

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Fight or Flight: The Commitment of German-Americans to the Union Cause during the American Civil War

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German-Americans fighting for or supporting the Union during the American Civil War felt humiliated on several occasions because of the failures of German units on the battlefields of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, and the command mistakes of the German general, Franz Sigel, at New Market. Nativist Americans exploited these events to question the loyalty and fighting ability of all German-Americans fighting for the Union. This thesis examines the commitment of German-Americans to the Union cause and the resiliency they demonstrated when they experienced disgrace and hostility during the Civil War.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT:
THE COMMITMENT OF GERMAN-AMERICANS TO THE UNION CAUSE
DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

by

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Preface

This thesis has one main subject, the resilience of German-Americans who fought for and supported the Union during the American Civil War in the face of public humiliation they experienced in the aftermath of military defeats during 1863 and 1864. It examines German-Americans' motivations in joining the Union army, then shifts to German-manned and German-led units in the Army of the Potomac to examine how the defeat of these units affected the reputation of German-Americans more generally within the United States. This work examines the damage done to the image of Germans in America, and it does so to determine whether German-Americans remained committed to the Union cause or their loyalty wavered. Most German-Americans, the thesis concludes, whether immigrants or their children, remained true to their original convictions during these hardships throughout the war.

Newspapers and letters provide the main body of evidence for this thesis. The newspapers demonstrated American and German-American reactions through the reports of special correspondents, published letters, and editorials. American newspapers from the period contain information on German-speaking participants in the Civil War. German language letters, diaries, and manuscripts are also available because of scholars that translated these documents into English. Together, these sources depict the disposition of German-Americans during the war.

Unfortunately, I did not have access to every letter, diary entry, or newspaper relevant to Germans fighting for or supporting the Union during the Civil War. Of course, the same can be said for any study of history, but I was limited to sources

translated by others. Thus, there remains the danger of sources that were purposely not translated because a German researcher choose to highlight only positive representations of their countrymen, or an American wished to pursue their own agenda through selective choices and suppressions of texts. Michel-Rolph Trouillot in his groundbreaking work, *Silencing the Past*, refers to the absence of information as a silence in fact retrieval.¹ A silence in fact retrieval occurs when a historian retrieves information from an archive, and chooses the facts they will present in their work. Naturally, there are sources not present in the narrative, and that is because it would be impossible to write about every source. Translators add to this silence when they decide whose letters or diaries to translate and publish. By supplementing the limited number of translated sources with sources that are in abundance, such as Oliver Otis Howard collections, a Major General of the largest German unit, Abraham Lincoln's Papers at the Library of Congress, and American newspapers, I have created a picture of Germans and their resilience during the Civil War.

Within this thesis, I have taken the approach of *res ipsa loquitur* (let the facts speak for themselves) by allowing the documents to demonstrate my argument. Doing so strengthens the argument, for it shows that my propositions are faithful to the actual positions of my historical characters. When an immigrant explicitly states why he joined the army, why he stayed after being wounded or seeing a friend killed, and why he wanted to defeat the South, there is no need extravagant interpretation.

¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26.

“Fight or Flight” examines Germans who immigrated to or born in the United States. However, nineteenth-century sources do not always distinguish between first- and second-generation Germans. Instead, nearly all of my sources identify both as “German”, and I attempt to respect their wording by calling the subjects of my study either Germans or German-Americans. Unless explicitly stated differently within the text, when either German or German-American is used within this thesis it refers to individuals with German heritage living in America.

Many people assisted me that I must acknowledge and thank for their efforts in the completion of this thesis. I thank my co-workers at the U.S. Army Center of Military History. In particular I thank Dr. Steve Lofgren, who ensured I had enough time to complete this work, and Dr. Eric Setzekorn and Dr. Mark Bradley, who both read my manuscript in its entirety and made numerous, valuable suggestions.

I thank everyone at the University of Maryland who instructed me over the years. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Jon Sumida, my advisor and committee chair. This work is the second thesis we have worked on together in two years, my first being an unwieldy BA honors thesis that he graciously accepted. I also want to thank Dr. Leslie Rowland for her editing abilities, and the numerous sources she brought to my attention that helped me to understand how to frame my study. Finally, I thank Dr. Michael Ross, who in one meeting took a disheveled chapter of eighty-two pages and turned it into a focused argument, with one central question. Together, these three have made me a better historian and I appreciate all their hard work over the years.

I dedicate this work to my wife, Anne, and my son, Cordell, who have supported me on this long journey from the beginning. Love you guys.

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Abbreviations

OR *Official Records of the War of Rebellion*

LOC Library of Congress

Introduction

Standing on a pedestal in a park or square in hundreds of northern towns is a statue of a Civil War Soldier. These statues memorialize a generic warrior, an anonymous patriot, the soldier, not a Scot, or Swede, or German, or Irishman, but a Union volunteer. The men in the ethnic regiments as well as native regiments are in those memorials. The best-kept secret of the ethnic regiments is how truly American they were.¹

In his classic study, *The Face of Battle*, John Keegan posed two fundamental questions regarding the nature of major land engagements: who fights and what motivates them to do so. In the case of the United States Civil War, these questions contend with the varying motives of individuals from the different national groups that constituted the native-born and immigrant populations of the Northern states. There is no single answer to the question of soldiers' motivations when they hailed from around the world.

The questions of who fought in the Civil War, and why, has received a great deal of attention from contemporary historians. Scholars who have recognized that imposing a binary perspective—that is, characterizing the conflict in terms of North versus South, or abolitionists versus slaveholders—as the basis of analysis ignores the fact that a significant number of those involved were from other countries with other concerns. The connections of immigrant soldiers with their homelands affected their behavior during the war and after, with consequences for both the United States and their countries of origin.

¹ William L. Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union's Ethnic Regiments* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 233.

This thesis is not an immigration history, but a military history that explores the role of German immigrants and second-generation German-Americans in ensuring the reunification of America. It explores the question, did defeat and public humiliation affect the motivations of German-Americans that fought with and supported the Union during the war? This question is examined by identifying the motivations of first-and second-generation Germans for fighting in the Civil War and the effects of the war and public humiliation on their motivations.

During the Civil War, predominantly German units and public German leaders were the main points of contact that Americans had to base their opinions of German-Americans in the Union. The reputation of German-Americans were thus a function of the native-born American perception of the battlefield performance their units and leaders. This thesis examines the role of Germans within the largest German unit, the 11th Army Corps of the Army of the Potomac. The investigation focuses on actions and after-actions of men in the 11th Corps after the battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, followed by an examination of the German hero and cultural leader, Franz Sigel. Sigel's actions at the Battle of New Market and his failure to halt the Confederate invasion of Maryland affected not only his career, but also the reputation of German-Americans throughout the North. These two approaches describe the range of German reactions in the face of public humiliation and demonstrates that German support for the Union cause was constant justify their hostile feelings toward immigrants, which prompted Americans to throughout the American Civil War.

This thesis examines German-Americans in the Civil War from multiple perspectives; however, there are many arguments that are either summarized, contextualized, or

outright ignored as outside the purview of this study. No unified German cultural identity existed for many Germans until after they entered the United States. Prior to 1871, there was no unified Germany. Germany was a collection of more than thirty states, including Austria, Prussia, Hanover, Saxony, and many others. When citizens of these countries came to the United States, Americans pushed onto them a single identity as German, and in response, many German-speaking immigrants accepted a shared cultural identity. For many of them, it was an easy identity to accept because of the many attempts to unify the German states under one system of governance.

According to the United States Census Bureau, 1,739,135 German immigrants came to America prior to 1860.² This figure does not include the large number of American-born Germans who considered themselves ethnically German. Second-generation Germans were called German by both their fellow Germans and other Americans, and they were identified through their surname, their ability to speak German, and for many, where they were born.³ German immigrants came to the United States from diverse socio-economic classes, religions, education levels, and political beliefs, all of which affected their motivations during the Civil War.⁴

² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. 69th ed. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1948), 107.

³ Certain cities in states such as Pennsylvania and New York became known as German cities. For example, the Pennsylvania Dutch are primarily known for being born in southeastern Pennsylvania in cities such as Allentown or South Central.

⁴ Marilyn Halter, "Ethnic and Racial Identity" In *A Companion to American Immigration*, ed. Reed Ueda (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 163.

Historians have identified three categories of motivation: initial motivation, sustaining motivation, and combat motivation.⁵ Initial motivation is why men volunteered, sustaining motivation is what kept them in the fighting, and combat motivation is what forced them to face death on the battlefield for a unified cause.⁶ James McPherson argues, “These categories are separate but interrelated.” This thesis takes their interconnectivity further and looks at how initial motivations become sustaining motivations for German-Americans during the Civil War.⁷

German-Americans were not a monolithic group. They did not all support the Union cause, nor did they fight solely for the North. Some Germans voted Democrat, lived in the South, and fought for the Confederacy. However, their numbers were not nearly as great as those who fought for the North, and for this study, they are grouped into the all-encompassing category of “southerners”. This thesis focuses on the German-American who fought for the North.

Love for a country not their own spurred thousands of German immigrants to fight for the Union in the Civil War. At the beginning of the war, German-Americans had a sense of pride in fighting for the Union. However, during the war German-Americans

⁵ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12. McPherson credits John A. Lynn for first conceptualizing of these three themes, and together these categories help historians understand what causes people to join a side in a war and fight with them until the war’s end.

⁶ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 12.

⁷ Combat motivations are outside of the focus of this work, and because of that, it’s not explored.

faced multiple defeats that undermined their desire of being held in favorable regard by native-born Americans. The question that drives this thesis is, whether defeat and public humiliation affected German-American commitment to the northern cause? To answer that question, three major and one minor military engagements in which German-American soldiers were prominent are examined: the battles of Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and New Market, and Jubal Early's incursion into Maryland. Chancellorsville and New Market were routs from the battlefield, and the aftermath of both battles negatively affected the reputation of German-Americans fighting for the Union. Gettysburg was not a Union loss like Chancellorsville and New Market, but its timing so soon after Chancellorsville diminished German-Americans' pride during 1863. Their sense of purpose is examined through such sources as German-Americans' defending themselves in newspapers, German-American soldiers' letters and diaries, manuscripts, published memoirs of German-American and American soldiers, records of General Oliver Otis Howard, who led the 11th Corps into battle during 1863, the papers of Abraham Lincoln, and translated collections of German-American letters and newspapers. Newspapers best demonstrate public sentiment, and by extension, humiliation before a national audience; thus, newspapers are the primary sources used to demonstrate German-American humiliation and self-defense during the Civil War.

The thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 begins with a brief overview of the events of 1848 and 1849 in Europe and the failed revolutions that led to a large influx of Germans into the United States, and it demonstrates that nearly a million

Germans left Europe for the United States prior to 1850.⁸ A decade later, Germans who had immigrated to the United States faced the decision to fight in another revolution, and on which side to fight. German motivations in fighting for the Union faced numerous hurdles during the war because of changing perceptions by American citizens. Of the estimated 243,000 German-American soldiers that fought for the Union, 36,000 of them fought within 61 ethnic units.⁹ The chapter examines six initial motivations for German-Americans to enlist in the Union army: economics, religion, politics, ideology, home, and conscription. It also explores German-American soldiers' letters to demonstrate their motivations, as well as diary entries and articles in newspapers.

⁸ The failure of the 1848 German Revolution was a significant point in European history, as historian Stephen Engle points out in *Yankee Dutchman*, "Aristocracy had crushed the advancement of republicanism and liberalism. The idea of individual freedoms and popular self-government vanished in the clouds of repression and militarism. ... It was one of those points in human history when history failed to turn." However, numerous historians have focused extensively on the revolution, and this thesis seeks to go beyond such a simple and heavily studied answer. Thus, the significance of the revolution is not explored as deeply as similar works, but it is explored to understand the effect it had on German-American motivation and unification during the Civil War. For more information focused solely on the revolution, see Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflicts, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

⁹ Twenty from New York, fifteen from Ohio, eleven from Missouri, six from Pennsylvania, six from Wisconsin, and one or two each from Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky. Dean B. Mahin, *The Blessed Place of Freedom: Europeans in Civil War America: Europeans in Civil War America* (Washington, DC: Brassey, 2002), 15. For comparison, approximately 180,000 African-Americans enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War. Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 250.

Chapter 2 examines the first viewpoint through which German-Americans had to understand their reputation in the Union, their ethnic units. The 11th Corps was the largest predominately German corps in the Union army, and its failures on the battlefield began a series of events that altered the reputation of all German-Americans in the North.¹⁰ It examines the events of the Battle of Chancellorsville which was fought between April 30 and May 6, 1863. After the battle, Germans in the 11th Corps were branded as cowards or “the flying Dutchmen”. This characterization of cowardice was extended to German-Americans throughout the North. Following Chancellorsville, the 11th Corps fought at Gettysburg, and the chapter focuses on their actions on day one of the engagement, July 1, 1863. Gettysburg was a Union victory, but a German regiment on the flank broke the first day and barely survived until reinforcements arrived to prevent another defeat. This near-defeat compounded the embarrassment of Chancellorsville, and Northern newspapers published hundreds of articles detailing the failure of the German unit. In addition, this chapter examines the sustaining motivation of defending the German-American cultural identity in American newspapers during the Civil War. It relies on these newspapers, the manuscripts of General O. O. Howard, the corps commander at both battles, the papers of General Carl Schurz, Howard’s second in command and a German-

¹⁰ William Burton first introduced ethnic units, within *Melting Pot Soldiers*, and he demonstrated that these units gave ethnic groups a unified identity and reputation during the Civil War. Since Burton, numerous historians have grappled with understanding these ethnic units. James Paula, Andrew Suhrer, Christian Keller, Valuska, and Donald Allendorf all wrote quasi-regimental histories of German ethnic units in the Civil War. Chapter two explores the largest of these units, and demonstrates the failings of the 11th Corps reflected poorly on all German-Americans’ reputations during the remainder of the nineteenth-century.

American cultural leader, and letters from German immigrants who either fought in those battles or experienced the negative judgments they produced.

Chapter 3 begins with a focus on the battle of New Market, which was fought on May 15, 1864, to survey the last large-scale German-American defeat of the war, and asks if it was the final tipping point that forced German immigrants to question their purpose in the war. This defeat was even more demoralizing for the German-Americans than Chancellorsville or Gettysburg, because the South won the battle with mere military cadets holding the center against Sigel's assault. The defeat was staggering enough that it nearly ended the career and reputation of Franz Sigel; his career was ended two months later, after he failed to stop Jubal Early from invading Maryland. Sigel's removal from active service caused some German-Americans to leave the Union army in 1864. The chapter concludes by demonstrating that after New Market most German immigrants remained resilient to the Union cause, despite widespread racism, poor leadership, and public humiliation. It shows that the principles and motivations that had caused so many German-Americans to volunteer for the northern cause remained with them until the end of the war or the end of their lives.

The thesis as a whole argues that German-Americans, both immigrants and their children, remained resilient throughout the American Civil War. Their commitment to the Northern cause superseded the public humiliation they experienced after numerous defeats.

Chapter 1: Germans in America

The Initial Motivations of German-Americans

Historians will probably forever argue the causes that led to the Civil War, but there is no mistaking why the German immigrant fought. The question of individual rights was the centerpiece.¹

On February 22, 1848, political unrest in an already unstable France culminated into two days of civil disorder throughout the country. In response, King Louis Philippe abdicated his throne and fled to Great Britain. He was acutely aware that French political turmoil could provoke murder of the ruling monarch, and his father had lost his life during the revolutionary convulsions of the 1790s. The new French government instituted universal adult male suffrage, protected the people's right to assemble, and established France's Second Republic. The rapid success of the liberal revolution France spurred other European countries into action.²

The February Revolution in France sparked a similar event, the March Revolution in Germany, with varying results in the German-speaking states. On March 13, 1848, a student demonstration in Vienna escalated into a revolt, and by the end of the day the chief minister to the Austrian emperor, Prince Metternich, was overthrown. The Prussian King, Frederick William IV, deployed 14,000 troops to Berlin to curtail the liberal revolutionaries, but the people supported the revolution

¹ Donald Allendorf, *Long Road to Liberty: The Odyssey of a German Regiment in the Yankee Army: The 15th Missouri Volunteer Infantry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), xvii.

² Don Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 91-93; Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflicts, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 5-8.

and stormed the capital, forcing the creation of a transitional government by March 19. Other revolutions in the German states were less violent. For example, King Ludwig I of Bavaria abdicated his throne instead of resisting the people, and after the fall of the Austrian and Prussian monarchs, many of the smaller German states capitulated in fear of the consequences that resistance brought. The liberal revolutionaries all had similar demands: freedom of the press, freedom to assemble, trial by jury, arming of the people, and the creation of a unified German parliament. The demands of the liberal Germans mirrored those in France's Second Republic and the U.S. Constitution, specifically its Bill of Rights. After March, the revolutionary movement in Germany would begin to stall, and the liberal bourgeoisie would lose its connection with the people, in turn losing the revolution.³

The lower classes that supported the German revolution quickly lost faith that the new liberal government would be any different than the conservatives previously in power. The support of the lower classes had fueled the German revolution, and once the provisional government lost broad support, it became vulnerable to the monarchy. The people wanted an elected parliament and a republic that mirrored that of France. However, once in power the new government began to consolidate itself, and the newly created German assembly attempted to elect the Prussian King as the leader of a united constitutional Germany. This was the same king who for years had supported polices that aided the wealthy and hurt the poor. William declined the crown and instead dissolved the constitutional assembly and created his own

³ Levine, *The Spirit of 1848*, 5-8; Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 89-93.

constitution in Prussia that once again favored the wealthy. To prevent another revolution, William made a concession by creating a parliamentary government. Meanwhile, Francis Joseph took over as King of Austria from Ferdinand I, and the new king—aided by his new prime minister, Felix Schwarzenberg—imposed a policy of extreme conservative reaction. With the two largest and most militarily powerful German states reestablished under monarchical governments, the lesser German states gave up their liberal revolutions.⁴

Because of the loss of popular support, Joseph and William using their armies to quell rebellions in the other German territories, and the failure of revolutions in other European countries such as Italy, by mid-1849 the German Revolution was no more. Some lasting changes emanated from the revolution, such as William's parliament, the will of the masses to unify Germany that would eventually spur Prussia to unify the German states in 1871, and, in some German states, appeasement of the lower classes by the granting of concessions.⁵ Such, minor reforms did little to placate those who would rather leave the continent than live under German monarchy and aristocracy.⁶

The failed German Revolution of 1848-49 sparked massive migrations. William's constitution, which heavily favored the wealthy, alienated members of the lower

⁴ Levine, *The Spirit of 1848*, 5-8; Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 89-93.

⁵ On the German Revolution, see Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflicts, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

⁶ Levine, *The Spirit of 1848*, 5-8; Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 89-93.

classes who believed they could not economically thrive in the German states. Religious policies dating back to the 1820s became worse for Jewish and *freien Gemeinden* (Free Communities) rationalist groups, forcing them out of their homes. Political figures such as Franz Sigel and other intellectual and military leaders of the liberal revolution fled the German states in fear of reprisals by the monarchies. Many Germans left their fatherlands with the intention of going to a country that already supported the policies they had sought in the revolutions. Thus, millions of Germans immigrated to European countries such as France, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, and between the years of 1850-1862, nearly 1.3 million chose to immigrate to the United States.⁷

German immigrants who came to the United States during the 1850s joined a large German-speaking population that had resided in the country for decades. In 1860, at least 5 million European immigrants lived in the United States according to the census, and analyzing immigration data for the years from 1820 to 1860 demonstrates approximately 2 million were German born.⁸ During the 1820s, approximately 6,000 German immigrants came to the United States, and immigration

⁷ German to America Passenger Data File, 1850–1897. Record Group 36, Data Files Relating to the Immigration of Germans to the United States, created, ca. 1977–2002, documenting the period 1850–1897. Center for Immigration Research. National Archives, College Park, MD. On all European immigrants to the U.S. during the decade prior to the Civil War, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1948* 69th ed. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1948), 107.

⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1864), xix.

skyrocketed in the 1830s to nearly 120,000.⁹ During the 1840s, the number of German immigrants to the U.S. jumped further to approximately 600,000.¹⁰ Economic depressions and a series of failed crops throughout Europe were responsible for the stark increases, and the depressions were one of the driving forces behind the revolutions of the late 1840s throughout Europe.¹¹ Most Germans who came to the United States prior to the Civil War had no intention of returning home. The 1860 federal census shows that of the 520,291 Germans who immigrated to the United States between 1855 and 1860, only 176 reported any desire to return to Germany.¹²

The high number of German immigrants shifted the composition of the American populace, and Germans became the second largest immigrant group in the United States¹³ During the 1850s alone, German-Americans born in the United States increased by approximately 123 percent, well above the 35 percent increase the United States Census reported for the rest of the population.¹⁴ Not surprisingly,

⁹ Levine, *The Spirit of 1848*, 15-17.

¹⁰ Ibid. For the number of German immigrants who arrived in the United States between 1820 and 1860, see Appendix.

¹¹ Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 92.

¹² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population of the United States in 1860*, xxi.

¹³ The Irish were the largest immigrant group but the Germans exceeded them in the Union ranks.

¹⁴ Levine, *The Spirit of 1848*, 15-17; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population of the United States in 1860*, v. The 35 percent gain includes immigration, and that is because the census data does not differentiate between born in the United States and immigrated to the United States. The Census states on page v, “That the whole of this gain is not from natural increase, but is, in part, derived from the influx of foreigners seeking here homes for themselves and their children.” Meaning the data is an

historian Herbert Gutman discovered that between 1840 and 1880, most American workers were either foreign born or the children of immigrants.¹⁵ Of the 2 million German immigrants who came to the United States between the 1820s and the Civil War, 50 percent were day laborers, 30 percent artisans, and only 20 percent were social elites, academics, merchants, or professionals.¹⁶ Because of compulsory military service in Prussia and other German states, many German immigrants had received significant military training.¹⁷

During the commercial and industrial boom in the North during the years prior to the Civil War, a large number of working-class German-Americans found jobs easily. German-Americans who preferred to farm took advantage of land offers in the western and southern territories. German-Americans integrated so well into the American workforce that the British Parliament took notice. Its report observed that “German workmen are largely employed in many departments of industry [in the American North].”¹⁸ The high rate of German immigration and reproduction,

aggregate of total gain during the decade. Excluding the 2,467,309 reported immigrants from all countries, from the 8,251,445-gain reported for all persons during the 1850s, the percent of increase for this decade from persons born living in the United States prior to 1850 is 25 percent. That percentage includes children born to immigrants that were the cultural *other* and not American, but there is no way to differentiate any further with the data I have.

¹⁵ Herbert G. Gutman, “Class Composition and the Development of the American Working Class, 1840-1890,” in *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class* 382-391, ed. Ira Berlin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 384.

¹⁶ Levine, *The Spirit of 1848*, 17-19.

¹⁷ Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 173.

¹⁸ “New York Industrial Exhibition. Special Report of Mr. George Wallis. Presented to the House of Commons by Command of Her Majesty, February 6,

combined with the German ability to assimilate into the American workforce, made them an important voting bloc in the American populace during Lincoln's election, and they would become the largest immigrant group to fight in the Civil War.

Between 1861 and 1865, approximately 190,000 German-born men volunteered for the Union, and 53,000 American-born sons of German immigrants served as well.¹⁹

Understanding the initial motivations of so many German-Americans to fight in the war is the first step toward understanding their tenacious loyalty to the Union throughout that war.

No single work has explored more than a few motivations of German-Americans who fought for or supported the Union during the Civil War. Most historians take one of three approaches when faced with the question. Some attribute German-American motivations solely to the revolution of 1848 and the political zeal it bred within German-Americans. Other historians focus heavily on German-American anti-slavery sentiment shared by many in Europe, or they use accounts by American soldiers' and civilians from both the Union and the Confederacy that paint German-Americans as mercenaries who only fought for money. Each of these explanations is valid to some degree, but none explores the full complexity of German-American motivations in fighting for the Union.

1854," (United Kingdom), quoted in *The American System of Manufactures*, ed. Nathan Rosenberg (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), 208.

¹⁹ Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 173.

Motivations of German-Americans to fight for the Union during the Civil War can be understood by examining the psychological reasons people fight for or support any nation during war.²⁰ There are three types of motivations that exist for any given populace that volunteers or supports a cause during a war: initial motivations, sustaining motivations, and combat motivations. This thesis focuses on the initial motivations of German-Americans who fought for or supported the Union during the Civil War, but the three types of motivations are so integrated that it is impossible to not analyze them together. Motivations that caused men to join the Union Army, kept them in the Army years later when times got hard and their commitment was tested because of public animosity. Thus, this thesis examines six types of initial motivations of German-Americans during the Civil War: politics, ideology, religion, economy/class, home, and conscription. Except for conscription, each kind of initial motivation played some part in a German's decision to fight in an American war. Exploring these six forms of initial motivation demonstrates the range of German imperatives, and their depth is a function not only of those who came following the Revolutions of 1848 but the 720,000 Germans that emigrated to the United States prior to the failed revolution. In addition, the initial motivations held by Germans

²⁰ Numerous historians have grappled with the question of soldier's motivations to fight in a war. John A. Lynn was the first historian to classify the motivations of soldiers into the three used in this study: initial, sustaining, and combat motivation. James M. McPherson in *For Cause and Comrades* and Ilya Berkovich in *Motivation in War* followed in Lynn's footsteps and expanding upon what motivates a populace to volunteer or support a nation during war. What they both find, is that motivations are interchangeable for any populace because of the diversity any group would have because of economic, political, or social standing within that group. This thesis expands on their findings, and focuses on how they apply toward German-Americans who fought for or supported the Union during the Civil War.

born in the United States that had no more than an indirect connection to their ancestral fatherland.

The political motivations of the '48ers are the most widely studied aspect of German-American involvement in the Civil War. However, not all German immigrants were highly political; many did not enjoy the acrimony of American politics.²¹ Sergeant Wilhelm Francksen, a German immigrant who served in the 26th Wisconsin Infantry Volunteers, expressed his political reservations to his family “Nearly everyone reads a newspaper here, but only the papers from their own political party, in which all the facts are colored or changed according to the party line and that contain nothing but lies and poison aimed at the other parties.” Francksen continues, “Thus, honest Germans soon grow sick of public life. You make sure that you get along yourself and with a few good friends, and you leave in peace the arrogant Yankees who think the Germans are only good enough to work for them,

²¹ There are multiple examples of German-Americans who were not highly political or wanted to engage with the entirety of the American culture. Instead, many of them moved themselves and their families to areas that were reminiscent of their native Germany. Areas they could farm and live in a small community, versus large cities and manufacturing jobs. Historians have attempted to understand these groups, and how their communities formed and existed during the nineteenth-century. Many of those historians track these communities from before the Civil War, through the end of the century. For more information regarding this historiography, see Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1994); Robert W. Frizzell, *Independent Immigrants: A Settlement of Hanoverian Germans in Western Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007); Minetta A. Goyne, *Lone Star and Double Eagle: Civil War Letters of a German-Texas Family* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1982); Robyn Burnett, and Ken Luebbering, *German Settlement in Missouri: New Lands, Old Ways* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996); and Hartmut Keil, and John B. Jentz, eds, *German Workers in Industrial Chicago, 1850-1910: A Comparative Perspective* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983).

but otherwise pay them less respect than a negro.”²² Minetta Goyne shows that many Germans were so frustrated with politics in both Europe and the United States that they moved to remote areas in Texas and the West in order to escape the infighting politics breeds.²³ Peter Osterhaus, a ‘48er who became a Republican once he immigrated to the North, attempted to avoid all political controversies in the United States.²⁴ However, because of his role in the German Revolution, he was unable to do so, and he would eventually become one of Lincoln’s “political generals,” used to inspire fellow German-Americans to fight in the Civil War.²⁵ Even though some Germans did not want to engage in American politics, others realized that American politics could be a tool to elevate German-American standing in the United States.

Prior to the Civil War, German-Americans organized into several political, economic, and social clubs that were intended to provide both cultural protection and integration. The ‘48ers brought with them the teachings of Fredrick Ludwig Jahn and his Turner movement. There were over 100 Turner organizations in the United States prior to 1860, with most being in the North.²⁶ Turner organizations were anti-slavery

²² Wilhelm Francksen to his father March 1, 1863, in *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich, trans. Susan Carter Vogel (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 141.

²³ Minetta Altgelt Goyne, ed., *Lone Star and Double Eagle: Civil War Letters of a German-Texas Family* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1982), i.

²⁴ Mary Bobbitt Townsend, *Yankee Warhorse: A Biography of Major General Peter Osterhaus* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 44.

²⁵ David K. Work, *Lincoln’s Political Generals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 48.

²⁶ Kamphoefner and Helbich, eds., *Germans in the Civil War*, 487. The Turner movement originated in the early nineteenth century within the German states as an

and pro-Republican, influencing thousands of German-Americans throughout the country. German-American social clubs, religious groups, and workers' unions were of varying political beliefs, but many members of the working-class in these groups were worried regarding their role in the American workforce at a time when the viability of free labor was threatened by the prospect of the spread of competitive slave labor.²⁷ The election of 1860 was of great concern to these groups, because they knew Lincoln was anti-slavery and wanted to protect the economic standing of working-class whites. German-American working-class groups held hundreds of conventions leading up to Lincoln's election, and even if they supported other candidates such as Stephen Douglas, they slowly shifted to Lincoln before the fall vote.²⁸

The driving force behind the support given by Turner organizations, cultural clubs, and German political conventions to Lincoln was their cultural leaders.

effort to liberate the area from Napoleon's rule. Jahn's teachings were the foundation of the Turner Movement, and the movement was focused on liberal principles of social equality, physical training. In America the movement was also anti-slavery. See Annette R. Hofmann, ed., *Turnen and Sport: Transatlantic Transfers* (New York: Waxmann Publishing, 2004).

²⁷ On working class whites' concerns with economic competition against slave labor, see Stacy L. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor; Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Peter Way, *Common Labor: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Terry Boswell et al., *Racial Competition & Class Solidarity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006).

²⁸ "Political," *Orleans Independent Standard*, August 31, 1860. The article demonstrates one example of a German convention changing its flag from Douglas to Lincoln, but many other examples could be listed.

German immigrants who were seen as political figures and cultural leaders like Carl Schurz worked with Lincoln to secure the German-American vote, and Schurz did so with the intention of bettering the position of Germans, and himself, in American politics.²⁹ One of Schurz's speeches to his fellow Germans informed them that the United States was the "great colony of free humanity," but to fulfill that promise the country had to welcome immigrants and abolish slavery.³⁰ Such speeches were meant to connect the elevation of German-Americans with the abolition of slavery and show that Lincoln would fight for equality. In another speech to German-Americans, Schurz further pushed for the abolition of slavery when he said, "May the God in human nature be aroused, and pierce the very soul of our nation with an energy that shall sweep as with the besom of destruction, this abomination of slavery from the land."³¹ Men like Schurz held enough influence in organizing Germans that Democratic papers began to circulate an article titled "Who is Carl Schurz" to discredit him in German eyes.³² Attempts by Democrats to discredit German-American leaders were common. For example, Elijah Green, who helped to organize most of Pennsylvania's Republican German, exalted Lincoln as the best candidate for German-Americans to vote for in dozens of articles and speeches. To discredit him,

²⁹ Townsend, *Yankee Warhorse*, 146.

³⁰ Quoted in Allison Clark Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 53.

³¹ *Bedford Gazette*, September 21, 1860, in Carl Schurz Papers, LOC (hereafter cited as Schurz Papers).

³² "Who is Carl Schurz," *Lewiston (NY) Gazette*, October 17, 1860.

Green's enemies resorted to claiming he did not exist, or perhaps was not German.³³ However, methods to discredit German leaders failed, and Schurz would later use his relationship with Lincoln to petition him to appoint Osterhaus and Franz Sigel to high-ranking positions in the northern army.³⁴ Schurz, Sigel, and other German leaders used their positions to convince German-Americans that Lincoln would fight for social equality, and these leaders convinced Lincoln to denounce the Know-nothings in his party prior to the election of 1860.³⁵

Lincoln quickly became the man German immigrants supported. Lincoln had various reasons for this admiration.³⁶ Some newspaper articles claimed that Lincoln

³³ "Schreckenzeiten," *Lewiston (NY) Gazette*, November 1, 1860.

³⁴ Townsend, *Yankee Warhorse*, 146.

³⁵ Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 41-43. The Know-nothings were an anti-immigrant political party of the early 1850s.

³⁶ There is an ongoing debate in German historiography regarding the German vote, and if they were responsible for the election of Abraham Lincoln. This argument began with William E. Dodd's article "The Fight for the Northwest, 1860" *The American Historical Review* 16 (July 1911): 774-790, and historians are still undecided if the German vote was decisive or not in Lincoln's election. Historians have resorted to individual case studies to argue their side of the debate, and depending on the location of the study, the answer differs greatly. George Daniels argues in his paper, "Immigrant Vote in the 1860 Election: The Case of Iowa," *Mid-America: An Historical Review* 44 (July 1962):146-162, that immigrants were a deciding factor, but Jay Monaghan proves in his own article, "Did Abraham Lincoln Receive the Illinois German Vote," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 35 (June 1942): 133-139, that Germans did not overwhelmingly vote for Lincoln. There are studies that examine education, region, class, and voting percentages spanning years to extrapolate a difference in voting behavior for Lincoln, and the historiography still does not have a unified answer regarding the German vote. This work is of the school that Germans did see something special in Lincoln, and German immigrants supported him through two elections based on the belief Lincoln would bring equality to the white working class.

had German lineage through his grandfather Colonel Lincoln.³⁷ German papers such as the Indiana *Volksbote* declared their support for Lincoln, and they did so to promote “free white labor” because they knew Lincoln was the man to promote a white labor market that could not be undercut by much cheaper slave workers.³⁸ Democrats, sensing that Lincoln would gain the immigrant vote, attempted to change the outcome on the day of the election:

Irish and German Laboeres [*sic*]! If Lincoln is elected to-day you will have to compete with the labor of four million emancipated negroes. His election is but the forerunner of an ultimate dissolution of the Union. The North will be flooded with free negroes, and the labor of the white man will be depreciated and degraded. Think of this, and vote the Union ticket. Go to the polls, every man of you, and cast your vote against Lincoln and abolitionism.³⁹

However, such pleas did little to change German-American voting patterns. Germans in New York overwhelmingly voted for Lincoln, and when the war began, many of them would be among New York’s first volunteers. Douglas did not attract the enthusiastic support Lincoln received in German papers, and dozens of German-run papers strongly supported Lincoln. The *Illinois State Journal* counted over seventy German “Freie Press” for Lincoln as early as July, and that did not include the papers that switched later in the fall.⁴⁰ Such strong press support had a major effect on German immigrants.

³⁷ “Hon. Abraham Lincoln. All About Him and His....,” *New York Herald*, August 13, 1860.

³⁸ “Germans for Lincoln,” *Highland (IN) Weekly News*, July 5, 1860.

³⁹ *New York Herald*, November 6, 1860.

⁴⁰ *Civilian & Telegraph* (MD), July 19, 1860; “The German Press,” *Evansville (IN) Daily Journal*, July 10, 1860.

The letters of some German immigrants demonstrate the influence of the media when they used nearly the same wording in the newspapers when they wrote about Lincoln to their families. John Dieden thought Lincoln was “the man of freedom, the enemy of slavery, the man of equal rights,” and he also admired Lincoln because he was “a farmer or Ackersmann” who rose to power through hard work, something he wished occurred in German politics.⁴¹ Otto Albrecht was amazed that a farmer who used to split logs, build fences, and had the nickname rail splitter, had risen to such high political power.⁴² At points in his letter Otto virtually quoted newspaper articles that were about Lincoln’s life and background. Lincoln rewarded German-Americans for their faith in him during the Republican national convention of 1860, when he invited dozens of German political leaders to Chicago and officially ratified German-American proposals to protect their rights as foreign-born citizens.⁴³

Klaus Knorr in his work, *War Potential of Nations*, shows that a nation cannot go to war without galvanizing support from the populace, and Abraham Lincoln realized he would need to muster all groups in the North to support the Union if he wanted to win the Civil War.⁴⁴ When the war began, Lincoln used German-American ideological zeal to motivate thousands to fight. Lincoln tapped into German-American ideology in three ways. First, he used his German-American connections

⁴¹ John Dieden to his cousin, Christian Dieden, November 29, 1860, and May 31, 1862, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 302-303.

⁴² Otto Albrecht to unknown, November 11, 1860, 37.

⁴³ Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship*, 82-83.

⁴⁴ Klaus E. Knorr, *The War Potential of Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 43.

that got him the German-American vote, specifically Carl Schurz, Franz Sigel, John Frémont, and many others, to connect the southern planter class with the aristocracy of Europe. Second, he took Carl Schurz's advice and appointed German heroes that he knew would rally the German-Americans into fighting for the Union, whether they were Democrat or Republican. Lastly, Lincoln and his German cultural leaders drew upon anti-slavery sentiment Germans held prior to the war. Northern newspapers, recruiting posters, and Germans who were ready for war promoted Lincoln's agenda to German immigrants throughout the war.

Lincoln learned from his election that German-American cultural leaders motivated German immigrants, and Lincoln used such leaders to maximize the recruitment of German volunteers once war began. Lincoln appointed Carl Schurz, Franz Sigel, John Frémont, and Peter Osterhaus to the rank of general to encourage German-Americans to serve the Union.⁴⁵ They had already organized and trained volunteers in Missouri during the first few weeks of the war, and Lincoln expanded their reach across the North with his appointments. Sigel was already extremely influential, and he used the military training he received in Germany to organize and train militias throughout the North.⁴⁶ All four generals wrote to newspapers and gave speeches condemning the Confederacy as an American aristocracy and argued that slavery was a moral ill that would keep immigrants from achieving full equality.

⁴⁵ On Lincoln's decision to give these men the rank of general, see David K. Work, *Lincoln's Political Generals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Stephen D. Engle, *Yankee Dutchman: The Life of Franz Sigel* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 46-47.

Hatred of aristocracy and ideological and moral opposition to slavery were the motives of many German immigrants who voted for Lincoln, and after the South declared war, they motivated thousands of them to fight for the Union. Overthrow of the aristocracy and the monarchy had been the primary justification of the German revolution of 1848, and the millions of German-Americans in the United States predisposed to act against an aristocracy. Articles like “Southern Confederacy” which was published before the 1860 election, described the South as an oligarchy filled with wealth, and “the right of voting will be limited to those who own slaves.” The article warned its readers “In this way they will get rid of the Irish and German vote!”⁴⁷ After the war began, similar messages regarding the Confederacy were repeated hundreds of times in northern newspapers. Articles such as “Attitude of England,” “English Editors and American Affairs,” and “Social Revolutions-Advent of the Shoddy Aristocracy,” published in both German and English, compared the South’s planter class to European aristocrats.⁴⁸ Orators such as Schurz spoke to large audiences, usually to a standing ovation, and they reiterated the message connecting the South and slavery to European issues.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Parson Brownlow, “Southern Confederacy,” *Pomeroy (OH) Weekly Telegraph*, November 2, 1860.

⁴⁸ “Attitude of England,” *Watertown Republican* (WI), August 23, 1861; “English Editors and American Affairs,” *New York Herald*, October 15, 1861; “Social Revolutions – Advent of the Shoddy Aristocracy,” *New York Herald*, November 6, 1861.

⁴⁹ “A Lincoln Minister,” (Richmond) *Daily Dispatch*, April 10, 1861, in Schurz Papers; “Ovation to an America Embryo Ambassador,” *New York Herald*, March 16, 1861.

Personal observations by German immigrants and European politicians demonstrated that Southern planters were the American aristocracy to German immigrants; the prospect of their downfall motivated thousands to fight in the Civil War. Europeans took notice of this German motivation. One observer, Colonel Ferri Pisani, Prince Napoleon's aide-de-camp when he visited the U.S. in 1861, declared that "In German eyes, *aristocracy* and *fortune*—the objects of his dislike—is the slave owner. This explains the instinct which leads these people, as a whole, to enlist under the flag of abolitionism, and now under the flag of the Union."⁵⁰ Pisani went on to say, "The German element played an important role in the electoral success of Mr. Lincoln, and now is at the basis of the extreme popularity, and the political future of General Frémont."⁵¹ Pisani's observation was accurate, as letters from German soldiers demonstrate. For example, Private Dietrich, a German-American volunteer, wrote to his brother Ludwig "This Southern aristocracy, however, is the worst the world has ever seen, but stamping out slavery will deal it a fatal blow, even if the aristocracy tries with all its devious schemes to win back in peace what was taken from it by the sword."⁵² Slavery and the southern aristocracy motivated German officers as well. "To us [German immigrants]" wrote Captain August Horstmann to his parents "the war is a war of sacred principles, a war that should deal the fatal blow

⁵⁰ Ferri Pisani, "Prince Napoleon in America, 1861," in *Europe Looks at the Civil War*, ed. Sideman et al., 86-87 (emphasis added).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Dietrich Gerstein to his brother Ludwig Gerstein, April 28, 1865, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 285.

to slavery and bow down the necks of the Southern aristocracy.”⁵³ Horstmann’s message exemplifies the ideological reasoning of many German immigrants. End the aristocracy, end slavery, and as a result, America will be a better country with its freedom permanently secured.

To many German immigrants, freedom should include all men, not only white men, and the liberation of slaves would liberate the soul of America itself. According to European source, Germans believed from the beginning of the war that victory would end slavery. “It was among the Germans that one could find the most exalted defenders of the Union, the most resolute enemies of slavery.” He continues “Having grasped from the beginning the character and object of the civil war, they have espoused the cause of the Union and of emancipation with an ardor and a passion, the influence of which has been felt even in Europe by the population beyond the Rhine.”⁵⁴ German soldiers confirmed this observer correct. For example, Corporal Ludwig Kuhner, who served in the Union infantry, wrote to his brother Gottlieb in 1861, “Freedom and slavery can’t exist side by side, one of the two will be abolished. I hope that right prevails.”⁵⁵ Dr. Hermann Nagel, who served at Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and many other battles as a Union doctor, expressed views similar to those of Corporal Kuhner in a letter to his brother, “I will never be able to reconcile

⁵³ August Horstmann to his parents, September 18, 1863, in *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵⁴ August Laugel, n.d., in *Europe Looks at the Civil War*, ed. Sideman et al., 89.

⁵⁵ Ludwig Kuhner to his brother Gottlieb Kuhner, December 22, 1861, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 294.

myself with the belief that slavery is the actual foundation of the state, that the continued existence of slavery is not merely a temporary necessity but the true essence and basic principle of the state, without which civilized society cannot exist.”⁵⁶ The same belief is shown in the letters of Private Anton Bullenhaar, a Union infantryman, when he wrote, “Everywhere you hear the unaccustomed, murderous hue and cry of war. The object of the war is the abolition of slavery. ... The Republican party is now aiming to free the slaves from their yoke.”⁵⁷ German-American letters provide many more examples, and they all show an ideological or moral opposition to slavery, as well motivations to fight the war based on the political motivations of Democrats to sustain slavery and the aristocracy.

By appealing to German ideology and their morality, the Union recruited many Germans, but religious dogma can supersede logical ideology if one’s faith is strong enough. There was no single German-American religion, German immigrants were Catholic, Jewish, Lutheran, and Protestant. In addition, many were members of the *freien Gemeinden* (free thinking German communities). Participants in the *freien Gemeinden* were the most diverse religion of the time. They were rationalists who supported greater rights for women in contrast to the Catholics that opposed expanding individual rights for women.⁵⁸ Catholic and Protestant German-Americans

⁵⁶ Hermann Nagel to his brother, April 28, 1861, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 396.

⁵⁷ Anton Herman Bullenhaar to his brothers and sisters, December 27, 1861, in *Ibid.*, 373.

⁵⁸ Bernice Cooper, “*Die Freie Gemeinde*: Freethinkers on the Frontier,” *Minnesota History Magazine* 41 (January 1968): 53-60.

tended to agree over personal rights, economic concerns, support for or ambivalence toward slavery, and disdain for independent religions. Calvinist and Lutheran German-Americans shifted based on personal concerns, primarily labor. The most anti-slavery of these groups were the Jews, because of Jewish treatment in Germany during the early nineteenth century.⁵⁹

Jewish-German immigrants immigrated to the United States not by choice but by force because of policies in Germany dating back to 1813. A law called *Matrikel* fixed the number of Jews allowed in various German states because of the perceived large number of Jews, and it applied to children born to Jews already settled in the area. The only way Jews could legally resettle or have children was through the death or emigration of a German Jew. *Matrikel* gave Jews in the German states three options: leave, stop reproducing, or die. The *Matrikel* identified Jews as the unwanted *other* who should leave the German states. Jews who felt forcibly exiled from their homeland had a sensitivity to personal rights that was often lacking in German immigrants who were Catholics or Protestants. Persecution in the U.S. only deepened Jewish sensitivity to the need for protection of the right of peoples could be persecuted by those with more power. Throughout the nineteenth century, German Jews outnumbered any other Jewish population in America, but because of their insecure position in America, rabbis and Jewish community leaders generally avoided speaking about slavery and up until 1860 they took a neutral stance on the question of

⁵⁹ On the diverse religious beliefs regarding slavery, see Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Regan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

slavery. This hesitation to speak publicly hid the reality that a large majority of northerners were against slavery. Once the war began, thousands of German Jews volunteered to fight for the Union.⁶⁰

Jews were located across the United States, but they settled predominantly in the North. German Jews were concentrated in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston, but a minority of them settled in the mid-West and the South.⁶¹ Jews in the North volunteered in large numbers during the Civil War, for it was their first chance to openly act against slavery and solidify their place as patriots and Americans in the Union. One of the largest was the 5th Pennsylvania Calvary Regiment also known as Cameron's Dragoons; its commander, Colonel Max Friedman, and nearly all his 1,200 men were Jewish. Their decision to fight for the Union had nearly immediate effects for Jews in America. The volunteer law passed by Congress on July 12, 1861 provided that military chaplains had to be Christian, and the regiment had a Jewish chaplain. He had to resign once federal authorities learned of he was Jewish, but Colonel Friedman and immigrant newspapers put pressure on Congress to modify the law to allow for the election of Jewish chaplains.⁶² After the law was changed, the Jewish chaplain returned to the regiment. While Jewish-German

⁶⁰ Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1994), 1-2, 79, 109.

⁶¹ Harry S. Linfield, *Statistics of Jews and Jewish Organizations: Historical Review of Ten Censuses, 1850-1937* (New York: American Jewish Community, 1939), 29.

⁶² Barkai, *Branching Out*, 118-119.

immigrants in the North utilized their role in the war to enhance Jewish standing in the Union, other religious groups had little reason to fight.

Catholics had difficulty finding motivation to fight in the Civil War because of clergy who preached slavery as a moral prerogative of white people.⁶³ One critic admonished Catholics for “advocating slavery and for taking for granted that a human being can be the property of another human being,” and he further denounced the belief that blacks were a naturally inferior race.⁶⁴ After the South declared war, Pope Pius IX personally wrote to Confederate President Jefferson Davis in support of the southern cause, and after Davis went public with the Pope’s endorsement, Catholics of all nationalities in America understood what it meant to be a good Catholic: either support the South or stay out of the war.⁶⁵

While understanding the message of the Pope, German-American Catholics openly spoke and wrote against slavery, and their messages left Germans who supported the war conflicted. In Ohio, an article titled “The Catholic Church,” was

⁶³ John Francis Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church: The History of Catholic Teaching Concerning the Moral Legitimacy of the Institution of Slavery* (London: Barry Rose Publishers, 1975), 107-108. To further understand the role of Catholicism during the Civil War, see Randall M. Miller et al. eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), and Michael Stogre, S.J., *That the World May Believe: The Development of Papal Social Thought on Aboriginal Rights* (Sherbrooke, QC: Éditions Paulines, 1992).

⁶⁴ Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church*, 107.

⁶⁵ Robert Emmett Curran, *Shaping American Catholicism: Maryland and New York, 1805-1915* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 106. While Pope Pius later attempted to retract his support for the American Confederacy to European monarchies, he did not retract anything in America or the media, leaving the impression of his support for Davis.

reprinted multiples in the North and it linked German, Irish, and Scottish Catholics together, and made it seem as if they should stand in solidarity against the Union.⁶⁶ In Chicago, the *Daily Tribune* published conflicting articles by two very different correspondents. In one, “A Catholic View,” the correspondent argued that Catholics were for fighting against the “slave holding oligarchy,” but another argued that it was not Lincoln’s place to emancipate slaves and the Catholic Church supported the South’s independence.⁶⁷ Articles such as these, combined with clergy that supported slavery and the South, left German immigrants such as Dietrich Gerstein, a German Catholic that volunteered for the Union infantry, morally perplexed. He later decided when he wrote to his family, “The Catholic religion has always been in its core the Christian sect that is most dangerous to freedom, and it is totally impossible to be a *good Catholic* and a *good republican* at the same time.”⁶⁸ The decision to choose one’s political party or morals over faith was something many Germans did. The most famous being Peter Osterhaus, another German immigrant that was a Catholic Republican.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ “The Catholic Church,” *The Democratic Press*, April 3, 1862.

⁶⁷ “A Catholic View,” and “Dr. Brownson on the War!” Chicago *Daily Tribune*, January 14, 1862. Newspapers in Chicago, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and New York all argued that Catholics should support the South and slavery.

⁶⁸ Dietrich Gerstein to his brother, October 1, 1862, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner et al., 281 (emphasis added).

⁶⁹ Townsend, *Yankee Warhorse*, 20.

Not all Christian denominations had a pope to influence what their clergy taught them.⁷⁰ The various other Christian faiths had two reactions in the North leading up to and through the war: follow the Bible's teachings on slavery, or follow the Bible's teaching on the treatment of your fellow man. Without a central leader, the religious beliefs of a congregation over slavery shifted from city to city, and sometimes from church to church.⁷¹ Many clergymen preached according to their interpretation of the Bible, or the interpretation their local bishop authorized for them. This divide between clergy created an interesting dichotomy in these religions, because the Bible has multiple verses regarding the treatment of slaves and their need to obey, but it also has verses extolling the virtue of treating your fellow man as you want to be treated. Catholic support for the South did influence these other religions, but its influence was primarily because of the proximity of a large Catholic population or the sharing of schools with Catholic churches. Because of large Turner organizations, clergy would sometimes preach messages that supported the beliefs

⁷⁰ On Catholicism's influence over immigrants' decision to fight for the Union, see Robert Emmett Curran, *Shaping American Catholicism: Maryland and New York, 1805-1915* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

⁷¹ Mark Noll's "The Bible and Slavery" *Religion and the American Civil War*, eds. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Regan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 43-73, and Bertram Wyatt-Brown's "Church, Honor and Secession" *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller, et al., 89-109. Both articles describe the dispute Christian congregations had over the Bible and slavery, and they are useful for anyone interested in the complicated way religious groups examined slavery.

their congregation already held to not lose members to another church.⁷² Non-political clergymen without fear of losing their congregation or standing in a city could preach according to their own beliefs, though sometimes to their detriment.⁷³

The ability to make one's own choice regarding slavery was prevalent in the *freien Gemeinden*. The *Gemeinden* was not a single religion. Instead, it was a conglomeration of hundreds of independent religions unconstrained by a unified identity.⁷⁴ They were primarily rationalists and believed more in science than blind faith, and the members were from larger religions that freethinking Germans could no longer support. Because of their belief in rationality, many of the *freien Gemeinden* thought the reduction of human beings to a form of chattel was inherently evil, and they worried that if the South should prevail, poor whites could become slaves.⁷⁵ No class distinction existed among the *Gemeinden*, and that added to the diversity of the groups' reach. Because of the *freien Gemeinden*' close connection with Turner organizations, most of the members were highly political, some influential, and the congregations' leaders motivated thousands to vote for Lincoln and fight in the war for the betterment of all Germans. Free to choose why they fought, the members of

⁷² George M. Fredriksson "The Coming of the Lord: The Northern Protestant Clergy and the Civil War Crisis," *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller et al., 111, 118.

⁷³ Bertram Wyatt-Brown "Church, Honor, and Secession," *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller et al., 96-98.

⁷⁴ Levine, *The Spirit of 1848*, 48.

⁷⁵ Bernice Cooper, "Die Freie Gemeinde: Freethinkers on the Frontier," *Minnesota History Magazine* 41 (March 1968): 53-54. Members of the *Gemeinden* were not atheist. Instead, they believed in God, but they also believed in consideration of human elements, specifically human nature and human morality.

the *Gemeinden* had two reasons to fight in the war: to end slavery, and to ensure German-American economic success.

Economic and class concerns were predominant interests informing German immigrants' decisions to fight in the Civil War. The economic concerns of the poor white working class that motivated German-Americans to vote for Lincoln also motivated many German-Americans to fight for Lincoln once war began. However, German immigrants had other economic and class concerns as well. While the betterment of the German-American working-class was important, bounties encouraged poor farmers and laborers in need of money to fight. German-Americans that were citizens of the U.S. were subject to the draft in 1863, and conscription forced many too poor to pay into fighting. Many non-political, middle-class Germans wanted to stay out of the war, and they could afford to pay out of conscription. However, political middle-class Germans that chose to fight wanted to be officers to increase their wealth, while upper-class Germans usually fought for personal honor and increased political influence. The economic concerns of each class influenced German-Americans' decision to fight for the Union or avoid the war.

The lowest class of German immigrants had the greatest motivation to fight in the Civil War when compared to the other classes. Working-class Germans typically found jobs in the North, but many feared the South would expand slavery to the white working class as well.⁷⁶ The South's laws regarding slaves that were physically

⁷⁶ On the possibility of working-class whites becoming economic slaves, see Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), and Charles C. Bolton, *Poor*

indistinguishable from white or black because of race mixing did little to quell this belief.⁷⁷ As one German laborer wrote, “the rebellion was started by slaveowners to overthrow the free constitution of the country and to set up a government by the nobility. These slaveowners are great lords who have a hundred or more black serfs and now want to enslave the free white workers.”⁷⁸ Ending the South’s ability to make slaves of men had the advantage of ensuring poor whites could never be slaves, and it would take away labor competition from slavery.

German-Americans that needed money joined in earnest when the Union offered bounties for their service. German immigrants like Gustav Keppler wrote to his parents regarding his job loss and his subsequent choice to accept the \$1,200 bounty offered by the Union.⁷⁹ He thought the bounty and his monthly pay would be more than enough to pay off all his debts within two years, but inflation and personal expenses would later prove him wrong.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, men such as Keppler gave rise to accusations in Confederate, Democratic, and nativist papers that Germans were mercenaries who fought only for money, a belief that would eventually spread through northern and southern troops.⁸¹

Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁷⁷ Merritt, *Masterless Men*, 264.

⁷⁸ Peter Klein, quoted in Mahin, *The Blessed Place of Freedom*, 12.

⁷⁹ Gustav Keppler to his parents and brothers, August 3, 1862, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 186.

⁸⁰ Gustav Keppler to his parents and brothers, April 15, 1864, in *Ibid.*, 187.

⁸¹ Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers*, 55.

Middle- and upper-class Germans who fought in the Civil War generally did so as officers, and they also sought the possibility of economic gain that war could bring. Many in these two classes had wealth, education, and connections to gain favor when seeking commissions. Lincoln personally appointed ten German generals as a political maneuver to gain favor with the large immigrant base, and these men accepted, in hopes of increasing their own political influence after the war.⁸² Of Lincoln's German political generals, only Sigel and Osterhaus had experience commanding large units in war, but neither was a military genius worthy of appointment to major-general, at the time the highest rank in the Union army. However, these men used their influence to enhance the cause of Germans throughout the country, although historians have argued that men like Sigel only advanced their own position.⁸³ Less influential men like Eduard Treutlen positioned themselves in roles that allowed them to move from the middle to the upper class. Treutlen's appointment allowed him to gain wealth from the bounties of volunteers he recruited and trained, prize money from the Confederate ships he seized, and his salary as an officer, and he used his wealth to open multiple businesses after the war.⁸⁴ In contrast,

⁸² On Lincoln's political generals, see David K. Work, *Lincoln's Political Generals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

⁸³ Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers*, 210-211. Sigel often threatened to or actually resign from the Union army whenever he felt he deserved a certain promotion or command. He knew his position influenced the ideology of many Germans, and he would use the threat of the Union losing German support to ensure his own political fortunes.

⁸⁴ Eduard Treutlen to his parents, May 7, 1865, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 231-235.

Christian Bonsel thought the prospect of the money he could earn in war was not worth the risk to his life, and instead he worked his own shop throughout the war.⁸⁵

Christian Harring summarized German-American class motivations best when he wrote, “I don’t quite know what to say, it is clear that the rich are fighting to make a lot of money, and the poor to make a living or to lose their lives, or even worse, to be crippled for life!”. However, he shows that he understands why when he wrote, “Times were really bad when the war broke out, business slowed down completely, and so for the workers there was no other way to earn a living except to enlist. And others who didn’t have to make their living as laborers found it a good opportunity to play the role of an officers.”⁸⁶ While Harring had a pessimistic view of his fellow Germans, his analysis of social class and motivations for fighting was precise. Harring would later return to Germany rather than face conscription. However, not all Germans believed that the Union was not worth fighting for, since many saw it as their home.

The concept of home motivated German immigrants in two ways: the United States was their home and they wanted to defend and re-unify their new homeland, or Germany was their home and they fought in the hope of aiding their original fatherland. Cultural leaders such as Schurz and Sigel spoke frequently about the United States as a bastion of freedom, and their belief that Lincoln would be the man to equalize human rights through war further fueled German-American support for

⁸⁵ Christian Bonsel to his parents, brothers, and sisters, January 29, 1865, in *Ibid.*, 329.

⁸⁶ Christian Harring to his parents and sister, August 30, 1863, in *Ibid.*, 220.

the war. German labor organizations wrote to Lincoln assuring him that Germans viewed the United States as their home and were willing to fight for him and the Union.⁸⁷ German-American judges in the North reiterated these messages, informing Germans they must “defend the Union and protect the Star-Spangled Banner.” German newspapers urged their compatriots to fight and the papers charged them to demonstrate, “we Germans... are prepared to defend our American home as the blessed place of freedom.” Defending American freedom was important to Leonard Streiff when he spoke to a large Kentucky convention of German-Americans, “show yourselves worthy of the freedom which this glorious country has hitherto bestowed upon you.” He would further charge them, “Our plain duty is ... to stand by [the Union] in this hour of peril, and sustain it if need be, with our fortunes and our lives.” Franz Sigel repeatedly proclaimed, “this great republic is the last refuge of liberty... for free men of Europe.” The reiteration of these messages influenced Germans personally when they decided to fight for the Union.⁸⁸

Individually, German immigrants realized that defending their new home would grant equality and freedom to all citizens if the Confederacy was defeated, and many immigrants wanted to assimilate into the American culture prior to 1861, the war provided them the opportunity to demonstrate their worthiness to the nation.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Cincinnati Ohio German Workmen to Abraham Lincoln, February 1861, in Lincoln Papers.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Dean B. Mahin, *The Blessed Place of Freedom: Europeans in Civil War America: Europeans in Civil War America* (Washington, DC: Brassey, 2002), 11-12.

⁸⁹ On immigrant assimilation, see Shannaon Latkin Anderson, *Immigration, Assimilation, and Cultural Construction of American National Identity* (New York:

One German-American volunteer demonstrated this belief when he asked his father, “Would I still be worthy of living in this land, enjoying this freedom, if I were not also willing to fight for this freedom, and if need be, to die for it?”⁹⁰ Another German expressed to his family “The United States have taken me in, I have earned a living here, and why shouldn’t I defend them, since they are in danger, with my flesh and blood!”⁹¹ Newspapers took notice of immigrant motivations to join the Union. The *Burlington Free Press*, for example, attributed the increase of German immigrants to the United States to their desire for equality and freedom in the New World and the belief that by coming to the United States they could fight for and defend freedom.⁹² The idea of assimilation resonated among Germans-Americans, and German language newspaper wrote, “German immigrants believed the American flag was big enough to permit them to enjoy themselves in accordance with their own native customs.”⁹³

Some German immigrants supported the Union in the hope of later aiding the German fatherland. For example, Gottfried Rentschler reflected on German participation in the Civil War as a continuation of the German fatherland’s “holy purpose of liberty,” and he theorized in 1864 that if the North won, many Germans

Routledge, 2015). For specifically European immigrant assimilation, see Dean B. Mahin, *The Blessed Place of Freedom: Europeans in Civil War America: Europeans in Civil War America* (Washington, DC: Brassey, 2002).

⁹⁰ Friedrich Martens to his father, August 24, 1861, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 319.

⁹¹ Albert Krause to his family, September 11, 1862, in *Ibid.*, 198.

⁹² “Foreign Immigration,” *Burlington Free Press*, July 19, in *Ibid.*, 1861.

⁹³ Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era*, 43.

would return to Germany with a renewed liberal zeal.⁹⁴ Another German officer, Karl Frick, shared Rentschler's views. "I am firmly convinced that before another year goes by we will have crushed the rebellion" Frick went on to write that "our republic, which is a home to any exile, will stand on a new firm base, more glorious than ever before. And then it may even be possible to think about freeing Germany, because that would only be feasible from this continent. As soon as we have freed our country from the curse of slavery, other countries can be taken care of."⁹⁵ Frick and Rentschler were not exceptions among German immigrants, and many prominent Germans hoped that America's re-unification would lead to German unification. Carl Schurz, a Prussian immigrant, openly supported German equality and integration into the United States, but he was ecstatic when Prussia established the North-German Confederacy because it would lead to full German unification.⁹⁶ The German fatherland may have concerned all German immigrants when they joined the Union, and their hopes came to fruition in 1871, when Germany constitutionally unified.

Beginning in 1863, the Union forced many poor German-Americans to fight in the Civil War if they were American citizens. The Enrollment Act of 1863 was the

⁹⁴ Gottfried Rentschler, Letter 8. Joseph R. Reinhard ed. *Two Germans in the Civil War: The Diary of John Daeuble and the Letters of Gottfried Rentschler, 6th Kentucky Volunteer Infantry* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 68.

⁹⁵ Karl Adolph Frick to his mother and sisters, September 29, 1862, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 349.

⁹⁶ Carl Schurz, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz: Volume 3 1863-1869* (New York: McClure, 1908), 268. On the unification of Germany, see Dennis Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015). Showalter makes a convincing argument regarding the effect of the American Civil War on German unification.

first law of its kind in American history, and it required men between the ages of twenty and thirty-five to register for the draft. As non-citizens, Germans born in Europe were exempt from the draft, but American-born Germans and Germans that had been naturalized as citizens were subject to conscription. The Union expanded the draft age to forty-five in 1864 once it realized the army needed more men. Draft riots erupted in New York City involving poor Irish and German immigrants who refused to fight in the war. Their primary complaint was the commutation clause in the 1863 act that called for the payment of a few hundred dollars and one could avoid fighting; however, only wealthy individuals had the funds required to escape conscription. This sparked the belief that the Civil War was “a rich man’s war, but a poor man’s fight.”⁹⁷ Wealthy individuals offered money to immigrants of all kind to replace them or their family after 1863 when the commutation clause was ended, and the German immigrants that accepted the money furthered the belief they were really mercenaries fighting for the Union.⁹⁸ The idea that German-American soldiers were

⁹⁷ John Keegan, *The American Civil War: A Military History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 9.

⁹⁸ Many poor German immigrants served as substitutes because of the amount of money offered to take someone else’s spot could be more than they could make in a year. The monthly income of a Union soldier was higher than the monthly income of a day laborer, and many Germans understood that if the worst should happen, Union pensions would take care of their families for the rest of their lives. For more information regarding conscription and its effect on immigrants, see James W. Geary, *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), and Tyler Anbinder “Which Poor Man’s Fight? Immigrants and the Federal Conscription of 1863,” *Civil War History* 52 (December 2006): 344-372. On German substitutes that took wealthier men’s position in the Union army, see Mack Walker, “The Mercenaries,” *New England Quarterly* 39 (September 1966): 390-398.

really mercenaries was solidified after federal recruiters went to Germany and offered men large bounties to fight for the Union.

Many Germans who had the means to flee the United States did so rather than fight for a cause they did not believe in, and others found innovative ways to escape conscription. For example, Victor Klausmeyer was drafted in D.C. but he was a resident of Maryland as well, and he used that fact to get redrafted in Maryland. “[I] was lucky enough to not get drafted” he wrote, “for I am not a fighting character.”⁹⁹ Fearing the next draw in Maryland, he became a Quaker to claim exemption from conscription. A more common tactic was the choice of Emile Durpre, who had his mother write a certified letter stating that he was her only living child and that she was a widow who depended on him for financial support.¹⁰⁰ Germans with wealth who had no reason to fight simply paid for a substitute. Fritz Kessel paid \$300 when their name was drawn, and continued with their wealthy existence through the war.¹⁰¹ In 1864, the commutation clause in the original conscription act was ended, and instead, wealthy individuals had to furnish a replacement or serve in the army. Germans such as Friedrich Schmalzried, who had already served as a volunteer were exempt from the draft, but he later considered volunteering again as a substitute if he was guaranteed another large bounty.¹⁰² Less imaginative and poor Germans had little

⁹⁹ Victor Klausmeyer to his family, April 4, 1865, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 239.

¹⁰⁰ Emile Durpre to his mother, July 7, 1863, in *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰¹ Regina Kessel to her father, January 11, 1867, in *Ibid.*, 392.

¹⁰² Friedrich Schmalzried to his brother, March 4, 1863, in *Ibid.*, 93.

choice but to fight after 1863, but many German conscripts voluntarily stayed until the end of war instead of deserting the Union army.

The six motivations examined in this chapter encompass nearly every German-American's initial decision to fight or support the Union during the Civil War. Aside from conscription, each of these motivations intertwined with the other, and to German-Americans they were personal and sometimes conflicting. Reading the personal letters of hundreds of German-Americans demonstrates that each one had their own reasons for fighting in the war or avoiding it.

During the war, these same six motivations became the sustaining set of forces as to why men stayed with the Union, and individual soldiers could shift from one to another depending on their situation. Soldiers that initially joined for money came to believe that their sacrifice for the Union earned them and their family the right to the American identity, thus home would become their sustaining motivation. Similarly, German-Americans that supported the Union because they hated slavery, could sustain themselves through the love of their heroes that made them feel as if all German-Americans were elevated because of their placement in certain positions, such as Carl Schurz and Franz Sigel. Understanding the role of these sustaining motivations and how they interacted with the German-American vision of national participation during public turmoil is the focus of the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter 2: The Dutch Take Flight

Battlefield Humiliations in 1863

The unpopular Germans insisted on believing they were the better soldiers and could thus win the respect of the Americans, and many Americans were eagerly waiting for a chance to prove that these incompetent foreigners were inferior to real Yankees.¹

On April 27, 1863, rain fell day and night, muddying the ground and giving the sky a grim overcast. The 11th Corps of the Army of the Potomac, trained by the German, General Franz Sigel, and commanded by General Oliver Otis Howard, marched south toward Kelly's Ford on the Rappahannock at the head of the entire army. General Joseph Hooker assigned the 11th Corps as the leading unit for two reasons: first, because it was the smallest corps, thus assumed to be the fastest moving; secondly, because being in the lead, the 11th simply had to march into its position on the right flank without causing confusion near the center. However, Howard had not previously directed such a large unit, and his newly formed staff was not able to compensate for their leader's inexperience. The 11th Corps moved its equipment and cattle with it instead of leaving it with the rear corps, and this beginner's error caused the unit to move more slowly than had been expected. After two days of rain and more marching, the 11th reached the Germanna Ford on the Rapidan River, but the river's water level was too high to cross, and the army had to halt, then sleep in mud

¹ Walter D. Kamphoefner, and Wolfgang Helbich, eds., *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 25.

and water. The army finally reached Chancellorsville on May 1 after two additional days of marching in the rain.²

By the time the 11th Corps reached its destination near the city of Chancellorsville, Virginia, the rain had stopped. General Howard had his men camp to the west along the Orange Turnpike, and this position secured the Union army's right flank and was not in direct contact with the Confederates in Chancellorsville. All the regiments of the 11th Corps camped facing south of Orange Turnpike, for that was the direction for which the Confederates were expected should they move from the center toward the flank. The German regiments entrenched themselves for two miles facing south of the Turnpike, and they all rested because Hooker assured Howard that the battle would be in the center. By 9:30 the next morning, a message came from General Van Alen to Howard that warned him the Confederates might attack his flank through the woods and destroy his right instead of attacking his front. Howard's flank was of major concern for General Hooker. Hooker knew if the 11th Corps broke ranks, their retreat would take them through his center, and the entire army could be disrupted by the confusion and demoralization. Whether it be because of inexperience, or because he did not understand the significance of the message, Howard only adjusted his artillery but did not change his units' front. By eleven in the morning, Howard began to receive reports from his right that there was movement and sounds from the forest, but he ignored these indications of trouble. Howard had his reasons, for Major General Sickles had reported to his fellow commanders the

² Oliver Otis Howard. *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, (1907; repr., Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), vol. 1, 354-378.

enemy was in retreat and he was pursuing them. Thus, Howard believed any noises in the forest must be either animals, an extremely small force, or stragglers attempting to escape capture. Dozens of animals leaped from the forest for hours, and their scurrying seemed to confirm Howard's belief that the disturbances were caused primarily by wildlife. By evening, the men slaughtered deer for dinner, looking forward to real meat for the first time in a long while.³

At approximately 5:00 p.m., seventy Confederate regiments, composed of 26,000 soldiers, attacked the exposed right flank of the 11th Corps, which was facing the wrong direction, cooking dinner. Howard's 8,500 men were stretched and outnumbered, but the exposed German divisions attempted to form lines and stand their ground. Captain Theodore Howell swore that the Confederates marched in so close that "they struck some of the men with the butts of their rifles," and the men did not retreat until the German lines were completely overwhelmed.⁴ Other lines did not hold as well, as expressed by Colonel Leopold von Gilsa, the officer in charge of securing the flank, "the whole line was at once engaged furiously, and my brigade stood coolly and bravely, fired three times, and stood still after they had outflanked me already on the right." Von Gilsa continues that after "The enemy attacked now from the front and rear, and then of course, my brave boys were obliged to fall

³ Ibid.

⁴ Christian B. Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity and Civil War Memory* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 94.

back.”⁵ He points out how other units had already retreated from the field of battle when he says, “Retreating, I expected surely to rally my brigade behind our second line, formed by [Schurz’s] Divisions, but I did not find the second line; it was abandoned before we reached it.”⁶ With the flank failing and units abandoning their positions, confusion set in on the battlefield, and that further demoralized the outnumbered 11th Corps.

As the most western regiments began to break, others further east were facing south because they were still awaiting orders to turn west or retreat. Fleeing soldiers broke the ranks of regiments attempting to hold their positions, but more than that, the fleeing soldiers shattered morale. Despite this, multiple regiments attempted to hold their position. The 119th regiment withstood the onslaught for almost twenty minutes when the Confederates reached them and the Ohio battery held for nearly as long before it lost too many men to stand. Sergeant Fredrick Kappelman wrote to his parents after the battle, “our regiment would have stood its ground better, but the attack came unforeseen, and we were caught down.”⁷ Officers were shot from their horses, but a few led the men in organized retreats that prevented a rout. The Confederates outnumbered the Germans 3:1, and because of their size and position, they enveloped the 11th until the flank broke and exposed the center. By nine that

⁵ Colonel Leopold von Gilsa report, quoted in Ernest B. Ferguson, *Chancellorsville 1863: The Souls of the Brave* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 175-176.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 63.

evening, the 11th Corps could only account for 3,200 men, and the rest were either in retreat, captured, or dead. Pushed back along with Hooker's center, the 11th Corps retreated from the battlefield with the rest of the Army of the Potomac across the Rappahannock, unaware of what their actions meant for Germans throughout the country.⁸

Events prior to the Battle of Chancellorsville had made both Germans and non-Germans of the 11th Corps apprehensive about their role in the war. First came the removal from command of the German hero, General Franz Sigel. He may not have been a good or even a competent general, but Sigel's men and Germans nationwide loved and believed in him. For months, Sigel used his position to further German standing in the army, and on numerous occasions he threatened to retire and embarrass Lincoln. Sigel went through with these threats on several occasions but returned to command weeks later. President Lincoln and Secretary of War Edward Stanton eventually had enough of General Sigel, and would dismiss him.

The loss of Sigel as their leader lowered German morale. This was demonstrated in their personal and public correspondence. Captain Theodore Howell wrote, "I would rather fight under Sigel than any other Gen'l in the army as he tries to save his men and don't go in blind." Private William Charles, a German-American serving in the 11th Corps, wrote, "I have heard yesterday that Gen. Sigel resigned. For one I am very sorry for I believe him to be a very good General and one that wishes

⁸ O. O. Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 354-378.

to put down this rebellion.”⁹ Sergeant Krause thought what many Germans in the north believed, that Sigel was the best General in the North.¹⁰ General Samuel Curtis wrote to General Osterhaus, asking him if they should both resign in support of Sigel.¹¹ The German paper, *Der Demokrat* was outraged Sigel was not allowed to return to the 11th Corps, which he had trained, and told its readers Sigel only resigned to help his men.¹² The paper called for Sigel’s return or replacement by another German. By April, the *Der Demokrat* realized that Sigel would not return, leaving Schurz as their next choice, and the paper expressed its expectation that his tutelage under Sigel would make him a good general.¹³ Many Germans believed the only man who could replace Sigel was another ‘48 German hero, and Schurz’s involvement in Lincoln’s election and German recruitment made him seem the obvious choice.

General Carl Schurz took command of the 11th Corps in Sigel’s absence, and he and his fellow officers thought Lincoln would give him permanent command of the unit. Lieutenant Colonel Alwin von Matzdorff wrote to a fellow German officer that “in this case [of Sigel’s resignation] Genr’l Schurz will probably take command of the corps.”¹⁴ Sigel wrote to Lincoln, requesting permanent command of the 11th

⁹ Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 47.

¹⁰ Albert Krause to his parents, July 27, 1861, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 197.

¹¹ Mary Bobbitt Townsend, *Yankee Warhorse: A Biography of Major General Peter Osterhaus* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 49.

¹² “General Sigel,” *Der Demokrat* (NY), March 12, 1863.

¹³ “General Sigel,” *Der Demokrat*, April 9, 1863.

¹⁴ Alwin von Matzdorff to David Strother, *OR*.

Corps.¹⁵ However, he was not the only contender, General Steinwehr hoped he could get the position and wrote to Lincoln as well.¹⁶ Northern papers such as the *Chicago Daily Tribune* believed Schurz was the only choice to command Sigel's old corps, because of his recent promotion to major-general.¹⁷ However, Stanton and Halleck petitioned Lincoln that another German would only cause further trouble. Sigel's use of the position as political means of advancing his own career alarmed Stanton and Halleck, who believed another German, such as Schurz, would do the same. Instead, they coordinated with General Hooker to appoint General Oliver Otis Howard as the new commander of the 11th Corps, a native-born American who had never worked with German soldiers before.

Howard's appointment prior to the battle of Chancellorsville had generated optimistic reactions in the Union, and the 11th Corps already held a good reputation, he only needed to maintain it. The letters of Howard to his wife, Lizzie, show that he received notification from General Hooker regarding his appointment to head the 11th Corps between March 15 and March 18. He first mentioned it on March 18 and the previous letter on the 15th made no mention of the 11th Corps or meeting with Hooker.¹⁸ On April 2 Howard assumed command of the corps. The governor of

¹⁵ Carl Schurz to Abraham Lincoln, February 24, 1863, in Lincoln Papers.

¹⁶ Adolf von Steinwehr to Abraham Lincoln, January 30, 1863, in Lincoln Papers.

¹⁷ "The Army in Virginia," *Daily Tribune*, March 17, 1863.

¹⁸ O. O. Howard to Lizzie Howard: Head Quarters 2nd Divn &c Near Falmouth Virginia, March 15, 1863; O. O. Howard to Lizzie Howard: Head Quarters 2nd Divn &c Near Falmouth Virginia, March 18, 1863, in Oliver Otis Howard Papers, Bowdoin College. (Hereafter cited as Howard Papers).

Pennsylvania met with Howard two days after his appointment, and the crowd in attendance cheered for Howard and his German men. The crowd applauded when the governor called Howard's 11th Corps "One of God's Christian Regiments."¹⁹ The 11th Corps already held the respect of the Union for its ability on the battlefield. The German almanac, *Lahrer Hinkender Bote*, had an entry dated early 1863 that stated, "The Germans have won such respect from their enemies that when the cry is heard, 'the Germans are coming, Sigel is coming!' entire regiments turn and flee without firing a shot."²⁰ Howard only needed to maintain the reputation Sigel built for the unit and its Germans. However, not everyone felt optimistic regarding his placement. General Schurz wrote to President Lincoln nine days after Howard's appointment and requested all Germans removed from under Howard and put under either General Burnside or Rosecrans.²¹ Lincoln rejected his request because he believed Howard could lead the 11th Corps.²² The events of Chancellorsville demonstrated that was not fully accurate, and the 11th Corps, and by extension all Germans, lost the respect of the nation.

Chancellorsville seemed to indicate that German-Americans were not the elite soldiers German-Americans believed themselves to be, and it fed nativist prejudice that immigrants were not loyal soldiers. Native-born Americans, especially those that

¹⁹ John S. Hart, "Soldiers' Reading," *The Sunday-School Times*, Philadelphia, April 4, 1863, in Howard Collection.

²⁰ *Lahrer Hinkender Bote* (1863), 253, quoted in Kamphoefner and Helbich eds., *Germans in the Civil War*, 24.

²¹ Carl Schurz to Abraham Lincoln, April 6, 1863, in Lincoln Papers.

²² Abraham Lincoln to Carl Schurz, April 11, 1863, in Lincoln Papers.

had been waiting for an opportunity to attack German-Americans, exploited the events of Chancellorsville to characterize German-American soldiers as cowards and mercenaries. The *New York Times* ran articles that depicted the 11th Corps as “panic-stricken Dutchmen,” “cowardly retreating rascals,” and “retreating and cowardly poltroons.”²³ The *Alexandria Gazette* called for the disbanding of the German 11th Corps, and the editor called for “a rigid investigation into the conduct of officers present on the field,” blaming Generals Schurz and Sigel but conspicuously leaving General Howard out of the article.²⁴ The *Gazette* reported two days later that the 11th Corps “instantly broke into panic stricken men in utter confusions [after Jackson attacked] ... For General Howard had no control over the cowardly fugitives who did not stop until they reached the Rappahannock.”²⁵ Much of the blame had to do with the German-American infantrymen Howard positioned with the artillery after he adjusted the lines. The infantrymen ran from their post when they saw the number of Confederates approaching their positions while the artillerymen remained and fired multiple volleys at their attackers. The initial rout of the German-American soldiers was labeled as the cause of a chain of events that ultimately led to the Union losing the field that day.²⁶

²³ *New York Times*, May 5, 1863.

²⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, May 9, 1863. Interestingly, the article does not ensure its readers know Sigel was no longer in command of the 11th Corps. A passive reader not abreast of the current military situation would assume Sigel was entirely at fault and he and all his Germans were cowards.

²⁵ *Alexandria Gazette*, May 11, 1863.

²⁶ Ferguson, *Chancellorsville 1863*, 177-178.

Multiple newspapers ran a story that centered around a German soldier injured in a Southern hospital that met a Confederate woman with a basket. She reportedly asked him if he was a Union man, upon answering yes, she moved on and gave the contents of the basket to a Confederate, who happily ate cake. Later that day another woman came and asked the same question, to which the German replied ‘yes’ but saw the contents were nothing but tracts. When a third woman came and asked the same question, he replied, “if you have tracts I am Union”, “if you have cake or mince pies I am with you.”²⁷ The point of the story was clear: the German was willing to exchange loyalty for material reward.

The private correspondence of soldiers at the battle reveals the conflicting viewpoints they had of Chancellorsville. Most American soldiers believed the Germans broke without any attempt to halt Jackson’s assault. One captain reported to General Hooker, “Sigel’s Dutchmen broke and ran, all of them, at the first shot, as I always knew they would... It is horrible awful. Everyman in Sigel’s Corps ought to be hauled off the face of the earth.” Another Captain decided his report should be publicized, and he wrote, “I never saw men as did these Dutchmen. Our boys stood, all American regiments did, but the panic among the Dutch was fearful. It shows where their mettle is... Americans will make a stand even if outflanked and surprised.”²⁸ Even German soldiers believed it was a complete rout. Carl Uterhard, a Union surgeon who fought and was captured at Chancellorsville, wrote to his family

²⁷ *Washington Chronicle*, May 22, 1863; *Alexandria Gazette*, May 26, 1863; *Winchester Daily Bulletin*, June 7, 1863.

²⁸ Quoted in Kamphoefner and Helbich eds., *Germans in the Civil War*, 24.

after his release that the battle was a slaughter, the Corps was massacred, officers were shot off of their horses, soldiers fled the field by shooting behind them and running, the wounded laid on the battlefield screaming, dying from dehydration, hunger, and madness from the sun's rays because the Confederates refused to help them and they would not allow him to help his men for eight days, and after 14 days of this in enemy hands, he was ready to resign and go back to Germany.²⁹ Adam Muenzenberger agreed with Uterhard's assessment of the battle. When we reached our camp again [after retreating from Chancellorsville], and pitched our tents, we saw only misery." He went on to write, "One-third of the tents in the camp were empty. And why? Because those who had occupied them were no more. Where are they? Dead! In the hospitals. Captured by the rebels. That is the worst thing that could happen to a regiment that was once so excellent."³⁰

Not all soldiers present believed it was a massacre, or that the men fled the field shooting behind them. August Horstman, a captain at the time of Chancellorsville, wrote to his family that the battle was bloody and merciless, but the men held their lines against the onslaught despite being outnumbered.³¹ Corporal Wilhelm Albrecht, an artillery NCO, was a part of the forward deployed soldiers

²⁹ Carl Uterhard to his Mother and his Wife Maria, May 17, 1863, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 158.

³⁰ Adam Muenzenberger to his wife, quoted in James S. Paula, *The Sigel Regiment: A History of the Twenty-Sixth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, 1862-1865* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas, 2014), 135.

³¹ August Horstman to his Parents, September 18, 1863, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 124-125.

utilized by Hooker, and he was proud of his unit's ability to hold their own against the superior Confederate cannons that day.³² Schurz would later assert that the men fought bravely that day, blaming the myth that the 11th Corps ran from Jackson on the 1st Corps Commander and General Charles King, who reinforced this inaccurate tale. Schurz believed the 1st Corps broke first, and his men suffered because of their cowardice.³³ What actually transpired at Chancellorsville was lost in the turbulence of conflicting accounts of officers and men present at the battle, but the mystification of events did not prevent northerners from disparaging the efforts of Germans fighting for the Union.

The loss of men and the negative press coverage depressed the soldiers in the 11th Corps. Frederick Winkler described the emotions of the Corps to his family: "the army, at least our corps, is demoralized; officers talk of resigning and a spirit of depression and lack of confidence manifest itself everywhere; this may be, and I hope is, transitory."³⁴ Many officers did attempt to resign, but Howard and Schurz rejected all their letters. For example, Colonel William Jacobs took leave soon after the battle. While away, he wrote to Schurz to request his permission to resign. Schurz was clear in his response for Jacobs and all officers, writing, "Whoever fights for a great cause has to consider that one's steadfastness will be crucially tested. Whoever does not

³² Wilhelm Albrecht to his family, August 22, 1864, 109.

³³ Carl Schurz, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*, 50-52.

³⁴ Frederick Winkler to his family, May 7, 1863. Frederick C. Winkler, *Letters of Frederick C. Winkler, 1862-1865*, ed. and trans. by William K. Winkler (n.p.: William Winkler, 1963), 50-51.

pass the test has no right to claim manliness.”³⁵ Schurz’s response demonstrated he would not allow this one defeat to destroy German involvement in the Union. To restore German morale, German leaders convened in New York, where they decided on a campaign to restore German honor by shifting the blame away from Germans soldiers toward those they felt were more at fault for the events of Chancellorsville.³⁶

German immigrants utilized the newspapers to express this argument, and to remind their fellow Americans that they were fighting and dying next to them daily. The *Chicago Tribune* published an article simply titled, “The Germans with Hooker”. “The Germans of this city, and we doubt not of the entire country are greatly pained at the tenor of the dispatches from the Army of the Potomac,” and the article argued “It is certainly mortifying to them there should be even a shade of suspicion cast upon the German name... the fugacious example that the Germans followed Howard... The German names which in all the battles of the war, appear in the list of killed and wounded show the quality of the fighting that their possessors have done.” The article ended with a reminder that native-born Americans had broken and run at Bull Run, Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Pittsburg Landing, Murfreesboro, and Vicksburg, asking, “were they all the cowardly Dutchmen?”³⁷ The pro-German camp utilized one of the largest German newspapers, the New York *Criminalzeitung*, to express their views to one another. Soldiers attributed the loss and their subsequent fleeing from the

³⁵ Carl Schurz to Colonel Jacobs, June 11, 1863, quoted in Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 95.

³⁶ *Evening Star*, May 14, 1863; *New York Tribune*, May 14, 1863.

³⁷ “The Germans with Hooker,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1863.

battlefield to their position and their orders to stand down, even after they heard noises in the trees and reported that they believed the enemy was massing in the woods.³⁸ After Germans reminded Americans of their patriotism, they maintained that Howard's command ability was at fault, not German soldiers.

German soldiers in the 11th Corps publicly expressed their belief that Howard's orders were the cause of military debacle at Chancellorsville, and a German commander would have positioned his troops better. An unnamed soldier wrote to the *New York Tribune* a letter later published in *The Spirit of Democracy*:

It cannot be denied that a needless disaster was permitted to happen at Chancellorsville. Upon whom rest the fault? Our own correspondents in all the journals have attributed it in turn to the disaffection, the panic, the cowardice of the eleventh corps. That one brigade (German) behaved badly is admitted; that they ran panic-stricken though the lines of other brigades, disorganizing them is true, but that the fault was the commanders'-or a commander's-and that the result must have been the same with any troops, of any condition of discipline or nationality, in from three to five minutes, is most certain... If Sigel had been in command of his old corps, none believe such a surprise could have happened.³⁹

This feeling that Howard and his fellow commanders were to blame was shared by many Germans in the Corps, and they felt this way directly because of their heritage. This fostered the belief that a German commander would have protected his men, rather than leave their flank exposed to enemy attack. One of Howard's men wrote, "[that General Howard] wanted to have us slaughtered, because most of us are

³⁸ *Criminalzeitung*, May 9, 1863.

³⁹ "Part taken by the 11th Army Corps in the Recent Battle," *The Spirit of Democracy*, June 10, 1863.

Germans.”⁴⁰ The Pittsburgh *Freiheitsfreund* published a letter that claimed “a comprehensive bitterness against Howard is evident that borders on insubordination – as expected, morale is quite depressed, especially among the officers who without exception feel offended and outraged in the aftermath of the strenuous denunciations from the American Press.”⁴¹ In-tune with the sentiment of his men, Schurz conducted his own plan to ensure German soldiers were not blamed for Chancellorsville.

Schurz commenced a letter-writing campaign seeking justice for his men and the removal of Howard. Schurz wrote to Hooker regarding the battle, asking for the ejection of Howard and expressing the effect the battle had on the men. “The Battle of Chancellorsville is not a thing, that happened yesterday in order to be forgotten tomorrow” wrote Schurz. “It will fill a prominent page in the history of this Republic, on which every incident and the conduct of every commander and every command out to be presented in their true light. You may believe me, General, when I say that the spirit of the corps is broken, and something must be done to revive it or the Corps will lose its efficacy. Too much humiliation destroys the morale of the men.” Schurz ended his letter by informing Hooker that “Every private in this command knows and appreciated them as well, that it would be looked upon as the grossest injustice if they were ignored in their official publications.”⁴²

⁴⁰ A. Wilson Greene, “From Chancellorsville to Cemetery Hill” *The First Day at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1992), 59.

⁴¹ *Freiheitsfreund und Courier*, June 17, 1863, quoted in Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 96.

⁴² Carl Schurz to General Hooker, May 17, 1863. *OR*.

Schurz ended his letter by asking for the publication of his own report that laid the blame on Howard, and he requested an official inquiry so that he could prove openly his men were not at fault. Hooker and Stanton would refuse his request, and this forced Schurz to go above their heads. Schurz wrote to politicians and newspapers requesting a public inquiry to demonstrate the truth of Chancellorsville, and prove German soldiers were not at fault for the Union rout.⁴³ Schurz also wrote to the president, requesting Sigel's reinstatement, for he was the only man the men had faith in, and the only man Germans in America would follow onto any battlefield. Schurz also took the time to report inadequacies he saw in Howard's command and his inability to galvanize the Germans of the 11th Corps the way Sigel did.⁴⁴ However, Lincoln relied on the advice of Stanton who was already fed up with Germans in command because of his experience with Sigel, and so Lincoln rejected Schurz's request.

Schurz's assertion that the men questioned the command ability of high-ranking officers in the 11th Corps is also to be found in the personal correspondence of the rank and file. Carl Uterhard wrote to his family that there was no longer a "penny's worth of trust or respect for the generals," for every soldier came to believe the colonels and generals were only interested in making as much money as

⁴³ Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 97.

⁴⁴ Carl Schurz to Abraham Lincoln, May 28, 1863, in Lincoln Papers.

possible.⁴⁵ Corporal Albrecht wrote to his family, “if our generals were even half as much soldiers and military leaders as the enemy, the Union cause would be in a much better position today.”⁴⁶ By May 10th Howard became aware of these feelings amongst his men, and he took steps to quell dissent within the ranks.

Soon after the battle, General Howard issued two general orders that he hoped would bring the men together, but instead, the orders reinforced the feelings of many of the men in the 11th Corps that Howard needed to be replaced. The first general order Howard issued was meant to counteract the emotions that always follow soldiers after a large-scale defeat, but Howard could not resist the urge to excuse his own actions that day at Chancellorsville. “As your commanding general, I cannot fail to notice a feeling of depression on the part of a portion of this corps. Some obloquy has been cast upon us on account of the affair of Saturday, May 2. I believe that such a disaster might have happened to any other corps of this army, and do not distrust my command.” Howard ironically finished the order by saying “Every officer who failed to do his duty by not keeping his men together, and not rallying them when broken, is conscious of it, and must profit from the past.”⁴⁷ Howard failed to realize that as the highest-ranking officer in their unit, the men placed much of the blame on his shoulders, and his statement that he did not distrust his command after such a

⁴⁵ Carl Uterhard to his Mother, May 27, 1863, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 161-162.

⁴⁶ Wilhelm Albrecht to his family, May 30, 1863, in *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁷ Howard General Order to the 11th Corps, May 10, 1863, quoted in Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 93-94.

failure further alienated Howard from his men. The rift between Howard and his men widened when Howard issued new and unpopular regulations for the 11th Corps. Howard stipulated that his troops should wear crescent badges on [all] their caps, and he banned lager beer for all enlisted men. Howard's orders were in part intended to promote greater cohesion and improve discipline, but the men of the 11th Corps saw it as punishment for their performance at Chancellorsville. The directives convinced Germans that Howard was not the right general for the 11th Corps, and many Germans within the unit wished for Sigel's return more than ever.⁴⁸

Newspapers published in the Confederacy and for Northern Democrats agreed with Schurz and his fellow Germans, and they believed that if Sigel came back, the 11th Corps would be dangerous again. The *Ohio Democrat* described the Confederate disposition in regards to Sigel and the 11th after Chancellorsville. "President [Lincoln] should not let the whims of a confirmed and established failure control important military appointments," said the article, and it continued by arguing "Sigel has demonstrated his ability as a soldier, his countrymen in the army and out of it are attached to him, and the services of such officers just now, appear to be much needed. The falling back of the Germans under Carl S[c]hurz we attribute to no want of pluck upon their part; but to a want of confidence in their leader."⁴⁹ The article finished by reminding its readers "Those who are disposed to censure this case should remember German soldiers throughout the war, while at the first Bull Run and other places some

⁴⁸ Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 94.

⁴⁹ *The Ohio Democrat*, May 15, 1863.

of our best troops gave way... In the next engagement in which these Germans soldiers are placed with Sigel in command, we confidently expect to hear of them wiping out the advantage which the fiery Stonewall Jackson obtained.”⁵⁰ The article was a warning to Confederate soldiers to not become complacent when dealing with the German Corps. The Southern expression of fear regarding Sigel thrilled the Germans in the North.

Sigel resigned and lost command of his divisions before 1863, only to return to command with a promotion, and most Union papers believed that after Chancellorsville, he would once more do the same. The German newspaper, the *Criminalzeitung* called repeatedly for Sigel’s return, or at the least, for the 11th to be under the command of Schurz.⁵¹ Some American papers called for the return of Sigel for they believed the Germans may have fought poorly either because of cultural loyalty or because, as they believed, Howard could not connect with the militarily inferior Germans.⁵² The *Daily Tribune* ran an article calling for the reinstatement of Generals Fremont and Sigel to protect the North from the southern incursion, and if the president would not reinstate them, they called for the governors of Maryland and Pennsylvania to utilize them in militia units. Lincoln responded that the governor of New York was already sending troops, but if the governors of Maryland or Pennsylvania wanted either general they were free to appoint them. However, he

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Criminalzeitung*, May 20, 1863.

⁵² *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 18, 1863.

refused to force either governor to give them a command.⁵³ The *Chicago Daily Tribune* and the *Evening Star* reported that General Sigel went to the White House, drew his sword, and confessed that he had acted in “bad faith on the advice of injudicious friends”. Both newspapers hoped that Sigel’s apology would be enough for him to regain command of the 11th Corps, and believed that his return would once again make the 11th Corps a formidable fighting force. Howard, however, remained in command despite the numerous calls from German and American newspapers for his removal.

General Howard was aware that many held him responsible for the poor showing of the 11th Corps, but he argued for decades after the battle that others were to blame for the defeat at Chancellorsville. Howard wrote a nineteen-page letter defending his men and himself from nativist press coverage and the belief that they had failed on the battlefield. He disputed the charge that he commanded poorly or his men were disloyal; writing, “in closing this report I beg leave to make one additional remark. The 11th Corps, and by error or malice especially the 3rd Division, have been held up to the whole country as a band of cowards. My Division has been made responsible for the defeat of the 11th Corps and the 11th Corps for the failure of the campaign.”⁵⁴ He dismissed the notion the campaign failed solely because of his men, and called attention to the numerical disadvantage his men had. Howard would later expand on this statement by writing, “that on the terrible day of May 2, 1863, I did all

⁵³ “Gens. Fremont and Sigel,” *New York Daily Tribune*, June 19, 1863.

⁵⁴ Howard’s report on Chancellorsville, Howard Papers.

which could have been done by a corps commander in the presence of that panic of men largely caused by the overwhelming attack of Jackson's 26,000 men against my isolated corps of 8,000 without its reserve."⁵⁵ The last line was a direct reference to Hooker taking his reserve and ordering him to the isolated position along the turnpike. Howard continued and wrote that if Barlow's Brigade had been present they would have protected his flank in retreat, and without them it forced the men to halt; thus, Howard assumed almost no responsibility for the failures of the Union right wing at Chancellorsville.⁵⁶

Howard sustained that belief, and he later included a section in his manuscript on Gettysburg that stated, "the defeat there [at Chancellorsville] was not because of any neglect on my part, willful or otherwise, but to other causes... I was made to feel soon after the battle Hooker blamed *me*, and was against me."⁵⁷ Howard held to this belief for decades after Chancellorsville. Within his autobiography, he shamelessly blames Schurz as a possible cause for the negative sentiment regarding his actions so Schurz could take command of the 11th Corps.⁵⁸ Howard also blamed Major Hoffman, a German and the Engineer Officer for the Corps, for not moving the

⁵⁵ O. O. Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 375.

⁵⁶ Collection of Lectures, Addresses, Articles, by O. O. Howard, in O. O. Howard Collection. Howard University, Washington, D.C. (Hereafter cited as Howard Collection)

⁵⁷ O. O. Howard, Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg, June and July, 1863, 51. Howard Papers.

⁵⁸ O. O. Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 375.

defenses himself.⁵⁹ Some of his later writings seem to be a response to Schurz's criticisms after Chancellorsville. It began when Schurz wrote to Howard after the battle asking him to resign, blaming Howard for the Corps losses, and Schurz later argued at a formal public inquiry that Howard and Hooker were the cause for the corps placement and subsequent rout.⁶⁰

The infighting and loss of morale gave some men the impression the unit was falling apart. Many of the men in the 11th Corps no longer trusted their leaders, especially Howard, and the insubordinate leaders of the 11th Corps were vying for political favor. The obloquy that Howard wrote of, embarrassed the German's in the unit, and questioned the commitment of Germans throughout the North. These conditions gave the perception the 11th Corps could not recover during the summer of 1863. For example, Uterhard wrote to his family that "it was clear a regiment like this cannot win a battle, as we will find out soon."⁶¹ The Battle at Gettysburg tested Uterhard's theory less than a month later.

While Chancellorsville and later Gettysburg were not the first loss for German units, its timing and scale damaged northern perceptions of German commitment to the Union cause. The 11th Corps marched toward Gettysburg, Pennsylvania with minimal desertions in the aftermath of Chancellorsville. July 1, 1863, the 11th Corps reached

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ O. O. Howard, Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg, June and July, 1863, 51, in Howard Papers.

⁶¹ Carl Uterhard to his friends, June 3, 1863, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 162.

their destination, and Howard received notification that the commander of the field, General John Reynolds, was already dead. General Reynolds' demise had made Howard the battlefield commander, and Howard placed Schurz in charge of the 11th Corps so he could properly oversee the entire battlefield. Schurz was of course aware of the German reputation because of the events of Chancellorsville, and as a German immigrant, he wanted to ensure that his corps performed well enough that day to prove German-Americans belonged in the Army of the Potomac. Schurz ordered General Francis Barlow to hold the right flank for the 11th Corps, but Barlow, an American that did not like Germans or immigrants of any kind, deployed the men facing the wrong direction, as had occurred at Chancellorsville. The Confederates attacked Barlow's exposed flank, and his division had to retreat. Barlow would later claim that his flank failed because the Germans fled at the first sign of battle. However, a Confederate officer wrote, "[the Germans] stood firm until we got near them. They then began to retreat in fine order, shooting at us as they retreated. They were harder to drive than we had ever known them before... Their officers were cheering the men and behaving like heroes."⁶² General Doubleday seems to agree with this view, for he believed, "the retreat [of the 11th Corps] would have been very successful if it not been the unfortunate case a portion of the 11th Corps, on the extreme right, had been surrounded." Doubleday attributed the appearance of a total retreat to the 11th falling back at the same time as his men, which entangled the men,

⁶² A. Wilson Greene, "From Chancellorsville to Cemetery Hill," in *The First Day at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1992), 79.

caused confusion, and led to many of them being captured.⁶³ By 5:00 p.m., Howard ordered the survivors of the 11th Corps to regroup, and the men held Cemetery Hill until Hancock's men arrived and supported them. Unfortunately, to many present, it appeared the Dutchmen failed to hold the flank once again, and their failure nearly caused another Union disaster if not for reinforcements. To Americans, this reinforced the belief that the German-American soldiers' were not effective fighting men, and affirmed the nativist that argued Germans were cowards that had signed up for money and run at the first sign of trouble.⁶⁴

There were varying reactions to Gettysburg and Chancellorsville in the 11th Corps. Howard wrote to his wife that it was a terrible conflict of three days and he asked "God grant us a complete victory" after such a battle.⁶⁵ Sergeant Wilhelm Francksen of the 26th Wisconsin was wounded at Gettysburg, and after hearing about the negative German-American reputation in the north, he grew tired of the war. Francksen explained to his father, "what I would like most would be a discharge. Times are hard now here, and you can't earn a lot of money, but I would get by somehow. I am sick of the soldier's life, and I can hardly hope to get through 2 more years of all the danger; because our corps is always at the front, and in the last two

⁶³ O. O. Howard, Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg, June and July, 1863, 56, in Howard Papers.

⁶⁴ Schurz, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*, 4-11; O. O. Howard, Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg, June and July, 1863, 53-57, in Howard Papers.

⁶⁵ O. O. Howard to Lizzie Howard. July 5, 1863, Howard Papers.

battles I fought in, we had the worst positions.”⁶⁶ Private Charles E. Davis wrote of the battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg to his parents “not Napoleon’s Old Guard, not the best and bravest troops that ever existed could held together in such a case.”⁶⁷ However, despite the indefensible position and the German willingness to fight when confronted by certain defeat, the 11th Corps and Germans throughout the army were labeled the Flying Dutchmen after Chancellorsville and the nickname became common parlance after the Battle of Gettysburg.

The American newspapers were not in agreement in their reporting of the 11th Corps and its German-American soldiers. After Gettysburg, some papers praised the actions of the 11th Corps. The *Chicago Tribune* reported Gettysburg as “the 11th Corps regaining their lost laurels”, but the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* reported the 11th Corps as cowards that had run panic stricken from the battle-cry of the Confederates.⁶⁸ Many papers drew parallels between Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, and reported that Germans at both battles ran from the flank without firing a single shot. The *Daily Tribune* ran multiple columns devoted to the events of Gettysburg, and while they listed the estimated 4,060 men in the 11th that were killed or wounded, they still took the opportunity to mention them faltering on the flank on

⁶⁶ Wilhelm Francksen to his father, September 29, 1863, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 142.

⁶⁷ Quoted in David L. Valuska and Christian B. Keller, *Damn Dutch: Pennsylvania Germans at Gettysburg* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2004), 157.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

the first day of Gettysburg.⁶⁹ An article in the *Ottawa Free Trader* described the movements of the 11th as disorderly in the columns and only saved by native-born American reinforcements.⁷⁰ The disorder in the columns was expanded upon in several papers as either confusion, panic, cowardice, and outright running through the city. Jacob Rush, a soldier in Kemble's Brigade, wrote to his aunt in a letter that was published in the papers, "what did they do when the eleventh corps ran like scared sheep? Many of them not stopping until they came to the river, some indeed are running yet for aught I know... where were they at Gettysburg? Concentrating their fire at the same time a serious loss."⁷¹ Nativists used Gettysburg as another example of German disloyalty, and as further proof they were not in the army to save the Union, but only to enrich themselves. The final reaction of the papers was to ignore the involvement of the 11th Corps, and instead focus on the 1st and 12th Corps actions on the first day or praise the entire army for winning the battle days later. These public discussions regarding Germans in the 11th Corps influenced northern perceptions of German involvement in the Civil War, and many northerners equated the perceived deficiency of Germans in the 11th Corps with all Germans in the North.

Prior to Chancellorsville, northerners respected the German-Americans, compared to other immigrant groups, but after Gettysburg, this favorable attitude

⁶⁹ "Incidents on the Battlefield near Gettysburg," *The New York Daily Tribune*, July 7, 1863.

⁷⁰ "The War in Pennsylvania," *The Ottawa Free Trader*, July 18, 1863.

⁷¹ Jacob Rush to his Aunt, July 22, 1863, *The Greene County Republican*, August 11, 1863.

largely dissipated. There was a riot in New York, and abolitionists blamed the events on the low Irish and Dutch, manipulated by Copperhead Democrats.⁷² The *Daily Tribune* referred to Irish Catholics being less intelligent than the American negro, and the riot showed that the Germans were no better.⁷³ The respect southerners once had for the Germans disappeared after Gettysburg as well, which can be seen in papers such as the *Raftsmen Journal* that published a story titled, “Proposition to Hang ‘The Dutch’.” The article compared Germans in America to negroes, mercenaries, and cowards, and it called for the hanging of Dutchmen versus capturing them and trading them like any other white prisoner.⁷⁴ Faced with northern and southern papers openly mocking their actions, the men of 11th Corps reacted defensively.

The 11th Corps attempted to uphold their reputation; the men wrote to the papers to refute false claims regarding their actions on the battlefield, and their commanders argued to politicians and even gained the support of Lincoln in defending their actions. Germans wrote to American and German papers refuting criticism and expressing who they felt was at fault. German papers reported that their men fought well and focused heavily on the contributions of their countrymen to the Union war effort. The German papers, the *Freiheitsfreund* (Friends of Freedom) and the *Freie*

⁷² “The Riot in New York,” *Clearfield Republican*, July 22, 1863.

⁷³ “The German and French Press of New-York on the Riot,” *New York Daily Tribune*, July 23, 1863.

⁷⁴ *Raftsmen Journal*, July 8, 1863. The change in southern newspapers was also a strategic maneuver by southern editors to further destabilize an already weakening relationship between northerners and Germans, therefore aiding the southern war effort.

Presse (Free Press), both described the deeds of specific units within the 11th Corps as standing for the bravery of all the Germans.⁷⁵ J. H. Vosbert sent the *New York Herald* a detailed map of the battle and the movements of the 11th Corps. The map accompanied descriptions of the movements of each division, to demonstrate that each had fought bravely. He ended his report by writing, “The eleventh corps did more than all the others.”⁷⁶ However, these actions alone were not enough to discourage those that looked for any pretext to fault the military record of immigrants.

Howard took steps to protect himself and keep his command in the aftermath of both battles. In the correspondence between General Longstreet and his officers, it is clear from the beginning of the battle that Longstreet was impressed with Howard’s ability to hold the battlefield when he had no prior experience at such a large command.⁷⁷ General Hancock told the vice-president, “the country will never know how much it owes to your Maine general, Howard.”⁷⁸ On July 18, 1863, Howard wrote to the president, informing him how well he and Meade performed on the battlefield, and on July 21, the president responded that he was grateful for everything

⁷⁵ Valuska and Keller, *Damn Dutch*, 162.

⁷⁶ J. H. Vosbert. *New York Herald*, July 3, 1863, quoted in Valuska and Keller, *Damn Dutch*, 160.

⁷⁷ Letter, Gen. James Longstreet to Col. Edward P. Alexander; and copies of Alexander's battlefield dispatches to Longstreet and Gen. George E. Pickett during the battle of Gettysburg, 3 July 1863, *OR*.

⁷⁸ O. O. Howard, *Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg*, June and July, 1863, 59, in Howard Papers.

done that day.⁷⁹ This gave Howard the moral support he needed to continue on as the commander of the 11th. Howard used praise from the military and political leadership of the Union cause to bolster his claims that the failures of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg were not his fault. Other officers and members of the rank and file also sought different ways of getting their side of the battle told and ways of ensuring they were not blamed for the failures of the 11th Corps.

The officers of the 11th Corps utilized American and German papers to present their side of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. An unnamed officer published in the *Daily Tribune* defended his commander and his men. The council of generals that had decided not to pursue Lee in defeat at Gettysburg had already become infamous by July 16, and this officer wanted it to be known that General Howard was the loudest in the room that voted to pursue the Confederates. However, there were generals of higher rank and seniority that over-ruled Howard and those that agreed with him, and the officer also points out that Howard and Wadsworth were in the best positions to pursue Lee. Thus, he believed if Meade had listened to him, Howard and the 11th Corps could have ended the war. He called this Howard's and the entire army's "golden opportunity," and cited a conversation with a Confederate prisoner who believed that Lee's cavalry was too demoralized to cover their retreat.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Abraham Lincoln to Gen Howard, July 21, 1863. Correspondence Book 47. Oliver Otis Howard Collection, Howard University, in response to Oliver O. Howard to Abraham Lincoln, July 18, 1863, in Lincoln Papers.

⁸⁰ "The Escape of Lee-How it was Effected-What He Left Behind-A Council of War-Why no Attack was Made," *The New York Daily Tribune*, July 16, 1863.

Carl Schurz personally responded to attacks on his leadership and his men. Leslie Combs had published a scathing letter, claiming “Our children [Americans] have fought in every battlefield, and never one fled as Carl Schurz and his gang of freedom-shirkers did at Chancellorsville.” Schurz outright called Combs a liar, insinuated he could kill him in a duel, and then invited Combs to share his tent and share the field of battle with him, so that Schurz could observe if Combs’ ability to stand his ground at Schurz’s next battle.⁸¹ Schurz consistently made it clear that he acted properly on the battlefield, and he took responsibility for the actions of his men that stood and fought at both battles. Schurz later requested and obtained a public inquiry to challenge Hooker’s and Howard’s reports on the actions of the 11th Corps at Chancellorsville. He succeeded in proving that he and his men were following the orders of their superiors at this inquiry.⁸² While officers were concerned with their reputations because they wanted to keep their commands, enlisted soldiers wanted to refute claims of failure because they believed they had done nothing wrong.

Enlisted soldiers and some lower-ranked officers agreed with Schurz that the faults of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg were attributed to the decisions made by their leadership. To the men, their generals had placed them in a position of failure on two separate battlefields, and as a consequence, they were perceived to be unfit soldiers. However, few Germans blamed Schurz for Chancellorsville; instead, they focused on Hooker having taken their reserves and Howard’s order to only shift

⁸¹ Carl Schurz, “Carl Schurz in Self Defense,” *The New York Daily Tribune*, November 19, 1863.

⁸² Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 129-130.

artillery but not the flank at Chancellorsville. At Gettysburg, Howard was the battlefield commander and Barlow commanded the flank, and to the soldiers both men failed them. German papers discussed Howard's failings as a leader after Gettysburg, and there were renewed calls for Sigel to return and "restore the reputation of German fighting men."⁸³ The soldiers' loss of confidence in their leadership was not enough to return the 11th Corps to Sigel, and that was because Lincoln and Howard's superiors felt Howard acted properly at Gettysburg.

When Lincoln made it clear that Sigel would not have his old post back to restore German morale, Germans utilized other methods to regain their sense of honor. The Landsmann's Hamilton Park memorial, that had begun construction June 8, 1863 to commemorate a German battle of the same date in 1862 at Cross-Keys, was used as a political device by the Germans to alter the memory of Chancellorsville. The *Times* reported that the statue was there to bolster the reputation of Germans, and the monument had every battle Germans fought at in the war so far. There were plans to rework the memorial at a later date, to enlarge it and list all Germans who gave their lives in service to the Union. The German intention of the monument became clear to the public when the *New York Times* wrote: "the multitude will undoubtedly hear the true story of the campaigns in the West and Southwest; where Germans before the Union flag so steadfastly, and perhaps get a

⁸³ *Criminalzeitung*, August 12, 1863.

version of Chancellorsville unheard before.”⁸⁴ However, it would take much more than a plaque for Americans to accept Germans in their Union army.

The failures of the 11th Corps forced Germans unconnected to the unit to defend the German reputation. An unknown German writer published an article in the *New York Times* covering the command of General Samuel Heintzleman. The article compared Heintzleman to Sigel and the spirit of ‘48 Germans despite him being born in Pennsylvania. The article detailed multiple successful engagements of Heintzleman throughout the war to demonstrate Germans could and did fight well.⁸⁵ General Osterhaus gave a speech at St. Louis after his victory at Vicksburg, and he made sure to give tangible impressions of Germans as being comparable to native-born American soldiers. He first admitted there were few Germans in his division but that they fought like Germans would, and then connected both sides when he spoke of all that fought for the Union as free American citizens.⁸⁶ Germans created a German National Organization (GNO), the purpose of which was to unify and protect German identity nationally instead of regionally. The GNO would later play a direct role in American politics in Lincoln’s next election. Working to unify business professionals and German newspapers and businessmen, the influential Germans of the GNO utilized their positions to discourage attacks against German immigrants.⁸⁷ However, these measures achieved limited success, and they were not enough to silence critics

⁸⁴ “German Monument to Union Heroes,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1863.

⁸⁵ “Maj.-Gen. Samuel P. Heintzleman,” *The New York Times*, July 13, 1863.

⁸⁶ “A Speech by Gen. Osterhaus,” *New York Times*, August 16, 1863.

⁸⁷ Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 137, 141.

of German soldiers. As Kamphoefner accurately asserts, many Americans were waiting for a reason to call Germans inferior, and the events of the summer of 1863 demonstrated to those Americans that Germans could not hold their ground the way true Americans could.⁸⁸

There were native-born Americans that called attention to the will of Germans that fought for the Union, and they made attempts to defend Germans from their critics. An article in the *New York Times* titled, “The German”, explained the plight of German immigrants that had come to the United States by arguing “The Germans are the most laborious, industrious people in the world, mentally and physically, and they are patient, faithful, honest, frugal, amiable, benevolent, and forbearing.... The Germans are a warlike people, more thoroughly than any other nation in Europe. The individual character of the German is decidedly military.” the author goes on to say “The Germans ardently and intelligently desire and crave to preserve the Union entire, and fully appreciate the blessings of freedom and equality enjoyed here where labor does not degrade one to white Slavery.” The unnamed writer signed the piece, “A Descendant of the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth, Mass., 1620”, clearly intentional to counter any nativists that would assume the writer to have been an immigrant or the child of one.⁸⁹ This author was not alone. Lincoln attempted to defend German involvement in the war. Lincoln’s motivations for doing so are not clear, as he stood to gain politically by securing their vote; it is certainly possible that

⁸⁸ Kamphoefner, and Helbich eds., *Germans in the Civil War*, 25.

⁸⁹ “The German,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1863.

he had genuine belief in their contribution to the Union cause.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, too many northerners were already convinced of German inferiority, and despite multiple measures to save their reputation, it continued to fall in 1863.

Toward the end of 1863, the demoralized 11th Corps was relegated from the front lines to railroad duty. One colonel joked after their movement, “The Eleventh Corps has the comparatively easy duty of protecting the railroad, by virtue of their being such excellent skedaddlers in time of battle. Our boys were cruel in their jokes on these fellows, and take every occasion to let them know that their peculiarities are appreciated.”⁹¹ The *New York Times* wrote of their new role as only supportive, working in and around fortifications and railroads, and this was in sharp contrast to the previous roles the 11th Corps held on the front lines.⁹² Private Rentschler summarized the experience of German soldiers best when he wrote, “The treatment or rather mistreatment of the Germans in the army has recently demanded the attention of the German press more than usual,” he later remarks that “If a full company is needed for an easy service, a German company is never taken. If an entire company is required for rough service, several days or weeks as Train-Guard, a German company will be ordered whenever possible. As a rule, the German has to wade through the

⁹⁰ Robert P. Swierenga, “The Ethnic Voter and the First Lincoln Election,” in *Ethnic Voters and the Election of Lincoln*, edited by Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1971), 138-140.

⁹¹ Kamphoefner, and Helbich eds., *Germans in the Civil War*, 24.

⁹² “Official Reports from Gen. Thomas and Gen. Grant,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1863.

mud, while the American walks on the dry road. The German is a “Dutch soldier” and as a “Dutchman” he is, if not despised, is disrespected, and not regarded or treated as an equal.⁹³ Rentschler accurately described German treatment and the experience did not change for the remainder of the war. Despite their movement to the rear unit, the men of the 11th Corps continued to do their best.

Even in victory, northern papers did not forgive 11th Corps for its past failures. Howard and the 11th Corps captured a secret Confederate resupply train and helped to win the Battle of Chattanooga, but in several newspapers the Corps’ efforts were referred to as the 11th redeeming themselves from the events of the summer.⁹⁴ Any action of the 11th could evidently only be redemption and not unequivocally meritorious. Americans made it clear to the 11th Corps and Germans everywhere that they believed Germans’ made for inferior soldiers that had no business on an American battlefield. The papers openly mocked the “Flying Dutchmen” and their new role, soldiers berated men from the 11th Corps and any German they happened to have in their own unit, and northern citizens looked at Germans in their country as immigrants that were only there to make money. Compared with the pride Germans’ had at the beginning of 1863, by the end of the year German-Americans were a public embarrassment because of the 11th Corps.⁹⁵

⁹³ Private Gottfried Rentschler, Letter 8, in Reinhart ed., *Two Germans in the Civil War*, 68.

⁹⁴ “The Eleventh Corps Charge the Rebels and Drive them from the Rifle Pits,” *New York Tribune*, November 11, 1863.

⁹⁵ The embarrassment for the 11th Corps continued for decades after the war. Within William Swinton’s, *Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac*, he wrote of their actions as “the disaster to the Eleventh Corps, which nobody in the army regarded as

This embarrassment followed Howard the rest of his life. Howard's manuscripts recall the 11th Corps had become small after losing one division that moved to South Carolina. After Hooker was replaced by General Grant, the 12th Corps was combined with the 11th to create a new 12th with Hooker at the head of the new Corps, and Howard was moved to command the 4th Corps, where he gained a Corps composed of 20,000 of "the finest western men."⁹⁶ Every mention of the failures at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg within his autobiography places the blame on someone else. Howard's ninth manuscript, titled Jackson's attack on the right at Chancellorsville, was the first work in which he published this belief, and within the work, Howard blames Hooker, "friends of Lee"—spies—from the cities they marched through, and his orders from Hooker to maintain the right of Dowdall's Tavern even if four miles south at the Rapidan would have protected their flank.⁹⁷ Every work that engages the history of Chancellorsville after his ninth manuscript reiterates these three points with varying language. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Howard rarely spoke of his command of the 11th corps, instead focusing on his early work at Bull Run, his victories with the 4th Corps, his role at the Freedmen's Bureau, or his other political successes. An article titled "Gen. O. O. Howard's War

of any moment (that corps hardly being accounted as belonging to the Army of the Potomac)." Outright dismissing the 11th Corps contributions on the battlefield prior to Chancellorsville, and relegating them to a subservient status that was not truly part of the Union Army.

⁹⁶ O. O. Howard, *The Georgia Campaign of 1864*, 3, in Howard Papers.

⁹⁷ O. O. Howard, Jackson's attack on the right at Chancellorsville, 7-8, in Howard Papers.

Memories” is based on an interview with the general, and in it, he discusses recollections of battles from the beginning of his career, aided by James G. Blaine, through the events of Bull Run and life under the command of Generals McDowell, McClellan, Sherman, and Grant, purposely ignoring Hooker.⁹⁸ Throughout the entire article, despite him discussing his commands large and small, Howard never once discussed his command of the 11th Corps. As the purpose of the article was to chronicle the testimony of the last surviving Union Commander at the time of the interview, it seems strange that Howard ignored his role in Gettysburg, the bloodiest battle of the war and the South’s only major incursion into the North. This is reminiscent of the nativist articles that ran after Chancellorsville and Gettysburg that put all the blame on Schurz and Sigel without once mentioning their commander was Gen. O. O. Howard. While Howard may have wanted to distance himself from Germans, men such as Franz Sigel embraced their role as an idol for Germans in the North.

⁹⁸ “Gen O. O. Howard’s War Memories,” *The Hartford Daily Courant*, June 24, 1905, Howard Collection.

Chapter 3: Stolz

The Fall of a German Hero

I Fights Mit Sigel!
“what regiment’s yours? And under whose flag do you fight?” said
I, touching his shoulder;
Turning slowly around, he smilingly said, For the thought made him
stronger and bolder,
“I fights mit Sigel!...”

*And once more I saw him and knelt by his side;
His life-blood was rapidly flowing;
I whispered of home, wife, children and friends, the bright land to
which was going;
And have you no word for the dear ones at home, the “wee one”,
the father or mother?
“Yaw! yaw!” said he, “tell them! oh! Tell them I fights” –
Poor fellow! He thought of no other —
“I fights mit Sigel!”¹*

On May 13, 1864, although it was raining, the roar of thunder that sounded throughout the Shenandoah Valley was cannon fire between Union soldiers led by Colonel William H. Boyd and Confederate soldiers led by General John D. Imboden. Boyd would lose this engagement with Imboden, and his rout from the field limited the cavalry and scouting abilities of General Franz Sigel. Sigel commanded the Department of West Virginia, his first independent command since he left the 11th Corps, and he faced the decision to either retreat from the valley or to go forward and

Stolz (self-esteem or pride)

¹ Grant P. Robin, “I Fights Mit Sigel” *Songs of Soldiers Arranged and Edited by Frank Moore*, Edited by Frank Moore (New York: George P Putnam, 1864), 156-158. “I Fights mit (with) Sigel”, was a poem written to praise General Sigel, and the entire poem demonstrates how loved Sigel was by Germans and the men he led into battle. John F. Poole would later satirize this poem in his song, “I Goes to fight Mit Sigel” were instead of respect for Sigel and the war, Germans are portrayed as lazy and drunkards, who were sad they had to give up lager beer (a reference to Howard and the 11th Corps), and were forced to fight for the Union. For further information on Poole’s satire of Moore’s work, see William L. Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union’s Ethnic Regiments* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988).

attempt to take Mount Jackson and the city of New Market, Virginia. Sigel knew his orders were to secure the valley, and he was aware that General Grant, the governor of West Virginia, Arthur Boreman, and northern papers were all waiting for an excuse to remove him from command should he fail again. Thus, Sigel made the decision to take Mount Jackson despite the misgivings of his officers.²

The following day, the rain continued to fall throughout the valley, and the weather was hot and humid. Sigel ordered Colonel August Moor and nearly half his men toward Mount Jackson, a move that Moor himself considered to be a great mistake because he had no maps, no experience in the area, and he knew Sigel was separating his forces while ignorant of the enemy's movement in the valley. By the evening of the May 14, Sigel received a report that Imboden was on the march toward his position, but General Crook had arrived in the valley to support Sigel and his outnumbered men. Sigel took their support to mean he could move the remainder of his forces to Mount Jackson and engage the Confederates at New Market.³

That night, the rain worsened and the thunder kept many of the men awake, Sigel included. The dawn of May 15 brought another day of rain; the clouds were gloomy, the ground muddy, roads soaked, and the air was and humid. Sigel stepped out of his quarters without any sleep. He was so ornery that Sigel accused his hostess, Madame Cheney, of stealing from him. She responded with a curse on his fortune in

² Stephen D. Engle, *Yankee Dutchman: The Life of Franz Sigel* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 184-194; William C. Davis, *The Battle of New Market* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 72-93.

³ Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 184-194; Davis, *The Battle of New Market*, 72-93.

the coming fight that the vengeance of the Almighty follow him into battle. It would seem Madame Cheney held some sway with the heavenly power, for the battle that followed haunted Sigel for the rest of his career.⁴

That morning, Confederate General Breckinridge ordered Imboden to Mount Jackson while he marched the bulk of his forces toward New Market. Moor fell back from Mount Jackson to Manor's Hill as it was a more defensible position. Sigel ordered General Stahel and Captain Kleiser to support Moor, and he ordered the remainder of his forces across the Shenandoah River to face Breckinridge. Many of his officers were apprehensive regarding the plan as the army was positioning itself between the enemy and a swollen river they could not cross, and Sigel had already split his forces. Sigel ignored their advice, because he wanted to prove his capability on the battlefield, for his career and his fellow Germans.⁵

After he crossed the river, Sigel quickly realized he had made a mistake by dismissing his officers' advice. The Confederates outnumbered Sigel's forces, and he recalled the men at Mount Jackson and Manor Hill for reinforcements. Major Lang asked Sigel angrily where the rest of the army was, and Sigel replied they were on the way. Breckinridge exploited Sigel's misjudgment to his advantage. He first sent Imboden to take Sigel's cavalry near Smith's Creek, and Imboden succeeded in blocking the Union cavalry from assisting Sigel. Without the support of the cavalry, Sigel's center began to collapse from the Confederate onslaught. Combined with the

⁴ Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 184-194; Davis, *The Battle of New Market*, 72-93.

⁵ Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 184-194; Davis, *The Battle of New Market*, 72-93.

fact that Sigel had an insufficient number of men to hold the lines, his forces broke rank and retreated; with some of his regiments falling back all the way to Mount Jackson or Bushong's Hill.⁶

By 2:00 p.m., Sigel regrouped his men at Valley Pike. He attempted to recall his men dispersed throughout the valley and General Sullivan from Rude's Hill, but the muddy roads, the swollen rivers, and the humidity slowed the pace of reinforcements to Sigel's position. Sigel rallied his men, and concentrated all his forces on the Confederate center. His final effort began to work, and a gap formed in the Confederate center that Sigel could exploit. Unfortunately, Sigel tended to command in German when excited, and he ordered his forces to charge the Confederate gap in German. His primarily American regiments did not understand the orders, and Sigel's forces failed to exploit the opportunity. Breckinridge took advantage of Sigel's slow response in charging the breach, and he ordered cadets from the Virginia Military Institute to hold the center. Sigel assumed his men could easily overpower teenagers, and in English, he ordered an attack on the cadet held center. However, Sigel was wrong and the Cadet Corps withstood his thrust. At the same time, Breckinridge assaulted Sigel's cavalry with artillery, forcing them to flee their position, and many of them rode through Sigel's lines in their retreat. To rally his men again, Sigel ran from side to side yelling in German, and when he went to

⁶ Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 184-194; Davis, *The Battle of New Market*, 72-93.

secure his artillery to the left, one of his units took it as a sign to retreat and followed him. Sigel eventually got his men under control and ordered one last assault.⁷

Realizing that he was losing the battle, Sigel attempted a massive charge in the hopes of securing the field. Sigel ordered the 34th Massachusetts, the 1st West Virginia, and the 54th Pennsylvania volunteers to advance toward Breckinridge. The Confederate general met the attack head on. The Union charge suffered heavy casualties, and witnesses called it “a harvest of death.” Fearing a massacre, Sigel ordered a full retreat from the field. General Stahel partially recovered his cavalry and ordered them to protect the retreat, but the men ran through the lines again to get to the front, further disrupting an already disorderly withdrawal. Sigel’s men eventually retreated to Rude’s Hill, where Sigel found General Sullivan and his men resting, despite his orders for their support. Sigel attempted one last stand at Rude’s Hill, firing his artillery for 30 minutes until they ran out of ammunition. With his men too exhausted and demoralized to fight, Sigel abandoned the field, burning the bridge to Mount Jackson to protect his retreat.⁸

Sigel knew that his political enemies would perceive the Battle of New Market as a failure in his command, and he hoped he could fight another battle and restore his honor before they could act. Officers that disagreed with Sigel’s plans were the first to report Sigel’s failure. The highest-ranking officer, Colonel David Strother, sarcastically reported that while Crook and Averell were successful in

⁷ Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 184-194; Davis, *The Battle of New Market*, 72-93.

⁸ Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 184-194; Davis, *The Battle of New Market*, 72-93.

tearing up the Virginia and Tennessee railroads, Sigel was tearing down the valley turnpike, running from the Confederates. Strother would later remark that “Sigel is merely a book soldier acquainted with the techniques of the art of war but having no capacity to fight with troops in the field... We can afford to lose such a battle as New Market to get rid of such a mistake as Major General Sigel.”⁹ Many of Sigel’s own men were disheartened by the defeat, and the song “I fights with Mit Sigel” was replaced with “We Fights mit Sigel no more.” Sigel attempted to reenergize his men after the defeat, and he told them, “boys, we got a little the worst of it this time, but will fight them again.”¹⁰ However, Sigel was wrong, for he would soon be removed from command of the Department of West Virginia.

On May 17, 1864, Union Chief of Staff, General Halleck, received the reports of Sigel’s defeat and subsequent retreat from the Shenandoah Valley. Halleck informed Grant that “[Sigel] is already in full retreat... if you expected anything from him you will be mistaken. He will do nothing but run. He never did anything else.”¹¹ Grant responded immediately to the news of Sigel’s command failures and said, “by all means appoint General Hunter, or someone else, the command of West Virginia.” The evening of May 21, General David Hunter informed Sigel he was relieved. The following day, Strother would find Sigel on the ground crying, disgraced, and broken.

⁹ David Hunter Strother, *A Virginia Yankee in the Civil War: The Diaries of David Hunter Strother*, ed. Cecil D. Eby, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 229-230.

¹⁰ Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 193.

¹¹ Report, Halleck to Grant, quoted in Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 194.

Sigel would tell Strother, “it were better to have died on that battlefield than to have suffered this disgrace.”¹²

Objectively, Sigel deserved the treatment that he received. Northern papers, the *Nashville Daily Union* and the *Cincinnati Gazette*, both reported on General Grant’s strategic plan. Sigel’s role in that plan was for his men to maneuver and attack with Grant’s forces, and together, they would draw the bulk of Lee’s forces into the valley and attack the Confederates, ending the war.¹³ Sigel’s rout in the Shenandoah spoilt Grant’s strategy, and because of Sigel’s failure, Lee moved his troops freely through the valley avoiding Grant’s forces and the major battle Grant intended. One historian categorized Sigel’s failure as allowing Lee to secure his strategic flank, and extend the war another year.¹⁴ Halleck removed and replaced Sigel once again, but Sigel attempted to salvage his reputation in the wake of New Market.

To recover his reputation, Sigel attempted to rewrite the narrative of the Battle of New Market. First, Sigel reported to Grant, and subsequently the papers and Stanton, that the Confederates outnumbered him nearly 2:1.¹⁵ Actual statistics of the battle put Sigel’s men in the majority nearly 1.5:1. Sigel, however, had forfeited his numerical superiority when he split his forces. Second, Sigel petitioned Strother and

¹² Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 194-195.

¹³ “Sigel’s March,” *The Nashville Daily Union*, May 18, 1864.

¹⁴ Joseph W. A. Whitehorne, *The Battle of New Market* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1988), 15.

¹⁵ Franz Sigel to General Grant, Report on the Battle of New Market. May 17, 1864, *OR*.

Putnam to write letters on his behalf exonerating him for the battle's errors in deployment. When they refused, Sigel wrote the letter himself, anonymously, to the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of War, and he used the letter to blame his superiors and his subordinates. Third, Sigel began to claim that he was not ordered to win the battle, but to draw a large portion of the southern army away from Richmond. Last, he would use his political connections to have various men of power write in favor of his actions, portraying Sigel as a scapegoat instead of a failure.¹⁶ However, none of those measures changed the fact that Sigel lost his command. By May 29, Hunter moved Sigel to lead the Reserve Division. To Germans in America that thought of Sigel as *the* best of all Germans, possibly the best of all generals in the army, his disgrace became their disgrace, and his defense became the defense of the reputations of all Germans.

Prior to New Market, Sigel was still seen by Germans as their hero, the one man that could return the 11th Corps to glory and restore German pride. His command of the Department of West Virginia was a concession to those calling for his return, and it excited many when he received that post. Days before the Battle of New Market, the *Camden Journal* praised Sigel and his men for attacking raiders and moving into the Shenandoah under Grant's grand plan.¹⁷ The *Weekly Register* believed Sigel's actions up to New Market were exemplary, reporting, "the inspiring news from Butler and Sigel, that completed the circle of our triumphs, and made this the happiest day that

¹⁶ Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 196.

¹⁷ *Camden Journal*, May 13, 1864.

Washington has known for many a month.”¹⁸ However, the *Aegis* showed that Americans still had not completely forgiven the Germans. The *Aegis* ran an article calling for more Americans to imitate Germans, for they know how to relax and enjoy recreation, implying that Germans were lazy, and Americans could learn to be happier by imitating their aptitude for drink and relaxation.¹⁹ The *Chicago Tribune* took its allegations further by accusing Copperhead Democrats of radicalizing Germans into traitors against Lincoln and the Union war effort in Illinois.²⁰ Days later, there would be no more calls to imitate Germans, no praise for Sigel, and accusations of copperheadism became more widespread because of Sigel’s portrayal in the newspapers. As Sigel’s public reputation fell, German-Americans experienced it with him, and they worked together to restore his claim to honor.

To understand why German-Americans felt so strongly regarding Sigel’s fall, it is necessary to look at what he had done for Germans in Europe and America during the preceding years of the Civil War. Sigel was born in the Grand Duchy of Baden, a small country among the German states, and he served as the secretary of war for the Baden revolutionary army during the German Revolution. Sigel never won a major battle during the revolution, but he consistently led his outnumbered men into battles with great monarchies, including the Prussians. In every battle he galvanized his men do their best, and each time he did, they were able to fight hard

¹⁸ “Details of Thursday’s Fight,” *Weekly Register*, May 19, 1864, (letter dated May 13, 1864).

¹⁹ “Necessity of Relaxation,” *The Aegis & Intelligencer* (MD), May 13, 1864.

²⁰ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 13, 1864.

enough to have an organized retreat and preserve the Baden army. Sigel had no choice but to flee Germany on July 7, 1849, and he first fled to London then New York in 1852. Eventually, Sigel moved to St. Louis, and he founded the German Institute for the advancement of all German-Americans.

When war began, Sigel left the institute he founded and readily volunteered for the Union army. He worked with President Lincoln and Carl Schurz to galvanize his fellow Germans to volunteer for the Union cause as well, personally forming some of the first German regiments in the Union. During the war, Sigel repeatedly put his life, his reputation, and his career on the line for what he said was the betterment of his fellow German-Americans.²¹ Many Germans that immigrated to America after 1850 already loved Sigel because of his role in the revolution, the underdog that always put up a good fight, and his actions preceding up to and during the American Civil War only made them love him more. They came to believe that Sigel was the best German born general in America, and they firmly believed that he always had the best interest of his people and soldiers at heart. Thus, Sigel's fall from grace was an attack on the love that thousands of people had for Franz Sigel, and German-Americans defended their beloved general throughout the North.²²

²¹ It is hard to tell when Sigel's actions are in the best interest of his own career and ego, and when his actions are for the betterment of his people during the Civil War. However, no matter what the true cause was, he always promoted his actions as altruistic, and because of that, German-Americans always believed he everything he did to further his career was to help them as well.

²² Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 9-23; 33-47.

After May 17, the same day Grant received his reports on the battle, both German and American papers began to report on the outcome of New Market in earnest. The German paper, *Der Lecha Cauntty Patriot*, immediately attempted to suppress the idea that New Market was a failure because of Sigel. They published three articles by unknown correspondents that day: “General Sigel’s Corps”, “Bon General Sigel”, and “Bon Grants Armee.” Each called attention to Sigel’s numerical inferiority at New Market, believing Sigel’s official report that he only lost because of numbers.²³ Some papers were initially optimistic regarding Sigel’s loss, demonstrating admiration that Sigel still commanded within the populace. The *Evening Star* wrote of Sigel’s defeat, but they believed Sigel would re-engage with Breckinridge, or at least attempt to slow Breckinridge’s movements so that he could not meet with Lee at Spotsylvania.²⁴ The *Civilian Telegraph* had an article ironically titled “Very Latest News” that was even more optimistic than the *Star*, that reported “On Tuesday afternoon we had rumors of Sigel having had a fight in the Valley and was falling back. It was said that he was fighting with Breckinridge.” The *Evening Star* believed in Sigel, and it went on to say that “Gen’l Sigel’s habit of fighting heretofore has been to retreat but to whip his enemy in retreating. He may be playing his old game on some *General* who don’t understand *his* generalship or mode of fighting, and we would merely suggest to the *exulting rebs* that it is not safe to shout

²³ “General Sigel’s Corps,” *Der Lecha Cauntty Patriot*, May 17, 1864.

²⁴ “The Rumored Junction of Breckinridge with Lee,” *Evening Star*, May 18, 1864.

over Sigel's retreat till he quits *retreating*.”²⁵ However, the *Telegraph* admitted they were slow because of their reporting coming from ground telegraphs and their distance from the fighting, and that explains why they were unaware that Sigel had already “quit” retreating long before they published on May 19. The article ended by calling upon Sigel's previous history in combat and stating the belief that Sigel would still have a successful expedition in the Shenandoah. However, when the facts of the battle became known, most papers were not optimistic. Instead, their reports painted pictures of Sigel as incompetent, and proof that Germans should not command large units.

The Confederacy enjoyed the opportunity to report on the downfall of the Yankee Dutchman, Franz Sigel. In Richmond, they reported on the battle and Sigel as if his defeat was pre-ordained, or too easy, as they were able to sufficiently defeat all “*dat fights mit him*.”²⁶ The *Daily Dispatch* reported, “Persons who came down on the train from Milford Station yesterday evening state that we captured six pieces of artillery in the fight, and the attack was very feeble, and more easily repulsed than any made, and that the enemy fought with less spirit than they had done during any of the previous engagements for the past two weeks.”²⁷ The *Richmond Enquirer* reported similarly to the *Dispatch* by stating, “Gen. Breckenridge's victory at New Market was even greater and more complete than at first announced.” They went on

²⁵ “Very Latest News, From Sigel Department,” *Civilian and Telegraph*, May 19, 1864.

²⁶ “The Defeat of Sigel,” *The Daily Dispatch*, May 20, 1864.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

to say Sigel's divisions were whipped as they arrived, and they called attention to the swollen Cedar Creek the enemy foolishly encamped in.²⁸ Even the papers in Washington re-published a "Southern News" article showing southerners basking in their victory over Sigel, harkening back to another Confederate victory over Germans. With the author writing, (sic)

On Sunday following he [Breckinridge] engaged Sigel three miles above Newmarket, and by Sunday evening at seven o'clock had defeated and driven him beyond the Shenandoah river, six miles from Newmarket, having marched forty-nine miles, fought, defeated, and routed the enemy, numbering from seven to ten thousand, in two days and a half. This simple state will show our readers that celerity of movement, as well as vigor of action, did not desert our cause when Stonewall Jackson died.²⁹

The connection to Jackson was surely deliberate, for he had died soon after defeating the German 11th Corps, and many southerners feared his loss would doom the entire South. But now, the South had Breckinridge defeating the highest ranking, and believed greatest, German General in the North with tired and outnumbered men. While the South enjoyed their victory over those that "fights mit Sigel," Northern papers demolished the already damaged reputation of the German general.

Repeated reports over the next several days covered the Battle of New Market and Sigel's actions, and much of what they reported was highly negative. Men like Lieutenant Knoebel had assumed that Sigel would do well, as shown by his letter to his family that stated, "I heard the enemy is retreating everywhere... General Sigel played a decisive part in that. He now has an important new command; he will no

²⁸ "From the Valley," *Richmond Enquirer*, May 20, 1864.

²⁹ "Southern News, The Battle Between Sigel and Breckinridge," *Evening Star*, May 21, 1864.

doubt add new laurels to his earlier ones.”³⁰ The letter is dated the day reports began to be published, and in it Knoebel lets his family know he is always a week behind the latest news because of his location. Knoebel’s remote location no doubt did not keep him uninformed for long, and that is thanks to the reporting of several papers. For example, the *Cleveland Morning Leader* wrote of Sigel’s actions in the Shenandoah and the supposed good work he was doing guarding the train lines, as a disappointment. They wrote, “while the *imaginary Sigel* was doing all these wonderful things, the *real Sigel* was resting at Woodstock watching the Shenandoah.”³¹ When Sigel did finally leave Woodstock, he was not heard from and the paper believed he was defeated easily by Breckinridge and he was on his way to meet Lee.³² Captain John Carlin wrote to the *New York Herald* regarding Sigel’s command, stating, “The dispatch about his [Sigel] having struck a blow at any vital point is all a piece of guess work... Gen. Sigel should vacate the Valley until his [Grant’s] grand encounter with Lee should make it certain that the old trick of creating a diversion in that direction was no longer possible.”³³ The *Daily Register* in West Virginia, admonished Sigel by writing, “fight at New Market as a disaster in

³⁰ Emil Cornelius Knoebel to his family, May 19, 1864, in *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, eds. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 150-151.

³¹ “A Disappointment About Sigel,” *The Cleveland Morning Leader*, May 18, 1864.

³² Ibid.

³³ “General Sigel’s Command,” *New York Herald*, May 18, 1864.

Sigel's command,"³⁴ Tennessee would report in the *Nashville Daily Union* of the south's "great victory over Sigel at New Market," claiming Sigel ran "twenty miles without stopping, abandoning his hospitals, burning his trains."³⁵ In Washington, the *Evening Star* was even more critical than the *Herald* and *Register*. "They report that Sigel met Breckinridge's advance about one mile east of New Market, and a smart skirmish ensued followed by a battle on Sunday, in which Sigel's total loss was seven hundred. He fell back across the river and Breckinridge did not follow as Crooks was close upon his rear," reported the *Evening Star*, and it continued "Breckinridge's infantry is not more than 4,500 strong, and Crooks, we believe, has as many a week ago. If a collision occurs between them we feel confidence that Crook's will be victorious, as his force have every confidence in him and are flushed with numerous successes."³⁶ The remarks of Sigel's men having no confidence in him, and the paper implying Sigel only made it across the river because of the actions of native-born American's, not the flooded river and Sigel's burning of the bridge, were damning to Sigel's reputation.³⁷ The author insures this intention is clear by personally insulting Sigel's generalship, writing, "We can have no hope that Sigel will aid him [Crooks] though the force with him [Sigel] is now twice as great as Breckinridge's. He is a

³⁴ "From Gen. Sigel's Army," *Daily Register*, May 20, 1864.

³⁵ "By Last Night's Mail," *Nashville Daily Union*, May 24, 1864.

³⁶ "Later from Sigel's Command," *Evening Star*, May 19, 1864.

³⁷ The implication was very nativist, for the author ignored the actions of the German, Sigel, and exalted the actions of the American, Crooks, even though Crooks set out the entire battle at New Market. The author further implied that Crooks could have won the battle with less men than Sigel, feeding the sentiment that Sigel needed to be replaced by an American if the Union wanted to win the Shenandoah.

chronic lagger – always finding something wanting to enable him to venture to act efficiently.”³⁸ The *Evening Star* reported in a different article, that “the recent defeat of Sigel need create no alarm whatsoever.” However, their reasoning is that, even though Sigel was “whipped” by Breckinridge, Sigel’s reports showed he had more men than Breckinridge, and they reported, “It is believed universally here that the President has already ordered some vigorous and effective soldier to the command of Sigel’s forces, as to hesitate an instant to do so would be madness.”³⁹ By immediately replacing Sigel, with someone who could command his large forces, many believed the Shenandoah could be re-captured and Grant’s strategy could still end the war that year. The author’s beliefs were confirmed quickly, for news of Sigel’s replacement was published that same day.

The *Constitutional Union* and the *Evening Star* were the first papers to announce Sigel’s removal from office. They both stated, “Gen. Sigel is to be superseded by a *more competent commander*, and for the double reason that whilst Sigel has no confidence in his men, the latter have *no confidence* in him.”⁴⁰ News of Sigel’s removal caused Germans to immediately call for a large but informal meeting at the Prescott House, in Washington. Phrases such as “more competent” did not sit well with many in attendance. To the Germans, northern papers implied Sigel was too incompetent to lead. Many in the country believed Sigel to be the greatest German

³⁸ “Later from Sigel’s Command,” *Evening Star*, May 19, 1864.

³⁹ “The Situation in the Valley,” *Evening Star*, May 19, 1864.

⁴⁰ *Constitutional Union*, May 19, 1864; *Evening Star*, May 19, 1864.

general in the United States; thus, if Sigel was too incompetent to lead, all Germans were as well. At the meeting, the Germans empowered a committee to contact the president, find out the facts of the matter, and express their desire that Sigel not be removed. Many there also charged northern papers of copperheadism for their attempts at maiming German pride in their insults of Sigel.⁴¹ In response, papers such as the *Daily Intelligencer* further admonished Sigel and argued that patriotic Germans would not care what happened to Sigel. “Private and public advices so far received from those who participated in the battle at New Market, leaves but little doubt that Gen. Sigel made a miserable fiasco of the whole affair. The government is evidently of this opinion, as is indicated by the summary way in which the Major General has been disposed of and another commander installed in his place.” The unnamed article by arguing “We have reason to believe that Genl. Sigel was sent to this department because *very little was expected from him*, and because it was supposed at Washington that his assignment to some command or other would strengthen the war element among the Germans... The administration has been clamored into at least two trials of him in a Major General’s command, and he has signally failed in both cases... it is notorious that in military circles at Washington *Gen. Sigel is considered a humbug*.”⁴² The article attempted to distance all Germans from Sigel, and the author went on to call Sigel a political general not a soldier, one many had been sacrificed for. However, the author was wrong regarding the motivations of patriotic Germans.

⁴¹ “Meeting of German Citizens,” *Daily National Republican*, May 20, 1864.

⁴² *Daily Intelligencer*, May 23, 1864.

Johann Dieden showed this in a letter to his cousin when he observed, “When the President of the United States issued the first call for volunteers, it was the Germans in particular that saved the state of Missouri for the Union. Sigel set up the first regiments, nothing but Germans, some 4,000-5,000 men, while the Americans did very little.”⁴³ Lincoln realized how Germans would follow Sigel as well, which is why Lincoln made Sigel a Major General. Germans in the Union did attach themselves and their reputations to the ups and downs of Sigel, and they demonstrated this through their reaction to Sigel’s removal and replacement by Hunter.

Germans tried several methods of defending the reputations of Sigel and Germans throughout the Union. One method that worked well throughout the war, used by many that felt the press was too harsh, was to accuse a paper of being copperhead or treasonous to the Union cause. The *Indiana State Sentinel* was the victim of one of these accusations, and they would defend themselves by writing, “What is our offense? The *Journal* says that our comments of Thursday upon the situation exhibits a disloyal heart. Did we not tell the truth, and is the truth disloyal? We stated that Sigel was met and defeated with severe loss; that another draft of three hundred thousand men was to be ordered, and that Lee was still holding his position at Spotsylvania.”⁴⁴ Another approach was to defend Sigel within German papers. The *Minnesota Staats-Zeitung* wrote of Sigel’s movements as “for the good of the

⁴³ Johann Dieden to Christian Dieden, July 26, 1862, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 304.

⁴⁴ “On the Situation,” *Indiana State Sentinel*, May 23, 1864.

service,” arguing he was only to distract Breckinridge, and removed the blame of any perception of loss from Sigel and laid it on his officers that did not follow his commands.⁴⁵ This accusation contained an element of truth, for Sigel had ordered Sullivan to reinforce him at New Market; which did not occur because Sullivan claimed he never got the order to move. High-ranking German officers, such as Schurz, and politicians attempted to defend Sigel’s actions publicly. Schurz would take advantage of a meeting with Lincoln to discuss politics and the German vote, and to remind Lincoln of Sigel’s importance to Germans and their support for his reelection.⁴⁶ The last expedient deployed by Germans was to organize and collectively declare their support for one another and the Union. German conventions publicly denounced Copperheads to demonstrate their faith to the Union, and these conventions disputed charges that Germans had run as mercenaries would and they were disloyal to the Union. For example, the Philadelphia convention published their resolutions, declaring,

That we most sincerely call upon all liberal Germans in the United States to consider well and calmly before they allow the reproach to be case upon themselves that they have helped to destroy the great party of liberty; that they aided the Copperheads to win a victory would jeopardize all that a horrible war of three years had gained for our cause, and that the streams of blood and the best resources of the country which we have suffered shall have been spent in vain.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Minnesota Staats-Zeitung* (Minnesota State Newspaper), May 21, 1864.

⁴⁶ Carl Schurz, Frederic Bancroft, and William Archibald Dunning, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*, vol. 3, 1863-1869 (New York: McClure, 1908), 103-104.

⁴⁷ “The Germans of Philadelphia Repudiate the Radical Democracy,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1864.

The declarations of the Philadelphia Convention, as well as every effort taken by Germans in the early summer of 1864, were crafted to affirm German loyalty to the Union and save their reputation. Perhaps these actions could have worked, but Sigel bungled the defense of Maryland when the Confederates invaded in July, which ended his active military career.

Sigel met a small rebel force led by Jubal Early at Martinsburg. Sigel ordered a retreat soon after Early attacked. Initially, the blame fell on Hunter, as he was in command of the valley. However, the papers took advantage of Sigel's retreat from New Market, and blamed the entire invasion of Maryland on Sigel. The *Daily Ohio Statesmen* ran three articles on one day titled, "Another one of Sigel's Blunders," "How Cooperation by Sigel might have sent the Rebels to the Right About," and "The Evacuation of Fredrick – Sigel's Mistake." As each title suggests, the articles laid the blame for nearly every aspect of the invasion on Sigel's shoulders. The *Statesmen* was not alone, the *Daily Intelligencer* accused Sigel of "holding the door" to the valley open for the rebels, "twice", only for the Confederates to "enter the dominion of the loyal States." They went on to say, "[Sigel] had his troops so faultily disposed that he was not even aware of the approach of the enemy, and he was never afterward willing to get near enough to them to learn their numbers."⁴⁸ The accusation of Sigel's cowardice was expanded upon in the *Herald's* defense of Hunter. "From the *disgraceful* stampede which had driven General Sigel back from Martinsburg to Maryland Heights without a contest, it is not easy to see how General

⁴⁸ *Daily Intelligencer*, July 18, 1864.

Hunter can be held responsible. He had left under General Sigel a total of over ten thousand men, and yet this force retired before an undeveloped enemy, having lost (so far as can be ascertained) somewhat less than thirty-five men, all told, ‘killed, wounded and missing’.”⁴⁹ The article ended by mocking Sigel, stating “This was the extent of the ‘gallant and stubborn resistance’ by which General Sigel ‘saved his invaluable train’ and sent it into Baltimore.”⁵⁰ While the accusations of a stampede from the field and having 10,000 men are both exaggerations, the effects of the battle only fueled the belief that a German could not lead. This belief continued to grow in papers such as the *Cincinnati Gazette* that repeated the charge that Sigel had “stampeded” from the field at Martinsburg, allowing the rebels to invade Maryland without a fight, but they at least admitted Sigel did not have 10,000 men and that he had retreated because he was outnumbered.⁵¹ The admission that Sigel was at a numerical disadvantage and thus, justified in his retreat did not stop the *Gazette* from placing the blame on Sigel instead of Hunter or any other general in his command. The *Civilian and Telegraph* reminded its readers that Hunter was in command in the valley to “retrieve our disasters in the Shenandoah Valley” created by Sigel,⁵² thus ensuring the failures of New Market were associated with Sigel’s actions at Martinsburg. Northern sentiment soured on General Sigel, and Lincoln had little

⁴⁹ “General Hunter’s Expedition,” *New York Herald*, July 20, 1864 (emphasis added).

⁵⁰ “General Hunter’s Expedition,” *New York Herald*, July 20, 1864.

⁵¹ “General Hunter,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, July 29, 1864.

⁵² “Secret History of Hunter’s Campaign,” *Civilian and Telegraph*, August 4, 1864.

choice in his decision to remove Sigel at the behest of General Halleck and Secretary Stanton.

In a great blow to German pride, on July 8, 1864 Sigel was relieved of command, never to serve in the northern army again. General Stahel wrote to Sigel, “today for you, tomorrow for me,” because Stahel believed what all Germans thought, and that was, if Sigel could be sacrificed and removed for a unit’s failure, any German officer could be next.⁵³ The idea that more German officers needed to be removed was shared by American officers as well. Colonel Strother remarked, “the whole affair [was] one of the most miserable that can be imagined, and I hope it will finish the Dutch element in this department.”⁵⁴ Major Charles Halpine wrote, “We have paid rather dearly for that [German] element.”⁵⁵ For he thought as many northerners, that German generals lacked the skills and the temperament to command effectively. *Der Demokrat* portrayed the battle as Sigel having no choice to retreat, and they went on to list various generals that retreated but were still in command.⁵⁶ The *Zeitung* of Leavenworth repeated the previous tactic of attacking northern papers, and they did so by calling many that spoke out against Sigel as know-nothing or copperhead papers.⁵⁷ The *Criminalzeitung* followed suit, at times calling politicians or officers by name, instead of attacking a paper or its readership in general. Socially

⁵³ Engle, *Yankee Dutchman*, 207.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁵⁶ “Unfere Generale” (Our Generals), *Der Demokrat*, September 1, 1864.

⁵⁷ *Zeitung*, August 4, 1864.

prominent German individuals attempted another letter campaign with one letter to Lincoln stating, “Mr. President! If there is a name which has obtained a firm and immoveable hold on the minds and the hearts of my German-American fellow-citizens, it is that of Gen. Sigel!”⁵⁸ Once again, none of these methods were effective in restoring Sigel to command. Too many in Lincoln’s administration were fed up with a political general that repeatedly failed on the battlefield, and the only response available to the Germans was to promote German-American pride in a general sense.

Many Germans expressed dismay at Sigel’s disgrace, and they struggled to comprehend how it could happen to such a man. Corporal Robert Rossi would write to his wife, “It is at any rate the most peculiar war ever fought’ instead of allowing the commanding officers to make the decisions, the men ought to know best how to make this or that move, they receive their orders from Washington, and some of these orders are so absurd that any sensible person would know they are nonsense.” Rossi goes on to say “Then, if they don’t follow them, they are relieved of duty no matter how capable (like for example, Sigel). ... and often they’re replaced by people who know as much about military campaigns as a cow knows Spanish.”⁵⁹ Rossi was not alone in blaming orders from Washington as being the cause for defeats, and his words are reminiscent of those written in the *Criminalzeitung*, which accused Sigel’s superiors of putting him in situations where he would have to had to either fight and

⁵⁸ From M. A. Jacobi to Abraham Lincoln, September 9, 1864, in Abraham Lincoln Papers, LOC. (Hereafter cited as Lincoln Papers)

⁵⁹ Robert Rossi to his wife, Elise Rossi, July 9, 1864, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 83.

suffer heavy casualties or retreat to preserve the lives of his men. Corporal Albrecht fought under Sigel, and he would write of Sigel's fall to his family. First, Albrecht described his feelings leading up to the battle, by stating, "An expedition force has been organized here under the command of Gen. Sigel to march up the Shenandoah Valley... Since we were under the command of the popular and beloved Sigel, we felt confident we would accomplish great deed [*sic*]." After their subsequent defeat and retreat, Albrecht wrote, "We all felt sorry for Sigel, since shortly thereafter he was relieved of his command and has probably ruined a career that had been so promising."⁶⁰ Albrecht's next letter showed a disdain for the Union army, for he had not been paid in months and he felt that his fellow soldiers did not regard him with respect. These new feelings were a far cry from a year before when he told his family the soldiers treated him as an officer even though he turned down a promotion to lieutenant.⁶¹

Higher profile Germans felt the effect of Sigel's removal from active service. Major General Peter Osterhaus, a man that began his career under Sigel and helped to bring Germans to the Union cause, was downcast by Sigel's removal. Osterhaus was the highest ranking military officer calling for Sigel to receive a command in the spring of 1864, and his removal in less than a few months left Osterhaus and Schurz

⁶⁰ Wilhelm Albrecht to his family, August 22, 1864, in *Ibid.*, 111-112.

⁶¹ Wilhelm Albrecht to his brothers and sisters, August 22, 1864, Wilhelm Albrecht to his brothers and sisters, May, 1863, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 112, 103. Albrecht does not state if the change in his treatment was because of Sigel or something else, but it is striking that prior to Chancellorsville he brags about his treatment and a year later he is less than human.

as the last German major-generals in the Union army. Schurz and Osterhaus began to rely on one another even more than before, and together, they took over Sigel's mantle, using their positions to further the cause of all Germans in the North.⁶²

Lieutenant Bertsch wrote to the Cincinnati *Volksfreund*, April 29, 1862, on the need for Sigel to be in command of German forces to achieve victory. By 1865, he would credit Sigel as the one man that worked to unify Germans and Americans; showing he and many Germans held Sigel in high regard throughout the war, despite what the papers said about him.⁶³ Bertsch's faith in Sigel mirrored that of his fellow Germans, and they maintained that faith because to them, Sigel was just another German victim of slander.

Germans felt the loss of Sigel was nothing but a continuation of the scapegoating that had begun after Chancellorsville, and because of this, Germans had to maintain their *Stolz* (pride) if they wanted to be treated as equals in the Union.⁶⁴

The *Daily Register* re-published one of these defenses of Sigel and German pride:

"Sigel is superseded", but why? A gallant soldier is disgraced, but what is his crime? A noble soldier, who never quailed before the enemy of the republic, is stricken down, but not by the foe against whom he drew his sword. "Sigel is superseded", and the Lincoln camp is jubilant with joy. The foe of tyrants, the

⁶² Mary Bobbitt Townsend, *Yankee Warhorse: A Biography of Major General Peter Osterhaus* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 167, 196.

⁶³ Letter 97 Lieutenant Friedrich Bertsch to the editor, *Cincinnati Volksfreund* April 30, 1862; Joseph R. Reinhart, ed. *A German Hurrah! Civil War Letters of Friedrich Bertsch and Wilhelm Stangel, 9th Ohio Infantry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2010), 249, 299.

⁶⁴ Joseph R. Reinhard ed., *August Willich's Gallant Dutchmen: Civil War Letters from the 32nd Indiana Infantry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), 13.

revolutionist of '48, the patriot of '61, and the *pride of the German Republicans* is deprived of his command.⁶⁵

The author claims that Germans overwhelmingly saw Sigel's loss of command as a direct insult to their cultural pride. The author went on to insinuate that the Prussian prime minister personally worked for Sigel's removal, and then attributed Sigel's fall to hatred of Germans throughout the Union when he wrote, "fear and hatred alike animate this administration against the *German population*." The article ends, "it only remains to strike down Carl Schurz, and without a treaty of extradition hand the pair over to the tyrants of Germany to answer for their aspirations after liberty!"⁶⁶ Another measure of defense was to gain political power. Political Germans ran for various offices, "in hope of exciting the national pride of our German citizens."⁶⁷

Because of the negative perceptions publicized within northern newspapers, German civilians had to contend with American employers refusing to hire them. *Der Demokrat* published nearly a full page of various Germans responding to an Iowa employer's observation that, "There is nobody to hire but the damned Dutch and Irish rabble, and let them go; they're only fit for bait for catfish anyhow."⁶⁸ To counter such negative characterizations of Germans in northern papers, a few Germans would publish their own definition of the German identity in the Union.

⁶⁵ "The German Republicans are Speaking out Against Lincoln," *Daily Register*, June 2, 1864 (emphasis added).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, (emphasis added).

⁶⁷ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 11, 1864.

⁶⁸ *Der Demokrat*, July 20, 1865.

Germans began public writing campaigns to combat anti-German rhetoric, and attempt to shame northerners into accepting those that fought beside them. Private Rentschler wrote to the German paper, the Louisville *Anzeiger*, regarding the northern view of Germans fighting for the Union:

I had a discussion once with a party of abolitionist officers about the employment of Negroes as soldiers and uttered my disapproval. Their main argument against me was that the Germans had no business to bear arms and become soldiers, because they value the country so little just like the Negro. A colonel once said that he could not understand why so many Germans volunteer so readily for the army, after all, as foreigners they could not be interested in it. This opinion is mainly represented by Americans in the North.⁶⁹

Reports of Germans fleeing from the battlefield without firing a single shot heightened the belief in northern minds that Germans were not loyal soldiers, and Sigel's actions during the Maryland invasion reinforced these beliefs. Rentschler continued and described in some detail the treatment of his countrymen by his fellow soldiers in comparison to black Americans. His analogy goes as far as accusing northern white men of treating blacks and freed slaves better than they treat his fellow Germans. He then returned to the treatment of the Germans and their hero, General Sigel, and wrote, "I have already heard many crude jokes made about one of the best known generals of the Union, not because he is not up to his high position, every Know-Nothing will argue the opposite, but rather because he is a German... I say this

⁶⁹ Private Gottfried Rentschler, Letter 8, in *Two Germans in the Civil War: The Diary of John Daeuble and the Letters of Gottfried Rentschler, 6th Kentucky Volunteer Infantry*, ed. Joseph R. Reinhard (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 68.

lack of respect for the Germans comes mainly from the Free States' Americans."⁷⁰

Rentschler theorized Sigel was punished because of his heritage, and this belief had been echoed by Germans since Sigel's replacement by Howard over a year prior. This argument followed Sigel throughout his career, and many Germans subscribed to this theory well after the Civil War. Rentschler would end his published letter in

Verteidigung des deutschen Stolzes (defense of German pride):

The German soldier is generally far more faithful, conscientious and zealous than the native-borne American. This is part of the German nature, which is our reason to be proud of our nation. One more thing: The German soldier is obedient and loyal to duty without regard to reward or punishment. The American generally considers, only reward... Because of the situation as mentioned, you may possibly draw the conclusion that the mixing of Germans and Americans in the Army may be beneficial to both parties, but such conclusion is in error.⁷¹

Rentschler made it clear that not only did he believe Germans deserved to fight in the Union, but that German soldiers were superior to Americans, essentially reversing the characterization of nativists. Were Germans superior soldiers? Such a question is too subjective to answer, and Rentschler only wrote such a statement to combat the calls of German inferiority.

Sigel joined his countrymen in attempts to defend German pride, publicly, one last time during the war. In an open letter titled, "The Truth of History":

I have for many reasons not found it convenient to enter into a refutation of a number of attacks and defamations propagated against me by certain papers, I however cannot be silent when statements are made which give more credit to me than I should conscientiously accept, and which at the same time if true, would throw a dark shadow on my fellow citizens... it cannot be denied that

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Private Gottfried Rentschler, Letter 8, in Reinhard ed. *Two Germans in the Civil War*, 68.

by far the greater majority of those loyal men were the adopted citizens of the State of Missouri, sometimes called “my German friends,” but very often also “the damned Dutch.” This epithet, with the addition of “Dutch hounds,” has been for a long time the watch-word of the enemies of the Republic in the State of Missouri, and the persecutions “these damned Dutch” had to suffer—the scorn and contempt heaped upon them—the foul revenge practiced upon them even when crippled by wounds or sleeping in the arms of death—would have given them in the eyes of any impartial man a right to be at least “honorably” mentioned, even in a mere historical sketch.⁷²

Sigel’s letter was directed to the *Tribune* in New York, but it was re-published in multiple papers throughout the country in English and German. His defense was passionate and accurate in summarizing the treatment of Germans throughout the war, and Germans understood what it meant for all of them. Unfortunately, Rentschler and Sigel’s letters did not curtail the mistreatment of Germans within the Union army, and German immigrants had to continue to be resilient despite their constant mistreatment in the Union and its armed forces.

By the end of 1864 German reputation in the Union was uncertain, and that was because of their power as an electorate. As the second largest immigrant population in the Union, both Republicans and Democrats courted Germans, and that was because 1864 was an election year. However, militarily, both parties attacked German pride in their soldering and generalship in 1863. 1864 saw the end of Sigel’s career and the eventual merging of multiple ethnic regiments into American regiments, something Rentschler had opposed. The year also marked the end of three-year volunteer contracts for Germans that had volunteered in 1861, and so the year would leave Germans throughout the Union with a choice to either stay and defend

⁷² Major General F. Sigel to the editor of the *New York Tribune*, “The Truth of History,” *New York Tribune*, February 17, 1865.

their honor or to leave the army. This choice and their vote became crucial for the German future, and they made their decision knowing there was a possibility it could lead to an endless war. The choice of the majority was ultimately the focus of this study, and it led Germans to assimilate into the American Anglo-Saxon identity for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Fight or Flight, those are the options humans face when attacked. The Germans discussed within this work made their choice clear when faced with public humiliation; they chose to fight. However, they were not fully representative of all German immigrants that fought in the Civil War. Thus, the work of Ella Lonn can be of assistance. Lonn demonstrates in her study of Civil War desertion rates that the 11th Corps, prior to its assimilation into other units, held the lowest desertion rate for the entire Army of the Potomac.⁷³ Other studies show that smaller ethnic regiments such as the 37th Ohio Volunteer Infantry volunteered to such a degree when called upon that they overflowed and many Germans had to be sent to other units. When the 37th had to reenlist in March of 1864, three fourths of the men volunteered without any knowledge they were fighting in the last 13 months of the war.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, studies regarding specifically German units are scarce, and many others seem to be

⁷³ Ella Lonn, *Desertion during the Civil War* (New York: Century, 1928), 191. For an updated version of Lonn's study, see James S. Paula, *For Liberty and Justice: The Life and Times of Wladimir Kryzanowski* (Chicago: Polish American Congress Charitable Foundation, 1978).

⁷⁴ *History of Trumbull and Mahoning Counties; with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches*, (Cleveland: H.Z. Williams & Bro, 1882), 1:131

unreliable or conjecture. However, the studies available demonstrate that Germans remained resolute in their commitment throughout the war.

Germans fighting for the northern cause re-enlisted to such a degree because many believed in the cause they were sacrificing so much for. Despite German relegation to the status of “white nigger,” ostracization by the Army of the Potomac and Northerners outside of the military, constantly being put in disadvantageous positions on the battlefield, and forced integration into American units with the subsequent loss of their ethnic units, German-Americans sustained their motivations for joining the Union. This is seen in the letters these soldiers wrote to their families, the articles they published in newspapers, and the will of their officers who petitioned Congress to better the German-American position in the army.

German immigrants disclosed their personal views to their families, and the letters they sent home were relatively unbiased and free of political spin because they only intended them for their parents, spouses, and children. Captain Horstmann was an officer who after the battle of Chancellorsville attempted to resign once he realized that Howard had no way to protect his officers or his flank. He wrote to his parents in mid-1864 when many Germans were at their lowest:

You rebuke me for having signed up for another three years? Dear parents! *Men of principle* do not put up with 3 long years of the greatest hardships imaginable—without receiving some kind of reward, being able to see either the successful or unsuccessful outcome of their efforts. He who fights for ideals and principles cannot stop halfway! This is the opinion of our government, of the soldiers here, and I share it! This war will be fought to the end, the rebellion will be defeated, slavery abolished, equal rights established in all America, and then finally I will be sent packing.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ August Horstmann to his Parents, July 16, 1864, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 128-129.

Captain Horstmann's resolve reflected that of his men, for they only agreed to extend for another three years on the condition that all their officers stay with them. Once the war was over, Horstmann wrote to his parents that he was resigning from service but he made it clear he succeeded in fulfilling the reasons he joined the army. "We republicans who in the last 4 years have fought thousands of battles against the largest revolution and rebellion the world has ever seen, won with an overwhelming victory... I am resigning since I have done my duty with regard to the enemy."⁷⁶ Horstmann was not the only German immigrant that had to bear cultural humiliation yet continued to fight through the war.

Nearly every single German soldier cited within this work choose to fight until the end of the war, became too injured to continue, or died on the battlefield for a cause they believed in. Carl Uterhard, the Union surgeon who was captured and wanted to resign soon after Chancellorsville also found his resolve, and he expressed it to his wife and mother through a series of correspondence. Uterhard remained with the army until they won, even after his mother asked him repeatedly why he could not resign. He wrote to her toward the end of 1864 that he could "leave anytime I like" for his three years were over, but he stayed in the army serving as a surgeon for the Union.⁷⁷ After the war was won, he returned to Germany and was a doctor in the Franco-Prussian War. Private Hoffman fought at Gettysburg, was injured and captured, and later released without leaving the army. However, he died one year

⁷⁶ August Horstmann to his Parents, June 23, 1865, in *Ibid.*, 129-130.

⁷⁷ Carl Uterhard to his Mother, September 5, 1864, in *Ibid.*, 172.

after the war because of his injuries. Sergeant Francksen fought at Gettysburg as well, and he was shot in the neck and paralyzed. Lieutenant Emil Knoebel was captured when the flank collapsed at Gettysburg and the Corps regrouped at Cemetery Hill, and after his eventual escape from Confederate hands weeks later, he returned to his unit and fought until the end of the war. His intentions for fighting were very clear when he wrote to his father, “that is the punishment they deserve, for never has so much blood been shed like this war—for such a wretched principle like the one the southerners have fought for... They are depraved, defying the most sacred good of humanity.”⁷⁸ Lieutenant Adolf Frick fought through the war and stayed in the United States afterwards, living out his life as a devote Republican until his death. Soon after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, Frick wrote to his family in Germany, “dear mother, the shameful 4-year war is over now that the rebellion with its armies/bandits have been destroyed... Our President Lincoln has also become a victim of these murderers.”⁷⁹ Private Rentschler performed so well under General Sherman during the Atlanta Campaign that he received a direct promotion to Captain and fought until the war’s end.⁸⁰ There are dozens of examples within German immigrant letters that mirror those of Uterhard, Knoebel, Hoffman, and Frick, and they show a common thread of completing their goal.

⁷⁸ Emil Cornelius Knoebel to his Parents, May 19, 1864. in *Ibid.*, 153.

⁷⁹ Adolf Frick to his mother and sisters, July 11, 1865, in *Ibid.*, 358-359.

⁸⁰ Reinhard ed., *Two Germans in the Civil War*, 161.

In newspapers, German soldiers maintained faith in themselves and stayed true to the motivations that caused so many to join and fight for the Union. When the Germans began to organize after Chancellorsville, not one argued for German soldiers to leave the Union, instead many spoke about their wish to continue their support for the Northern government and why slavery and the South needed to be defeated.⁸¹ The *New York Times* reported,

The *Staats Zeitung*... call upon Germans for greater activity in this election, admits the truth of our assertion that the intelligent Germans are on the side of the Union party... As they are often gentlemen of much culture, who know from long reading the fearful effects of the system of human slavery in all lands while it has been tried, as personally they have sacrificed fortune and country for liberty, we think the last point of the accusation is probably true. They undoubtedly can appreciate what liberty means, better than many native Americans, and they do unquestionable hate slavery as men should... We are convinced also that large numbers of their less educated countrymen, intelligent German mechanics and shopkeepers, are now seeing the true nature of this outrage, and will vote for the Union party. They understand that it is precisely the same struggle which they left behind in Europe—the contest between the privileged few and the masses.⁸²

The remainder of the article compares the South and its slaveholder class to European aristocracy, and the author makes the claim that the Union is also fighting to prevent poor-white economic slavery that would spread nationwide if the Southern aristocracy should win. It ended by summarizing how Germans viewed the war from beginning to end, “The great German vote of the country has always been on the side of Liberty and Union. It will continue to be so.”⁸³ The author panders by calling the

⁸¹ *Evening Star*, May 14, 1863.

⁸² “The German Vote for the Union,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 1864.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Germans in the army ranks as noble, despite the multiple negative articles the *Times* had published regarding Germans in Union ranks. However, the author accounted for nearly every motivation German immigrants had in fighting, from economics, home, politics, and their ideological view of slavery and southern aristocracy, excluding religion and conscription.

The *Chicago Tribune* had a more direct source when it published a translated article titled “The War in America from a German Standpoint.” It compared the Civil War to Germany fighting to unify, and praised the intensity of the fighting, while faulting officers for not being prepared from the beginning since the United States had years of peace prior. The author went on to praise the Union he was fighting for, for its grand success in “full liberty in civil and political life, in commerce and trade” and the promise of wealth having no equal in Europe. The article closed by acknowledging the German-American soldiers who fought for the Union, and called their contribution to the Union cause admirable.⁸⁴ A sentiment made all the more powerful, as the *Chicago Tribune* was another paper that less than a year prior rejoiced when the 11th Corps merged into the 12th, and months prior helped to tear down the reputation of General Sigel. Religiously, German churches openly supported the Union and, as shown in chapter one, many of these religions were anti-slavery. In Pennsylvania, the *Potter Journal* argued that “The Dutch Reformed Churches have, on various occasions, adopted resolutions not less decided and patriotic. The Dunkard... all know hate slavery, with a cordial hatred... The

⁸⁴ “The War in America from a German Standpoint,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 23, 1865.

Evangelist denounce it from the house-tops as ‘the sum of all villainies.’ The Episcopal (Protestant) Church... with great unanimity vowed unceasing hostility to slavery and unfaltering allegiance to the Government... The German Reformed Church, as a body, is loyal to the country, and hostile to slavery.” The article ends by stating, “We perceive the, that every branch of the Christian Church North is arrayed in principle against human slavery, and is with the Government in its efforts to suppress the rebellion.”⁸⁵ The last line is a gross over-simplification, and they realized it, for the paper discussed the Roman Catholic Church’s separation over the question of slavery. Nevertheless, religiously, Germans had their reasons to remain resilient as well, proving that home, economics, religion, politics, and ideology motivated Germans to fight in the war, and these reasons stayed with them throughout the entirety of the Civil War. Conscription was the only outlier to these five, and that is because conscription was forced upon many after 1863.

Nativist, racist, sentiments in northern papers spurred a counter movement to Germans that stood with the Union and Lincoln, proving German immigrants were not a monolith. Groups such as The Germans of the West Against Lincoln utilized the nativist sentiment northern papers published on the quality of Germans in the Union to demonstrate Germans did not belong with the Union and Lincoln did not truly support them. The *Anseiger*, a republican German paper, thought McClellan’s letter that stated he would run for peace instead of more war would incite Germans tired of fighting in wars of revolution or those who thought of Lincoln, his generals, and his

⁸⁵ “Testimony of the Churches against Slavery,” *The Potter Journal*, November 23, 1864.

administration as corrupt and incompetent.⁸⁶ They were not alone, for German papers in Wisconsin, New York, Missouri, and Illinois all began to think that between the nativism in Union ranks and the possibility of endless war, a change in the administration could improve the stance of Germans in the country. However, Democrats were aware they would not win most Germans to their side, for in November 1864 one “Copperhead” was quoted as saying, “Of course it won’t do for Copperheads to bet on the Dutch. The Dutch don’t lean that way.”⁸⁷ The unnamed source would be proven correct in the coming weeks.

Most Germans supported and voted for the Union, as shown by their mass meetings leading up to the election. At Turner Hall, a “large and enthusiastic gathering of Union loving Germans was held,” and at the meeting McClellan was “compared to the English General Monk who surrendered the army of the commonwealth” and he was also compared to men aspiring to become supreme commanders of Europe.⁸⁸ Throughout the war, the majority of Germans remained loyal to Lincoln, the Union, and the northern cause. Germans believed that with the North’s victory, the new Union they would create would have equality, fulfilling many of the German motivations for joining the war. Germans numbering 8,000 who met in St. Louis on May 10 to celebrate the anniversary of the capture of Camp Jackson spoke openly about their continued support for the Union and their belief in

⁸⁶ “Accessions to M’Clellan,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 7, 1864.

⁸⁷ “It Wont do to Bet on the Dutch,” *The Smoky Hill and Republican Union*, November 12, 1864.

⁸⁸ “Mass Meeting of Loyal Germans,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 7, 1864.

President Lincoln to create a country that would be equal for all.⁸⁹ European papers such as the *London Times* thought that the majority of German press believed slavery was wrong, and that Germans believed the war should end with the total abolition of slavery.⁹⁰ On June 2, 1863 United States Consul General William Murphy sent a clipping from a German newspaper to President Lincoln, and within the clipping the German showed a strong desire to preserve the Union and end slavery.⁹¹ Petty Officer Eduard Treutlein wrote to his parents expressing his personal love of Lincoln, “If there was ever a ruling person for whom I had esteem, affection, and respect, then for Abr. Lincoln. I wish Germany could someday have a man like that!”⁹² The majority of Germans demonstrated respect for Lincoln, and the belief that he and his republican party would preserve the interest of immigrants after the war.

Abraham Lincoln nurtured these feelings by interacting with the German Free Press and German Union Clubs. On March 31, 1864 one of these clubs sent resolutions to by President Lincoln which he signed, stating that he supported policies meant to limit the racism of Know-Nothing Republicans.⁹³ Lincoln publicly endorsed those resolutions for the German-Americans. Resolutions such as these galvanized

⁸⁹ *The New York Herald*, May 14, 1863.

⁹⁰ “Foreign Views of the American War,” *New York Daily Tribune*, November 26, 1864.

⁹¹ From William W. Murphy to Abraham Lincoln, June 2, 1863, in Lincoln Papers.

⁹² Eduard Treutlein to his parents, May 7, 1865, in *Germans in the Civil War*, ed. Kamphoefner and Helbich, 236.

⁹³ From Paul Jagode, et al. to John G. Nicolay, March 31, 1864, in Lincoln Papers.

Germans like Horstmann and Uterhard, because it showed them that the president truly was working toward creating a country they could be accepted and thrive in. The owner of the *Cincinnati Daily Weekly* wrote frequently to the president, and in one published letter he referred to the North as the greatest republic, “the last refuge of the oppressed of all nations,” and to Lincoln as the only man that could “save the Republic and human liberty.”⁹⁴ This sentiment was shared by Germans in New York and the *New York Times* reported on this socially, politically, and militarily. In the article, Germans throughout New York showed they were maintaining faith with the Union, Lincoln, and the war cause. The draft, the major concern for all in America, was described from the German perspective as, “Germans are true to the Northern cause, and, although the wheel of fate is already rolling out their names by hundreds, and the future drafting will summon thousands of them from their City homes, they go in for the draft.”⁹⁵

German-Americans remained committed to the Union because of the sustained motivations they developed during the Civil War. Their resilience to the North was a direct reflection of the principles so many volunteered and died for during the four-year conflict.

⁹⁴ From M. A. Jacobi to Abraham Lincoln, September 9, 1864, in Lincoln Papers.

⁹⁵ “Germans in New-York,” *New York Times*, August 23, 1863.

Conclusion

Now it is unfortunate that Americans disdain immigrants, and disparage whatever they do, as soon as every possible advantage has been taken of the same immigrants.... Often enough a palpable hatred accompanies that attitude, hatred especially for Germans, often expressed in downright and nasty calumny and lies.¹

On that memorable first day of July 1863, when we fought a hopeless battle from the beginning, our only object being to delay the progress of the enemy until our other Corps came up. History will show that we did out part well and nobly.²

Who fights and why? That is the fundamental question John Keegan challenges military historians to answer. For the American Civil War, the answers are many and various, but this thesis has offered an explanation of the initial motivations of German-Americans who answered the call to arms. German immigrants faced expulsion from their fatherland, criticism from nativists in America, economic uncertainty in the United States, and public humiliation multiple times during the war. Yet nearly a quarter of a million Germans fought in the Civil War, and thousands more to supported Lincoln and the Northern war effort. German immigrants

¹ Constantin Grebner, *"We Were the Ninth": A History of the Ninth Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry, April 17, 1861, to June 7, 1864*, trans. and ed. Frederic Trautmann (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1987), 184.

² Speech, Eleventh Corps Association Dinner, December 15, 1892, Oliver Otis Howard Papers, Bowdoin College. (Hereafter cited as Howard Papers). I love the comparison of these two quotes. Both, decades after the war, German-Americans such as Grebner, who continued demonstrating that Germans were hated, lied about, and mistreated during the war. Showing his own hatred of the treatment of Germans and immigrants during, and in many ways after the war. Followed by the 11th Corps' dinner, were they seem to beg history to one day realize their sacrifice the first day of Gettysburg. Not hating the memory bestowed upon them, but hoping that the correct memory will last. Together, they show the various ways Germans attempted to correct the narrative of their involvement in the Civil War.

demonstrated their willingness to defend their self-respect throughout the war, even after numerous defeats and public humiliations.

The German-Americans who volunteered to fight for the Union exemplified what it meant to be resilient and succeeded in their goals for the war. General O. O. Howard, who commanded the 11th Corps, summarized the feelings of his men in his manuscript on Gettysburg, saying, “We went to war to prevent a breakage of the great Vessel of State; to preserve the institutions which it held.” Howard believed the corps succeeded when he wrote, “We have preserved and established on good foundations our American constitutional government; our peculiar American life; our effective American schools; our organized American charities; our free American churches; and our hopeful American balloting.”³ For German-Americans, these were the ideals they fought and died for, and to see them come to fruition ensured their sacrifice was not for nothing. Despite multiple public humiliations, being ostracized by their own comrades, and losing the respect of northern and southern Americans, German immigrants stayed committed to the Union during the Civil War.

It took many years for Americans to forgive the events of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, and once the 11th Corps received forgiveness, its members began to be recognized for their dedication. The *Gettysburg Times* ran an article in 1932 that referred to the 11th Corps and General Howard as heroes that “held the battlefield with reserve troops, while keeping superior force in check all day.”⁴ *The Evening*

³ O. O. Howard, Campaign of Gettysburg, 54, in Howard Papers.

⁴ “General O. O. Howard Led Active Life; War Service,” *Gettysburg Times*, November 12, 1932.

Post had a similar article titled, “The Eleventh Army Corps, and its General”, and within the article they wrote, “We rejoice over this redemption of the Eleventh Corps. Its disgrace was a sad thought to everybody who had the honor of our arms at heart. That the Corps is now trustworthy is proof that its demoralization was the fault not of the men themselves, but of the officers under whose command they were.” The article ends by saying, “We are glad that to General Hooker belongs the credit of restoring this lost Corps confidence of the country.” J. G. Blaine, a friend of Howard, wrote to the paper upset they gave credit to Hooker instead of Howard. Blaine went on to admonish the *Post* for they were the “first respectable paper that intimated Howard at fault for Chancellorsville” in 1863. Oddly enough, this was one of the rare times an American wanted to ensure everyone knew Howard was in control of the 11th Corps. Blaine also wrote of the gallantry and glory of Gettysburg and the letter Lincoln wrote Howard praising him for his efforts to maintain the battlefield.⁵

The catalyst for German forgiveness in the American memory was the amalgamation of German culture into American identity. Gottfried Rentschler was one of the few German-Americans that wrote against the assimilation of German units, and that was because he knew it meant the assimilation of the German ethnic identity. Unfortunately for Rentschler, most Germans wanted to integrate into a common American identity, especially after they sacrificed so much for the Union during the war. John Higham in 1963 was the first historian to argue that the Civil War assimilated European immigrants into American culture. He argues, “The war

⁵ J. G. Blaine to the editor of *The Evening Post*, December 4, 1863, in Howard Papers.

completed the ruin of organized nativism, by absorbing xenophobes and immigrants fighting in a common cause. Now the foreigner had a new prestige; he was a comrade at arms. The clash that had alienated sections reconciled their component nationalities.” Burton, within *Melting Pot Soldiers*, takes this idea further, and he presents a convincing argument for German amalgamation into the post-Civil War American identity because of their ethnic units.⁶ Alison Efford is the culmination of this argument, and her work, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era* demonstrates that Germans who thought of the United States as their home sought citizenship and acceptance into a conception of America as an amalgamation of multiple peoples.

During the war, home would become the greatest sustaining motivation for German-Americans fighting for or supporting the Union. Numerous times during the war, Germans in America faced public humiliation because of the failure of their ethnic units and their cultural leaders. However, German-Americans did not let that humiliation compromise their commitment to the North and that was because they viewed themselves more and more in terms of a unified identity of German-American, which would one day be simply American. When they defended themselves in the newspapers, they did so to demonstrate that those hostile and insulting accounts written about German-Americans were incorrect, but they also did

⁶ Because Burton and Efford perform such an extensive study of assimilation, anything said here would simply be a re-statement. See William L. Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988); and Allison Clarke Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

so because they wanted to be seen as equals with their fellow Americans. Germans thought they sacrificed as much as any other group during the war, and they believed they deserved the benefits for their sacrifice. To relegate them as the other during the conflict, a group that was undeserving because of a few examples, angered many German-Americans during and after the war. They would fight against this label, and purposely fight to integrate into a common American identity with their new countrymen.

Because of the efforts of 240,000 German-American soldiers, and thousands of civilians that supported the Union, they achieved their goal of assimilation. German societies in America believed that “the chief part in the rise of the nation” in immigration and integration of Germans was because of the work their brethren during the Civil War.⁷ German-American churches, schools, and political figures slowly became one with American versions over decades after the war, fulfilling one of the biggest sustaining motivations of Germans in America.

The initial motivations of German-Americans became the sustained motivations that kept them committed to the Union cause during the Civil War. This thesis has demonstrated six of these initial motivations, and shown that despite numerous battlefield humiliations, due to the 11th Corps and Franz Sigel, German-Americans re-enlisted in droves and re-elected Lincoln in 1864. Their perseverance in the face of adversity is one of the most amazing aspects of the Civil War.

⁷ *First Annual Report of the Society for the History of Germans in Maryland* (Baltimore: Society for the History of Germans in Maryland, 1887), 57.

Appendix

Table 1. German Immigration to the United States, 1820-1860

<u>Year</u>	<u>Immigration to U.S.</u>
1820	968
1821	383
1823	148
1824	183
1825	450
1826	511
1827	432
1828	1,851
1829	597
1830	1,976
1831	2,413
1832	10,194
1833	6,988
1834	17,686
1835	8,311
1836	20,707
1837	23,740
1838	11,683
1839	21,028
1840	29,704
1841	15,291
1842	20,370
1843	14,441
1844	20,731
1845	34,355
1846	57,561
1847	74,281
1848	58,465
1849	60,235
1850	78,896
1851	72,482
1852	145,918
1853	141,946
1854	215,009
1855	71,918
1856	71,028
1857	91,781
1858	45,310
1859	41,784
1860	54,491

Source: Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflicts, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 16.

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