"No Heroism Can Avail"

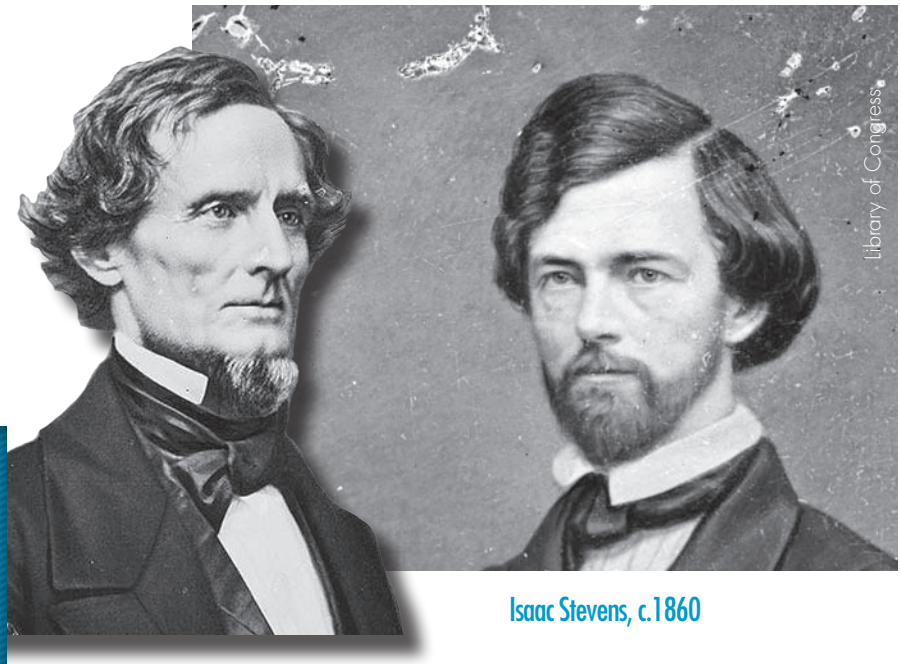
Andrew A. Humphreys and His Pennsylvania Division at Antietam and Fredericksburg

By Matthew T. Pearcy

In the harried days after his inauguration on 18 February 1861, the new Confederate president, Jefferson Davis, made "quiet overtures" to "some of the best officers in the U.S. service."[1] Among these was a senior captain in the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers, Andrew A. Humphreys, a fifty-year-old Pennsylvanian and leading scientist and engineer. He and Davis enjoyed a long association going back to their cadet years at West Point and had worked together substantially in the previous decade. As secretary of war in 1854, Davis pulled Humphreys from important duties for the Topographical Bureau to work closely with him as chief of the Office of Pacific Railroad Explorations and Surveys, a grand Army-led effort to study the American West and make it more accessible. Their "warm personal and official friendship" continued after Davis returned to the Senate in 1857, and they served together as late as December 1860 on a six-member commission headed by Davis reviewing the curriculum, disciplinary system, and organizational structure of the U.S. Military Academy.[2] Two months later, with seven states already in secession and war on the horizon, Davis secreted a list of names to an abettor in Washington, D.C. He was Louis T. Wigfall, a U.S. senator from Texas and leading fire-eater who remained for a time in the "capital as a self-appointed 'rear guard' " to spy on federal activities and work his mischief.[3] He moved quickly to make the necessary contacts in the War Department and saw Humphreys on 24 February. Following what could only have been an uncomfortable encounter, Wigfall had his answer. He reported back to Davis the next day, "Capt. Humphreys can not under any circumstances join us."[4]

After quietly turning his back on untold opportunities in a new Southern confederacy, Humphreys found few immediate prospects in his own army. He closed his Western exploration and survey office in July 1861, just days before the Union disaster at Bull Run, but serious illness made it impossible for him to take the field.[5] He resorted to a system of physical training to make himself fit for active service and first sought field duty in October, but without success. Though highly regarded in the old Army, he had built his reputation as a scientist and, after many years in Washington, was regarded as something of a desk soldier, a perception only reinforced by his long history of frail health and his lack of recent combat experience. Baseless but persistent rumors that Humphreys was "lukewarm in his loyalty" were buttressed when his only surviving brother, Joshua, threw in his

He wanted a division, and Porter apparently took the hint.



Library of Congress

Library of Congress

Isaac Stevens, c.1860

Jefferson Davis, c. 1859

lot with the rebel navy.[6] All of these factors, combined with the hurried and sometimes haphazard method of selecting the first Civil War generals, condemned Humphreys to watch from behind while less worthy men moved to the front rank.

Amid heightened security concerns in 1861, the Army assigned a number of officers to the protection of public buildings in Washington, D.C., and Humphreys, probably at the request of his good friend, the eminent scientist Joseph Henry, took charge of the turreted Smithsonian castle.[7] He remained at that post late into the year but continued to seek field duty, even requesting affidavits of support from well-connected friends. Among these was the dashing Brig. Gen. Isaac I. Stevens, a fellow West Pointer and engineer, who had served as governor of Washington Territory and then as its delegate to Congress and was now a brigade commander in the Army of the Potomac. While territorial governor, Stevens had commanded one of a handful of expeditions for the Pacific railroad surveys, and in 1860 he had served as campaign manager for one of Abraham Lincoln's electoral opponents, Vice President John C. Breckenridge.[8] The well-regarded Stevens was only too happy to help. "I have dropped a line to the President [Abraham Lincoln] in your behalf," he wrote to Humphreys in October 1861, "speaking of you in the way a friend speaks of a friend of whose abilities . . . he has the high appreciation I have of yours."[9]

Reaching across the aisle, Humphreys also tapped West Point classmate Brig. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis (class of 1831), a former Republican congressman from Iowa with presumably better ties to the White House. Curtis wrote directly to the War Department, also in October, recommending Humphreys for service in the field.[10] While undoubtedly helpful, these overtures from volunteer generals failed to dispel the belief "universally held here in Washington," as Humphreys wrote many years later, "that I would join the South, an expectation that the newcomers into power were duly informed of and acted on, [which] excluded me from everything and caused me to be looked on with distrust."[11]

Opportunity came in March 1862 when Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, commanding the Army of the Potomac, appointed Humphreys to his personal staff as additional aide de camp with the rank of colonel and as the chief topographical engineer of his army. It was an act of good faith and solid judgment on McClellan's part, and Humphreys did not disappoint. In his new capacity, he accompanied the general on the Peninsula Campaign from April through July 1862 and served ably, conducting careful field reconnaissances and working with both the Topographical Bureau in Washington and the Coast Survey to supply maps and other intelligence for the advancing Union army. It was difficult and at times dangerous work but also mostly thankless. By July, Humphreys had wearied of staff duty. From Harrison's Landing on the James River, he wrote to the new secretary of war, Edwin M. Stanton, to again solicit a command of troops, but the political climate back in Washington was volatile. McClellan's stock was down after the failed campaign, and his political enemies were moving against him. Lincoln placed his hopes briefly in Maj. Gen. John Pope, and McClellan found himself in eclipse.[12]

After returning to the capital in mid-August, Humphreys met with Stanton to press his case. Always on the lookout for Army officers of dubious loyalty to the administration, Stanton accused Humphreys of being a "McClellan man." Humphreys responded firmly (if inelegantly), "Mr. Secretary, I am no man's man."[13] The meeting adjourned, apparently in his favor, and he then promptly escaped the city, having secured, as he later wrote to a friend, "four or five days of perfect quiet with my family at our old place near Philadelphia [Pont Reading]." There he enjoyed the company of his wife, Rebecca, and his two young daughters, Letitia and Becky, and was struck by the "luxury and ease of [civilian] life" compared to that in the field. Humphreys hurried back to the capital but arrived ill. He lay in a Washington sickbed on Saturday, 30 August, "without hearing a sound or echo of the many shots that were being fired at [the Battle of Second] Bull Run."[14] That bloody exchange went to the Confederates as a capstone to a brilliant six-week campaign in which General Robert E. Lee followed his successful defense of Richmond by moving north toward Washington, D.C., and crushing Pope and his short-lived Army of Virginia. The gallant General Stevens was among the dead, shot through the temple while leading a charge at Chantilly. Lee's next move into Maryland set the stage for the great clash at Antietam.

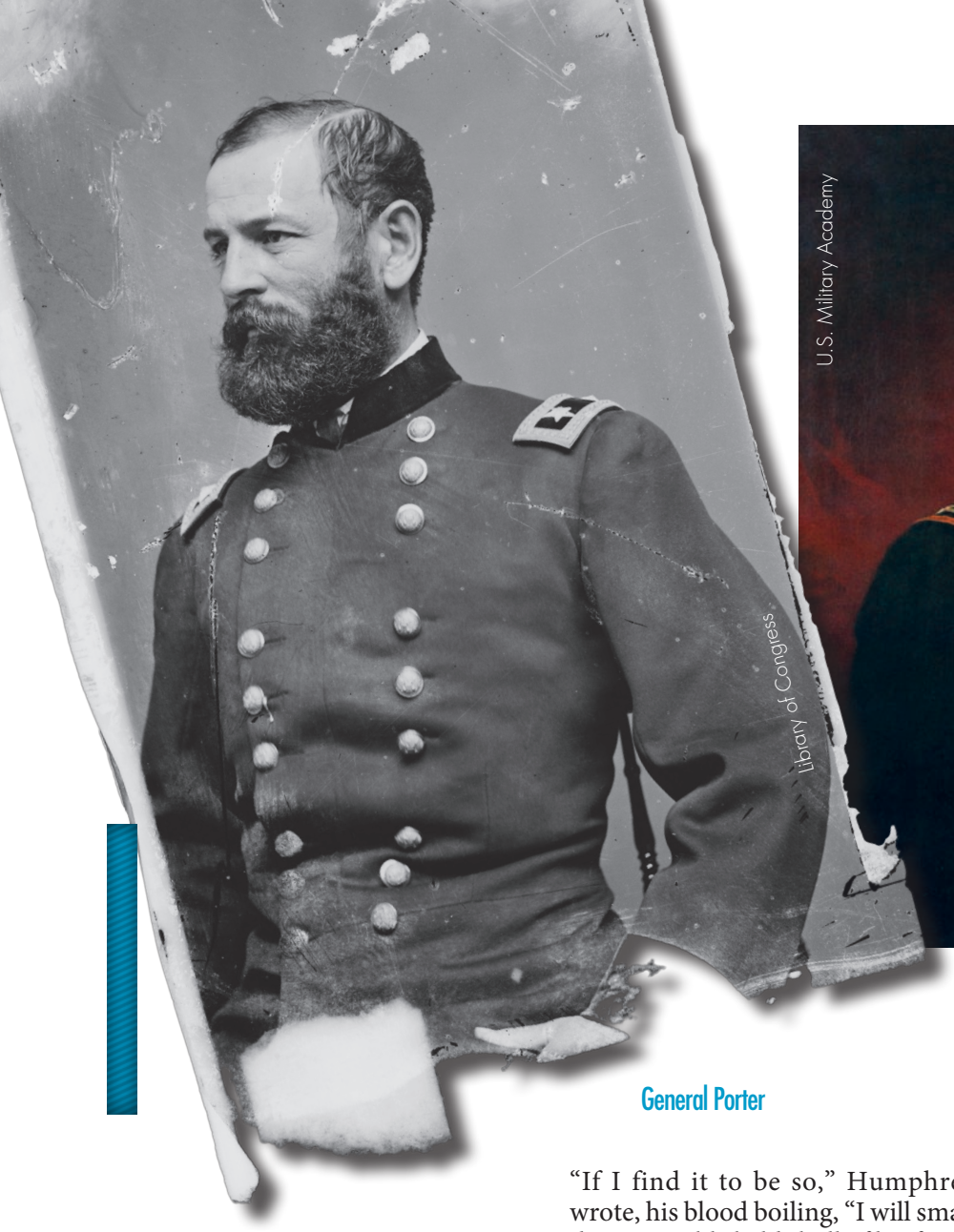
On the Monday following his return to Washington, Humphreys received orders issued more than a week earlier to report to Brig. Gen. Silas Casey, commander of the Provisional Brigade in Washington and the officer responsible for organizing, disciplining, and training new recruits. Humphreys found the old headquarters "dull enough and dispirited" as word spread of the disastrous defeat at Manassas, but there was opportunity in that news as well. Casey had been tasked with organizing several new divisions for immediate dispatch to the front, and Lee's invasion of the North gave the assignment greater urgency. One of those divisions was meant for the Fifth Corps, Army of the Potomac, commanded by Maj. Gen. Fitz-John Porter, and Humphreys had met with him in Washington that first week of September. The two men were acquainted from the Peninsula Campaign and friendly, and Porter asked him to assume command of a new brigade of volunteers. Humphreys balked with an explanation that he was "ready for anything in an emergency" but that a "brigade command was a small affair." He wanted a division, and Porter apparently took the hint. Several days later on Friday afternoon, 12 September, Casey "suddenly asked" Humphreys if he would "take command of a division of Pennsylvania troops" already en route to Washington and under orders to "march immediately to join General McClellan," who had momentarily regained favor with the administration and was pursuing Lee and the Confederate Army into Maryland. The new command was the Third Division, Fifth Corps, under Porter. Humphreys accepted on the spot.[15]

The rest of that day and the next passed in a flurry of activity. The new regiments were scheduled to arrive that afternoon, and Humphreys had orders to "join them and continue the march." Instead, several were delayed by as much as twelve hours with the last arriving well after midnight. The regiments congregated at the foot of Meridian Hill, then dominated by Columbian College (later George Washington University), where Humphreys—still without a staff—conducted a quick inspection. He was exasperated by what he saw. They were without rations, overloaded with personal property, some without ammunition, and five of the regiments "with such defective arms that the men had no confidence in them whatever." The division was, as Humphreys noted, "miserably deficient in everything and exhausted with want of rest." Thus he found it "utterly impossible to move on Saturday morning" and turned his immediate attention to enlisting a staff, securing provisions, and exchanging thousands of unserviceable Austrian muskets for Springfield rifles.[16]

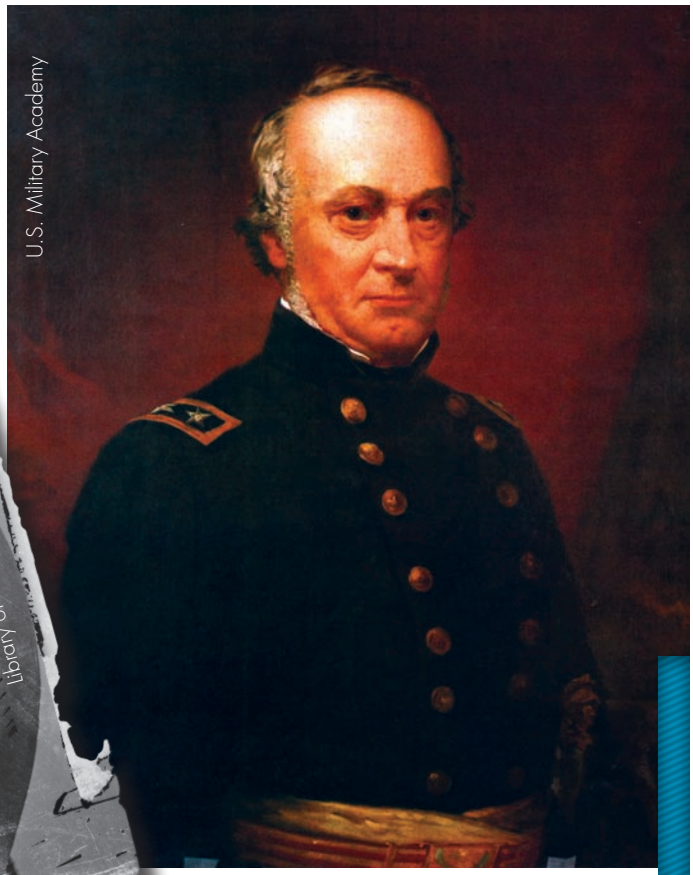
Porter left the city early that morning with the older divisions of his Fifth Corps, but Humphreys kept him advised throughout the day and secured "cordial approval" for the necessary delays. He also sent an update to Army headquarters through Brig. Gen. George W. Cullum, a West Point engineer and chief of staff to Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck, the Army's

The Humphreys family home, Pont Reading, in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, June 2006

Matthew T. Pearcy



General Porter



General Halleck, portrait by Jacob H. Lazarus

commanding general. As the day grew long, Humphreys resigned himself to an additional night in the capital. He sent a second note to Cullum explaining the circumstances and indicating that his division "would march at daylight the next morning." This communication prompted an astonishing response from Halleck—who seems to have been deeply suspicious of Humphreys—threatening the new division commander with arrest for "disobedience of orders" unless he "immediately leaves to take command of his division in the field."[17] Humphreys was furious. Though he had no confidence in Halleck and shared in a popular distain for the general in chief, Humphreys turned the brunt of his anger on fellow engineer Cullum, a potential rival whom he suspected of double-dealing. "If I find it to be so," Humphreys wrote, his blood boiling, "I will smash that miserable bald skull of his for the dastardly attempt to injure one who he may think stands something in his way in Corps [of Engineers] matters." He made one last review of his troops late Saturday afternoon to see if it might be possible to march that night but "found it would be folly."[18]

Freshly outfitted and rested, the green division set out for Frederick, Maryland, on the morning of Sunday, 14 September, as the main body of the Army of the Potomac clashed with Confederate forces in the rugged passes of South Mountain. News of the fight reached Humphreys as he pushed his troops north under difficult conditions, with "part of the way exceedingly dusty and the sun very hot," but he kept his men "well together and pretty fresh." Marching fourteen miles a day, the division reached the Monocacy River just shy of Frederick on Wednesday morning, where it received orders from Washington to halt and await further instructions. In the previous days, Lee had retired from the mountain passes toward Sharpsburg and secured the rolling hills west of Antietam Creek while McClellan and practically the whole Army of the Potomac had positioned itself along the opposite bank. Humphreys chafed at the delay amid the distant sound of cannonading emanating from the clash of the two armies that had now begun. As the blood spilled at Antietam on what would be the bloodiest day of the war, Humphreys, still without instructions, scouted the area around Frederick and prepared his men for a long march. The first orders arrived from Washington late in the afternoon instructing Humphreys to rejoin the main army. He and his men advanced five miles before sunset and were about to make camp when a second dispatch arrived, this

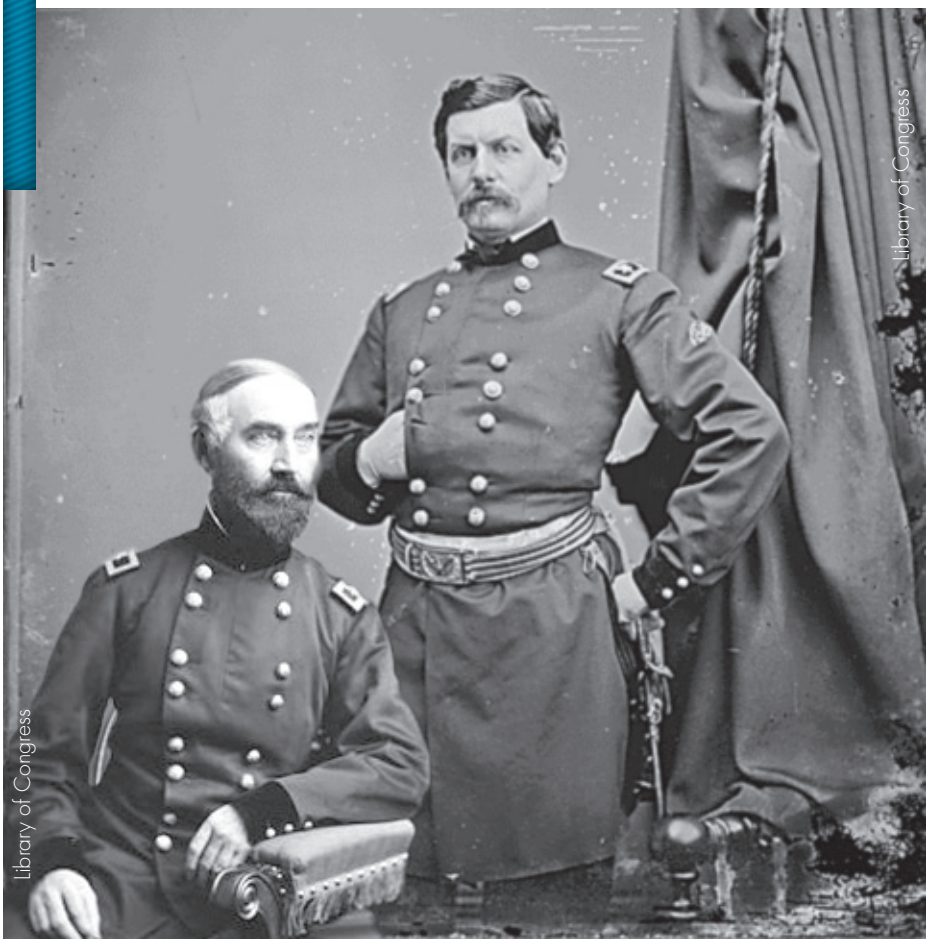
THOUGHT IT "HIGHLY PROBABLE THAT I SHOULD BE KILLED."

one from Porter urging Humphreys to "hurry up with all haste . . . force your march."[19] The much-maligned Army of the Potomac had checked the Confederate invasion and blunted the threat to Washington, D.C., but McClellan believed that a decisive victory might still be had. He planned a morning assault and wanted Humphreys' 7,000 troops on the field.[20]

Restless for a fight, Humphreys and his men pushed through the night in long sinewy lines of dust and humanity. The road they took carried them west from Frederick across the misty battlefields of South Mountain and through the hushed villages of Boonsboro and Keedysville, all congested with the dead and wounded of both armies. The sky was overcast and the night "pitch black," and the men stumbled along in their exhaustion through a choking dust several inches deep. Humphreys was conspicuous, riding up and down the column on his thoroughbred (named after a favorite uncle, "Charley") and pressing his heavy-lidded men forward at a killing pace. Nearly a thousand fell out along the way while others pushed on at the price of injury. Amid the sounds of the great column, of harness and hoof and shuffling feet, his thoughts turned to the coming battle. His men had only just been mustered into service and would be skittish in battle. They might break under fire. He would lead from the front but thought it "highly probable," as he wrote many years later, "that I should be killed." Even so, he promised himself that he would "stick to the [battle] ground if all the others did leave it. . . . Nothing should make me quit the field."[21]

As the division approached Sharpsburg just before dawn, Humphreys "thought the firing would begin" and stopped the column for an hour's rest. In an instant, his men were "on the ground covered with their blankets." Humphreys slept with his back against a rock, his son Harry by his side, and awoke at first light. He rose stiffly to his feet, quickly roused his men, and recommenced the march. The division crossed the Antietam at 0730 and fell in with the rest of the Fifth Corps along the center of the Union lines. None of the men who participated in that hurried march would ever forget it. Struggling against fatigue, they drew up in rank, loaded their weapons, and stood at arms, "supposing themselves about to pass their first ordeal of battle." But the excessively cautious McClellan tarried, and two hours later the men stood down and stacked their rifles. Preparations for an assault consumed the whole day, but it was all for nothing. That night under cover of darkness, Lee and his grey ranks fell back across the Potomac into Virginia. McClellan declined to pursue. The battle was over.[22]

General Cullum (seated), c. 1862, and General McClellan, 1861



Library of Congress

Library of Congress

They were often, however, an unwieldy bunch—"perfectly green"

Bloody Antietam saw two great armies badly mauled on the deadliest day in American military history. Lee staggered from the battlefield, signaling his defeat, but, for McClellan, Antietam was no triumph. A complete victory ending in the destruction of the Rebel army had slipped from his grasp and, with it, any prospect of ending the war on generous terms. The lost opportunity promised months if not years of continued fighting and played directly into the hands of his political foes in Washington. As powerful Radical Republicans railed against "Little Mac," President Lincoln issued his preliminary emancipation proclamation. That humble edict of 22 September 1862, remade the war into a moral crusade to abolish slavery, a transformation heartily opposed by McClellan and many of his fellow West Pointers, including Porter and Humphreys. Theirs was no radical tradition. Most regular officers were solid Democrats and conservative on issues of race and slavery, and many, like Humphreys, had quietly opposed Lincoln in 1860.[23] They fought for union, not slavery, but had been outmaneuvered. A wave of abolitionist sentiment, soon to break, would wash away both McClellan and Porter and strip Humphreys of his most powerful allies in the Army of the Potomac. Merit alone would see him through.

Humphreys and his men spent the next six weeks in camp near Sharpsburg where he began the arduous duty of training and indoctrinating his raw recruits. Volunteer soldiers constituted the great mass of the Union army, and their services were indispensible to the struggle.[24] They were often, however, an unwieldy bunch—"perfectly green," as Humphreys described his own division, "and scarcely able to do anything."[25] A grim determination had carried his men to Sharpsburg, but it fell to the division commander to make soldiers out of this ragtag bunch of Pennsylvania farm boys, store clerks, coal miners, and assorted ruffians. And it would have to be done quickly as six of the eight regiments were short-timers, nine-month volunteers recruited in late summer 1862. They hailed from across the Keystone State and most passed through Camp Curtin (named for the popular Pennsylvania Governor Andrew G. Curtin) near Harrisburg where they were outfitted and organized into regiments. For the vast majority, that constituted the extent of their military experience, and they would not be easily tamed. Citizen-soldiers considered it degrading to give immediate and unquestioned obedience to orders, and the whole concept of taut impersonal discipline was foreign to them.[26]

Volunteer officers shared many of the strengths and deficiencies of the enlisted men. They could be brash, idealistic, and imperfectly disciplined. Company and regimental officers were generally elected by the soldiers or appointed by the state governor for political reasons, and most either were or wanted to be personally liked by the men they commanded. Fraternization was a common problem.[27] Brig. Gen. Erastus B. Tyler, a fur businessman from Ohio, commanded the first of two brigades (encompassing the 91st, 126th, 129th, and 134th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiments). A strong-willed, competent officer, he joined the war at its outset and secured election to the colonelcy of the 7th Ohio Infantry Regiment, felling a future president, James A. Garfield, in the regimental contest. Tyler fought in the Shenandoah Valley campaign but without distinction. He was an avowed teetotaler and so something of an outsider at division headquarters.[28] Col. Peter H. Allabach, a burly Mexican War veteran and a congenial fellow, commanded the second brigade (123d, 131st, 133d, 155th Regiments). Humphreys liked him. Other notables were Col. Jacob G. Frick, also a veteran of Mexico and a loud man of real courage; and Lt. Col. William H. Armstrong, a talented young lawyer and stalwart Republican. The latter two served in the 129th under Tyler.

For his personal staff, Humphreys retained two from the Peninsula Campaign—his twenty-two-year-old eldest son, Henry "Harry" Humphreys, and Lt. Col. Carswell McClellan, an engineer graduate of Williams College and, notably, first cousin of the commanding general (though Humphreys was unaware of the fact when he brought him on). Of middling height, dark hair, and haunting eyes, McClellan served Humphreys with pluck and fidelity and, like his brigadier, saw a younger brother join the rebellion.[29] Harry was eager and smart, an inch or two taller than his father and fiercely loyal to him. He attended high school at the elite Phillips Academy at Andover, a traditional feeder school for Yale College, but he looked instead to West Point. With his father's help, Harry secured an at-large appointment in 1857 that would have placed him in the undistinguished class of 1861

General Humphreys and his staff, September 1863, photo by Timothy O'Sullivan

alongside George Armstrong Custer; but for reasons unknown, he accepted the appointment but did not attend, enrolling instead at the Yale Scientific School (later the Sheffield Scientific School) for instruction in science and engineering. The Civil War interrupted his education, and he joined his father at Yorktown as a civilian assistant in the Topographical Engineers Department. Now in a combat role, Brig. Gen. Humphreys wanted a commission for his son and successfully lobbied Governor Curtin, who in the days after Antietam appointed Harry a first lieutenant in the 112th Pennsylvania Volunteers. The young Humphreys immediately left the regiment to serve with his father, rarely leaving his side.[30]

The weeks ahead were dedicated to training. The division had a loose-jointed quality about it, but Humphreys was nevertheless impressed with his volunteers. He wrote a friend that "the material is excellent, some of it splendid, much of it loutish, but all are, apparently, desirous of learning." He pushed his men as he pushed himself and carried the entire enterprise on his sturdy shoulders. As he wrote a friend, "The labor is immense. Everything has to be taught and must all emanate from one person—every little detail even to the manner in which non-commissioned officers teach and make their squads keep themselves, clean their arms, accoutrements, etc. It keeps me so closely occupied that I have time for nothing else."

Training included daily recitations by the officers in tactics and drill and four hours each day of squad or company and battalion drill. By the end of September, Humphreys reported that the men of his division could "go through the most important battalion drills pretty well, not with precision or elegance, but without confusion."[31] The first test of their martial bearing came at the beginning of October 1862, when the president paid an unexpected visit to the Army of the Potomac at Sharpsburg.

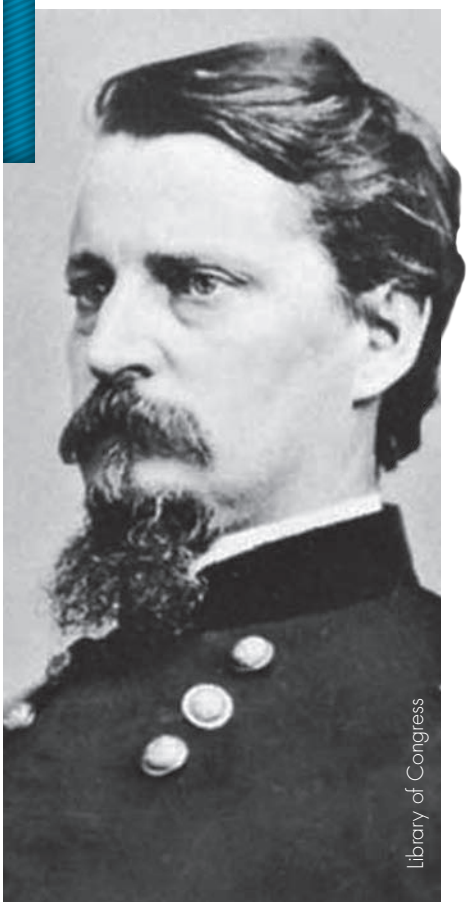
Lincoln wanted the army to move and came to prod it along. He spent four days in camp, quietly accessing its condition and meeting with commanders. He reviewed the Fifth Corps on 3 October 1862, and Hum-

President Lincoln, in top hat, meets with General McClellan, sixth from left, and a group of officers at Antietam, 3 October 1862; also present are Generals Humphreys and Porter, second and fifth from right, respectively; photo by Alexander Gardner.

phreys recognized in his own ordered ranks the "good effects" of rigorous training. That same day, McClellan and fifteen members of his staff were photographed with the president, who towered over all others. His famous stovepipe hat only added to the perception. Behind and a couple of feet to his left stood the bearded Porter and to his left and a step back, Humphreys, sword at his side and immaculately dressed but small and nearly lost in the shadows—not yet a recognizable figure in the war effort.

The division continued to improve into October, but many of the rank and file and not a few of the officers bristled under the harsh discipline. Humphreys was the lone West Pointer in the division. He was a stickler for detail and stubborn as a mule. He was also a firm disciplinarian. While charming on a personal level, he cared little as yet for the affection of his troops and understood to his very core that morale depended on control, discipline, and punishment. This precept informed his leadership, and from it he would not bend; he would not deviate; he would not excuse. When his men fell short of expectations, as they inevitably would, Humphreys relied on the court-martial as the most visible instrument at his disposal for enforcing order and maintaining the rank structure.[32] One early case stood out. It involved seventeen-year-old Pvt. Robert Stevens of the 155th Pennsylvania who fell asleep on guard duty on the night of 23 September. It was a capital offense. The volunteer officer who discovered the boy took pity on him and determined not to prefer serious charges, but word got back to Humphreys who was "greatly incensed." He ordered a court-martial. A conviction seemed beyond all doubt when Colonel Armstrong interceded on the boy's behalf and put up a suitable and ultimately successful defense based on an imperfect identification of the accused. That officer probably saved the boy's life, but the episode soured relations between Humphreys and several of his key men and presaged a later and very serious falling out.[33]

General Hancock, c. 1863



Library of Congress

Half of the division saw its first action in mid-October. Following the retreat from Antietam, Lee needed time to refit and reinforce his battered army, and he sought refuge in the familiar Shenandoah Valley. From there, the Rebels recovered strength and spirit, and the flamboyant Confederate cavalryman Maj. Gen. James E. B. Stuart started anew with his exploits. Tasked with gathering intelligence and collecting supplies, he set out with 1,800 cavalrymen on 10 October 1862, and splashed across the Potomac near Williamsport on a raid that carried him as far north as Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, and fully around the encamped Union army.[34] Stuart returned two days later with food, clothing, and 1,200 horses liberated from angry Pennsylvania farmers. It was a humiliating episode that left McClellan looking foolish and touched a nerve among the men of Humphreys' division, particularly those of the 126th Pennsylvania who hailed mostly from the Chambersburg area. One private from the regiment wrote home that the men "are all out of humor and are discouraged that we have to be here and let the Rebels plunder our homes."[35] Lincoln, already sorely disappointed with McClellan, challenged him to engage the Rebel army. The recalcitrant general answered with incursions of his own into Virginia and tapped for the job two of his newest division commanders—General Humphreys and Brig. Gen. Winfield S. Hancock, a fellow West Pointer and Pennsylvanian and a rising star in the Army of the Potomac.[36]

The two led separate but coordinated reconnaissances. Hancock took his First Division of the Second Corps and 1,500 additional men across the Potomac River at Harpers Ferry and followed the Shenandoah Valley as far as Charles Town. He met little resistance and carefully reconnoitered the area. Humphreys took command of a larger body that included 500 cavalry; six pieces of artillery under Lt. Charles E. Hazlett, 5th U.S. Artillery; and 6,000 infantry drawn from each division of the Fifth Corps and a regular U.S. Army infantry brigade. The whole column crossed the Potomac at Shepherdstown under the watchful eye of Confederate pickets and soon clashed with lead elements of Stuart's cavalry brigade. A series of skirmishes saw the Rebels driven "from position to position" towards Kearneysville, six miles to the south, and the long blue line halted for the night just short of town. The next day, the bulk of the force moved through Kearneysville where it engaged a large Confederate cavalry force on its front. Humphreys advanced with both regulars and volunteers, forced the Rebels back, and pushed on four more miles to Leetown. With the scouting mission accomplished by early evening, he and his men returned to Shepherdstown under scattered musket and artillery fire. As they approached the river, two Confederate cavalry regiments charged the rear of the column and were neatly repulsed by a single volley fired at forty yards, "emptying many saddles."[37] The river crossing occurred without incident. Back in camp before

Officers embraced, and tears flowed. Alcohol poured freely

midnight on 17 October, Humphreys reported that Confederate cavalry occupied Martinsburg and that the left wing of the Confederate army rested on Bunker Hill, several miles west of Kearneysville. This, his first combat command in a quarter-century, went off without a hitch, and Porter was effusive in praise of his new division commander.[38] The episode also fostered a close friendship between Humphreys and Hancock that "grew stronger and stronger throughout the war" and after.[39]

General Burnside

Library of Congress

News that Lee and his army were still in striking distance only fed the mounting frustration in Washington, and Lincoln again pressed for action. McClellan relented in the last days of October, pulling up stakes and nudging his army across the Potomac towards Richmond. Lee responded by dispatching Lt. Gen. James Longstreet, and his single wing easily outpaced the lumbering Union army and positioned itself across McClellan's line of advance at Culpeper, Virginia, shielding the northern army from its objective—the Confederate capital. News of the setback reached Washington on 4 November 1862, and Lincoln fired McClellan the next day.[40] His replacement was the reluctant Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside, commander of the Ninth Corps and a favorite of the Republican Congress. Better known for his muttonchop whiskers than his martial abilities, he was a man of action but perhaps too eager to please. With the transition under way, the opposing armies settled on either side of the Rappahannock—the Army of the Potomac near Warrenton and the Confederates across the river at Culpeper.[41]

The sacking of McClellan staggered the Army of the Potomac, and the days that followed saw an outpouring of raw emotion for the man who had fashioned the army and shared in its many trials. The general bid farewell to his staff on the evening of Sunday, 9 November, greeting the men personally and sharing in their expressed dismay and frustration. Officers embraced, and tears flowed. Alcohol poured freely, and "in their cups men spoke their minds." A few uttered serious indiscretions, and Humphreys—probably drunk at the time —was chief among the transgressors. "By God," he proclaimed to a not

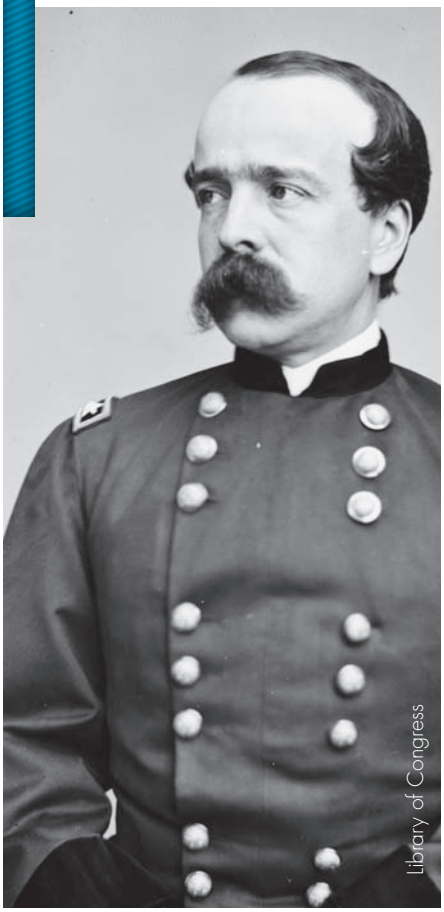
General McClellan, accompanied by General Burnside, taking leave of the Army of the Potomac, 10 November 1862, drawing by Alfred R. Waud

Library of Congress

altogether friendly audience, "I wish someone would ask the Army to follow [General McClellan] to Washington and hurl the whole damned pack into the Potomac, and place General McClellan at the head of affairs."[42] These "harmless" expressions of regret were, according to his son, "enlarged upon by his enemies in the division," particularly Frick and Tyler, and later "made to militate against him in his promotion to higher rank" after Fredericksburg.[43] Humphreys conceded many years later that "my greatest misfortune was my association with McClellan."[44]

Amid the uproar, Burnside first set about consolidating his command and devising a plan of action. Having already conferred with McClellan about his plans, the new commander determined to advance on Richmond, "the taking of which . . . should be the great object of the campaign." The army would march southeast along the Rappahannock River to Fredericksburg, a small town of some five thousand people near the head of navigation that would serve as a staging ground for the advance south. In a fateful move, Burnside ordered the army to keep to the north bank of the Rappahannock and cross en masse at Fredericksburg. For that he would need pontoon boats and lots of them. Halleck would make the necessary arrangements. Burnside also reorganized the army. Distrustful of his own abilities to command so unwieldy a force, he grouped the six Union corps into three "grand divisions" and promoted several of his senior commanders. The Left Grand Division, consisting of the First and Sixth Corps, went to the highly regarded Maj. Gen. William B. Franklin, a fellow topographical engineer captain before the war and someone Humphreys knew and liked. The Second and Ninth Corps constituted the Right Grand Division, which fell under the sixty-five-year-old Maj. Gen. Edwin V. Sumner. During the reorganization, Halleck ordered the arrest and court-martial of General Porter, accused of disobedience at Second Bull Run. Maj. Gen. Joseph "Fighting Joe" Hooker took his place but just days later ascended to the head of the Center Grand Division, composed of the Third Corps as well as the Fifth, including Humphreys' raw division. Command of the Fifth Corps devolved to senior division commander Maj. Gen. Daniel Butterfield, a duplicitous figure Humphreys would later characterize as "false, treacherous, and cowardly."[45]

General Butterfield



Library of Congress

The pace of things picked up considerably under Burnside. Within days, the massive Army of the Potomac with more than 120,000 men began moving out of Warrenton, pushing Lee's army back toward Culpeper, and then making quickly for Fredericksburg. Lead elements covered the nearly forty miles in two days and began situating themselves opposite the city before Lee could reinforce it. The Fifth Corps was the last to leave Warrenton, breaking camp in the predawn hours of 17 November. Heavily burdened as they marched through the nearly deserted town, the blue ranks drew the attention of "two indignant females well up in years, who scolded . . . the 'Yankee troops' . . . as they passed."[46] Late the next day, a cold winter rain soaked all to the bone and transformed the country roads into quagmires. The mud was knee deep in places. Humphreys and his division trudged along with stops at Spotted Tavern and Hartwood Church before reporting to camp near Potomac Creek. The army under Burnside had exceeded all expectations, placed itself ahead of Lee on a strategic location en route to Richmond, and found Fredericksburg exposed and vulnerable. But there was a problem. As a result of some bureaucratic bungling in Washington (with Halleck mostly at fault), the pontoons had not arrived, and the narrow but now swollen Rappahannock separated Burnside from his objective. He could only wait, his progress arrested, and watch as Lee gathered together his scattered forces and occupied the high ground beyond the city. Soon, lonely pickets of blue and grey stretched for four miles on opposite banks of the river.[47] The element of surprise was lost, and Burnside abandoned any pretext of it. He waited several days for the pontoons and surrendered another two weeks to planning, establishing reliable supply bases on a nearby bend of the Potomac River, and rebuilding fractured railroad lines.

During this period of inaction, Humphreys and his men settled into "thick pine woods" so dense they could scarcely find room to stack arms. Spirits were high, but the men felt the weight of the coming battle and turned their nervous energy to transforming the grounds into a "fine camp and a good parade ground." As a winter chill moved into Virginia, they hid away in their "dog tents," and a few of the more industrious threw up pine huts with fireplaces, though, as one officer later explained, "many hapless fellows had their 'homes' destroyed by fire." The days passed in rest and routine. The men wrote long letters home and crawled from their shelters for drill and occasional picket duty. On Thanksgiving Day, the division heard an "eloquent discourse" from Col. John B. Clark, a former chaplain and commander of the 123d Pennsylvania.[48] Four inches of snow fell on 6 and 7 December, and the men suffered accordingly. At least two froze to death.

Humphreys used this time to outfit his division, fill out his staff, and rid

ONE OF THE LOUDEST SWEARERS THAT I EVER KNEW

himself of incompetent officers. He removed one for "mental dullness and physical ineptness."[49] He also picked up on his correspondence. He had letters from old friends and new, those seeking favors, and those with advice. A note from one of his brigade commanders, General Tyler, counseled headquarters to "procure at once a supply of onions . . . which are said to be an excellent remedy for the prevailing diseases in the brigade."[50] Another—written, apparently, by the mother of a soldier in the division—admonished Humphreys for his salty tongue.

> Hon. Sir, you must excuse the liberty I have taken in address you these few lines. You are a stranger to me but I heard you spoken of as a gentleman but a profane swarer. Now, I am going to give you a lecture, and you must bare with me. God is just and will not let the guilty go free. It's not your own Damnation but youre example to others. Pause and think to Curse the god that made you to whome you are indeted for every breath you draw. I must say no man is fit to command that can't command his own toung.[51]

The thrashing continued for several pages. Humphreys' meek response came in the third person: "General Humphreys it is true swears at his fellow men—never at the Almighty—such an act of impiety is as abhorrent to his soul as to that of the most pious Christian, even when carried away by an irresistible burst of passion." He never did forswear the colorful habit, and his reputation only grew. Many years later a gifted chronicler of the war, Charles A. Dana, called Humphreys "one of the loudest swearers that I ever knew" and put him in rarified air: "The men of distinguished and brilliant profanity in the war were General Sherman and General Humphreys—I could not mention any others that could be classed with them."[52]

The great movement began on Thursday, 11 December 1862, when just after 0300 the dangerous task of throwing the pontoon bridges was initiated. Confederate sharpshooters across the river harassed the engineers, dropping a dozen or more before a massive Union cannonade hurled shot and shell into the historic city. The bombardment continued for several hours to sweep the rifle-pits along the

Union troops cross the Rappahannock River to assault Fredericksburg, 11 December 1862, print by L. Prang & Company

Library of Congress

Union Army engineers build a pontoon bridge across the Rappahannock River into Fredericksburg, 11 December 1862, drawing by Alfred R. Waud

river and drive the Confederate rifles from riverfront homes and buildings. The effect was more general. The explosions kindled fires throughout the city, and these burned furiously. Dense clouds of smoke hung in the air, but the sharpshooters persisted with their deadly work. To the sound of artillery and occasional musket fire, the Fifth Corps broke camp and, moving in three separate columns, advanced towards the river. The march was irksome, and the crisp morning air stringent with the smell of gunpowder and burnt pine. Early in the afternoon, the bridges still incomplete, Burnside sent out infantry—placed on boats and ferried across the river—to drive the enemy from its bunkers. That bravely done, the frustrated engineers made short work of the bridges.[53] All that day and the next two, long blue columns marched across gently rocking pontoons into the city.

Humphreys' division, held in reserve with the center wing, would be among the last to cross, and it closed on the river as troops in advance entered the city. On the eve of battle, the division bivouacked in uncomfortable circumstances near the Phillips House, where Burnside would establish his headquarters. The weather was "exquisite," according to Humphreys; but the melting snow "left six inches of mud in its place," and the men were in it "all day and lay down in it all night."[54] They were not permitted fires and subsisted on the food in their haversacks. A few men took ill. The following morning, Saturday, 13 December 1862, was cold and frosty, and a dense fog obscured everything but the opening salvos of a great battle. It had begun.

The Battle of Fredericksburg unfolded in a natural amphitheater bounded on the east by the Rappahannock River and on the west by a string of hills heavily fortified by Lee. The Union plan called for a flanking movement against the Confederate right and a demonstration against Marye's Heights, the anchor of the Rebel left and the heart of its defenses. For the luckless Army of the Potomac, things went badly from the start. Confusing and evasive orders from headquarters left Franklin perplexed as to who was leading the main attack, and his efforts that morning were tentative and uncertain. He began the assault against the Rebel flank on Prospect Hill at 0830 in piecemeal fashion. His top subordinate, Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, led a single division through a seam in the woods and achieved temporary success, threatening to roll up the defenders, but the movement was not reinforced. A devastating counterattack by Lt. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson swept the field. Meade was driven back with heavy casualties, and the opportunity lost. Franklin did not renew the assault despite orders to do so. Fully half of his 60,000 men were never engaged in the battle.[55]

The attack on Marye's Heights began about noon. Lee was strongest there and his troops enjoyed a splendid field of fire. His artillery occupied the high ground, and his legions were burrowed into the hillside and sheltered behind a heavy stone wall that extended a half mile along the base of the ridge, "as perfect a defensive work as any engineer could have planned, or any engineer troops could have constructed."[56] Six hundred yards of narrow plain stretched from this position to the town below and fun-

neled the attackers against the heart of the Confederate defenses. It was a killing field, and Burnside hurled his doomed army onto it. The veteran Second Corps under Maj. Gen. Darius N. Couch led the way. One by one, the brigades debouched from the town, crossed a canal, traversed the narrow level, and formed under cover of a rise of ground below a large brick house less than 150 yards from the Confederate line. At a word, they ascended the bank and pressed forward up the hill for the stone wall and oblivion. In the boldest of the early assaults, Hancock led his three brigades to within twenty-five yards of the defenders before each in turn staggered back, crushed and bleeding. Hundreds of dead and dying littered the battlefield. Remnants of the shattered Second Corps, slightly sheltered by a small rise in the ground, formed a ragged line of battle across the field and held the position late into the afternoon—but to no advantage.[57]

As the battle raged across the river at 1430, Humphreys stepped from the Phillips House with orders in hand and a look of grim determination on his face. He mounted his horse, galloped to the head of the forming column, and addressed his division, "Gentlemen, the Fifth Corps is in the reserve of the Army, and it is expected to carry the day." He turned and led his men hastily down the ravine to the banks of the icy Rappahannock and traversed one of the three new bridges leading into the burning city. The fog had dissipated, and the Confederate artillery improved its range, splashing ordnance in the river as the men tread warily across the pontoons. Safely on the other side, Humphreys climbed atop his horse and directed his division up a steep bank and south along the riverfront before winding his men up narrow avenues toward the western edge of town. While the division was passing through an intersection, a rebel shell exploded overhead, throwing brick, slate, and a large tree branch on the lead brigade, killing several horses. Moments later, a second shell ripped one of the men nearly in two. He died with a gasp, "Oh, my God! [T]ake me," the first of more than a thousand division casualties that day.[58]

As he neared the staging area, Humphreys met Hancock just off the field. The two were talking when met by a highly agitated General Couch who had watched the slaughter of his own corps from the cupola of the Fredericksburg Court House. Despite horrific losses, his men had "gained the heights" but were out of ammunition and needed support. Humphreys already had instructions from Burnside and indicated as much to Couch. "But you are the ranking officer," Humphreys continued, "and if you will give me an order to do so I will support you at once." Couch recalled many years later "the grim determination which settled on the face of that gallant hero when he received the words, 'Now is the time for you to go in!' "[59] Humphreys rode ahead, his division in tow. Once free of the city, the two rookie brigades took up positions on either side of George Street, which

Confederate riflemen fire on advancing Union troops from behind the stone wall on Marye's Heights, drawing by Allen C. Redwood

Library of Congress

MOMENTS LATER, A SECOND SHELL RIPPED ONE OF THE MEN NEARLY IN TWO.

Library of Congress

Fredericksburg Court House, May 1862, drawing by Edwin Forbes

merged up ahead with Telegraph Road leading directly into the Confederate lines. Soon after, Hooker confirmed the new orders. Humphreys and his four thousand men would lead the final attack on Marye's Heights as the "forlorn hope" of the Army of the Potomac.

Humphreys had not yet seen the Confederate position and had received little intelligence.[60] He rode forward with his son and the rest of his staff to survey the field, approaching the high ground, as he later wrote, "above, on which, some 200 yards in advance, were the troops I was to support, slightly sheltered by a small rise in the ground." These were the men of Couch's Second Corps.[61] One hundred fifty yards in front of them was the heavy stone wall, "the existence of which I knew nothing of until I got there." While exposed, the small contingent drew fire from Rebel sharpshooters, and, according to Harry, the "balls flew in a perfect shower like one of the severest hailstorms . . . ever witnessed." One struck General Humphreys' horse in the neck. As the general reeled around, Harry's horse, Tom Cat, took a ball in the left foreleg but "did not seem to mind at all."[62] Humphreys and his staff withdrew to the shelter of lower ground and began preparations for the assault.

The Second Brigade under Colonel Allabach would go first. His men threw off everything that might impede their progress—coats, knapsacks, canteens—all but their guns and ammunition, and formed under the shelter of a rise. As the bugle sounded, Humphreys turned to his staff, took off his hat, and quietly addressed them, "Gentlemen, I shall lead this charge; of course you wish to ride with me." The officers moved twelve paces to the front, and Allabach gave the command, "Forward, guide center, march!"[63]

Elbow to elbow, the men advanced with colors flying, ranks dressed as if on parade, out of the depression and into the fire. The balls came "thick and fast," creating a din, one soldier recalled, "as I never wish to hear again." Men fell in groups. The dead and wounded lay all around, but the advance continued with Humphreys still mounted and in front. As the line reached the massed troops of the Second Corps, a galling fire of musketry and of grape and canister from a rebel battery on the right shattered the formation, and the advance was "thrown into confusion" by a throng of bluecoats lying several ranks deep and muddy behind a little fold in the ground. Some of the prostrate cried out, "Don't go there, 'tis certain death." Others reached out to the advancing brigade, grabbing at the skirts of their overcoats and deliberately tripped them. Allabach's men lay down with the men of the Second Corps and generally joined them in firing at the wall.[64]

Humphreys knew what was ahead and wanted a rapid movement to the wall. Little could be gained by firing into the fortified Confederate position, and the time lost to reloading would slow and ultimately stymie the assault. "There was nothing to be done," Humphreys concluded, "but to try the bayonet." He ordered all muskets emptied. Through force of will, Humphreys and Allabach extricated the latter's brigade from the mass of bluecoats and in loose formation advanced on the stone wall. Deep gaps opened in the ragged lines as the deadly storm of leaden hail rent clothing, tore flesh, and splintered bone. Amid mounting confusion, the general's horse took another minié ball, this in the leg, and tumbled over. Humphreys jumped to his feet, "let off sulphurous anathemas at the rebels," and mounted a second horse, soon killed, and then a third. His staff, excepting only his son, was all dismounted and most of them were wounded, "a strange scene," as the elder Humphreys later recalled, "for father and son to pass through." Perhaps as close as twelve paces from the stone wall, the column reached its zenith and began to melt away with men scattered about the field and in retreat. Some few brave souls held forward positions—flat on their bellies amid the mud and gore—as Humphreys stepped away to prepare for a second run.[65]

His adjutant, Captain McClellan, had gone back to ready the First Brigade and returned to find Humphreys "sitting quietly and alone viewing the

HE REPEATEDLY EXPOSED HIMSELF TO THE MOST GALLING FIRE

ground in his front" and whistling a cheerful tune. It was "Gay and Happy," a prewar favorite that inspired several parodies. One popular version included the lines:

> We are the boys so gay and happy,
> Wherever we chance to be,
> If at home or on camp duty,
> 'Tis the same, we're always free.
> So let the war guns roar as they will,
> We'll be gay and happy still.[66]

McClellan delivered a hurried status report, and Humphreys, "without the slightest show of excitement of any kind," directed that "the formation and movement of the First Brigade should be hastened." He returned to his study of the ground, and McClellan rode off to Telegraph Road where the troops had just arrived. There he met Butterfield and Hooker, and both offered their compliments to General Humphreys—"tell him he is doing nobly—nobly." Butterfield sent McClellan and a personal aide back to Humphreys with final orders. En route, the aide took a bullet, and McClellan lost his horse but not his orders. They were hand delivered and unambiguous—"the heights must be carried before dark."[67]

Tyler's men had formed a double line of battle behind the rise as shadows stretched across the field under a setting sun. The First Brigade would lead the final charge of the day. Humphreys rode among them trying to restore confidence as shells fell all around. Many of the men ducked and dodged. "Don't juke, boys!" hollered Humphreys. When the general shied from another shot, the boys laughed. "Juke the big ones, boys," the general said, smiling, "but don't mind the little ones!" Humphreys moved to the front, turned his face to the heights, and lifted his hat as the signal to attack. The brigade lurched ahead, running and hurrahing.[68]

Immediately, the batteries began to play upon them from every side, and there was a continuous line of fire from the top of the stone wall into the advancing column, shredding the regimental flags and sowing confusion in the ranks. Humphreys later described the scene:

> The stone wall was a sheet of flame that enveloped the head and flanks of the column. Officers and men were falling rapidly, and the head of the column was at length brought to a stand when close up to the wall. Up to this time not a shot had been fired by the column, but now some firing began. It lasted but a minute, when, in spite of all our efforts, the column turned and began to retire slowly. I attempted to rally the brigade behind the natural embankment so often mentioned, but the united efforts of General Tyler, myself, our staffs, and other officers could not arrest the retiring mass.[69]

As Humphreys led the remnants of his shattered division from the field—"in order and singing and hurrahing"—the skies over Fredericksburg fell dark and put a merciful end to it all.[70]

The survivors of the bloodied Third Division, Fifth Corps, gathered in a ravine near the mill race and began forming around regimental colors. Humphreys initiated roll calls, but nearly half failed to answer. "Sarvey, Stahl, Stonecypher . . ." And so it went. Humphreys dispatched search parties to gather the missing and wounded and to collect the dead where it was safe to do so. Two lost regiments were located. In absence of new orders, the 123d and 155th had held their positions on the field. Their returning numbers swelled the ranks, and the corrected report returned 1,030 casualties—one man out of four. Miraculously, Humphreys was uninjured. Two horses were shot out from under him and another badly wounded, and he repeatedly exposed himself to the most galling fire, to the point of criticism even. "I do like to see a brave man," wrote one young Union officer of Humphreys, "but when a man goes out for the express purpose of getting shot at, he seems to me in the way of a maniac." Only one of his staff, his son Harry, remained in the saddle, but he suffered a painful contusion to his foot. At about 0900, the division pulled back and bivouacked for several hours near the unfinished Mary Washington monument before retreating further into the streets of the ruined city. There it passed a fitful night's sleep on cold cobblestone.[71]

Back at his headquarters, a rattled Burnside made plans to lead a grand bayonet assault at dawn, but his generals were all against it. Butterfield, Meade, Humphreys, and several others met late in the evening, and all agreed that another such attack would be disastrous. Couch thought it suicidal. When confronted, Burnside dumped the plan and determined for the time being to secure the city and wait. Humphreys and his division spent most of Sunday holding a line in the northern part of town between Fauquier and Amelia Streets just east of the old cemetery.[72] The men threw up barricades and established an array of batteries to resist any counterattack. The sense of risk was visceral. One postwar unit history reported that Lee had plans to send Jackson smashing into the demoralized Yankee army occupying the city streets but that

Gallant charge of Humphrey's division at the battle of Fredericksburg, drawing by Alfred R. Waud

rumors of another Union assault on Marye's Heights had stayed his hand. Late on Monday, 15 December, Burnside dictated orders to abandon the city. Well after dark, the army began a sober withdrawal. It was conducted rapidly but in secret. Talking above a whisper was prohibited, and the engineers placed straw and sod on the pontoons to muffle the sound.[73]

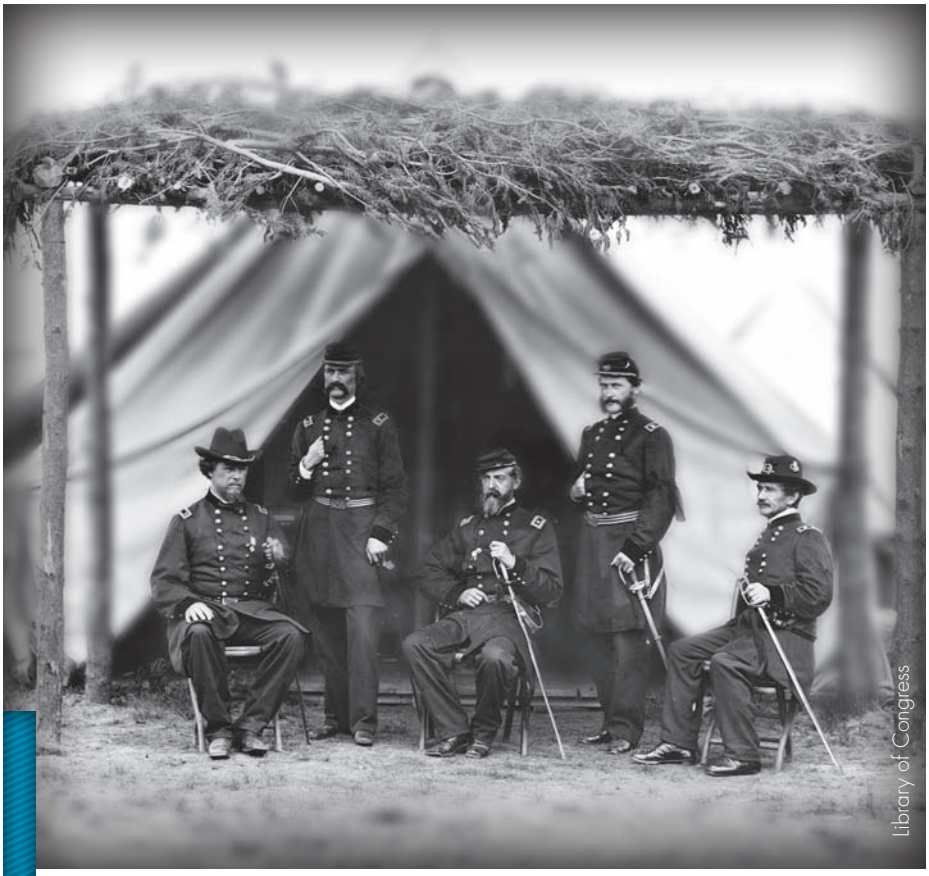
Humphreys and his division drew a short straw and were tasked with covering the retreat. Before nightfall, they deployed all along the mill race to the west. Their orders were stark—hold the position "against any attack and at any cost."[74] The men were uneasy for to their immediate front stood the bulk of the Confederate Army, a lone division against several hostile corps. A bleak wind howled and sent black clouds scudding across the sky. Torn awnings and broken window shutters flapped and banged about, unsettling nerves and stoking fear among men already haunted by dreams of "death and horrid murder." Sheets of rain began to buffet the city at 0300 on 16 December and continued for three hours. Humphreys' men nevertheless kept their wits and maintained an almost constant musket fire as the city emptied behind them. The job was completed just before dawn. Following one last search for stragglers, Humphreys ordered the whole line back to the pontoons, and word spread excitedly through the ranks to hurry or risk capture.[75]

The withdrawal began in an orderly fashion, but one company of the 91st Pennsylvania, one of Tyler's regiments and the only veteran unit in the division, remained too long in its isolated position on the far left. At sunrise the Confederates recognized the dramatic turn of events and began advancing on the city. The last Pennsylvanians then beat a hasty retreat, but it was a close affair and some members of the 91st were captured. At the end, the lines broke, and it was a race for the bridges—every man for himself. The last crossed just two hundred yards ahead of pursuers.[76] Safely on the far side of the river, the division crept back to its "old camping place" and braced itself for a cold winter.[77]

Humphreys had, by all accounts, performed magnificently at Fredericksburg, and the aftermath brought accolades thick and fast. Letters home captured the excitement as he reveled in the esteem of his fellow officers and men. "From every side," he wrote Rebecca on 15 December, "we meet with commendation. It is pleasant to be greeted by everyone as I am and to have it said that the best disciplined

troops could not have done better in the charges we made." Days later his son wrote that "hundreds of officers of all ranks speak of the charge as being the most brilliant and gallant that has ever been made," and, he added, "I think father will get his other *" [star; that is, a promotion to major general].[78] Burnside, too, heaped praise on his division commander who was "conspicuous for his gallantry throughout the action," and Col. Regis de Trobriand, a colorful immigrant of French aristocratic origin who commanded the 55th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, went further still. He called Humphreys "probably the best officer in the Army of the Potomac that day."[79] Two weeks after the battle, the popular magazine *Harper's Weekly* ran a flattering account of the charge, observing that "before that awful hurricane of bullets no heroism can avail." The issue included a handsome two-page sketch by Alfred R. Waud of the division's already famous assault on Marye's Heights, entitled *Gallant charge of Humphrey's division at the battle of Fredericksburg.*[80]

While the severe loss at Fredericksburg shuffled the deck and gave boost to a number of careers (Hooker's and Meade's, most notably), Humphreys saw his own aspirations for higher command go unrealized. In this Burnside was blameless. He sought a promotion for Humphreys and pressed Lincoln on the issue, successfully it seemed at first, but nothing came of it. Congress was angry, and its radical elements began a highly charged investigation into the battle that further politicized an already partisan process for selecting top commanders. The results mostly cleared Burnside, a Republican, but pinned responsibility on General Franklin—a Democrat, a confirmed McClellanite, and a West Pointer. Humphreys shared all of those attributes, and despite his heroics on the battlefield, probably suffered from the same animus.[81] His own actions in the weeks after the battle did not help. Tense relations with leading men of the 129th Pennsylvania Infantry led to untimely and politically harmful courts-martial in mid-January. Two of his best volunteer officers, Frick and Armstrong, had refused to support a requisition for winter frock coats that they saw as an unnecessary and extravagant expense for their men, most of whom had only several months remaining in their short enlistments. Humphreys dug in his heels, testified against both men, and saw them promptly cashiered from the army for "conduct subversive of good order and military discipline, tending to mutiny." Neither went quietly, and their howls of protests reached the Capitol with some effect. Several months later, both were restored to their positions by Secretary of War Stanton.[82]



General Meade, center, commander of the Army of the Potomac, and Union corps commanders, from left Maj. Gens. Horatio G. Wright, John A. Logan, John G. Parke, and Andrew A. Humphreys, June 1865, photo by William M. Smith

Humphreys, meanwhile, fumed in frustration at his circumstances, writing Rebecca on 17 January, "President L. had not done as he had promised General Burnside." She offered to speak to Stanton, but Humphreys initially refused—"I would not have you or anyone say one word to the Secretary of War or anyone else. If I cannot command the position I know that I am entitled to by my acts, I will not have it by imperfanity or interception . . . so let it pass."[83] Within days, though, his resolve weakened, and he determined "not to remain silent any longer." The ensuing weeks saw a flurry of activity intended to expose "those fellows at Washington, prompted by hostility and self-interest, secretly working against me."[84] A short visit to Washington in late January evidenced the extent of the damage done to him, and he left the capital with "the depression consequent upon the chilling reception I met at the Presidents' and at the War Department." That Halleck harbored old grudges was no surprise, but Humphreys was disheartened to learn that Lincoln had "no recollection of my recommendation for promotion, nor of his assurance it should be made, and knows nothing of my service at Fredericksburg."[85]

As was mostly the case throughout the war, his relationships within the upper echelon of the army were strong. "You must not fancy that I am out with General Hooker at all," he reassured his wife. "On the contrary we are on the best of terms. And with General Burnside there is the greatest warmth and cordiality." Humphreys took comfort in the camaraderie of camp life and turned his attention to the immediate needs of his battered division, but he could not shake a feeling of disappointment. In a telling line to his wife, he confessed, "Recognizing no man in this army as my superior, it wounds me to see men above me in rank and command."[86]

For the cause of union, Fredericksburg ranks among the most humiliating defeats of the war, but for Humphreys it was a proving ground, a test of his mettle and an opportunity for the scientist-soldier to dispel any questions about his martial abilities. "It has cost me great labor," he later contemplated, "but I take it that it has established my reputation in arms as the same earnestness did before in Science & art & administration."[87] He followed up Fredericksburg with a heroic effort at Gettysburg, a defensive struggle where he and a new division fought doggedly in retreat, resisting a slashing Confederate attack along Emmitsburg Road in some of the fiercest fighting of the war. He finally received his second star (but not yet a corps command) as chief of staff of the Army of the Potomac under friend and fellow engineer, General Meade, and played a prominent role in the tragic encounters at the Wilderness and Cold Harbor as well as the early siege of Petersburg. Late in the war, in November 1864, Humphreys took command of the celebrated Second Corps, Army of the Potomac, and earned additional accolades at Sailor's Creek, contributing in dramatic fashion to Lee's final surrender at Appomattox Court House. At war's end, Charles Dana, Assistant Secretary of War, called Humphreys "the great soldier of the Army of the Potomac." It was a brilliant Civil War record, but not what it could have been had he advanced more rapidly to high command.

In 1866, General Ulysses S. Grant selected Humphreys as the new chief of Corps of Engineers, into which the Corps of Topographical Engineers had been consolidated in 1863, and he held that position for thirteen years. During his long tenure, he administered a dramatic postwar expansion of internal improvements and oversaw important surveys and explorations of the American West as well as a complete overhaul of the nation's coastal fortifications. He also established the Army's first engineer school at Willets Point, New York, and served on a number of important boards and commissions, including the Washington Monument Commission, the Lighthouse Board, and a commission to examine possible canal routes across Central America. He retired at the age of sixty-eight as the next longest serving chief of engineers, second only to Brig. Gen. Joseph G. Totten. Humphreys' last years were devoted to penning two important and highly reputable histories of the Virginia campaigns. He died in Washington, D.C., on 27 December 1883, still harboring, as he wrote a friend in July of that year, "many regrets concerning my own career during the war."[88]

Notes

1. *Charleston Mercury*, 9 March 1861.

2. James H. Wilson, "Major-General Andrew Atkinson Humphreys," in Theodore F. Dwight, ed., *Critical Sketches of Some of the Federal and Confederate Commanders* (Boston: Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, 1895), p. 78, quote; James L. Morrison Jr., *"The Best School in the World": West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833–1866* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986), pp. 124–25. For further evidence of the friendship between the two men, see Andrew Humphreys to Jefferson Davis, 22 Feb 1872, printed in *Jefferson Davis: Constitutionalist, His Letters, Papers, and Speeches*, ed. Dunbar Rowland, 10 vols. (Jackson, Miss.: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923), 7: 305–06.

3. Eric H. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), pp. 187–88, quote, p. 188.

4. Ltr, Wigfall to Davis, 25 Feb 1861, in *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, 12 vols. to date (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971–), 7: 60–61.

5. Henry H. Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1924), p. 155.

6. Wilson, "Major-General Humphreys," p. 78, quote; John Watts De Peyster, "Andrew Atkinson Humphreys," *Magazine of American History* 16 (October 1886): 349; Henry Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, p. 147.

7. Henry Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, p. 156. Joseph Henry was secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

8. Matthew T. Pearcy, "Science, Politics, and Bureaucracy: Andrew A. Humphreys and the Office of Pacific Railroad Explorations and Surveys," *Military History of the West* 38 (2008): 89–90; Kent D. Richards, "Isaac Ingalls Stevens," *American National Biography*, 24 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 20: 700.

9. Ltr, Isaac Stevens to Andrew Humphreys, 19 Oct 1861, Andrew A. Humphreys Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereinafter cited as AAHP, HSP), 5/91.

10. Ltr, Samuel R. Curtis to Secretary of War Simon Cameron, 10 Oct 1861, AAHP, HSP, 5/90.

11. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to John Watts De Peyster, 18 Jul 1883, AAHP, HSP, 31/9.

12. Henry Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, pp. 156–66.

13. Ibid., p. 166.

14. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Archibald Campbell, 4 Oct 1862, AAHP, HSP, 8/103.

15. Henry Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, p. 166, quotes; *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (hereinafter cited as OR), 128 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1880–1901), ser. 1, vol. 12, pt. 3, p. 640.

16. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Campbell, 4 Oct 1862.

17. Ibid., first two quotations; *Under the Maltese Cross: Antietam to Appomattox, The Loyal Uprising in Western Pennsylvania, 1861–1865, Campaigns, 155th Pennsylvania Regiment, Narrated by the Rank and File* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: 155th Regimental Association, 1910), p. 67, printing Halleck's order, third and fourth quotations.

18. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Campbell, 4 Oct 1862.

19. Ibid., first and second quotes; *Under the Maltese Cross*, pp. 68–72, last quote, p. 72; Henry Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, p. 170.

20. *Autobiography of Major General William F. Smith, 1861–1864*, ed. Herbert M. Schiller (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside House, 1990), p. 55.

21. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 20 Sep 1862, HSP, 33/17, first quote; Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Campbell, 4 Oct 1862; *Under the Maltese Cross*, pp. 72–73; Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to De Peyster, 19 Apr 1881, AAHP, HSP, 29/9, remaining quotes.

22. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 20 Sep 1862; Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Campbell, 4 Oct 1862, quotes; Stephen W. Sears, *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam* (New Haven: Ticknor and Fields, 1983), pp. 298–307; William H. Armstrong and Frederick B. Arner, *Red-Tape and Pigeon-Hole Generals: Andrew A. Humphreys in the Army of the Potomac* (Charlottesville, Va.: Rockbridge Pub., 1999), pp. 14–15, 19.

23. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to De Peyster, 18 Jul 1883; Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *The Passing of the Armies: An Account of the Final Campaign of the Army of the Potomac, Based upon Personal Reminiscences of the Fifth Army Corps* (1915, reprint ed., New York: Bantam Books, 1993), p. xiv.

24. Volunteers comprised 94 percent of the Union army and 80 percent of the Confederate. See Herman Hattaway, *Shades of Blue and Gray: An Introductory Military History of the Civil War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), pp. 31, 33.

25. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Campbell, 4 Oct 1862.

26. Bruce Catton, *The Civil War* (1960, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), p. 144; William J. Miller, *The Training of an Army: Camp Curtin and the North's Civil War* (Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 106–09, 260–63, 265.

27. Catton, *Civil War*, pp. 144–45.

28. Allan Peskin, *Garfield: A Biography* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1978), p. 90; Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 515; for the reputation for drinking at the Humphreys headquarters, see Ltr, Capt Francis Adams Donaldson to Jacob Donaldson, 15 May 1863, printed in *Inside the Army of the Potomac: The Civil War Experience of Captain Francis Adams Donaldson*, ed. J. Gregory Acken (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1998), p. 267.

29. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 22 Oct 1862, AAHP, HSP, 33/20; Benson J. Lossing, *Harper's Encyclopædia of United States History from 458 A.D. to 1905*, 10 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1905), 6: 8, 10. Also a graduate of Williams College, Carswell's brother, Henry Brainerd McClellan, taught in Virginia for several years before the war and attained some notoriety during its course as chief of staff to Confederate Maj. Gen. James E. B. "Jeb" Stuart.

30. For notice of Henry Humphreys' appointment to West Point, see *New York Times*, 25 February 1857; also see *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, 6: 529; Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Curtin, 18 Sep 1862, AAHP, HSP, 9/46.

31. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Campbell, 4 Oct 1862.

32. *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand*, ed. James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p. 89.

33. Joseph R. Orwig, *History of the 131st Penna. Volunteers: War of 1861–5* (Williamsport, Pa.: Sun Book and Job Printing House, 1902), pp. 55–58, quoted words, p. 56; Armstrong and Arner, *Red-Tape and Pigeon-Hole Generals*, pp. 49–53, 303–05; Reid Mitchell, " 'Not the General but the Soldier': The Study of Civil War Soldiers," in *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand*, ed. James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p. 89.

34. Sears, *Landscape Turned Red*, pp. 327–28.

35. Ralph S. Geiman, "Letters of Samuel W. North, 126th Regiment," *Papers Read before the Kittochtinny Historical Society*, 18: 215–24.

36. Many years later, Humphreys indicated that General Porter had selected him to head the reconnaissance. See Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to De Peyster, 18 Jun 1882, AAHP, HSP, 29/63.

37. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Lt. Col. Frederick T. Locke, assistant adjutant general, Fifth Corps, 19 Oct 1862, printed in OR, ser. 1, vol. 19, pt. 2, pp. 85–88, quotes, pp. 86, 88. A manuscript copy of the letter is in AAHP, HSP, 9/16.

38. As a young lieutenant in 1836, Humphreys fought in the Second Seminole War. See Matthew T. Pearcy, " 'The Ruthless Hand of War' : Andrew A. Humphreys in the Second Seminole War," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 85 (Fall 2006): 123–53.

39. De Peyster, "Andrew Atkinson Humphreys," p. 350.

40. Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1988), pp. 336–40.

41. Francis A. O'Reilly, *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War on the Rappahannock* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), p. 13.

42. Sears, *George B. McClellan*, pp. 340–41; David S. Sparks, ed., *Inside Lincoln's Army: The Diary of Marsena Rudolph Patrick, Provost Marshal General, Army of the Potomac* (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1964), p. 174; Bruce Catton, *Mr. Lincoln's Army* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1951), pp. 328–30; O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, pp. 16–19; Armstrong and Arner, *Red-Tape and Pigeon-Hole Generals*, pp. 317–18. Captain Francis Adams Donaldson of the 118th Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment wrote to his brother shortly after the event that he had heard General Humphreys say, while riding through a farewell throng, "that he wished to God Genl. McClellan would put himself at the head of the army and throw the infernal scoundrels at Washington into the Potomac." See Ltr, Capt Francis Adams Donaldson to Jacob Donaldson, 11 Nov 1862, printed in Acken, *Inside the Army*, p. 164.

43. Henry Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, p. 173; also see, Theodore Lyman, *With Grant and Meade from the Wilderness to Appomattox*, ed. George R. Agassiz (1922, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 78.

44. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 17 Jan 1863, AAHP, HSP, 33/27.

45. O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, pp. 21–24, 30, first quote, p. 21; Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 1 Sep 1864, AAHP, HSP, 33/88, second quote.

46. Ltr, H. W. Ryder to Andrew Humphreys, 16 Nov 1862, AAHP, HSP, 9/96; *Under the Maltese Cross*, p. 91, quote.

47. Edward J. Stackpole, *The Battle of Fredericksburg* (Gettysburg, Pa.: Civil War Times Illustrated, 1965), p. 43.

48. Orwig, *History of the 131st Penna. Volunteers*, p. 85, first four quotes; *Under the Maltese Cross*, p. 93, final quote.

49. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Daniel Butterfield, 29 Nov 1862, AAHP, HSP, 9/114.

50. Ltr, Erastus B. Tyler to Carswell McClellan, 9 Dec 1862, AAHP, HSP, 10/24.

51. Ltr, "Mother J. D." to Andrew Humphreys, 19 Nov 1862, AAHP, HSP, 9/98.

52. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to "Mother J. D.," 1 Jan 1863, AAHP, HSP, 9/99, first quote; Charles A. Dana, *Recollections of the Civil War: With the Leaders at Washington and in the Field in the Sixties* (1898, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 192, second quote.

53. Armstrong and Arner, *Red-Tape and Pigeon-Hole Generals*, pp. 268–69; Orwig, *History of the 131st Penna. Volunteers*, pp. 96–97; O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, pp. 57–86.

54. Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, printed in Armstrong and Arner, *Red-Tape and Pigeon-Hole Generals*, p. 269; Henry Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, p. 177.

55. James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 572.

56. De Peyster, "Andrew Atkinson Humphreys," p. 352.

57. Charles W. Cowtan, *Services of the Tenth New York Volunteers (National Zouaves) in the War of Rebellion* (New York: Charles H. Ludwig, 1882), pp. 166–67; O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, pp. 246–75, 293–388.

58. Carswell McClellan, *General Andrew A. Humphreys at Malvern Hill Va., July 1, 1862, and at Fredericksburg Va., December 13, 1862: A Memoir* (St. Paul, Minn.: Press of Wm. L. Banning Jr., 1888), p. 20; Ltr, Henry Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 18 Dec 1862, AAHP, HSP, 33/26, first quote; *Under the Maltese Cross*, p. 96; Orwig, *History of the 131st Penna. Volunteers*, p. 114; Armstrong and Arner, *Red-Tape and Pigeon-Hole Generals*, p. 270, second quote.

59. Darius N. Couch, "Sumner's 'Right Grand Division,' " in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Being for the Most Part Contributions by Union and Confederate Officers,* ed. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, 4 vols. (New York: Century Company, 1887–88), 3: 111–15, final quote, p. 115.

60. Henry H. Humphreys, *Major General Andrew Atkinson Humphreys, United States Volunteers at Fredericksburg, Va., December 13th, 1862, and Farmville, Va., April 7th, 1865* (Chicago: Press of R. R. McCabe and Co., 1896), p. 28.

61. Rpt, Brig Gen Andrew Humphreys to Brig Gen Daniel Butterfield, 16 Dec 1862, printed in OR, ser. 1, vol. 21, p. 431.

62. Ltr, Henry Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 18 Dec 1862.

63. Orwig, *History of the 131st Penna. Volunteers*, p. 117; Henry Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, p. 181, first quote; O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, p. 401; Carol Reardon, "The Forlorn Hope: Brig. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys's Pennsylvania Division at Fredericksburg" in *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Decision on the Rappahannock*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 89, second quote.

64. O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, p. 402, first quote; Reardon, "The Forlorn Hope," pp. 89–90, 104, second quote, p. 104.

65. Henry Humphreys, *Major General Andrew Atkinson Humphreys*, pp. 28, 31, first (divided) quote, p. 28; McClellan, *General Humphreys at Fredericksburg*, pp. 14–15; Reardon, "The Forlorn Hope," pp. 90–93; O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, pp. 405–06, second quote, p. 405; Humphreys, *Andrew Atkinson Humphreys: A Biography*, p. 179.

66. McClellan, *General Humphreys at Fredericksburg*, p. 16.

67. Ibid., pp. 16–17.

68. The sentences on Humphreys' efforts to dodge shells are taken verbatim from O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, p. 406; this is a superb history of the battle. See also Armstrong and Arner, *Red-Tape and Pigeon-Hole Generals*, p. 274.

69. Rpt, Humphreys to Butterfield, 16 Dec 1862, as quoted in William H. Powell, *The Fifth Army Corps (Army of the Potomac): A Record of Operations during the Civil War in the United States of America, 1861–1865* (1896, reprint ed., Dayton Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1984), p. 381.

70. Reardon, "The Forlorn Hope," p. 98.

71. Orwig, *History of the 131st Penna. Volunteers*, pp. 119, 126, 132; *Under the Maltese Cross*, p. 103; De Peyster, "Andrew Atkinson Humphreys," pp. 352–53; Theodore Lyman to Elizabeth Lyman, 20 May 1864, in Lyman, *With Grant and Meade*, p. 108, quote.

72. Stackpole, *Battle of Fredericksburg,* pp. 44–45; William Marvel, *Burnside* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 198; Orwig, *History of the 131st Penna. Volunteers*, p. 128.

73. *Under the Maltese Cross*, p. 107; O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, pp. 447–49.

74. Ms. memoir by Capt. John H. Weeks, 91st Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, of his experiences at the Battle of Fredericksburg, 19 Jan 1887, AAHP, HSP, 32/11.

75. Reardon, "The Forlorn Hope," pp. 99–101, quote, p. 99; *Under the Maltese Cross*, pp. 107–08; O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, p. 450.

76. Weeks memoir, 19 Jan 1887; Orwig, *History of the 131st Penna. Volunteers*, p. 129; *Under the Maltese Cross*, p. 108; Samuel P. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861–5*, 5 vols. (Harrisburg, Pa.: B. Singerly, 1869–71), 3: 188.

77. Ltr, Henry Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 18 Dec 1862.

78. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 15 Dec 1862, AAHP, HSP, 33/23; for the breakup of the division, see Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 17 May 1863, AAHP, HSP, 33/32; Ltr, Henry Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 18 Dec 1862.

79. Ltr, Ambrose Burnside to Andrew Humphreys, 21 Jan 1863, AAHP, HSP, 14/60; Burnside's official report of the Fredericksburg campaign, submitted 13 November 1865, in OR, ser. 1, vol. 21, pp. 82–97; De Peyster, "Andrew Atkinson Humphreys," p. 352, quoting de Trobriand. Similar comments appear in Francis W. Palfrey, *The Antietam and Fredericksburg*, Campaigns of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882), p. 170: "Some of the very best fighting that was done at Fredericksburg was done by the Third Division of the Fifth Corps. The division was commanded by General Humphreys, who was probably the best officer in the Army of the Potomac that day."

80. *Harper's Weekly* 7 (10 January 1863): 17, 24–25, quote p. 17.

81. Mark A. Snell, *From First to Last: The Life of Major General William B. Franklin* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), pp. 254–64; O'Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign*, p. 460; Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 17 Jan 1863; Brooks D. Simpson, "General McClellan's Bodyguard: The Army of the Potomac after Antietam," in *The Antietam Campaign*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 68.

82. Armstrong and Arner, *Red-Tape and Pigeon-Hole Generals*, pp. 307–12, quote, p. 307. Many years later, Frick received a Medal of Honor for valor at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. See Committee on Veterans' Affairs, United State Senate, *Medal of Honor Recipients, 1863–1973* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 93.

83. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 17 Jan 1863. By imperfanity, Humphreys apparently meant impetration.

84. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Professor Hansen, 22 Feb 1863, AAHP, HSP, 12/22.

85. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Burnside, 1 Feb 1863, AAHP, HSP, 14/63, first quote; Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Hooker, 28 Jan 1863, AAHP, HSP, 14/61, second quote.

86. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 17 Jan 1863.

87. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to Rebecca Humphreys, 17 May 1863.

88. Ltr, Andrew Humphreys to De Peyster, 18 Jul 1883.