue Broad Cloth frock Coats, Blue caps same style as the military fatigue caps."[19]

On June 25, Captain Smith was told what specifications his

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[15]Sylvester B. Smith to Robertson, June 3, 1861, Ibid.

[16]LeFavour to Smith, June 4, 1861, Ibid.

[17]Smith to Robertson, June 18, 1861, Ibid.

[18]D. Garmo Jones to Smith, June 19, 1861, Ibid.

[19]Smith to Robertson, June 24, 1861, Ibid.

company must meet. It must have one captain, one first lieutenant, one second lieutenant, one first sergeant, four sergeants, eight corporals, two musicians, with between sixty-four and eighty-two privates. The muster roll must state the rank and age of each commissioned and non-commissioned officer, the date and place of enlistment of each volunteer, and show the captain's certification of the correctness of the roll.[20]

The prospects seemed brighter. Smith sent his muster roll on July 6, commenting that he could have done this sooner, but hadn't thought it necessary since other companies had been accepted with hardly enough men to fill the officer positions. Since he had fulfilled the requirements, he certainly expected to be "reckoned in" when the next regiment was called.[21] After more than three weeks with no word, Smith lost patience with the Adjutant General's Office. On July 31 he wrote to Governor Blair that friends in the county were signing a petition asking that his company be accepted.[22] The Morenci Guards changed their name to the Hudson Riflemen, and were accepted by May's Regiment.

In all of these and other cases, impatience marks the recruiters. These men couldn't wait to get their companies in the army. Most of them believed that the fight would be over before they had a chance at glory.

While Captain Smith's friends were signing their petition,

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[20]Jones to Smith, June 25, 1861, Ibid.

[21]Smith to Robertson, June 6, 1861, Ibid.

[22]Smith to Austin Blair, July 31, 1861, Ibid.

Governor Blair was getting the unlimited authorization he had long needed. During July Congress had given Lincoln the power to enlist 500,000 instead of 42,000 three-year volunteers. Michigan's quota under these laws was large enough to absorb all who were asking for a chance. But the machinery of government was running too slowly, and to men like Mudge and Smith the delay was unbearable. If the Governor couldn't help them right away, then they would go elsewhere. If the State couldn't authorize their regiments, they would have them anyway. And so May's Independent Regiment was born.

CHAPTER II

"No better opportunity to enlist has yet been offered."

Since state regiments had more than enough men to fill their ranks, many leaders of local militia tried to have their groups recognized as independent units by the War Department. What might have been the outcome of these efforts cannot be known, because independent units were discontinued in September, 1861. Apparently an independent regiment was organized to join a particular army. Presumably such a unit would accept men from all parts of the country; in practice, recruiting was usually limited to the area adjacent to its rendezvous. This was true of the proposed independent regiment in St. Joseph County, Michigan.

Samuel Chadwick, later adjutant of the regiment, had been called to Washington to work as a clerk in the office of Secretary of War Simon Cameron. On August 4, 1861, there appeared in Chadwick's office Dr. S. L. Herrick of Three Rivers, Michigan, who told him William J. May of White Pigeon wished to raise a regiment. Chadwick, who approved of May, obtained authorization for the regiment, and instructions were immediately telegraphed to Colonel May by Secretary Cameron.[1]

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[1] Reporter, Aug. 21, 1869, p. 1. Stoughton in a letter to Robertson, Apr. 28, 1880, refers to this article: "I enclose you printed history of the 11th as desired. I have pencilled out some of it which were interpolated by Adj. Chadwick." As Stoughton's edited copy is missing, it is not known whether he was referring

On August 14, 1861, this notice appeared in a Three Rivers paper:

> We are informed that Col. Wm. J. May, of White Pigeon, so well and favorably known to the travelling public as proprietor of the White Pigeon Dining House, is making an effort to raise an independent regiment to serve under Gen. Fremont, in the West. He has enlisted the names of over five hundred volunteers from the villages of Sturgis, White Pigeon, Constantine, and the surrounding country.[2]

With his authorization from the War Department, Colonel May began recruiting in earnest. At first he confined his efforts to St. Joseph County; then, after the first rush of enthusiasm, he reached into the surrounding area in southern Michigan. Although his regiment ultimately included men from several southern counties, it was recruited chiefly from St. Joseph County. Of its ten companies, three came from that county, and most of the remaining seven reported at the rendezvous so under strength that their ranks were filled with local men. When the regiment left for the south, its rolls bore 610 names from St. Joseph County.[3] The company organization was as follows:

Company A, St. Joseph County Guards of Centreville, St. Joseph County, Captain David Oakes.
Company B, Quincy Wolverines of Quincy, Branch County, Captain Melvin Mudge.

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to this particular incident as related by Chadwick. In the face of strong evidence that Stoughton did not have a good opinion of his adjutant, and that Chadwick's influence in securing appointment for Colonel May is not verified elsewhere, the story merits further investigation. Stoughton to Robertson, Apr. 28, 1880, Regimental Service Records.

[2]The Western Chronicle (Three Rivers, Mich.), Aug. 14, 1861, p. 3. Cited hereafter as Chronicle.

[3]History of St. Joseph County, Michigan (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & Co., 1877), p. 54.

Company C, Sturgis Light Guards of Sturgis, St. Joseph County, Captain Calvin Hood.

Company D, Bronson Guards of Bronson, Branch County, Captain Benjamin Bennet.

Company E, Three Rivers Light Guard of Three Rivers, St. Joseph County, Captain Henry Spencer.

Company F, Hudson Riflemen (formerly Morenci Guards) of Hudson, Lenawee County, Captain Sylvester Smith.

Company G, Schoolcraft Rifle Rangers of Schoolcraft, Kalamazoo County, Captain Charles Moase.

Company H, Coldwater Tigers of Coldwater, Branch County, Captain John Hackstaff.

Company I, Chandler Horse Guards of Monroe, Monroe County, Captain Nelson Chamberlain.

Company K, Lenawee Lions of Adrian, Lenawee County, Captain William Phillips.[4]

Colonel May was authorized to raise a battery of artillery in addition to an infantry regiment. This battery of six pieces was organized by Captain John Andrews of Coldwater and was known as the Coldwater Flying Artillery.[5] It later became Battery F, First Michigan Light Artillery.[6]

In the first weeks of August, 1861, Colonel May's Independent Regiment began to take shape. Volunteers enlisted at eight different offices in St. Joseph County. According to The Three Rivers Reporter, an "unprecedented number" came forward.[7] The war was young and

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[4]Chronicle, Sept. 25, 1861, p. 3. Nov. 13, 1861, p. 3. Michigan, Adjutant General's Office, Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers in the Civil War, 1861-1865 (46 vols.; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Ihling Bros. & Everard, 1905), XI, 1. Cited hereafter as Record, Eleventh Michigan Infantry.

[5]Chronicle, Sept. 25, 1861, p. 3. This article clearly states that Andrew's Battery was encamped at White Pigeon.

[6]Andrew's Battery is credited with being organized at Coldwater, and left for Kentucky, March 3, 1862. Battery D under Captain Alonzo F. Bidwell is reported to have been organized with the Eleventh Infantry, and left its rendezvous at Coldwater for Kentucky, Dec. 9, 1861. Michigan in the War, pp. 526-27, 529. Apparently at one time or another, two artillery units were involved in the organization of May's regiment.

[7]Reporter, Aug. 8, 1861, p. 3.

enthusiasm was high. In their shock and indignation after Manassas, the people of southern Michigan, as elsewhere in the North, were in no mood to allow the southern states to destroy their beloved Union. If the battle of Manassas accomplished anything, it awoke these people to the reality and imminent danger of the threat. The men who joined May's Independent Regiment were the true 1861 volunteers. They joined simply because they believed it their duty to defend the Nation's honor and preserve the Union. At the time they enlisted, they expected only their pay as a soldier, which for many was less than they made as civilians. The issue of slavery was to them of minor importance; a regiment raised to free the slaves would have brought few recruits in Michigan. The only issue was the Union.

Recruiting was handled in different ways. Usually a local citizen of repute would announce his intention to organize a company. Since this involved expense, it was usually understood that he would be elected captain of the company when it was mustered into service. It was necessary to advertise to induce recruits into the ranks. One method was to print handbills announcing the new company and distribute them freely. Another was to secure favorable publicity in local newspapers. Thus, readers of The Three Rivers Reporter learned that:

> There are a number of important considerations tending to induce volunteers from this section to join the Three Rivers Company Col. May's regiment. They will be in the ranks with those they are best acquainted with; have surgical and medical attendants whose reputations are well established in their own neighborhood, and officers whom they have known for years; while the facility with which communication may be had to and from friends at home will be reliable and direct. No better opportunity to enlist has yet been offered. Office of enlist-

ment is at the Post Office.[8]

Knowing that men would respond most favorably to the personal appeal, the organizer used public meetings to present his case. On the platform, or near it would be seated the town dignitaries, the local band, future company or regimental officers, and, if possible, several privates who had already enlisted. The audience would hear several strong patriotic speeches, the soul-stirring martial music of the band, and, if they were lucky, a talk by some man with military experience. Seldom would these efforts fail. The close of the meeting would find the company officers happily in the possession of several new names for their muster roll.

An especially active recruiter was County Treasurer David Oakes, with his St. Joseph County Guards. Forming his company at Centreville, he traveled to several small county towns.[9] For example:

> A meeting was held at Parkville, on Monday evening, for the purpose of raising recruits for Col. May's Independent Regiment. The occasion was enlivened by the presence of Capt. Oaks [sic] with several members of his Company, and Martial Music. The meeting was addressed by Drs. Beck and Howard, and Messrs. Oaks, Crosette and others. Several names were added to the Muster Roll. The feeling throughout the county is decidedly in favor of having Col. May's Regiment, at the disposition of the War Department in as short time as possible. Meetings are being held all over the county. A meeting was held in Cass County last night, which was attended by several persons from Three Rivers.[10]

One of the best recruiting speakers was Benjamin G. Bennet of Burr Oak. As a first sergeant in the First Michigan Infantry, he had taken part in the battle at Manassas. People who came to hear

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[8] Ibid., Aug. 17, 1861, p. 3.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Chronicle, Aug. 21, 1861, p. 3.

him expected a first hand account of the war in which they were about to take part. At Constantine, on August 31:

> Pursuant to notice, there was a public meeting held at Case's Hall, in this village, on Saturday evening last. The meeting came together at seven o'clock and was organized by electing B. G. Bennet, chairman, and L. T. Hull, secretary. Hon. H. H. Riley addressed the meeting upon the matters now agitating the country and the duty of all loyal citizens in the present exigency. He was followed by B. G. Bennet, who gave a brief and graphic account of the battle of Bull's Run, July 28th [sic], at which he was present and an actor. His remarks were listened to with the utmost attention. At the conclusion he made a statement of the facts relative to Col. May's commission from the U. S. War Department to raise an independent regiment. That it was a reality, and could not fail of being filled up if the people acted in as good faith and as earnestly as the War Department and Col. May were acting.[11]

August recruiting brought such good results that by early September public meetings were dropped. Most of the local companies were full, or nearly so, and could rely upon less elaborate practices to fill their ranks. When word went around that Captain Bennet's company lacked a few men, The Three Rivers Western Chronicle came to his aid:

> We understand that Capt. Bennett [sic] - "Grove Bennett" - wants a few more good men in his company. Everybody knows "Grove," and hence it is useless for us to say anything in his favor. We apprehend that when his friends (and their name is "legion") throughout the county know that he wants a few men, they will be forthcoming. "Grove" is "one of 'em" and has been through the mill - he was at Bull Run; yet as he avers, he was not one of the Running Bulls, although he gave some good specimens of tall walking.[12]

Should the humorous approach fail, the patriotic appeal could be expected to produce results. In late September, when Calvin

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[11]The Weekly Mercury and St. Joseph County Advertiser (Constantine, Mich.), Sept. 5, 1861, p. 3. Cited hereafter as Mercury.

[12]Chronicle, Sept. 11, 1861, p. 3.

Hood was completing his company, The Sturgis Journal exhorted:

> Capt. Hood, of the Sturgis Guard, Col. May's Regiment, informs us that he wants ten or twelve more industrious and able-bodied young men to fill up his ranks. Young men, now is the time to serve your country. She has need of your services and it is your duty to obey her call. You can never serve a better cause; can never fall, if fall you must, in a more glorious struggle, a struggle for the maintenance of the liberty our fathers established. Let it not be said that our Government was dismembered and broken in pieces for the lack of men, but come up to its support against the mighty, and united strike a blow at the traitor's heart that will toll the death nall [sic] of treason.

And The Journal reminded its readers that any person joining the company would draw pay from August 24.[13]

With the ranks of the companies rapidly filling, it was necessary to select an assembly point for the regiment. The village of White Pigeon was chosen, apparently for no other reason than that it was the only town with a building large enough to accommodate about 1000 men. The first company to reach the rendezvous was the Quincy Wolverines, who left Quincy on August 22.[14] Most of the units arrived in September. The last to be assigned the regiment was the Chandler Horse Guards, who left Monroe on October 5.[15]

When a company left its home town the citizens would do their best to give them a grand send off. Nothing was too good for the home-town boys on their way to preserve the Union. Everyone had relatives or close friends who would be leaving, and though they did

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[13]The Sturgis Journal, Sept. 26, 1861, p. 3. Cited hereafter as Journal.

[14]History of Branch County, Michigan (Philadelphia: Everts & Abbott, 1879), p. 66.

[15]Nelson Chamberlain to Robertson, Oct. 5, 1861, Regimental Service Records.

not then realize how long the war would last, they sensed that some would not be coming back. When the Centreville company left, it traveled to White Pigeon by way of Constantine. On September 2, The Constantine Mercury noted that:

> Capt. David Oakes' Company, from Centreville, went into rendezvous at Camp Goodwin, White Pigeon, on Monday last, with, as we are informed, one hundred and sixteen men. On their way they paid our village a visit. They were in wagons, accompanied by a large number of their friends and neighbors, and with their banners and two good bands of music made a sight worth seeing. The Company is made up of the very best material - strong, robust men, used to labor - they will go into camp and be easily transformed into the very best soldiers. The size and apparent strength of the men was the admiration of everyone.[16]

When the Three Rivers Light Guard marched to the railroad depot on September 9, they were accompanied by a large crowd of relatives and friends, then escorted to White Pigeon by the Three Rivers band, which did its best to enliven the occasion with good music.[17]

The numbers at White Pigeon continued to increase until by September 28 over 700 had arrived.[18] By October 19 there were more than 1200 in camp, including 150 in the artillery company.[19] Thereafter the number in camp remained about the same; new recruits continued to arrive, but others were discharged as unfit for military duty.[20]

In the fall of 1861, as throughout the war, the organization

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[16]Mercury, Sept. 5, 1861, p. 3.

[17]Chronicle, Sept. 11, 1861, p. 3.

[18]Reporter, Sept. 28, 1861, p. 3.

[19]Ibid., Oct. 19, 1861, p. 2.

[20]William J. May to Robertson, Nov. 8, 1861, Regimental Service Records.

of volunteer troops was under the control of the governors of the respective states. Since each state received credit for the number of men it furnished, a governor was naturally anxious to retain control of all recruitment within his state. Governor Austin Blair looked with displeasure upon the rapid organization of May's Independent Regiment, for Michigan would not get credit for their service. Apparently Blair tried to slow down the organization of May's and other independent units, so that his own State regiments would have a better chance of filling their ranks. Many in St. Joseph County, failing to see the real motive behind the Governor's action, resented it.

This problem of Michigan's governor was shared by the governors of other northern states. Collectively they pressured the War Department into modifying its policy. By General Orders No. 78, of September 28, 1861, the War Department placed all volunteer regiments, batteries, and companies under the governors of the States in which they were organized.[21] This transfer of authority caused no changes in May's Independent Regiment. Its company organization and staff appointments continued as before. The only difference was that the regiment now received its orders from the State Adjutant General's Office and its commissions from the Governor, instead of from the Secretary of War. Yet the dispute over authority probably delayed

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[21]Michigan Historical Commission Archives (Lansing), Records of the Michigan Military Establishment (Records Group 59-14), General and Special Orders Issued from Adjutant General's Office, March 15, 1861 to September 15, 1866, General Orders No. 101, Oct. 16, 1861. General Orders No. 78 from the War Department was incorporated in General Orders No. 101. Cited hereafter as General and Special Orders.

the formation of the regiment by at least one month.[22]

Michigan regiments were not given numbers until their formation was nearly enough complete that they would likely soon take to the field. Thus, although Colonel May's regiment came under State control on September 28, it was not until October 11 that it was officially designated the Eleventh Regiment Michigan Infantry.[23]

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[22]Mercury, Dec. 12, 1861, p.2.

[23]General Orders No. 92, Oct. 11, 1861, General and Special Orders.

CHAPTER III

"Those who bear it hence will never return with it dishonored."

The camp of the Eleventh Infantry was originally called Camp Goodwin. After the arrival of United States Mustering Officer Captain Harvey Tilden, it was renamed in his honor. Camp Tilden was located immediately south of the village of White Pigeon, where the roundhouse and railroad yards of the Michigan Southern Railroad were located. On the south side of the track a car-house 640 feet long was used as sleeping quarters for the entire regiment. To the north and across the tracks was the railroad eating house, now converted into the regiment's "victualing department." The use of these buildings with their adjacent grounds was donated by Superintendent Campbell of the Michigan Southern Railroad. Camp Tilden was called the "best and healthiest in the state."[1] A visiting editor wrote that:

> Messrs. Shurtz, Laird and Wallis have the contract for feeding and lodging the men, and from all we have seen and can learn, are giving the very best satisfaction. The tables are loaded with good, substantial, well cooked food, neatly prepared and arranged. The lodgings are in buildings temporarily fitted up for the purpose, and are comfortable. Those who lodged upon the State fair ground at Detroit last Spring, think the lodgings at White Pigeon luxurious.[2]

Nearly all the men who arrived at White Pigeon were

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[1] Chronicle, Sept. 11, 1861, p. 3.

[2] Mercury, Sept. 26, 1861, p. 3.

encountering military life for the first time, and they found the experience enjoyable. The wide meadows and cool woodlands, the quiet little village next to the camp, were scarcely different from the towns and farms they had left. Although their car-house sleeping quarters resembled a huge, drafty barn, the weather was pleasant enough, and sleeping was comfortable. These men had a difficult time believing they were soldiers. There was little to indicate that Camp Tilden was anything but a large gathering of men. Uniforms, guns, tents, and other military items were in decidedly short supply.

They had, indeed, almost nothing but their willingness to go to war. In the entire Eleventh Michigan Infantry, few men had had any military training. The mustering officer, Captain Tilden, was the only regular army man in camp, and his time was taken up with paper work. The future adjutant, Samuel Chadwick, had been a lieutenant in the Mexican War, but he was spending his time recruiting. In the ranks, apparently only one man had had significant military experience. He was Private Robert Anderson of Company I, who had served twenty-one years in the British Army and two in that of the United States.[3]

Drill began as soon as the men arrived. Though they did not have muskets or uniforms, they did have legs, and William L. Stoughton saw to it that they used them. Company and regimental drill were almost daily events. With inexperienced officers and men, one can imagine that their early trials with intricate marching maneuvers must have been interesting. The War Department's pocket-sized book

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[3]Muster In Roll Company I, White Pigeon, Aug. 24, 1861, Regimental Service Records.

U. S. Infantry & Rifle Tactics was a coveted prize for the officer lucky enough to find one.

Through early September, Camp Tilden was a pleasant adventure. Hardly a day passed but what new men would arrive, or rumors spread through the camp about orders to leave for the south, or about orders to stay, or about equipment soon to arrive. First Sergeant Walter Hoisington thought "everything [was] somewhat mixed up."[4]

On September 16, Colonel May was ordered to detach three hundred men from his regiment to fill up regiments that had been stalemated in their recruiting. Naturally the Colonel protested, and the three hundred were cut to eighty. The regiment was assembled, the facts related to the men, and volunteers met this reduced quota. At 11:30 on the morning of September 17 these men were escorted to the station by the entire regiment, who watched them board the cars for Cleveland. There they joined Stockton's Independent Regiment.[5]

On the afternoon of that day the regiment was assembled to elect its officers. Not unexpectedly the vote was unanimous for William J. May as colonel and William L. Stoughton as lieutenant-colonel. Colonel May was known to all as the popular proprietor of the White Pigeon Railroad Dining Hall. He was a former member of the Pennsylvania Legislature, and had some military experience. The Constantine Mercury said:

> Lieut. Col. Stoughton has resided in this county for the last ten years, during which he has enjoyed the full confidence of the

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[4]Chronicle, Sept. 18, 1861, p. 3.

[5]Ibid. Stockton's regiment became the Sixteenth Michigan Infantry. Michigan in the War, p. 359.

people, as evidenced by the oft times he has been called to stations of honor and trust. He is now U. S. District Attorney. He has for some years paid considerable attention to military matters, and is we believe well posted in infantry tactics. Diligent, preserving and determined, he will be a competent and popular officer.[6]

Elected also that day were Major Benjamin F. Doughty, Quartermaster Addison I. Drake, and Adjutant Germain H. Mason.[7] Adjutant Mason was not mustered with the regiment, and his place was taken by Samuel Chadwick. The other staff officers at organization were Surgeon William M. Elliott, Assistant Surgeon Justin C. Elliott, and Chaplain Holmes A. Pattison.[8] About Mr. Pattison The Chronicle noted that he " . . . is just the man for the place, is well versed in theology and military science, and being stout and healthy is prepared if necessary to fight as well as pray."[9]

One of the greatest problems in the volunteer regiments was the maintenance of discipline. This was especially true of regiments from the western states, where most of the men were products of a frontier environment that encouraged individualism. Accustomed to running their own lives, it was difficult for them to learn to obey commands of officers who a few weeks before had been their neighbors. To make matters worse, because the training camp was so close to their homes, the soldiers were constantly plaguing their officers for leaves. Walther Hoisington thought that if they could only move to some place several hundred miles away to finish their

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[6] Mercury, Sept. 19, 1861, p. 3.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Record, Eleventh Michigan Infantry, p. 1.

[9] Chronicle, Nov. 13, 1861, p. 3.

drill, they would "feel first rate."[10]

About the middle of September an incident occurred which increased the respect of the men for their officers. For several days the soldiers had seen a sign over the washroom near the entrance to the eating house: "No soldiers allowed to wash here." This seemingly unreasonable prohibition caused much resentful talk. Finally the truth was learned:

> It happened that when one of the officers began washing himself in the washroom of the Eating House, he noticed upon one of the towels, one of those "animals" that sometimes infest the uncombed heads. And when the men found that the officers were so very careful of them, as to not let them go near infections of this kind, their confidence and regard for their officers increased amazingly.[11]

In late September a cannon arrived at Camp Tilden. This first visible sign of the arms they were anxiously expecting excited a good deal of interest. On October 1, this cannon was fired several times in anticipation of the arrival of Governor Blair, who, unfortunately, failed to appear.[12]

On Thursday, October 3, the camp again prepared for the Governor. Certain he would arrive this time, the men hurried to the woods, secured the best pole they could find, planted it, and from it unfurled their best flag. The cannon was polished bright, guards placed to keep the walks clear, and the windows filled with ladies to cheer the Governor. The men donned their boots, put on clean collars, combed their hair, and took their places in line. The

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[10] Ibid., Oct. 2, 1861, p. 3.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., Oct. 9, 1861, p. 2.

officers were with their companies. The field officers sat perfectly aligned in their saddles. The train arrived without the Governor.[13]

A sudden shower forced the regiment into the mess hall, where the men were somewhat mollified by the Sturgis Presbyterian Sabbath School teachers and scholars, come to present a sword to Captain Calvin Hood. The regiment gave three cheers for the Captain, three for the Sabbath School, and three for themselves.

> Then Judge Wilson of Hillsdale was called to the stand and made a very eloquent and patriotic speech - spoke highly of the officers and privates of the Regiment, - spoke much in praise of Capt. Hood as a citizen, and said he would make a brave and efficient officer. - Rev. Mr. Fuller was then called to the floor. He had unbounded confidence in the soldiery of Michigan, spoke highly of the Regiment as men of intelligence and integrity . . . , Mr. Dickinson of Hillsdale was called to the floor. He made a stirring patriotic speech - short, pithy and full of zeal.[14]

When Governor Blair finally visited the camp five days later, on October 8, the regiment was put through its drill by Lieutenant Colonel Stoughton, reviewed by Colonel May and the Governor, then formed into a hollow square to hear the Governor speak. He assured them that he had the best interests of the regiment at heart and that he was in no way unfriendly to their efforts to complete their organization. He knew the men were among the finest the State had to offer, and called upon them to do their best when they met the enemy.[15] That evening the Governor and his regimental entourage journeyed to Three Rivers, where he spoke to a large and enthusiastic crowd at Kelsey's Hall.[16]

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[13]Reporter, Oct. 12, 1861, p. 31.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Journal, Oct. 10, 1861, p. 2.

[16]Mercury, Oct. 9, 1861, p. 3.

Early in October the Michigan Southern Railroad announced that on Saturday, October 12, a "Grand Picnic Railroad Excursion" would travel to White Pigeon to see May's Independent Regiment. Several days were spent by the ladies in preparing pies, cakes, and other refreshments. On the day of the great event, sixteen passenger cars arrived from the east and fourteen from the west, so jammed that many excursionists rode on the tops of the coaches. Others came by teams and on foot. Perhaps 5,000 people gathered that day at White Pigeon, the largest number that town had ever seen. Yet on what should have been a joyous occasion, many of the men were unhappy and embarrassed: their uniforms had not arrived, and their civilian clothing was becoming ragged.[17]

The lack of uniforms and equipment was becoming serious. The Eleventh Michigan never had found it difficult in obtaining men, housing, food, or adequate grounds, or anything that could be furnished by the townspeople. The very things the regiment needed to go to war were the things they did not have. Their situation was not unique; it was shared by virtually every regiment, North and South. The country was simply not prepared for a war of such magnitude. By scrounging around most of the states had found enough of the necessary items to equip their first three-months volunteers; now, in the late summer of 1861, the shortage had become acute.

Michigan's procurement problem was like that of other states. As soon as a regiment was organized, the Adjutant General's Office

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[17] Chronicle, Oct. 16, 1861, p. 3.

at Detroit would appeal to the War Department for the necessary equipment. The speed with which this material arrived would depend upon its availability and the efficiency of those in charge. The real miracle was that the material was supplied at all.

At last, on Monday, September 23, Camp Tilden received 800 army blankets.[18] Their distribution on the following day raised the morale of a regiment that was beginning to think it was forgotten.[19] The early fall weather already had touches of cold and these blankets were sorely needed. But 800 were not enough for a regiment fast approaching the 1000 mark, the people of the area sent their own blankets to relieve the shortage.[20]

Happily a letter from the War Department soon announced that full equipment was on the way. For several days afterwards each train arriving at White Pigeon was met by a group of expectant soldiers in search of uniforms.[21] The uniforms had been sent, but they were lost among the supplies piling up at Pittsburgh.[22] When they were finally located, The Reporter wrote:

> The uniforms of the Independent Regiment have at last been dug out of the immense mountain of freight which had accumulated at Pittsburgh by reason of some obstruction of the railroad. We will venture an opinion there never was a gladder set of fellows than these when the long-expected and anxiously looked for cars containing the woolen freight hove in sight.[23]

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[18] Mercury, Sept. 26, 1861, p. 3.

[19] Chronicle, Oct. 2, 1861, p. 3.

[20] Ibid., Oct. 9, 1861, p. 3.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Mercury, Oct. 17, 1861, p. 3.

[23] Reporter, Oct. 26, 1861, p. 3.

When the uniforms came on Saturday, October 19, it was discovered that there were trousers only for the officers, and a reporter wrote "If no more trousers come, the regiment may be very respectably uniformed a la highlander."[24]

The days went by after this premature rejoicing and still no new shipments came. Impatient, Colonel May wrote to General Robertson on November 9, asking him to look into the clothing situation.[25] Robertson's office found that a government contractor at Philadelphia had failed to complete his order. The State then arranged with Messrs. Sykes and Company of Detroit to supply the missing equipment.[26] Towards the end of November, the remaining uniforms, canteens, haversacks, and other items reached Camp Tilden.[27] The uniform was a large overcoat, a dress coat with brass shoulder scales which the men called frying pans, pants, two pairs of drawers, a vest, two shirts, socks, shoes, forage cap, and a tall stiff black felt hat embellished with a plume. It was called " . . . the handsomest and most comfortable uniform yet furnished."[28]

But the soldiers still lacked muskets. Of all necessary items, the State's supply of firearms was perhaps the least adequate.

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[24] Mercury, Oct. 24, 1861, p. 2.

[25] May to Robertson, Nov. 9, 1861, Regimental Service Records.

[26] Chronicle, Nov. 27, 1861, p. 3.

[27] Ibid., Dec. 4, 1861, p. 3.

[28] Reporter, Oct. 26, 1861, p. 3. Borden M. Hicks, "Personal Recollections of the War of the Rebellion," Glimpses of the Nation's Struggle, Sixth Series, Papers Read before the Minnesota Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, January, 1903-1908 (Minneapolis, Minn.: Aug. Davis, 1909), p. 522.

Consequently, General Robertson did not forward muskets to a regiment until he was sure it would soon be leaving for the front. This policy caused consternation at Camp Tilden, where men had been drilling without weapons for three months in exercises requiring weapons.

On November 22 General Robertson ordered that a thousand muskets and accessories be forwarded to the Eleventh Regiment.[29] These arms arrived early on Tuesday, November 26, and were distributed the same morning.[30] The make and model of these guns cannot be determined by the inadequate evidence available. A Branch County history refers to Belgian and other muskets of poor quality.[31] Sergeant Borden Hicks identified them as Belgians.[32] A photograph of Melvin J. Lyon, Company D, which was taken during the early months of the war, shows him with an Austrian musket.[33] It is safe to state that these arms were of foreign make and approximately .69 caliber.

At the war's beginning, both North and South had realized at once that the supply of arms was not adequate, and that domestic production could not supply the demand for many months to come. Both governments sent agents to Europe to buy arms. These men, their pockets stuffed with money, usually found them. Unfortunately, the merchandise they bought was not always the best.

For many years the standard weapon of most world armies had

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[29]Special Orders No. 29, Nov. 22, 1861, General and Special Orders.

[30]Chronicle, Dec. 4, 1861, p. 3.

[31]History of Branch County, Michigan, p. 66.

[32]Hicks, p. 522.

[33]Photograph in the possession of the author.

been a smoothbore musket of approximately .69 caliber. Since all armies were similarly armed, this weapon was considered adequate. During the early 1850's the situation changed when most armies adopted a rifled arm of about .58 caliber. Rifled weapons had been in use before, but their loading had required the use of a patched bullet, a time-consuming process. Then two French captains, Minie and Tamasier, developed a conical bullet which could be loaded easily and quickly in a rifled barrel without the use of a patch.[34] The resulting change-over in weapons left European countries with large numbers of obsolete muskets which they were only too glad to sell to the American agents.

Probably the men of the Eleventh were proud to have their foreign muskets, for they were evidence that they had at last become soldiers. But their first experience with cleaning and firing these weapons must have raised doubts of their effectiveness in battle. For these Belgian and Austrian muskets were heavy, cumbersome, and usually quite dirty from long storage. Some could not even be fired. And as for the ones that could be fired, an Illinois colonel said he could always tell which of his Belgians had fired by noting which men were lying flat on the ground. The colonel added:

> One of these Belgian muskets will kick like a mule, and burst with the greatest facility. Several soldiers in our Illinois regiments have been killed in this way. The bayonet, too, is a novelty - a soft iron affair, apparently designed to coil round

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[34]Claud E. Fuller (comp.), Springfield Muzzle-Loading Shoulder Arms, A Description of the Flint Lock Muskets, Musketoons and Carbines, and the Muskets, Musketoons, Rifles, Carbines, and Special Models From 1795 to 1864 (New York: Francis Bannerman Sons, 1930), p. 113.

the enemy, as it is introduced, thus taking him prisoner.[35] When the Eleventh had more practice with these muskets, opinions were freely expressed. One soldier wrote: "Our guns are miserable things, and our regiment would be disgraced were they to go into action with them. - About one-eighth of the entire number are utterly useless."[36] A sergeant said they feared the gun more than they did the Rebels. The buck and ball load did not always hit the target, but the recoil was sure to strike the man firing the musket.[37] That his was not just the opinion of private soldiers is shown by Captain Bennet's comment:

> The guns with which our regiment is armed are miserable things - absolutely good for nothing. The men have no confidence in them, and if called into action would be loth to stand fire where they knew there was not an even show. For my part, I hope we shall not go into battle until we get better arms.[38]

With a soldier's training at Camp Tilden came his first realization of the responsibilities of army life. At some time or other most men wished they had never enlisted. Most of them complained and stayed on. But a few cut their military ties. In its three year history there were thirty-nine desertions in the Eleventh, twenty-seven of which occurred before they left Michigan.[39] The first to leave were Isaac Holland and Orrin Simmons, both of Company

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[35]Frank Moore (ed.), The Civil War in Song and Story, 1860-1865 (New York: P. F. Collier, 1889), p. 137.

[36]Journal, Jan.16, 1862, p. 2.

[37]Hicks, p. 522. The buck and ball load was the normal charge of powder, and the normal round lead ball sized to the diameter of the bore, topped by three lead balls sized about half the diameter of the bore. The intention was to increase destructive power.

[38]Journal, Feb. 6, 1862, p. 2.

[39]Record, Eleventh Michigan Infantry, passim.