

# DIGNITY *of* DUTY

THE JOURNALS OF ERASMUS CORWIN GILBREATH

| 1861-1898 |



A personal odyssey of service  
from the Civil War to  
the Spanish-American War



EDITED BY Susan Gilbreath Lane ■ INTRODUCTION BY Carlo D'Este



# SERVICE OF ERASMUS C. GILBREATH

1861-1898

## CIVIL WAR

● Skirmish ■ Battle

- 1 Hatteras Inlet  
October 1861
- 2 Battle of the Ironclads  
March 1862
- 3 Seven Days Battles  
June-July 1862
- 4 Kelly's Ford  
August 1862
- 5 Second Battle of Bull Run  
August 1862
- 6 Battle of Chantilly  
September 1862
- 7 Battle of Fredericksburg  
December 1862
- 8 Battle of Chancellorsville  
April-May 1862
- 9 Battle of Gettysburg  
July 1863
- 10 Wapping Heights  
July 1863

- 11 Kelly's Ford  
November 1863
- 12 Locust Grove  
November 1863
- 13 Mine Run  
November-December 1863
- 14 Battle of the Wilderness  
May 1864
- 15 Battle of Spotsylvania  
May 1864
- 16 Battle of North Anna  
May 1864
- 17 Totopotomoy River  
May 1864
- 18 Battle of Cold Harbor  
May-June 1864
- 19 Siege of Petersburg  
June-October 1864
- 20 Deep Bottom  
August 1864
- 21 Strawberry Plains  
September 1864

## SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

1898



Dakota Territory  
1876

Arizona Territory  
1891

Mississippi  
1866

Texas  
1869

PENNSYLVANIA

Draft Riots NYC  
July, 1863

9 • Gettysburg

• Hagerstown

MARYLAND

• Frederick

Baltimore

• Washington

• Culpeper

Fredericksburg

Richmond

Petersburg

Norfolk

VIRGINIA

0 Miles 30



# DIGNITY *of* DUTY

**THE JOURNALS OF ERASMUS CORWIN GILBREATH**

| 1861-1898 |

ERASMUS CORWIN GILBREATH'S last formal military photograph (right) was taken sometime in 1897 or 1898, after he made the rank of major for the second time in his 37-year military career. During his time in the United States Army, there was no regular system for medals and awards because official medals were then seen as symbols of monarchical, aristocratic privilege (one exception being the Medal of Honor, which was established by the U.S. Congress during the Civil War). Thus the medals and cords he is wearing in the photograph are largely ceremonial. Gilbreath is wearing Palm Leaf Epulettes, indicating the rank of major, and an Indian Wars Bullion Aiguillette (gold fringe and shoulder cord). His medals and badges include (top row from the left): Third Corps Union Badge, Society of the Army of the Potomac Medal, Military Order of The Loyal Legion of The United States Medal, Grand Army of the Republic Medal; (bottom row): Sons of the Revolution Medal.

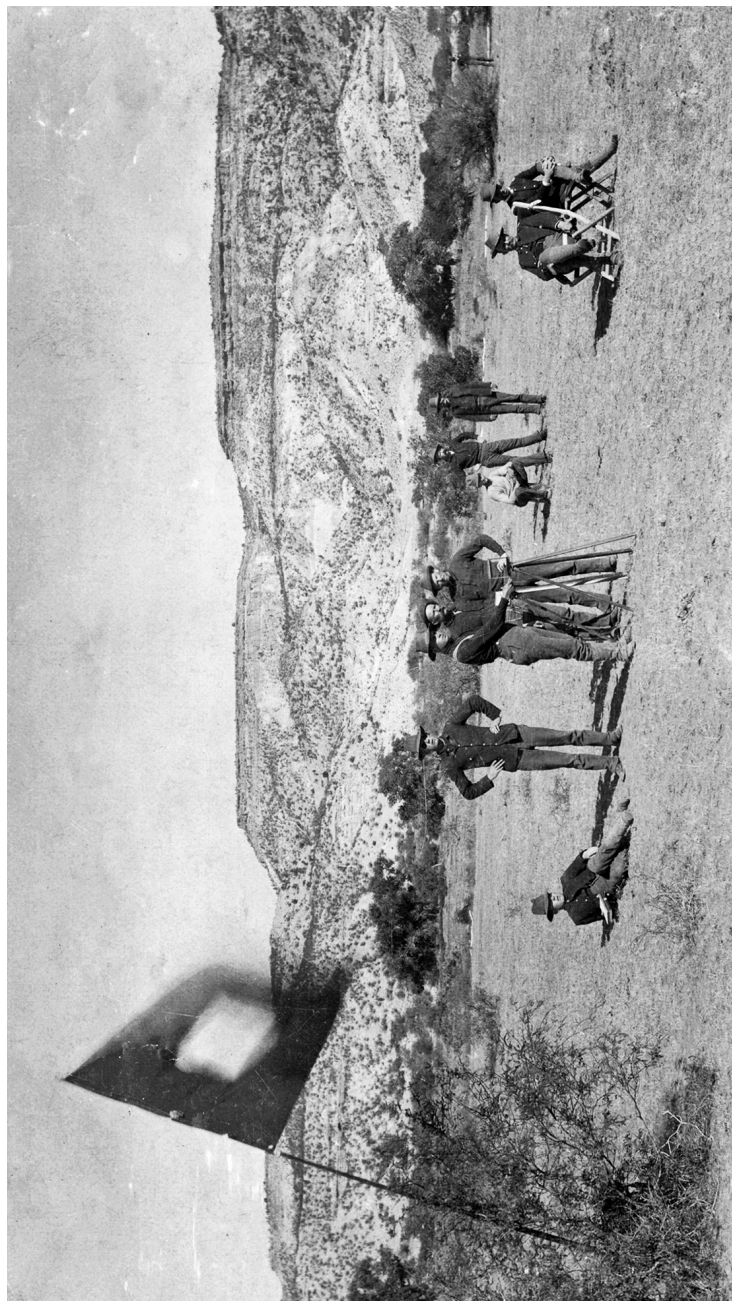
It is interesting to note that the War with Spain, in which Major Gilbreath fought, marked the end of America's continental struggles and the beginning of America's use of its maturing armed forces for world power projection. Following Gilbreath's death, who died while stationed in Puerto Rico ten days after the cease-fire with Spain was signed on August 12, 1898, the U.S. military began issuing campaign medals. Posthumously he is eligible for the Civil War Campaign Medal, Indian Wars Campaign Medal, Occupation of Porto Rico Campaign Medal, and Spanish American War Campaign Medal, all of which are featured on the book jacket. Major Gilbreath is also eligible for a Purple Heart for the wounds he received during the battle of Fredericksburg. These medals, like the last war he fought in, are a reflection of the United States' shift from a continental power to a world power.

—Colonel (IL) Jennifer N. Pritzker, IL ARNG (Retired)









*Erasmus Corwin Gilbreath, seated second from right, camp at Seneca, Arizona Territory, 1894. Son-in-law Oliver Edwards is on his left.*



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A personal odyssey of service  
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Edited by Susan Gilbreath Lane • Introduction by Carlo D'Este

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MILITARY  

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2015

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[www.pritzkermilitary.org](http://www.pritzkermilitary.org)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gilbreath, Erasmus Corwin, 1841-1898, author. | Lane, Susan Gilbreath, editor. | D'Este, Carlo, contributor.

Title: *Dignity of Duty: The Journals of Erasmus Corwin Gilbreath, 1861-1898*, by Erasmus Corwin Gilbreath; introduction by Carlo D'Este; edited by Susan Gilbreath Lane.

Description: 352 pages: illustrated with black and white photographs, maps; cm. | Includes glossary and index.

Identifiers: ISBN 978-0-9897928-5-1 (hardcover) | ISBN 978-0-9897928-6-8 (Kindle and EPUB) | ISBN 978-0-9897928-7-5 (Web PDF)

Subjects: LCSH: Civil War, 1861-1865 – Personal narratives. | United States. – Army. – Indiana Infantry Regiment, 20th (1861-1864). | Reconstruction (U.S. history, 1865-1877) | Indians of North America – Wars – Personal narratives. | Fort Custer (Mont.) – History. | Spanish-American War, 1898 – Personal narratives. | United States – History – 1865-1898.

Classification: LCC E601.G55 2015 | DDC 973.781

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Maps by David Cain © Pritzker Military Museum & Library:

Endpapers, p. 25, p. 44, p. 67, p. 82, p. 95, p. 119

Photographs and documents courtesy of Susan Gilbreath Lane:

Cover, frontispiece, p. 214, p. 216 (bottom).

Photographs and documents courtesy of William Sydnor Gilbreath III:

p. xvi, p. 215 (both), p. 216 (top), p. 217 (both), p. 218 (both), p. 219 (both), p. 220, p. 221, p. 313, p. 321, p. 326.

This book was published in coordination with a companion exhibit at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library about the life and times of Erasmus Corwin Gilbreath. Visit [www.dignityofduty.org](http://www.dignityofduty.org) or the Museum and Library in Chicago. The trade edition of *Dignity of Duty: The Journals of Erasmus Corwin Gilbreath, 1861-1898*, was preceded by a limited edition of 100 numbered copies with a unique tip-in page.

First Edition

...But the sense of fear on this and other occasions has been  
subjugated by a strong sense of duty and honour, or otherwise  
I should have slunk to the rear.

The brave man is not he who feels no fear,  
For that were stupid and irrational;  
But he whose noble nature dares  
The danger Nature shrinks from.

—From *Reminiscences of the Sutlej Campaign*  
by Colonel S. Dewé White



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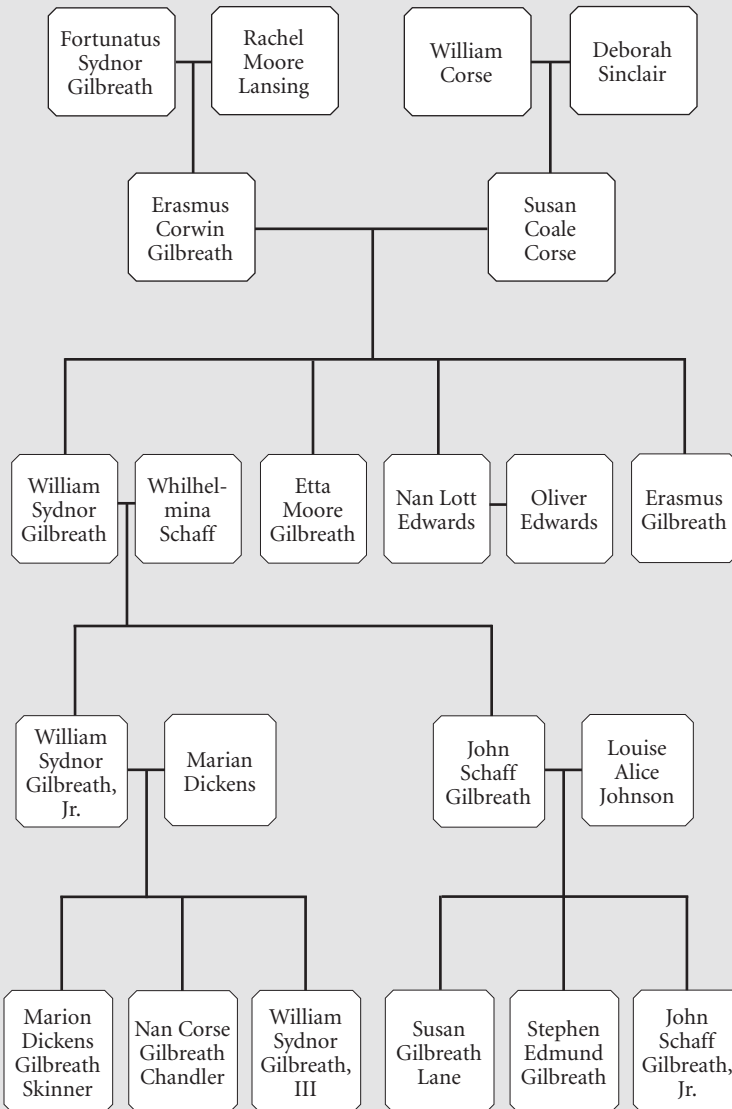
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## GILBREATH FAMILY TREE



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## FOREWORD

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AS A YOUNGSTER, I WAS FASCINATED BY THE STORIES my grandmother told with obvious pride and affection about her husband and his family. She was married to the son of Erasmus Corwin Gilbreath, the author of these journals.

Erasmus was born on May 13, 1840, in Guernsey County, Ohio, the eldest child of Fortunatus Sydnor Gilbreath, a physician, and Rachael Moore Lansing. Sometime in the 1850s the family set off for Chicago, traveling by canal to Cleveland, by steamer to Detroit, and by railroad to Michigan City, Indiana, where they were met by relatives who convinced them to settle in Valparaiso, Indiana. Just after Erasmus finished his last term in school, his father died, in 1853. My great-grandfather worked to support his family, studied law, and when the Civil War broke out “begun work raising a Company” and signed on as a volunteer with the 20th Indiana Regiment.

In support of his widow Susan’s application for a military pension, Erasmus’s attending officer General Schram wrote, “The immediate cause of his death was apoplexy . . . The campaign in which Major Gilbreath’s regiment took part, though a brief one, was exceptionally arduous and trying to the officers and soldiers engaged in the expedition . . . It was a few days later when Major Gilbreath received the stroke which in the course of a few days resulted fatally.” He died on August 22, 1898, in Puerto Rico; he was 59 years old. Susan was awarded a monthly pension of \$25.

Susan was born in 1843 in Maryland to William Corse and Deborah Sinclair. They were Quakers, raised their large family in Baltimore, and lived in their home, Furley Hall. William was a “nurseryman,” a business he took over from Deborah’s father, Robert Sinclair. According to family lore, the family assisted escaping slaves, giving them safe haven as part of a link in the Underground Railroad. This is elaborated upon in a novel, *The Green Rose of Furley*, written by Helen Corse Barney, the daughter



of Susan's brother, Frank. Susan died in 1919. Erasmus, Susan, and their daughter Etta are buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

I can only guess how Susan and Erasmus met. I know, however, that one of the first stops for the 20th Indiana was Baltimore, Maryland. The two were married on April 24, 1866, leaving that same day for Philadelphia then on to Chicago where his family was living. What challenges they would face together!

Erasmus and Susan had four children: first, William Sydnor, my grandfather; second, Etta, who never married; third, Nan, who died a tortured death from complications of childbirth; and fourth, Erasmus, who died in infancy. Only my grandfather and grandmother, Wilhelmina (Minnie) Schaff, had children: first my Uncle Syd (William Sydnor, Jr.) and second my father (John Schaff). Syd's children are Marion, Nan, and William Sydnor III (Bill), my cousins. My father's children include me and my twin brothers, Jack and Steve.

By the time I was born in 1942, my grandfather had died. I knew my grandmother very well. She lived to be 96 and died when I was in college.

Grandma told me many tales of her life with William Sydnor, including having danced with Henry Ford. But mostly I remember her description of his intoxicating recipe for eggnog, love of books, and adventurous pioneering spirit.

My father also had stories to tell about his father's adventures in the West: going down a river and being attacked by Indians who were shooting at the family using bows and arrows. To a city kid it all sounded very exotic and full of hyperbole. Somewhere along the way, I vaguely remembered hearing that his "papers" were in both the Detroit Public Library (DPL) and a special collection at the University of Michigan.

In the late 1970s, I updated and had reprinted a family tree, "Unser Stammbaum," written by my grandmother's father, John Adam Schaff, a German immigrant who came to Chicago. I was visiting the DPL's Burton Historical Collection to give them a copy of the thin volume when, acting on my vague recollection, I looked in the card catalog for listings under Gilbreath. To my surprise and delight, I found volumes of material about my grandfather.

William Sydnor had been an active and innovative force in the cre-

ation of the Dixie Highway and the Good Roads Movement during the early 1900s and came to Michigan to work for the fledgling Detroit Motor Club. In some haste, I perused the scrapbooks that had been brought to me, discovering a treasure of pictures and, in one instance, an album that was my father's and had his name on the back cover. The entire collection seemed to have been donated en masse with little consideration to its content. In my father's scrapbook there were some personal items that I wish I had. But, as someone pointed out to me, if they hadn't made it into the Burton Collection, I may never have seen them. The more I looked at the dozens of pictures of my grandfather, the more I felt a connection with the handsome and flamboyant person I had only heard and wondered about.

At the same time, in the same card catalog, I found another treasure which neither I nor any member of my family had any knowledge of: the Civil War Journal of my great-grandfather, Erasmus Corwin Gilbreath. When the librarian brought it to me, I could hardly believe what I had in my hands. It was a yellowed, legal-size, multicolored typed document that included his handwritten notes.

Another 20 years passed before I returned to the DPL for a more careful look at their collection of my grandfather's papers. On that visit, I found stuck in a folder another typed copy of the Civil War Journal in which my great-grandfather's edits had been incorporated into the text, a post-Civil War Journal, and a Spanish-American War Journal. It was the Post-Civil War Journal that confirmed the reality of what I had once thought was hyperbole.

I have never found a handwritten copy of the journals. However, I do have copies of letters that Erasmus wrote, and his writing is a challenge to read. I am therefore grateful that he produced a typed copy of the materials. Recently, with my family present, I passed out copies of a letter he had written to his mother. Working together, we couldn't completely decipher what he had written, but we had some good laughs trying.

Erasmus stated on the first page of the Civil War Journal that it was for his descendants and not for publication. However, his son donated the journals to the DPL, exposing them to public scrutiny. Because my great-grandfather was an educated man, I can well understand that he



would not have wanted an unedited manuscript in the hands of a broad population of readers. If he had been satisfied with the original document, he would not have begun editing the journals.

In my grandfather's papers, I found responses to letters Erasmus had written to a person in Virginia seeking information about his family. Therefore, I'm convinced of his interest in family history and am not surprised that he wanted to pass on his personal story. But I also feel that he wanted to correct what he felt was a poor historical record of his regiment. He laments that record at the beginning of Chapter 5 in the Civil War Journal. I believe that his journal is, in part, a response to that regret.

Of course, when working on the project at least 30 years after the events occurred, Erasmus couldn't possibly have remembered all the details he ultimately wrote about. Evidently, he researched some facts and figures that he combined to create a narrative from the notes he had kept at the time. We have a glimpse into how he kept a journal by what remains of a sketchy record of his involvement in the Spanish-American War.

For years I resisted reading the Civil War Journal because I thought it would be disturbing, but at the urging of both my brother Steve and cousin Tom Chandler, I finally took the plunge. It was indeed disturbing, and even horrifying and appalling. But I was riveted. Here was my great-grandfather telling his great-granddaughter his accounting of history, breathing life into the textbook version I had read in school.

When I discovered that my great-grandmother was Susan, I asked my father if I had been named for her. Curiously he said, "No, I didn't know that was her name!" Since she died in 1919 when my father was 17, I found that a bit surprising, but presumably he only knew her as "Grandma." I'm delighted to share her name.

As I immersed myself in this effort, there were times when it seemed I felt Erasmus's presence, working with me and discussing his life. I only wish he had known how thrilled his family is to have his record of the events in his life beginning when he first signed on to volunteer to fight in the Civil War.

What a privilege that dumb luck led me to these journals. As my husband suggested, it was like finding a bottle stuffed with a message that washed up on a shore, and I was the fortunate one who found it.

This has been a true labor of love. My version of my great-grandfather's journals is dedicated to Erasmus Corwin Gilbreath's memory. It is also dedicated to the first Susan Gilbreath, my namesake even if only by chance, who braved the challenges of marriage to a pioneering military man.

—*Susan Gilbreath Lane*

### Note

I respect that historians value firsthand accounting of events in their original states, as mistakes in such documents can also reveal information about the writer. But my great-grandfather Gilbreath did not leave unedited material. He began the editing process himself, and so I continued it. My guiding principle has been to retain the character of his writing and aim for clarity, without changing his content or style of writing.

The author's punctuation, paragraphing, usage, and spelling of place names, proper names, and military ranks were made consistent throughout. Where the absence of punctuation made his account difficult to understand, for example, where the beginning of Chapter 1 of his Civil War Journal was written as one long sentence devoid of punctuation, the addition of two commas clarified his meaning.

Obvious typographic errors were corrected. Where a word was clearly missing from a sentence, it was added in brackets. When the author's sentence seemed to make no sense, or his meaning or intention was unclear, the sentence was left unchanged.

Based upon Gilbreath's indicators, I created a table of contents. He gave titles to only three chapters in the Civil War Journals. I named the others, using a phrase from his text. I also added the year in which the events occurred, in keeping with his Post-Civil War Journal indicators.

In the last chapter of the Post-Civil War Journal, Gilbreath wrote about events he had not included in the earlier material. I inserted those entries where I thought they were chronologically appropriate.

—*S.G.L.*

Camp of 20<sup>th</sup> Lu. Fals.  
May 7 1863

My Dear Mother

I wrote you when we started in an expedition against the enemy, but as the mails were not allowed to go I suppose you have not received it. I am now very tired and hungry and cold - so can not give you a full account of our movements. We crossed the Rappahannock about 15 miles above here and five miles from our crossing met the enemy, after great preparations for battle and having everything in readiness we were had so bright prospects of success at first. But then came one of those things that seem to follow this army as a fatalist almost. The Union<sup>th</sup> Corps one of the

Erasmus Corwin Gilbreath wrote this letter to his mother on May 7th, 1863. He wrote of the Union's loss at Chancellorsville and of being slightly wounded during the battle.



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## INTRODUCTION

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THE MOMENTOUS CIVIL WAR that lasted from 1861 to 1865 was the most traumatic event in American history. A recent study estimated that as many as 750,000 soldiers on both sides died in a clash of ideas that left scars on the American psyche that a century and a half later have yet to fully heal. As the Civil War Trust notes, “Approximately one in four soldiers that went to war never returned home,” in what was “the largest human catastrophe in American history.”

In the spring of 1861, a call went out from Washington for volunteers to join militias for what was originally thought to be only three months of service to help put down what President Abraham Lincoln initially called the “insurrection.”

One of those who came forward to volunteer to fight for the Union was an unusually gifted 21-year-old from Valparaiso, Indiana, named Erasmus Corwin Gilbreath, who served initially as a lieutenant in the 20th Indiana Volunteers.

Although not much is known of his early life, we do know he was born on May 13, 1840, in Guernsey County, Ohio, and that, prior to the war, Gilbreath had worked under a civil engineer building a railroad in Indiana.

Gilbreath was typical of the young men who fought in the Civil War. Although he came from a background ill suited to a sudden transformation from an ordinary citizen into a combatant, he quickly learned the art of soldiering. Fortunately, his natural curiosity and great intelligence resulted in these journals through which we experience not only many of the major battles of the Civil War but also an illuminating journey through much of 19th-century America that reveals the growing pains of a nation seeking its identity in the wake of the most devastating event in its history.

This book is first, and foremost, a tale of war in which there is no glory, only carnage and death. We get a sense of what war was like from the

point of view of a young field officer rather than from the perspective of high command, strategy, and maneuver.

In Gilbreath's journals death is as routine as the dawning of a new day. Through his eyes we learn firsthand of the true horror of the Civil War: of the boredom, the fatigue, the death of so many on the battlefields, of the crude nature of caring for the wounded in the 1860s, of the blood and the amputations in the aid stations and primitive field hospitals.

Although seriously wounded by a Rebel bullet at the battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, Gilbreath was one of the lucky ones who miraculously survived his wound to record his extraordinary tale of life and death, pithily noting that "my right leg would not do its duty." He lay on the battlefield for nearly seven hours before help came. It is a measure of his grit and determination that he refused to permit his badly injured leg to be amputated.

Another revelation of these journals is how little the participants in the Civil War actually knew of the politics that lay behind it. Gilbreath and his fellow soldiers were cogs in a great war machine, men who fought for a cause that, in retrospect, few fully understood. These were young men who simply responded to a call to duty, without regard for or knowledge of its myriad political and social elements.

His years of soldiering turned a country boy from Indiana not only into a professional soldier but also into a self-taught student of history who carefully chronicled what he saw and experienced into a fascinating journal of his life and those who served with him.

Gilbreath was the quintessential good soldier who learned to lead by example. Like so many other citizens in the more than 200 years of America's history, he almost seamlessly evolved from an ordinary citizen into an exceptionally capable and dedicated soldier.

His later journals paint a vivid picture of a nation recovering from a devastating war. Rural America of the post-Civil War years was a harsh and unforgiving place, where lawlessness, bloodshed, and disorder often reigned and where none of the amenities we take for granted today existed. After the war, Gilbreath remained in the army where his duties during the years of Reconstruction resulted in extensive travel in the war-torn South and throughout the vast wilderness of the western United States.

He takes us on a fascinating and hazardous journey by stagecoach in the Texas frontier that took him 175 hours to travel 175 miles, where the plains were rife with raids by warring Indians and filled with herds of buffalo that extended for 200 miles. We learn about the revolting food he was obliged to eat, and how this crude and thoroughly rough means of travel bore no resemblance to the romantic images depicted in Hollywood films.

The reader will also learn what it was like to experience a shipwreck off the Gulf coast, travel in a wagon train pulled by mules with pet names, and steam aboard a riverboat for more than 700 miles to the Montana Territory to establish Fort Custer, where his daughter was born in a tent with his cook acting as a midwife.

Gilbreath also witnessed events such as the great Chicago fire of October, 1871, that burned \$200 million in property, killed some 300 people, and left another 100,000 homeless.

His amazing journey through America ended tragically on August 22, 1898, as a result of his service in the Spanish-American War. It is likely that, while stationed in Puerto Rico, he was a victim of an illness that led to what is thought to have been a stroke at the age of 59.

Major Gilbreath is buried in Arlington National Cemetery among fellow comrades-in-arms of America's wars. We are indeed fortunate that his legacy lives on in the pages of these remarkable journals.

—*Carlo D'Este*





Camp of 20<sup>th</sup> Regt. Ind.  
May 7 1863

PART ONE

# CIVIL WAR

1861-1865

*There is no pretense to originality in these pages as  
I have consulted all the reports and books on these events  
I could lay my hands on to help me make a connected  
story with the hope that it may be slightly interesting.*

*I have tried to relate my own experiences and to tell of  
what I saw so that it is all more personal than a general  
history of either the Twentieth Indiana Volunteer  
Infantry or of the events in which we took our part.*

*So too, with regard to battles, I have only written of  
my part or the part of my Regiment and have not tried  
to give a full description of the affair. There are numerous  
stories of these battles fully describing all of them.*

—E.C.G.



## RAISING & ORGANIZING THE REGIMENT

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# 1861

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**I**n a country like ours was in 1861, accustomed to a long series of years of peace and composed of a people not at all habituated to the performance of any military duty, the mobilization of a large force in a short time was a problem not easily solved.

History relates the story of the arousing of public sentiment in the North on the attempt of the Southern States to withdraw from the Union. I shall confine this narrative to the more personal story of the raising of the Volunteer Company and the organization of the Regiment to which I belonged, the 20th Indiana Volunteers, and shall follow this with an account of the Regiment's experiences, the whole intended to be my own personal experience as well as the movements of the Regiment during the War.

The story of raising one Company or one Regiment from county districts was like the story of each one so raised.

In 1861, I was living at Valparaiso, the County seat of Porter County, Indiana. Like the majority of the great mass afterwards formed into the gigantic Volunteer Army of the War of the Rebellion, the people of this county were living with no thoughts of the possibility of such events as came to them in the following four years.

We, who became members of the Volunteer Army from that county, were entertaining only hopes for the future bounded by friends, neighbors and our immediate surroundings.

I wished only for a light which would guide me to a way by which I could care for my mother, her daughter and other son.

I had begun to study law in the office of Mark L. DeMott, Valparaiso, Indiana, who later became Colonel in the Volunteer and held many offices including that of member of Congress. My law study had progressed to such an extent that I had hopes of being admitted to practice at the Bar after a few more months' work.

The War alarm was sounded. President Lincoln called for 75,000 Volunteers. I paid little attention to the matter except to keep posted by the newspapers as to the excitement of the country, and certainly had little thought of going into the Army myself.

On the 4th of June, 1861, J. W. Lytle, a personal friend of mine and of my mother, came to Valparaiso from a visit to his old home and the home of his father at Logansport, Indiana. At the latter place, he had come in contact with W. L. Brown, a Mexican War Veteran, and had been asked by Brown to help raise a Rifle Regiment which Brown had authority for from the Secretary of War at Washington.

Lytle had been a Civil Engineer and I had worked under his orders for some time while he was building a railroad from Logansport to Valparaiso, Indiana. I met him quite by accident, as he stepped off the train at Valparaiso. His first exclamation was, "You are just the one I wanted to see, for you are going to War with me." I was surprised, and refused. I pass the personal and affecting incident following his arrival, and say that on the 5th of June, Mr. Lytle and myself begun work raising a Company.

To do this, we simply rode through the country, informing everyone of our desires and sending out information that we had fixed on the 15th day of June for a grand meeting at the courthouse for the purpose of organizing a Company for the War under the call of the President for 75,000 men.

On the day fixed, the 15th day of June 1861, nearly everybody in the county came to Valparaiso, and so great was the enthusiasm that, in an hour after the meeting was called, we had enrolled 150 men or 50 more than we needed. So little did we know about military affairs that we supposed we could keep all of these men with us.

When the time came at that meeting for the selection of Officers, everybody was good-natured and Lytle urged me for Captain while I urged him to take it. Either one of us would have been satisfied with any position in the Company.

Lytle was made Captain by vote of the 150 enrolled. I was elected 1st Lieutenant. The 2nd Lieutenant and 1st Sergeant, Sergeants and Corporals were also elected, and, after a day of pleasurable excitement, we began our preparation to leave home.

We had fixed on the 4th day of July as the day for starting for the rendezvous. This day was fixed by Col. Brown for each Company to start from home.

Lafayette, Indiana was the place at which all the Companies were to assemble and the Regiment was to be organized.

On the 4th day of July, the day fixed for the men to get together, almost every man, woman and child in Porter County was at Valparaiso.

The only music in town was a fife and drum. The former was played by M. Cook, the Sheriff, and the latter by Jacob Brewer, the blacksmith. These gentlemen played all day and were only too anxious to march us to the railroad Station and to go with us to Lafayette.

The crowd at the Depot was very extensive, and we had plenty of time to say good-bye to all our friends. We went without change of cars to Lafayette, and so on the 5th of July marched into camp.

Other Companies came in from time to time until on the 6th all had assembled.

The Col., W. L. Brown, had some experience of war and, being a very energetic man, began at once to get his men in shape as well as he could. It was no easy matter to form the Regiment, as so few had any notion of what was to be done.

The number of the Regiment was given from the office of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana.

The Colonel gave the letters to the Companies, and the Captains, 1st Lieutenants, and 2nd Lieutenants each took rank from the place the Company occupied as to the alphabet. Captain & etc. of Company A, was senior Captain followed by Captain of Company B, and so to the last, or Company K.

The Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, Major, Adjutant, Regimental Quartermaster, the Surgeon and Assistant Surgeon were all appointed by the Governor.

This form of organization was only for the first formulation of the

Regiment. As vacancies occurred, the Lieutenant Colonel was promoted to be Colonel, the Major to be Lieutenant Colonel and the senior Captain was promoted to be Major.

In Companies when a vacancy in the Captain's place happened, the 1st Lieutenant of the Company was promoted and he was followed by the 2nd Lieutenant and by the 1st Sergeant of the Company. The Captain promoted in his Company took his rank with the rest of the Captains according to the date of his commission, and was promoted to be Major in that order, without reference to the original letter of the Company.

Our Company was lettered I, next to the last of the 10 in the Regiment. This was given because Capt. Lytle called Logansport his home, and that being the home of Col. Brown, the latter thought best to give us a low place. He was confirmed in this no doubt because Logansport Company was F.

In the formation of the Companies at Lafayette, each Captain selected his own 1st Sergeant, Sergeants, Corporals, Musicians, and so on, making his choice generally of those picked out by the men.



THE CAMP AT LAFAYETTE WAS AN AMUSING PLACE to think of now after the lapse of years. There were 1100 untrained Hoosiers there who had camped out often enough, no doubt, but never before under any restraint whatever. Guards were stationed around the camp, but their old style Harper's Ferry smooth-bore muskets without any ammunition were of little avail to keep men in bounds. Everybody was good-natured and having too much fun to get real mad about anything. Sentinels did not yet know that such a thing as military dignity could be in existence.

The men had great bunks in sheds with one side open and plenty of straw. No clothing was issued, so they all had to depend on what they brought from home.

Company messes were formed, and each Company was drilled in such movements as the Officers had mastered. The Colonel even essayed to move the whole crowd out as for Battalion drill, but this did not amount to as much as the other.

The Officers were as zealous and enthusiastic as we could be, and were



very busy preparing to be mustered into the U.S. Service. With all our efforts, however, I think of the camp at Lafayette is [as?] one of the greatest turmoil I can now imagine.

On the 22nd day of July 1861, we were gotten ready to be mustered in the United States Service. The Officers and men were not submitted to any medical examination. The Mustering Officer simply walked along the line of each Company, looked at the man's hands and general appearance, asked him if he were all right and sound in every way, and passed on. The Mustering Officer took his place in front of the Company after inspection and, calling on the Officers and men to hold up their right hands, read or administered to them the usual oath of enlistment.

Each Company was mustered in separately and was then dismissed.

The officer who mustered in our Regiment was Major Thomas J. Wood, 1st Cavalry, U.S. Army, a very dignified old soldier who had been in service since 1845. He was a graduate from West Point and from Kentucky.

As he passed around the line of Company I, he found a thin 6 footer in the second file from the right, in the rear rank, named John Smith. Smith had lost the index finger of his right hand. This was a serious defect. As Smith held out his hand, Major Wood said, "You can't shoot a gun with that hand." "Yes, I can," said Smith. Major said, "Do you think you could hit a man at 400 yards?" Smith replied, "I wish you would step out and let me try."

The Major went on. At the left of the Company he found a young boy with blocks placed under his heels to make him tall enough to pass muster. The blocks were taken away, and young Boulson went off crying like a child.

Smith was sworn in. Boulson went with me as sort of a servant until he became large enough to enlist, when he became a fifer of the Company and later the Chief of Field Music in the Regiment. He is now a prominent physician in Jackson, Michigan.

It may be well observed at this place that the 20th Indiana Regiment was composed of quite young men, most all from life in the country. I, myself, was only 21 years old in the month of May 1861. All trades were represented in the Regiment. The Captain of Company F was a Methodist Minister, while the Captain of Company A was a shoemaker; Captain of Company I was a Civil Engineer.

There were no strictly town or city Companies in the Regiment, but

each Company represented some County. There was a Company from each of the following Counties: Marion, Tippecanoe, Porter, Lake, La Porte, Carroll, Cass, Marshall, Jasper and Howard.

The Officers of the 20th Indiana at the time of the Muster in were as follows:

**Field and Staff**

William L. Brown, Colonel, Logansport  
Charles D. Murray, Lieut. Colonel, Kokomo  
Benjamin H. Smith, Major, Logansport  
Israel N. Stills, Adjutant, Lafayette  
Isaac W. Hart, R. Q. M, Attica  
William C. Porter, Chaplain, Plymouth  
Orpheus Everts, Surgeon, La Porte  
Anson Hurd, Asst. Surgeon, Oxford

**Company A**

John Van Valkenburg, Captain, Peru  
William B. Rayburn, 1st Lieutenant, Peru  
John Hoover, 2nd Lieutenant, Peru

**Company B**

John Wheeler, Captain, Crown Point  
Charles A. Bell, 1st Lieutenant, Corydon  
Michael Sheehan, 2nd Lieutenant, Crown Point

**Company C**

Oliver H. P. Bailey, Captain, Plymouth  
William C. Castleman, 1st Lieutenant, Plymouth  
Joseph Lynch, 2nd Lieutenant, Plymouth

**Company D**

George F. Dick, Captain, Attica  
Charles Reese, 1st Lieutenant, Attica  
James A. Wilson, 2nd Lieutenant, Attica

**Company E**

James H. Shannon, Captain, La Porte

John W. Andrews, 1st Lieutenant, La Porte

John E. Sweet, 2nd Lieutenant, La Porte

**Company F**

John Kistler, Captain, Danville

John H. Logan, 1st Lieutenant, Logansport

Edward C. Sutherland, 2nd Lieutenant, Logansport

**Company G**

Nathaniel C. Herron, Captain, Delphi

William C. L. Taylor, 1st Lieutenant, Lafayette

William H. Brittingham, 2nd Lieutenant, Lafayette

**Company H**

George W. Geisendorff, Captain, Indianapolis

George W. Meikel, 1st Lieutenant, Indianapolis

William O. Sherwood, 2nd Lieutenant, Indianapolis

**Company I**

James W. Lytle, Captain, Valparaiso

Erasmus C. Gilbreath, 1st Lieutenant, Valparaiso

William I. Carr, 2nd Lieutenant, Valparaiso

**Company K**

Alfred Reed, Captain, Monticello

John I. Richardson, 1st Lieutenant, Monticello

Daniel D. Dote, 2nd Lieutenant, Monticello

## EQUIPPING THE REGIMENT & LEAVING INDIANA

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1861

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**T**he two days of July 23rd and 24th, 1861, were rather slow to pass, and rather solemn ones for all of us. We had been sworn into the service of the United States, and possibly felt the serious side of really being soldiers for the Government.

On the 24th of July, we left Lafayette by rail for the city of Indianapolis. We numbered 1200 men, and every man carried with him his grip sack or carpet bag. As no uniforms had been issued to us, the variety of dress was very great, and it was a motley procession.

Arriving at Indianapolis on the 25th, we camped at Camp Morton just outside of the city. The camp was in a beautiful place and well situated to facilitate the work of completing our organization. Clothing was given out to the men. Officers procured their uniforms, swords, & etc. The uniform of the men consisted of a jeans suit, gray in color, the coat or jacket was of Zouave shape with round corners and a braided edge. Thus our first suits were the gray color which the Confederacy adopted as their own. The material was of the worst possible quality and soon wore out. The Officers wore the blue of the Regular Army.

Everything about the Capital was haste and hurry, and the energy displayed by Oliver P. Morton, the Governor, and his assistants was quite wonderful, as not one had had experience in such affairs. He soon collected about him a number of Regular Army Quartermasters and other Officers, and everything moved quite smoothly.

The time came a few days after our going into camp at Indianapolis for



the issue to us of guns, belts, cartridge boxes, & etc. This was done in this way. The various articles were placed in a large store building. We were marched on the side street and entered the back door through an alleyway. The Officers required the men to equip themselves as they passed to the front door. Each man picked up a belt, cartridge box, haversack, canteen, & etc., and the last thing at the front door was the gun. One Company followed another rapidly, and the entire Regiment was soon equipped.

The Companies were formed on the main street of the city by the Company Officers as fast as they arrived with their equipments.

As I have said before, the Regiment was raised to be a "Rifle Regiment," and in getting men together, we were told to induce them to enlist for a "Rifle Regiment." This plea had its effect, as the idea of carrying a smooth-bore musket shooting buckshot with a round ball in each cartridge was repulsive to all who gave the matter any thought. It will thus be readily imagined how intensely indignant every man was when he found that he was in possession of an old-fashioned smooth-bore Harper's Ferry Musket.

It may be well to explain at this time that a smooth-bore gun for foot troops was manufactured by the Government at Springfield, Mass. from 1795. It was fired by means of a flint and pan, and was called a musket after a French Model.

In 1842 the Government adopted the use of percussion caps, and old muskets were changed at Harper's Ferry so that, instead of the flint and steel, the percussion caps were used. These altered muskets were called Harper's Ferry Muskets because altered there. All muskets used a round ball and three buckshot in each cartridge.

In 1846 there were not enough of the altered muskets to arm the troops taking part in the Mexican War, and Genl. Scott preferred to use the old flintlock musket to using an untried gun (like the musket altered to use percussion caps), and the Mexican War was fought with the 1795 gun. After the Mexican War, the altered musket became of general use in the Army.

In 1855 the new gun, called the Springfield Rifle, was adopted and placed in the hands of the Regular Army, but the Government had not arms enough at the beginning of the war for so many troops, so they were compelled to use the old altered musket the caliber of which was 69, the diameter of the ball being 69 one-hundredths of an inch.

These rifles of 1855 were what our men supposed they were to get while the old musket was what was issued. All the guns given out by the Government were muzzle loading.

When our men were formed in the street after receiving their equipment, there was a groan of indignation which increased to loud expressions of dissatisfaction and, before the Officers knew what was going on, all Companies had piled their guns on the sidewalk.

There was great excitement, and the Governor came out and wanted all the Officers arrested. After a good deal of persuasion, we coaxed the men to carry the musket to camp and the Governor promised to explain things to us.

The following morning on looking out at Reville, we found that the men had gone to the guard line and had thrown the guns in a heap outside the camp.

The Governor came to our camp, but when he tried to speak, the men hissed him. He arranged with the Colonel to show good faith in the promise to give us rifles, so that Companies A and B on the right and left flank of the Regiment should at once receive the rifles, and that the other Companies should be supplied at an early day with rifles. The men accepted of the situation, and we had no more difficulty.

Having completed our equipment and organization at Indianapolis, we were ordered out of the State, and left the State on the 2nd day of August 1861. The journey was delightful, as at every farm, village and town on the way we were received with every demonstration of patriotism.

We went by way of Pittsburgh and Harrisburg to Cockeysville, Maryland, thirteen miles from Baltimore, and there had a beautiful camping place.

Our first duty consisted of guarding 65 bridges on the Northern Central Railroad running from Baltimore to Harrisburg. We drilled a great deal and worked ourselves into a fair state of discipline.

During our stay at Cockeysville, the Officers and men made frequent trips to the city of Baltimore. These visits were probably the first time many of the Regiment had seen a city.

Our stay at Cockeysville was short, as the Regiment was ordered to Baltimore and Fortress Monroe. We left Cockeysville about the first of September, 1861, and on our arrival at Baltimore by the Northern Cen-

tral Railroad, we were disembarked from the cars at the old Fulton Depot near where now stands the Union Depot.

We were feeling that Baltimore was still very hostile to all Union people, as it was no doubt, so that the Colonel ordered all the muskets loaded. It was an awfully dangerous thing to do, as I look at it now, as the slightest accident might have precipitated a fearful disaster.

After disembarking, we marched through the city of Baltimore, passing down St. Paul [Street] to Baltimore Street and to the wharves where we took steamer and were landed at Fortress Monroe next morning.

We were marched to the mainland, and went into camp at what was called Camp Hamilton; Genl. J. E. Wool commanding the Department, and Genl. Joseph K. Mansfield commanding the Camp. There were several Regiments of Volunteers in this camp, and we were kept hard at work drilling and marching for practice.

About the 26th of September, we took the steamer S. S. *Spaulding*, and on the 28th entered the inlet of Fort Hatteras. Most of us had never seen the ocean before, and as the passage was stormy, we had wonderful experiences.

On reporting to the Commanding Officer at Fort Hatteras, we were ordered to change from the ocean steamer to smaller vessels and ordered to proceed inside the Hatteras Island in Pamlico Sound to the extreme northern end of the Island where there was a small inlet. This place was called Chickamicomico Beach, and the object of sending us there was to establish a camp from which to demonstrate against Roanoke Island.

**COMMENTARY:** *When the first shots of the Civil War were fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor, at dawn on April 12, 1861, the total strength of the U.S. regular army was just over 16,000. But by early May, as the battle lines emerged between Confederacy and Union, President Lincoln had called for over 150,000 volunteers. Many states responded quickly, as did Indiana, and volunteer regiments were raised. Initially, the units had the character of town meetings, with basic democracy prevailing over anything like military discipline in selection of officers and decisions about uniforms and weapons. Some drilling occurred, but there was little in the way of basic training. Neither side was prepared for the scale, ferocity, and duration of the war that had begun.*

## HORRORS ON HATTERAS ISLAND

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1861

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**H**atteras Island is a long narrow spit of land with Pamlico Sound on the west. It is about 45 miles long, extending from Hatteras Inlet to Loggerhead Inlet on the north end. The former inlet is only about 12 hours' sail from Fortress Monroe. The island is as wide as 2 miles in one place, but is generally much narrower.

Chickamicomico Beach is about 40 miles from Hatteras Inlet by water, and only a few hours steaming from Roanoke Island.

The surf of the sea beats upon the east side of the island and over it in many places in cases of a storm or strong east wind. The Sound, on [the] west side of the island, is quite still and the bottom shoals for a long distance into the Sound, and there are only a few places where a steamer could reach the shore. In fact, I believe that at Hatteras Lighthouse, ten miles north of the inlet, is the only place, and there only if an expert pilot is at the wheel.

To get to Chickamicomico, we transferred at once from the ocean steamer to several small gunboats which drew only 6 to 9 feet of water. In them, we were taken north through Pamlico Sound and were compelled to anchor about 3 miles from shore, and to disembark in lighters. This we accomplished with 7 Companies, or about 500 men, on the 29th of September.

The Officer in command at Fort Hatteras was in such haste to send us north that we carried little baggage and very few rations. He wanted to send all of our baggage on a separate boat. Our Regimental Quartermaster was left at the Inlet to bring up the baggage.

We were without tents or rations on landing. Capt. Isaac W. Hart, our