

# Norwich University and the Civil War

## 1861-1862: Toward a Higher Moral Purpose



*The Second in a Series of Exhibitions Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War*

Norwich alumni were connected with nearly every aspect of the Civil War. There are many more stories than we can tell in this exhibit. Norwich alumni played crucial roles on the battlefield, and some of their exploits are presented here. This exhibit also examines some of the more neglected aspects of the first two years of the Civil War through the experience of Norwich alumni. These include:

### ***Organizing and Training of the Volunteer Armies***

This unglamorous and time-consuming process was crucial to the future success or failure of the troops on the battlefield. Brig. Gen. Alonzo Jackman (*Class of 1836*) exemplifies commitment to this duty.

### ***The Role of the Navy***

Often assigned routine tasks such as blockade duty, the Navy provided critical service in the early years of the War. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles (*Class of 1826*) fostered a climate of creativity and improvisation that sustained the Union cause.

### ***The Capture and Occupation of New Orleans***

After the Navy captured New Orleans, Union soldiers, such as Edward M. Brown (*Class of 1844*), found themselves policing a hostile population, while also dealing with social reconstruction. The occupation provides a glimpse into the on-the-ground decisions made during the uncertain progress of the war.

### ***Gradual Progress Towards Emancipation***

As the war entered its second year, Union soldiers' first-hand experience with escaped slaves led to the realization that slavery had to be destroyed if the war was to be won and the Union preserved. This gradual progress towards abolition was indeed a military story that needs to be highlighted.



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**August 2012 – April 2013**

**Alonzo Jackman** (*Class of 1836*)  
(1809-1879)

In 1836, Jackman was the very first graduate of the recently chartered Norwich University. He stayed on at Norwich and served as a professor of various subjects and as the instructor of Military Science and Tactics.

Jackman also rose quickly in the ranks of the Vermont and New Hampshire Militias. In 1860, he was commissioned a brigadier general of the Vermont Militia. He was meticulous in his inspections and drills of the various militia companies, going so far as to demonstrate proper technique of playing the fife and drum.

In 1861, Alonzo Jackman was summoned to a meeting with Vermont Governor Eustace Fairbanks. Brig. Gen. Jackman informed the Governor which Militia companies were ready and able to answer the President's call for troops. In his notebooks, Jackman outlined the organization for the First Vermont Infantry Regiment.



*Alonzo Jackman*  
(NU Archives)

The Governor offered Jackman the honor of commanding this first regiment of Vermont troops if he wished to go to the front, but expressed a preference that Jackman should remain in Vermont, to train other soldiers. Although he could have easily secured a battlefield command, Alonzo Jackman agreed to the Governor's request, recognizing it was his obligation to undertake the difficult task of organizing and training soldiers.

During the summer of 1862, Jackman travelled relentlessly, inspecting the various companies that would go on to make up the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vermont Brigade. Jackman kept a precise journal of his activities, even documenting his expense account for money spent on trains, coaches, and food. In the journal, Jackman recorded the purpose of these trips.

**"Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 1862:**

***On my tour, I attempted to throw light on dark military points, answer questions, rectify abuses, shut the mouths of crankers, and announce to the companies they are now detached, and will hereafter report for orders to the commander-in-chief...***"

Although Gen. Jackman would be called upon to lead the Corps of Cadets to the Canadian border following the 1864 Confederate raid on St. Albans, he never commanded troops in the principal theaters of the war. However, drawing on his skills as a tireless administrator and careful teacher, he ensured that Vermonters were prepared to fight.

**Norwich Cadets as Drill Instructors**

When the Civil War broke out, most of the senior and junior classes left the university to enlist. For those underclassmen that remained, attention was constantly turned to the progress of the war. One cadet noted, ***"Naturally, the [Military Science] class taught by Gen. Jackman was most given to discussion. Every recitation opened and closed with a review of the national situation."***

The cadets eagerly followed the recent military news. When Gen. Ulysses S. Grant captured Fort Donelson in February of 1862, the Brattleboro newspaper reported that the ***"cadets of Norwich University participated in the general rejoicing over our late victories. Last Saturday, the cadets entrenched themselves in the deep snow on their parade grounds, mounted a battery of six-pounders, (the guns pointed south of course,) and fired federal and national salutes."*** The cannons that they fired had been given to Norwich University by the State of Vermont in 1853 so that the cadets could be instructed in artillery drill. During the war, the State also supplied Norwich with upgraded muskets and equipment.

The cadets soon became so proficient at military drill that they could instruct volunteer companies on their own. Gen. Jackman personally assigned Norwich cadets to drill the various Vermont regiments. Other Norwich cadets were dispatched to drill recruits throughout New England. Nearly 200 Norwich alumni served as drillmasters during the War, and together they were responsible for the training of many thousands of troops.



*Cadets on the Parade Ground, Norwich, VT* (NU Archives)

**The College Cavaliers**

In the years preceding the Civil War, the rivalry between Norwich University and neighboring Dartmouth College, just across the Connecticut River from Norwich, often led to pranks and even occasional brawls. 1861, however, saw students at the two institutions joined together in patriotic demonstrations.

In early 1862, Confederate troops threatened Washington, D.C. and the U.S. Government called for "three-month" troops to help defend the Capital. The Governor of Rhode Island was charged with raising a three-month cavalry squadron to counter the threat, and put out a call for volunteers.

Dartmouth junior Sanford Burr proposed organizing a troop of cavalry composed entirely of Dartmouth students, and offered their service to the State of Rhode Island. Many Dartmouth students signed up but later dropped the idea when their parents and faculty disapproved. Sanford Burr then turned to the rival Norwich cadets for help in filling up the ranks. Twenty-three Norwich cadets enlisted their services. The troop became known as the “College Cavaliers”. It was the only unit of its kind in the Civil War, composed entirely of college students.

The College Cavaliers were mustered into service along with another company of cavalry, this one enlisted mainly from working-class men from the city of Providence. The two companies were united as the 7<sup>th</sup> Squadron, Rhode Island Cavalry. By the toss of a coin, the Providence company won the distinction as “Troop A”, while the College Cavaliers became “Troop B.”

At the end of July, the 7<sup>th</sup> Squadron was transferred from guard duty around Washington to the Shenandoah Valley. For the next several months the College Cavaliers served on picket duty, scouting and patrolling the countryside.

In September 1862, The Confederate Army moved north into Maryland. The College Cavaliers retreated to the town of Harper’s Ferry, where a force of 11,000 Union soldiers, including 1,300 other cavalrymen, was stationed. The advancing Confederates surrounded Harper’s Ferry and it soon became evident that the Union forces there would be forced to surrender.



George Bailey, Class of 1863  
(NU Archives)

The Union cavalry commanders in Harper’s Ferry met and decided on a bold plan. Instead of surrendering with the rest of the Union soldiers, they would attempt a night-time escape through the Confederate lines. On the night of September 14, the College Cavaliers mounted up and joined the long column of 1,500 Union cavalrymen. They left the town of Harper’s Ferry and crossed the pontoon bridge over the Potomac River. The College Cavaliers, along with the other Union horsemen, made a dash through the lines of the sleeping Confederates and began a fifty-mile ride to safety.

The Norwich members of the College Cavaliers were back on campus in early October 1862, readjusting to campus life and telling stories of their adventure. For some of these cadets, the College Cavaliers was their only experience of military service, however, others went on to re-enlist and fight on with other units later in the war.

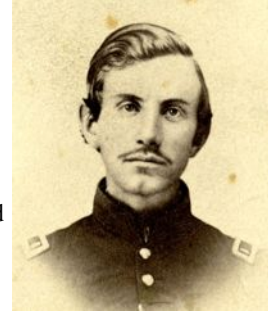


Charles Tillinghast,  
Class of 1864  
(NU Archives)

### **Robert E. Hitchcock** (*Class of 1859*) (1839-1861)

In June 1861, Robert Hitchcock was commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant in the U. S. Marine Corps. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles soon ordered his Marine Company to join the Union campaign towards Manassas, Virginia.

On July 21, Hitchcock commanded Company C of the Marine Battalion, which supported Union artillery on the Bull Run battlefield. As Hitchcock rallied his Marines, he was struck in the head with a cannonball. The Union army retreated from the field, and Hitchcock’s body was never recovered.



Robert Hitchcock (NU Archives)

Robert Hitchcock was the first U.S. Marine, the first Vermonter and the first graduate of Norwich University to be killed in the Civil War.

### **Gideon Welles** (*Class of 1826*) (1812-1892)

Upon completing his studies from Captain Partridge’s Academy in 1826, Gideon Welles returned to Connecticut, and became the editor of the *Hartford Times* newspaper. Welles’ paper was the leading mouthpiece of the state Democratic Party and his political involvement landed him a seat in the Connecticut legislature. He served as Postmaster of Hartford and was appointed as the Chief of the Bureau of Provisions and Clothing for the U.S. Navy.



Gideon Welles  
(NU Archives)

In the 1850s, Gideon Welles split from his party over the issue of slavery and joined the new Republican Party. In 1860, Welles was a delegate to the Republican National Convention, where he voted to nominate Abraham Lincoln as the Republican candidate for President. When Lincoln was elected, Gideon Welles was the first appointment to his Cabinet, as Secretary of the Navy.

Welles had some limited experience with provisioning the Navy, but the extent of his military education had been gathered as a cadet at Alden Partridge’s Academy. With his long white beard and elaborate wig, many thought Welles old-fashioned and sluggish. However, Welles proved to be an innovative and incorruptible force in the Cabinet.

He quickly rebuilt the outdated U.S. Navy and served as a close advisor to President Lincoln during the War. Welles was one of the first people Lincoln consulted about the Emancipation Proclamation, and their families became close friends.

After Lincoln's assassination in 1865, Welles stayed on in the cabinet of President Andrew Johnson, serving as Secretary of the Navy until 1869. After his time in Washington, Welles retired to Hartford, and began writing a series of important books about the history of the Civil War and the Lincoln administration.

### The Union Navy in the Civil War

The U.S. Navy that Gideon Welles inherited was a tiny force, with ships dispersed around the world. He ordered the construction of many new ships, and purchased merchant vessels and outfitted them for military service. Welles also realized that the Navy would need innovative types of vessels to operate along the coasts and inland waterways. He initiated the creation of new armored "ironclad" warships.

The Navy also faced shortages of sailors during the war. Gideon Welles endorsed enlisting free and fugitive African Americans to serve on board the Navy's ships, long before the Army began accepting black soldiers.

In April 1861, Lincoln ordered a blockade of Southern ports from Texas to Virginia. Gideon Welles argued that the "Blockade" granted the Southern states independent legal status, yet worked tirelessly to support the effort. Union vessels stationed along the Atlantic Coast and in the Gulf of Mexico endeavored to capture "blockade-runners". U.S. Navy officers such as **George M. Colvocoresses** (*Class of 1831*) and **Tunis A. M. Craven** (*Class of 1829*) provided notable service in the blockading squadrons along the 3,500 mile coastline.

### **James H. Ward** (*Class of 1823*) (1806-1861)

James Ward was considered one of the best educated and promising officers in the U.S. Navy. When the U.S. Naval Academy was founded in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1845, Ward became one of its first faculty members. He wrote several textbooks which were used by Annapolis Midshipmen for years.

In 1861, Gideon Welles asked James Ward to develop a plan to recapture Fort Sumter, but this plan was overruled by Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott. Ward then set about developing a Potomac River Flotilla, to defend Washington D.C. and disrupt the flow of weapons and insurgents between Maryland and Virginia.



*Dress Hat of James H. Ward (SMHC)*

In June 1861, Ward learned that Confederates were constructing an artillery position on Mathias Point on the Virginia side of the Potomac. On June 27, Ward planned to land a Union force at Mathias Point to drive away the Rebels. His gunboats shelled the position, but Ward was shot by the Confederates and died. James H. Ward was the first Union Navy officer killed in the Civil War.

### **Hiram Paulding** (*Class of 1823*) (1797-1878)

In 1861, Paulding was assigned by Abraham Lincoln and Gideon Welles to serve as one of three officers on the newly formed "Ironclad Board." The Union Ironclad Board was tasked to select designs for new armored warships to counter the threat of *C.S.S. Virginia*. This Confederate ironclad was being constructed from the hull and engines of *U.S.S. Merrimac*, which Paulding had attempted to scuttle at the outbreak of the war to deny its use to the Confederates. The Ironclad Board accepted the design of the *U.S.S. Monitor*, which featured a revolving iron gun turret on a flat deck. Hiram Paulding sped the construction of the *Monitor*, and the new vessel was completed just in time to battle *C.S.S. Virginia* in Hampton Roads on March 9, 1862.



*Navy Sword (SMHC)*

### **Josiah Tattnell** (*Class of 1823*) (1795-1871)

Josiah Tattnell was the son of a wealthy plantation owner and Governor of Georgia. After his father's death, he set out to join the U.S. Navy. He saw action in the War of 1812 against the British Navy. In 1821 Tattnell was granted a leave of absence from the Navy to enter Partridge's Academy to further study engineering and mathematics. He completed his studies in 1823. From the 1820s to the 1840s, Tattnell commanded ships around the world, fighting piracy and the illegal African slave trade. He was cited for gallantry in the Mexican War.

In 1861, Tattnell resigned from the U.S. Navy and was appointed to the Confederate Navy. On March 25, 1862, Tattnell was given command of the ironclad *C.S.S. Virginia*. The *Virginia* had just fought her famous battle with the *U.S.S. Monitor*, and Tattnell replaced her commander who had been wounded during the fight.

As Union forces pushed towards Richmond, the Confederate army retreated from Norfolk, and the base of *C.S.S. Virginia* was evacuated. Tattnell tried to remove enough armor to move the heavy *C.S.S. Virginia* up the James River towards Richmond but found that she could not be saved. He decided to destroy the ship rather than let it be captured by the Federals. On May 10, 1862, Tattnell ordered the *C.S.S. Virginia* to be destroyed.



*Cane made of wood from the C.S.S. Virginia (SMHC)*



## Battles on the Mississippi River

Union strategy called for control of the Mississippi River, but not much progress had been made by 1862. The Confederacy still used the river to move troops and re-supply its armies. New Orleans, the largest Southern port, was still open for blockade-runners.

Gideon Welles and his officers devised an operation in which the ships of Admiral Farragut's fleet would run past the forts, and force the city of New Orleans to surrender. During this furious action at Forts Jackson and St. Philip, Norwich alumni **Charles Boggs** (*Class of 1826*), **Thomas Craven** (*Class of 1823*), and **George Dewey** (*Class of 1855*) helped secure Union victory.

## Edward M. Brown (*Class of 1844*) (1821-1903)

Edward Brown studied for two years at Norwich University. After teaching for a few years in Pennsylvania, he returned to Vermont and became publisher and editor of several newspapers including *The Spirit of the Age* (Woodstock, VT) and the *Vermont Patriot* (Montpelier, VT).

In 1861, he was commissioned adjutant of the 5<sup>th</sup> Vermont Reg't. and served with that unit in Virginia. In early 1862, he was commissioned as lieutenant colonel of the newly organized 8<sup>th</sup> Vermont Infantry Reg't..



*Edward Brown (NU Archives)*

The 8<sup>th</sup> Vermont was sent to help garrison the recently captured city of New Orleans under the command of Gen. Benjamin Butler. To quell anti-Union sentiment, Butler ordered hostile newspapers to be suppressed by Union troops. Because of his editorial experience, Edward Brown was detailed with the take-over and operation of the *New Orleans Daily Delta* newspaper, which was published under his direction for the remainder of Gen. Butler's tenure as commander of the Department of the Gulf.

Edward Brown also had to deal with situations arising from the influx of African Americans into the camp of the 8<sup>th</sup> Vermont Reg't. When one slave-owner came to forcefully reclaim a fugitive slave, the Vermont troops hid the fugitive and kicked the white man out of camp.

***“The regiment was thereupon called into line by Lieut. Col. Brown, and after a severe lecture on their conduct, the men were informed that they were not to interfere with the personal property of citizens, “whether in slaves or anything else”.***

A number of the soldiers in the 8<sup>th</sup> Vermont declined to accept Lt. Col. Edward Brown's orders. At the risk of court martial, they continued to hide fugitive slaves in their camp.

## Jesse A. Gove (*Class of 1849*) (1824-1862)



*Jesse Gove (NU Archives)*

Following service in the Mexican War, Jesse Gove resumed his studies and graduated in 1849. He was eventually elected Deputy Secretary of State of New Hampshire. In 1855, he joined the Army and saw active service in the West, campaigning against the Sioux and Mormon separatists.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Gove was one of the most promising young officers in the Army, and was selected to lead the 22<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts Regiment. Col. Gove was killed in action at the 1862 battle of Gaines' Mill.

## Frederick W. Lander (*Class of 1841*) (1821-1862)

Frederick Lander used the engineering skills he learned at Norwich to explore and survey railroad and wagon routes to the Pacific Coast. He made five trans-continental explorations, often fighting and negotiating with Native American tribes.

When the Southern states began to secede, Lander delivered secret messages from President Lincoln to Sam Houston, in an attempt to keep Texas loyal to the Union. In May 1861, Lander was commissioned a brigadier general and led Union troops in western Virginia.



*Frederick Lander (NU Archives)*

During the Union withdrawal from the disastrous battle of Ball's Bluff in October 1861, Lander was severely wounded in the leg. He campaigned against Stonewall Jackson's forces in early 1862, but his leg wound never properly healed, and he died of disease in early 1862.

## William H. “Bull” Nelson (*Class of 1839*) (1824-1862)

William Nelson had a distinguished career as a naval officer. Wanting to see more active service, he resigned from the Navy to accept a commission as a brigadier general in the Army. In 1861, President Lincoln sent him to rally Union support in the volatile border state of Kentucky, and Nelson organized thousands of loyal Union troops.

In April 1862, William Nelson commanded the lead division of Union troops that reinforced Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's demoralized soldiers at the battle of Shiloh.

During the 1862 defense of Kentucky, Nelson was murdered during an argument with another Union officer.

**Edgar A. Kimball** (*Class of 1844*)  
(1822-1863)

In 1861, Edgar Kimball became major of the 9<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, which was organized by Vermont native Col. Rush Hawkins. This unit was known as the Hawkins Zouaves. Kimball served bravely in battle, and was promoted to lieutenant colonel of the regiment. Kimball's promotion is recorded in an order book of the 9<sup>th</sup> N.Y. Infantry in the collection of the Norwich University Archives.

Kimball was in command of the Hawkins Zouaves at the battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862. He led his men in a daring charge towards Confederate positions. As the color guard was shot down, Kimball took the flag and wrapped it around his body. The Zouaves suffered terrible casualties, but Kimball emerged unhurt.

Edgar Kimball is also remembered for an unfortunate incident surrounding his death. In the Union camp at Suffolk, Virginia, Kimball got into a heated argument with another Union officer, Col. Michael Corcoran of the 69<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment. Corcoran shot and killed Kimball, later claiming that he had acted in self-defense.

**Frederick H. Farrar** (*Class of 1856*)  
(1837-1863)

Frederick Farrar travelled from Point Coupe, Louisiana to attend Norwich University in 1853. Following his graduation, he returned south and worked as a surveyor and engineer for the Louisiana Board of Public Works. His supervisor there was Chief Engineer Braxton Bragg, brother of Norwich alumnus Thomas Bragg (Class of 1828). When Louisiana seceded in 1861, Farrar went to New Orleans, and enlisted a company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Louisiana Regulars.

In early 1862, Farrar was promoted to major. He first experienced combat at the battle of Shiloh, where he assumed command of his regiment.

Following the Confederate retreat from Shiloh, Farrar was promoted to lieutenant colonel. He commanded his regiment during Gen. Braxton Bragg's 1862 invasion of Kentucky, and again during the battle of Stones River in early 1863. On the evening after this battle, as he spoke with other officers around a campfire, Farrar was struck by a random shell and mortally wounded.



*Frederick Farrar*  
(NU Archives)

**Thomas Bragg** (*Class of 1828*)  
(1810-1872)

Thomas Bragg was born into a family of relatively modest means. The family's social position sheds light on the strict class system in place in the Antebellum South. Bragg's father was a carpenter and built up a profitable business as a building contractor. Despite his success, the Braggs never amassed much wealth. They had invested heavily in buying slaves, and by the 1820s owned nearly twenty enslaved people.

Although the Braggs had a prosperous business and social ambition, they were not accepted into the established aristocracy of their region. To ensure that his sons would be able to raise their position in society, Thomas Bragg's father invested a great deal in their education, and sent them far from home to further their studies.

In 1825, Thomas Bragg was sent from North Carolina to study at the A.L.S. & M. Academy. He arrived with \$200 for tuition and a letter from his father explaining that the sixteen-year old was to take the Academy's basic course of study, but not to take the extra classes offered in French, Spanish, Dancing, or Fencing. (Thomas Bragg's younger brother, Braxton, was able to secure an appointment to West Point, and would go on to become a Mexican War hero and one of the leading Confederate generals in the Civil War.)

After completing his studies, Thomas Bragg returned to North Carolina and opened a law office. As the law practice grew, he moved to Raleigh and eventually became a State Legislator. Bragg was elected Governor of North Carolina in 1854 and again in 1856. In 1859 he was elected to the United States Senate, but resigned his seat in 1861 when North Carolina seceded from the Union. He did not oppose the war, but doubted that the Confederacy would be able to win its independence militarily.

Thomas Bragg was well-acquainted with the new Confederate President Jefferson Davis. He had worked with Davis in the U.S. Senate, and Davis had served with his brother Braxton Bragg in the Mexican War. In November 1861, President Davis appointed Thomas Bragg to his Cabinet as Attorney General for the Confederate States of America. After serving only four months, Bragg resigned on March 18, 1862. He was concerned that the escalating military conflict in North Carolina threatened his family home and personal business interests. However, he remained an advisor to the Davis administration throughout the war.



*Confederate Artillery Short Sword (SMHC)*