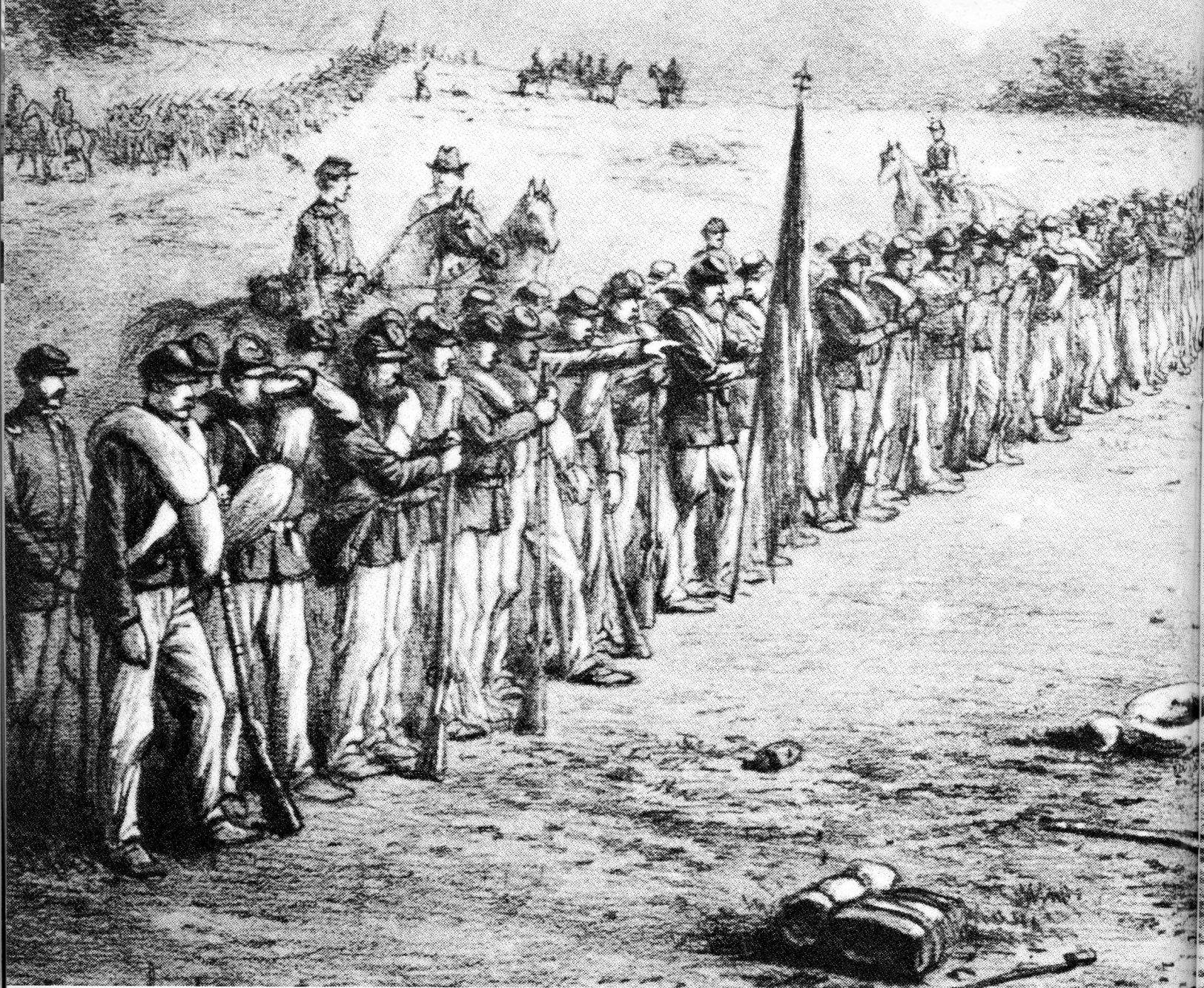


# When the Green Wore Blue

By Seymour E. Wheelock, M.D.



**DMS's alumni rolls from the 19th century reveal 225 veterans of the Civil War. Why did so many sons of the Green don the Union blue? A medical historian with Dartmouth roots dug into the past to answer that question. The resulting narrative is part history, part literature, and wholly compelling.**



EDWIN FORBES

**‘W**ar! War!! War!!! Our Massachusetts citizens have been murdered in the streets of Baltimore while marching on their way to Washington to protect the capital of our country. All our citizens are requested to meet at the town hall this evening to see what can be done.”

It was all too true. The Massachusetts 6th Regiment had been attacked on Friday, April 19, 1861. It was 86 years to the day after the “shot heard ’round the world” — that shot fired by some nervous farmer, his brain hot with anger and his belly hot with rum — had ricocheted off the Old North Bridge in Concord.

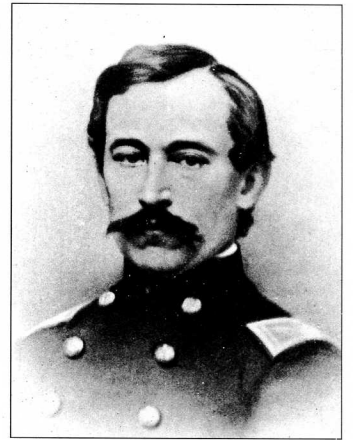
The hall in Worcester to which this broadside called the town’s finest seethed with men eager for action. That night, the first of many names were placed on the rolls of Company F of the 15th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment.

The next evening there was a second crowded meeting, and the *Worcester Daily Spy* trumpeted: “Nobody can ever remember a similar excitement in Worcester. Our extras with the news disappeared as fast as they were printed. All are determined to defend our country to the last.”

At that second meeting, a brass band tootled away with cacophonous enthusiasm and cascades of patriotic eloquence flooded the hall, while still more names were added to the military rolls. Adding luster to the momentous proceedings was Colonel Edmund Brigham, a stringy veteran of the Revolution. He stood, clutching his slender, full-stock Kentucky rifle, in a place of honor on the platform at the front of the hall.

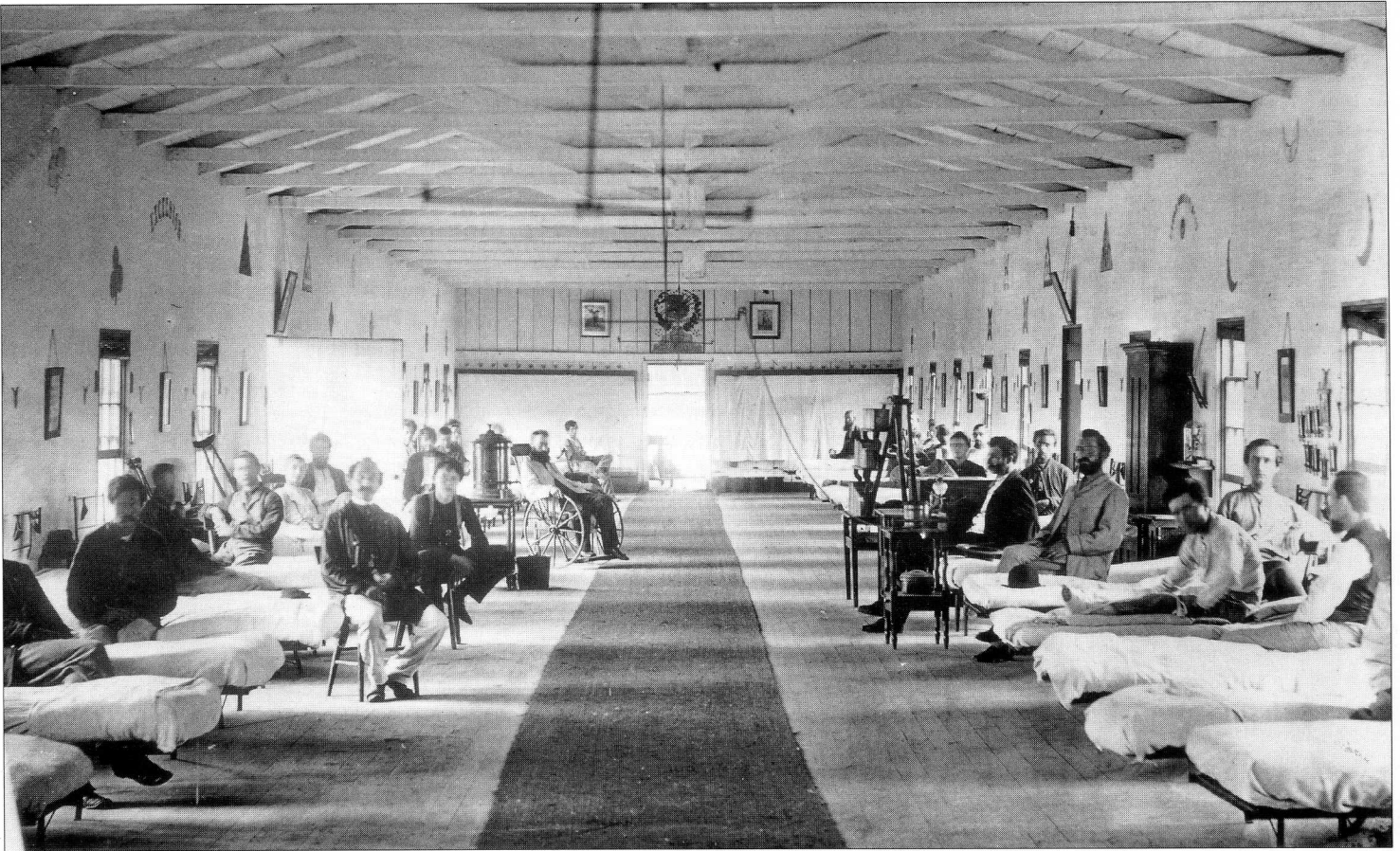
Meanwhile, a sturdy citizen with graying, sandy hair shouldered his way through the excited crowd, making way for himself and a much younger companion following behind. After a moment’s sober reflection, both signed the enrollment papers with a pen that had already set in motion the destinies of a dozen

*Dr. Wheelock, a 1940 graduate of Dartmouth College, earned his M.D. at Northwestern. He returned to Hanover in 1944 for his internship and was a member of the Hitchcock Clinic pediatric staff from 1962 to 1966. Now a professor emeritus of clinical pediatrics at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, he writes regularly on a variety of medical history topics. For this article, he used as references the following documents: Military Record of the Sons of Dartmouth, compiled by Major E. D. Redington, Dartmouth College, 1861; The Story of the Fifteenth Regiment — Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War, Andrew Ford, Coulter Press, 1898; Alumni of Dartmouth College, George T. Chapman; The Story of Dartmouth, Wilder Quint, Little, Brown, 1914; and a collection of letters written from the front by one of his own Civil War-era relatives, George N. Wheelock. Although this narrative is based on historical fact, the author has taken some liberties with the material in the interest of literary liveliness; in particular, Dr. Bates’s “journal entries” were crafted by the author on the basis of a meticulous history of the 15th Massachusetts Regiment. Dr. Wheelock’s last article for Dartmouth Medicine, on DMS founder Nathan Smith, appeared in the Fall 1990 issue.*



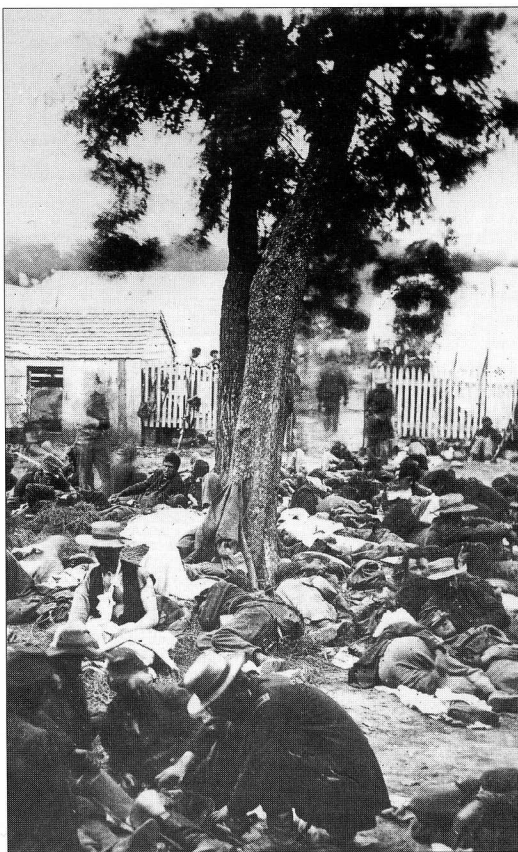
**Bloody battles:** Above is George Ward, a colonel in the Massachusetts 15th Volunteer Regiment; he himself was not a Dartmouth graduate, but he recuperated with a DMS alumnus after the Union bloodbath at Ball’s Bluff in 1861. The drawing on the left, by an artist who traveled with the troops, shows a Union regiment surveying its dead while reforming the line of battle at Antietam.

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**Caring for the casualties:** *The medical facilities for wounded Civil War troops ranged, by today's standards, from meager to abysmal. The spartan setting above — a military hospital in Washington, D.C. — was about as good as such facilities got. Much more common were scenes like the one at right, showing wounded Union soldiers waiting for treatment at a first-aid station after the Battle of Fair Oaks in Virginia.*

THE BETTMAN ARCHIVE



men before them. The adjutant whirled the book about to read what the pair had just written:

"Joseph Nye Bates, M.D.; born 1811, Princeton, New Jersey; married; residence, Worcester; occupation, surgeon; age, 50.

Samuel F. Haven, Jr., M.D.; born 1831, Dedham, Massachusetts; residence, Worcester; occupation, physician and surgeon; age, 30."

"Welcome aboard, sawbones," wheezed the clerk. "Looks as if you'll be needed — maybe sooner than you think."

The two physicians knew one another well, and as they left the hall they stood for a moment on the steps in the chilly drizzle, jostled by groups of shouting, gesticulating men.

"What exactly have we done, Sam?" inquired the elder of the two. "We must recall this moment."

The younger man hunched his shoulders against the buffeting wind and started down across the common. "Who knows? Who can ever guess?" he shouted back. "See you at the muster."

**From the journal of Joseph Nye Bates, M.D.:**

*Camp Scott, Brook's farm, South Worcester.*

*Today is June 28, about two months since Sam Haven and I signed on as regimental surgeons for the 15th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment. I am to be chief surgeon*

