

“A Perfect Institution Belonging to the Regiment”



The importance of the latest news reaching Civil War troops is evident in Newspapers in Camp (detail), a copper-plate etching by Edwin Forbes from his Life Studies of the Great Army.

The *Soldier's Letter* and American Identity Among Civil War Soldiers in Kansas

by Chandra Miller

“Slavery is Buried!!!” On January 28, 1865, four triumphant columns of newsprint celebrated the acts by which Tennessee and Missouri washed away “the foul stain of human bondage” by abolishing slavery within their borders.¹ News about the demise of slavery was not exactly rare as the Civil War ground through its last exhausting months. Since the outbreak of war in 1861, newspapers in New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and countless towns from New England to the Great Lakes had included reports on the condition of slavery alongside military dispatches.² However, this particular newspaper did not originate in a midwestern city or a New England town; it emanated from distant Fort Riley, Kansas. Entitled the *Soldier's Letter*, this semiweekly newspaper was written and published in 1864 and 1865 by enlisted soldiers of the Second Colorado Cavalry during their Civil War service on Missouri's western border and the Kansas plains.

Far removed from their homes and from the center of the government they fought to protect, enlisted cavalrymen created the *Soldier's Letter* as a weapon against the prairie soldiers' persistent enemies of isolation, boredom, and vagueness of purpose. In each issue the *Soldier's Letter* covered topics from the history of the regiment to civilian gossip, but the bulk of its pages was dedicated to reflections on the righteousness of American governmental institutions, politics, and the eradication of slavery. This regimental paper reflected and shaped community identity by reinforcing regimental identity and pride when the companies of the Second Colorado were separated from each other and, more important, by asserting Col-

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1. *Soldier's Letter* (Fort Riley), January 28, 1865. For this article the author used microfilm copies from the Kansas State Historical Society.

2. Several historians have explored the political and social implications of the Civil War for American society and the civilian response to the war. See, for example, Randall C. Jimerson, *The Private Civil War: Popular Thought During the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Earl J. Hess, *Liberty, Virtue, and Progress: Northerners and their War for Union* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Maris A. Vinovskis, ed., *Toward a Social History of the American Civil War: Exploratory Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For the best comprehensive, single-volume treatment of the Civil War, see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Soldier's Letter.



THE FLAG WE FIGHT UNDER.

SECOND COLORADO CAVALRY.

Vol. 1

"THE UNION MUST AND SHALL BE PRESERVED"—JACKSON.

No. 1

D. V. WALLACE, Editor & Proprietor.

Wm. B. STUBBS, Publisher.

COMMEMORATIONS for the 'SOLDIER'S LETTER' are solicited in the Regiment.

All Orders and Correspondence should be addressed to—

D. V. WALLACE,
Co. E, 9th Colorado Cav.

HASN'T THEM LITER.

Make them, Letter, haste away,
Have no longer make thy stay;
Haste thee home to friends most dear;

Tell them how we soldiers fare,
Tell them, tho' we're far away
From the scenes we loved so well,
Still our hearts will wander back
Where our friends and loved ones dwell.

Tell them we are still engaged
Driving back the rebel flag;
And the thought of home and friends,
Keeps our hands for God's true
blows.

Comrades young, and true, and brave—
"Bound as fall on every hand,
Let our banner yet with float
O'er our rebel, happy land,
Double our men, our cause is just—
and our hearts are true and strong.

With our hearts, "God our trust,
Right will triumph over wrong.

—Colonel James H. Ford
Second Colorado Cavalry,
commands 4th Dist.—District,
District Central Missouri—
consisting of the Counties of
Jackson, Cass, Bates, and
part of Vernon; Headquarters

COMPENDIUM OF HISTORY.

(In presenting this compendium to the public, an explanation, or apology seems evidently necessary for the lack of matter and interest in the present No. The author made repeated and arduous endeavors to obtain the desired information; but there was no little interest manifested by those to whom he applied, and who were supposed to be posted in regard to the matter, that he was obliged to abbreviate and condense much more than was at first intended, and omit many items that would interest the reader.)

When the great rebellion broke out, in '61, the shock was felt not only in the immediate locality of the outbreak, but extended all over the continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast. The echo of the bugles fired on Sumter, had scarcely died away, when the loyal men of the loyal States and Territories, rose in their might, and called to be led against the "invaders of peace, and enemies of free institutions." The sentiment among that number, was the Territory of Colorado. Although but a child in years; and separated from the Union by a vast body of water, with a population composed of all classes, representing almost every State and Government on the Globe; yet the great heart of her people throbed with a loyal patriotism and loyal blood scorped through her every vein; when the war was forced upon us by the rebels—true to her Allegiance to the Government of the United States—Colorado called the roll of loyalty and honor, and a thousand

men the rebel hordes that were overrunning and despoiling the fair and wealthy soil of Texas and New Mexico, and threatening even Colorado herself. How well the work was done, may readily be ascertained by pointing to the bloody battlefields of Valverde, Pigeon's Bluffs, Agavea Canon, &c., where the First Colorado, under command of Colonel Blough and Major Livingston, assisted by a portion of the New Mexican Forces under Gen. Utey—went, and signally defeated the rebels under the notorious Hibley—driving them like chaff before the wind, thus rescuing from their unhallowed grasp, the fertile soil of New Mexico, and the rich gold deposits of Colorado—a prize they had almost lost forever. Perhaps for years to come; for, even a small force in the mountains, well acquainted with the passes and fastnesses could have kept us bay, and bid defiance to an army ten times their superior—in point of numbers—and have proved a serious obstacle for the already heavily burdened—Government—in crushing out the most gigantic rebellion on record.

Notwithstanding the patriotism, and energy exhibited in filling the ranks of the First Regiment, the Government, needing more men, issued a call for another regiment—and the Second Infantry. (Colonel Leavenworth,) sprung into existence, within almost as brief a space of time as was occupied in organizing the First; its ranks

the art of war, and that little confined, principally, to two Independent companies—A. and B.—that were included in the organization. These two companies were organized in the fall of '61, and transferred into service some three months subsequent—under Captain Ford, (now Colonel of Second Colorado Cavalry) and Dodd, (Lieut. Col. of same regiment) and had seen service with the Sacs under General Utey in New Mexico.

The organization was completed and the regiment recruited and equipped for service—when an order was issued changing the First Infantry to Cavalry; and two companies detached from the Second, and transferred to the First, in order to complete its organization of twelve companies—leaving but eight companies of Infantry. The remaining companies were concentrated at Fort Lyon, and having received "marching orders"—on the 5th of April, 1863, started from that post under command of Lt. Col. Dodd, for the States, by the way of Forts Larned and Riley. From that post they were ordered to Fort Hunt, near where, on the 3rd of July 1863, they bore a prominent part in the battle of Cabin Creek, in which 1,500 rebels under Col. Stovall, were repulsed with considerable loss.

The first volume and number of the Soldier's Letter, published August 1864 in Kansas City, Missouri.

orado's membership within America's national identity. The *Soldier's Letter* provided a means of connecting soldiers to each other, the war effort, and the American nation.

"Regimental" or "camp" newspapers, created by some regiments in both the Union and Confederate armies, varied in every possible detail. A newspaper might have been published weekly or sporadically, as wartime conditions and the soldiers' other duties dictated. Some regimental papers lasted through several issues while others survived only very short life-spans. Thanks to the long stay of Illinois soldiers in Tennessee in 1865, for instance, the *83rd Illinoisan* was published nearly every week for two months. Much more common were newspapers such as the *Vidette* of Morgan's Confederate Brigade, which was published "semi-occasionally," or *Lauman's Own* of the Seventh Iowa, which petered out almost as soon as it began. While the papers of some fortunate regiments were set in type on standard newsprint paper, other papers were printed or handwritten on any available surface, including wallpaper, wrapping paper, or the backs of used army documents. The *Pioneer Banner* of the First Alabama was neatly hand-lettered by the Alabamans guarding Fort Barrancas, Florida, in 1861, while the *Unconditional S. Grant* was printed on the back of wallpaper by soldiers of the 130th Illinois serving in New Iberia Parish, Louisiana.³

Regimental newspapers provide extraordinarily useful glimpses into the world of the Civil War soldier. The newsheets usually were created not by officers but by and for enlisted men. While some papers clearly credited an editor, most individual articles were the initialed or unsigned contributions of enlisted soldiers who managed to find a little extra time on their hands. Topics ranged from scanty military information and regimental chit-chat to searing political debate and often included lengthy reflections on the purposes of the war. While newspapers provided amusement and information, they also served to cement regimental identity. Regimental newspapers were not formally censored and were permitted to print anything other than important strategic information. In the pages of their regimental papers, many enlisted soldiers aired their grievances about skimpy rations and grueling duty, registered their disgust at the insufficient amounts of

3. *83rd Illinoisan*, March 1865–May 1865; *Vidette*, August 17, 1862, November 2, 1864; *Lauman's Own*, August 21, 1861; *Pioneer Banner*, February 23, April 29, 1861; *Unconditional S. Grant*, October 24, 31, 1863. Microfilm copies are from the Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville; Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, and Tennessee State Library and Archives; Chicago Historical Society; Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; and Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, respectively.

patriotism displayed by civilians back home, and expressed their candid opinions about unpopular officers. Soldiers stationed in Fernandina, Florida, in December 1863, even accused one former officer of the Tenth Army Corps of bearing the "cloven foot of Mephistopheles!" One issue of the *Soldier's Letter* opened with the poem "Tired of the Army," lamenting the long marches and camp conditions endured by soldiers, while another issue complained about the "cheerless and melancholy" atmosphere of Independence, Missouri, where the regiment was stationed.⁴ Thanks to their vigorous, unguarded tone, these regimental newspapers provide invaluable glimpses into the experiences and attitudes of enlisted Civil War soldiers.⁵

Like other regimental newspapers, the *Soldier's Letter* reflects the perceptions of enlisted soldiers engaged in Civil War duty, but its uniqueness in several areas makes it an especially valuable source. The *Soldier's Letter* enjoyed a remarkably long and steady publication from August 1864 through November 1865. In addition, the soldiers who produced the paper did not serve in the eastern theater or even in the Mississippi Valley; rather, they published the *Soldier's Letter* from Kansas City, Missouri, and Fort Riley, Kansas. Finally, the *Soldier's Letter*

4. *Peninsula*, December 24, 1863. Microfilm copies from the Massachusetts Historical Society. "Tired of the Army," *Soldier's Letter*, August 20, 1864; *ibid.*, August [incomplete date] 1864.

5. No full-length, comprehensive treatment of camp newspapers exists, but numerous articles explore aspects of this subject. See, for example, Earl Lutz, "The Stars and Stripes of the Illinois Boys in Blue," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 46 (Summer 1953): 132–41; "The Stars and Stripes in 1861: Soldiers Printed Newspapers in English and German," *Missouri Historical Review* 39 (October 1944): 127–28; Bell Irvin Wiley, "Camp Newspapers of the Confederacy," *North Carolina Historical Review* 20 (October 1943): 327–35. The broader topic of Civil War soldiers' lives has attracted historians' attention, at least since Wiley's publication of the path-breaking studies *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1942), followed by *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943). Important subsequent studies include Larry J. Daniel, *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee: A Portrait of Life in a Confederate Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Joseph Allan Frank and George A. Reaves, *Seeing the Elephant: Raw Recruits at the Battle of Shiloh* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); Joseph Allan Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Joseph Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaign* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997); Gerald Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Larry M. Logue, *To Appomattox and Beyond: The Civil War Soldier in War and Peace* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Viking, 1988); James I. Robertson Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988).

was created by soldiers from Colorado Territory, who were fewer in number, less likely to have wives or family members in Colorado to whom they could write letters than was true of eastern soldiers, and who therefore left fewer records of their wartime service than did soldiers from the eastern and midwestern states.⁶

In many ways the soldiers of the Second Colorado Cavalry who wrote the *Soldier's Letter* reflected the young territory from which they had enlisted. The soldiers constituted a remarkably diverse lot, as did the population of Colorado Territory. They originally hailed from twenty-five states, three territories, and nineteen foreign countries, and most of them were miners or farmers.⁷ More significantly, they were defensive about their identity as American soldiers. When the *Soldier's Letter* claimed that "no nobler position" than Colorado Union soldier existed, it echoed the uncertainty of Colorado Territory about its place within the American Union.⁸ Before Kansas achieved statehood in 1861, Colorado had vaguely existed in most eastern minds as a distant attachment to Kansas Territory. It did not have the same long thread of tradition tracing to the American Revolution held by places such as Massachusetts or Pennsylvania, nor could it claim the formal statehood status of the newer states of the Midwest. Furthermore, its road to full membership in the Union met obstacles in 1862 when Congress voted not to admit Colorado as a state, and in 1864 when the voting population of Colorado narrowly rejected the state constitution (and by ex-

6. Most of the Colorado cavalymen were young, unattached men who had already left their parents and siblings and ventured to Colorado in pursuit of independence or a piece of the economic pie promised by mining. This profile matches the white settlement and population patterns in 1850s and 1860s Colorado described in Carol Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and David McComb, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1994); Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson, and Duane Smith, *A Colorado History* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Co., 1982); Duane A. Smith, *The Birth of Colorado: A Civil War Perspective* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989); William Wyckoff, *Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape 1860–1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). Ray C. Colton, *The Civil War in the Western Territories: Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), especially 20, 71, and William Clarke Whitford, *Colorado Volunteers in the Civil War: The New Mexico Campaign in 1863* (Denver: State Historical and Natural History Society, 1906), ch. 3, briefly treat the demographic make-up of Colorado's Civil War soldiers; both emphasize the high number of miners.

7. For state and nation of origin breakdown, see "Second Colorados Table of Statistics" in Ellen Williams, *Three Years and a Half in the Army; or, History of the Second Colorados* (New York: Fowler and Wells Co., 1885), 178. One soldier also was born at sea, and one soldier was "nationality unknown." For occupational statistics, see *ibid.*, 177. Of 1,174 soldiers divided into 77 different occupations, 462 were miners, 235 were farmers, and the rest were scattered in small numbers among such vocations as brewer, dancing instructor, tinker, and waggoner.

8. *Soldier's Letter*, August 20, 1864.

tension, statehood status) proposed by the territory's constitutional convention.⁹ As Colorado soldiers serving in the Union army, Second Colorado cavalymen could not help but be affected by such uncertainty. The *Soldier's Letter* responded with such exhortations as "We should be proud of the title of AMERICAN UNION SOLDIERS! We should be true to ourselves, as well as true to our country." They were bolstered by assurances that at the outbreak of war "the great heart of her [Colorado's] people throbbed with a loyal pulsation and loyal blood coursed through her every vein . . . true to her Allegiance to the Government of the United States—Colorado called the roll of loyalty and honor, and a thousand brave hearts and willing hands came up and answered."¹⁰ In other words, much of the tone and content of the *Soldier's Letter* suggests that both Colorado and its soldiers entered the war encumbered by the need to prove their membership in and loyalty to the Union.

The urge to demonstrate Coloradan patriotism grew when the response to Colonel Jesse H. Leavenworth's calls for Coloradan enlistment in the Union army came slowly and reluctantly, and it was heightened further when regiments such as the Second Colorado Cavalry found themselves stationed far from the war's main theaters. The first two companies were mustered into service in the autumn of 1861. They began their wartime careers by performing garrison duty in New Mexico and participating in the battles of Fort Craig, Valverde, and Glorieta Pass. In 1863 the companies returned to Fort Lyon, where they were joined by the recently recruited companies that would round out the Second Colorado. The regiment set off for Missouri, only to be divided once again, with companies parceled out to various locations in Arkansas and Indian Territory, where they guarded against attack by Confederates, guerrillas, and Indians. In January 1864 the Second and Third Colorado were consolidated into the Second Colorado Cavalry and sent to the counties around Kansas City, Missouri, where once again guerrilla bands proved to be formidable opponents, engaging the Second Colorado Caval-

9. For Colorado's halting progression to statehood, from the Organic Act that created Colorado Territory in 1861 through the appointment of the first territorial governor and election of delegates to Congress and various congressional and territorial statehood votes, see Colton, *The Civil War in the Western Territories*; Abbott, Leonard, and McComb, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*; Ubbelohde, Benson, and Smith, *A Colorado History*; Smith, *The Birth of Colorado*. For commentary on the weakness and uncertainty of full-fledged American identity among Coloradans, see Colton, *The Civil War in the Western Territories*; Whitford, *Colorado Volunteers in the Civil War*; Williams, *Three Years in the Army*, especially 2.

10. *Soldier's Letter*, August 20, 1864; *ibid.*, August [incomplete date] 1864.

ry in skirmishes at numerous locations, including Hickman's Mills, Independence, and Lone Jack. Confederate general Sterling Price tried to take Missouri for the Confederacy in October 1864, and the Second Colorado Cavalry joined in the successful Union effort to thwart Price's raid at battles such as Westport, Missouri, and Mine Creek, Kansas. Once Price and his Confederates had been driven from Missouri and Kansas, the companies of the Second Colorado were sent to the Kansas plains, where they spent the remainder of the war.¹¹

While the Coloradan soldiers' early duties served important strategic purposes, standing guard in New Mexico or setting up camp in Indian Territory still seemed a far cry from repulsing the Confederates at Gettysburg or recapturing the Mississippi River at Vicksburg. By 1864 the cavalrymen of the Second Colorado were engaged in the distasteful, deadly, and even more isolating business of clearing Confederate guerrillas out of the western Missouri border counties, and in 1865 they were ordered to guard against Indian attacks in Kansas rather than participate in the final defeat of the Confederates in the East. Soldiers of the Second Colorado Cavalry conceived and published the *Soldier's Letter* in part to combat the sense of isolation that by 1864 hampered their efforts to prove themselves as Americans fighting for the Union cause.

The *Soldier's Letter* consisted of three pages of articles, columns, and letters, and one blank page on which soldiers choosing to send the *Soldier's Letter* to friends or loved ones could add a few lines of personal news, thus updating the home front on the activities and ideas of the regiment, as well as the soldiers' individual

11. For a concise, capable survey of the enlistment and service record of the Second Colorado Cavalry, see Blanche V. Adams, "The Second Colorado Cavalry in the Civil War," *Colorado Magazine* 8 (May 1, 1931): 95–106. The career of the Second Colorado Cavalry is treated more fully in Williams, *Three Years and a Half in the Army*. For a first-hand account of the early career of the Second Colorado, told through the letters of one of its members, see Nolis Mumey, ed., *Bloody Trails Along the Rio Grande: A Day-by-Day Diary of Alonzo Ferdinand Ickis: A Soldier and His Activities with Company B, the First Volunteer Regiment to Leave the Territory of Colorado for the Civil War, Their Participation in the Battle of Valverde, New Mexico* (Denver: Old West Publishing Co., 1958). For sound studies of the Civil War in the West, see Alvin M. Josephy Jr., *The Civil War in the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Jay Monaghan, *Civil War on the Western Border, 1854–1865* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1955); Colton, *The Civil War in the Western Territories*; Richard S. Brownlee, *Gray Ghosts of the Confederacy: Guerrilla Warfare in the West 1861–1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958); Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). For specific treatment of Price's raid, see Albert Castel, *General Sterling Price and the Civil War in the West* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968); Monaghan, *Civil War on the Western Border, 1854–1865*, ch. 29–31.

welfare. Edited by Private Oliver Wallace of Company H, the paper undoubtedly reflects the opinions of this particular enlisted soldier, but the voice of the *Soldier's Letter* did not belong solely to Wallace. While most articles appear unsigned (as is the case in most Civil War regimental newspapers), making definite attribution impossible, varied tones and styles suggest that the paper benefited from multiple authors. In addition, the publication frequency of a new issue every two weeks (or even every week for much of 1865) indicates that many soldiers pitched in between hours of drill and other duties to complete each edition. Some articles are cryptically signed with such bylines as "Co. F," "E. W.," "B.," and "M. W."¹² Occasionally, Ellen Williams, wife of Company B's bugler George Williams, submitted a piece praising the paper's ability to cheer the "toil-worn soldier" of the Second Colorado Cavalry and bring "glad tidings to the anxious ones at home." Mrs. Williams went on to encourage "even the Ladies of the Regiment" to "lend a helping hand" to ensure the steady publication of the *Soldier's Letter*.¹³ Therefore, while it is usually impossible to assign views expressed in the *Soldier's Letter* to one particular soldier, a certain company, or the regiment as a whole, and while the paper undoubtedly represents most closely the views of its editor, Private Wallace, the constraints under which it was published and the multiple if often unnamed contributors helped the *Soldier's Letter* reflect the ideas of a cross section of Second Colorado Cavalry members, even if those views were necessarily refracted through the prism of editor Wallace.

Issues of the *Soldier's Letter* often followed a similar format. The first page opened with a bit of poetry, generally more notable for its pertinence to soldier life than for its literary merit, to which verses such as "Haste Thee Letter," "Broad Hints to a Rebel," and "Tired of the Army" attest.¹⁴ The remainder of page one narrated the history of the Second Colorado Cavalry, beginning with the formation of the regiment in 1861 and continuing the story in installments with each successive issue, right through the regi-

12. *Soldier's Letter*, September 3, 1864; *ibid.*, September 17, 1864; *ibid.*, October 1, 1864.

13. *Ibid.*, September 3, 1864. Ellen Williams and her children accompanied the regiment on its travels through New Mexico, Indian Territory (present Oklahoma), and the Missouri and Kansas plains. See Williams, *Three Years and a Half in the Army*. "Ladies of the Regiment" were rarities among Civil War armies. Of the women who did accompany regiments, many were "camp followers," or prostitutes. Ellen Williams, however, refers here to the small number of wives like herself who accompanied the regiment and served as cooks, laundresses, and nurses.

14. *Soldier's Letter*, August [incomplete date] 1864; *ibid.*, October 1, 1864; *ibid.*, August 20, 1864.



Ellen Williams, wife of Company B's bugler George Williams, occasionally contributed to the Soldier's Letter. This sketch of Mrs. Williams likely was made years after the Civil War, as it appeared in her 1885 book Three Years and a Half in the Army; or, History of the Second Colorado. (Left) One of Ellen Williams's poems, published in the June 10, 1865, issue of the Soldier's Letter.

OLIVER V. WALLACE,
Editor and Proprietor.

LINES

On the death of Major SMITH, who fell, pierced to the heart by a rebel ball, while bravely leading his men to battle at the 'Little Blue,' on the 21st day of October, 1864.

BY MRS. E. WILLIAMS.

He fell, as only a hero falls—
Facing a deadly foe—
The blood gush'd from the manly heart,
And bathed the pallid brow.
One moment gaze that gallant band,
Upon the stricken, there ;
Then, one long hoarse determin'd shout
Rose on the burdened air,
One shout—he's dead—revenge ! revenge
A thousand bullets sped,
And hurtling through the rebel band,
Laid many a traitor dead.
Dead ! and they lay a mingled mass
Together, man and horse :
Yet, on they came, their legions trod
O'er many a mangled corse.
But they were met by hands as firm
As e'er a sabre drew :
Unflinching was their Iron front—
They many a rebel slew.
He sleeps—that gallant soldier sleeps,
Within an honored grave :
Laid their by loving hands, and mourn'd
By many a gallant brave,
Mourned as only soldiers mourn
A hero loved and lost :
Oh ! would he were the only one
This cruel war had cost !

ment's discharge on September 23, 1865.¹⁵ In the early issues, page two was devoted to printing company rosters and periodic morale-boosting selections such as "Nothing But a Soldier," in which the unidentified author (probably Wallace) urges enlisted soldiers not to feel degraded by their low rank but rather to "do what is right and honorable . . . always speak the truth; treat every man as a gentleman, until you know him to be otherwise; be respectful to all classes—inferiors, equals, and superiors; do your duty promptly; do thus, and you will make the position you occupy an honorable one."¹⁶

By October 1864 important events in the war, high excitement in national politics, and continued developments in the key issues of slavery and emancipation saw to it that pages two and three of the *Soldier's Letter* were devoted to news, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor. Some pieces, such as the October 1, 1864, contribution of "E. W.," regaled readers with humorous accounts of soldier life, such as the unexpected addition of watermelons to the usual dreary rations, while other selections weighed in on national issues.¹⁷ Signing himself as "Yours for the union," soldier "M. W." wrote as companies L and C left Camp Wagoner, Missouri, that "the prospect of War looks very encouraging; I don't see how the Rebs can hold out much longer; Lincoln will undoubtedly be re-elected—and that in my opinion, will decide the question. Now for Richmond, and the day is ours!"¹⁸ Sergeant True, on a recruiting assignment in Colorado, informed readers of the February 4, 1865, issue that "recruiting is very brisk at present" and that "The Citizens of Boulder gave a dinner to the 100 day's men who were enlisted in that vicinity, said to be the grandest thing of the kind, ever gotten up in Colorado!"¹⁹ M. Wisner of Company L wrote from Fort Ellsworth, Kansas, to endorse the sentiments on "human Liberty" expressed in a previous issue of the *Soldier's Letter*, to disavow any Copperheads who opposed such sentiments, and to inform all readers that "there's nothing in camp, but what is frozen, including my feet."²⁰

The *Soldier's Letter* did more than just dispassionately emit information; it dispensed news and conveyed soldiers' attitudes with definite purposes in mind. The pages

15. The "Compendium of History," as this running regimental history was called, seems to have been written by editor Wallace, Ellen Williams, or both.

16. *Soldier's Letter*, September 17, 1864, continued from *Soldier's Letter*, August 20, September 3, 1864.

17. *Ibid.*, October 1, 1864.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, February 4, 1865.

20. *Ibid.*

of the *Soldier's Letter* consistently worked as connecting links, attaching the various companies of the regiment to each other and apprising the entire regiment of the progress of the war. Like many regiments, the Second Colorado Cavalry used its regimental paper to solidify a sense of shared identity among the various companies of the regiment. Editor Wallace described the intent of the paper as "giving a truthful and unbiased account of all matters of interest that transpired in the Regiment."²¹ This task took on added importance in early 1865 when the companies of the Second Colorado were dispersed to multiple duty stations throughout the Kansas plains. After the successful repulse of General Sterling Price's late-1864 raid into Missouri and Kansas, in which the Second played a key role, the individual companies of the regiment were divided among various Kansas forts, including Forts Leavenworth, Zarah, Larned, Ellsworth, and Riley.²²

In response to the dispersal of the regiment, editor Wallace of Company H rededicated himself to the task of making the *Soldier's Letter* a "perfect institution . . . belonging to the Regiment."²³ From his post at Fort Riley, Wallace continued to open every issue of the *Soldier's Letter* with an installment in the ongoing chronicle of the Second Colorado Cavalry's career and supplemented that narrative with updates from the regiment's various companies. The edition of February 4, 1865, for instance, includes a letter from Fort Larned written by Sergeant W. W. Babbitt of Company F, describing the death of soldier Joseph Fields in an Indian raid, followed by a letter from "Kemp" of Company M, hoping for the speedy arrival of new hospital staff and the paymaster.²⁴ Recurrent contributors, such as "Kiowa," sent dispatches from Fort Larned where soldiers kept watch against extreme cold and Indian attack.²⁵ Wallace also redoubled his efforts to inform his fellow Coloradan soldiers of important war events and took great pride in the fact that, while "it was next to impossible to obtain news of what was transpiring in the east through any other source" during the last months of the Civil War, critical news, such as "the news of Lee's surrender was published in an 'extra,' at the 'SOLDIER'S LETTER' office,

21. *Ibid.*, November 28, 1865. In this, the last issue, the goals and seventeen-month history of the *Soldier's Letter* were reviewed.

22. Publication of this newspaper temporarily ceased during General Sterling Price's raid in the autumn of 1864 but resumed in November of that same year. Companies A and B actually were discharged following Price's raid, since their terms of enlistment had expired. See Adams, "The Second Colorado Cavalry," 105.

23. *Soldier's Letter*, November 28, 1865.

24. *Ibid.*, February 4, 1865.

25. *Ibid.* Other regularly featured contributors included "J. H.," "B.," and "M. Wisner."

at Fort Riley, the same hour, of the same day that it was issued at Leavenworth City—one hundred and twenty miles farther east!”²⁶ Even civilian sources, such as the *Missouri Democrat*, praised the *Soldier’s Letter* as a “spicy little newspaper” whose mission of detailing “the doings of the regiment and collateral matter” was “excellently carried out in the number sent to us.”²⁷

Even more important, the *Soldier’s Letter* served as a connecting link in a larger sense, aligning the Coloradan soldiers with the purposes as well as progress of the Civil War and uniting the Second Colorado with the American nation. The newspaper achieved these ends through the recurrent discussion of three main topics: the traditions and institutions of American government, the demise of slavery, and the dramas of territorial and national politics.

In issue after issue, the *Soldier’s Letter* sought to identify Colorado Territory and the Second Colorado Cavalry with the American nation by claiming allegiance to the history and principles of the United States. Contributors to the *Soldier’s Letter* explained how the outbreak of war refined Colorado’s fidelity to the United States into a tough, pure patriotism defined by commitment to the “just and holy Cause” of the Union.²⁸ The shots fired at Fort Sumter might have separated the North from the South, but the experience of war united the West more firmly with the East on the basis of shared values, such as the “Constitution and the laws” and “free institutions” celebrated by the columns of the *Soldier’s Letter*.²⁹ By enlisting to help put down the rebellion against American government, Coloradan soldiers demonstrated their loyal American identity:

WHEN this great rebellion broke out, in ‘61, the shock was felt—not only in the immediate locality of the outbreak, but extended all over the continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast. The echo of the first gun fired on Sumter, had scarcely died away, when the loyal men of the loyal States and Territories, rose in their might, and asked to be led against the “invaders of peace, and enemies of free institutions.” Conspicuous among that number, was the Territory of Colorado.³⁰

In other words, Colorado’s ties to the American Union consisted not of contiguous geographic territory but of shared

convictions and allegiances, and in this article the *Soldier’s Letter* claimed that these were the ties that mattered.

According to the *Soldier’s Letter* and its exaggerated descriptions of Coloradan patriotism, the willingness of Colorado civilians to become soldiers and take up arms to preserve the American ideal of free government compensated for the “youth” and distant location of the territory and qualified Colorado as a full-fledged part of the American republic. The recent date of Colorado’s incorporation as an American territory paled in comparison to its citizens’ purported willingness to defend the American government. As a contributor to the *Soldier’s Letter* explained:

Although but a child in years; and separated from the States by a vast Sandy Plain; . . . yet the great heart of her [Colorado’s] people throbbled with a loyal pulsation and loyal blood coursed through her every vein: when the war was forced upon us by the rebels—true to her Allegiance to the Government of the United States—Colorado called the roll of loyalty and honor, and a thousand brave hearts and willing hands came up and answered to their names—exchanging the “Pick and shovel,” for the “Sword and bayonet”—and marched forth to meet the rebel hordes.³¹

Coloradans had demonstrated willingness to sacrifice their private lives and livelihoods, their “picks and shovels,” out of the same “Allegiance to the Government of the United States” that had inspired New Englanders, New Yorkers, or Ohioans to join the Union army. Consequently, this article implied, Colorado was just as much a part of the American nation as were the established states.

The *Soldier’s Letter* prompted soldiers to demonstrate further their American allegiance and identity by taking pride in the responsibilities of citizenship shared by Americans throughout the Union. “‘American Union soldier’—should be looked upon as one of the most honorable titles it were possible to bestow upon any one—more especially, those of our own nativity,” exhorted one unsigned piece, probably by editor Wallace.³² Even the burden of taxation should be willingly shouldered as an illustration of inclusion within the American nation. As one column explained, “every loyal man should not only consider it a duty, but a privilege to pay his proportion of tax for the maintenance of the Government, and the prosecution of the War. . . . That’s our doctrine exactly!”³³ By frequent rep-

26. *Ibid.*, November 28, 1865.

27. *Missouri Democrat*, quoted in *ibid.*, February 4, 1865.

28. *Soldier’s Letter*, August 20, 1864.

29. *Ibid.*, August 20, 1864; *ibid.*, August [incomplete date] 1864.

30. *Ibid.*, August [incomplete date] 1864.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*, August 20, 1864.

33. *Ibid.*

etition of such patriotic “doctrines” as this one, along with the celebrations of “free government” that appeared in successive installments of the “Compendium of History of the 2nd Colorado,” the *Soldier’s Letter* actively sought to strengthen Colorado’s claim to the adjective “American.”

“Free government” signified more than mere rhetorical flourish in the pages of the *Soldier’s Letter*; it stood also for the commitment to emancipation that animated the contributors to the *Soldier’s Letter* and helped link them to what they saw as the central purpose of the Civil War. Through its discussions of slavery, ex-slaves, and abolition, the *Soldier’s Letter* reminded soldiers why they wore the Union uniform. By following the progress of slavery’s legal eradication, soldiers could remind themselves of the purpose that the whole broad, sprawling Civil War had to accomplish, and by supporting that purpose, they remained at the ideological center of the war, even while stationed on the geographic periphery. Support for emancipation was another way in which the *Soldier’s Letter* demonstrated Coloradoan attachment to the American nation.³⁴

To the *Soldier’s Letter*, the cause of the Civil War was plain; the “terrible war” came about, according to a typical unsigned article, because the South tried “to uphold the institution” of slavery.³⁵ It followed, then, that the cause of the Union could not be separated from the destruction of slavery, and the paper discussed this theme throughout its existence. Despite Colorado’s distance from the fierce wrangling over slavery that had occupied the United States in the years before the war and the apparent irrelevance of the slavery issue to Colorado, the newspaper of the Second Colorado Cavalry looked forward to the day when “the last vestige of Slavery shall be buried, and we shall become ‘a nation truly free!’”³⁶

34. Numbers in which contributors to the *Soldier’s Letter* discuss slavery and the fates of black Americans include (but are not limited to) September 3, 1864, January 28, February 4, 13, May 27, June 17, September 9, 16, 1865. The related issue of black Union soldiers also appears, such as in the *Soldier’s Letter*, August 20, 1864, which reports on the cooperation between the Second Colorado Infantry and the First Kansas Colored Infantry at Cabin Creek and Honey Springs in the Choctaw Nation. The Second Colorado Infantry was later reorganized as the Second Colorado Cavalry, by the authority of Special Order No. 278 on October 11, 1863, and Special Order No. 323 on November 26, 1863. See Adams, “The Second Colorado Cavalry in the Civil War”; Williams, *Three Years and a Half in the Army*; *Soldier’s Letter*, October 1, 1864.)

35. *Soldier’s Letter*, September 9, 1865.

36. *Ibid.*, January 28, 1865. It should be noted that some settlers to Colorado Territory did support slavery. In 1861 a proslavery faction briefly flew a Confederate flag in Denver for part of a day before the outraged Union majority removed the banner. Nevertheless, the likelihood that Colorado would admit slavery was never strong, and the issue was never so divisive as in Kansas Territory or in Congress. See Abbott, Leonard, and McComb, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*; Ubbelohde, Benson, and Smith, *A Colorado History*; Smith, *The Birth of Colorado*.

The paper followed the path of the Thirteenth Amendment through Congress and the individual states, eagerly repeating each vote for emancipation as one more chime in slavery’s ultimate death knell. On January 28, 1865, the *Soldier’s Letter* informed readers that “Missouri and Tennessee have come out, and abolished slavery” to the “rejoicing and satisfaction [of] all loyal citizens.” Another column in that same issue included, among its brief run-down through news items of importance, the intelligence that “Only four votes were cast against the Emancipation Ordinance at the Convention held at Jefferson City, Missouri.”³⁷ The February 4, 1865, issue proclaimed that “the amendment to the Constitution of the United States, abolishing slavery, has passed!”³⁸ The next edition cheerfully monitored the amendment’s progress, noting that “MAINE has ratified, unanimously, the Constitutional Amendment.”³⁹

Expressing interest in the fate of black Americans was one more way the *Soldier’s Letter* linked soldiers on the Kansas frontier to developments within the American nation. By the end of the war, Union soldier support for emancipation as a war aim was widespread but did not necessarily mean that soldiers concerned themselves with the fate of actual ex-slaves, as long as the South was deprived of the institution of slavery upon which it relied and that it sought to defend.⁴⁰ The *Soldier’s Letter*, however, reflects a comparatively high degree of concern for the welfare of African Americans and clearly associates the advancement of ex-slaves with the success of the Union war effort. In the last months of the war, one anonymous contributor approvingly noted that “A colored lawyer J. S. Rock, of the Massachusetts bar, has been admitted to practice in the Supreme Court of the U.S.” In September a brief, unsigned item supported a project under way near Vicksburg, Mississippi, in which ten thousand acres of land were to be leased to former slaves as they began their new lives in freedom. Another column applauded the Massachusetts senate for “imposing \$50 fine for making discrimination on account of color in any inn, place of amusement, public conveyance or public meeting.”⁴¹ One unnamed soldier reported that “a colored woman in Marietta, Ohio,

37. *Soldier’s Letter*, January 28, 1865.

38. *Ibid.*, February 4, 1865.

39. *Ibid.*, February 13, 1865.

40. For Union soldiers’ attitudes on slavery, see Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond*; Hess, *Liberty, Virtue and Progress*; McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*.

41. *Soldier’s Letter*, February 13, 1865; *ibid.*, September 9, 1865; *ibid.*, June 17, 1865.



During most of its lifetime, the Soldier's Letter was published at Fort Riley, Kansas, which is depicted here shortly after the end of the Civil War.

brought recently to her minister \$5. It was the first money she had ever earned. She wanted it to begin a monument for Abraham Lincoln, she said, without whom she would have remained nothing but a slave."⁴² Yet another anonymous column centered around a convention of "colored men in Tennessee" and its political activities among loyal whites and the United States Congress.⁴³ The frequency and variety of such articles demonstrates an acute awareness that the fate of black Americans was firmly linked to the cause and outcome of the Civil War.

The *Soldier's Letter* further affirmed Colorado's place within the nation by emphasizing the impact of the abolition of slavery—and by extension, all those who supported abolition—not only on the United States but also on the rest of the world. One column speculated that the destruction of slavery brought about by Union soldiers' victory in the Civil War would further the cause of emancipation in foreign countries. The author explained that the "terrible war in the United States, and the equally terrible debt caused by trying to uphold the 'institution,' give considerable uneasiness in the countries which legalize it, and the question is being asked, whether it is not better to try and get rid of it by other than violent means. A question like this is likely to bring it about by one means or the other." Inspired by the Union's triumph in the American Civil

War, countries such as Brazil and Spain now perched on the edge of emancipation. Colorado soldiers were united with all Union soldiers in bequeathing to other nations a model of free government purged of the blemish of slavery.⁴⁴

The *Soldier's Letter* demonstrates that Colorado soldiers maintained an emotional attachment to the American government, that they understood the government to be based upon shared ideas, that "freedom" ranked as the most important of those ideas, and that slavery was antithetical to freedom and therefore incompatible with American government. Despite its foundation in ideas, however, American government was not an abstraction to the soldiers who read and wrote the *Soldier's Letter*. Instead, it was a dynamic process in which they expected to participate. Politics provided the process through which soldiers took an active part in government. Politics also served as a bridge that connected Colorado Territory to the United States and linked soldiers to both their home territory and the American Union. Through frequent coverage of topics such as the Colorado statehood campaign and the presidential election of 1864, the *Soldier's Letter* kept its readers apprised of political developments in Denver, Washington,

44. Ibid., September 9, 1865. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, discusses the tendency of Union soldiers to believe that a Union victory in the Civil War would have global consequences because such a victory would prove that a free, representative government could survive. The *Soldier's Letter's* discussion of Brazil and Spain adds an interesting angle to this theme.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., September 16, 1865.

and throughout the Union, and it exhorted soldiers to take seriously their responsibilities as voters as well as fighters.

By the late summer of 1864 Colorado's bid for statehood loomed as a political issue of great importance to the *Soldier's Letter*. By choosing statehood, Colorado Territory would strengthen the ties that bound it to the United States. By participating in the statehood process, soldiers could bind themselves simultaneously to their communities back in Colorado and to the national community. For these reasons, editor Wallace highlighted the importance of participating in the statehood election, reminding soldiers that they "had a voice in the matter" and hoping that "the 2nd will roll up an aggregate of over 1000 votes on that [election] day."⁴⁵

The *Soldier's Letter* supported statehood partly for the practical advantages promised by closer linkage with the United States. By becoming a state, Colorado stood to gain "land grants for Railroads; grant of lands for an Agricultural College," and other programs that would aid in the territory's development. Further, Coloradans would secure an even higher degree of self-determination, since statehood would bring elected representation in Congress and the right to vote for officials, such as the governor, who were currently appointed.⁴⁶

Beyond the economic perks promised by statehood, however, the *Soldier's Letter* portrayed a vote for statehood as a way for each soldier to articulate his commitment to the war and the Union and to affirm his allegiance as an American. Claiming that only Copperheads could possibly oppose statehood "for the simple reason that they are opposed to the war, opposed to taxation to carry it on, opposed to the Administration, and would rather see the rebels succeed in their treasonable designs, than that the Union cause should triumph," the *Soldier's Letter* encouraged soldiers to use the statehood vote to decry disloyalty and prove their own commitment to the American Union.⁴⁷

45. *Soldier's Letter*, August 20, 1864. Despite the enthusiasm of Wallace and the votes of the Second Colorado Cavalry, the statehood vote did not pass in Colorado, and in fact, Colorado did not achieve statehood until 1876. Nevertheless, Wallace had no way of knowing that in 1864, and the failure of his efforts does not negate their sincerity. On the campaign for Colorado statehood, see Abbott, Leonard, and McComb, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*; Ubbelohde, Benson, and Smith, *A Colorado History*; Smith, *The Birth of Colorado*.

46. *Soldier's Letter*, August 20, 1864.

47. *Ibid.* "Copperheads" was a derisive title for those who opposed the Republican Party and the war effort and who supported a speedy end to the conflict, even if that meant granting independence to the Confederacy. The most visible Copperhead was Ohioan Clement Vallandigham, who was for a brief time banished from the United States for his alleged disloyalty.

When the statehood vote occurred on September 13, 1864, the newspaper took pleasure in reporting that only one vote against statehood had been cast by a soldier in the Second Colorado Cavalry.⁴⁸

The *Soldier's Letter* encouraged its readers to endorse trustworthy candidates as another means to express their own loyal American identities. Editor Wallace endorsed former Colorado soldier U.B. Holloway, the Republican nominee for secretary of Colorado, on the basis of his wartime service and his status as a "true Union man." The secretary ranked second only to the governor and served a function much like that of today's lieutenant governor. For this important position "they could not have selected a better man for that position," claimed Wallace, as he instructed members of the Second Colorado to "give him a full vote on election day."⁴⁹

The *Soldier's Letter* also forthrightly supported Abraham Lincoln for president in 1864, following the election as closely as if the Second Colorado Cavalry had been stationed on the banks of the Potomac River rather than on the remote Kansas prairie. Like no other event, the 1864 presidential election linked the decision of the individual voting soldier to the fate of the American nation as a whole, since the continued prosecution of the war depended upon Lincoln's reelection.⁵⁰ In the war's most discouraging moments, remembered the *Soldier's Letter*, "'Old Abe' would come out with a plain, lucid, common-sense-view of matters, and settle all doubts, and scatter all the dark clouds that seemed to hover over our mind, and we felt a renewed confidence, that all was right—so long as Abraham Lincoln was at the helm."⁵¹ The White House and the Kansas plains may have been thousands of miles from each other; nevertheless, the soldiers who aired their views in the *Soldier's Letter* claimed that the inhabitants of both locales depended upon each other. The presidential election allowed Coloradan soldiers a voice in an event affecting all Americans and the chance to carry "out our way of thinking, on Election-day, by voting for Lincoln and Johnson—the choice of true Union men."⁵²

48. *Ibid.*, September 17, 1864. The election took place only four days earlier, on September 13, and the results of only four of the companies and headquarters (395 votes) had been reported at the time of publication.

49. *Ibid.*, September 3, 1864.

50. For soldier response to and participation in the election of 1864, see Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet*; William C. Davis, *Lincoln's Men: How President Lincoln Became Father to an Army and a Nation* (New York: Free Press, 1999); David E. Long, *The Jewel of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln's Re-Election and the End of Slavery* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1994); T. Harry Williams, "Voters in Blue: The Citizen Soldiers of the Civil War," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 31 (September 1944): 187–204.

51. *Soldier's Letter*, September 17, 1864.

52. *Ibid.*

Missouri is Free!!!

Slavery is Buried!!

Read the following clause in the Emancipation Ordinance, passed on the 11th of January, 1865:

"Hereafter in this State there shall be neither slavery, nor involuntary servitude, except in punishment of crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, and all persons held to service, or labor as slaves, are hereby set free."

The ball is under motion, and it will roll on, until the last vestige of Slavery shall be buried, and we shall become "a nation truly free!" Missouri's "gone and did it, boys! glory! hallelujerum!" She has come out from the dark cloud, and shines forth resplendent in all her glory; washed from the foul stain of human bondage! More is approaching, and soon the full day, will make its appearance!

The Soldier's Letter (left) frequently carried news and commentary about slavery, an institution the newspaper described as the "foul stain of human bondage." This column appeared in the January 28, 1865, issue.

The last issue of the Soldier's Letter (right) was published November 28, 1865. In the editor's final column, "Valedictory," he stated that the paper "became a perfect institution; as belonging to the Regiment; and its regular appearance was hailed with a hearty welcome by its friends, that the author fully appreciates."

VALEDICTORY.

With the present number, closes our labors, and ends the volume of the "SOLDIER'S LETTER." How well the work has been accomplished, we leave with our readers. That it might have been much better, we do not for a moment pretend to deny. In the volume, of which this is the end, there are some typographical errors, and a few specimens of very indifferent grammar, as well as some rather unsatisfactory blanks existing, in regard to matters of which it was utterly impossible for the author to obtain any definite information, and preferred to remain silent, rather than run the risk of making a false, or one-sided statement, which would only do an injustice to the object for which the "LETTER" was designed;—that of giving a truthful and unbiassed account of all matters of interest that transpired in the Regiment, during its existence, from its first organization, to the time that it was mustered out, and left the service.—None but those who have had experience in such matters, can give an adequate idea of the unpleasantness of the

Since Colorado was not yet a state in 1864 and therefore not entitled to cast any electoral votes in the presidential election, Colorado soldiers might have been expected to have displayed little sense of connection to the political events of 1864. However, the pages of the *Soldier's Letter* display a high degree of political awareness and interest in both the Colorado statehood vote and the Lincoln-versus-McClellan presidential contest. In fact, Private Wallace and other contributors used the *Soldier's Letter* to link the political interests of Colorado and the nation. Letters to the editor from Second Colorado cavalrymen championed the Lincoln platform and decried Copperheads. By reporting the results of the Second Colorado's nonbinding straw poll, in which support for Lincoln and Johnson was overwhelming and support for their rivals was "not known in these parts," the *Soldier's Letter* reinforced the image of Coloradan soldiers as loyal Americans.⁵³

Finally, the very process of voting itself helped reinforce the identity of these cavalrymen as committed Americans. One column about the upcoming statehood vote ended with the hope that "every soldier in the 2nd will be wide awake on the occasion and cast in a vote 'For the Constitution,' and send back to our friends a good account of ourselves on election day."⁵⁴ In another issue editor Wallace reported that "The men of this Regiment want to be wide awake and vote for the right men at the coming election. They expect lively times in Colorado and want all the assistance we soldiers can give them."⁵⁵ The "wide awake" references reminded Colorado soldiers of the previous national presidential campaign of 1860, when the Republican Party had campaigned on a platform that maintained the Union while prohibiting the westward extension of slavery and had billed its supporters the "wide awakes." As he


53. Ibid., September 30, 1864, February 4, 1865.

54. Ibid., August 20, 1864.

55. Ibid., August [incomplete date] 1864.

wrote in 1864, Wallace sought to ally the Second Colorado with the Republican Party, by then regarded as the true defender of the American Union. Support for Colorado statehood and Republican candidates, couched in terms designed to link Coloradan political concerns to national politics, resounded throughout the *Soldier's Letter* because voting in territorial and national elections reinforced and proclaimed soldiers' identities as both Coloradans and as Americans.

Politics continued to play an important role in linking Colorado soldiers with the rest of the American public, even after the Civil War. Political participation could function as a bridge between the American soldier who fought for the government and the American citizen who continued to guard the fruits of free government in civilian life. In its last issue the *Soldier's Letter* urged Second Colorado cavalrymen to "ever realize the necessity of a watchful interest in the preservation and perpetuation of our noblest of Governments; as well in *civil* life, as in *military*." The newspaper further reminded soldiers to remain vigilant against disloyal Americans, who were more dangerous to "our loved Union" than any external enemy could ever be and to limit the influence that the disloyal could exercise on the nation by attending faithfully to their political obligations.⁵⁶ If soldiering inaugurated Coloradans into the Union, then attention to political responsibilities such as voting ensured their continuing membership and also contributed to the health of the American nation.

Since its inaugural issue in August 1864, the *Soldier's Letter* had promoted a strong sense of kinship among the companies of the Second Colorado Cavalry and a firm connection between Colorado soldiers and the American Union they fought to protect. Through patriotic meditations on the ideals of American history and government, discussions of slavery and emancipation, and coverage of national and territorial politics, the *Soldier's Letter* helped forge strong regimental and American identities among Colorado soldiers and consciously linked those two identities together. While the conclusion of the Civil War reattached the Northern and Southern sections of the United States, the experience of war also bound the *eastern* and *western* halves of the nation more firmly to each other. The Civil War altered Americans' sense of the national community to which they belonged, and it even changed what it meant to identify oneself as an American. Through their regimental newspaper, enlisted soldiers of the Second Colorado Cavalry maintained links with the communities from which they had enlisted and with the national community for which they fought. Although a map might have placed the Kansas plains where the cavalrymen served far from the center of any Union battle campaign and distant from the seat of the United States government, the *Soldier's Letter* enabled Colorado cavalrymen to locate their wartime service firmly within the ideological bounds of the United States and allowed soldiers to place themselves at the center of the American nation. 

56. *Ibid.*, November 28, 1865.