

Tracy found corps headquarters in something of a panic. The Confederates under General Robert E. Lee were rumored to be crossing the Potomac River into Maryland, and Union authorities fully expected Baltimore and Washington to be under siege momentarily. Thus, when Tracy's 109th New York detrained at the Baltimore depot it was caught in a fluid situation in the war zone. This situation changed Tracy's ultimate destination.

Major General John Wool, commanding the VIII Corps, saw a clear need to guard against major Confederate raids on isolated posts, bridges, and transportation arteries under his jurisdiction. He quickly ordered Tracy and his inexperienced regiment southward to Annapolis Junction astride the railroad midway between Baltimore and Washington.<sup>8</sup>

Tracy and his men reached the Junction during the afternoon of September 1. Having selected their camping ground and pitched their tents, the New Yorkers scoured the locale for straw to make themselves more comfortable in the face of an approaching storm. All in all, it was not a very pleasant introduction to soldiering. Tracy was greeted within the week by complaints of local citizenry that his

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<sup>8</sup> Letter, Major General John E. Wool to Secretary of War, September 2, 1862, U. S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (128 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Ser. I, Vol. XII, Part III, p. 806. (Hereinafter cited as OR. with appropriate series, volume, part, and page).

incorrigible men were "plunderers and common thieves."<sup>9</sup>

Tracy found that, while he shared guard responsibilities with another regiment, the 141st New York, he would be obliged to establish firm policies concerning both his assignment and his command. He immediately set up a scheme of guard posts at intervals along the line, and planned to keep the "off duty" companies engaged at strenuous training. He issued special orders prohibiting foraging in the country-side, discharging firearms in camp, and gambling. Finally, the concerned regimental commander ordered strict personal cleanliness and a daily schedule which paralleled that of Camp Susquehanna for keeping his men active and fit for duty.<sup>10</sup>

The assignment did not altogether please the young colonel and his regiment. At first, the inevitable delays in supply, poor quality of Army rations, and a controversy with the Surgeon at the General Hospital at the Junction caused some sleepless nights for Tracy. Then, too, there was the matter of getting the rest of his men to camp who had

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<sup>9</sup> Letter, Colonel B. F. Tracy to Major General John E. Wool, September 17, 1862 in Regimental Letterbook, 109th New York, RG 94, NARS.

<sup>10</sup> Special Orders 3, September 3, 1862; 4, September 4, 1862; 5, September 7, 1862; 9, September 9, 1862, and 27 September 18, 1862, all in Regimental Letterbook, 109th New York, RG 94, NARS.

been left stranded at Elmira by insufficient transportation.<sup>11</sup> Most of these problems were not straightened out until mid-autumn, and in the meantime there was always the possibility of a Confederate raid.

Despite the fact that Lee's invasion of Maryland ended along Antietam Creek on September 17, sixty miles west of Tracy's position, the threat of cavalry raids disturbed Union authorities long into October. Indeed, from October 9 to 14, Lee's cavalry under Major General J.E.B. Stuart rode completely around the Union Army of the Potomac, and their return placed them between the main force of Federals and the Baltimore and Washington railroad axis. This raid occasioned constant alerts and Tracy's regiment shuttled back and forth between Annapolis Junction and Beltsville, closer to the Capital.

Tracy, as senior officer at this point took command of the so-called "Railway Brigade" and engaged in amateurish strategic planning as to how he would catch the elusive Stuart if the latter proved bold enough to attack the railroad. But the Confederates passed some miles to the west of

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<sup>11</sup> On supplies see Letter Tracy to Wool, September 17, 1862; On Ammunition, Letter Captain Richard B. Irvine to Colonel B. F. Tracy, October 14, 1862; Controversy with Medical Department, Letter A.M. Railin, Surgeon USA to Tracy, October 8, 1862; On Army Rations, Letter Tracy to Captain Kent, October 24, 1862; On transportation of men, Letter P.W. Hopkins to J.A. Redfield, General Agent Elmira & Williamsport R.R. September 21, 1862; Letter Redfield to Agent; Elmira, New York, September 25, 1862; and Letter W.P. Smith (Camden Station, Baltimore) to Tracy, September 25, 1862, all in Regimental Letterbook, 109th New York, RG 94, NARS.

the alert Federals and escaped into Virginia unscathed, leaving the lines of communication intact between Washington and the North.<sup>12</sup> The alert subsided and Tracy and his command turned their thoughts to more mundane matters.

Tracy soon felt concerned about winter quarters for his brigade. This issue led to a running fight with the Medical Department since the New Yorker wished to take over quarters of the General Hospital at Annapolis Junction. Then late in October he wrote to higher headquarters and outlined an extensive plan for guarding the railroad during the winter.

Tracy felt that two regiments should go into winter quarters at Laurel covering the railroad bridges over the Pautuxent River and Annapolis Junction, near Savage's Switch where the main line of the Baltimore and Ohio turned west. Tracy noted that winter quarters could easily be built at Laurel, and that the hospital at Annapolis Junction now occupied those barracks used the previous winter by the railroad guard.<sup>13</sup>

Ten days later Tracy reiterated his request for guidance from headquarters. Meanwhile, the Medical Department,

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<sup>12</sup> Letter, Captain A. Merritt, to Captain Norman Leeber, October 5, 1862 with notation; Telegrams Captain Richard B. Irwin to Colonel B. F. Tracy, October 12, 1862, (1:20 P.M.); Captain W. D. Whipple to Colonel B. F. Tracy, same date, (1:50 P.M.); Letter, Tracy to Irwin, October 14, 1862 all in Regimental Letterbook, 109th New York, RG 94, NARS. Ibid. For report of Stuart's operations see OR Ser.I, Vol. XIX, pt. 2, pp. 32-33.

<sup>13</sup> Letter, Tracy to Irwin, October 28, 1862, Regimental Letterbook, 109th New York, RG 94, NARS.

apprised of the situation, vacillated between evacuating the hospital and turning it over to Tracy, or retaining it. Finally, upon the recommendation of the Surgeon in charge at Annapolis Junction, the Surgeon General of the Army ordered retention of the hospital.<sup>14</sup> While the records do not show to what recourse Tracy retired in order to secure winter quarters, he was undoubtedly soured by the rebuff and for the rest of his wartime service, medical personnel succeeded in providing a source of great frustration for the young, impressionable officer.

Aside from these daily irritations, Tracy could feel some degree of pride in the service being rendered by his brigade by the end of 1862. His men were well drilled in their duties and Tracy constantly attempted to instill them with a sense of responsibility for protection of the valuable supply and communication link between Washington and the North. Such duties might not be as inspiring as actual participation in battle, but Tracy was satisfied at their performance thus far.

The winter of 1862-1863 provided a sobering experience for Tracy and the men of 109th. Sickness and the monotony of garrison duty took their toll of the soldiers' bodies and spirits. Tracy's restlessness gave vent to such schemes as a possible brigading of the 109th with its sister regi-

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<sup>14</sup> Letter, Colonel B. F. Tracy to Lieutenant Colonel C. McKeever, November 7, 1862; Letter, J. D. Smithy, Surgeon, USA to J. Simpson, Medical Director, Baltimore, November 22, 1862; Letter, Tracy to McKeever, November 21, 1862; Letter, Simpson to Tracy, November 24, 1862; All in Regimental Letterbook, 109th New York, RG 94, NARS.

ment, the 137th New York, in order to secure more active duty. Tracy, writing to his old friend ex-Governor Morgan, claimed that: "Such an order...would be hailed with delight by the friends and soldiers of both regiments." But such a scheme fell through, as did Tracy's other solicitations, through Morgan, for a reassignment as acting assistant provost-marshal-general for the State of New York.<sup>15</sup> Was it merely the natural reaction to months of inactivity in a stagnant military assignment, or was Tracy yearning for the more familiar scenes of Albany where he could also mend political fences?

The first half of 1863 continued the dull but necessary railroad duty for Tracy and his troops. Lee's second invasion of the North, ending at Gettysburg in early July, again brought fears for the safety of the railroad. However, as in 1862, Tracy and the 109th saw no action. Drill, parades, and guard detail occupied the days for the brigade, and the stagnating condition of the regiment is reflected in numerous special orders deploring increase in diarrhea, dearth of cleanliness, in addition to an increase of gambling and intemperance, which fill regimental order books in this period.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Letter, Colonel B. F. Tracy to Hon. E. D. Morgan, April 19, 1863, Regimental Letterbook, 109th New York, RG 94, NARS; Morgan to Tracy April 27, 1863, Copybook Vol. VII, p. 49, Edwin Morgan Papers, New York State Library, Albany, New York.

<sup>16</sup>Letter, Colonel B. F. Tracy to Colonel J. H. Taylor, Department of Washington, June 29, 1862, OR. Ser. I, Vol. XXVII, p. 406. War Department (Adjutant Generals Office), Special Order (S.O.) 23, June 10, 1862 (gambling); S.O. 29, July 30, 1862 (cleanliness); General Order 30, August 3, 1863, (intemperance) in Regimental Letterbook, 109th New York, RG 94, NARS.

The monotony was somewhat broken for Tracy when, near the end of the hot summer, he received additional duties as commander of a depot of draftees at Annapolis Junction. But Tracy's restiveness could be seen in official letters and dispatches. At one time he wrote requesting a complete re-outfitting of the 109th New York as a cavalry unit, undoubtedly a subtle ploy to gain combat service. But this scheme proved equally unsuccessful.<sup>17</sup>

Tracy's equestrian proclivities that summer also got him into hot water with some of the local citizenry, one of whom turned out to be the Sergeant-at-Arms of the Senate. The episode illustrates one of Tracy's strongest character traits, a rigid adherence to duty.

Apparently about August 10, Tracy while scouting the countryside for stolen government property noticed a horse in the possession of a Laurel horsedealer which the Colonel took to be property of the Government. Tracy seized the horse only to find out later that it allegedly belonged to G. E. Brown, Sergeant-at-Arms of the Senate. Caught off-guard, Tracy nevertheless refused to yield the horse without written proof that it was not still Government property. Brown then complained to his superiors that Tracy was insult-

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<sup>17</sup> S.O. 343, August 1863, in Compiled Service Record (C.S.R.) Letter of Benjamin F. Tracy, Record Group 15, Records of the Veterans Administration, Department of the Interior, Pension Office, hereinafter referred to as Tracy CSR, RG 15, NARS. On cavalry idea see Letter Tracy to Taylor, September 2, 1862, and note by Chief of Cavalry on reverse side dated September 10, 1862 in T 408, (US) 1863, RG 94. All in NARS.

ing in manner and was using the horse for his own personal use. In fact, Brown aggravated the situation by accusing Tracy of horse-stealing as well as conduct and language unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.

Tracy's sharp legal mind suspected something amiss when Brown tried to duck the request for proof of ownership. Tracy went so far as to write the Secretary of War himself that he was only doing his duty by guarding government property.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the New Yorker maintained his innocence of any guilty intent and caustically observed to higher headquarters that: "'The said Tracy' (quoting Brown) may be a very 'contemptible and cowardly' fellow but he is not so jolly as to suppose for an instant that a Congressional official would use his office to cover stolen property...".<sup>19</sup> The matter soon closed, but Tracy remained loyal to the strict letter of his responsibility to the Government as an officer of the United States Army.

Higher headquarters was aware of the growing restiveness of Tracy and his command. On October 12, the War Department ordered Tracy to leave two companies guarding the railroad at Laurel and take the other eight companies of the 109th

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<sup>18</sup>. Letter, Colonel B. F. Tracy to Hon. E. M. Stanton, Secretary of War, August 11, 1863; Letter Tracy to Taylor, August 18, 1863; both in Regimental Letterbook, 109th New York. Also Letter Sergeant of Arms, U.S. Senate to Maj. Gen. Samuel P. Heintzman, August 12, 1862, Tracy CSR Both RG 94, NARS.

<sup>19</sup> G.O. 34, Annapolis Junction, Maryland, October 10, 1863; G.O. 36, Mascos Island, D.C. October 16, 1863, and Letter, Tracy to Taylor, October 19, 1863, all in Regimental Letterbook, 109th New York, RG 94, NARS.

New York to the draft depot on Mason's Island in the Potomac River across from Georgetown within the confines of the District of Columbia. Three days later Tracy moved again, with six companies to Falls Church, Virginia, on the Loudon and Hampshire railroad.

Tracy's concern now became the guerrilla band of Major John S. Mosby. The Union colonel took charge of four or five miles of track between Falls Church and Arlington Mills, and established four companies on actual guard duty, with two as mobile reserves. He felt that this arrangement would protect the railroad yet keep his detachments "so strong as to prevent them from being 'gobbled up by Mosby [sic]'."<sup>20</sup>

During the winter of 1863-1864 Tracy's command remained divided between three places - Falls Church, Virginia, Mason's Island, D.C., and Laurel, Maryland. Barely 250 men were with Tracy personally, and he must have experienced difficulties in properly exercising command and supervision over the whole regiment.<sup>21</sup> Regular passes to visit Washington were available to the command, yet there was the inevitable grumbling of stagnating men.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Monthly Return of the 109th NY for October 1863 showed only 19 officers and 567 enlisted men, present for duty out of an aggregate regimental strength of 982. But by late January 1864, Tracy had raised this figure to 37/785 out of 983, and was moving toward better concentration of his units. See OR, Ser. I, Vol. XIX, pt. 2, p. 523 and OR, Ser. I, Vol. XXXIII, p. 475.