

“Soldiers, and Yet Not Soldiers”: New York and Washington, DC

“Instant Service”

On April 18, 1861, an article appeared in the *New York Tribune* announcing the formation of a “Zouave Regiment,” modeled after the colorfully uniformed North African troops known for their gymnastic aptitude, fearless swagger, and elite fighting abilities.¹ Less than a week prior, Fort Sumter had fallen to the Confederacy, President Lincoln called for 75,000 militia volunteers to quell the rebellious South, and Virginia seceded from the Union. Regiments north and south formed quickly, and war seemed imminent, with most Americans convinced that any sort of armed conflict would be quick and relatively bloodless. For this new unit of Zouaves, however, only a certain class of men qualified: New York City

¹ The First New York Fire Zouaves or 11th New York Volunteer Infantry was one of more than seventy Union regiments (and some twenty-five Confederate units) raised during the Civil War that tried in varying ways to adopt the dress, manner, and drill of the original North Algerian and then French-born Zouaves. For an overview of Zouave Civil War regiments, see Michael Kalu, “Fierce and Colorful: Zouave Regiments in the Civil War,” War History Online, www.warhistory.com. For more on Zouaves and Americans’ attraction to them, see Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 265–266, 294. Gerald Wheeler notes that Zouave units attracted men who wanted to appear in an “elite regiment.” Yet he states, “this very sense of selectiveness made discipline a major problem.” See Gerald E. Wheeler, “D’Epineuil’s Zouaves,” *Civil War History* Vol. 2, No. 4 (December 1956): 99. See also Carol E. Harrison and Thomas J. Brown, *Zouave Theaters: Transnational Military Fashion and Performance* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2024); Daniel J. Miller, *American Zouaves, 1859–1959: An Illustrated History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2019). Parts of this chapter and Chapter 2 previously appeared in “Novices in Warfare”: Elmer E. Ellsworth and Militia Reform on the Eve of Civil War,” *Journal of Civil War Era* Vol. 11, No. 2 (June 2021): 194–223, published by the University of North Carolina Press.

volunteer firemen.² The *Tribune* attested that firemen possessed the perfect combination of physical and mental prowess: “As men of steady nerves, unflinching courage, of the cool temper which the habit of facing danger alone can give, built up with muscles of steel, and of an indomitable power of endurance, they are just the men for that service.” They were, the *Tribune* described, “soldiers, and yet not soldiers; men who had just drill enough for the habit of it, but without any that would interfere with the acquisition of new tactics.”³ Leaders of the city’s fire department quickly joined the call, urging their members to “turn out” and “join a regiment of firemen who can sustain the name of the New York Fire Department under any and all circumstances.”⁴ Nearly every fire station became a recruiting office, and hundreds of men excitedly signed up to serve.⁵ In just over a week, thousands of dollars were raised, uniforms procured, and the Fire Zouaves, as they were quickly known, had more than 1,000 volunteers in their ranks.⁶ In a letter pledging funds from individual members of the

² Additional qualifications called for: “Men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five, and over five feet two and a half inches, and under five feet ten inches.” See *The New York Times*, April 21, 1861. Not every member of the unit was a fireman, but the majority were. It is also significant that most of the officers were firemen, with the notable exceptions of Elmer E. Ellsworth, Adjutant Charles McKnight Leoser, a recent West Point graduate, and nearly all the first lieutenants, who were former Chicago Zouaves.

³ *New York Tribune*, April 18, 1861.

⁴ *New York Herald*, April 19, 1861. Fire Department Chief John Decker and several other assistant engineers signed this appeal. Decker, as chief engineer, was elected every three years by the volunteers. See Augustine E. Costello, *Our Firemen: A History of the New York Fire Department* (New York: Augustine E. Costello, 1887), 126.

⁵ There were 123 firehouses in New York City with more than 4,000 members in 1861. See John Mulligan, “‘Trial by Fire,’ the Story of the Fire Zouaves,” *WNYF: With the New York Firefighters* Vol. 48 (1987): 8; New York Military Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY (hereafter referred to as NYMM). Costello calculates 4,227 members of the Fire Department’s “working force” in 1860. See Costello, *Our Firemen*, 140.

⁶ *The New York Times*, April 27, 1861; *New York Leader*, April 27, 1861. The Zouave Fire Regiment Fund Committee quickly formed with Adolphus F. Ockerhausen as chairman, George F. Nesbitt as secretary, and James Kelly as treasurer. Kelly got to work writing letters to men well connected with the city’s fire department, inviting them to his home on the night of April 19 to help organize the regiment and raise funds. By April 24, the committee had raised \$12,000, including \$1,000 from the “New York Board of Brokers.” See James Kelly to Henry B. Venn, April 19, 1861; Minutes of April 24, 1861 meeting; William Wright to James Kelly, April 20, 1861; James Kelly to George F. Nesbitt, April 19, 1861, all in the Folder 2, Box 8, Administrative Correspondence Files, Series A4111, Bureau of Military Statistics, New York State Archives, Albany, NY (hereafter referred to as NYSA). See also *New York Tribune*, April 22, 1861. Adolphus F. Ockerhausen was a “well-known and wealthy sugar refiner,” who died in 1877. See *Railroad Gazette* (New York, NY), Vol. 9 (April 27, 1877): 189.

New York Stock Exchange, William Irving Graham expressed his and his fellow brokers' appreciation for "our red shirt" and "gallant friends," confident that the firemen would "never prove unworthy of the generosity extended to them."⁷ The regiment of "brave firemen" was, the press declared, "ready for instant service."⁸

Elmer E. Ellsworth, the Fire Zouaves' twenty-four-year-old commander, already had a national reputation as the "finest drill officer of his age."⁹ During the summer of 1860, he toured the country exhibiting his Chicago Zouaves, an elite company of militia volunteers who perfected gymnastic-like drills and carefully coordinated maneuvers. Clad in flamboyant uniforms, Ellsworth and his cadets impressed audiences and received mostly rave reviews from the press. Their performances, which lasted hours, attracted tens of thousands of spectators. When they visited Washington, DC, in August 1860, *The Baltimore Sun* described the Zouaves executing "the finest display of manual exercise ever witnessed here." President James Buchanan praised them as models of citizen soldiery. "I wish you prosperity and happiness in peace," Buchanan told the cadets; "should war come I know where you will be."¹⁰

Now Civil War *had* come, and Ellsworth rushed to participate. He had been dreaming of being a soldier since he was a boy in upstate New York. His family had struggled to make ends meet, and as a teen he had ventured off to New York City and later Chicago to support himself and his parents.¹¹ Still, the military beckoned. Ellsworth initially

⁷ See W. Irving Graham to George Nesbit, April 24, 1861, Folder 2, Box 8, Administrative Correspondence Files, Series A4111, Bureau of Military Statistics, NYSA.

⁸ "brave firemen" from the *New York Herald*, April 19, 1861; "ready for instant service" from the *New York Daily Tribune*, April 20, 1861. Ellsworth won the endorsement of *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley, who helped him with a "well planned system of placarding" to stir enlistments. See William D. Kelley, "The Assassination of Ellsworth," *The Graphic News* (Cincinnati, OH) Vol. 1, No. 4 (July 21, 1886), in Newspaper Clippings, Frank E. Brownell Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN (hereafter referred to as MNHS). Kelley was long-serving Pennsylvania Republican congressman.

⁹ *Chicago Tribune*, March 20, 1861.

¹⁰ *Baltimore Sun*, August 6, 1860.

¹¹ Ellsworth's biographers emphasize his modest beginnings and the impoverishment of his parents, apparently struck hard by the Panic of 1837. See, for example, Charles Ingraham, *Elmer E. Ellsworth and the Zouaves of '61* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1925), 5; Ruth Painter Randall, *Colonel Elmer Ellsworth: A Biography of Lincoln's Friend and First Hero of the Civil War* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1960), 11–12.

sought an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, but lacking political connections or adequate education to pass the qualifying exams, he turned toward the volunteer militia. By the age of twenty, he served as a drill instructor to various militia companies in Illinois and Wisconsin. In 1858, he sought to raise a unit of volunteers to fight in what looked like a war with Mormons in Utah territory, and in September 1859, he gained appointment as Assistant Adjutant General and Paymaster for the State of Illinois. In the meantime, he was accumulating political connections, too, including, most notably, the soon-to-be president Abraham Lincoln. The outbreak of war seemed to position Ellsworth in an ideal situation, with the right contacts and experience to secure a commission and make his dream of military command a reality.¹²

Ellsworth had also developed an elaborate plan that was as much about reforming young white working-class men like himself as it was about revitalizing the volunteer militia. The Chicago Zouaves had to follow his own strict “Golden Resolutions,” which banned alcohol, profanity, and other perceived sinful behaviors. In essence, he wanted to mold men as much as transform the militia system and reconfigure the volunteer American soldier as respectable as any other professional class. In his proposed legislation, which he first tried at the state level, and then nationally, the militia would be not only more efficient in times of crisis, but more valued and admired. In doing so, Ellsworth was revisiting a perennial question of US military policy: Could the citizen soldier be relied upon for national defense?¹³

Ellsworth fervently believed that he could single-handedly transform Americans’ attitudes toward citizen soldiers. With the outbreak of the Civil War, it seemed that his moment had come.

¹² Biographical details on Ellsworth can be found in Randall, *Colonel Elmer Ellsworth*; and Ingraham, *Elmer E. Ellsworth*. These works are decidedly hagiographical, yet they contain valuable insights into his life, particularly his boyhood and struggles as a young man. A more recent and somewhat better-balanced biography of Ellsworth is Meg Groeling, *First Fallen: The Life of Colonel Elmer Ellsworth, the North’s First Civil War Hero* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2021).

¹³ Ellsworth detailed his “Militia Bill” in an interview with the *New York Herald*, February 16, 1861. For more on the citizen-soldier ideal, militias, and attitudes toward them in American antebellum society, see Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 54; also Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775–1865* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1968). I expand on Ellsworth’s prewar ambitions to reform the militia in Gordon, “Novices in Warfare,” 194–223.

"AFFECT RECKLESSNESS"

Ellsworth did not return to Chicago to command his original company. Instead, he did something entirely new: he raised his regiment of New York City Firemen, intending to train them to be Zouaves.¹⁴ There are conflicting accounts about whether Ellsworth went to New York with "orders, without assistance or authority" or had Lincoln's approval.¹⁵ Nonetheless, he had apparently been thinking about this idea for some time, assuming that firemen would make excellent soldiers.¹⁶ Ellsworth "had this fire brigade on the brain," his friend and fellow Chicago Zouave Edward B. Knox explained, "and nothing would stop him." To Ellsworth, "the New York firemen were his beau ideals of soldiers in embryo."¹⁷

This "class of men," Ellsworth presumed, would be, in the words of a postwar account, "best adapted from their accustomed exposure to privations, for the Zouave discipline."¹⁸ "I want the New York Firemen," he

¹⁴ As already mentioned, Ellsworth's Fire Zouaves were not the only Zouave unit raised that spring of 1861 and styled after his original Chicago company. Rush C. Hawkins, who created the "First Regiment New York Zouaves," claimed to be the "first organizer of a Zouave company in this city." See *New York Herald*, April 19, 1861. See also *The Daily True Delta* (New Orleans, LA), January 23, 1861, which includes a story about raising a "Military Organization of the Firemen" in New Orleans. Another reason why Ellsworth did not return to Chicago may have been dissent within his original company and continuing resentments toward his command style. See E. M. Coates to Elmer Ellsworth, February 11 and 14, 1861, Box 1; John C. Revere Reynolds to Elmer E. Ellsworth, March 6 and 14, 1861, Box 2, Elmer Ellsworth Papers, Brown University, Providence, RI.

¹⁵ Eugene Arus Nash, *History of the Forty-Fourth New York Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (Chicago, IL: R. R. Donnelley, 1911), 4. For more on Ellsworth's decision to go to New York and raise a regiment of firemen, see Henry Wisner, "Annals of the War: Chapters of Unwritten History How Ellsworth Fell, The Tragic Episode in Alexandria at the Outbreak of War," in the *Weekly Times* (Philadelphia, PA), December 29, 1883; New York State, *Fifth Annual Report of the Chief of the Bureau of Military Statistics* (Albany, NY: C. Van Benthuysen Steam Printing House, 1868), 173-174; "Zouaves of Years Ago," the *Chicago Herald* reprinted in the *Troy Observer*, (Troy, NY) June 5, 1887, from Newspaper Clippings, Brownell Papers, MNHS; *Chicago Tribune*, May 29, 1887. According to novelist Henry Morford, Ellsworth "made many valuable acquaintances in New York" during his 1860 tour with the Chicago Zouaves, and "witnessed the bravery, agility and rattling character of the New York firemen." Henry Morford, *Days of Shoddy: A Novel of the Great Rebellion in 1861* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Person & Brothers, 1863), 142.

¹⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, May 25, 1861; reprinted in the *Illinois Daily State Journal* (Springfield, IL), May 28, 1861.

¹⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, May 29, 1887, Newspaper Clippings, Brownell Papers, MNHS.

¹⁸ "11th Regiment, New York Volunteer Infantry Historical Sketch," in State of New York, *Third Annual Report of the Bureau of Military Record of the State of New York* (Albany, NY: G. Wendell Printer, 1866), 105-106.

explained, “for there are no more effective men in the country, and none with whom I can do so much. They are sleeping on a volcano at Washington and I want men who can go into a fight now.”¹⁹ Others agreed. The *New York Daily Tribune*, for example, proclaimed: “No better material for soldiers than our firemen can be found in the world.”²⁰ Thus, despite Ellsworth’s years of experience as a drill master, and his repeated insistence that intensive training and strict discipline made effective soldiers, he now claimed he could transform these volunteers into “efficient Zouaves” in a matter of days.²¹

In his impatience to form the regiment, though, Ellsworth failed to make allowance for how challenging it would be to train them quickly.²² To assist him, Ellsworth recruited several of his original Chicago Zouaves to serve as first lieutenants; however, the men in the ranks selected their company captains, and “seemed to consider the only qualifications necessary for the office were their ability to do considerable ‘heavy swearing’ and put out fires.”²³ Company E initially did not have one of the original Chicago Zouaves assigned to it. The company’s first lieutenant was William R. W. Chambers, a popular fellow fireman, but tardy in joining the regiment due to the death of his young daughter. Pvt. Harrison H. Comings insisted though that this was an advantage for the company, motivating them to work all the more earnestly “to perfect themselves” in its complexities without an officer familiar with the drill to instruct them.²⁴

¹⁹ Quoted in Ingraham, *Elmer E. Ellsworth*, 127. I have been unable to find contemporary corroboration of this quote, so it may be apocryphal.

²⁰ *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1861.

²¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, April 18, 1861. See also *The New York Times*, April 18, 1861.

²² Morford, *Days of Shoddy*, 142.

²³ E. B. Knox, “How Ellsworth Died,” *Sunday Herald* (Chicago, IL), May 24, 1885, in Newspaper Clippings, Brownell Papers, MNHS. Former Chicago Zouaves in the 11th New York included 1st Lt. E. B. Knox (Co. A), 1st Lt. Lucius Larrabee (Co. B), 1st Lt. Edwin M. Coates (Co. C), 1st Lt. Freeman Conner (Co. D), 1st Lt. Frank Yates (Co. G), Charles A. Bell (Co. H), 1st Lt. George Harris Fergus (Co. K), and 1st Lt. Stephen Stryker (Co. B). See “Eleventh Infantry,” roster included in the *Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of New York for the Year 1899. Registers of the Sixth, Seventh, Seventh Veterans, Eighth, Ninth, and Eleventh Regiments of Infantry Transmitted to the Legislature February 5, 1900*. Serial No. 18 included in *Documents of the Assembly of the State of New York, One Hundred and Twenty-Third Session Vol. X, No. 58, Part 3*. (Albany, NY: James B. Lyon, State Printer, 1900), 1078, 1096, 1099, 1121, 1154, 1155, 1205, 1222 (hereafter referred to as AGNY). All ten of the company captains were members of the fire department. See Costello, *Our Fireman*, 718.

²⁴ Harrison H. Comings, *Personal Reminiscences of Co. E, N.Y. Fire Zouaves Better Known as Ellsworth’s Fire Zouaves*. (Malden, MA: J. Gould Tilden, 1886), 4. The death of

Firemen frequently had to rush headlong into danger, refusing to show or admit any trepidation. In many ways, they seemed to epitomize widely held idealized conceptions of nineteenth-century white male courage.²⁵ Firemen also had a reputation for rabblousing, bravado, and willfulness. Critics likened them to ruthless street gangs, fiercely competing against one another to put out fires that plagued the city.²⁶ The fact that a sizable contingency was Irish Catholic and working class only added to their perceived unfettered virility.²⁷ The English novelist Charles Dickens,

Chambers' two-year-old daughter, Minnie Eloise, who died on April 29, and chronic illness caused Chambers' continued absence in camp. Nonetheless, Company E would later gain recognition from Gen. William B. Franklin as the best company in the regiment. See William B. Franklin to S. Williams, August 9, 1861, 11th New York, Muster Rolls, Returns, Regimental Papers, RG 94, NARA. For more on Chambers, see *The New York Times*, April 30, 1861; *New York Daily Tribune*, May 2, 1861; A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 29, 1861; *New York Leader*, June 1, 1861; A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, June 19, 1861; *New York Leader*, June 1861 in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 92, 120. In the 1860 census, Chambers is listed as twenty-nine years old and a clerk with two children (including Minnie). He and his wife Mary ran a boarding house. See Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Population Schedule, New York Ward 10 District 4, New York, Records of the Bureau of the Census, RG 29, NARA, accessed via ancestry.com. Chambers' younger brother Thomas was private in Co. E and killed at the Battle of Bull Run. See AGNY, 1094; and Costello, *Our Firemen*, 489.

²⁵ Scholars have noted competing notions of manhood in flux during the long nineteenth century, demarcated by class, race, and ethnicity. See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Amy Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Lorien Foote, *The Gentleman and the Roughs: Violence, Honor and Manhood in the Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

²⁶ Pohanka, "Foreword," in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York Fire*, 9. Problems with the "disreputable element" of the firemen can be traced to their early beginnings in the late eighteenth century. In an 1887 history of the New York City Fire Department, the author recognized "the existence of a rowdy crowd" within the ranks, which remained despite repeated efforts to weed them out. This fighting between companies and "spirit of rowdyism" impaired "its character and efficiency." See Costello, *Our Firemen*, 115–116. Costello also maintained that a "superior class of men" composed the volunteer fire department (148).

²⁷ For more on Irish immigrants and their service in the Union army, see Susannah Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861–1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Damian Shiels, *The Irish in the American Civil War* (Dublin: The History Press of Ireland, 2013). David T. Gleeson offers an examination of Irish Confederates and a list of common Irish surnames in his appendix. Based on his list, there were approximately 208 men with Irish surnames in the 11th New York or just under 20 percent of the regiment. See David T. Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray: The Irish in the Confederate States of America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 225–227. For these Irish members, their identity seemed layered as immigrants, firemen, and Zouaves. No doubt, some of the negative attention they garnered came from the anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant sentiment of the time.

who observed them during a visit to the city, reasoned that “fireman’s service” as compared to that of the militia was more popular because it was “not so restrained and monotonous as that of the militiaman’s.” Noting their red flannel shirts, “leather helmet bound with brass,” black handkerchiefs tied in “jaunty tailor knots,” Dickens wrote: “It is evidently the manner with them to affect recklessness, so as not to appear to be drilled or drummed about to the detriment of their brave democratic freedom uniform.”²⁸

Dickens sensed the very real challenges in trying to make soldiers out of firemen. They were fearless; no one doubted that, and their bravery seemed to be part of their moral constitution. But that recklessness, so central to their self-identity, would prove to be a detriment to their wartime service. In his famous exposition of the golden mean in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Classical Greek philosopher Aristotle noted that an excess of fearlessness was actually rashness, and thus not properly modulated and genuine courage at all. In effect, just as a lack of courage could result in cowardice, too much boldness could get one into trouble, recklessly exacerbating a dangerous situation rather than effectively resolving it. In this regard, while these men were initially lauded for their fearless behavior as firemen, later concerns would emerge about their moral disposition and judgment – particularly their unruliness, their disobedience, and their impatience.²⁹ For instance, a later account of the unit explained that they would have been fine in the fight; it was the tediousness of camp life and drilling that was problematic for them: “To select such a regiment composed of elements so peculiar and so thoroughly permeated with the spirit of intrepid bravery – a spirit that regards the most heroic deeds in the light of everyday achievements – for the dull routine of permanent garrison duty, was a blunder.”³⁰

In truth, bold and brash men did not, and do not, always make effectual soldiers. This was a lesson yet to be learned in the early months of the Civil War. In April 1861, before any real fighting had commenced, it appeared

²⁸ Charles Dickens, “American Volunteer Fireman,” *All the Year Round*, March 16, 1861. For more on the political and economic culture of volunteer firemen, see Amy Greenberg, *Cause for Alarm: The Volunteer Fire Department in the Nineteenth-Century City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

²⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1115b.7 to 1116a.15), from “What Is Courage and How It Stands between Cowardice and Rashness,” *Aristotelian Philosophy*, translated by George Kotsalis, www.aristotelianphilosophy.com. See also Walsh, *Cowardice*, 5.

³⁰ Costello, *Our Firemen*, 722–723.

uncontested that men already proven to be fearless in peacetime would easily translate that same valor to the battlefield.³¹

"RESTLESS SPIRITS"

Soldiers, even the most seemingly courageous, require basic necessities: guns, uniforms, and rations for starters. Ellsworth had promised brand new Sharps rifles, bowie knives, and bright ostentatious uniforms, like that of "the famous Imperial Zouaves."³² Yet, obtaining these items quickly, and in adequate numbers and good quality, proved a serious challenge for local and state officials. The country was hastening to war at breakneck speed, but few Americans really had any experience at all dealing with the basic logistics of arming and preparing tens of thousands of volunteers for the battlefield.³³ One private likened their original uniform to a "butterfly costume," cheaply made with inadequate insulation for cool nights or dewy mornings.³⁴ When crates of used, rusty muskets were delivered to the regiment, the men balked at unpacking them. Colonel Ellsworth had to request assistance from Chester A. Arthur, New York's assistant quartermaster, who called in the local police and allegedly "put the ringleaders under arrest." The muskets were unpacked but never used.³⁵

³¹ In August 1860, there had been an attempt to create a Zouave militia unit of New York City firemen soon after the Chicago Zouaves' performance there. The "military duties" were not to "interfere with the business of extinguishing fires, but are intended to afford innocent amusement to the firemen; and by creating direct social intercourse between the members it is thought it would break down those strong company distinctions and animosities which now exist," to make them "more united, and harmonious." As the *New York World* explained, the purpose of such a unit "is to keep men out of the rum-shops," and "break them of playing cards" and "cursing and swearing." See *New York World*, August 14, 1860. As mentioned in my introduction, the opposite was also assumed to be true: cowards in peace would be cowards in war. See Walsh, "Cowardice Weakness or Infirmary," 501.

³² *The New York Times*, April 18, 1861. Sharps rifles were breech-loading guns with relatively long-range accuracy, designed for rapid firing and maneuvering. They proved expensive to manufacture and thus ended up reserved for elite sharpshooting units. See Fred Ray, "Picketing, Skirmishing and Sharpshooting," Essential Civil War Curriculum, www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com.

³³ A few days before their departure south, the regiment was also short on funds despite the thousands of dollars raised. See *The New York Times*, April 27, 1861.

³⁴ A. O. Alcock complained about the lack of proper clothing and arms repeatedly in his published letters to New York newspapers. See, for example, A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 10, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 11, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 53–54.

³⁵ This story about the Fire Zouaves refusing to open boxes of muskets is repeated in biographies of Arthur, including the most recent by Scott S. Greenberger, *The*

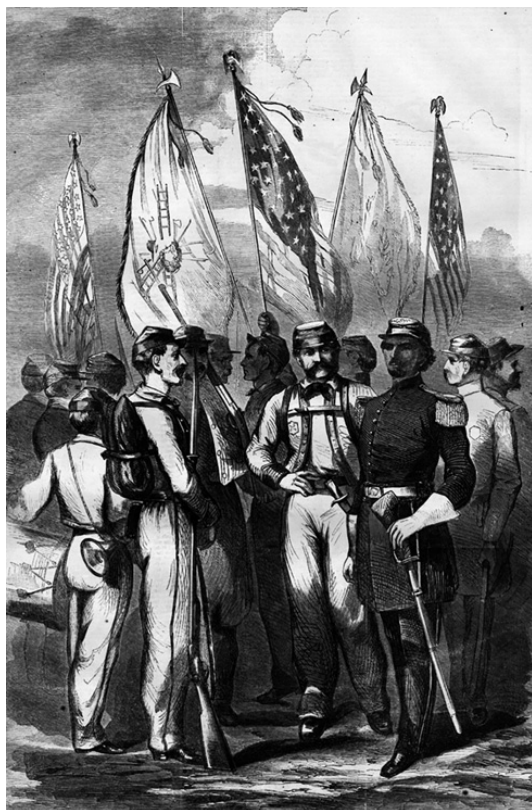


FIGURE 1.1 “Colonel Ellsworth’s New York Fire Zouaves.” Image courtesy of *Harper’s Weekly*, May 18, 1861.

As they waited for their promised Sharps rifles, there were reports that “great dissatisfaction exists among our gallant volunteer firemen, that no arms have been furnished them.” *The New York Times*, though, insisted: “They will never desert – no fireman would do that – but they declare they will not go on till they have something better than their bare fists to fight with.”³⁶

Unexpected President: The Life and Times of Chester A. Arthur (New York: DeCapo Press, 2017), 52. These biographers claim that Arthur called in local police, but this is not verified by any contemporary sources. See also “Ellsworth Was a ‘Golden Boy’: Death Made Him a Martyr of the North,” in *New York State and the Civil War* Vol. 2, No. 1 (June 1962): 10.

³⁶ *The New York Times*, April 29, 1861.

Public pressure was mounting to leave quickly for Washington. *The New York Sunday Mercury* demanded that the regiment be placed "in the position they ask for. That is – *the nearest to the enemies of their country* and face to foe with the bragging, yellow-faced Southern traitors, if they *dare* to face honest men! We fear not the result."³⁷ Ellsworth himself pleaded with local officials to allow his regiment to head south immediately. Brig. Gen. Charles Gates, who had warned New York Governor Edwin D. Morgan to hold off dispatching volunteers too hastily, made an exception for the Fire Zouaves, reasoning that "it is composed of many enthusiastic, restless spirits who will be governed much better out of the city of New York than in it."³⁸

It was also starting to prove a mixed blessing that the regiment had a close relationship with the city's major newspapers on all sides of the political spectrum. Ellsworth had shown himself quite adept at manipulating his own public persona when he led the Chicago Zouaves, although he sometimes withstood vicious attacks by the press, too.³⁹ The Fire Zouaves counted five "Fire Editors" and two special artists in their ranks, including one who was a correspondent for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.⁴⁰ Pvt. Arthur O. Alcock served as Fire Editor for two separate Democratic newspapers, the *New York Leader* and the *New York Atlas*, both influential Democratic broadsides. Using two different pseudonyms, Alcock drafted lengthy letters to the papers

³⁷ *New York Sunday Mercury*, April 28, 1861. Emphasis from the original.

³⁸ Charles Gates to Edwin D. Morgan, April 26, 1861, quoted in "Ellsworth was a 'Golden Boy,'" 10.

³⁹ The Democratic press harshly criticized Ellsworth as pompous, uncouth and a greedy office-seeker. See Randall, *Col. Elmer Ellsworth*, 225–226; *Boston Herald*, March 6, 1861. No doubt much of this was due to his close affiliation with Lincoln.

⁴⁰ See *New York Daily Tribune*, April 29, 1861. A. O. Alcock mentioned that a "Leslie's artist" was "a member of Company C." See A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, April 30, 1861; *New York Atlas*, May 5, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 32. This was probably William F. or Wilbur F. Osler, who enlisted on April 20, 1861, but deserted on August 1, 1861. See AGNY, 1184. A drawing "sketched on the spot by Wilbur F. Osler," "The Ellsworth Zouaves Routing the Black Horse Cavalry" appeared in the *New York Illustrated News*, August 5, 1861. *Frank Leslie's* referenced its "artists in the field" on June 1, 1861, including Wilbur F. Osler. See *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, June 1, 1861. Sgt-Maj. Thomas F. Goodwin was also a "special artist" making sketches of the regiment. Alcock identified Goodwin as a "special artist" in his Letter to the Editor (May 13, 1861), *New York Atlas*, May 19, 1861 in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 63; see also AGNY, 1130. Goodwin was "Ex-Foreman for H and L Co. No. 15" and according to Alcock "thought much of by all." See his Letter to the Editor, April 30, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 5, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 37.

from the regiment's early beginnings.⁴¹ Two more reporters, Henry J. Wisner, with the conservative Republican *New York Times*, who was also Ellsworth's acting aide-de-camp, and Edward House, with the Democratic *New York Herald*, were essentially embedded within the unit.⁴²

With so many papers tracking them, the Fire Zouaves became avid consumers of news themselves. One member demanded copies of the *New York Sunday Mercury*: "The boys can't do without it. If you forget it, and I am shot; I will haunt you."⁴³ Another soldier, Pvt. John A. Smith (Co. H), "an ex-knight of the quill," agreed, stating that the *Mercury* in particular was "in great demand here." He explained: "It is meat and drink to the boys."⁴⁴ With the added media attention came a new nickname: Ellsworth's "Pet Lambs." Its origin is unclear, but the moniker circulated widely among the men themselves and beyond New York

⁴¹ Alcock was Welsh, born around 1820, enlisting in the 11th New York as a private. He was captured at the First Battle of Bull Run, imprisoned, and paroled. He later served in the 10th New York Volunteer Infantry, also known as "The National Guard Zouaves," suffering a leg wound at Spotsylvania Courthouse on May 10, 1864, and dying a month later in a Washington hospital. For additional biographical details about Alcock, see Pohanka, "Forward," to Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 11–16. Led by Democratic editor John Clancy, the *New York Leader* became the principal organ of Tammany Hall. See Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The Nineteenth Century New York City Neighborhood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 171. John Clancy further had served in the fire department. See Castello, *Our Firemen*, 166. The *New York Atlas*, which Alcock wrote for too, was also a Sunday-only paper with a Democratic bent. Walt Whitman was an early contributor, but he eventually fell out of favor with its editors. One of those editors, Anson Herrick, later became a Democratic congressman. See Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690–1872* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1873), 338–339; Zachary Turpin, "'Manly Health and Training' and the *New York Atlas*," Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, eds., *The Walt Whitman Archive*, www.whitmanarchive.org.

⁴² Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 82. Henry Wisner later recalled that Ellsworth "impressed me also into his service" as his "military secretary, with the rank and uniform of first lieutenant" soon after his arrival in New York city. See Wisner, "Annals" in *Weekly Times* (Philadelphia, PA), December 29, 1883. However, Wisner is not listed on the 11th New York's roster, nor is there any other proof that he had a formal commission with the unit, although it may be that it was delayed (like other commissions) and he left the unit before receiving it.

⁴³ "Company C., Ellsworth's Fire Zouaves," Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 8, 1861, in William B. Styple, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War: Soldier Correspondence to the New York Sunday Mercury* (Gettysburg, PA: Belle Grove, 2000), 19.

⁴⁴ John A. Smith, Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury* (May 9, 1861), in Styple, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War* 18. "ex-knight of the quill," from *The New York Times*, August 20, 1861. Smith briefly served as secretary to Colonel Leoser after Bull Run. He resigned in October with the rank of second lieutenant. See AGNY, 1201.

City.⁴⁵ Contrasted with the Fire Zouaves' reputation for impudence, "pet lambs" implied innocence and coddling; but the term also conveyed a chilling foreboding: lambs, even pet ones, can be sacrificed and slaughtered.

The media attention, both positive and negative, heightened the regiment's eagerness to rush to war. It had only been a matter of weeks, but Ellsworth and his Zouaves were convinced they were ready for war.

"PLAYING SOLDIER LONG ENOUGH"

On the morning of Sunday, April 28, a large and boisterous crowd gathered in front of the regiment's temporary headquarters on Canal Street. The "entire Fire Department" turned out to escort their comrades through the city to board a steamer heading south. But there was bureaucratic "red tapeism," and the men still lacked guns and other accouterments.⁴⁶ Chafing at the delay, Ellsworth pronounced that his regiment had "been playing soldier long enough" and he deemed them ready to begin "the actual duties of a soldier's life."⁴⁷

The next day, they were off, their departure creating a memorable spectacle.⁴⁸ The Republican *New York Daily Tribune* proclaimed it: "a proud day for the New-York Firemen." More than 1,000 Fire Zouaves,

⁴⁵ For example, on May 13, 1861, *The Sun* stated: "The 'Pet Lambs' is the soubriquet by which the New York Fire Zouaves are favorably known in Washington. They are fast improving in discipline and their officers predict that the 'Pet Lambs' will make their mark in the military history of the country." See *The Sun* (New York), May 13, 1861. See also John A. Smith, Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 9, 1861, in Styple, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*, 18; "L.B.," Letter to the Editor, *New York Herald*, May 12, 1861. Later, they would be called "Lincoln's pet lambs." See *The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette*, May 23, 1861. Brian Pohanka claims that Ellsworth himself dubbed the regiment his "pet lambs," but this author has not found any evidence of this. See Pohanka, "Forward," Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 10.

⁴⁶ "Red tapeism" from *The New York Times*, April 30, 1861. Although George Strong described seeing the regiment fully armed with "Sharp's rifles and revolvers," by the time they departed New York on April 29, members later complained that they never received them in their list of grievances after Bull Run. See *The New York Times*, August 15, 1861; and Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds. *The Diary of George Templeton Strong: The Civil War, 1860-1865* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), April 29, 1861, 137. See also Robert Campbell to Charles G. Myers, April 1861, Telegrams Sent and Received by the Governor's Office, 1861-1862, Box 1, Series A4149, Bureau of Military Statistics, NYSA. *New York Daily Tribune*, April 28 and 29, 1861; *New York Herald*, April 28 and 29, 1861.

⁴⁷ *New York Daily Tribune*, April 29, 1861.

⁴⁸ All the major New York newspapers commented on the parade (and its initial delay). See for example the *New York Tribune*, April 28, 1861; and the *New York Herald*, April 28, 1861.

“the bone and sinew of the city,” marched smartly through the city streets, escorted by police and some 5,000 fellow firemen.⁴⁹ Clad in loose-fitting gray uniforms, with bright red shirts and red kepis, they stepped in cadence past cheering crowds. In their rear followed fourteen “colored servants” “attached to the regiment,” assisting with menial tasks and chores.⁵⁰ The sense of exhilaration and expectation was palatable. *The New York Times* described the firemen “in their highest animal spirits, and all seemed happy at the prospect of soon having a set-to with the Secessionists.”⁵¹ “You can scarcely conceive,” one private later recalled, “the excitement that occurred in New York at this time.”⁵² George Templeton Strong, who watched the parade from atop an omnibus, was unimpressed with their marching, yet judged the regiment “a rugged set” who “will fight hard if judiciously handled.”⁵³

At various locations, the Fire Zouaves halted to ceremoniously receive stands of colors, including a white silk banner from the Fire Department, displaying “all the implements pertaining to the fireman’s calling – hooks, ladders, trumpets, hats, lanterns, torches &c.”⁵⁴ There were also specially designed banners from Augusta Astor, the wife of wealthy financier and real estate magnate John Jacob Astor III, and one from the actress Laura Keene.⁵⁵ There seemed enough flags, the *New York Daily Tribune* observed, for the men to “wrap themselves up in American flags if they

⁴⁹ There were also police, a “melodious band,” and miscellaneous citizens marching alongside them. Descriptions of the parade from the *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1861, and the *New York Herald*, April 30, 1861.

⁵⁰ *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1861. It is unclear who these “servants” were, their purpose nor their eventual fate, but Brownell later wrote that Ellsworth had a personal “colored servant” who helped dress him. See Brownell quoted in unnamed newspaper clipping, February 2, 1886, Newspaper clippings, Brownell Papers, MNHS. For more on the Zouaves’ original uniform, see Richard Warren and Roger Sturckle, “The 11th New York Volunteer Infantry (Ellsworth’s First New York Zouaves), 1861–62,” *Military Collector & Historian* Vol. 39 (1987): n.p.

⁵¹ *The New York Times*, April 30, 1861.

⁵² Comings, *Personal Reminiscences*, 1.

⁵³ Nevins and Thomas, eds., *Diary of George Templeton Strong*, April 29, 1861, 137. Strong also observed: “As a regiment of the line, they will be weak, but they are the very men to deal with the mob of Baltimore.”

⁵⁴ *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1861. See also Christopher S. Morton, “‘The Star Spangled Banner in Triumph Shall Wave’: The New York City Fire Department’s Presentation Color Carried by Ellsworth’s New York Zouaves, 1861,” *Military Collector and Historian* Vol. 57, No. 2 (Summer 2005): 58–60.

⁵⁵ The flag from Laura Keene had the inscription: “From Captain Laura Keene to her Brother Zouaves.” Keene’s New York theater featured a play called the “Seven Sisters” which included twenty-five women performing Ellsworth’s stylized Zouave drill with Keene as commander. See *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1861.

choose."⁵⁶ The martial pageantry fit the pattern Ellsworth had mastered with his Chicago Zouaves on their national tour the year prior: it was a public celebration of citizen soldiery.

Military officials, local politicians, and leaders of the fire department addressed the men with rousing speeches.⁵⁷ W. H. Wickham, the Fire Department President, professed: "You have established a character for noble daring which has received the admiration and the tribute of the people." He urged them to "go forth to exhibit your gallantry and your energies in another field," and enter "where the fight is the thickest and the bullets fly the fastest."⁵⁸ Kentuckian Cassius M. Clay recounted a visit to Russia where he was asked: "how was it that a government as extensive as ours could be conducted without the aid of a standing army?" Clay responded that the United States had in fact the "largest standing army in the world," in its citizenry. "We are all soldiers here," he proclaimed, "ever ready to defend the honor for the flag under which we live."⁵⁹

A noticeably tired Ellsworth spoke too, declaring his pride in commanding "such a gallant body of men" despite the short association he had had with them. "He knew," he told the crowd, "that brave hearts beat within their breasts and felt confident that if the opportunity offered, they would do credit not only to the firemen but to the city of New York." Accepting one of the banners, he vowed: "So long as any of us live – so long as one single arm responds to the promptings of the heart – this flag will not be disgraced by any act of the New York Fire Zouaves." He admitted that his men would "go into [the] field without discipline, it is true, without drill." Nevertheless, he assured the crowd that they would more than compensate for these deficiencies and make the city and fire department proud. He promised to return from war with their "colors as pure and unsullied as they are now."⁶⁰

Most press accounts were glowing. "No class of men," the *New York Herald* declared, "could be better calculated to go through the fatigue of campaign than Colonel Ellsworth's Zouaves. Thick set, rugged and tough

⁵⁶ *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1861.

⁵⁷ Speakers included: Gen. John A. Dix, Kentucky politician Cassius M. Clay, and "Board of Fire Commissioners, Supervisors, Councilmen and others." See *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1861; also *New York Herald*, April 29, 1861.

⁵⁸ *New York Herald*, April 30, 1860. Wickham later became Democratic mayor of New York City. See *The New York Times*, January 14, 1893. See also *New York Leader*, April 30, 1861.

⁵⁹ Ellsworth invited Clay to address the regiment. See *New York Herald*, April 30, 1861.

⁶⁰ Varying versions of Ellsworth's remarks appeared in the *New York Herald*, April 30, 1861; *The New York Times*, April 30, 1861; and the *New York Herald*, April 30, 1861.

fellows they are; capable of bearing any amount of hardship." As brave and hardy men, they would, the *Herald* predicted, excel in battle; and if they failed, it would not be for lack of valor.⁶¹ Novelist and journalist Henry Morford later affirmed that the intention was for the Fire Zouaves, "to be *picked men*, ready for any service and capable of reflecting honor on the city that sent them forth." Other regiments, "composed of miscellaneous material and of men whose courage and endurance had never been proved, might cover themselves with glory or fall into comparative disgrace"; but firemen were a proven commodity and there was no questioning their bravery; at least that was what nearly everyone assumed at the time.⁶²

Still, alongside these effusive public testimonies affirming the Fire Zouaves' gallantry were disquieting accounts of illicit behavior and challenges to their loyalty. Their insubordination over unpacking the crates of muskets was just one example. Fire Editor A. O. Alcock recognized that there were some in the city hoping to see the firemen disgrace "themselves in some way." But, he attested, except for a handful of "black sheep," the unit as a whole was strong and ready for the fight.⁶³ The *New York Leader*, in response to the doubters, noted the large number of enlistments in the unit as a counter to anyone that questioned the firemen's patriotism. "They know," the paper affirmed, "the hardship they are expected to endure. They offer their lives, and look to the citizens of New York for the means to get them into active service."⁶⁴

It was becoming clear that Ellsworth's Zouaves represented more than the city's volunteer fire department: in those early, heady days of war, they seemed to embody the city's patriotism and devotion to the Union cause. The *New York Herald* had predicted that the regiment would "reflect the infinite credit on the great commercial metropolis of the United States, whether in a bold and daunted front against the enemy, or as good citizens and respectable members of society."⁶⁵ This was both a boon and burden,

⁶¹ *New York Herald*, April 30, 1861.

⁶² Morford, *Days of Shoddy*, 197–198.

⁶³ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, April 30, 1861, *New York Atlas*, published May 5, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 36. Alcock later referred to a handful of soldiers in the guardhouse, calling them "black sheep," and claimed that they never belonged to the Fire Department. See A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, *New York Atlas*, May 16, 1861, published May 19, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 70. For another reference to the "misconduct of a few black sheep" from the regiment, see *The New York Times*, May 12, 1861.

⁶⁴ *New York Leader*, April 27, 1861.

⁶⁵ *New York Herald*, April 22, 1861.

and something, at least on the surface, the men of the unit welcomed and celebrated. Private Alcock encapsulated this sentiment when he described "the whole country" watching them, expecting "great things."⁶⁶

Near the end of their joyous parade, the regiment came to a sudden stop. Ellsworth had received stern orders from the Governor's office disallowing his regiment from formal mustering into service due to "an excess of men," and thus, requiring another delay in their departure.⁶⁷ The colonel quickly consulted with military officials and made a special plea to Maj. Gen. John Wool, who was reviewing the regiment as it passed from the balcony of a hotel. Wool agreed to make an exception, issuing an order "directing the mustering of the companies in Washington, notwithstanding the excess of their numbers."⁶⁸ Wool later recalled that he was loathe to be "the first to check the noble and patriotic enthusiasm of the citizens of New York."⁶⁹ The crowd cheered, and the Fire Zouaves excitedly resumed their march forward. "But for Gen. Wool," the *New York Daily Tribune* speculated, "the firemen would have been thus turned back in Broadway the other day." The paper speculated: "Who can calculate the moral effect of such a disastrous procedure?"⁷⁰

While the *Tribune's* remark pertained specifically to the mustering of the regiment at this early stage in their own city, it ominously foreshadowed what was to come on the battlefield; and as the question implies, calculating the moral effect of a disastrous action is not always an easy or simple matter.

"BE AS GOOD SOLDIERS AS BRAVE MEN"

Escorted to the pier, the regiment "had to run the gauntlet of firemen, every one of whom felt it to be his bounden duty to shake the hand of every soldier and remark 'Go in Lemons'" – contemporary slang for attacking

⁶⁶ *New York Leader*, April 27, 1861. See also A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 2, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 4, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 49.

⁶⁷ *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1861. It was not just the excessive size of the regiment that threatened their departure, but also their lacking "the original Roll of enlistment at headquarters." See Report of the Zouave Fire Regiment Fund Committee (April 30, 1861), May 27, 1861; also Charles W. Sandford to John Meredith Read, April 29, 1861, Telegrams Received and Sent by the Governor's Office, Box 1, Series A4149, Bureau of Military Statistics, NYSA.

⁶⁸ *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1861. See also *The New York Times*, April 30, 1861.

⁶⁹ Wool quoted in "Ellsworth was a 'Golden Boy,'" 11.

⁷⁰ *New York Daily Tribune*, May 3, 1861.

"with full force or earnestly."⁷¹ After this frenzied and final farewell, the Zouaves boarded the steamship *Baltic* and began sailing southward toward Annapolis, Maryland. This vessel, originally designed as a luxury liner for transatlantic travel, was meant to accommodate 600 passengers, not 1,000 soldiers.⁷² Private Alcock described his comrades having "to camp as best they could" in any space they could find.⁷³ Finding the air below deck "sickening in the extreme," twenty-one-year-old Pvt. Alfred Vaughn opted to sleep in the open air, with his thin government-issued blanket for cover.⁷⁴ There also were no rations; when the order came halting the regiment's departure from the city, Quartermaster Arthur had canceled stocking the ship with food. Now with hungry men swarming the ship's decks, Arthur frantically arranged to deliver the necessary supplies.⁷⁵

Even in transport, Ellsworth sought to get better control of his raw troops. He ordered company drills on the upper deck and posted guards throughout the ship, but the men were more interested in amusing themselves. They smoked, played cards, told raucous jokes, and sang, well into the early morning hours. At one point, it appeared that an enemy boat came close to attack, but this proved a false alarm. Then a rumor spread that several Fire Zouaves had been arrested and were in irons. This, too, was untrue. By the time they debarked in Annapolis on May 2, an officer from the 13th New York Infantry observed that Ellsworth's men "seemed highly pleased to get off the vessel. Some say they have fared well on their passage, and some tell a different story." He remarked: "I have no doubt

⁷¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1861; for the meaning of "Go in Lemons," see *The New Excelsior Dictionary, Containing Every Useful Word in the English Language with Its Correct Spelling, Accurate Pronunciation, and Exact Meaning According to Webster and Worcester. To which is Added an Encyclopedia of Valuable Information, Also a Complete Supplement of New Words* (Nashua, NH: C. C. Parker, 1889), 377.

⁷² John H. Morrison, *History of American Steam Navigation* (New York: W. F. Sametz, 1903), 412, 419. Morrison writes that SS *Baltic* and its sister ship SS *Artic* "had large passenger accommodations, the cabins being large and roomy"; and "elaborate" "saloons." During the Civil War, these steamers were "chartered by the North Atlantic S.S. Co. to the Quartermaster's Bureau of the War Department" (419).

⁷³ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, April 30, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 5, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 32.

⁷⁴ Alfred Vaughn, Letter to the Editor, May 6, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 12, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 40. Twenty-one-year-old Vaughn later deserted on September 19, 1861. See AGNY, 1212. Morford claimed that the only time the unit had done any drilling prior to leaving New York was "a single and very short attempt" "in the facings." See Morford, *Days of Shoddy*, 265.

⁷⁵ "Ellsworth was a 'Golden Boy,'" 11–12.

that there are many among them who would fare well if there was any fare to be had."⁷⁶ The *Baltic*'s purser told a reporter that the New Yorkers had had a "lively time on board."⁷⁷ Ellsworth's attempts at transforming the firemen into obedient soldiers would only continue.

The regiment marched off the boat and onto the Naval Academy's parade ground for lunch. There they listened to another speaker trying to advise them on what lay ahead. The officer, identified as "Lt. Hamilton," was probably Lt. Col. Schuyler Hamilton, the grandson of Alexander Hamilton and Military Secretary to Winfield Scott. Lieutenant Hamilton told them that no one "doubted their bravery, but many feared about their order and discipline, and they must show now that they could be as good soldiers as brave men." They cheered in reply.⁷⁸

The Zouaves packed up and resumed their journey, this time on train cars to Washington, DC. Lieutenant Hamilton's warnings proved fruitless. Just a few hours later, Private Vaughn recalled a "scene" that "makes me blush with shame to write it." As the train passed a depot manned by members of the 69th New York Infantry Regiment, a few Fire Zouaves jumped off the cars to raid the "poor men" selling various items to the passing soldiers. They returned gleefully weighed down with "boxes of cigars, loaves of bread, and anything they could lay their hands on. Not even the poor people's coffee was spared." Colonel Ellsworth quickly "paid for it all and the men were allowed to go unpunished." Vaughn, however, insisted that the culprits were not members of the Fire Department, "nor ever did; and I think it very hard that good men united in a good cause, should have their reputation and that of their Colonel and regiments ruined by evil geniuses, who go about raving pillaging, destroying and blasting the fair fruits of peace and industry, mercy to satisfy and [sic]

⁷⁶ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 7, 1861.

⁷⁷ *New York Daily Tribune*, May 3, 1861. For more on their voyage on the *Baltic* see A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 2, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 4, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, ed., *With the 11th New York*, 50–51. See also A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, April 30, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 5, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 32, 35; and the *New York Herald*, May 5, 1861. Alcock clarified the rumor of arrests by explaining: "On Wednesday night (May 1), the store room was broken open by one of the ship's crew, who attempted to sell stolen liquor to the me at exorbitant prices. He was speedily discovered, the[n] placed in irons. No rations of whiskey were distributed at all during the passage." See A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 2, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 4, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 51.

⁷⁸ *The New York Times*, May 3, 1861. See also Alfred Vaughn, Letter to the Editor, May 6, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 12, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 41; and *New York Herald*, May 7, 1861.

insatiable thirst for that which is wrong.” Vaughn, whose letter appeared in the *New York Atlas*, wanted people at home to “know that these men do not belong to the fire department, and that they may still be proud of their firemen, who are all eager to see these blackguards drummed out of the regiment.”⁷⁹

Colonel Ellsworth was finding that transforming firemen into obedient soldiers was far more difficult than he had anticipated. During the brief time he commanded the unit, he quickly gained their trust and respect. On the surface at least, he was “an excellent fit for the firemen.” Private Alcock explained that his “intrepid, dashing character” suited them well: “They are used to such, and nothing else would content them.” But as Ellsworth kept trying to instill “perfect discipline,” he kept clashing with the firemen’s distaste for conformity.⁸⁰

“DISCREDITABLE MANNER”

The Zouaves’ antics only continued during their brief stay in Washington, DC. They arrived after dark on Thursday, May 2, and marched by the White House “with a long, springing step, giving their ‘Hi! Hi! Hi!’ when cheered as they passed.”⁸¹ One member of the unit spotted President Abraham Lincoln watching them from a window but was unable to “distinguish his features.”⁸² A few days later, Ellsworth drilled his men near the Capitol building. When President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of War William Seward came to observe them, the Zouaves crowded eagerly around the president as he shook hands and answered their inquiries.

⁷⁹ Alfred Vaughn, Letter to the Editor, May 6, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 12, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 41–42. The *New York Herald* reported another incident of insubordination at Annapolis where Fire Zouaves mingled with soldiers from other units: “Though under arms and in uniform the ‘fire-laddie’ spirit manifested itself in all its brilliancy. Dozens of them brushed by the guards stationed here and there; and in one instance, being repulsed at the bayonet’s point, they raised a window, about four feet from the ground, and clambering in, fireman fashion, bolted through the building to another portion of the yard.” The reporter predicted: “After a month’s duty they will know better how to conduct themselves.” See *New York Daily Herald*, May 7, 1861.

⁸⁰ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, April 30, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 5, 1861, Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 37; and A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 2, 1861, *New York Leader*, (May 1861), accessed via museum.dmna.ny.gov.
⁸¹ *The Sunbury Gazette* (Sunbury, PA), May 11, 1861.

⁸² Alfred Vaughn, Letter to the Editor, May 6, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 12, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 42; see also *New York Daily Tribune*, May 3 and 5, 1861; *New York Herald*, May 7, 1861.

Private Vaughn wrote: "He looked very well, but at the same time rather feeble."⁸³ The president's obvious interest in the regiment only increased public curiosity and added to already high expectations. "I doubt," one Zouave later recalled, "if any body of men ever felt the responsibility resting upon them."⁸⁴

Within the crucible of that public pressure, the Zouaves' bad behavior worsened. Temporarily quartered in the Capitol Building, they were soon "having a good time."⁸⁵ Members held raucous mock sessions and swung from ropes from the unfinished rotunda. There were also accounts of them stealing, carousing in the city streets, and deliberately setting fires so they could put them out. The *Philadelphia Press* reported: "They have had two days of extensive, expensive and extreme fight, fun and frolic."⁸⁶ This devil-may-care attitude fueled their critics and exacerbated their officers' frustration. Gen. Winfield Scott relayed his displeasure through then Maj. Irvin McDowell, temporarily halting their shenanigans with some sort of "treaty."⁸⁷ Colonel Ellsworth tried to assure the Zouave Fire Regiment Fund Committee that "the boys have generally behaved well," admitting that there were "twenty exceptional characters" who were a problem. He predicted that, "when rid of these [we] will have a regiment creditable to your City, and I trust to myself."⁸⁸

Less than a week later, however, Gen. Joseph K. Mansfield, commander of the Department of Washington, had to remind Colonel Ellsworth that he was "entitled to fuel," but that he would have to be "careful not to burn fences, as some have already been burnt."⁸⁹ A Pennsylvania newspaper recounted that the "quiet Massachusetts" troops quartered nearby "don't fancy them, especially as they go, eat, or sleep, where they please, 'an' mind yer don't say nuffing about it, hay!"⁹⁰ An unnamed soldier from the 71st

⁸³ Alfred Vaughn, Letter to the Editor, May 6, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 12, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 42. See also *New York Daily Tribune*, May 5, 1861.

⁸⁴ Comings, *Personal Reminiscences*, 2.

⁸⁵ "J.D.," Letter to the Editor, May 3, 1861, *New York Herald*, May 7, 1861. "J.D." was a member of the unit but there are too many names on the roster with those initials to know who he was.

⁸⁶ *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA), May 7, 1861; and *New York Daily Tribune*, May 5 and 8, 1861. See also Kelley, "The Assassination of Ellsworth," Vol. 1, No. 4 (July 21, 1886), in Newspaper Clippings, Frank E. Brownell Papers, MNHS.

⁸⁷ *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA), May 7, 1861.

⁸⁸ Elmer E. Ellsworth to James Kelly and "Gents of Committee," May 4, 1861, *The New York Times*, May 8, 1861.

⁸⁹ Joseph K. Mansfield to Elmer E. Ellsworth, May 9, 1861, Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

⁹⁰ *The Sunbury Gazette* (Sunbury, PA), May 11, 1861.

New York Volunteer Infantry depicted more sordid behavior: "Some unworthy members of the New York Fire Zouaves are creating a great disturbance here. They break into houses, and in some instances have outraged defenseless women. So great was the disorder among them that Colonel Ellsworth was compelled to threaten some of them with death."⁹¹ Pvt. Alfred Vaughn admitted: "Some of the men have committed outrages in the city and some are to be punished."⁹²

Stories of their bad behavior made it into the Confederate press, too, only adding to their growing reputation as lowly criminals. The *Alexandria Gazette and Virginia Advertiser* noted the Fire Zouaves' arrival in Washington, DC, recognizing their ability as "efficient agents in extinguishing material combustion," but wondered if they could "subdue the concealed fires which are burning in the minds of our innocent, lawful and peaceable citizens." The paper added: "Several members of this regiment were arrested today by the police for disorderly and riotous conduct."⁹³ A negative story from the *Richmond Examiner*, reprinted in a Brooklyn newspaper, alleged that the Fire Zouaves were "the lowest refuse of New York city." Scoffing at their uniforms, the Confederate paper was decidedly unimpressed, dismissing them as looking dirty and "worn six months in some pork packing establishment." The *Examiner* stated: "If you were to meet one of them in a lonesome place, you would instinctively produce your wallet and hand it over. Such are the kind of men that Gen. Scott proposes to let loose upon the soil of his native South."⁹⁴ In another example, one of the "secession dailies" ridiculed the Fire Zouaves as illiterate. The *New York Leader* responded: "As our firemen went to fight for their country's honor, and not to be sneered at by a cowardly press it is rather contemptible in any man to cast slurs upon them because they cannot handle a pen as readily as a bayonet."⁹⁵ The firemen's celebrated reputation for brash fearlessness, which initially seemed to affirm their potential as soldiers, was quickly turning them into symbols of immorality.

⁹¹ Dated May 5, 1861, this letter appeared in the *New York Herald* on May 10, 1861.

⁹² Alfred Vaughn to the Editor, May 6, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 12, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 43.

⁹³ *Alexandria Gazette and Virginia Advertiser*, May 4, 1861.

⁹⁴ *Times Union* (Brooklyn, NY), May 9, 1861. The bad press cross-pollinated: For example, the *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, May 13, 1861 reprinted a story from *The New York Times* which recounted the Fire Zouaves "ransacking the Capitol like so many rats."

⁹⁵ *New York Leader*, May 1861.

On Tuesday evening, May 7, 1861, Ellsworth's Fire Zouaves were officially mustered into service in the US Army with formal designation as the 11th New York Volunteer Infantry. Ellsworth marched the men to the parade ground near the uncompleted Washington Monument and addressed his regiment candidly in a "lengthy speech." He praised them for their "fine appearance and proficiency of drill," assuring them that promises to supply tents, new rifles, and new uniforms would be met.⁹⁶ But he also reminded the Zouaves that he had specially selected firemen because of their reputation for "bravery, intrepidity and brawn, and how much was expected of them by their country."⁹⁷ Now he sought a greater commitment from them, stipulating that they must agree to serve for the duration of the war. "Some of the men blinked," the *Tribune* recorded, "but a vast majority seemed ecstatic with delight." Ellsworth warned them: "any who didn't want to fight who would like to go home in irons and be sneered at as cowards, to stand out and he would accommodate them instantar [sic]."⁹⁸ "There were some complaints and objections," Private Alcock reported, but in the end "all but a dozen responded cheerfully to the obligation."⁹⁹ Those who refused, *The New York Times* pronounced, were men whose "reasons for leaving were not of a character to reflect upon their courage." "The remainder," the paper stated, "cheerfully took the oath of service for the war."¹⁰⁰

Ellsworth additionally promised to discipline any members who continued to tarnish the unit's reputation. Apparently, just as he sent a squad of men to round up the guilty parties, Generals Lorenzo Thomas and Irvin

⁹⁶ *New York Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1861.

⁹⁷ *The New York Times*, May 11, 1861.

⁹⁸ The *Tribune* inaccurately claimed: "Nary [a] man obeyed." See *New York Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1861. This was a point of contention until the unit's disbandment in June 1862, with some claiming that, when they left New York, they were "sworn in" as a three-month regiment. This was the assumption of disgruntled members, particularly after Bull Run, but there is no documentation before their formal mustering in in May 1861. See Costello, *Our Firemen*, 718.

⁹⁹ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 10, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 11, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 52. In a letter on May 29, Alcock said only three men refused to be sworn in "for the war" and were then "returned to New York, looking very small, and doubtless feeling so, amidst the jeers of their more enthusiastic and patriotic companions." See A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 29, 1861, *New York Leader*, June 1, 1861.

¹⁰⁰ *The New York Times*, May 11, 1861. The *Times* described Ellsworth addressing the men in a "pithy, stirring manner upon the duties of soldiers in the present crisis, and the history and circumstances of the organization of the corps was related," and further claimed that nine men left rather than twelve.

McDowell arrived to formally swear in the regiment. President Lincoln, with his son Tad and Senators Henry Wilson and Edward Baker, also appeared to witness the mustering in and review of the troops. "The expulsion of the men" the *Tribune* reported, "was postponed."¹⁰¹

Publicly, Colonel Ellsworth and his supporters refused to concede that recruiting firemen had been a mistake. It was inevitable, he and others argued, that in a unit of more than a thousand men there would be *some* bad actors. He admitted that he had had no chance to properly screen volunteers and, thus, a small minority were "conducting themselves in a discreditable manner." "It is the intention of the regiment," he vowed publicly, "and my own determination, to free ourselves by the most summary process of all such characters, the moment we can identify them."¹⁰² Ellsworth paid for damaged property out of his own pocket and issued new orders posting more guards and prohibiting members from roaming the streets without authorization. He further appealed to victims to come forward and identify the perpetrators.¹⁰³ When news stories circulated that more than 150 Fire Zouaves were sent home "in disgrace," Ellsworth assured his fiancée Carrie Spafford that these reports were "false." "We have sent back 6 and the men do well," adding proudly: "The President and Sec. of War say my regiment is without exception the best [in] the service of the U.S."¹⁰⁴

Just who these culprits were, and what if anything happened to them, is unclear. Colonel Ellsworth claimed more than once that he had arrested the guilty parties and punished them.¹⁰⁵ Pvt. John Smith castigated them as "scamps, who crept into our ranks before leaving New York" who had "committed outrages here." But he also insisted, as did others, that: "they have been taken, and will be sent home in irons. Five of the vagabonds will

¹⁰¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1861.

¹⁰² *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 6, 1861. See also *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA), May 6, 1861.

¹⁰³ Elmer E. Ellsworth to Stephen W. Stryker, "Regular Orders No. 9," May 5, 1861, Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth Collection, NYSSM; See also Elmer E. Ellsworth, "Special Orders," May 6, 1861, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, accessed via gilderlehrman.org; *New York Daily Tribune*, May 5, 1861; Frank Brownell Interview in *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 3, 1888, in Newspaper Clippings, Brownell Papers, MNHS.

¹⁰⁴ *Cleveland Daily Herald*, May 8, 1861; Elmer E. Ellsworth to Carrie Spafford, May 10, 1861, Ellsworth Papers, ALPL. See also Ingraham, *Elmer E. Ellsworth*, 136.

¹⁰⁵ Elmer E. Ellsworth to Stephen W. Stryker, "Regular Orders No. 9," May 5, 1861, Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth Collection, New York State Library, Albany, NY. See also *New York Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1861.

be turned over to the civil authorities."¹⁰⁶ Another Fire Zouave assured readers of the *Sunday Mercury*: "We had six bad-minded men in the regiment and they came very near disgracing us all." At least three of them disguised themselves as firemen, somehow gaining possession of the prized firemen badges. But when they were discovered, "they were drummed out of the regiment, and will be sent to New York to-morrow in irons."¹⁰⁷ Rosters and other surviving military documents fail to corroborate these assertions. There were a handful of men discharged or dismissed in May from the unit, some deemed unfit for active service due to physical disabilities, but nothing points to formal arrests (civil or military), court-martials, or other punitive proceedings.¹⁰⁸

Ellsworth continued to do his utmost to ensure that his regiment was free of any miscreants. He still clung to the notion that firemen made the best soldiers and that all they needed was the chance to show it.

"NOT DANDY SOLDIERS"

Soon an opportunity arose to prove the Fire Zouaves' worthiness, albeit not on the field of battle. A few days after their arrival in the capital, a fire broke out in the middle of the night in a building adjacent to the famed Willard's Hotel. General Mansfield, who happened to be staying there, hurriedly sent a plea for help to Ellsworth. Some 300 firemen sprang into action, with "deliberation and bravery," breaking open the doors of the district's fire stations and rushing to extinguish the flames.¹⁰⁹ Their

¹⁰⁶ John A. Smith, Letter to the Editors, (May 9, 1861), *New York Sunday Mercury*, in Style, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*, 18.

¹⁰⁷ "Company C., Ellsworth Fire Zouaves," Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 8, 1861, in Style, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*, 19. This soldier's identity is unknown.

¹⁰⁸ Discharges included: William Cashier (Co. G); Theodore Dakin [or Dacin] (Co. H); James McColgan [or Colligan] (Co. G); A. W. Renson, (Co. E). George Stevens (Co. G) is listed as "discharged 1861 by civil authority" but there is no additional explanation. See AGNY, 1093, 1107, 1165, 1191, 1204. On May 10, 1861, Alcock reported: "We sent home to-morrow (Thursday) several who are unfitted for active service, among whom is one of our military secretaries who has been in the hospital since our arrival here." See A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 10, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 11, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 54.

¹⁰⁹ Quote from *New York Herald*, May 10, 1861; see also *The New York Times*, May 11, 1861. It is unclear just how many members of the regiment participated in putting out the fire. *The New York Times* claimed that one hundred were originally ordered out, but then "nearly the whole Regiment" sprang into action. See *The New York Times*, May 10, 1861; also *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), May 9, 1861; State of New York, *Third Annual Report of the Chief of the Bureau of Military Record*, 107;

quick action prevented the blaze from spreading and causing more damage. Ellsworth used a brass trumpet to direct the firemen and, as *The New York Times* correspondent Henry J. Wisner reported, “marched them back to quarters, none looking in any manner fatigued after two hours of as hard labor as ever, probably, fell to their lot.”¹¹⁰

Their uniforms were torn and soiled, but the men were heartened by the episode. Pvt. John A. Smith described being “cheered heartily” as they marched back to their camp at the Capitol building. “Some of our detractors here,” he attested, “have found out that we are fit for any kind of duty, and ask nothing but a ‘clear field and no favors.’”¹¹¹ General Mansfield addressed the regiment from the balcony of Willard’s with “an enthusiastic speech,” predicting that if they performed as “well in actual warfare as they had in battling with that fire[,] they would render an excellent account of themselves.”¹¹²

Indeed, the Fire Zouaves and their supporters hoped saving Willard’s Hotel would silence their critics. Their “gallant behavior” was, according to one member, “the talk of the town” and managed to cover up “a multitude of sins.”¹¹³ Accounts of their handiwork appeared in major newspapers, including *Harper’s Weekly*, which featured a front-page illustration of the Zouaves forming a human ladder to reach the heights of the buildings, with one member held upside down so he could spray water through an open window.¹¹⁴ This “exhibition,” Wisner with *The*

Brownell Interview, *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, June 3, 1888 in Newspaper clippings, Brownell Papers, MNHS.

¹¹⁰ Report of the fire in *The New York Times* was attributed to H.J.W.—Henry J. Wisner serving as “acting aide-de-camp for Ellsworth.” See *The New York Times*, May 11, 1861; also Pohanka and Schroeder, ed., *With the 11th New York*, 82. Wisner recalled first meeting Ellsworth in 1855 when Ellsworth was seventeen and seeking appointment to West Point. See Wisner, “Annals” in *Weekly Times* (Philadelphia), December 29, 1883. For more on Wisner as a war correspondent, see J. Cutler Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955), 72.

¹¹¹ John A. Smith, Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury*, (May 9, 1861), in Styple, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*, 18.

¹¹² Comings, *Personal Reminiscences*, 3. See also *New York Herald*, May 10, 1861. The Willard brothers gave the regiment \$500 as a reward for saving their hotel from the fire, “with the idea of buying badges for the whole regiment.” Years later, those funds, which had accumulated interest, helped pay for a monument to Ellsworth in Mechanicville, New York. See *Chicago Tribune*, July 16, 1872; and *Exercises Connected with the Unveiling of the Ellsworth Monument at Mechanicville*, May 27, 1874 (Albany, NY: Joel Munsell, 1875). There was also talk of using some of this money to dedicate a monument to Noah Farnham, who succeeded Ellsworth as colonel, but that did not occur.

¹¹³ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 10, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 11, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 56.

¹¹⁴ *Harper’s Weekly*, May 25, 1861.



FIGURE 1.2 “Willard’s Hotel Saved by the New York Fire Zouaves.” Image courtesy of *Harper’s Weekly*, May 25, 1861.

New York Times contended, should “retrieve the character of the regiment from the disgrace cast upon [them] by the excesses of the few rogues who have been turned out of its ranks.” It was a “disgrace,” Wisner lamented, “which was very unjustly cast upon it in consequences of the habit of some newspapers have of exaggerating and magnifying small offences into grave outrages.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ *The New York Times*, May 11, 1861.

A change of location also seemed a possible solution to the regiment's ongoing problems. The day after the fire, Ellsworth moved his regiment to "Camp Lincoln," along the heights southwest of town as part of the capital's defenses. On their first night in their new camp, there was a heavy rain, and the men "slept on muddy ground."¹¹⁶ Despite the bad weather, Wisner insisted, "The post to which the regiment has been assigned is a very important one, and the honor is fully appreciated."¹¹⁷

Here, Colonel Ellsworth once again sought to instill at least some semblance of order. He housed the men in Sibley tents and instigated five to six hours of daily drill and dress parades, even on Sundays, disallowing the regimental chaplain, George W. Dodge, from giving sermons.¹¹⁸ Ellsworth was starting to realize, though, that he could not rely solely on his former Chicago Zouaves or his own skills as drillmaster; he needed more help. Assistance soon came in the form of Lt. Col. Noah L. Farnham and Adj. Charles McKnight Leoser. Farnham, thirty-one years old and nicknamed "Pony" for his small stature, was well familiar with the firemen, having served as an assistant engineer, and he was a member of the 7th New York State Militia. Like Ellsworth, Farnham had studied military tactics as a teen and excelled at fencing. "Pony Farnham is every inch a soldier," a Fire Zouave maintained, "and after the boys earn his worth and military abilities, will not stop at liking him – they will love him."¹¹⁹ A. O. Alcock was also initially impressed, writing that Farnham "already made a good impression on the members of the regiment who are personally unacquainted with him; and as a

¹¹⁶ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 16, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 19, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 65; see also 60. Their encampment was located on Insane Asylum Hill, across from the Navy Yard.

¹¹⁷ *The New York Times*, May 11, 1861.

¹¹⁸ Alcock complained that he and his comrades "believe in keeping the Sabbath day holy," and despite the demands of training, they should still have the "benefit" of a sermon from their chaplain. See A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 23, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 26, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 75.

¹¹⁹ "Company G," Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 13, 1861, in Styple, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*, 20. Farnham met Ellsworth during the Chicago Zouave tour in 1860, and organized his own Zouave company in the city. See *Brooklyn Evening Star*, May 30, 1861; and *New York Herald*, June 9, 1861. He resigned from the 7th New York State Militia, writing Ellsworth on May 6 that he would "report for duty as soon as I am relieved from guard." See Noah L. Farnham to Elmer E. Ellsworth, May 6, 1861, Elmer E. Ellsworth Papers, Folder Ams 811/2.6, The Rosenbach Museum, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter referred to as RM). For more on Farnham see *The New York Times*, August 16, 1861 and *New York Daily Tribune*, August 16, 1861.

disciplinarian he will prove inestimable to us."¹²⁰ Leoser, only twenty-one years old, graduated West Point that May, and brought his professional education to the regiment.¹²¹

Ellsworth further sought to resolve the unit's continued supply problems: there still were not enough guns, and uniforms were wearing thin.¹²² Chief Decker visited them from New York, impressing upon them yet again "the necessity of obedience and discipline."¹²³ There was some noticeable improvement – at least General Mansfield thought so when he reviewed the regiment at Camp Lincoln, complimenting them on their "progress" in drilling.¹²⁴

Despite these improvements, with stricter rules and new officers, the men had, according to one Fire Zouave, "plenty of amusements here, more than a person would think." There were daily visitors from Washington and New York, including "many ladies," and Wallace's Band performed regularly, cheering the men with "its enlivening strains."¹²⁵ "Just imagine to yourself," one member recounted, "a thousand men playing leap frog; dancing, groups of singers, card-players, smoking, cooking, washing, growling, [and] talking fire."¹²⁶ The regiment, though, was restless for

¹²⁰ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 10, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 11, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 54.

¹²¹ Biographical information from Pohanka, "Forward," in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 11, 5n; *New York Tribune*, April 28, 1861; and "Charles McKnight Leoser," findagrave.com. Leoser impressed Alcock, who judged the young officer as intelligent, well-mannered, and a gentleman. See A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 16, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 19, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 68. See also "R.W." Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 18, 1861, in Style, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*, 21.

¹²² See A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 17, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 18, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 56.

¹²³ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 17, 1861, *New York Leader*, n.d., accessed via museum.dmna.ny.gov.

¹²⁴ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 16, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 19, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 69. Various accounts mention not just the insufficiency of arms, but the poor condition of the guns that were provided. See State of New York, *Third Annual Report of the Chief of the Bureau of Military Record*, 107.

¹²⁵ Letter to the Editor, May 16, 1861, *New York Herald*, May 19, 1861. Visitors included the Astors, Simeon Draper, Chief Decker, Engineers Baulch and Mccosker, Aldermen Brady and Henry. See also A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 17, 1861, *New York Leader*, n.d., accessed via museum.dmna.ny.gov; and A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 16, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 19, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 69.

¹²⁶ "M.C. Company G," Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 13, 1861, in Style, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*, 20.

real action. "Here," a member bemoaned, "we remain, in dull inactivity, rusting for want of excitement."¹²⁷ Some soldiers were intent on finding their own excitement, easily slipping past guards, and venturing into the city.¹²⁸

The Zouaves' antics were still making national news. For example, *The Weekly Sun* from Vincennes, Indiana, reported that thirty women were discovered in their camp soon after they arrived in DC. The women were sent home, but the paper observed: "The Zouaves, we fear, are not at all of the highest moral character."¹²⁹ An article in the *Philadelphia Press* targeted seventy-five members of the unit as part of a "class whose irrepressible propensities for mischief cause themselves and their friends no little trouble." The paper described members scattering through the capital's streets, looking for "amusements, novel, exciting, and dangerous and otherwise." Several Fire Zouaves "amused themselves in feats of jumping" "over a six foot iron rail around the grounds of the Smithsonian." Colonel Ellsworth, the paper alleged, planned to return 100 men back to New York City to be rid of the bad influence. This would leave the regiment "orderly, noble and brave men as ever were called together for military duty."¹³⁰

This was a pattern that had developed from the initial founding of the regiment. Lurid stories of the Fire Zouaves' bad behavior circulated in the press and then there was a rush to defend them, with claims that the stories were exaggerated or that only a handful of men were culprits and would be duly punished. Their "unenviable notoriety," one New Yorker insisted, was simply due to "the pranks of a few unruly members."¹³¹ Ellsworth

¹²⁷ "R.W.," Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 18, 1861, in Styple, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*, 20. "R.W." could be Pvt. Robert Waldron (Co. E); Pvt. Robert F. Wallace (Co. I); Pvt. Richard Warner (Co. A) or Pvt. Richard Wilson (Co. B).

¹²⁸ Alcock described: "Last night the Colonel sent a detachment to the city to pick up stragglers. It seems that about a dozen, tired of being kept in camp, crossed the river in fishing-boats, and were seen in the streets of Washington. Word was immediately sent to the camp, and probably all will be arrested before morning as deserters." See A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 17, 1861, *New York Leader*, n.d., accessed via museum.dmna.ny.gov.

¹²⁹ *The Weekly Sun*, (Vincennes, IN), May 17, 1861.

¹³⁰ *The Press* (Philadelphia, PA) excerpted in *The Advance* (Ogdensburg, NY), May 17, 1861.

¹³¹ "L.B.," Letter to the Editor, *New York Herald*, May 12, 1861. "L.B." could be Sgt. Levi Bennett, (Co. A); later commissioned 2nd Lt.; Lloyd W. Berry, 2nd Lt in Co. E; or Pvt. Lawrence Brown, (Co. G). See AGNY, 1079, 1086.

dismissed the bad press out of hand, writing his fiancée Carrie: "Stories you hear about [the] Regt [are] all false."¹³²

Fire Editor and Pvt. A. O. Alcock wrote a lengthy defense of his regiment to the *New York Leader* on May 10: "You have probably heard," he told his readers, "of the alleged disgraceful conduct of a few of our members and in common with our friends in New York have felt aggrieved." Alcock echoed Ellsworth when he reasoned that the hurried nature of the regiment's formation meant that there were men in the ranks "whom had never met before they were mustered into service." Thus, to expect "them to be all saints would have been too much, and we all knew that if there were any bad or vicious natures in the ranks, they would soon make themselves known through their activities." Like others, Alcock insisted that the "few derelictions committed were traced to less than a dozen men, six of whom have been publicly disgraced and dismissed from the regiment." Except for these few men, Alcock declared, the regiment consisted of "good material" who behaved "as orderly as any members of any company now in Washington." He characterized most of the accusations as "rumors and exaggerated stories," some of them "manufactured out of whole cloth" by reporters who failed to understand the ways and manners of firemen. It was true, Alcock admitted, that the men were still lacking in mastering the manual of arms. But their "evolutions and marching are not excelled." "All the members of the Regiment are anxious and willing to do their duty, and discipline among volunteers is not learned in a day." He avowed: "The Fire Zouaves are not dandy soldiers, full of smirking politeness, but rugged and vigorous warriors, who do not deserve the severe criticism that has been showered upon them."¹³³

That severe criticism would not abate; it only seemed to increase the longer the Fire Zouaves remained idle.

"WE WANT THE CREDIT FOR IT"

On May 17, the 11th New York moved again, two more miles further down on the banks of the Potomac. They were now quartered on the sprawling property of George Washington Young, a large slave and landowner, and according to Alcock "not the most reliable friend that

¹³² Elmer E. Ellsworth to Carrie Spafford, (May 1861), Ellsworth Papers, ALPL.

¹³³ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 10, 1861, *New York Leader*, May 11, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 52–54.

Union men have in these times.” The men christened their new location “Camp Decker” to honor their popular Fire Chief.¹³⁴ The firemen’s rocky transformation from civilian to soldier continued. They had to give up their band due to its expense. But Alcock maintained it was an unnecessary luxury. “We are not,” he proclaimed, “holiday soldiers, and care nothing for show, or for thirty days but ‘FOR THE WAR,’ we willingly leave the ‘lascivious pleading of the lute,’ for the ‘stern alarms,’ until we can return to those we love, crowned with victory.”¹³⁵ While at Camp Decker the men also received new guns: “splendid Minie Rifles.” Alcock reported confidently that “if our boys ever get into action with the beautiful weapons they now possess, they will make [a] mark that will distinguish the Firemen’s Zouaves forever.”¹³⁶ A fellow Zouave affirmed: “We will be immediately initiated in the grand mystery of using them.”¹³⁷

The close ties between the city and the regiment persisted. Alcock candidly declared that the Fire Zouaves had to “*depend on our men at home*” to ensure they had the necessary supplies and armaments. The regiment’s “friends in New York” have, Alcock stated, “pledged themselves to us, and we have plighted our honors to them, that we will faithfully represent the Fire Department in any and everything we may

¹³⁴ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 23, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 26, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 73–74. According to the 1860 Slave Schedule, George W. Young owned a total of sixty slaves, ages seven months to seventy years old. See Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Population and Slave Schedule, Washington Ward 4, Washington, DC, Records of the Bureau of the Census, RG 29, NARA; accessed via ancestry.com. See also Kenneth J. Heineman, *Civil War Dynasty: The Ewing Family of Ohio* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 93; Louise Daniel Hutchinson, *The Anacostia Story, 1608–1930* (Washington, DC: US Govt. Printing Office, 1977), 61–62; and “R.W.,” Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 18, 1861, in Style, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*, 21.

¹³⁵ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 23, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 26, 1861, Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 75.

¹³⁶ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 23, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 26, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 77.

¹³⁷ Letter to the Editor, May 16, 1861, *New York Herald*, May 19, 1861. This soldier claimed the new rifles arrived at Camp Lincoln, but Alcock alleged they arrived later at Camp Decker. Frank Brownell, however, stated that the regiment did not receive new rifles until the day before they departed for Alexandria (May 23). See *The Budget* (Troy, NY), September 20, 1891, in Newspaper Clippings, Brownell Papers, MNHS. Ron Field, however, maintains that the 11th New York “received Model 1855 rifle-muskets – although the two flank companies (A and K) continued to carry Model 1855 rifles with sword bayonets.” See Ron Field, *Union Infantryman vs Confederate Infantryman: Easter Theater 1861–65* (Oxford: Osprey, 2013), 42.

be called upon to do. We know them – they know us, – and neither will be disappointed."¹³⁸ In addition, the firemen expected the city to take care of their loved ones left at home. On May 19, three representatives of the Fire Department "deputized by the Committee of the Board of Trustees of the Fire Department," Alcock explained, "to attend to the wants of the firemen in our regiment, and those of the families left behind."¹³⁹

Published letters from the regiment sought to counter the relentless negative publicity about them. One soldier insisted: "We are all in the best of health and spirits, with the best of provisions to eat and plenty of good water to drink. The common reports to the contrary in the newspapers are entirely without foundation."¹⁴⁰ Capt. John B. Leverich (Co. E) wrote directly to the *New York Herald* to defend his men: "We were hurriedly organized, and instead of being, as stated, unfortunate in the selection of men, we have been remarkably fortunate. Out of one thousand and fifty men, we can find but five who have acted disgracefully, and even these cases are not as bad as represented." "No regiment," Leverich stated, "that has left the city has had less disorderly men than ours. The reports against the regiment are injurious, and as we are on our good behavior, we want the credit of it; we value a good name at home, and will strive to deserve it, and ask your assistance."¹⁴¹

As with Ellsworth's earlier letter to his fiancée, such an assessment is perhaps understandable as a defensive reaction against public condemnation. Yet it clearly requires an element of denial as an attempt to gloss over and cover up transgressions. It would prove an ironic foreshadowing of what was to come in the aftermath of the regiment's first battle: the public magnification and censoring of their actions that will serve to incriminate them to the public.

¹³⁸ A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 23, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 26, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 77.

¹³⁹ The three Fire Department representatives were Owen W. Brennan, Andrew Craft, and John R. Platt. Brennan was an assistant engineer with two brothers who also served in the department; Craft had been a member of the NYC Fire Department since 1829 and served as Fire Commissioner. Platt, whom Costello called the "beau ideal of a fireman," had been foreman of three different companies and president of the Fire Department. See Costello, *Our Firemen*, 499, emphasis from original; also 109, 425, 460. See also A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 23, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 26, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 77.

¹⁴⁰ *New York Herald*, May 21, 1861.

¹⁴¹ *New York Herald*, May 21, 1861. Leverich was member of Hose 7 in the NYC Volunteer Fire Department. See Costello, *Our Firemen*, 718.

It had been just over a month since those exhilarating days in New York when the Fire Zouaves first formed. Serious problems continued in the ranks, with desertions and a growing number of soldiers on the sick rolls. A few days before the regiment received orders to abandon Camp Decker, twenty-five men were listed as sick, twelve of them in the "Washington Infirmary." In addition, the regimental surgeon determined that eighteen Zouaves were "unfit for service" due to a variety of ailments including pneumonia, "shortness of vision," and "Neuralgia" – defined as someone who "wants to come back."¹⁴²

"MEN AS WELL AS SOLDIERS"

One afternoon, when the 11th New York was still stationed in Washington, DC, Pvt. Alfred Vaughn had climbed to the top of the Capitol building, ascending "a spiral staircase, which winds round and round a pillar to the dome." "It makes you dizzy," he wrote, "before you reach the top." Vaughn observed the "glorious site" of the panoramic view of Washington, but also the city of Alexandria, which was some seven miles distant. "I can," he wrote, "discern two secession flags waving, which please God, we will tear down soon."¹⁴³

Once the regiment moved to Camp Lincoln, about three miles from the capital and closer to Alexandria, the sights and sounds of that town continued to both bemuse and annoy the men. One soldier wrote: "Our boys are opposite the city every hour of the day, and can see the movements of the people there almost with the naked eye."¹⁴⁴ They still took

¹⁴² A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 23, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 26, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 76–77. William Gorman (Co.K) who had this diagnosis remained with the regiment until mustering out in June 1862. See AGNY, 1131.

¹⁴³ Alfred Vaughn, Letter to the Editor, May 6, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 12, 1861, included in Alcock, *With the 11th New York*, 43. There is some dispute over whether the Marshall House flag could be seen from Washington or not, but it is significant that Vaughn made this comment nearly three weeks before Ellsworth's death. See also "Ellsworth was a 'Golden Boy,'" 12. A correspondent for the *New York Commercial* mentioned another rebel flag in Alexandria allegedly also visible from the White House: "With a glass, the secession flag, which floats over the United States Custom-house at Alexandria, is visible from the President's study window." Excerpted from the *New York Commercial*, May 23, 1861, in *The Civilian and Gazette Weekly*. (Galveston, TX) May 28, 1861. It is not clear if this was the same flag atop the Marshall House or an entirely different one.

¹⁴⁴ "M.C Company G" to the Editors of the *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 13, 1861, in Styple, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*. It is uncertain who "M.C." was as there is

notice of one of the rebel flags, which was enormous and could clearly be viewed through field-glasses. "Is it not tantalizing to see the secession flag flying there," a Zouave asked, "and we unable, though anxious to pull it down?" Some began to plot to steal across the river and "bear it down in triumph." But Colonel Ellsworth unearthed the scheme and "positively refused to countenance it."¹⁴⁵

Less than a week later, Ellsworth learned of federal plans to move into Alexandria, Virginia. The young colonel made a special plea to General Mansfield and, allegedly, President Lincoln himself, insisting that his Fire Zouaves "must go into the field," and that they "must go first."¹⁴⁶ His regiment would be ready to "march at 1 minutes notice," to travel by water, or if necessary by land, "twenty miles at a *rapid pace*."¹⁴⁷ "I would consider it as a personal affront," he told Gen. Mansfield, "if he would not allow us to have the right of the line, which is our due, as the first volunteer Regiment sworn in for the war." Mansfield acquiesced, and

no one listed on the Co. G roster who had those initials. See Adjutant General's Office, State of New York. *A Record of the Commissioned Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Privates, of the Regiments which were Organized in the State of New York and Called to the Service of the United States to Assist in Suppressing the Rebellion Caused by the Secession of Some of the Southern States from the Union, A. D. 1861, as Taken from the Muster-In Rolls on File in the Adjutant General's Office, State of New York*. 8 Vols. (Albany, NY: Comstock & Cassidy, Printers, 1864), Vol. 1: 256–257.

¹⁴⁵ "R.W.," Letter to the Editors, *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 18, 1861, in Styple, ed., *Writing and Fighting the Civil War*, 20. See also A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 29, 1861, *New York Leader*, June 1, 1861. John Hay later stated that Ellsworth had himself spotted a large rebel flag from the window of the White House and that "the temptation to tear it down with his own hands was too much for his boyish patriotism." This story, though, may be apocryphal. See John Hay, "A Young Hero," *The World*, February 16, 1890, Newspaper Clippings, Brownell Papers, MNHS. Henry Morford also alleged that the Zouaves had in fact taken down "its predecessor from the same roof, only a few days before," but this seems highly unlikely, too. See Morford, *Days of Shoddy*, 302. The flag that Ellsworth eventually removed, stained with his blood, was fourteen feet high and twenty-four feet long. Its remnants currently reside in the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, NY.

¹⁴⁶ According to Brownell, Lincoln replied that the situation was delicate and he "desired to avoid all violence." Brownell further explained that this conference with the president was "unknown to the command." This author has been unable to find any corroboration that Ellsworth appealed to Lincoln, but it would be unsurprising given their close relationship. See Frank E. Brownell, "Ellsworth's Career," *Weekly Times* (Philadelphia, PA), June 18, 1881.

¹⁴⁷ Elmer E. Ellsworth to Joseph Mansfield, May 23, 1861, 11th New York Volunteer Infantry, Volunteer Organizations, Regimental Returns, RG 94, NARA. Emphasis from the original.

around midnight on May 24, Ellsworth summoned his regiment to announce preparations for departure.

The night was clear with a full moon “shining over the long array of glittering bayonets, lighting up the surrounding landscape,” remembered Lieutenant Coates.¹⁴⁸ Ellsworth excitedly addressed the soldiers: “Go to your tents, lie down, and take your rest till 2 o’clock, when the boat will arrive, and we go forward to victory or death.” The Zouaves were about to embark on their first mission, and, their young colonel warned them, the world was watching: “When we reach the place of destination, act as men; do nothing to shame the regiment, show the enemy that you are men as well as soldiers, and that you will treat them with kindness until they force you to use violence. I want to kill them with kindness. Go to your tents and do as I tell you.”¹⁴⁹ He stressed, too, that this was a special honor even though there were “many regiments in a better state of drill than ourselves.”¹⁵⁰ Lieutenant Knox well remembered Ellsworth’s words that night, emphasizing “the great necessity of obedience” and assuring them that he would “never order one of you to go where I fear to lead.”¹⁵¹ It was nearly impossible to sleep. Private Alcock described: “little knots of men might be seen here and there, talking of our prospects in the approaching struggle – strong in their determination to do or die as became good soldiers in a just cause.”¹⁵²

Ellsworth penned a short note to his parents, predicting “it may be my lot to be injured in some manner. Whatever may happen I shall have the consolation of knowing I was engaged in the performance of a sacred

¹⁴⁸ E. M. Coates to Charles Coates, May 24, 1861, published in the *New York Herald*, May 27, 1861.

¹⁴⁹ “Ellsworth’s Last Speech,” in Frank Moore, ed. *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events, with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, etc.* 12 Vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1861–1868), Vol. 2 “Rumors and Incidents,” 57. See also Wisner, “Annals,” *Weekly Times* (Philadelphia, PA), December 29, 1883. According to Morford, the Zouaves finally received new rifles for everyone just before leaving for Alexandria. See Morford, *Days of Shoddy*, 285.

¹⁵⁰ E. M. Coates to Charles Coates, May 24, 1861, in the *New York Herald*, May 27, 1861.

¹⁵¹ E. B. Knox, “How Ellsworth Died,” *The Sunday Herald* (Chicago, IL), May 24, 1885 in Newspaper Clippings, Brownell Papers, MNHS. Another soldier described the speech as “thrilling.” See Wilber A. Apgar Letter, May 30, 1861, excerpted in R. L. Murray, “*They Fought like Tigers*”: *The 11th New York Fire Zouaves, 14th Brooklyn and Irish 69th New York at First Battle of Bull Run. Army of the Potomac Journal, Volume Two* (Wolcott, NY: Benedum Books, 2005), 13; see also *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 27, 1861.

¹⁵² A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 29, 1861, *New York Leader*, June 1, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 92. See also A. O. Alcock, Letter to the Editor, May 23, 1861, *New York Atlas*, May 26, 1861, in Pohanka and Schroeder, eds., *With the 11th New York*, 73.

duty.”¹⁵³ To his fiancée Carrie, he similarly and ominously admitted in a letter to her that his unit may “meet with a warm reception” and with “so many careless fellows one is somewhat likely to be hit.”¹⁵⁴ His words would prove chillingly prophetic but not in the way anyone could have anticipated.

¹⁵³ Elmer E. Ellsworth to Ephraim and Phoebe Ellsworth, May 23, 1861, printed in the *Weekly Times* (Philadelphia, PA), June 18, 1881. A typescript copy of this letter can also be found in the Ellsworth Papers, ALPL.

¹⁵⁴ Elmer E. Ellsworth to Carrie Spafford, May 23, 1861, Ellsworth Papers, ALPL.