

The U.S. Marshal at Gettysburg

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A typical American envisioning U.S. Marshals may imagine them bringing peace and order to the frontier with the fabled Wyatt Earp or the Hollywood hero, Matt Dillon. But the historic accounts of marshals during the American Civil War are no less intriguing and are more significant. That is particularly so regarding the provost marshal of the Army of the Potomac, Marsena Patrick, who served at Gettysburg during and immediately after the battle.

Each of the two words in his title has a storied past still hinted at in twenty-first-century America. *Marshal* is derived from the Teutonic, meaning “master of the horse,” and is commonly used yet today to describe the one responsible for a parade. *Provost* comes from the Latin conveying the idea of “one who is placed above others.” Many colleges today have a provost, the chief academic officer who stands second only to the president. A provost marshal general serves as a high-ranking officer who carries the authority of his commander in assuring order in the army. In recent years, the U.S. Army has again brought the terminology to prominence, replacing the term *provost marshal* with *military police*, or MP’s.¹

One of the earliest documents prescribing the duties of the provost marshal is a 1629 edict from King Charles of England:

The Provost must have a horse allowed him and some soldiers to attend him and all the rest commanded to obey and assist, or else the Service will suffer: for he is but one man and must correct many and therefore cannot be beloved. And he must be riding from one Garrison to another to see the soldiers do no outrage nor scath the country.²

Ten years later King James specified his authority and role further: “to hear, judge, and determine any fact done by soldiers . . . to see that soldiers do no outrage, and scatter about the country.”³

Though a high-ranking officer, the provost marshal was not to command in combat or lead in attacks, but rather was to assure discipline and order in the ranks. His scope of responsibilities was behind any line of battle and between battles to assure that soldiers comported themselves properly.

The Provost Marshal in America

In America the provost marshal was a citizen soldier, one whose role would be tested in time. During the Revolutionary War, as the ranks of the forces swelled, problems in compelling order and discipline prompted army commanders to establish the office here. Generals George Washington, Horatio Gates, Nathaniel Greene, and other commanders appointed respected subordinates to serve in this capacity—though the role was vaguely defined—relieving pressures upon unit commanders while better assuring effectiveness on the field of battle. In times of relative peace, when the numbers of soldiers were much reduced and were only professional, no need was felt to continue the practice.

In subsequent periods of war, however, commanding generals again recognized the value in having provost marshals to keep order. Andrew Jackson appointed such a staff officer in the War of 1812, and Winfield Scott did so in the Mexican War. But as the American Civil War began to flare, there was no existing office of provost marshal. This would change quickly and the need expand rapidly.

As the armies multiplied and grew, each army department established the office of provost marshal for itself. And as civilian authorities found themselves incapable of assuring order in the larger

cities, particularly where numbers of soldiers were garrisoned or passing through, the need became evident for provost marshals in municipalities within the region of an army department. Thus, Baltimore, Washington, Frederick, Nashville, St. Louis, Winchester, New Orleans, and other cities found themselves subject to the authority of a provost marshal and sometimes effectively under martial law.

On July 18, 1861, Brigadier General Irvin McDowell authorized each regimental commander in his army to designate an officer and ten enlisted men to form a provost guard for their regiment but relatively few colonels did so.

Far from being an easy solution, the work of the provost guard would become exhausting and, despite good intentions, never fully successful. Major General George B. McClellan, when called to Washington by the War Department, decried continuing conduct by his soldiers that was “eminently prejudicial to good order and military discipline.” McClellan sought to deal with this rampant misbehavior with the establishment of a position of authority holding “a class of duties which had not before in our service been defined and grouped under the management of a special department.”⁴

McClellan thus appointed Colonel Andrew Porter as provost marshal of Washington, specifying the following duties:

- Prevention of straggling on the march;
- Suppression of gambling-houses, drinking-houses, or bar-rooms, and brothels;
- Regulation of hotels, taverns, markets, and places of public amusement;
- Searches, seizures, and arrests;
- Execution of sentences of general courts-martial involving imprisonment or capital punishment;
- Enforcement of orders prohibiting the sale of intoxicating liquors, whether by tradesmen or sutlers, and of orders respecting passes;
- Deserters from the enemy;
- Prisoners of war taken from the enemy;
- Countersigning safeguards;
- Passes to citizens within the lines and for purposes of trade;
- Complaints of citizens as to the conduct of the soldiers.⁵

Note how broad-based his duties were and how strong his authority.

Despite these specifics, however, several issues were not adequately addressed. Porter was hamstrung because he could not direct the activities of any regimental provost guards, and there developed an inevitable tension between the operations by his central authority and those guards functioning within the regiments subject to their own commanders. Furthermore, although Porter’s responsibilities extended beyond the District of Columbia, it was not clear to what extent he could enforce order beyond city and camp. A further area of ambiguity had to do with the provost marshal’s authority over civilians: initially his authority dealt exclusively with soldiers only but, as the war developed, such control expanded to include the civilian population where the armies were operating. And when conscription was instituted to draft civilians into the army, enforcement fell also to the provost guard operating far from the front.

Initially, Porter was assigned battalions from two regular Army regiments of infantry plus a cavalry regiment. But this organization did not constitute a separate branch of the army, as it would in the following century, and various units rotated in and out of the provost guard during the war. Within months, volunteer regiments considered sufficiently well disciplined were included among those at army level. Colonel Porter continued his duties as provost marshal general through the Peninsula campaign, but then relinquished the post due to ill health.

The Provost Marshal General in the Civil War

As the national conflict expanded, the War Department established the office of provost marshal general on September 24, 1862, in order to establish a more cohesive management of order within the armies. The intent was to assure effective accomplishment of the work being done among the various departments. Thus, the organizational structure would be akin to the work of the surgeon general and quartermaster general, whereby each commanding general would direct the work of his own staff, yet each army provost marshal would also coordinate his activities with his counterpart at the War Department.

The new provost marshal general in Washington was given overall responsibilities similar to those given by McClellan to Porter at the army department level:

- Arrest deserters and disloyal persons;
- Detect spies;
- Investigate treasonable practices;
- Seize stolen or embezzled government property.

However, though this list of duties was shorter, it also contained the direction that the provost marshal general would “perform other duties” unspecified. Ambiguity in the scope of responsibilities, the dual channels of accountability, and uncertainty as to the geographic area in which a particular provost marshal’s authority reached would become chronic headaches during the war.

The War Department order of September 1862 also authorized the establishment of provost marshals in all loyal states without clarity as to how these would operate. Yet there was the provision that each of said provost marshals were to report all proceedings promptly to the provost marshal general of the War Department.

On March 3, 1863, Congress created the Office of Provost Marshal General in Washington. It is not clear whether this was to ratify what the War Department had done five months earlier or to assert its own authority in establishing such an office. In any case, Colonel James B. Fry, later to become brigadier general in the regular army, was several days later appointed to become provost marshal general of the War Department.

In sorting out roles in the nation’s capital it is important to note the two other marshals who would be operating there. President Abraham Lincoln appointed his close friend, Ward Hill Lamon, as marshal of Washington. This civilian position to assure public order had long existed in the Federal District of Columbia with particular responsibility for overseeing the local jail, operating in the shadow of the Capitol building. A respected local resident was historically appointed to fill the role, but now this marshal would emphatically serve as an agent of the president (Lamon would occasionally act as Lincoln’s bodyguard).

Colonel Lafayette C. Baker, reputedly recruited directly by Major General Winfield Scott, served as provost marshal for the War Department in Washington, a military department of its own. Baker was an ambitious man and a self-promoter who published an account of his exploits shortly after the war describing his leadership in Washington of “The Bureau of Secret Service” and “The Bureau of the National Detective Police.”⁶ Baker would have repeated flare-ups with Brigadier General Marsena Patrick who, on October 6, 1862, was appointed by Major General George B. McClellan to become provost marshal general of the Army of the Potomac. (Patrick would continue in this capacity under successive commanding generals and would serve General George G. Meade most capably in the Gettysburg campaign.)

Without plunging deeply into a growing dispute between Baker and Patrick, it should be mentioned that the inevitable interaction between the War Department in Washington and its primary army and protector of the capital led to mutual frustrations, misunderstandings, and growing tensions in the broad and important area of responsibility of the provost marshal.

Patrick in his diary wrote, “Baker swears hostility eternal against Ingalls and myself.”⁷ He claimed to have come upon “some infamous letters from Washington, hatched by Baker ... to annoy me.” And he asserted that Baker and accomplices “are very busy to get a foot in my department.” Patrick surmised that Baker’s power arose because “he is in the employ of Seward—is his tool & monster—and is only nominally on duty in the War Department.”⁸ Rather than forming mutual support in their singular area of responsibility, the two were repeatedly at odds with each other.

Baker in turn referenced “the unjust and unkind charges preferred against me by General Patrick,” and accused him of endeavoring “to attack my private character.” The role of a provost marshal would be tough enough amidst a horrific war with unruly soldiers without having to contend with unbridled conflict among peers. But the geographical demarcation of provost authority was not clear, especially in the high-traffic passages between Washington and the Army of the Potomac and the respective spheres of the two provost marshals. At one point Patrick gave orders to “arrest all persons ... with the pass of Baker—Prov. Mar. War Dept.”⁹ He felt that Baker was extending his reach too far out from the District of Columbia.

Provost Marshal General Marsena Patrick

Marsena Rudolph Patrick had been serving as a brigadier in the Army of the Potomac when McClellan tapped him to become provost marshal general of the Army of the Potomac. Patrick was a native New Yorker and graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, class of 1835. He had served in the Seminole and Mexican wars and resigned his commission in 1850 to become a leader in upstate New York in agriculture, education, and railroading. His effective work as inspector general of the New York militia at the beginning of the war caused him in November 1861 to be named adjutant inspector general of the Army of the Potomac by McClellan. In March of the next year he received command of his own brigade.



General Marsena Patrick, (seated on the porch), and his staff officers, September 1863.
(LOC)

After the war, Patrick wrote to a friend about his exhausting labors as a brigadier in the autumn of 1862:

The Marchings and counter marchings, the Blunders and mishaps, the Carnage and blood, through which we waded . . . present to the memory but a confused mass of images, changing rapidly as they pass in review like the hues of a kaleidiescope, and only separated from each other by reference to the written memoranda of each day's operations.¹⁰

Patrick was a well-educated and thoughtful man and a frank descriptor of army experience. His diary is one of the most thoughtful and revealing to have been penned by any soldier; it is a great benefit to researchers seeking to appreciate the dynamics at army headquarters. McClellan respected Patrick's hard-working, no-nonsense approach to his work, a quality essential to a good provost marshal, and saw him as a desirable staff officer.

On October 7, 1862, Marsena Patrick assumed the duties of provost marshal general of the Army of the Potomac. And what would they be? Since the position was newly re-established since its last use in the Mexican War, the role was only vaguely defined. "I am not able yet to say, that I know any thing about duties," confided the new marshal to his diary two days later.¹¹ But already he had come to acknowledge being "suspicious that I shall not like the position, from the fact that I may be snubbed up by almost anybody. I am not supreme, as I used to be in my own Camp, & there is nothing fixed, or established, apparently . . ."¹² Though preferring command in line of battle, Patrick remained on staff for Burnside, Hooker, and Meade (and later, effectively for Grant), where he was privy to the deliberations and scuttlebutt of army headquarters, yet discreet except in the private pages of his diary.¹³

Without doubt, neither soldiers nor commanders liked to have the provost marshal meddling into their affairs. Though supposedly positioned on the very inside of the army, Patrick soon learned that he was becoming marginalized by his peers. Though he was "suspicious" that he would not like being the provost marshal, most everyone else readily became convinced they did not like him around. Nobody wanted him imposing his authority, and Patrick was initially unsure how to exert it.

Just ten days later he was disturbed by rowdiness in the camp throughout the night but reluctant to intervene. "... I slept until about 12'30" when I was aroused by boisterous language . . . It was a drinking bout & several Officers of Rank were concerned in it. The muss was kept up until about 4 o'clock this morning & no one in the neighborhood slept a wink."¹⁴ Patrick was doubtless aware that a firm foot and an iron hand in the camp could alienate him from his comrades. But in time, his reluctance faded and he showed little hesitation in enforcing order, despite having few friends left in uniform.

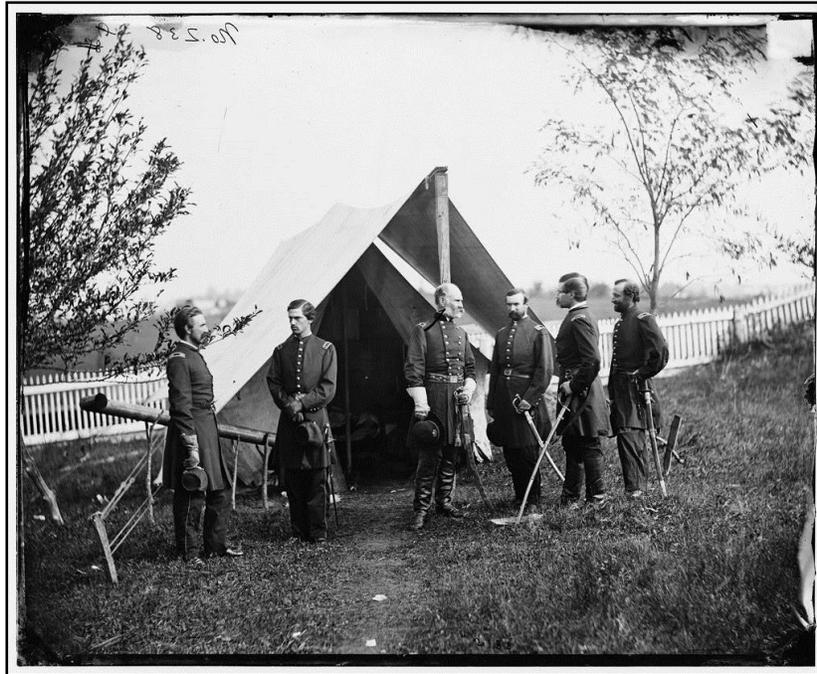
Patrick's Purview

This paper is intended to focus upon the role of the provost marshal general during the Gettysburg campaign, and particularly the battle itself. The difficulty is that amidst the exigencies of combat and the enormous tasks befalling Patrick, he had less time to reflect in his diary on the passing of those momentous days. One rightly assumes that all the everyday frustrations continued into July of 1863, compounded by the stress of battle. So it is well to first review the headaches that a man in his position sustained even apart from combat.

Though emphatically a staff officer, Patrick had the responsibility of commanding the equivalent of a brigade. But there was no unit cohesion with "regiment after regiment . . . assigned to me," each time with adjustments needing to be made and a steep learning curve of "difficult, laborious, and responsible duties."¹⁵

During the Battle of Gettysburg Patrick's guard was comprised of 84 officers and 1,445 men.¹⁶ Thus all the routine issues confronting a brigadier—setting up camp, roll calls, commissary, ordnance, supplies and equipment, breaking camp, movements, the sick, the insubordinate—had to be faced

immediately by Patrick. Moreover, it became army practice to rotate different units into and out of the provost guard, such that Patrick could not as effectively assure unit cohesion, continuity, and morale as he had with his own brigade. No mere staff officer, all the requisitions, inspections, logistics, paperwork, and accountability with which every brigadier was saddled were Patrick's as well. But because of their far-flung duties, his men would often not be serving under his watchful eye.



Gen. Patrick with his staff outside of his typical field quarters, September 1863.
(LOC)

General Patrick's broader responsibility was to manage the behavior of all the soldiers in the army. Each regiment or battery would have a daily roll call to ascertain those present for duty, specifying those whose absence was approved and others who were absent without leave. The provost guard was responsible for scouring the country for stragglers and prodding them on, plus rounding up deserters. A soldier in the 82nd Ohio wrote about the forced march to Gettysburg when "the hum of conversation ceased, and when the laggards of whom there were always a few, began to make excuses for going to the rear, the provost-guard was cheered by their more sturdy comrades for driving them forward at the point of a bayonet."¹⁷ Rounding up deserters proved to be a difficult challenge.

One of the primary reasons soldiers temporarily left their units was to imbibe intoxicating beverages. The resulting drunkenness seriously compromised the fighting capacity of the army. Journalist Whitlow Reid reported on the state of affairs in Frederick, Maryland, on the eve of the battle:

Frederick is Pandemonium. Some-body has blundered frightfully; the town is full of stragglers, and the liquor-shops are in full blast. Just under my window scores of drunken soldiers are making night hideous; all over the town they are trying to steal horses or sneak into unwatched private residences or are filling the air with blasphemy of their drunken brawls. The worst elements of a great army are here in their worst condition; its cowards, its thieves, its sneaks, its bullying vagabonds, all inflamed with whiskey, and drunk as well with their freedom from accustomed restraint.¹⁸

This serious problem had been going on for days. In his diary, Randall Knapp of the 6th U.S. Cavalry wrote on the day Major General Meade had taken command, “There has been more men drunk today than I ever saw before ... like dead men on a Battlefield.” Then he wryly added, “I think Gn. Whiskey conquered Genl Meade.”¹⁹ A similar description was recorded by Lieutenant Tattall Paulding: “A sad scene of drunkenness among our soldiers there being no provost guard apparently in town, whiskey was found abundantly & for miles beyond the city the roadside was strewn with soldiers, both infantry & cavalry, dead drunk.”²⁰

Upon his arrival in Frederick, Major General Henry Slocum, commanding the 12th Corps, was appalled by the conditions he found and sent an urgent message to Meade, describing “... men from every corps in the army lying about the streets, beastly drunk.”²¹ The night before the battle, an already exhausted Marsena Patrick wrote in his diary, “At a late hour I was called into [Frederick] & clean out that town, which was reported full of drunken men & Stragglers.”²² A Pennsylvania trooper recounted that on June 28 his company was assigned provost duties and was ordered to Frederick with two other companies “to pick stragglers from the marching ... Many stragglers had taken up positions in the saloons of the town. The detachment left on the 29th, left Frederick with a load of stragglers ...”²³ A soldier in the commissary office of Geary’s division, 12th Corps, wrote on July 2 of having seen in Frederick, “about three thousand drunken soldiers lying in the gutters and streets or staggering about town. Provost Marshall was drunk and the people, as loyal as any in the country, were subjected to insult beyond expression.”²⁴ Whether the provost marshal in question was one of Patrick’s guards is uncertain, since the corps and division commanders often appointed their own.



Alfred Waud’s wartime sketch of the typical punishment for soldiers charged with illegal gambling. (LOC)

Two important roles for the provost guard were to assure that the enemy did not gain intelligence about the Federal army and that discipline in the ranks was not compromised. Thus, the provost marshal was responsible for any visitors coming into camp, screening them, providing passes, and escorting them if needed. This included journalists, foreign observers—of whom there could be ten or a dozen at a time—and civilians who had various intentions.

Some of the most popular visitors in camp were women, despite regulations to limit their presence. Some were wives of officers, whereby understandable irritation toward the provost marshal could occur if they were precluded from visiting. Many commanders felt they were entitled to have their wives visit at a whim and without interference. Patrick would generally provide passes when the time and

circumstances seemed appropriate, but admitted that many fellow officers didn't bother even to seek such a pass. "It is a farce this business of not allowing ladies to come to the Army when every one that has a friend at Head Quarters can get permission without applying to me for a pass," Marsena grumbled in his diary on June 2.²⁵

More of a concern involved the prostitutes that sought to ply their trade in camp. Whenever an army corps was in the immediate vicinity of a city, this became a particular problem to control. In doing so, the provost guard became ever more perceived as the adversary of the common soldier.

One of Patrick's biggest headaches was from newspapermen, who both sought news from the army and to sell papers to the soldiers. Commanders were outraged when their performance was criticized in the papers, and Patrick was the one with the unpleasant duty of seeing that this did not recur. The New York *Herald* seemed to be a frequent violator. On March 16, he wrote in his diary of "another poor correspondent" from that newspaper who was arrested. Chief of Staff Daniel Butterfield ordered him to be placed in irons and thrown in the guard house, though the diary entry admits this was "carried out only partially but not in irons."²⁶ It was not a duty Marsena Patrick relished. Several reporters were scheduled to be tried before a military tribunal for their allegedly outrageous comments. A couple of months later the critique in the pages of the *Herald* had not abated and tempers were seething at army headquarters. Editorials had been particularly unflattering to Hooker and Butterfield, so they ordered the provost marshal to seize any of those newspapers coming into camp and burn them.²⁷

Other newspapermen devised a tactic to boost circulation. They approached Patrick arguing that they were loyal and deserving of support, going as far as asking for "an exclusive privilege" to sell their papers in camp at five cents. A disgusted Patrick commented in his journal that it was a "scheme," something with which he wanted no part.²⁸ Indeed, with any goods or products coming into camp from legitimate traders, the good marshal established a policy that "no monopoly will be allowed in *any* thing ... I would make *competition* regulate matters." He also assured that moneys received from the granting of permits to sell papers was accounted to the General Hospital fund.

Then there was the chronic problem of sutlers, businessmen who used wagons, tents, or make-shift cabins to sell food, beverages, supplies, and whatever else a soldier might need or crave. Although it could be argued that they provided a valuable service, often they sought to take unfair advantage of the plight of disgruntled men far from home without access to stores and desired food. Sutlers were a common sight selling their wares and produce around camp, but they could only do so with a permit from the provost marshal. Those who proved themselves disreputable were banned. At one point Patrick wrote, "we are sending off hosts of Sutlers, Traders, etc. beyond our Lines."²⁹

Drunkenness was a chronic problem in camp and virtually impossible to control. Nevertheless, it was the provost guard who were tasked with stopping the flow of booze, some of it raunchy stuff. Although Patrick did not give details, he noted in his diary that he repeatedly closed down "Fat Andy's establishment."³⁰ On another occasion Patrick wrote how "... inspection of the premises to be made and if liquor was found in the establishment in violation of Gen. Ord ... to place a guard over the quarters where such liquor was found, arrest the persons ..."³¹

The selling of alcohol was not only common but flagrant. It was not as if it were done on the shadowy periphery of the camp. "I found a number of soldiers, teamsters, etc intoxicated ... and traced the liquor through one William Hamilton to the store of Duff & Co. at Head Quarters."³² Indeed, Patrick's struggle over this was not with the enlisted men but the officers, many of them high ranking. In a letter of May 21, 1863, Patrick protested the privileges officers were asserting in assuring the transit of table luxuries, particularly liquor:

I regret to say that the evil is with the officers who give orders for unreasonable purchases, and to the commanders who endorse them. Frequently the allowance of liquor for one officer, per day, on these orders, is from one to three bottles of whiskey, besides fermented beverages additional. The vast number of purveyors, traders, messengers, clerks, employees, etc. hanging upon this army are a curse to it.³³

All manner of problems were dumped in Patrick's lap even when the army was comparatively inactive. He had to be concerned with contraband items sent through the mail into camp. "I have seized upon & now hold, large amounts of Bogus Jewelry, Watches, etc. all from the same houses that furnish the vilest of Obscene Books, of which I have made a great haul lately."³⁴ He was also upset with the transit of goods away from camp, such that those "at home are fattening upon the plunder obtained here."³⁵ And he was tasked with stopping illegal trading with the enemy, a practice among some soldiers posted out at a distance as pickets, particularly when coffee or tobacco was sought.

It was also Patrick's assigned duty to stop the rampant use of counterfeit currency. At one point he confessed to his diary that "these Counterfeiters have given me a great deal of uneasiness & trouble ..."³⁶ What to do with fugitive slaves escaping into the Federal camp was also his responsibility. And when Rebel prisoners were paroled but didn't want to return home, the matter was turned over to the provost marshal. "I have been obliged to examine a number of ... paroled prisoners, who do not wish to go South & will be sent North for liberation ..."³⁶

Misbehavior by soldiers was virtually unbridled throughout the war. Within a month of assuming his duties, Patrick became exasperated by the manner in which soldiers took advantage of civilians, often stealing without compunction. "I am distressed to death with the plundering & marauding of the Army—I am sending out detachments in all directions & hope to capture some of the villains engaged in these operations." It was hard to keep track of all the depredations, let alone stop them. "I know not how many men I have arrested today ... I have got a number of horse thieves in Custody & have handled some marauders very severely."³⁷

Because of their mobility and isolated assignments taking them far from army headquarters, the cavalry proved to be one of Patrick's biggest headaches. "It seems as though the Cavalry has determined to see how bad they could behave, in our rear, and they are stealing, ravaging, burning, robbing & marauding on the road, in rear of us, to a most alarming extent."³⁸ Misconduct was widespread, and Patrick rued that the soldiers "are behaving as badly as it is possible for them to behave."

The harder the provost marshal general labored to stem the tide of misconduct, the more the lawbreakers in uniform worked to foil his efforts. "There is a growing idea on the part of the Cavalry, that I am in the way of their unlicensed robbery & they are trying their best to overthrow my authority."³⁹ Following of the Battle of Gettysburg, he became incensed to discover that the crimes were sometimes being perpetrated under his own authority! "[My men] succeeded in capturing ten men of the 6th Cavy. out on a robbing expedition & representing themselves as belonging to a patrol from me."⁴⁰

What was particularly distressing for the provost marshal general was realizing that he had little support from commanders in keeping their soldiers in order. Some of these high-ranking officers were even complicit in the crimes. "Horses without number are stolen all over the Country & Brigade, Division, and Corps commanders wink at it. They get up false, or made up papers & think to quash proceedings in that way."⁴¹ Patrick wrote in his diary that he "had to arrest Gen. Brooks yesterday for insubordination & to do several other disagreeable things."⁴² Some commanders were using their military authority to intimidate citizens. Though commanders could arrest and discipline their own men, the provost marshal general alone was to hold sway over civilians when charges were made. Yet, Patrick was disturbed to discover "many arrests have been made, without my knowledge, and it is not known by whose authority they were made."⁴³

The system of provost guards had an inherent defect. Each corps of the army typically had an assistant provost marshal general, but he was not actually an assistant to the provost marshal general. Furthermore, each division could have its own provost marshal with one company in support. But these officers reported to their own commanders, not to the provost marshal general of the army. Patrick had no way to assure consistent compliance and discipline, and in each segment of the army there was resentment toward him as one who could and would interfere in the affairs of each respective unit. No commander wanted his dirty laundry exposed to the staff at army headquarters.



Provost Marshal of the Third Corps at Brandy Station, Virginia, 1863 (LOC)

Keeping the army promptly on the move was a responsibility shared by commanders and the provost guard. When the commanding general was dissatisfied with the progress being made by one of his corps, he would expect the provost guard to expedite movements. They would in particular oversee the crossing of rivers when the guard was responsible for staking out the ford and where the clogging of a column of march might well occur. The sheer volume of traffic could be overwhelming in an army of some 92,000 soldiers and easily ten thousand cooks, personal servants, sutlers, washerwomen, teamsters, and camp followers. There would be some 45,000 horses and mules, with 4,000 supply wagons, 1,000 ambulances, 372 artillery pieces, hundreds of caissons, plus traveling

forges and odd wagons. After one particularly exhausting day, Marsena wrote in his journal that “the crossing of Troops, Supplies, Stagglers, prisoners, sick & wounded, the care of roads, depots, communications & Telegraphs, with an occasional visit to the front & establishing of Provost Lines kept me busy all day.”⁴⁴ In July of 1863 Patrick referenced “a very hard time” in moving the army and its trains, admitting “I had to use my riding whip more than I wished.”⁴⁵

It was natural for everyone to desire the easiest journey, but the exigencies of the army demanded effective movement, not convenience. The provost guard had to enforce such edicts as the following: “Ambulances will not be used for any other than the specific purpose for which they are designed, viz, the transportation of the sick and wounded ... The provost-marshal is directed to see that the provisions of this order are carried out, and will arrest every officer and confine every private and non-commissioned officer who is found violating it.”⁴⁶

Bureau of Military Information

One of Patrick’s very important new responsibilities was that of the Bureau of Military Information, the first effort the army had ever made to provide comprehensive gathering of intelligence and analysis in the field. Much of the intelligence theretofore gained had been through the cavalry, passed up-channel through the chief of cavalry to the commanding general. Brigadier General Alfred Pleasonton was reluctant to yield this position of power, wanting to continue as the primary eyes and ears of the army, and in doing so holding control of analysis and release of intelligence.

Patrick was fortunate to have the services of a bright and determined officer, Colonel George H. Sharpe, to serve as his deputy to oversee the intelligence function for the army. Indeed, there seems to have been little management by the general over the colonel’s endeavors, as Patrick sought to provide Sharpe with the resources and space he needed to do the job right. Although Sharpe technically reported to Patrick, who reported immediately to the commanding general, it seems that Patrick had no compunctions about allowing Sharpe to speak routinely with Hooker or Meade.⁴⁷



Col. George Sharpe (LOC)

Sharpe's efforts were nonetheless stymied at times by the cavalry of his own army! On March 2, Patrick wrote in his diary that "the Scouts sent out by Col. Sharpe were arrested and sent back by Averill [sic] notwithstanding they had my pass."⁴⁸ Brigadier General John T. Averill, who was commanding a division of troopers in the Army of the Potomac, did not respect the authority of the provost marshal general. Patrick further commented that night in his diary, "it was a great deal of arrogance & stupidity combined." Resentment was held by all.

The issue of cooperating was undoubtedly brought to the attention of the commanding general, for Patrick would write a diary entry on May 23 that Pleasonton had turned over to him \$3,000 in Confederate money that Sharpe could dispense to his scouts to enhance their effectiveness in gaining intelligence.⁴⁹ Indeed, John C. Babcock, working for Sharpe, had compiled a remarkably accurate order of battle for the Army of Northern Virginia that had proved a most valuable asset for Major General Joseph Hooker.

The commanding general did not, however, show his appreciation. Quite the opposite! On June 17 Patrick confided in his journal that Hooker "has treated our 'Secret Service Department' which has furnished him with the most astonishingly correct information with indifference at first & now with insult."⁵⁰ His growing exasperation spilled into his diary again two days later when he wrote, "We get accurate information, but Hooker will not use it and insults all who differ with him in opinion."⁵¹ Patrick and his staff persisted in the work of intelligence nonetheless. Sharpe worked in correspondence with attorney David McConaughy in Gettysburg in amassing needed information on the movements of Lee's army into Pennsylvania.

Marsena Patrick had not sought the position of provost marshal general and had quickly learned it would become an ordeal dealing with commanders and soldiers resistant to his authority. What he did not count upon was the invective that would come from army headquarters. In particular, he seethed at the impositions and directives coming from the army chief of staff, Major General Daniel Butterfield.

Not five months into his responsibilities, Patrick felt overwhelmed by the unreasonable demands coming from headquarters. "Find a great deal of work behind ... I cannot manage it under Butterfield—He makes more work than I am able to carry out."⁵² Patrick, who served out of a sense of commitment to the cause and duty to his country, not out of a desire for stature and personal glory, seriously contemplated returning to civilian life. "I am pretty much decided to resign & go," he wrote.⁵³ But through duty he persevered, even though carrying a deep resentment of Butterfield. "I am utterly disgusted with him."⁵⁴

Patrick at Gettysburg

Through all this we can readily understand that the labors and responsibilities were weighing heavily upon Marsena Patrick. In a brief note to a friend, he admitted "I have no time to write more & my fingers wouldn't let me if I had the time."⁵⁵ And things would only get more onerous and more hectic with the approach of battle.

As the Army of the Potomac went on the march to deal with Lee's advance northward, all the aforementioned responsibilities swirling around its provost marshal general would not only continue, but become more intense. Intelligence gathering became more critical, opportunities for misconduct more likely, discipline more important, problems with stragglers and prisoners more demanding.

Patrick had no time to write in his diary during the battle, but caught up a bit on events days later. He had remained with the new commanding general in Taneytown throughout the first day of battle. Until late in the afternoon, Major General George G. Meade apparently thought the fighting at Gettysburg was a prelude to the real battle, which he planned to take place along Pipe Creek in Maryland, just south of the

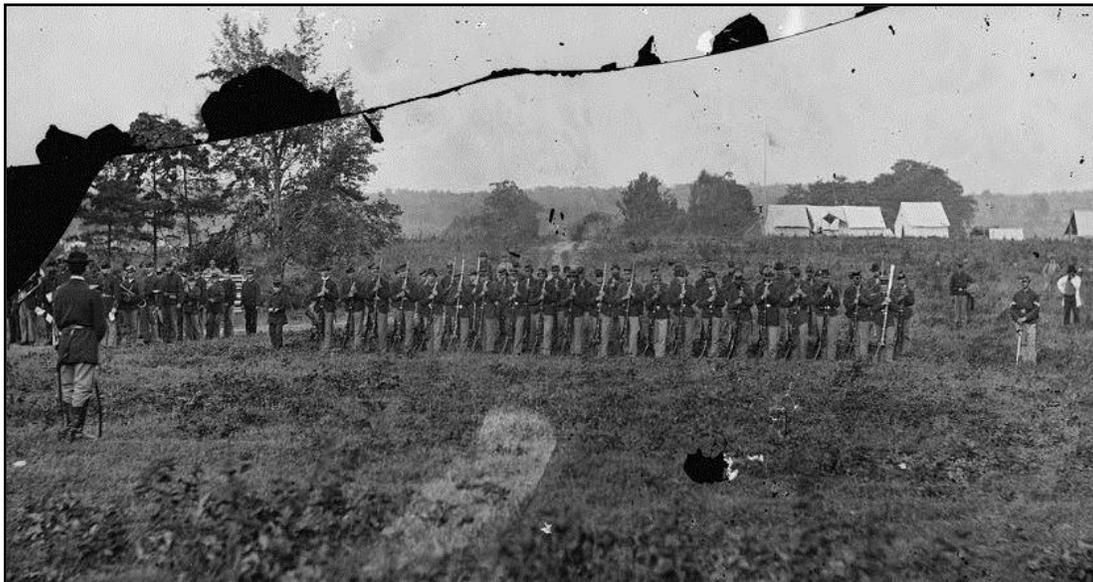
Pennsylvania border. But orders were finally issued at 10:00 P.M. for the army headquarters to move out; Meade departed around midnight with his entourage to follow.

“A great many prisoners” captured during the first day’s fight had already been sent to the rear that evening and would there be interrogated by Patrick, Sharpe, and others.⁵⁶ The provost marshal general would himself depart for the front about 2:00 A.M., moving on the heavily traveled and rutted Taneytown Road, arriving about an hour after sunrise.

Patrick’s first task was to establish a depot for Rebel prisoners, with nothing available but an open field.⁵⁷ He placed Colonel Butler Price of the 2nd Pennsylvania Volunteer Cavalry in charge and then rode on to the newly established army headquarters at the Lydia Leister house on Taneytown Road. Having there received an update on the operational situation, the provost marshal general then established his own headquarters at the William Patterson house, about a half-mile down the road. The remainder of the day was a blur, as Patrick spent much of his time in the saddle. It was critical to get stragglers up to their units, to get prisoners to the depot for interrogation, and to establish a guard to preclude cowards from running away from battle.⁵⁸

Heightened anxiety filled the minutes and hours of July 2 until replaced by sheer panic late in the afternoon. Three Confederate divisions attacked across the Emmitsburg road. As to the provost guard line back along the Taneytown road, Patrick acknowledged, “we were obliged to leave the place we had selected under the furious shelling & musketry.”⁵⁹ It proved to be a dire and desperate time of battle, such that, as Patrick recorded, Meade was required “to abandon his own Head Quarters for a time.”⁶⁰

Most of the attention of historians is focused upon the collision at the front, with attacks by the divisions of Hood, McLaws, and Anderson crashing into and sometimes causing the collapse of the 3rd, 5th, and 2nd U.S. Army Corps units. Behind the Federal lines, Patrick’s men faced an enormous challenge. “I had my hands full, with the Prov. Guards to keep the Troops from breaking.” It was “hot work” containing the frightened blue-coats, explained Patrick, but having formed several provost lines, “very few succeeded in getting entirely through.”⁶¹ Battles were won in large part due to inspired leadership and brave soldiering at the front, but the essential role of file closers and provost guard in holding a line together in the crisis cannot be overlooked. The provost marshal general praised what his men had accomplished under the most trying circumstances.



A company of the 8th United States Infantry, assigned to provost guard duty at Brandy Station, VA. (LOC)

That night a larger depot for some 1,360 prisoners would need to be established, that too in an open field (its location behind the lines was never specified). The great bulk of prisoners were held for interrogation and eventually transported to Fort Delaware.

Colonel Sharpe's Bureau of Military Information, with particular credit to civilian John C. Babcock and Captain John McEntree, did an outstanding job of interrogating prisoners. Patrick, who had plenty of things to keep him busy, allowed the bureau to report directly to army headquarters:

Prisoners have been taken today, and last evening, from every brigade in Lee's Army excepting the four brigades of Picketts. Division. Every division has been represented except Picketts from which we have not had a prisoner. They are from nearly one hundred different regiments.⁶²

That night before his council of war, Meade sent directly for Sharpe and discussed the intelligence with him. Sharpe gave his calculated assessment that Pickett had by now arrived and that, other than that division and some cavalry, Lee had already thrown virtually his entire army into the fight. Early the next morning Babcock sent a more specific report of findings to army headquarters. Patrick's deputy and his lieutenants tasked with intelligence gathering had exhausting work and did it well.

The provost marshal general gave his commanding general credit for his leadership on July 2. "Meade handled his troops well ..."⁶³ But it was apparent to all that there would be at least another hard day of fighting.

Patrick had little time to rest, though he never detailed his activities through the morning of July 3. The anticipated outbreak of fighting occurred with volcanic eruption in the Rebel cannonade at 1:00 P.M. "I never saw such artillery fire as came upon us ... It was terrific ..."⁶⁴ Sergeant Thomas W. Smith, doing provost duty with Company I of the 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry, wrote "we lost 11 Horses out of our Squadron ... but strange to say Comp I had not one man disabled, though several of them were struck with Pieces of Shell."⁶⁵

With the renewed Confederate infantry attack, it was déjà vu for Patrick. Though the Yankees on Cemetery Ridge would assert that they did not flinch under the charge of some 12,000 gray-coats, the provost guard saw things a bit differently. "I had my hands full with those who broke to the rear," exclaimed Patrick, "but we succeeded in checking the disorder."⁶⁶ When captured Rebels were then sent back, there was renewed anxiety. "The Prisoners came in such droves that at one time they created a slight Pannick in our Reserve who thought that the Rebs had forced our line of Battle."⁶⁷

Then there came the crucial duty of containing and managing the Rebels who had been captured. Without sufficient forces of his own, the provost marshal general rounded up soldiers separated from their regiments to augment the guard, working to organize "a guard of Stragglers to keep nearly 2000 prisoners all safe."⁶⁸

As the second prisoner depot proved to be inadequate, an even larger one was established. The farm of Aaron Sheely, southeast of the Baltimore pike crossing of Rock Creek, proved suitable.⁶⁹ Patrick called it White Church for the nearby white clapboard meeting house. It was several miles from the front yet convenient to the main artery being used by the Army of the Potomac. There the prisoners could be interrogated, yet evacuated quickly. Most of the prisoners would be sent to Westminster after dark, the work complicated by rain that night.

It was anticipated by some that the battle would flow into a fourth day. One provost guard wrote, "We are expecting another Battle now every Hour (8 O'clock A.M.) and we are all saddled up."⁷⁰ That day, however, would involve readjusting of lines and only sporadic fire.

Nor would July 5 bring another round of battle, but it was exhausting nonetheless. Patrick went back to the front where he sought to reestablish his first depot for prisoners. He discovered that Meade was unable to reoccupy his headquarters at the Leister house because of the condition of the house and some 20 dead horses in the yard. The army headquarters was temporarily set up in Guinn Woods, southward and across the Taneytown road, until later that day when it would be established on Baltimore

Pike.⁷¹ Patrick gave his commanding general his frank assessment of how things looked from the rear during the battle, and it was not flattering:

Large numbers of enlisted men were out of the line of fire, in charge of pack-mules, officers' horses, mess establishments, company and regimental property, as well as guards of general officers. Also pioneer detachments, regimental bands and field music entirely unarmed ... Corps and division commanders [should] be required to point out to their provost marshals, respectively, their lines of battle as soon as formed, that their guard may be deployed in rear, at proper distances, to check disorder, and in a crisis to be put in with the troops.⁷²

After the Battle

The aftermath of battle was a relief to the front-line soldier, but a growing headache for the provost guard. Patrick's assessment was that "our Army was too weak to follow up the advantage gained."⁷³ He found the army drenched by the rain, with everyone "without any thing to eat & waiting for subsistence." He spent much of the day "busy gathering men from their places of retreat & straggling ..."⁷⁴ Though their defense had held, the toll on the Union army was understandably severe. His responsibilities would be mounting, now with an added headache: dealing with Union soldiers who had become prisoners of war, but then released upon the granting of a parole.⁷⁵ The numbers would be limited, because General Lee at some point put a stop to the issuing of paroles.⁷⁶

On July 5, as the army struggled to recover and to prepare itself for pursuit and another possible battle, responsibility for the field of battle would be shifting fully to the provost marshal general. Patrick remained for another forty-eight hours seeking to establish order, before resuming his duties at an army headquarters that was now on the march.

With the duty of sending off most prisoners accomplished, Patrick would next have to attend to two enormous tasks: completing the "burial of the dead" and "securing of the property on the battlefield."⁷⁷ In both efforts he would become exasperated. Patrick rode into Gettysburg seeking some "respectable parties" who could assist in these labors, but encountered "a great deal of difficulty." He received support from David Wills, who drew together some of the other community leaders, but the exhausted, traumatized, and overwhelmed citizenry were not motivated to assist the army.

Patrick perceived another dynamic at work, one that troubled him immensely. He seethed, "thoroughly disgusted with the whole Copperhead fraternity of Gettysburg & the country about ..." asserting that the people being "nearly all Copperheads."⁷⁸ Though that position was held by some locals, Patrick's perspective was skewed. The most notorious case was that of a "Copperhead Editor (William Stahle of the *Gettysburg Compiler*), confined for pointing out the refuge of Union Soldiers to Rebel Officers."⁷⁹ Though the charges were subsequently deemed unfounded, affidavits were sworn against Stahle and he was sent to Fort McHenry to be incarcerated.⁸⁰

Each day more Rebel prisoners were taken by the provost guard, as well as Union stragglers who had to be reconnected with their units. Collecting army property proved to be unexpectedly frustrating because civilians from all about the area "came in Swarms to Sweep & plunder the battlegrounds."⁸¹ Far from assisting the provost guard, the residents of Adams County seemed to be working at cross-purposes.⁸²

In addition to the huge weight of responsibility, Patrick experienced personal difficulties. Two of his horses had had their feet "badly torn on the rock during the engagements" and had to be shod.⁸³ Oddly, perhaps the only pleasant moment he had was to sit down for nearly a half hour with Confederate Major General Isaac Trimble, who was recuperating from an amputation. Patrick made arrangements for Trimble to be brought to the more comfortable home of Robert McCurdy in the first block of Chambersburg Street. (After Patrick left town, nearby residents complained that Trimble had been singled

out for special care; despite his vociferous cursing, Trimble was then relocated to the less desirable Seminary hospital.)

The broad field of battle was a ghastly scene in those initial post-battle days. Even by July 6 there were still unburied bodies presenting to Patrick an “awful appearance ... a most hideous spectacle.”⁸⁴ He noted that many of these bodies yet exposed days after death were from Reynolds’s 1st Corps.

The provost marshal general did not have time to spare, and early in the morning of July 7 he set out to rejoin the army, leaving the gruesome task behind to the provost guard from the state militia who were arriving (some would include draftees from the newly imposed conscription). Patrick discovered that the wake of the army’s march was clogged and cluttered with straggling soldiers. “I had a rough time in driving up Stragglers, Officers & Men.”⁸⁵ Yet he estimated that he accomplished that day a “hard march” of thirty miles.

He found that the trains of the army were slowed by the persistent rains, and he had a “busy time until dark, keeping the trains, for miles, from getting blocked & moving on.”⁸⁶ The trains of a single army corps could stretch for ten miles, and slogging in the mud slowed progress considerably.

The provost marshal general found himself and his men overextended and overworked again. He could please no one. An article in a newspaper from a nearby community described how discipline in the army had again seemingly faded:

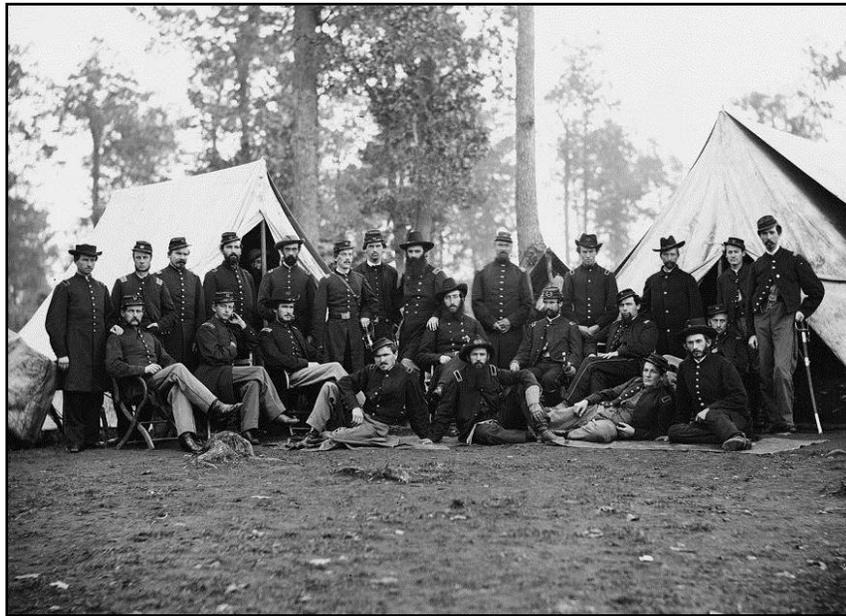
Several thousand men are counted among the missing but they are not prisoners— they are on a grand straggle, and the country from Frederick to Westminster, to Hanover, to Gettysburg, and back again to Frederick, swarms with loose men away from their commands—luxuriating among the farm houses as long as their money lasts, and safe from the gobble of provost guards, of which, by the way nobody has seen lately.⁸⁷

Within another three days Patrick recognized that another battle could be forthcoming and that much work must first be done. On July 13 he rued, “we have had a great deal to do with prisoners & all that kind of work.”⁸⁸ He also discovered that the “Country is full of the employees of the Press, Christian Commission & curiosity hunters.” It was not simply an occasional inconvenience to deal with them, as Patrick wrote in his diary, “I have had a great deal of trouble with them.”⁸⁹

The provost marshal general’s guard would soon be augmented by two more regiments, the 80th and 130th New York Volunteer Infantry. The 80th New York was a special benefit. Patrick had great trust in it as it had served in his old brigade and also had past experience in provost guard duty. Finally, on July 17, the provost guard had completed its handling of prisoners from the Gettysburg campaign. “We got rid of all of our Secesh Prisoners this morning,” said a relieved Hiram Wilson, “which makes our duties somewhat lighter than they was.”⁹⁰ Meanwhile, back in Gettysburg, the provost guards were encountering their own difficulties.

The ground over which the enormous battle had extended would for weeks be a horrid place. Writing home on July 6, a provost guard from the 93rd New York explained, “In some places you can not get a horse to go over the field on account of the horrid smell from the unburied corpses.”⁹¹ Fear of contagion was understandable, as evidenced in this plea:

To all citizens: Men, horses, and wagons wanted immediately, to bury the dead and to cleanse our streets, in such a thorough way as to guard against a pestilence. Every good citizen can be of use by reporting himself, at once, to Captain W.W. Smith, Acting Provost Marshal, N.E. corner of Centre Square.⁹²



Officers of the 80th New York Infantry (20th NY State Militia), taken in September 1863 when the regiment was assigned to General Patrick for provost guard duties. (LOC)

Captain Wilbur Smith

Captain Wilbur Smith was not a subordinate to Marsena Patrick, nor was he customarily assigned to provost marshal duties. He had been sent by the War Department from Washington to oversee the cleanup of the battlefield once the provost guard of the Army of the Potomac departed. He was actually on the staff of Brigadier General Montgomery Meigs, quartermaster general of the United States Army. Meigs was understandably concerned with recouping from the battlefield arms and equipment belonging to the army. It can thus be seen that the term *provost marshal*, in addition to being an official office, was sometimes used as a generic description for military authority exerted over civilians.

Burying the dead in makeshift graves took days to complete.⁹³ Some civilians roamed the field pilfering items from the bodies. Even as late as July 9, Smith telegraphed Meigs that “today buried three hundred & thirty seven rebels using rebel prisoners and citizens found carrying away government property.”⁹⁴ Two days later the problems had not been resolved, and Smith became ever more alarmed: “After notifying citizens and strangers visiting the battlefield against taking property either Federal or Confederate that arrest and punishment would follow all such offenses, people still continued to carry off arms & equipments & to mutilate those on the field.” Smith then vowed “to use more stringent measures.”⁹⁵

Many thousands of dollars of government property, some of it reusable or salvageable or at least saleable, had been strewn across the field of battle to be plucked up by whomever. As Patrick had noted before departing, civilians were already claiming such bounty for themselves. Smith was distressed by this and reported to Meigs how widespread the practice had become: “On my arrival here I found that at the rate property was being carried away, three or four days would clear the field and the Government would find its property scattered hundreds of miles.”⁹⁶

Captain Smith, angry and determined to do whatever was necessary to stop the thievery, responded to the loss of military property by issuing the following directive:

Civilians visiting the battle-field are warned against carrying away any government property, either Federal or Confederate, are directed to return the same without delay, to my office in Gettysburg, thereby saving themselves from arrest and punishment.

His determination to reclaim this equipment won him few friends and many enemies. Though some residents complied, on July 11 five civilians were arrested.

Three civilian surgeons from Pittsburgh who had come to aid in the care of the wounded fell under Smith's martial law when they wantonly picked up ramrods left on the field to use as "canes or for the purpose of picking up papers." For that crime they were tasked with joining the grisly work of burial parties. A protest was generated at high levels against the "offensive harshness & violence ... in which [Smith] performed the duties of Provost Marshal." Smith responded vigorously in defending his reputation; documents in support of his stringent efforts were accumulated and later deposited in the National Archives, giving researchers an insight into the difficulties he faced.⁹⁷

A respected local resident, J. Howard Wert, wrote years afterwards that Captain Smith "knew just what he was there for, and went about his work very expeditiously, standing not much on ceremony and caring not one picayune whose toes he trampled on."⁹⁸ Wert went on to give the illustration of a Pennsylvania judge, "whose word was law in his hometown," but who was caught by a provost guard carrying off "a fine specimen of firearms." When ordered to drop it, "he haughtily told the fellow in blue to mind his own business or he would report him to headquarters." Undaunted, the provost guard reacted promptly, such that the judge went to burying dead horses, "not of choice, but because the bayonets behind him were sharp."

On July 25 Smith reported that he would still "occasionally find parties who positively refuse to give up the property and in two instances we got a wagon load of property." His reaction to this was not spelled out in detail, but he frankly admitted to Meigs, "I am not very careful how I treat such parties ..."⁹⁹

An example of the hoarding of government property can be seen on July 19 in Smith's detailing of what was found concealed in a well and under boards at the homestead of Daniel Scheaffer: 300 shirts and drawers, 50 blankets, 28 guns, artillery harnesses, etc. He also cited the case of a Dr. Dill, "a mean Copperhead," who had taken an army horse. When arrested for the infraction, the country doctor informed Smith that "he would be damned if I should not know where there were more."¹⁰⁰

From residents George and William Keefauver Captain Smith retrieved "guns, blankets, axes, picks, etc. ..." But what perturbed the acting provost marshal the most was the claim that a military coat had actually been purchased from a soldier in return for a loaf of bread. Smith asserted he "would not return the overcoat, and that he ought to be ashamed to rob a soldier who had come here to fight for him." Added the good captain in distain, "I find too many such men here ..."¹⁰¹

The same type of incident was viewed quite differently by J. Howard Wert, the respected local citizen, for he told how the provost guard became commonly known as the "Forty Thieves":

In some cases these arbitrary seizures worked a real injustice to the poor folks who had the blankets and articles of that character, for they were things for which the soldier who had originally carried them had been charged by the Government on his clothing account, and which the grateful boys in blue had given to some large-hearted farmer's wife for food furnished, wounds bound up, and kindness shown.¹⁰²

There was mutual disparagement between Smith and local residents. The quartermaster general in Washington weighed the charges of misconduct by Smith and acknowledged that he "certainly had a hard and disagreeable duty to perform, which required prompt measures ... [as] he endeavored to do his duty."¹⁰³ Considering the circumstances, however, Meigs exonerated Smith from any culpability.

The 36th Pennsylvania Volunteer Militia

Most of the provost duties in the weeks after the battle were accomplished by state militia, particularly the 36th Pennsylvania Volunteer Militia. Though civilian authority was gradually restored, for several weeks travel was restricted. “No civilian could approach Gettysburg without a pass from high military authority, properly countersigned by the provost marshals ...”¹⁰⁴ Surgeons were directed not to allow anyone, military or civilian, to approach or leave the field hospitals without a proper pass. Curiously, a wounded prisoner, J. F. Crocker of the 9th Virginia, received a pass to travel alone between a Confederate hospital and town “to avail myself of the opportunity of getting a new suit.” He had, before the war, been a student at Pennsylvania College. Getting his pass countersigned at the provost office in the square, he used it to wander freely through the fields and streets, engaging old friends, and even venturing out to the 11th Corps hospital.¹⁰⁵

The 36th Militia would remain at Gettysburg about four weeks doing a yeoman’s work of security and cleanup. On August 15, after returning to Camp Curtin in Harrisburg, John E. Heller wrote to the editor of his hometown newspaper with a description of their experience:

We gather up on the battlefield 20,000 small arms, burnt a great many dead horses, escorted thousands of rebel prisoners to different places, did guard duty in town and at the hospitals and assisted in fixing up new hospitals, dug trenches for them and hauled off their offal’s by the barrel; mixed up plentifully with vermin and called upon to do other things, which as white men our officers in some instances refused to do.¹⁰⁶

It was, in summary, a most unpleasant ordeal for these guards, but done in service to their country.

The experience of the provost guard at Gettysburg was not only physically demanding, but irksome and disturbing for everyone involved. Lieutenant Robert S. Robertson of the 93rd New York wrote in his journal, “I can’t say much in favor of its inhabitants ... They are a miserly crew, and have no souls or conscience where a penny is concerned. Some took the pumps out of their wells, and others charged the soldiers for the privilege of drawing water.” The local citizenry had suffered much as a result of the battle and apparently felt that due compensation was warranted. But Robertson did not see it this way, decrying the fact that “I paid a dollar and a half for a small loaf of bread which could be bought in New York for 8 cents ...”¹⁰⁷

Marsena Patrick, who frankly detested his work, would nevertheless go on to serve out of a sense of duty as provost marshal general in other battles through the end of the war. His service is worthy of honor, and it is regrettable that his role has been accorded so little attention and respect. Yet one historian of his era did acclaim his work in the most glowing terms:

In ability and experience he was then, in that army, the peer of any ... He was the only chief of a department on the staff who survived to its end the vicissitudes of that army ... General Patrick was a model for emulation. He adorned his office ... His comprehensive mind, great intelligence, with sagacity, profound insight into human nature, and military knowledge, with a figure gracious and commanding, made a combination most rare.¹⁰⁸

With the multiplication of provost marshals in departments, corps, divisions, regiments, and cities, their accomplishment and contribution varied markedly. Few approached the standard of Marsena Patrick. “Some of the officers appointed displayed unusual tact and decision,” opined one historian, “while others were rash, obstinate, and arbitrary.”¹⁰⁹ Since their role was so irritating to many commanders and soldiers alike, there was a tendency to speak disparagingly of provost marshals as a class. Brigadier General Samuel R. Curtis, serving in the Department of the Mississippi, crassly denounced “the creation of the so-called provost-marshal [which has] invented a spurious military officer

which has embarrassed the service.”¹⁰ When in 1863 the enforcement of the draft was also assigned to provost marshals, the office would become the object of many a curse.

But at least at Gettysburg a corner was turned in the labors of the provost guard. In a Gettysburg newspaper six weeks after the battle a small article appeared expressing appreciation for the final chapter in the work of the provost marshal at Gettysburg, with special regard for the leaders who brought that work to a close: “Col. Alleman and Lt. Col. Maclay ... are respected by our citizens both for their promptness and energy, as well as their courteous deportment ... Everything appears to be moving along pleasantly and harmoniously.”¹¹ It is reassuring to see something positive being said for the work of the provost marshal.¹²

There would be one final appearance of a provost marshal at Gettysburg, in circumstances less strenuous and less contentious. The provost marshal general of the War Department, Brigadier General James B. Fry, would accompany our sixteenth president in his journey to the battlefield in November 1863 to commemorate what had been done there and dedicate a final resting place for those who had died. It was a fitting conclusion to what had been the turbulent role of the U.S. Marshal at Gettysburg.

Endnotes

¹ In World War I both terms were used, but by World War II the term *provost marshal* had been replaced by that of *military police*; in 1941 the military police gained permanent status as a branch of the U.S. Army.

² Charles M. Clode, *The Administration of Justice under Military and Martial Law* (2nd ed.), (London: John Murray, 1874), 9.

³ For further information on the early history of the provost marshal, see Captain G.S. Carpenter, “The Provost Marshal,” *Journal of the Military Service Institution* 15 (Governor’s Island, N.Y.: Military Service Institution, 1894), 312-327.

⁴ Holland Thompson, “The Provost-Marshal and the Citizen,” in *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, ed. Francis Trevelyan Miller (New York: Review of Books, 1911), 188.

⁵ General Order 2, Division of the Potomac, July 30, 1862, U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion, The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Volume 2, Chapter IX, 769, and No. 1 Extract, March 13, 1862, Series I, Volume 5, 30 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Officer, 1880-1901) [Herein cited as *O.R.*]

⁶ Patrick would in similar fashion refer to work of his “detectives” in “my secret service Department.” See David S. Sparks, ed., *Inside Lincoln’s Army: The Diary of General Marsena Rudolph Patrick, Provost Marshal General, Army of the Potomac* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1864), 211.

⁷ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln’s Army*, 216. Brigadier General Rufus Ingalls was quartermaster general of the Army of the Potomac.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁰ See the Marsena Rudolph Patrick Archives and Correspondence, 1841-1888, in the Ralph G. Newman Collection at the United States Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. [Hereafter cited as USAHEC.]

¹¹ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln’s Army*, 161.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ The observations and opinions Patrick recorded in his diary are truly noteworthy. For example, on June 17, 1863, he wrote that Joe Hooker “acts like a man without a plan and is entirely at a loss what to do, or how to match the enemy, or counteract his movements—whatever he does is the result of impulse ...” Then on June 19, he added that Hooker “knows that Lee is his master & is afraid to meet him in fair battle.” See Sparks, *Inside Lincoln’s Army*, 261.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁵ Theodore B. Gates, *The “Ulster Guard,”* (New York: Benj. H. Tyrrel, 1879), 193.

¹⁶ The number of soldiers assigned to the provost guard of the Army of the Potomac fluctuated. On June 10 Patrick had had an aggregate assigned of 2,096, though only 1,827 were present. During the battle Patrick commanded the

93rd New York Volunteer Infantry commanded by Colonel John S. Crocker, eight companies of the 8th U.S. Infantry commanded by Captain Edwin W.H. Read, the 2nd Pennsylvania Cavalry commanded by Colonel Butler Price, Companies E and I of the 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry commanded by Captain James Starr, and detachments from the 1st, 2nd, 5th, and 6th U.S. Cavalry.

¹⁷ Unknown, 82nd Ohio Infantry, Gettysburg National Military Park vertical file V6-OH82.

¹⁸ Whitlow Reid [Agate, pseud.], *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, June 30, 1863.

¹⁹ Ran R. Knapp, 6th U.S. Cavalry, diary, entry dated June 28, 1863, in the DeYoung Henry Collection, Western Michigan University, GNMP vertical file V6-US6 CA.

²⁰ James W. Milgram, "The Libby Prison Correspondence of Tattnell Paulding," *The American Philatelist* 89, no. 12 (December 1975): 1114.

²¹ *OR*, Series 1, 27(3): 398.

²² Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 266.

²³ "Historical Sketch of Sgt. Aaron K. Seip, Company H, 2nd Pennsylvania Cavalry," GNMP PC229098.

²⁴ James Gillette, letter July 2, 1863, Ralph G. Newman Collection 1841-1888, USAHEC.

²⁵ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 253.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 220.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 214. Later he noted he was "obliged to cut short some very enterprising Sutlers." *Ibid.*, 221.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 276.

³¹ Patrick, Newman Collection, USAHEC.

³² *Ibid.*, letter to Brig. Gen. Seth. Williams, A.A.G., April 25, 1863.

³³ Carpenter, "The Provost Marshal," 321.

³⁴ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 255-56.

³⁵ Carpenter, "The Provost Marshal," 321.

³⁶ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 169.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, May 6, 1863, 241.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, July 27, 1863, 275.

⁴⁶ General Order, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, September 9, 1861.

⁴⁷ Later Patrick did have misgivings about Sharpe, evident in this diary entry: "Col. Sharpe is not the man to place much reliance on, so far as business in a business way is concerned—He is quite too fond of a nice time, loves fun, and is very irregular in all his ways." See Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 292.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁵⁵ Patrick, Newman Collection, USAHEC.

⁵⁶ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 267.

⁵⁷ A provost guard described how Confederate prisoners were contained in similar fashion on July 14 as follows: "The 8th Infantry guard house is full of Grey-backs all the time, I don't know as you would consider it a 'guard house' for it is nothing more or less than a big open field and they are turned in like sheep and the guard is around the outside, there are continually from one to five hundred of them in there, and a dirtier site you could not imagine. Still it is better living than they are used to, for they draw full rations of Uncle Sams pork, sugar, coffee, and hard tack, and although they sleep without any protection in the shape of tent or blanket, they don't seem to mind it at all."

It does seem strange how much a soldier can stand in the shape of fatigue and exposure. Waters W. Braman, letter to "Libbie," July 14, 1863, near Boonsboro, Maryland, GNMP vertical file V6-NY93 IN.

⁵⁸ Paul Philippoteaux in his Cyclorama of the Battle of Gettysburg depicts this provost guard line. Statistics are hard to establish of soldiers who sought to escape from duty, but in the five-month period from July through November the Army of the Potomac reported 592 men tried for desertion, plus another 2,000 men seized and returned to their units. There were doubtless thousands more who momentarily ran from the front but were herded back by the provost guard. General George G. Meade, "Report of the Number of Men in the Army of the Potomac tried for desertion from July 1 to date, number guilty and shot," November 30, 1863. See the Robert T. Lincoln papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁹ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 267.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Lieutenant Colonel George Sharpe, message to Major General Daniel Butterfield, July 2, 1863, RG 93, National Archives.

⁶³ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 267.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Sergeant Thomas W. Smith, Company I, 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry. Collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. GNMP vertical file V6-PA6 CA.

⁶⁶ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 267.

⁶⁷ Smith vertical file.

⁶⁸ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 267.

⁶⁹ Aaron Sheely would write in 1904 that Patrick "came up to the barn with his retinue. I invited him to the house. He refused, saying he preferred to stay in the barn." "Terrible Fourth," Philadelphia, 1904. Civilian file at the Adams County Historical Society.

⁷⁰ Smith vertical file.

⁷¹ William Frassanito speculates that the new army headquarters would be at the Pfeffer house, which would be across the road from the current-day restaurant, The Pike. Yet upon arriving, Brigadier General Herman Haupt described it as farther from town, which would possibly be at the Baker homestead, adjacent to Rock Creek.

⁷² Carpenter, "The Provost Marshal," 32.

⁷³ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 268.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ It read "CONFEDERATE STATES FORCES, GETTYSBURG, PA, JULY , 1863. I, the subscriber, a Prisoner of War, captured near _____ do give my parole of honor not to take up arms against the Confederate States, or to do any military duty whatever, or to give any information that may be prejudicial to the interests of the same, until regularly exchanged." Hundreds of Union soldiers thus paroled following the action on July 1 were sent to a camp at West Chester, Pennsylvania.

⁷⁶ In the July 6 entry of the diary of Lieutenant Tatnall Paulding, a Federal prisoner, is the explanation: "In the morning it was announced that a parole would be granted to any officer who should desire to take it instead of going on to Richmond & to any men who were unable to march. About 100 officers accepted the parole, the 11th Corps principally declining ... After the parole had been signed & the certificates given to the officers, an order was recd. from Gen. Lee to the effect that no paroles should be given." See Milgram, "The Libby Prison Correspondence of Tatnall Paulding," 1118.

⁷⁷ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 268. Patrick would later report an "estimate of captures from the enemy" as amounting to 754 officers and 12,867 enlisted men. See *OR*, Series 1, 27(1): 224.

⁷⁸ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 268.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The Adams County Historical Society has a fascinating file on the incident, complete with Democrat Stahle's vehement denunciation of Republican David McConaughy for having filed false charges against him.

⁸¹ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 268.

⁸² The utter frustration of serving in this capacity is evident in an anecdotal reference by Philip Schaff of the Lutheran Seminary. He wrote on July 6 in his journal that a Captain McCulloch was appointed a provost-marshal at the seminary hospital but "would not serve." See Philip Schaff, "The Gettysburg Week," *Scribner's Magazine* 16 (July 1894): 27.

⁸³ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 269.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

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- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 269-70.
- ⁸⁷ Lancaster *Daily Express*, July 10, 1863.
- ⁸⁸ Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 271.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid.
- ⁹⁰ Hiram S. Wilson, 93rd New York State Volunteers, letter, July 17, 1863, New York State Library, GNMP vertical file V6-NY93 IN.
- ⁹¹ R.S. Robertson, 93rd New York, letter to parents, July 6, 1863, GNMP vertical file V6-NY93 IN.
- ⁹² Captain William Willard Smith file, Adams County Historical Society, copied from Record Group 92, Records of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File (CCF), "Gettysburg," National Archives.
- ⁹³ A provost guard writing home soon after the battle explained "Genl Lee tries to come the flag of truce game one Genl Meade, but it failed to work. Genl Meade sent back word that he would bury their dead for them." Many of the Rebel dead would in fact be buried by their comrades, but not as Lee intended. Waters H. Braman, 93rd NY, letter to uncle, July 5, 1863, GNMP vertical file V6-NY93 IN.
- ⁹⁴ Captain W.W. Smith file, Adams County Historical Society, copied from Record Group 92, Records of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File (CCF), "Gettysburg," National Archives.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ Smith, letter to Meigs, July 29, 1863, Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Smith.
- ⁹⁸ J. Howard Wert, "In the Hospitals of Gettysburg," *Gettysburg Compiler*, July 25, 1907.
- ⁹⁹ Smith.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰² Wert, "In the Hospitals of Gettysburg."
- ¹⁰³ Smith.
- ¹⁰⁴ Wert, "In the Hospitals of Gettysburg."
- ¹⁰⁵ J.F. Crocker, *Gettysburg—Pickett's Charge and Other War Addresses* (Portsmouth, Va.: n.p., 1915), 54.
- ¹⁰⁶ John E. Heller, letter to the editor, *Pottsville Miner's Journal*, August 15, 1863.
- ¹⁰⁷ Charles N. and Rosemary Walker, eds., "Diary of the War," *Old Fort News* 28, no. 2 (April-June 1965): 113.
- ¹⁰⁸ Carpenter, "The Provost Marshal," 320, 327.
- ¹⁰⁹ Thompson, "The Provost-Marshal and the Citizen," 193.
- ¹¹⁰ Major General John Schofield quoted this judgment favorably. See Thompson, "The Provost-Marshal and the Citizen," 190-201.
- ¹¹¹ *Adams Sentinel*, August 11, 1863.
- ¹¹² Alleman commanded the 36th Pennsylvania Militia. His regiment would be relieved by six companies of the 2nd Coal Regiment of Philadelphia, the 51st Pennsylvania Militia, commanded by Colonel Hopkinson with Lieutenant Colonel Burke as provost marshal.