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## COUCH'S "FLYING" DIVISION DURING POPE'S RETREAT AND THE MARYLAND CAMPAIGN.<sup>1</sup>

General Darius N. Couch's<sup>2</sup> Division<sup>3</sup> had been the first of the three which had composed General Erasmus D. Keyes IV Corps of the Army of the Potomac during the Peninsula Campaign. In May of 1862 General William F. Smith's, third division was removed from the corps and combined with General William B. Franklin's Division to create the VI Corps. This left only the divisions of Couch and Casey comprising the IV Corps. On June 23, 1862 brigade commander General John J. Peck was promoted to the command of Silas Casey's division of the IV Corps and when the Army of the Potomac withdrew from the Peninsula in August 1862, Casey's old division, now under Peck, remained at Fortress Monroe. The IV Corps which had gained such honors at Williamsburg, Fair Oaks and Malvern Hill effectively ceased to exist. From this time, until it became the third division of the VI Corps, Couch's Division operated independently.

### Evacuating the peninsula.

Couch's division remained on the peninsula long after most of McClellan's army had been sent to Aquia Creek purportedly to support Pope's army and to defend Washington. Peck's old brigade, now commanded by Albion P. Howe, along with the rest of the division, boarded steam transports on or about August 30, 1862. The 62nd and the 55th boarded the *Conquest*, a barque, which was towed by the Steamer *Daniel Webster* which had on board the 93rd and possibly the 98th Pennsylvania. The 102nd Pennsylvania boarded the *Cossack*. Crammed into the ships, the ragged and depleted regiments of Howe's brigade were a far cry from the fresh, well equipped commands that had required six steamships and two barques to transport them and their equipment to the peninsula just five months earlier.



*The only known image of the steam transport 'Daniel Webster' which towed the barque 'Conquest,' with the 55th and 62nd aboard, from Yorktown to Alexandria in August 1862. It is taken from the August 2, 1862 issue of Harper's Weekly. The 'Daniel Webster' had been the flag ship of the transports of Couch's division when it had left Washington on March 26 and had transported Couch and his staff, along with the 31st Pennsylvania (82nd) and the 67th New York (1st Long Island) Infantry of Brigadier General John J. Abercrombie's second brigade. - Image courtesy of sonofthesouth.net*

At the same time as Couch's division was setting out from Yorktown for Aquia Creek, Pope's army at Manassas was being over-run by the Army of Virginia. When they arrived at Aquia Creek, the transports of Couch's division were directed to Alexandria from where, it was feared, the Army of Northern Virginia, hot on the heels of Pope's rout, would attack Washington.

At 5pm on August 30, Longstreet and Jackson broke the Union resolve and a general retreat of the Federal army onto the Washington defenses began. Halleck, who Lincoln had appointed as General-in-Chief of the Union Armies in July 1862, rushed desperate dispatches off to McClellan enquiring after the arrival of Couch at Alexandria and, with

the rest of the army in full retreat, instructed McClellan to send these regiments as soon as they arrived along the railway to protect it from "marauders".



*The steamer 'Cossack' which transported the 102nd Pennsylvania of Howe's brigade from Yorktown to Alexandria in August of 1862.*

By 5.40pm, just after Longstreet and Jackson had made their final attack on the Union army and sent it into a full retreat, only one of Couch's 14 regiments had arrived at Alexandria<sup>4</sup>. The other regiments, scattered the length of the Potomac and Chesapeake Bay on various steamers with vessels in tow, arrived gradually over the next day or so. After struggling to shore these regiments were directed to the front.

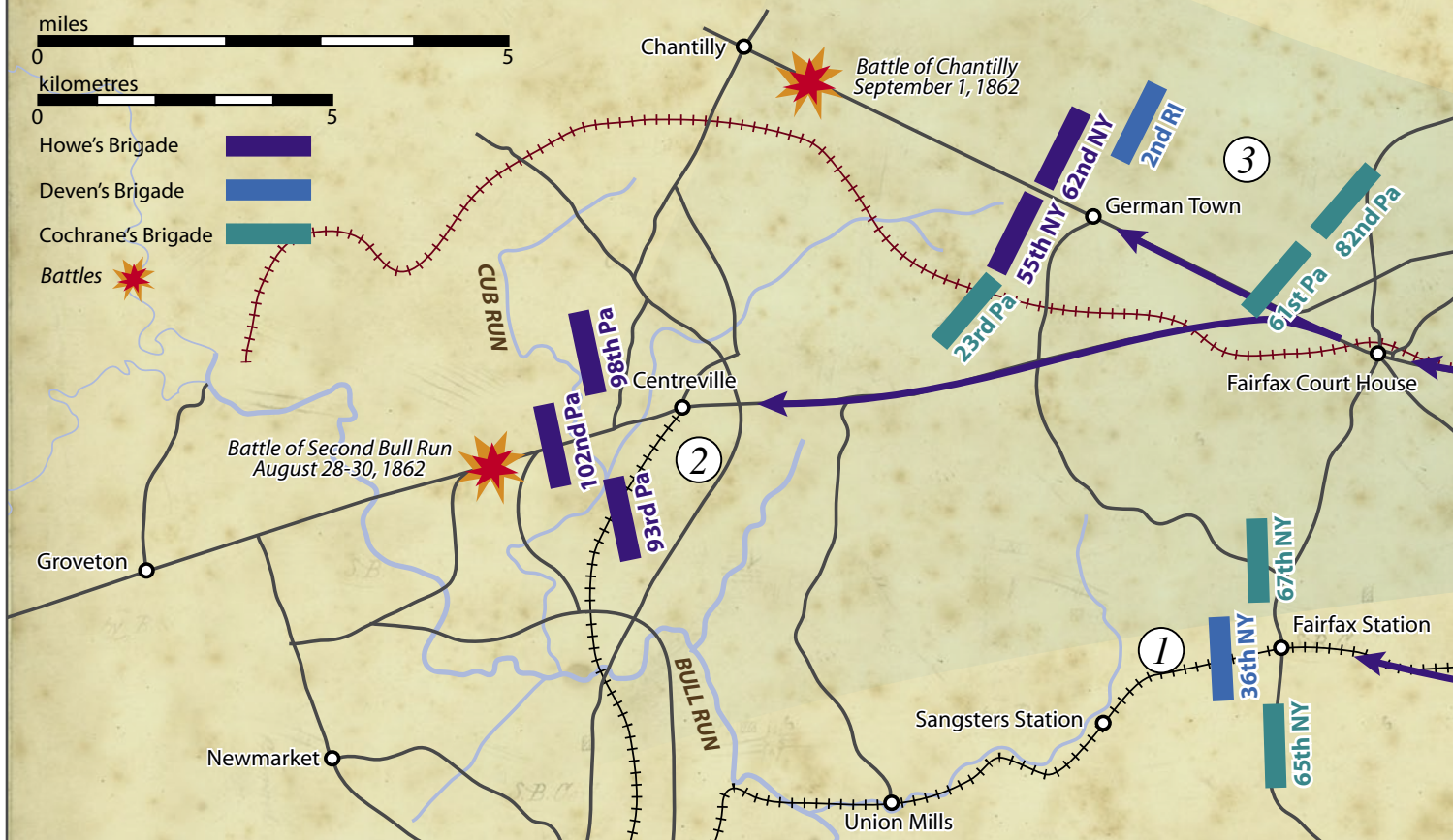
### Couch's rear guard action.

At 7.45pm on August 30, McClellan reported to Halleck that some more of Couch's division had arrived at Alexandria and would disembark during the night. McClellan added that Couch's excellent division of veterans were almost too good to be used as a railway guard and asked for permission to use different troops. Halleck replied that by sending the regiments of the division down the railroad they could be more quickly moved to the front and that they could be replaced as a guard as other troops became available. Despite these instructions it appears that most of the regiments of Couch's division, as they did so often during the war, got to the front by marching.

The road between Alexandria and the front at Fairfax Court House was in chaos. Pope's trains choked the roads as the army fell back on the defenses of Washington. Colonel Regis de Trobriand of the 55th New York was temporarily in command of both his own regiment and the 62nd New York. Both of these regiments had arrived at Alexandria on the morning of August 31, but such was the traffic at the port that they were unable to get ashore until the evening of the same day – a full day after the first regiment of the division had arrived. The 93rd Pennsylvania on board the *Daniel Webster* was able to disembark on the evening of the 31st as was 2nd Rhode Island which had steamed uneventfully up the Potomac on board the *S. R Spalding*. The 10th Massachusetts, on board the *Key West* with the 7th Massachusetts in tow, entered the Potomac at daylight on August 31. Proceeding at a snail's pace the *Key West* reached Alexandria at dark where it anchored until the following morning before getting its troops ashore. The 10th bivouacked near the landing for most of the following day only beginning its move to Fairfax Court House on the afternoon of September 1. Company A of the 61st Pennsylvania was so delayed aboard the barque *Metropolis*, being towed by the steamer *City of Richmond*, that it found itself caught in the frightful storm that struck the battlefield on the night of September 1.<sup>5</sup> Just what time the other regiments in the division disembarked and in what order the 36th, 65th and 67th New York, the 23rd and 82nd Pennsylvania and the 7th Massachusetts proceeded to the front is unclear as this author is unable to find any data. What is evident from the



# COUCH'S REAR GUARD DEFENSE OF POPE'S RETREAT AUGUST 30 – SEPTEMBER 2, 1862.



The above map endeavours to show the likely positions of the regiments of Couch's division based on available sources. The deployment of Couch's Division as a rear guard for Pope's routed army appears to have had three stages. ① The first regiments to arrive on Saturday August 30, appear to have reported to Colonel Haupt (in charge of the USMRR at Alexandria) and to have been sent down the line to the area around Sangsters and Fairfax Stations. In the absence of historical data these first regiments are assumed to have been the 36th, 65th and the 67th New York. ② With the situation rapidly changing for Pope the three

detail descriptions that do exist, is that the division's movement to the front was as chaotic and disorganised as Pope's flight was to the rear.

In Bates' history of the 98th Pennsylvania, Colonel John F. Ballier, who was in command of the brigade on September 1, says that his regiment arrived at Centreville some hours before daylight on that day. During this time the confusion of the rout increased and the sound of the guns got nearer. At daylight the 98th joined the retreat, taking the road to Fairfax Court House. The regiment, forming part of the rear guard of the army, fell back gradually, turning to front every one hundred paces or so. It is interesting to note that it was Ballier's opinion that Howe's brigade appeared to be the only one of the three of Couch's division that had been sent to cover the retreat of Pope's Army.<sup>6</sup> According to Stewart, the 102nd Pennsylvania had disembarked at 5pm and set out from Alexandria at 7pm on August 31, which was most likely the same time as the 93rd and the 98th Pennsylvania set out, and arrived at Centreville early on the morning of September 1 "indescribably weary," having marched 22 miles overnight. After an half hour rest at Centreville the 102nd was marched seven miles back to Fairfax Courthouse where it was held in reserve. Bates in his history of the 102nd is even more specific. He says that the 102nd, along with its brigade, on the advance of the division moved out beyond Centreville and formed at intervals to check the advance of the enemy. The 102nd then acted in support of a battery during the battle of Chantilly, but did not become actively engaged.<sup>7</sup> Penrose Mark says of the 93rd Pennsylvania, that it arrived at Centreville at noon on September 1, having passed through Fairfax Court House earlier that morning. The 93rd were formed up in support of a battery most likely attached to the command of Fitz John Porter before being counter-marched to just west of Fairfax Court House, where Hooker's command lay in reserve. Here it was formed into line of battle during a skirmish. De Trobriand says that both the 55th and the 62nd, having disembarked on the evening of

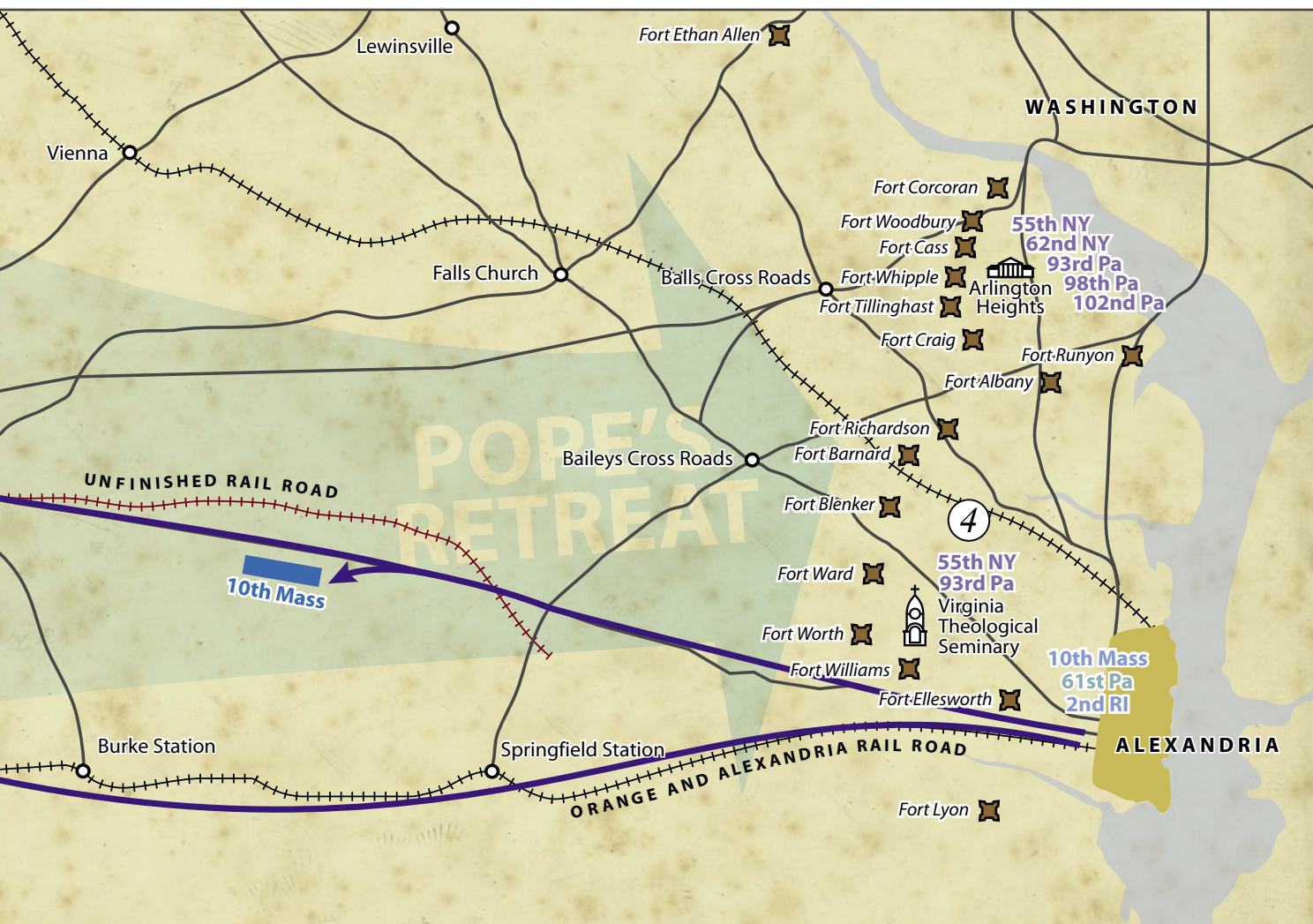
August 31, were made to wait at Alexandria until 3pm the following day, before they received orders to march to Fairfax Court House to join the rest of the brigade which had set out from Alexandria a full 20 hours earlier. Soon after setting out, the severe storm that hit the area on that evening made the roads into mud-holes and by the time the two regiments arrived at the outskirts of Fairfax Court House, eight hours and 15 miles later, two thirds of the 55th and most of the 62nd had disappeared from the disordered ranks.<sup>8</sup>

In comparing the accounts of Stewart, Mark, De Trobriand and Bates it seems clear that Howe's brigade had been divided into two columns. One comprising the three Pennsylvania regiments under the command of Ballier and the other with the 55th and the 62nd New York under the command of De Trobriand. So when Bates refers to "the brigade" it appears he is only referring to the three Pennsylvania regiments meaning that his history is not a good indicator of what may have been the movements of the 55th and the 62nd.



The steamer 'S. R. Spaulding' which transported the 2nd Rhode Island to Alexandria.





*Pennsylvania regiments of Howe's Brigade marched out to Centreville before withdrawing to Fairfax where they supported elements of Hooker's division. ③ The remainder of Couch's division which had been held back at Alexandria were marched out to Fairfax where they formed line of battle but were not engaged during the battle of Chantilly. ④ The available accounts say that the 55th NY and the 93rd Pa fell back to the Fairfax Seminary before marching north to Fairfax Heights where the other regiments of the brigade would eventually end up. The 10th Mass, 61st Pa and the 2nd RI are said to have fallen back on Alexandria.*

Elisha Hunt Rhodes claims that the 2nd Rhode Island, having left Alexandria on August 31, like the 93rd, 98th and 102nd Pennsylvania, got only as far as Fairfax Courthouse where it too formed in line of battle just to the west of the town and two miles from the front lines of the Battle of Chantilly.<sup>9</sup> The 10th Massachusetts, according to Newell, disembarked at Alexandria on September 1 and bivouacked near the landing until the afternoon when it was ordered to Fairfax Courthouse to support Pope. At about midnight while it picked its way along the edge of the road in the driving rain, with Pope's trains passing in the other direction, it received an order to hurry to the front. At the same time it also received an order to return to Alexandria. Unable to obey both the regiment bivouacked by the side of the road while Pope's trains passed.<sup>10</sup> The movements of the 23rd Pennsylvania are quite vague and confusing. In Bate's history of the Pennsylvania Regiments it is said that it disembarked on August 31 and hurried to the battlefield at Chantilly the following day where it took part in the action losing five men. If this is the case then those casualties have not been recorded in any official record and, if by "losses" we are meant to understand "deaths" then the battle of Chantilly would be the third worst engagement for the 23rd in terms of number of men killed. These casualties do not appear to be accounted for in any of the official records. It seems likely that, in this case, Bates' source for this part of the 23rd's history was somewhat unreliable. The 82nd Pennsylvania, in the same history, is said to have been in line of battle at Chantilly but to have not been engaged.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the scant information available from these accounts regarding the movements of Couch's division between August 30 and September 1, 1862, it may still be possible to use a broad brush to paint a likely picture.

Clearly, the messages sent between Halleck and McClellan show that the first of Couch's regiments arrived at Alexandria at around 6pm on August 30. In the couple of hours that followed it would appear that

at least two and maybe more of regiments arrived. The information to hand would suggest that these regiments were most likely the 36th New York, 65th New York, 67th New York. All the other regiments in the division have histories for the period which suggest that they arrived no earlier than the following day – August 31. It is possible that these first regiments had been sent down the rail lines as had been suggested by Halleck in his first dispatches. This would have taken these regiments away from the main action which by this stage had moved north and east away from Manassas and towards the area around Centreville, Fairfax Courthouse, Chantilly and Germantown. The regiments which arrived in the second wave of transports on August 31, which included the 93rd, 98th and the 102nd Pennsylvania from Howe's brigade, would have had to have been sent by road to form the rear guard of Pope's retreating army. If this is the case then it would have meant that the three Pennsylvanian regiments of Howe's brigade, despite having not been the first of the division to arrive at Alexandria could have easily have found themselves in the vanguard of Couch's defense of Pope's retreat. The delay in sending the 55th New York, the 62nd New York and the 10th Massachusetts among other regiments of the division may well have reflected a concern on the part of Halleck and McClellan that General Thomas J. Jackson and General James Longstreet may have been intending to pass North of Pope's disordered force to attack Washington and Alexandria before Pope was able to reorganise and establish communications with McClellan. A less than optimistic report which appeared in the *New York Times* with the dateline "Centreville August 31, 1862" made this fear explicit when it said, with words in italics for added emphasis:

In case our troops prove too weak to hold the present line of defence, they will still be able to fall back in good order to the fortifications in front of Washington, *unless the enemy, by some dar-*

ing flank movement, succeed in occupying them first. In the former case Washington is entirely safe till the new levies arrive – in the latter contingency, its fate would seem to be sealed.<sup>12</sup>

It seems that it was only after the Confederates engaged Pope's army at Chantilly that a decision was taken to send the remaining regiments of Couch's Division from Alexandria to Fairfax Courthouse. It must have seemed to many of the troops and citizens of Washington that there was a real chance that Washington would be taken by the confederates.

Ballier was probably correct when he observed that his three Pennsylvania regiments were the only ones of the division to make it out as far as Centreville. The few regiments which had arrived earlier were in all likelihood to the south, guarding the railway while the rest were behind them marching against the tide of Pope's retreating troops or still awaiting orders back at Alexandria.

Given that the division was scattered and broken up into separate regiments and attached to batteries and brigades from other corps it is not surprising that the role played by Couch's Flying Division in ensuring the safe retreat of Pope's army is practically unrecorded. In a conflict which saw Pope callously sacrificed and McClellan reinstated to unmerited popularity, it is perhaps not so surprising that those who marched to the front while most of the army fled, were not given their full measure of credit. De Trobriand is unambiguous about the betrayal of Pope by McClellan<sup>13</sup> and it is tempting to see the delays to which Couch's division was subjected, even going back to the delay in its embarkation at Yorktown, as being part of a conscious plan to ensure Pope's failure at Bull Run. The death of General Kearny, a personal friend of De Trobriand, would most certainly have been avoided if McClellan had done as he was ordered and went to Pope's support rather than just "opening communications" with him so that he might retreat onto the Washington defenses.

De Trobriand, in command of both the 55th and the 62nd New York, arrived at Fairfax at 11pm on September 1. Upon taking roll call he found that two thirds of 55th and almost all of the 62nd had dropped off the march among the mud holes and retreating regiments. The following day De Trobriand's took what remained of his commands and formed a picket three miles beyond Fairfax while Pope's troops continued their retreat onto the Washington defenses. The regiments of Couch's division spent the remainder of September 2 defending the rear of the army and arrived within the Washington defenses at Arlington Seminary around midnight.

Several years after the war, in his history of the 5th New York, Alfred Davenport recounted a touching incident which occurred when the Duryee Zouaves were met on the road by the 62nd during the retreat:

*While on the road near Fairfax during a brief halt, a regiment came marching by, and an unusually tall and well-proportioned man stepped from the ranks; it was noticed that he carried the colors.*

*He inquired for Company G and William McDowell, and was answered that he was lying dead on the battle-field. The tears started to his eyes, and for a moment he was quite overcome, until suddenly becoming conscious that men were looking at him, he dashed his hand across his eyes, and joined his regiment, which was the Anderson Zouaves. He was the brother of our own lamented Sergeant.<sup>14</sup>*

The "unusually tall and well-proportioned member of the Anderson Zouaves was James McDowell<sup>14</sup> of Captain David J. Nevin's company "D". James (21) and his older brother William (27) had enlisted on the same day in New York – April 25, 1861 – James with the Anderson Zouaves and William with the Duryee Zouaves. William had been killed at Centreville a few days earlier on August 30 at the same time that James was setting out from Yorktown aboard the barque Conquest.

Moving north west of Washington, Robert E. Lee used the opportunity presented by his success at the Second Battle of Bull Run and the disorganisation of the Federal army to inaugurate his Maryland Campaign which was to culminate in the turning point of the war – the Battle of Antietam.

[Part two in next month's issue]

#### Notes

1. Attempting to cobble together in detail the movements of Couch's division from its evacuation of the Peninsula, to its march on Centreville and Fairfax Court House through to its subsequent movements in Maryland, in the absence of an existing history, has been a difficult process. It is not only possible but very likely that many errors have been made and the author invites correspondence from anyone who feels that he or she can contribute further information.
2. Darius Nash Couch (born July 23, 1822, South East, Putnam County, NY – died February 12, 1897, Norwalk, CT, and buried at Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Taunton, CT). Couch, who pronounced his name "Coach" (IPA 'koutʃ), had his first command in the Civil War as the Colonel of the 7th Massachusetts. By May 1861 he was promoted to command of the brigade which in October 1861 included the 7th Massachusetts, 10th Massachusetts, 36th New York and 2nd Rhode Island. His brigade was attached to the division of Don Carlos Buell which included the brigade of John J. Peck composed of the 55th New York, 62nd New York, 98th Pennsylvania and the old 13th (later 102d) Pennsylvania, and the brigade of Lawrence Pike Graham composed of the 65th New York, 67th New York, 23rd Pennsylvania and 82nd Pennsylvania. Couch was promoted to commander of the division when Buell replaced Sherman as head of the Department of the Ohio.
3. In August 1862 Couch's division was composed of the three brigades, Albion P. Howe's (55th NY, 62nd NY, 93rd Pa, 98th Pa and 102nd Pa), Charles Deven's (7th Mass, 10th Mass, 2nd RI and 36th NY) and John Cochrane's (65th NY, 67th NY, 23rd Pa, 61st Pa and 82nd Pa).
4. Mark, P. 1911, *Red, White and Blue Badge*, p. 172.
5. This shows the inaccuracy in some of the accepted regimental accounts. The account of Company A of the 61st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry is to be found on pages 119-123 of the History Indiana County, Pennsylvania. Based largely on the diary entries of James Miles Walker, a company musician, it claims that the company boarded the barque Metropolis on August 28 and set off that evening in tow of the steamer *City of Richmond* in a driving storm. The driving storm referred to was most likely the storm which hit Alexandria and the Fairfax Court House on the afternoon of September 1 meaning that the embarkation date of August 28 must be incorrect. Furthermore the same account claims that after disembarking at Alexandria the company was ordered to Fairfax Court House and arrived at its destination on the morning of September 2. Given that Couch's regiments were being sent to the front, more or less, as soon as they arrived at Alexandria, this would indicate that the company disembarked on the evening of September 1 during the storm that had struck on that afternoon. If Company A had embarked on August 28, as claimed, it would have meant the entire trip must have taken about four and a half days – a trip that, for other regiments, generally took no more than two and a half days. In light of this it is probable that the accepted time line for Company A of the 61st Pennsylvania, for its journey from Yorktown to Alexandria, is incorrect. It probably embarked on August 31 and left that evening encountering the storm as it moved up Chesapeake bay from the south-east and disembarked at Alexandria in the evening of September 1. Moving with the storm the 61st would have encountered it at a slightly earlier time than recorded by De Trobriand, Rhodes and Newell. Elisha Hunt Rhodes records his time of arrival as the morning of August 31 and says that he had a "pleasant sail from Yorktown", so the 2nd Rhode Island must have arrived before the 61st Pennsylvania of whose trip it is written "we went on board the bark Metropolis in tow of the City of Richmond and started up the bay that night in a driving storm. Our bark very nearly ran down the steamer, which was also loaded with troops. "The boys" had got almost proof against cholera morbus, but didn't know how to flank seasickness and were captured".
6. Bates, S. P., 1871, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-65*, Harrisburg.
7. Stewart, A. M., 1865, *Camp, March and Battlefield*, Philadelphia, pp. 223-224.
8. De Trobriand, P. R., 1889, *Four Years with the Army of the Potomac*, Boston, p. 296.
9. Rhodes, E. H., 1985, *All for the Union*, New York, p. 79.
10. Newell, J. K., 1875, "Ours." *Annals of 10th Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, in the Rebellion*, Springfield, p. 140.
11. Bates, S. P., 1871, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-65*, Harrisburg.
12. *New York Times*, September 2, 1862, p. 1
13. De Trobriand, P. R., 1889, *Four Years with the Army of the Potomac*, Boston, p. 296.
14. Davenport, A., 1879, *Camp and Field Life of the Fifth New York Volunteer Infantry*, p. 307.
15. The flag that James was carrying was most likely the Brandon & Styles state flag that had been presented to the regiment on May 8th by brigade commander John J. Peck on behalf of the New York City Council. Prior to the presentation of this second colour it appears that the regiment had only a Federal standard which had been presented to the regiment on Riker's Island by Mrs Robert Anderson on behalf of Major Robert Anderson on August 8, 1861. This flag, it appears had been borne for most of this time by Abram T. Perine of Staten Island. Perine was said to have been the first to place the flag upon the battlements of Fort Magruder but there are competing claims for this honour and it is likely that Perine actually placed the flag on one of the redoubts and not on the actual fort. The Honors of the Empire State in the War of the Rebellion by Thomas Seaman Townsend has an account of Perine's actions on Page 311: *After the terrible battle of Williamsburg, General Kearny, being anxious to know whether or not the Rebel forts were deserted, the Sixty-second pushed up and took the fort next on the left, and planted thereon the Stars and Stripes. This gallant act was performed by Abram T. Perin , color-sergeant of Company C.*

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**Editor:** John James Tierney

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