

JAMES T. FRITSCH



*The
Unried
Rifle*

**THE TWENTY-NINTH
OHIO VOLUNTEER INFANTRY
IN THE CIVIL WAR**

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Prologue

THE WONDER OF THE AGE

Its soldiers came from many places in northeastern Ohio, but Jefferson, seat of Ashtabula County, was the hometown of the Twenty-Ninth Ohio Volunteer Infantry. The men who came up with the idea of founding the regiment lived in Jefferson, as did J. R. Giddings, the famous politician who led them in their quest to have a regiment whose membership reflected their fervent antislavery beliefs. The camp where the regiment organized, and where young men took their first clumsy soldier steps, sat on the edge of the village, and its first company, Capt. William Fitch's Company A, was of this place.

A few decades earlier Jefferson, Ohio, had been a muddy stopover in the middle of a lightless primeval forest. By 1860, the year before the war, Jefferson had become a fair facsimile of a New England village. It had an avenue of pretty churches, a fine courthouse, and shaded streets of white clapboard houses set back on neat lawns. Jefferson's population of 658 was only half that of the largest place in the county, the city of Ashtabula, and smaller by a third than the village of Conneaut, both of which, unlike Jefferson, enjoyed the advantages of fine natural harbors on Lake Erie and a place on the railroad.¹ The only real business of the village revolved around the battalion of lawyers who worked from a row of squatty cottages lining an alley next door to the courthouse. In the only surviving photograph taken before the Civil War, Jefferson looks about the same as any other village of the time: a dusty main street, a plank walk running along the front of a common-walled row of businesses, and a few men in linen dusters and stovepipe hats leaning against hitching rails and lounging in doorways.

The Howells family moved to Jefferson from southern Ohio in the 1850s, knowing it to be a place more in step with their own antislavery beliefs. The elder Howells, William Cooper Howells, took over the editorial responsibilities at Joshua R. Giddings's pulpit-newspaper, the *Ashtabula Sentinel*. His son William Dean Howells spent most of his adolescence there. Had he stayed in Jefferson he might have enlisted in the Twenty-Ninth Ohio and written the great American novel about it and the Civil War. But Howells grew bored with village life and left for better and larger opportunities in Columbus. Howells would become the best-known man of American letters of his day. As an old man, he looked back at the Jefferson of his boyhood and concluded that it had been "simply the high-water mark of American civilization, a place so charming and warm that only fiction could portray it faithfully."² It was worthy of a book, and Howells wrote one, which he titled *Years of My Youth*.

He remembered the people of Jefferson as affable but blunt in disposition, hard working, and hard thinking, and he described everyone in the village as amazingly literary. The people were universally poor, but their entertainments cost them nothing. There were organized excursions into the country to pick blackberries or gather chestnuts in their seasons, barn-raising, and riotous Fourth of July. Young people slipped along the village streets, stopping to serenade at the homes of friends. The annual county-wide rendezvous that was the Ashtabula County Fair marked the summer's end. Christmas celebrations were something out of Charles Dickens. Antislavery zealots came to lecture, which in Jefferson was like

preaching to the choir. From what can be seen in the photograph of the main street—and imagined through the recollections of Howells—Jefferson, Ohio, appears too fixed in its homely, charming customs for anything revolutionary to have occurred here, but thinking that would be a mistake.

There was another side to Jefferson beyond the field of view of the photograph, and apparently forgotten by Howells. Jefferson as it turns out is noteworthy for more than its sponsorship of the Twenty-Ninth Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment, and its notoriety explains in a very direct way why the regiment came into existence. Jefferson could rightly be considered one of the birthplaces of the Civil War. It was this particular neighborhood's harsh, insistent voice, and its defiant actions on the issue of slavery, that led in no small way to the calamity of civil war. The people that Howells remembered as open minded were also the troubling opposite.

The several counties making up the Western Reserve of northeastern Ohio were famously antislavery, but Ashtabula County was by national reputation the most notoriously abolitionist among them, and Jefferson, its county seat, was the epicenter. Two nationally famous politicians lived in the village; both were reviled in the South: U.S. senator Ben Wade, and U.S. congressman Joshua Reed Giddings. Howells remembered that by the late 1850s the churches stood empty. The people were no longer much interested in religion, and the young openly mocked it. They had replaced the old-fashioned orthodoxy of their New England grandfathers, first with a devotion to temperance, and then to the antislavery cause. It had begun in the 1830s with scholarly meetings in schoolhouses, and progressed to an open flaunting of the Fugitive Slave Law, until finally the believers threatened violent insurrection if the federal government dared to interfere. This region of small farms and tranquil, well-ordered villages was also the home, arsenal, and refuge of John Brown, the martyr of Harpers Ferry. Shock waves originating here rolled out across the nation and helped break otherwise peacefully disposed Americans loose from their reason. Over time, the people here came to believe that war was inevitable, and some, like J. R. Giddings, clamored for it.

For years, the Jefferson newspaper, like most others in this part of Ohio, was filled with relentless antislavery agitation: graphic, firsthand accounts of Southern cruelty; the full texts of Giddings's provocative floor speeches in Congress, and of those made by angry, frock-coated men from the courthouse steps. All these produced a hatred not just of slavery, but of all things Southern. If some in the county had had it their way, the Civil War would have been fought years earlier than it was. "That sooner than submit to such odious laws we will see the Union dissolved; sooner than see slavery perpetual we would see war; and sooner than be slaves we will fight!"³ This resolution had been overwhelmingly approved in a sleepy village not far from Jefferson. The year: 1850.

Some Reserve residents feared what the hate mongering might produce and wanted no part of it. As early as the 1830s, with the antislavery movement already galloping through the Reserve, a group of citizens in Painesville, a picturesque place on Lake Erie, above Jefferson, met to consider the consequences of having the Reserve's name so intimately associated with so divisive an issue and concluded the one-sided discourse had in it the seeds of civil war.⁴ Over the years, the voices of those who counseled restraint became more difficult to hear, until the Reserve was known at last as the most abolition-obsessed region in the entire nation.⁵ As the Reserve's association with antislavery deepened, its people began to regard themselves as besieged by barbarians, leaders of a lonely crusade in a nation sunk down by the sin of slavery and cut loose from the sacred intentions of the Founding Fathers. They alone knew the course to redemption, and they had been led in that cause by their congressman of two decades, the Honorable Joshua Giddings.

Giddings's rise paralleled that of another midwestern politician, Abraham Lincoln. Both grew up in log cabins, both were self-educated to an extraordinary extent on borrowed books, both were champion wrestlers and rail splitters, and both took up the study of law. Giddings and Ben Wade opened a law office and were soon the wealthiest two men in Jefferson. Fussing over legal papers dragged Giddings down into episodes of depression. He turned to land speculation, which provided the excitement he craved, but his timing was bad and he lost his shirt in the Panic of 1837. His despair caused a psychic

change, after which he pledged to devote himself to uplifting mankind. The antislavery movement drew him like a lodestone. When he went to Congress, in 1839, his was one of the first voices to rail against the slave interests, and his supporters thought him their Daniel in the lions' den. A pariah in Washington because of his outspoken views, he was welcomed in every kitchen and played baseball in his shirtsleeves when home in Jefferson.

In the South he was the personification of everything that was wrong with the North: a cold-blooded advocate of slave revolt, a demon who grinned happily at the prospect of Southerners awash in their own blood.⁶ The most scurrilous of these epithets were invariably reprinted in the *Sentinel*. Giddings clipped them from the newspapers and pasted them into his scrapbook, suggesting that he took satisfaction in the animosity he had stirred up. He had powerful enemies in his own state, and even within the Reserve. The editors of the *Cleveland Herald* referred to him as the Old Reprobate and believed his radical ideas were "putrid excrescence."⁷ In their own state, feelings toward the people of the Western Reserve were hardly more charitable. Some Ohioans regarded the Reserve as "one vast Coon Pen," for the number of runaway slaves that were given refuge there, and wished that the Reserve would dry up and blow away.⁸

The people's crusade against slavery had been one of words mostly, until the Fugitive Slave Law became the law of the land. After that, the faithful in the Reserve set themselves on a course of open subversion of the law. Those who favored violent action had their own champion. John Brown had been raised not far from Akron and his face was familiar to everyone. He led a Reserve band into the Kansas-Missouri border dispute. The authorities saw in Brown's bloody work not the hand of an avenging God but simple murder. He ended up in Jefferson, where he was concealed from the authorities by local sympathizers, including Joshua Giddings's son Grotius.⁹ Brown received money, arms, and manpower from supporters in Ashtabula County for his assault on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He had hoped to inspire a slave revolt, but the slaves did not rise up, and the raid was a failure. Brown himself had been captured, but a few of his band escaped, and at least four of them fled straight back to Ashtabula County.

Brown was sentenced to death for treason, and rumors began to circulate that men were plotting to break Brown out of the Richmond jail. The source of the plotting was Ashtabula County.¹⁰ Brown was hanged, and across the Reserve he was immediately elevated to sainthood. Preachers climbed into their pulpits and interpreted his legacy: he had proved that the stain on the national soul could never be blotted out without the effusion of blood.¹¹ Some in Washington feared that beneath Brown's insurrection lay a broader, far more troubling conspiracy, and various committees were established to investigate.¹² Virginia senator James Mason and the Honorable Clement Vallandigham of Ohio began to investigate. It didn't take a bloodhound to see that the road to Harpers Ferry ran straight back in the direction of Ashtabula County, and some saw it leading right into Giddings's parlor.¹³ Giddings admitted that he had entertained Brown over tea in his home, and that he had corresponded with Brown during the Kansas difficulties, but of his plan to raid Harpers Ferry, Giddings said he knew nothing until he read about it in the newspapers afterward.¹⁴ Those interested in seeing Giddings brought to justice gave up after he threatened to sue them for libel, but they got in the last word on the John Brown affair: the ceaseless agitation of Giddings and men like him was responsible for the insurrectionary environment in which John Brown flourished.¹⁵

A Richmond newspaper posted a bounty of \$5,000 for Giddings's head, and \$5,000 more to the man who could bring him to Richmond alive.¹⁶ Threats did not deter Giddings in the least; he continued to denounce the Fugitive Slave Law as piratical and told his listeners that if violence were necessary to resist it, then so be it. His followers in Jefferson followed his lead.

Wanted fugitives from the raid stood on the courthouse steps the day after Brown was hanged in Charleston, in 1859, and vowed vengeance. One thousand armed Ashtabula County men, known as the Black Strings for the dark hank of thread they looped through their buttonhole, swore oaths to protect the Harpers Ferry fugitives. The Black Strings manned outposts at every approach to the village and had the final say on who could pass by. A plaque mounted on the courthouse wall memorializing the resisters

claims with defiant pride, “The Federal Government made little effort to arrest any person in Ashtabula County as a conspirator or witness for fear of invoking Civil War.”

By 1859, J. R. Giddings’s lifelong crusade against slavery had brought the nation to the edge of civil war, and his years of struggle were about to produce fruit. When the local nominating convention of the Republican Party he had helped found met in Jefferson that autumn, he was passed over in favor of a younger and less radical man. Giddings found himself involuntarily removed from the public spotlight.¹⁷ The John Brown raid had dangerously breached the dam holding back sectional hatred, and it would take only one more push to bring it down entirely, with the election of Abraham Lincoln as president of the United States. The Reserve geared up early in the campaign of 1860 to make sure voters lined up foursquare behind the Illinois Rail-Splitter. The campaign was a gigantic pageant, big on torchlight parades and spectacles of all sorts and short on serious consideration of the issues: union or disunion, war or peace. In every Reserve town, young men enlisted in a pro-Lincoln organization called the Wide Awakes. Their uniforms eerily resembled the costume later adopted by the U.S. Army for what was to come: kepi-style caps, dark-blue trousers and blouses, and oilcloth capes, worn to deflect the sparks their lamps threw off.

The newspapers pitched in for all they were worth and stepped up their longtime practice of encouraging revulsion toward the South. Scattered among legitimate news pieces were stories of outrages committed upon innocent Northern visitors: a young woman traveling through Virginia victimized by brutes who assailed her with foul language and spat tobacco juice on her white crinoline skirts when her accent gave her away as a Yankee; a young Illinois man who was bullwhipped to death by Texans when he let slip that he was against slavery.¹⁸ Keeping the readers’ emotions as inflamed as a case of poison ivy proved unnecessary. Lincoln took every free state except New Jersey. He did not get a single electoral vote in any Southern state. Votes for him in the Reserve amounted to a stampede, and local Republicans claimed that without their support, he might not have won in Ohio, where the contest had been less lopsided.¹⁹

The people had waited for this moment for decades, and with their man elected, they pulled out all the stops in a regular jubilee that made past celebrations seem puny and halfhearted in comparison. One train after another pulled into Akron, each car jammed to the roof with the joyful of the surrounding villages.²⁰ Torchlight parades snaked through the streets, skyrockets were fired from rooftops, every public place was illuminated by huge bonfires, and lurid forty-foot-tall images of Washington and Lincoln were projected by lanterns onto the sides of buildings. The jubilant were heedless of the animosity Lincoln’s election had touched off in the South. Six weeks after the election South Carolina seceded from the Union, joined soon after by six other Southern states. For years, Reserve politicians had ridiculed the threats of Southern states to leave the Union; these had been bluffs, calculated by Southern fire-eaters to win concessions for their “darling institution” of slavery. At first, South Carolina’s secession from the Union was not taken seriously in the Reserve.

Lincoln’s inauguration train pulled into Columbus, where he addressed the state legislature. The listeners found Lincoln’s speech oddly vague and introspective. In these dangerous times, he was sounding like a man with his head in the sand. “I have not maintained silence from any want of real anxiety. It is a good thing that there is no more than anxiety, for there is nothing going wrong. . . . We entertain different views upon political questions, but nobody is suffering anything.”²¹

The train moved deeper into the Reserve, where the Christmas season just past had held little goodwill toward men. At John Brown’s hometown of Hudson, in Summit County, five thousand people showed up to greet Lincoln. He appeared for a second on the platform, gave the spectators a look at a real live president, and disappeared back into his car.²² At Ravenna, west of Akron, he said that he realized that not everyone in the Reserve had voted for him.

But let me tell to those who did not vote for me, an anecdote of a certain Irish friend that I met yesterday. He said that he did not vote for me, but went for Douglas. “Now,” I said to him, “I will tell you what you ought to do in that case. If we will all turn in and keep

the ship from sinking this voyage, there may be a chance for Douglas on the next; but if we let it go down now, neither he nor anybody else will have an opportunity of sailing in it again." Now, was that not good advice?

The crowd replied in one voice, "Yes, yes, that's the talk."²³ The town's local artillery fired a round, shattering the window through which Mrs. Lincoln was peering out nervously at the rambunctious crowd. At Cleveland, the Lincoln party rode two miles through the muddy snow to the Weddell House. The people of the Western Reserve were used to their politicians talking in language as hard as New England granite. But again, Lincoln's speech stuck them as soft and vague. "Why all this excitement? Why all these complaints? As I said before, this crisis is all artificial. It has no foundation in fact. It can't be argued up, and it can't be argued down. Let it alone and it will go down itself."²⁴

The inaugural train pushed east, out along Ohio's north shore, stopping at every Reserve station along the line. At Ashtabula, a crowd of three thousand people had gathered around the city's depot. Lincoln appeared on the platform of the rearmost car. The band struck up and the crowd cheered. He said in a voice so hoarse only those nearest him could hear, "I can only say how do you do, and farewell, as my voice, you perceive will warrant nothing more."²⁵ The residents of Conneaut awoke to the sound of ringing bells and the booming of the town's cannon. They rushed into town and crowded dangerously close to the railroad track. Lincoln explained that he had lost his voice and could not speak. As the train began to move forward, parting the crowd, a spectator hollered above the din of music and screeching iron wheels, "Don't give up the ship," and Lincoln replied, "With your aid I will never, so long as life lasts."²⁶

No where in the Reserve had Lincoln echoed the warlike sentiment of its people. Lincoln's words were meant to relax the grip on the trigger, but in the Reserve, they fell on the ears of a people whose hearing had been deafened by years of war talk. Nevertheless, there still might be a pulling back from the brink. A peace conference in Washington was presenting resolutions hoped to stave off war. When it got right down to it, most people, North and South, still had enough composure to see that the nation was sliding down into an abyss, and they wanted a peaceful solution. Faced now with the real possibility of taking up arms against their own countrymen, most Ohioans decided compromise was preferable to civil war. Perhaps the South deserved consideration of its grievances, especially over the Fugitive Slave Law.²⁷ At the statehouse, in Columbus, a movement toward compromise gained momentum. Up in the Western Reserve, the people dug in their heels and prepared to resist. With South Carolina gone out and other Southern states threatening to join her, Joshua Giddings addressed an anticompromise meeting in Jefferson. He raised his arms and declared, "Sir, whether those States remain in the Union, or shoot madly from their spheres . . . I have no fear of dissolution. . . . Our entire redemption from the slave power *must come*, whether it come in peace, or in blood, I know not, but whether in peace or in blood, let it come."²⁸

In Akron the same intransigent attitude was broadcast: there would be no further compromise of principle with slavery, whatever the result.²⁹ Even if secession advanced further, Reserve citizens were confident that the strength of a Southern confederacy was puny compared to the might of the North; Fort Sumter, the vulnerable federal bastion out in Charleston harbor, was a perfect floating castle and, like the North, impregnable to anything the South might throw at them. In these fragile days, citizens of the Reserve continued to pass runaway slaves through to the safety of Canada. With Lincoln elected, it was predicted that the steady flow of refugees of years past would become a stampede.³⁰

Lincoln was inaugurated on March 4, 1861, and he was immediately beset by office seekers. At the head of the line was J. R. Giddings. He had fastened on the remunerative and comfortable consulate post at Montreal.³¹ He called in old favors from influential men like Salmon P. Chase and Charles Sumner and got the job and the remarkable \$4,000 annual salary that went with it.³² But Giddings was a man who craved the limelight, and the Montreal post would take him out of the country just when the issue he had championed was about to be tested.

With the national crisis deepening, the people of Ashtabula County became suddenly fascinated with the prospect of riches. Oil had been found oozing from the banks of a creek in the county near the time Texas had seceded from the Union, and a well drilled nearby produced an explosion of oil. Fever took hold that would outrun the excitement touched off by the discovery of gold in California a decade earlier. In a very short time, Ashtabula County seemed poised to outgrow its reputation as an antislavery headquarters and the state's foremost producer of cheese and to become famous as the new El Dorado. Farmers stood all day in their fields haggling with speculators, while un milked cows bawled at their elbows. An oil company had formed near Kingsville and hoped to find enough oil there to "slide herself out of the Union," a jibe that showed the people here still were not taking Southern secession seriously.³³

Running beside news of the wildfire spread of the oil fever were situation reports on the developing crisis in Charleston harbor, drawings of the new Southern flag, and scholarly analysis of the skill of the gunners lobbing shells into and out of Fort Sumter.³⁴ The residents of Warren, in Trumbull County, anticipated the day there *might* be a call for troops, and enrolled one hundred men in its new military company, every one of whom could "bite a cartridge and carry a knapsack 25 miles a day."³⁵ It was becoming clear that the national predicament was not going away. Reverend Olds climbed into the pulpit at Jefferson's Brick Church and reminded any in his congregation who needed reminding, "The blind can see it, and almost the dead can know it. Great events are soon to transpire, that are to make an impression on human destiny. . . . Surely we are living in an eventful time, and it is well to be impressed with such a fact, for our own example and influence will help to make the impression, whatever it may be, that is to stamp the coming ages."³⁶

Life in the Western Reserve seemed to go on just as it always had. Yankee Robinson's circus still came to town featuring lions, tigers, Florida alligators, Pygmies direct from the African jungle, Chinese acrobats, beautiful female equestrians, wire walkers, and trick-shot artists. At the evening show, the crowds were treated to a full staging of the battle of Buena Vista. Gypsies continued to set up camp on the edge of the village as they always had, making their livings by examining the palms of the villagers and disclosing their destinies. Merchants continued their feverish pitching of new-fangled implements for the home and hay field, like Roger's Improved Washing Machine, and Howard's Reaper and Self-Raker. People suffering from diseases for which there was as yet no earthly cure shuffled into the local drugstore to buy patent medicines with lurid labels and claims to match, like Madame Bovin's Celebrated Silver-Coated Female Pills and Mexican Mustang Ointment. There were ads aplenty for the latest New York fashions so any man or woman could promenade down the muddy main streets of Akron or Jefferson and feel up to date. The big lake boats continued to call at Ashtabula and Conneaut, with reports of where they had been and where they were bound.

There were notices of Sunday school picnics in the grove out on the edge of the village, and announcements for meetings of literary and dramatic societies, and of the village glee club. There were reports of regular, bloody wrecks on the local railroads, and the news that a ship that had called recently in Conneaut had gone down with all hands in a squall out on the Great Lakes, and accounts of the first days of the Pony Express. Neighbors paused on the boardwalk in Jefferson and debated the efficacy of the sage advice published in every edition of the village newspaper: how best to break a colt or raise a boy, how to prune a fruit tree, or how to make a better cheese or homemade barn paint. There were the announcements of life's ceaseless beginnings and endings—births, marriages, and deaths. Farm women used to lives of staggering hardness pondered the advice a learned professor offered in the local newspaper on the important topic of "premature aging of American female beauty." His prescription: young women should engage in a more vigorous outdoor life, including sleigh riding and playing in the snow, and avoid pretty shoes, and bonnets, except for when out under the hot midwestern sun.

The steam trains whistled down brakes in Akron, Ashtabula city, and other places lucky enough to be on the railroad, and halted just long enough to unload passengers and the bounty of the outside world: buffalo robes, French corsets, fancy wallpapers, and kid gloves. Loaded aboard for the outbound trip was the output of the Reserve's farms and shops: casks of the Reserve's famous cheese, pig iron,

crocery, bales of wool, boat oars, and, in their season, barrels of fresh passenger pigeon harvested by the hundreds of thousands from islands in the great Pymatuning Swamp, out on Ashtabula's eastern border.

Families climbed the steps to the rooms above Steinbachar's Drug to have the image of how they looked this spring of 1861 recorded for posterity by G. W. Manley, Akron's most successful photographer. He was ready to place their picture on a carte de visite, which was all the rage and which, he assured them, was "the ne plus ultra of Card Pictures." Spring advanced by fits and starts but the snow finally went away. Sleighs were dragged into the shed and covered with an old sheet; buggy and wagon axles were greased. T. S. Winship, Ashtabula County's most exuberant merchant, stepped into the show window of his mercantile and replaced the sealskin caps and beaver mufflers with the finery of summer. Out on the stump-covered clearings in the big woods where most of the boys who would join the Twenty-Ninth Ohio lived, farmers studied the planting tips in the *Almanac* and squeezed a handful of soil to see if it was dry enough to scour from the plow. Amateur poets of the neighborhood sent their impressions of the condition of nature in this springtime of 1861 to the local newspapers: the land was quiet except for the hopeful sound of melted snow running in every watercourse and the bickering of the waterfowl that floated in every marsh. At twilight a mist heavy with the fragrance of rot and new life hung close the ground, and the lights from the stars overhead flickered and wavered and could be seen only dimly. The war, predicted by some to be the most terrible of modern times, had been a long time in coming but its arrival now was merely a question of time.³⁷

Something awful, perhaps beyond imagining, lay just out of sight past the bend in the road, so powerful that it began to send shockwaves backward into the present, troubling people in their sleep. Just north of Atlanta, Georgia, sat a drowsing, no-account railroad stop named Big Shanty, and not far from the tracks stood a small, worn-out house. One night the woman who lived in it awoke from a troubling dream. In it, blackbirds had filled the air around her so thickly she thought she would suffocate. There would come a time a few years into the future when she awoke to find dark-coated men marching into her yard, digging rifle pits in her garden, and setting up their tents outside her kitchen window. The road leading past would be trod by an endless procession of armed men. On an evening in July 1864, she pulled up a chair and confided her dream to a church pastor from Conneaut, Ohio, who was doing duty just then as chaplain for the Twenty-Ninth Ohio Infantry. The troubles seen in her dream had come to pass, and she would see that her dream had been a prophecy.³⁸

People of that day looked for signs of things to come: in their dreams, in the sky, and in the blurry shapes left in the bottoms of teacups. War was coming, that much seemed likely, but not everyone saw it as Armageddon—Joshua Reed Giddings, for instance. When the war was but a few weeks old, and the depths of the thicket into which the nation had stumbled were not yet plumbed, he wrote to his son, "We are opening up a new page in the history of governments and nations, and those who now save their country will be remembered, and be cherished in coming time." To the old man, the war might be nothing less than the wonder of the coming age.³⁹

PART I

"Madly from Their Spheres"

THE LONG ROAD INTO BATTLE



A P R I L – J U L Y 1 8 6 1

“Let the Dogs of War Be Loosed”

On a warm autumn morning in 1861, a group of nine young men hiked south the few miles from the hamlet of Kingsville, Ashtabula County, Ohio, to the village of Jefferson. They passed through the village and out the few blocks to the fairgrounds. The Kingsville squad had come to be soldiers in a new regiment, the Twenty-Ninth Ohio Volunteer Infantry, that was camped within the oval of the race-track. Present in this happy group was Nathan Parmater, age twenty-five. Most recently, he had been a teacher in the country schools of the neighborhood and had used his earnings to pay for his tuition at the Kingsville Academy. He had been close to finishing his studies when he heard a regiment was taking shape just down the road, and he and a few others—including his best friend, Alonzo Sterrett, whom Parmater called Chum—decided to put their schoolbooks aside and go to be Union soldiers.

Settled in his tent that first night, Parmater folded back the stiff, red-morocco cover of a new diary book and on its first page wrote:

September 23— Started from Kingsville with eight others to join Co. E. 29th Regt. at Jefferson. The weather being fine we all enjoyed the trip well. Co. E is from K. and surrounding towns and is commanded by Capt. Luce. We arrived at camp about two o'clock p.m. with a good appetite to relish the bread and beef which the boys had prepared for us. After dinner we pitched a tent and prepared to camp for the night.¹

He promised to write in it every day as long as the war lasted, but after a few days, he gave it up and would not write in it again until the day the regiment was packing to leave this place. To explain the lapse he wrote, “I quit writing in this Diary until now for the want of a change in country, and now the Regt. has got orders to march tomorrow I will go on again.”² After that, he would write in it faithfully every day, even on those days he had to be propped up in a hospital bed to do it. There seemed more than enough blank diary pages for him to record the full details of the brief war they all expected, with pages left over. Unknown to him, the war would require that he fill this volume and several more like it. The places he would visit, and the things he would do or would see others do, no one could foresee. One of the boys in this camp would survive what they would pass through, and as an old man he would look back to this innocent time and conclude that the new soldier’s most valuable asset had been his inability to see into the future.

Another boy had come into this camp with an Akron company of soldiers a few days before Parmater. Before he became a private in Company D, Benjamin Franklin Pontius had been a wagonmaker,

talented in the fashioning of wood and iron. His widowed mother did not want him to go off to war. He was her only son, and keeping their poor farm afloat was plenty hard enough even with his help. But he wore down her objections, and she finally gave her permission. One day he dug out a paper and pencil and walked to the top of a low rise. He wanted to show his mother the importance of what he had come here to be part of, which was something he could not likely put into words. He could see in his mind's eye what Camp Giddings looked like to a bird flying over it, and he made a drawing of the camp, complete down to the shakes on the cook room roof.³ He got the perfect outline made by the track that enclosed the lines of the company streets just so, and along the lines of the company streets he drew evenly spaced dark triangles to show the tents in which the soldiers lived.

Camp Giddings was little more than a few weeks old when these two young men first saw it. But in its perfect arrangement, already fixed military rituals, and a population double that of the village, Camp Giddings must have seemed to have been here forever. The nation had been at war for going on half a year already when Parmater, Pontius, and hundreds of others were already in this camp, but little blood had yet been spilled, and only a little war pain felt. Boys coming into camp and those already there longed for a look at this war, and Camp Giddings was the nearest portal by which they might approach it and see the great thing with their own eyes.

Every soldier knew that old J. R. Giddings had founded this regiment, and if they had not known why he started it, he explained it to them on the chill day when he came out to this camp to present them with their flags. What they did not know was that the roots of this particular grand military establishment ran back into their common, peculiar Western Reserve history. The more direct explanation as to why the Giddings Regiment was begun, by whom, and to what purpose, lay as near to hand as the events of a few months before, on the day the war began.



The most important news in the history of Jefferson, seat of Ashtabula County, Ohio, came to it over the telegraph wire on April 12, 1861. The rebels had fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor. As the people were fond of expressing it, the "ball" had opened. The excitement could not have been greater had the rebels lobbed shells into the village's main street. The people were exhorted to awaken and show their faith in the Union by their actions, and their actions were instant and electric. Within a day following the news of Fort Sumter, companies of men were practicing marching drills in the streets of every town in the Reserve. The residents filled the plank walks and spilled over into the streets and broke spontaneously into "Yankee Doodle." Flags floated from every home and shop, lifted high on the hot breath of war fever. Military bands practiced martial tunes at all hours in the village square. *Supernatural* was the only word that came close to describing the intensity of feeling felt by everyone in the springtime of 1861.⁴ If a modern sociopsychologist were transported back to that first week after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, he might well diagnose the people's behavior as a form of mass hysteria; it had all of the characteristics of that malady.

Groups of men hurried along previously quiet village streets from morning to night, scooping up the latest telegrams and guessing at their meaning. No one could, or wanted to, talk of anything but war. Rumors blew up and down the village streets like dust devils; everything might be true, or all of it false, but nothing could be discounted entirely. The critical instinct of the newspaper editors was swept away in the tidal wave of high feeling; they printed everything that came to hand. Close to home, it was reported that John Brown Jr. had gathered an armed force of four hundred Negroes in the Pennsylvania woods just across the Ashtabula County line and was expecting fifteen hundred more to return from refuge in Canada and join him within a few days.⁵

Northerners who fled home from the Southern states brought with them rumors being circulated there: New York City had taken up arms and joined the secession; Washington city had been destroyed and Lincoln and his cabinet taken prisoner. Lincoln was reported to have been drunk since the inauguration and locked up in the White House taking a cure of opium and brandy, going out only under

disguise.⁶ Reliable men just returned from the South reported that whiskey-fueled mobs produced the United States flag at public demonstrations, tore it into strips, and spit and trampled on it. Southerners believed their cause was making gigantic headway, even in the North.⁷ The Akron editors put some stock in that claim and warned Summit County's would-be traitors to "bridle their tongues or emigrate to the Sunny South."⁸ Harsher chastisements of those of suspect loyalty were in the offing. To fill President Lincoln's first call for troops, the phenomenon of the war meeting burst immediately into existence.

Committees of leading citizens were formed to enlist men and raise money for their equipment. Residents were summoned to crossroads schoolhouses, churches, and mechanics' halls, or in the middle of the street to hear fevered speeches interrupted by the spontaneous eruption of band music, singing and cheering, and the firing of the village artillery piece. Those places too small to afford artillery touched off a thick charge of black gunpowder sandwiched between a pair of anvils borrowed from the local blacksmith, producing an explosion equal that of any cannon, and sending the topmost anvil wailing through the air. When the excitement reached its peak, men were exhorted to step to the front and sign the enlistment roll. War meetings would become a fixture on the Reserve scene for the next four years. After just a year of active war, the people would grow sick to death of them, and the newspaper editors bored with reporting them.⁹ Just now, with the crisis still novel, the announcements of meetings taking place everywhere proved that the people were impassioned, and united.

At the hitherto sleepy crossroads village of Johnsons Corners, a few miles north of Akron, three cannon shots brought the residents quick-stepping into the village for an impromptu war meeting. They were treated to soul-stirring fife and drum music played by one C. L. Fergusson and his musical sons. Every man spoke who was inclined, including fourteen-year-old Albert Wright. He mounted the farm wagon being used as a speaker's platform and brought some men to tears by his sudden maturity and the eloquence of his words. Everyone joined in singing "Yankee Doodle" and "Hail Columbia" accompanied by the village band, and the meeting concluded with a fourteen-volley salute fired by their very own Union Gun Squad.¹⁰

The Akron newspaper happily ticked off the list of communities surrounding it that had fallen in and saluted them for their speedy, efficient reaction to the challenge. The formerly serene villages of Boston and Northfield were "up to the time," and Richfield was "wheeling into line." Copley was "in earnest," and Cuyahoga Falls was "all in a blaze." Akron itself was "fully aroused," and Summit County as a whole, "completely astir."¹¹ At tiny Greensburg, in Summit County, a gallows was hammered together on the village common. A rope was thrown over the top timber and from it hung the warning "Death to Traitors."¹² In Richfield on a Saturday evening, the Stars and Stripes were run up to the top of a seventy-foot-tall Lincoln pole left over from the last election, and the crowd cheered until all were hoarse. Akron had reached the flood stage of its own war fever. The relentless enthusiasm of the war's first week, the number of flags now flying, banners stretched across the town's streets, the mustering ceremonies and company drills, the singing and cheering had all been exciting and gratifying beyond description.¹³

Everywhere, plans were made to raise at least one company of hometown soldiers. At every war meeting, at least a few brave-hearted patriots would step forward to sign up, and they were rewarded by the crowd with three cheers and a tiger for the Union, and three groans for the Southern Confederacy. Afterward, the committeemen who had put on the show hurried out to canvass every home in the neighborhood for recruits, and if the household had no son or husband to contribute, cash donations were requested for the support of the soldiers' dependents. The newspapers kept a careful count of the men enlisted in each town in their neighborhood, heaped praise on the successful, and admonished others to do more. Competing villages exchanged delegations of freshly recruited soldiers. Visiting military bands with names like the Brimfield Rub-a-Dubs serenaded.¹⁴

A single campaign would wipe out the rebellion, and restore peace and prosperity to the land, and the people had good reason to believe such a thing could be true.¹⁵ There was the evidence of their own eyes: the rush of men to enlist, the constant drillings to and fro of newly formed companies in the village streets, and the exuberance of the war meetings. One Reserve newspaper ran a prophetic piece

called “Where the War Strength Lies,” which compared the population of Northern cities to those of the South and came to the confident conclusion: “Thus at a glance will be seen where the advantage is, and what chances even a consolidated South are against a consolidated North.”¹⁶ An observer watched the demonstrations of men eager to come to the nation’s rescue in the streets of Ashtabula city and concluded that the president could have as many men as he wished. “There is no want of the sinews of war—men and money are both abundant—equal to any emergency that is likely to arise.”¹⁷

Everyone was of the same mind: the deck was stacked against rebel success. The Confederacy had no navy and little capacity to provision itself with the implements of war. Most important, the South was bankrupt. Loans to it made by Northern bankers, including some in Ohio, far exceeded the real value of the South’s assets, which were hardly worth counting.¹⁸ There was no anxiety as to whether the South could be whipped. The only real fear was that some unlucky town would be left behind in putting its boys into the fight.

Editorial rhetoric had been bitterly anti-Southern through decades preceding the war, but in this splendid state of alarm, the gloves came off completely. The current rapture equaled that which talented preachers had conjured up in the tents of the great religious revivals that had roared through here thirty years earlier, but unlike those, an element of bloodlust rose to the top. The editors of Akron’s *Beacon* cried, “The rebels have begun the War, and now let them have war to their savage and bloody heart’s content. . . . Let the dogs of war be loosed, and let them never be called in . . . let them drink their fill!!! Let the traitors be annihilated.”¹⁹

To carry out the sanguinary work, a Massachusetts regiment was reportedly furnished special axes capable of splitting a man from his head to his belt buckle.²⁰ At the Union Hall in Akron the largest crowd ever gathered at a meeting of any kind showed unanimous support of one speaker’s resolve: “We will do all in our power to exterminate or conquer them . . . no sacrifice is too great.”²¹

That slavery would be obliterated as a natural byproduct of the North’s triumph may have seemed too obvious to mention, and it was not mentioned, except in private by men like Giddings. To his friend Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, he expressed what to him seemed self-evident: “The first gun fired at Fort Sumter rang out the death-knell of slavery.”²² For everyone else caught up in this mystical state, everything being done now was for the Union, plain and simple. Party lines had been spontaneously obliterated, political bickering forgotten, and all real patriots regardless of stripe were coming to the rescue of their country. On speakers’ platforms, former political enemies sat shoulder to shoulder, good Democrats and Republicans alike waiting for their chance to stir the crowd.²³ The people were reminded that they were the lineal descendants of the heroes of the Revolution, which most all were here in the Reserve, and that the foul spirit of the Southern traitors had viciously assaulted the sacred legacy of ’76.²⁴

The pages of the local papers suddenly gave way to a fascination with all things military. Fresh recruits wrote excited, detailed letters home from training camps no more than an easy walk from the town as if they were writing from the other side of the planet. Old soldiers offered their wisdom to new ones: avoid strong coffee and oily meat, grow beards as protection for the throat and neck, wear hats with high crowns to allow air to cool the brain, and sleep on an India rubber blanket to ward off rheumatism. Above all, the soldier must practice vigilant hygiene and guard against fevers brought on by sudden, sweaty exertions in cold night air. One veteran of the War of 1812 concluded factually, “More men die from sickness than by the bullet.”²⁵

Everyone got into the act, including the Reserve’s Yankee storekeepers. The proprietor of Talcott’s Hardware, across the street from the courthouse in Jefferson, bombarded the readership of the local newspaper with ads astutely tied to the grand excitement sweeping the countryside. He headlined his ad “Fight! Fight! Fight!” and urged his townsmen to give the rebels their due without sparing the grapeshot, while bearing in mind at all times that Talcott’s Hardware was prepared now more than ever to furnish hemp rope, oil lamp wicks, fishing line, and bed cording at fair prices every time.²⁶

Reserve ministers had long since given up preaching Christian forbearance as a solution to the simmering sectional conflict, nor had most made any attempt to keep politics out of the church house.

In the present crisis, divine services were concluded now with “Our Country, ’Tis of Thee” and other patriotic anthems. Reverend Adams of Akron reminded a company of local soldiers bound for the battlefield that secession had not been merely treason but religious sacrilege. “This conflict therefore, to which you offer yourselves, is for this reason, of a sacred character. It is a holy war. . . . You will therefore fight not only for your country but for your God—and God therefore will be with you.”²⁷ To prove that the divine was on their side, it was reported that the God of lightning had thrown a bolt onto a Confederate gunpowder factory, blasting it to smithereens, just as he had earlier sent lightning down to destroy the campaign signs and even headquarters buildings of their political opponents during the Lincoln campaign.

The hoopla immediately produced a huge surplus of soldiers. Ohio’s quota under Lincoln’s call was thirteen thousand men. Columbus had been a town of twenty thousand souls, but overnight its population pushed past fifty thousand by some accounts, and it grew larger with every train that came into the depot with another cargo of excited recruits.²⁸ A correspondent for Jefferson’s leading newspaper had gone to Columbus to report on the chaotic scene. Thousands of fresh volunteers marched round the clock through the city streets, excited boys trying to get some sleep on the floor of the senate chamber while their friends drilled in the hallways, boxed, and wrestled. Some fellows played leapfrog, and there was one big chap down on all fours with a general riding on his back shouting orders.²⁹ Outside, recruits burned off their energy running barefoot races on the statehouse lawn. In Jefferson, the editor of the *Ashtabula Sentinel*, William Cooper Howells, regarded the war preparations seen in the village streets and concluded, “Of local matters, it may be said, in round terms, we are all war.”³⁰

Headquarters, Jefferson, Ohio

In Jefferson, the *Sentinel* put on its war face and took on the role of command post, dispensing bulletins and encouraging volunteers to step forward immediately, as if the war might last only a few days: “Headquarters, Jefferson, Ohio, To Arms . . . Men of Ashtabula! Men Are Wanted Now!” and following that, the announcement of a mass meeting to consider the urgent matter of the village’s response to the call for troops.³¹ The timing of the village response would prove critical if it were to avoid being left behind in the stampede to get a company into the war. The ball had opened, but the dance floor was yet small, and it was immediately crammed to capacity. Every single printer employed at the *Painesville Press* had thrown down his apron and hurried out to enlist, leaving the abandoned editor to wonder how he was going to get out his paper.³² Within two weeks of the war’s start, as many as eighty thousand men had rushed forward to fill Ohio’s quota, six times the number of recruits Lincoln had requested of the state, and several thousand more men than he had asked of the entire North.³³

Jefferson lawyer and brigadier general in the state militia Darius Cadwell had rushed to Columbus to see about getting Jefferson’s company into the war.³⁴ Neither Cadwell’s rank nor his close connection to the influential J. R. Giddings got him special treatment. He had to stand in the line of men filling the adjutant general’s office, all of them wanting to tender their own companies, and when he finally got inside, he was told that from the obvious looks of things Ohio had met its quota of recruits. Cadwell was given assurance that some companies *might* be accepted into regiments already organizing. Encouraged thus, he went back to Jefferson to begin organizing, but five days had already wound off the clock by the time the village held its first big war meeting at the courthouse, on April 20, the first such event of the Civil War held in Ashtabula County.³⁵ Sixty men stepped up to the table manned by the meeting’s secretary, Jefferson attorney J. D. Ensign, and signed the rolls. First in line was U.S. senator Ben Wade. Wade was too old for field service, and had important work to do in Washington, but his demonstration of community spirit and patriotism was appreciated. The Jefferson Guards were organized on the spot.³⁶

The fiery exhortations of speakers at other county villages produced enlistees for their pet companies. At tiny West Andover, ninety-four men enlisted in the Andover Union Guards. Rollin L. Jones, a young printer of the village of Wayne, signed up and was elected second lieutenant.³⁷ The villages of Kingsville and Pierpont combined efforts and organized a company. They chose a rotund Pierpont

merchant and schoolteacher named Wilbur F. Stevens as their first lieutenant.³⁸ He could be seen leading them in practice on the village green most every afternoon. In Ashtabula city, a veteran of the Mexican-American War was raising men for his company of Rough and Ready Guards, and at Hartsgrove, Capt. Leverett Grover had his company of Red Coats ready to go.³⁹ While the Jefferson Guards were still getting organized, the Morgan Riflemen, from nearby Rock Creek, marched into Jefferson to show off their homemade uniforms and advanced state of preparedness.⁴⁰

During his visit to Columbus, Cadwell had been given the disappointing news that the state of Ohio already had more men than it could use. Then, while the company-raising hullabaloo was still reaching its zenith, unhappy news came that Conneaut's offer to the state of the company it had raised, which included a thin-faced doctor of medicine named Amos Fifield, had been refused and its dejected men ordered to disband.

The soldiers of Jefferson's company were organized and ready to march when they received official notice that they would not be accepted. They had already elected officers, and each man had been presented with a Bible and two red-flannel shirts sewn by the ladies who had turned the county courthouse into a sewing room.⁴¹ The Jefferson Boys drilled every day in the village streets while they waited for orders, but when an order did arrive from Columbus, it was for them to disband. One company of Jefferson men would be going to war, but that was a reflection more of a single man than of the village. Giddings's son Grotius had resigned his comfortable post as his father's assistant in Montreal and gone home to Jefferson to raise two companies of expert riflemen. That he could easily raise two companies in and around Jefferson, and that the addition of them would complete the county's own regiment, was guaranteed.⁴² Grotius Giddings succeeded in raising only one company of men, and with his father's influence he got his gaily outfitted Zouaves accepted into the three years of service under the flag of the Twenty-Third Ohio Infantry, officered in part by future president Rutherford B. Hayes. The Twenty-Third Regiment was not a purely local organization, and Ashtabula County residents did not place their hopes in it. For now, the people of the village would have to be content with the maneuvers of an excited group of juvenile boys who had formed the Jefferson Light Artillery. The youngsters had resurrected the village's rusty cannon and entertained themselves by firing it off from time to time and strutting about the village in their showy uniforms.⁴³

Within two weeks of the war's start, editor W. C. Howells had stated confidently, "Will those papers who have been so free in their remarks concerning this County, please inform their readers that this County will have *one Regiment* in the field by May 6."⁴⁴ The hoped-for regiment did not materialize. Eventually, four Ashtabula County companies would be allowed to join the war's first call to arms, and Howells tried to put a bright face on this accomplishment.⁴⁵

The Reverend Crane, regarded as a "true Christian and a good shot," would be taking his Rock Creek Company, known also as the Morgan Riflemen, into the war.⁴⁶ He had found a slot for his men in Company D of the ninety-day-term Nineteenth Ohio Volunteer Infantry being recruited from several Reserve counties. Ashtabula city's company, the Ashtabula Guards, would be allowed into the Nineteenth as Company I, under the leadership of a local preacher who had as his motto, "Look to the Lord and keep your powder dry."⁴⁷ Jefferson and Andover, two towns that had been in the national spotlight as abettors of the John Brown insurrection, would have to sit it out. The disappointment felt in Jefferson was acute.

The principal interest of Akron, two hours to the west, had always been commerce, but since Fort Sumter, business was the last thing on anyone's mind. The busiest intersection in the town, at Howard and Market Streets, was filled with mobs of excited men. Competing recruiters delivered patriotic speeches from wagon beds decorated with flags, while their deputies circulated through the crowd with enlistment rolls. Enough Akron men came forward in just two days to fill three companies. There would be room in the young war for only two of the three. One of these, the Akron Union Light Infantry, led by local businessman and militia officer Lewis P. Buckley, got a place in the Nineteenth Ohio. The town's third company, the Akron Buckeye Light Infantry, could not get in and was ordered disbanded.

Two of its members, George Dice, son of a Pennsylvania widow, and Myron Wright, a miller's boy from Johnsons Corners, found places with Buckley.

Two weeks after Lincoln's call for volunteers, Akron's soldiers marched up the main street bound for Cleveland, and the war. Buckley's company formed up to receive its send-off. One soldier after another was called forward to receive the presentation of a Colt's pistol, a Bowie knife, or both, from friends, fathers, brothers, and fellow workers.⁴⁸ James B. Storer had been a clerk in his father Webster's prosperous iron store. His brother Daniel presented him with a six-shooter, and James responded with feeling-filled words: "My brother, I accept this revolver, and I pledge to you that while I have life, I shall stand by the flag of my country, and that the giver of this shall never have occasion to say that he has ever been disgraced by me."⁴⁹ The citizens of Copley brought packets of cash for its soldiers.⁵⁰ Bibles were the most popular parting gifts, now and throughout, given with the blessing that the Ruler of Battles would keep them safe.⁵¹ Most soldiers were still in the clothes they had worn to tend the family's dairy herd, but the luckier few wore the outlandish uniforms of their local militia. The few that were armed carried old-fashioned smoothbore muskets retrieved from long storage at the local militia armory. With a giant crowd accompanying them, Captain Buckley led his men down to the rail depot through a crashing thunderstorm behind the celebrated Professor Marble's Band and set off for Cleveland.⁵²

Summit County's third company, Hard's Light Infantry, got itself to Camp Taylor in Cleveland but found no room. Captain Hard was handed an order to disband and go home. Pulaski Hard had been named after a Polish hero of the Revolution, was a graduate of a New York law school, and was an officer with three years' service in a local militia outfit. Given his credentials, and the efforts he had invested in his company, he thought they should not be so easily dismissed, but there was really nothing he could do about it.⁵³ Hard and his dispirited men marched to the depot but the railroad refused to honor their transportation vouchers, and the men had no money for tickets. They started out for Akron on foot. To make matters worse, boat passengers tossed insults at the ragged men as they trudged the path along the Ohio and Erie Canal home, hollering out that they were marching away from the war, not toward it.⁵⁴

Over at the tiny village of Rock Creek, in Ashtabula County, the exit of the Morgan Riflemen brought out over a thousand people, everyone of them cheering wildly as their boys marched down the steep main street, across the creek, and out onto the main road.⁵⁵ In Jefferson, there was no cheering. They had not succeeded in getting their company into the war. Countywide, the people would have to be content in the knowledge that they had succeeded in getting at least some of their boys into a war that everyone expected would be won by the end of the summer, or earlier.

The Origins of the Giddings Regiment: The Summertime War, 1861

The Nineteenth Ohio Volunteer Infantry crossed the Ohio River into western Virginia. Before their brief campaign under George B. McClellan ended, they would find battle at a place called Rich Mountain, and the victory they won there would be regarded as glorious, even monumental. They itched for a fight, and the rebels were up ahead in the hills ready to accommodate them. The rebel general, Robert S. Garnett, had his small force dug in at a pass over Rich Mountain, which sat above the town of Beverly, and was set to dispute McClellan's passage. McClellan's second in command, Brig. Gen. of Volunteers William Starke Rosecrans, got his skirmish line up the mountain and right into the rebels and a sharp little fight sputtered to life in the rain. The Nineteenth Regiment, the Reserve's pride, got their chance when the rebel line began to totter.⁵⁶ They fired two volleys and the rebels broke.⁵⁷ The Union boys rushed into the deserted enemy camp and ransacked it for trophies just in case this had been the war's first and last battle. Soldiers of an Akron company dove into abandoned trunks, costumed themselves in Confederate dress uniforms, and amused their fellows by strutting about issuing mock orders in what they believed to be Southern accents.⁵⁸

The Nineteenth Regiment's soldiers were convinced they had fought one of history's capital battles, even though only three men had been slightly wounded and none were killed, an economy of bloodletting that was attributed to the rebels' poor marksmanship.⁵⁹ Two days after Rich Mountain the rebel

general, Garnett, took a ball in the back while directing his rear guard and was killed. The curious citizens of Wheeling waylaid Garnett's remains on the way back to his Virginia home, and opened the sealed metal coffin to gaze at him. They marveled at the remarkable damage done by the newfangled bullet that had killed him. Tearing the body like a cannonball, the lead, cone-shaped minié ball had pierced his coats, his vest, and his underwear, before exiting his chest through a hole the size of a dinner plate.⁶⁰

Back home on the Reserve, the newspaper editors were crowing. Their boys had fought like hurricanes, as good as U.S. Regulars or better. Rosecrans singled out Lewis P. Buckley for his competence in managing his boys under fire.⁶¹ It had been a fine summer's outing for the Nineteenth Regiment, but the campaign had not been entirely a lark, and despite the glory and good fun, some of the boys were carrying grievances home with them. First and foremost, they had not been paid. The soldiers had left their farms with crops half planted or lost several months' wages from jobs in shops and mills. Until they were paid, the soldiers would curse the government for failing to hold up its end of the bargain. They had other complaints of a far more serious nature, and the revelation of them would lead directly to the founding of the Twenty-Ninth Ohio Volunteer Infantry.

It would be a while longer before their soldiers returned and their grievances became public. In the meantime the people of the Reserve celebrated the sort of old-fashioned Fourth of July their grandfathers had enjoyed. There was a war on, but it seemed far away. In the years just around the corner, the Fourth of July would still be observed; it was far too important a milepost in the year's passage to ignore. Future celebrations would be carefully orchestrated to encourage enlistments and donations to keep the produce of the ladies' aid societies flowing toward the army hospitals. At dawn, July 4, 1861, the firing of Conneaut's big gun rattled window glass, and people jumped from their beds and went out to see what was in store. Down on the village green, they found an evergreen bower filled with young women in white robes, each wearing a banner representing all of the states, including those fallen away from the Union, seeming to suggest that there were at least some folks in Conneaut who still believed that the tear in the fabric of the Union could be mended. There were brass band competitions, picnic baskets, and plenty of speeches. For the youngsters, a forty-five-foot-high swing was erected between two giant trees.⁶² Sunday school superintendents took their charges down to the cool shade of the nearest grove for games and ice cream. After the Fourth, it was back to the measured pace of a Reserve summer.

The weather had turned unrelievedly hot as July deepened, and although dark clouds ganged up over Lake Erie late every afternoon, the rain would not come. Farmers worried over grain crops that lay slumped in the fields. Men of commerce wrung their hands over the state of the Reserve's business, which after only three months of war had gone as flat and stale as the July weather.⁶³ The village folk were preparing homecomings for the soldiers from the Nineteenth Ohio. Their three-month period of enlistment would expire soon, and the boys would be returning home and sliding back into quiet country life. The news of their sons' successful exploits in western Virginia started to come in before the Independence Day decorations had been packed away, and the people were now convinced more than ever that the Johnnies would be whipped wherever encountered and that after a few more rebukes like Rich Mountain, they would quit entirely.⁶⁴

“Dark Peril”

The sun was going down red and belligerent on a Sunday that had been as unremarkable as any other July Sabbath in Jefferson. Then, the first news hit that the federal army had engaged the enemy at Bull Run, Virginia. The first major battle of the war had been fought, the result as yet unknown. A group of citizens gathered in the street outside the post office, which also served as the village's telegraph station, to await the details.

Telegrams piled up, reporting victory in one, calamity in the next. Men became gloomy and women lowered their eyes and sighed deeply into cupped hands, thinking of the sad prospects in store for the country, and maybe for their own families. The people of the village finally turned out the lamps and tried to get some rest, but most could not sleep. They got up and hurried back to the post office, drawn

by the ellipse of light thrown onto the dirt by the telegrapher's lantern. They stood and held nervous discussion with their neighbors, with the latest news from Washington still clacking in over the telegraph wire.

As the night progressed, the news kept getting worse, the carnage and the scale of the defeat far greater than first reported. Once the gasconade was separated from fact, there was no longer any doubt: the Union army had been trounced and was presently making its way back to Washington like the survivors of a colossal shipwreck. That such a thing had happened was beyond anyone's belief.⁶⁵

Alvin Coe Voris and Sam Lane, both stars of Summit County's stump speaker's bureau during the past fall's presidential election, addressed a meeting convened in Akron the Monday after the battle, and resolutions were passed. Akronites were more ready than ever "to pour out our blood like water in defense of country and home against rebellious despotism." Another resolution suggested that this might be the right time for Lincoln to emancipate the slaves.⁶⁶ Howells of the *Sentinel* in Jefferson took a more restrained view for once and did not try to explain away the reverse as some had by saying the defeat had been purely accidental.⁶⁷ Howells wrote, "It will be seen that we have experienced a reverse, such as must cast a gloom over the whole North and such as will be a grave lesson to us for the future."⁶⁸ The lesson of Bull Run was that the people of the North must prepare for the longer war now in the cards.⁶⁹ Bull Run had been a necessary wake-up call, not a signal defeat. For the people of Ashtabula County, the dark cloud of Bull Run was silver lined. From this point forward, the war would be prosecuted with just the sort of iron hand they had been calling for from the start. At Bull Run the rebels had revealed themselves to be barbarians and deserving of harsher treatment.

Reliable sources provided dozens of reports that proved just how evil an enemy they were up against. Wounded Union soldiers had been bayoneted while they lay hurt and helpless. Boys gone missing were found pinioned to tree trunks and sliced in ways improper to mention, and a Union officer was discovered drawn and quartered.⁷⁰ Louisiana Zouaves had severed the heads of dead Union boys and amused themselves by kicking them around the battlefield.⁷¹ Souvenir hunters had picked up poisoned musket balls, reported to be the rebel's secret weapon, and beheld what they sincerely believed to be history's largest wreckage of men and materiel.⁷² The rebels had committed these and a thousand other outrages, forcing the editor of the *Ohio State Journal* to ask, "Are they civilized?"⁷³

The faces on the street the morning after the news of Bull Run seemed to show a people too broken to carry on with a war, or anything else. Within a few days, the public heart recovered sufficiently for the editor in Conneaut to observe, "That an awful battle has been fought there is no doubt, and that our loss has been considerable is also certain, but that we are disheartened or discouraged in the least we do not think. On the contrary, we believe that the defeat will fire up the hearts and nerve the multitudes to rush to the conflict."⁷⁴ But there would be no rush into this new phase of the war. The patriotic hysteria visible on every street corner in the opening days of the war had fallen back to earth like a spent skyrocket and just at a time when the nation was entering its "dark hour of peril."⁷⁵ Despite the steely backbones and upbeat words of men like Voris and Lane in Akron about the people having been aroused to new levels of patriotism, nothing was seen on the streets this time around that resembled the rapture that had greeted the opening of hostilities three months earlier. Wiser men counseled that sober determination must now replace pure exuberance if the rebellion were to be put down.

A vast organization, as precise in its parts and predictable in its output as a steam engine, began to be set in place, one in which every man and woman, young and old, and even children, would be required to take a hand. Men signing on now would be away not for just a summer but for nearly three years, and as Bull Run had shown, it would not likely be a pleasant, bloodless summer's outing like the Rich Mountain campaign. Most important for the disappointed in Jefferson, every last man who could march and shoulder a musket would now have a place.

The Twenty-Ninth Ohio Infantry would be founded in these chastened times, but the timing of its birth was only coincidental to the debacle at Bull Run. The motivations for its organization lay back in the treatment of Reserve Boys in the recently concluded Rich Mountain campaign and deeper yet in

Ashtabula County's decades-long devotion to the antislavery movement. The soldiers had not been paid, which was cause for complaint, but they had also been mistreated by their own commanders in ways that stung the pride of the people. The details of these humiliations were finding their way back to the Reserve just ahead of the returning soldiers. Ashtabula County's reaction to these injuries to their soldiers, and to their common political beliefs, would lead to the birth of the Twenty-Ninth Ohio Volunteers.

Disappointment's Child

The lore of the Twenty-Ninth Ohio Volunteer Infantry gives the time of the regiment's birth as the evening of the day of the battle of Bull Run and its place as the street in front of the Jefferson post office. Joshua Reed Giddings came up the street, stepped onto the boardwalk, and made his overwrought neighbors a speech: "We must raise a regiment in this County, and I am ready to do anything and all in my power to promote it. . . . This reverse is necessary to excite us to action, and now is the time for us to move."⁷⁶

These were memorable words, and Giddings might well have spoken them. The best known of the county's published histories memorialized Giddings's words, and over time they became the gospel of the how and when of the regiment's origin. The story, however, turns out to be more legend than fact. Giddings had taken the first step in building a new regiment before the armies had collided at Bull Run, and his motivation for taking that step came from a series of embarrassments suffered by the county's boys in the Nineteenth Ohio. The first incident had been humiliating enough, but the second struck directly against the war's higher purpose as the people of Jefferson and their neighbors envisioned it.

While the Nineteenth Ohio was camped in western Virginia, on its way to Rich Mountain, Lt. Joel Stratton of Company C, which had in it a squad of soldiers from Trumbull County, just below Ashtabula, took a detail out into the surrounding countryside to procure provisions. They discovered a house along the way and while they were rummaging through it, the owner surprised them and accused them of stealing his gold watch and his money stash.⁷⁷ Rosecrans had the men arrested and ordered them thrown out of the regiment and sent back to Ohio under an armed guard.⁷⁸ What's more, the entire company, not just the accused men, was paraded in front of the assembled regiment, ceremonially disarmed, and ordered to prepare for the humbling march home.⁷⁹ Some of the regiment's officers threatened to resign in protest over the injustice.⁸⁰ Rosecrans reconsidered and decided the balance of the company could have their muskets back and stay on, but the accused had to go.⁸¹

The indignant in Warren, Stratton's hometown, and Jefferson railed against the army commanders who had blighted the flower of Trumbull County's young manhood, attacked Governor William Dennison for failing to step between McClellan and Ohio's citizen-soldiers, and accused McClellan of mollicoddling traitors. The citizens demanded a fair and public trial for their boys, as if it was a case for the court of common pleas rather than a court martial.

At the same camp, at about the same time, a far more serious incident occurred. Their boys' high officers had tried to turn them into the lowest thing any Reserve man could become: slave catchers.⁸² A company having in it dozens of Ashtabula County men had come close to mutiny, and for a time it looked as though the first casualties of the campaign might very well be their own commanders.

McClellan had given the inhabitants of western Virginia his personal guarantee that their houses and property, including their slaves, would not be disturbed as long as they kept their noses clean. A gentleman rode up to McClellan's headquarters to file a complaint that one of his slaves had come up missing. His man had disappeared about the time Rosecrans's brigade had come to town, which to him seemed a mighty compelling coincidence.⁸³ Judge Thomas Key, McClellan's advocate general, was sent to help the man locate his missing property.⁸⁴ While searching the Nineteenth's camp, the gentleman spied his slave tending a cook pot. The runaway was being escorted from the camp when members of two companies, with large representations of Ashtabula and Geauga County men in them, blocked their path. The soldiers were mad as hornets and threatened to kill Judge Key and his assistants. Some soldiers went so far as to swear they would avenge the execution of John Brown right there in the company streets. One

of the companies involved had men in it from Rock Creek, in Ashtabula County. They expressed their outrage by painting a legend in large letters on the side of a U.S. government tent, "REMEMBER JOHN BROWN, BENIGHTED ASHTABULA THE HOME OF GIDDINGS AND WADE."⁸⁵ An armed escort arrived and covered the retreat of the slave, his owner, and the headquarters staff.

The good citizens in Jefferson and their neighbors at Rock Creek were livid. The front page of the *Sentinel* bristled with a headline that answered its own provocative question as to why the county had sent its finest young manhood off to western Virginia: "BLOOD-HOUNDS?—NO!" A public meeting was announced for July 20 at the academy in Rock Creek to consider what might be done to redress the degradation.⁸⁶ There had been other slights done the Reserve's boys by their own high officers, and for that the people pinned the responsibility on the man at the very top.

George B. McClellan was well liked in most places in Ohio. He was a native son after all and was currently basking in the praise of the Northern press for his victory at Rich Mountain. The editors of newspapers in the Reserve began to assail McClellan from every quarter. In their opinion, he had shrunk before the slave owner's lash like a whipped spaniel.⁸⁷ General Rosecrans, also a native son, fell in for most of the abuse, which was justified in the eyes of the Akron newspaper: "The troops from the Western Reserve have been made to understand that it was enough to know that they hailed from this section to ensure them any amount of annoyances and indignities from some quarters . . . these men have been made the victims of a prejudice that rankles in the bosom of Gen. Rosecrans towards the Western Reserve troops."⁸⁸

Rosecrans had reportedly mouthed a comment that there was too much of the high-minded gentleman in Reserve troops for them to make good fighters.⁸⁹ In another story, he had ordered the keeper of a tavern to refuse food to hungry Reserve soldiers. The general feeling was that the Reserve's people were going to be persecuted in the military, just as they had been at home, all because of their antislavery beliefs.

"What Does Ashtabula Do?"

The people's champion, J. R. Giddings, was supposed to be in Montreal tending to his consulate post, but he was in Ohio as much as Canada these days, which put him in line for some of the heat coming Ashtabula County's way. His critics accused him of continuing his shameful beating of the antislavery drum even after war had begun, and he was being paid for it out of the public coffers. A Cleveland newspaper put its fingers on a spot that had recently become very sore to the people who had steadfastly supported the antislavery movement: "The people have enough of difficulty and trouble now on their hands arising out of the agitation of such demagogues as Giddings."⁹⁰ Giddings was feeling the sting of such accusations when in the first days of hostilities he wrote to persuade Governor Denison to admit his son Grotius's company into the war: "You are well aware the people of that County [Ashtabula] have long been taunted with the charge of leading in the great antislavery struggle which now attracts the attention of the civilized world; and I submit to you the request of permitting them a corresponding opportunity to maintain their principles on the field."⁹¹ Since the war's first days, editors of neighboring newspapers had needled each other regularly over whose village, town, or county had the higher population of patriots. As the ninety-day war wound down and a longer war loomed, the *Sentinel* began to regard accusations printed in other newspapers that Ashtabula County was not doing its part as downright "malignant." The county's neighbors were charging them with "backwardness" when it came to volunteering for the fight.⁹²

Ashtabula County had fitted two infantry companies into the war, and, given the vast numbers of soldiers throughout Ohio competing for a place, they had done fairly well. The Nineteenth Regiment was being reformed for the three years' service, but having the county's men continue their service in that regiment after what had happened down in Buckhannon was out of the question. Ashtabula County was represented in other outfits: Grotius Giddings's company of soldiers in the Twenty-Third Ohio, Capt. John Carlin's battery from Conneaut, and the Geneva Artillery from up on the lakeshore. The Geneva boys had won the distinction of firing the war's first land-based artillery piece during the

battle of Philippi, in western Virginia. However, there was no infantry regiment on the drawing board, or in the field, that fully embodied the fiery spirit of Ashtabula's moral crusaders.

A few days after the news of Fort Sumter, a headline in the Jefferson newspaper had posed the question, "What Does Ashtabula Do?"⁹³ This was more than a rhetorical lament to stir enlistment. It was a genuine expression of worry that the county would be left behind, to be remembered in history for having touched off the war and then done nothing of consequence while others spilled their blood.

A full week before Bull Run, Giddings had gone to Washington on a special mission.⁹⁴ He likely knew something of the grave injuries to the county's pride before he set off for the capital. His goal was to get authority from the secretary of war to organize an infantry regiment to be recruited within the boundaries of his old congressional district. Before Bull Run, many men were lobbying to have their own regiments shoehorned into service, but getting one in required a letter of special permission signed by the secretary of war, and that took some doing. The ocean of men who had crowded forward to enlist in the springtime just past were far more than the federal government thought necessary to tame secession.⁹⁵ Thus assured, Secretary Cameron ordered the national recruiting machine essentially closed down. A few three-year regiments ordered in the president's call following Fort Sumter were being accepted, but for the most part the War Department had taken the Help Wanted sign out of the window.⁹⁶

Giddings shouldered aside knots of army officers, politicians, and contractors clogging the secretary of war's outer office, settled his bulk into an armchair at the desk of Simon Cameron, and commenced string-pulling. He returned to Jefferson on July 13 with the happy news that his lobbying effort with Cameron had been a success. Cameron had given his word that a regiment raised within Ashtabula and adjoining counties would be accepted into the federal service.⁹⁷ Giddings published "a card" in the Jefferson newspaper confirming that his mission had succeeded. He invited interested gentlemen to meet at his home on Chestnut Street on the afternoon of Thursday, July 25, to discuss the project, but four days before the meeting was held, news of the Federal calamity at Bull Run hit, and it changed everything.⁹⁸

Bringing the South back into the fold would require far more than had been previously done, and the throttle on the idling recruiting machine was thrown wide open. Lincoln issued a new call for troops the day after Bull Run. Of the half a million fresh volunteers needed to get the job done, Ohio's quota was just over 67,300. For every man who had fought in the ninety-day service, six more would now be needed.⁹⁹ Bull Run had come at a propitious time for vindication of Ashtabula County's honor, and leading citizens in Jefferson set to work immediately to capitalize on it.

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