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Joseph Knight Taylor: "Plain Path of Duty"

by Donna L. Gnatek

The history of Massachusetts is imbued with patriotic fervor. Accounts of citizen participation in matters of defense lend a particular spirit and vigilance, if not a zealous sense of patriotism. Various records and resolutions of the towns and cities of the Commonwealth substantiate the loyalty and enthusiasm of its inhabitants. The chronicles of western Massachusetts also support this ardent portrayal, as writers of local histories consistently provide glowing accounts of military activities which reflect the "highest credit upon the towns." Religion, education, and patriotism were the three factors, wrote one historian, which combined to produce good citizenship.¹ For some, patriotic citizenship was an aspiration, a tradition of honor and courage.

The Civil War, or the "Great Rebellion" as it was called in the nineteenth century, gave test to this patriotic ideal, as evidenced in the letters of Joseph Knight Taylor of Granby. Numerous letters to his father from August 1862 to August 1864 provide a personal view of the war and a response to military life. They also portray a commitment to duty and honor worthy of a Massachusetts' "patriot."

Joseph's family record, as described by a descendant historian, presented an "unbroken line of moral, religious, industrious, thrifty, and patriotic citizenship."² Born in Granby on December 6, 1840, Joseph was a sixth generation descendant of Ebenezer Taylor, one of the first settlers of that town. In 1662, his ancestors were among the early settlers of Hadley, from which

1. Rev. Elbert O. Taylor, History of John Taylor of Hadley (Boston, 1903) p. 16; for accounts of western Massachusetts military activities, see Josiah Gilbert Holland, History of Massachusetts: the counties of Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin, and Berkshire (Springfield, 1855) and Louis H. Everts History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts (Philadelphia, 1879).

2. Taylor, History of John Taylor, p. 25.

the town of Granby separated in 1768.³ Ebenezer Taylor, Jr. served in the French and Indian War in 1755, marched on the Lexington alarm of the Revolutionary War in April of 1775, and joined the Continental Army, serving from 1777 to 1779. His son Levi, Joseph's great-grandfather, became a soldier in the American Revolution, at the age of sixteen, and was at West Point to witness Benedict Arnold's flight. When he left home to enter the Continental Army, his mother said: "Levi, never let me hear of your being a coward," indicative of the spirit of mothers during the Revolution, and the value of honor within the society. In 1836, Levi established a woolen mill in Granby, which he managed until his death. He was for many years a selectman of the town, was elected to the state legislature several times, and for two years he represented Hampshire County in the state senate.⁴

Joseph's grandfather, Willard Taylor, was a deacon in the Congregational Church of Granby, as was his maternal grandfather, Joseph Knight. Frederick Taylor, Joseph's father, had "every advantage that the county afforded for acquiring an education."⁵ With the death of his father, Frederick and his brother at an early age managed the family farm. Around 1853, Frederick purchased a mill and began to manufacture paper in his hometown. In 1865, when the mill burned, he purchased similar property in South Hadley, where he resumed management of a successful business until 1883. Meanwhile, Frederick served as town assessor and selectman for many years, was a Justice of the Peace, and a director, stockholder, and trustee of various banking institutions in the nearby city of Holyoke. Politically, he supported the Republican Party, and during the Civil War he was actively involved in the enlistment of troops. Town records of

3. The town of Granby separated from South Hadley in 1768, which previously had been the south precinct of Hadley. Granby is considered the 'grand-daughter' of Hadley. See Granby Bicentennial 1768-1968 (Granby, 1968) pp. 38 and 47; Sylvester Judd, History of Hadley (Northampton, 1863), p. 407; W. B. Gay, Gazetteer of Hampshire County, Mass., 1654-1887 (New York, 1887) p. 265.

4. History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts, biographical insert between pp. 152-153, and pp. 240, 543, and 547; History of John Taylor, pp. 91-92.

5. Biographical Review: the Leading Citizens of Hampshire County, Mass. (Boston, 1896) p. 97.

1861 indicate that it was he who made the motion to form, and also served on, the committee to appropriate money for soldiers while drilling, and to support the families of those who might lose their lives in the war.⁶ Frederick maintained the traditions of his ancestors by an active interest in the welfare of his town and his country.

Joseph was the only surviving child of Frederick and his first wife Sarah, who died in 1855, when Joseph was fifteen years old. He obtained his preliminary education at Williston Seminary in Easthampton, and in 1861 he entered Amherst College, where he studied Greek, Latin, and mathematics, and was a member of the Chess Club and the Athenian Literary Club. After one year he left college, enlisting in the Massachusetts infantry on August 1, 1862, in response to a call from President Lincoln for 300,000 volunteers for three years of service.⁷

With the sudden call for 75,000 troops at the outbreak of the war in 1861, military organizations had not existed for the past thirty years in ninety percent of the towns in Massachusetts. The military force of the state consisted of fewer than six thousand men, located predominantly in the large cities and the seacoast counties. And the total organized militia of the central county of Worcester and the four counties of western Massachusetts (Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire) consisted of fewer than one thousand men. Yet, the Commonwealth responded promptly and dispatched more regiments than its quota required. Governor John A. Andrew ordered an accurate assessment of the militia, and recommended the state contract for overcoats, blankets, knapsacks, and ball

6. *Ibid*, pp. 96-98; History of John Taylor, p. 95; History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts, p. 547; and Granby Town Records (May 2, 1861), microfiche 34, p. 414.

7. History of John Taylor, p. 96; History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts, biographical insert between pp. 152-153; "(Amherst College Olio), September 14, 1861 (vol. 7, no. 1)" in Amherst College Memorabilia: Olios, 1861-73 (Northampton, MA 1861), vol. I, p. 32; Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War (Norwood, MA 1932), p. 802; Catalogue of the Officers & Students of Amherst College for the Academic Year, 1861-62 (Springfield, 1861) p. 32.

cartridges, to supply the troops as he prepared to support the Union.⁸

Throughout the war it became easier to recruit new regiments than to fill up old ones, as the "Massachusetts man with two hundred years of tradition behind him wished to go with his neighbors and be commanded by men he knew." Of the 300,000 men requested on July 4, 1862, Massachusetts was required to furnish 15,000 volunteers, and it did so in less than two months' time. The response of the recruits reflected the continuing surge of patriotism, and the draft did not become necessary until June of 1863.⁹ Joseph Taylor was one of those volunteers, being mustered into the Thirty-Seventh Regiment, Company F, on August 30, 1862. He was credited to the town of Granby in Hampshire County, as one of the 104 men which that town was required to furnish through the duration of the war.¹⁰

The Thirty-Seventh Regiment of the Massachusetts Infantry was composed mostly of men from the four western counties of the state, and it was organized at Camp Briggs in Pittsfield. Ten companies made up the regiment, and Company F, under the command of Captain George Montague of South Hadley, won the honor of being "color company," for "standing best in drill and discipline." The appointed color sergeant voiced the patriotic spirit of the regiment, when he replied to a friend who expressed regret at his appointment to so dangerous a position: "This is the proudest day of my life. To this work I have devoted myself, and if I fall it is for my country and my God!"¹¹

8. William Schouler, A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War (Boston, 1868-1871) II:9; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Massachusetts in the Army and Navy During the War of 1861-65 (Boston, 1895-1896) I: 10 and 16.

9. Mass. in the Army & Navy During the War of 1861-65, I: 37-38.

10. A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War, vol. 1, p. 667; vol. 2, pp. 14-15, 341, 343. The State of Mass. furnished a total of 159,165 men during the Civil War, a surplus above all calls, of 13,492 men. Hampshire County furnished 4500 men and Granby 112, a surplus of eight above demands. The U.S. Census of 1860 reported Granby residents at 907 and the State Census of 1865 listed 908; History of the Connecticut Valley, vol. 1, p. 107.

11. Mass. in the Army & Navy During the War of 1861-65, vol. 2, p. 266; Bowen, James L. History of the Thirty-Seventh Regiment Mass. Volunteers, in the Civil War of 1861-1865 (Holyoke, MA, 1884) p. 65.

During the first week of camp, Joseph wrote his father that "as a general thing the regiment is made up of fine fellows, very little profanity or obscenity is heard, though of course some."¹² Uniformed and equipped with Springfield muskets, the regiment left on September 7th for Washington, D.C. They eventually joined the 6th Corps of the Army of the Potomac, under the command of General George McClellan, who was replaced on November 5th by General Ambrose Burnside, and in January of 1863 by General Joseph Hooker.¹³

Joseph Taylor enlisted with an "idea of soldiering" that was "far from the true one." At twenty-one years of age, he left an affluent home and good social relationships to assist his "bleeding nation." His letters home were matter-of-course and described day-to-day activities, assigned duties, campaigns the Regiment took part in, and constant reassurances to his father concerning his health and spirit. It may be assumed that because Joseph's correspondents read the newspapers, some subjects, such as politics, were mentioned only briefly. He rarely complained and saw little need to write at length about any hardships. He wrote of them incidently, "as showing a small part of [his] experience in common with so many others. The truth is bad enough," he commented, and "one soldier can not boast of hardship when hundreds of thousands undergo the same or even worse toils." He often remarked: "I do not wish to be understood as complaining."¹⁴

Joseph expressed his commitment to serve his country, as well as concern about his father's respect. "If I live to return to my friends," he wrote in 1863, "I shall be proud in the consciousness of having done my duty, and if I fall you will never have to say you were ashamed of me. Think how you would feel, if at this crisis in our country's history, at this hour of our country's sorest need, I, your eldest son, hearty, healthy, and

12. Joseph Taylor to Frederick Taylor Aug. 15, 1862. Letters in the possession of Maudetta Taylor, Granby, Massachusetts. Hereafter cited as: Letters.

13. History of the Connecticut Valley, vol. 1, p. 152; History of the 37th Regiment, p. 94; Randall, J.G. and Donald, David, The Civil War and Reconstruction (Lexington, MA, 1969) pp. 224, 226.

14. Letters April 10, 1864; Nov. 26, 1862; February 18, 1863; October 13, 1862.

robust had shrunk from the plain path of duty . . . would you not blush for very shame . . . ?"¹⁵

Letter-writing was a large part of the Union soldier's life, and this was particularly true for Joseph. Being literate enabled him to spend his free time writing to relatives and acquaintances. He wrote lying down, or sitting "on the ground or a rock," on his "knee either in the cold, or enveloped in smoke from an outdoor fire." He sent his father a letter approximately every five days, and those letters indicate that he was also writing to others. Joseph was quick to reprimand his father for not writing at least once a week, for, as he said, "Nothing gives us more pleasure than letters from home." Early in his service he commented:

I am willing to write often and shall do so but I want to hear often too. Imagine that you were in my place 500 miles from home and friends with no society to enjoy except such as is to be found in camp, no one [in authority] to care one cent whether you are dead or alive . . . and I guess you would want to hear from home about once a day.¹⁶

In 1861, President Lincoln appointed Montgomery Blair as Postmaster General. Faced with the great demands on mail service during the Civil War, Blair created an effective plan which established postal organizations in the main armies. Every regiment had its own postmaster who received and distributed the mail, sold stamps, and forwarded letters. Blair also introduced the money order system in response to the need of soldiers to send money back home safely; later in the War, soldiers could send their mail free of any charge. The postal organization of the Army of the Potomac was "especially efficient," and Joseph

15. *Ibid.*, November 22, 1863; June 25, 1863.

16. Wiley, Bell Irvin, *The Life of Billy Yank* (New York, 1952) pp. 183-186 describes the content and ability of soldier letter-writing; *Letters* November 26, 1862; October 31, 1863; Sept. 21, 1862.

received his father's letters, newspapers, and magazines usually within five to six days.¹⁷

The advantages of education and an affluent family gave Joseph the opportunity for certain privileges. Within five months of mustering in, he was transferred to the Quartermaster's Department, where he worked as a clerk, keeping account of the issue of forage to the different Divisions of the 6th Army Corps. There he remained for four months, enjoying good food, a log house with a fireplace, and "little work." Back in Company F, Joseph did a large share of its writing and the recording of payrolls. His good character and intelligence occasionally brought him into the company of the officers for ball games, "checquers" and chess, spelling and debating matches, and Lyceum meetings. "I have achieved quite a literary reputation here, I assure you," he wrote his father.¹⁸

His leisure time was well-spent. Joseph maintained his clothing and gear, and he sometimes received the *Atlantic*, the *Springfield Republican*, and the *Hampshire Gazette*, and also borrowed other reading material. Food preparation took up a great deal of time and energy, as each man was his own cook. "I shall come home miller, cook, tailor, and cobbler [as well as] pack horse," he joked to his father. The Company was sometimes given rations of whiskey, but Joseph never indulged. "I sold my whiskey for four crackers, a good trade was it not?" he noted. "If I had a dollar for every time that I have refused whiskey this winter, I'd be worth considerable." Joseph expressed disdain for the commissioned officers who indulged in whiskey. He felt it would be necessary to cut off liquor from the officers entirely before the armies would be of the greatest service to the country. "It has been very aptly said that the Rebels give the whiskey to their men and keep the Officers sober," he told his father, "while our Officers get drunk and keep the men sober . . . it is certainly true."¹⁹

17. United States Postal Service, We Deliver: The Story of the U.S. Postal Service (Feb. 1, 1986) p. 11; Harlow, Alvin Old Post Bags (New York, 1928) pp. 374-375.

18. Letters January 6, 1863; January 14, 1863; May 11, 1863; February 24, 1864.

19. The Life of Billy Yank, p. 96; Letters Day after Thanksgiving, 1862; November 26, 1862; May 5, 1864; June 20, 1863.

Joseph made frequent requests for supplies and money from his family. "You see I am full of wants," he remarked, "but I have no one to apply to but you." Army rations of hardtack, salted pork, and coffee were the company's main staples, while occasionally vegetables and fresh bread and meat were provided. The quantity of rations for the Army of the Potomac depended on who was in command, food shortages, and if the soldiers were on the move. In comparison to General Burnside, the soldiers considered generals McClellan and Hooker as good providers. Every regiment, however, experienced times of hunger, usually during periods of rapid movement and active fighting, when supply lines were cut off. Sometimes following a hard march, when rations were short, special dispensations were given. "The Army is allowed to forage with perfect impunity now," Joseph informed his father in 1863, and "hundreds of sheep, cattle, [and] hogs have fallen in the Union cause."²⁰

Many soldiers of the Army of the Potomac received boxes of supplemental supplies from home. These "boxes" were packed with foodstuffs and whatever else the soldier had requested. Joseph received supplies such as dried fruits, butter, cheese, "medicinal" articles, and clothing he had asked for. Clothing supplied to the soldiers was often inadequate or poor in quality. Soldiers used part of their pay, often owing some of it before it was received, to purchase coats, gloves, or other articles needed in bad weather. Joseph had boots made to his specifications by the cobbler in his home town. Shirts, gloves, hats, and vests were sewn by his relatives. Examples of other articles he requested were maps, a coffee pot, toothpicks, and an army knife. Usually Joseph applied to his father for money with which to purchase extra food to supplement his diet. "I would as soon be without clothes as without money here," he wrote.

It is very unpleasant to go hungry, when a little money will buy bread . . . a man needs and must have something to eat besides pork & hard bread or he will be on the sick list in a short time. If you will send me a dollar or a dollar and a half or so

20. Letters August 8, 1864; "Hardtack, Salt Horse & Coffee" in *The Life of Billy Yank* (chapter IX) particularly pp. 226-227 for Army of the Potomac provisions; Letters July 29, 1863.

once a week, you will greatly oblige and relieve me from being continually confined to pork and hard tack for a diet.

Joseph bought things such as apples, squash and sometimes fresh meat. He would purchase a little molasses or sugar to enhance his rations, and often shared with his tentmates in preparing a "firstrate meal."²¹

Army pay was infrequent. Soldiers were mustered every other month to have their names called out and recorded on the payroll list to be forwarded to Washington. They then waited for a visit from the paymaster to receive their allotment, which was usually late. In 1864 a period of four months elapsed before the paymaster arrived at Company F. Joseph received thirteen dollars a month as a private, and more after being promoted to corporal and first sergeant. Upon receipt, he usually sent part of it home, asking his father to keep an account of his expenses. "I must try to keep square with you," he wrote. This allowed Joseph a particular freedom to make requests without feeling obligated.²²

Joseph credited his good health to the purchase of extra foodstuffs beyond his rations. Many of the men in his regiment were afflicted with jaundice as early as December of 1862. "I had a slight touch of the jaundice last week but by being careful . . . and eating what vegetables I could get I drove it off," he remarked. And, Joseph "was laid up a week after the battle of Fredericksburg, though by being careful and purchasing apples and pickles drove off the jaundice."²³

Exposure to the elements and inadequate food rations were conducive to illness. Ignorance of the causes of disease and inadequate medical measures (prevalent during the time period) caused much more sickness and death. Epidemics of small pox, measles, malaria, and typhoid took their toll. Joseph's health was normal for a Union soldier. He had "the camp diarrhea for three

21. The Life of Billy Yank, p. 231; History of the 37th Regiment, p. 100; Letters December 19, 1862; July 9, 1863; December 6, 1863.

22. The Life of Billy Yank, pp. 48-49; History of the 37th Regiment, p. 370; Letters January 27, 1864; February 24, 1864; March 5, 1864; March 27, 1864 refer to lack of pay; April 10, 1864.

23. Letters December 26, 1862; April 11, 1863

weeks," which along with dysentery, was widespread among the troops. "I steeped up a lot of White Oak bark yesterday and have used it pretty freely and I think it will cure me in a few days," he wrote. Scurvy was another common ailment for soldiers lacking fruits, and Joseph was "near having the scurvy from being deprived of all acids. I craved acid and acrid substances," he explained. He also suffered from chills and fever periodically, probably having contracted malaria. In May of 1864 he wrote, "Have been quite sick but am nearly well now . . . I had a sort of intermittent fever attended with loss of appetite, weakness, etc . . . [and] three or four chills too, but not very severe ones."²⁴

Joseph treated his own ailments. He took Algiers pills for fever and chills, believing his "blood was out of order . . . probably fermenting inside," and he requested from home saleratus (baking soda) and Tartaric acid. He also consumed Plantation Bitters, believing that it strengthened him. Joseph expressed fear of the Army doctors and surgeons. He avoided medical personnel and hospitals. "I won't report to the surgeon till I have to be carried. Our surgeons are cross and abusive to soldiers. I tell you, a man must take care of himself . . ." Once, when he had a boil on his arm which affected the handling of his gun, his Captain instructed him to report to the Surgeon for it. "No one but the Surgeon has the right to excuse a man from duty. I told him I would rather do duty than to go," Joseph wrote home. He believed in "Home-opathy . . . that nine times out of ten, home care and nursing is more efficient than physic. My observation of medical practice since I have been in the Army has disgusted me with the whole thing....Doctors here don't know but two kinds of medicine, one is quinine and the other whiskey. They take the whiskey and give the soldiers quinine." Joseph was not aware that the Army of the Potomac's chief medical officer, Jonathan Letterman, had instituted reforms which provided effective use of "available surgical skills" through a pooling of supplies and personnel within a field-hospital system. This new system not only allowed the wounded to be promptly collected and moved to tented field hospitals, but to be treated and cared for until they could be transferred to general hospitals. This innovative

24. "The Depths of Suffering" in The Life of Billy Yank (Chapter VI) for disease statistics and causes; Letters May 11, 1863; April 2, 1863; August 19, 1864; June 11, 1864; May 31, 1864.

structure of military medical care continued to be used through World War II.²⁵

All the soldiers experienced the hardships of Army life. The weather alone tested a person's fortitude. Company F did not receive shelter tents until the end of December of 1862, three and a half months after they left Massachusetts. The troops had left on frozen ground by then, with blankets still wet from the previous night's frost and the weather so cold that "water froze in canteens." The cold wind penetrated blankets and rain made it impossible to keep dry. Wood for fires sometimes became scarce and new quarters had to be located. People at home "don't know what it is to get wet through [crossing a river] and then lie down on the ground out of doors with your wet garments still on and then go to sleep," Joseph wrote in a letter. They don't know what it is to "march 20 miles in a day . . . what aching shoulders from carrying a knapsack are, blistered feet or clouds of blinding dust." In the heat of the summer marching continued relentlessly. In July of 1863, the Regiment participated in the march of the 6th Army Corps to Gettysburg, covering thirty-five miles in less than eighteen hours. "Hundreds have fallen by the wayside every day. Many have died from the effects of the heat," Joseph wrote. In July of 1864, the Regiment marched for four continuous days, stopping at midnight once, and moving out again at 6 A.M. "We have had a tedious march," Joseph reported, "and a great many are still behind. Thousands fell out by the way yesterday . . . stopped by the road unable to keep up. None but the very toughest men could stand such marching." And in early August of 1864, Joseph wrote that

Hundreds of men have melted and great numbers have died from the effects of the heat, still they persist in loading us down with four or five days rations, from forty to one hundred rounds of

25. *Letters* April 2, 1863; August 3, 1863; August 18, 1863; October 24, 1862; May 27, 1863; Joseph Taylor to Uncle July 5, 1864; *The Life of Billy Yank*, pp. 145-146.

ammunition and then marching us fifteen or twenty miles a day²⁶

In January of 1863, the Thirty-seventh Regiment took part in what was called the "mud campaign," or "mud march," in which the "rain poured down and the ground became a bottomless sea of mud." Artillery and ammunition wagons sank into the mud; their animals sank out of sight or dropped dead in their places. Every road was blocked. Joseph witnessed mules sinking to their deaths, as he explained, "the mud is not less than a foot deep and often more than four."²⁷

Joseph and the Regiment fought in the major battles at Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and in the Wilderness campaigns. They were also engaged in various assignments in Washington, Maryland, and Virginia, and were detailed to New York for duty during the draft riots of July 1863.²⁸ Joseph's perspective of uselessness continued as the intensity of the War increased. His tone became "war weary." Throughout his service, he referred to the waste of time, drilling, marching, money, and life. While issuing forage for four months, he remarked, "I've nothing to complain of but it seems almost like wasted time spent out here." Skirmishes with nothing or little accomplished frustrated him. During the Regiment's retreat from the banks of the Rappahannock in Virginia, he witnessed "not less than \$1,000,000 worth of overcoats, blankets, shoes, and boots, etc. . . cast away and left by the roadside." The Fredericksburg disaster, engaged in during the early part of his career, distressed him. "The battle of F. has put back our cause, I fear, for months. Who is responsible for such a disaster, I know not . . . another such operation will spoil our army. When I see the waste of blood and money and look for an adequate return in the amount of work accomplished,

26. Letters December 26, 1862; October 27, 1862; Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War, vol. 3, p. 769; Letters June 25, 1863; June 20, 1863; July 30, 1864; August 8, 1864.

27. History of the 37th Regiment, pp. 118-119; Letters February 24, 1863; March 2, 1863; March 7, 1863.

28. Mass. in the Army & Navy During the War of 1861-65, vol. 2, p. 266; Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War, vol. 3, pp. 769-770; History of the Connecticut Valley, vol. 1, pp. 152-153.

nothing but a blank presents itself." And in 1864, during a Maryland campaign, Joseph complained that the Regiment executed a gigantic counter-march, "making three times that we have travelled over the same road and all to no apparent purpose."²⁹

Expressions of contempt for men at home who failed to enlist, and for those who evaded the draft later in the War, become stronger in Joseph's letters. A national conscription law was passed on March 3, 1863, which called for all able-bodied male citizens between twenty and forty-five years of age to serve. Exemptions could be bought, however, for \$300, or if a drafted man furnished a substitute, he was exempt from service. The commutation clause was objectionable to soldiers and depressing to their morale, as it favored the rich over the poor.³⁰ Joseph expressed his feelings clearly: "I am glad more men are called for, and but for the fact of prolonging the war, I could wish every man now at home might be called into service. . . . I would like to give all of them a chance to cover themselves with 'Glory', which they are so ready to ascribe to others, especially when the quota is not full. I would not exchange places with a single one of the cowardly ones who are shaking in their shoes at home. . . ." Following the conscription law passage, he confessed, "I should regard it as no mean privilege to be able to tell such men just what we soldiers think of them . . . I imagine such men will not carry their heads over high after the war is ended."³¹

The soldiers despised cowards. "Pride prevents soldiers from running oftener than courage," Joseph explained, "and most men prefer to run their chance in battle rather than be a 'By word and hissing among their comrades.'" Honor was important to Joseph. He took pride in his duties and his company, and he projected a positive attitude in most of his letters. "I never was in better health in my life and my spirits are correspondingly good," he wrote in 1863, and "The longer I stay in the Army the more

29. Letters March 26, 1863; April 2, 1863; June 25, 1863; December 23, 1862; August 8, 1864.

30. The Life of Billy Yank, pp. 275, 281-282; The Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 313-314.

31. Letters February 3, 1864; November 22, 1863; June 8, 1863; July 5, 1864.

content I am." The Regiment applied to the War Department early in 1864 for permission to reenlist. "I think nearly all would reenlist if they had the chance," commented Joseph. He battled with the idea, as he asked his father, "If I serve three years will anyone accuse me of lack of patriotism because I don't choose to serve six?" Having been promoted to sergeant, his previous duties of picket, guard, and fatigue were replaced with drilling the recruits three times each day. "I expect I am a good drill master," he reflected, "though I don't like the job." Joseph praised his company when he commented, "I believe we have the largest Co. in the Reg't., certainly the best."³²

Company F had approximately eighty-one men in January of 1864, and by July it had lost thirteen of them to death. Joseph did not write about the horrors of war. His letters did not contain descriptions of death. He was rational about life and death, and he knew the fate of soldiers. "We, who see death in some shape nearly every day give the subject only a passing thought," he wrote, yet his sentiments reflected how much better it was to "die a soldiers death than to be sneaking about home." Two of his tentmates were killed in the Wilderness in May of 1864, and Joseph described them as men of "sound principles and great popularity in the Co." He then admitted, for the first time, that "After . . . battle, when we had withdrawn from the front and had time to think where we had been and what ravages had been made in our Co. by the bullets of the enemy, I just sat down under a tree and cried, I could not help it . . . tears would roll down my cheeks in spite of my efforts to restrain them."³³

In the summer of 1864, the Thirty-seventh Regiment, as part of the 6th Army Corps, engaged in the defense of Washington against the Confederates. They pursued General Early into the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and during the battle at Charles Town, West Virginia, on August 21, Joseph was wounded. He was "struck by a bullet on the inside of the right hip, the ball passing nearly through." Removed to the field hospital at Sandy Hook, Maryland, the ball was extracted from the back. Joseph wrote

 32. Joseph Taylor to Uncle, July 5, 1864; Letters June 20, 1863; June 18, 1863; April 10, 1864; January 27, 1864; February 11, 1864.

33. Letters January 17, 1864; July 30, 1864; November 22, 1863; Joseph Taylor to Uncle, July 5, 1864.

two hopeful letters to his father, describing the wound as "serious but not particularly dangerous," and that it was "doing finely." He waited for his wound to improve, so that he could be transferred to a General Hospital in Baltimore or Philadelphia. Nine days after being wounded, on August 30, 1864, Joseph died, exactly two years to the day that he was mustered in. His remains were brought home by his father, to the cemetery in Granby. His epitath read "Sweet after battle is the tired soldier's rest."³⁴

Joseph's father received three letters following the death of his son. A member of the U.S. Christian Commission, the captain of the Regiment, and a comrade wrote to extend their sympathies, describe his last days, and praise his qualities. "The Sergeant was a fine soldier," Captain Mason W. Tyler wrote

brave in battle, faithful in the performance of his duties in the field and in the camp, well posted in all the routine of Military life. He could be trusted anywhere He had come to be universally beloved with the boys. His natural good qualities of head and heart had already earned him the highest position in the ranks of enlisted men of the Company.

Joseph had been promised a Commissioned Officers promotion, which he would have received "had he lived but a few weeks. . . . By his death the service has lost what it really needs . . . some of its educated and talented young men, the material with which to make Officers."³⁵

In 1864, Joseph admitted: "I never yet saw the day in which I could really say I was sorry I enlisted." He was committed to helping his country in its time of need. He was

34. History of the 37th Regiment, pp. 372-373; Massachusetts in the Army & Navy During the War of 1861-65, vol. 2, p. 266; Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War, vol. 3, p. 770; Letters August 23, 1864; August 31, 1864; History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts, biographical insert between pp. 152 & 153.

35. L. L. Wood, U.S. Christian Commission to Frederick Taylor, August 31, 1864; Mason W. Tyler to Frederick Taylor, September 13, 1864; G.L. Cooley to Frederick Taylor, September 13, 1864. These three letters are included in the collection of Frederick Taylor's letters owned by Maudetta Taylor of Granby.

bound by honor and duty by patriotism worthy of Massachusetts history. As his great-grandfather had fought to establish a nation, so had Joseph Knight Taylor fought and died to save it.³⁶

36. Letters April 10, 1864; History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts,
biographical insert between pp. 152 & 153.