

Civil War Training Camps

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I would like to thank the
SUNY Potsdam Camp
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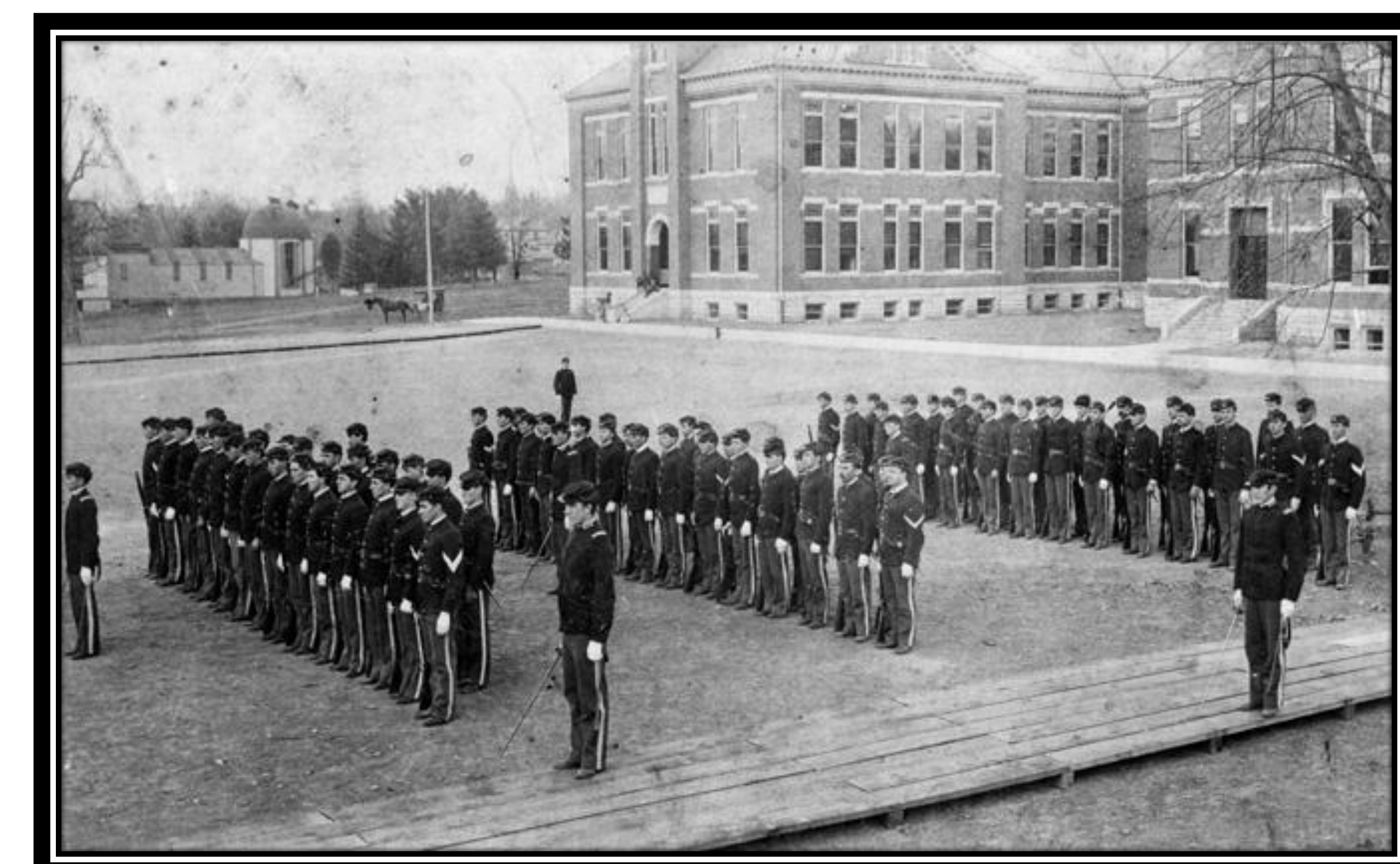
Training

New enlistees did not come to camp with the knowledge to go into battle and fight efficiently. This can be seen with the Federal army at the First Battle of Bull Run, and with the Confederate army at the Battle of Shiloh. In both battles, the troops' inexperience was shown on the battlefield. The men who fought in the American Civil War on both sides trained in many different ways.

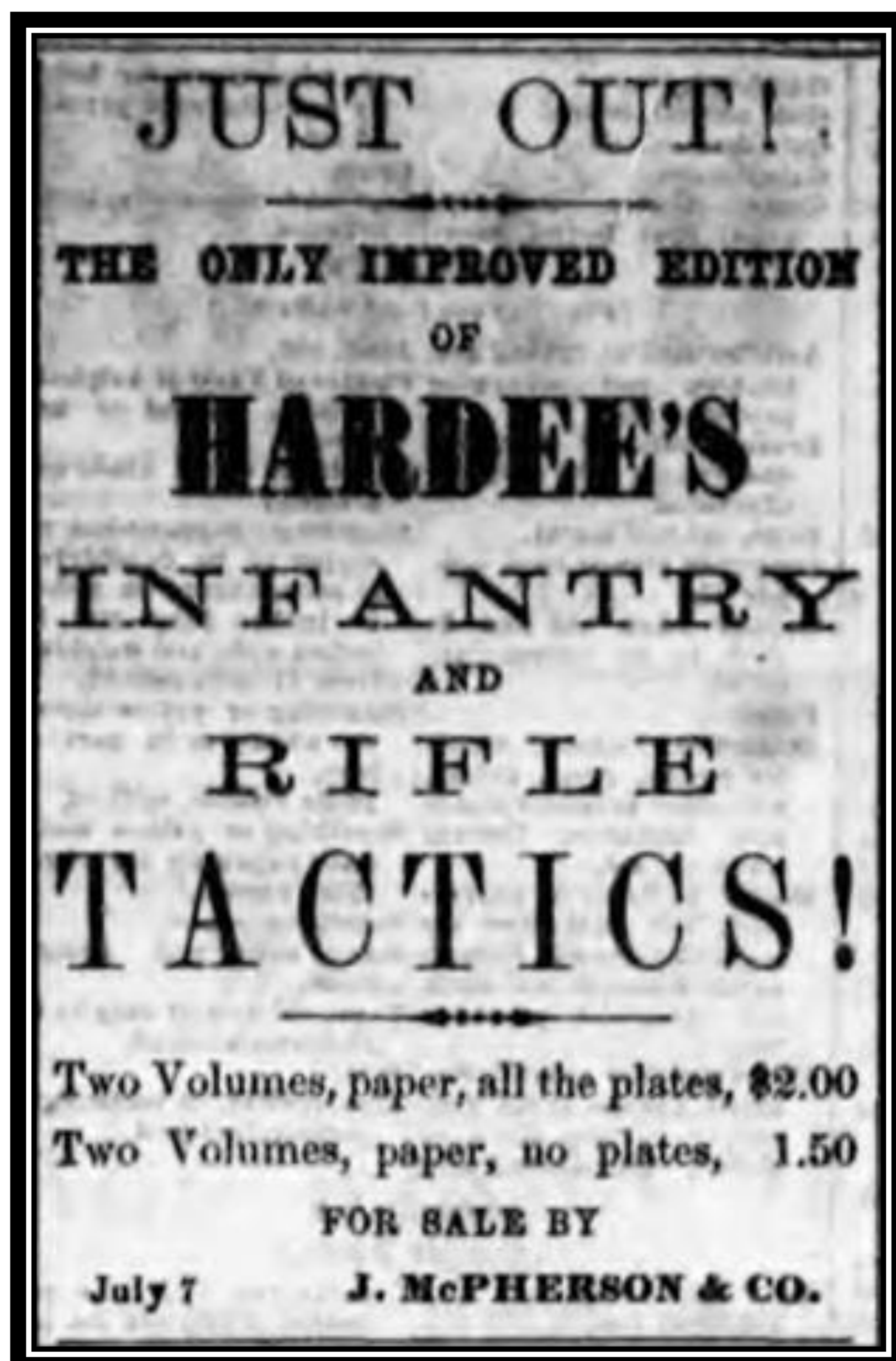
Many cadets at VMI kept the same training schedule they had before the American Civil War started. The cadets started their day at 5 a.m., with drilling commencing at 5:30 a.m. Drill was worked around the Cadet's school work, and their day would end at 10 p.m. The Cadets at VMI drilled throughout the year, except during winter. Once the American Civil War started, the Cadets were sent across the state to help train many of the new Confederate recruits (Civil War and New Market, Virginia Military Institute, accessed on February, 6 2020, <https://www.vmi.edu/archives/civil-war-and-new-market/>).

In both the North and South, training new recruits was the responsibility of regimental commanders. Training schedules were similar to those of the VMI Cadets. Training would start at 5 a.m. with reveille, and the day would end at 9 p.m. with the playing of taps (New York Military Archives).

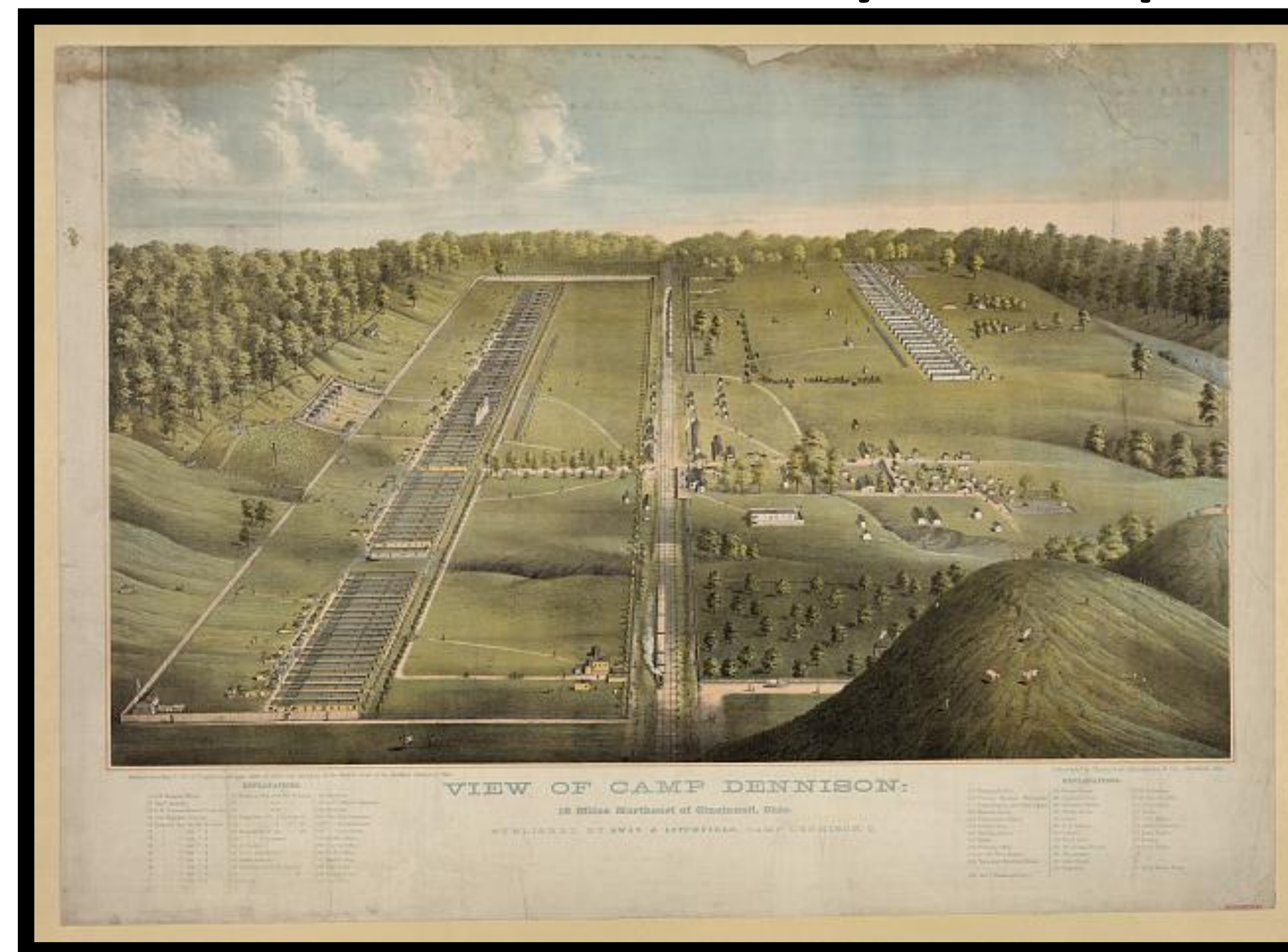
During training, the recruits learned everything they would need to know to be a good soldier. Responsibilities were broken down to the basic levels. The soldiers mastered the first part of a drill before they were allowed to move to the next stage. In perfect conditions, the training would be taught individually. Training was split into three parts: learning and comprehending what needs to be taught; learning the weapon; and marching (Lt. Col. W. J. Hardee, *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics; For The Exercise and Maneuvers of Troops When Acting as Light Infantry or Rifleman*, 1861).



Military Drilling in Missouri



Ad For Hardee's Training Manual



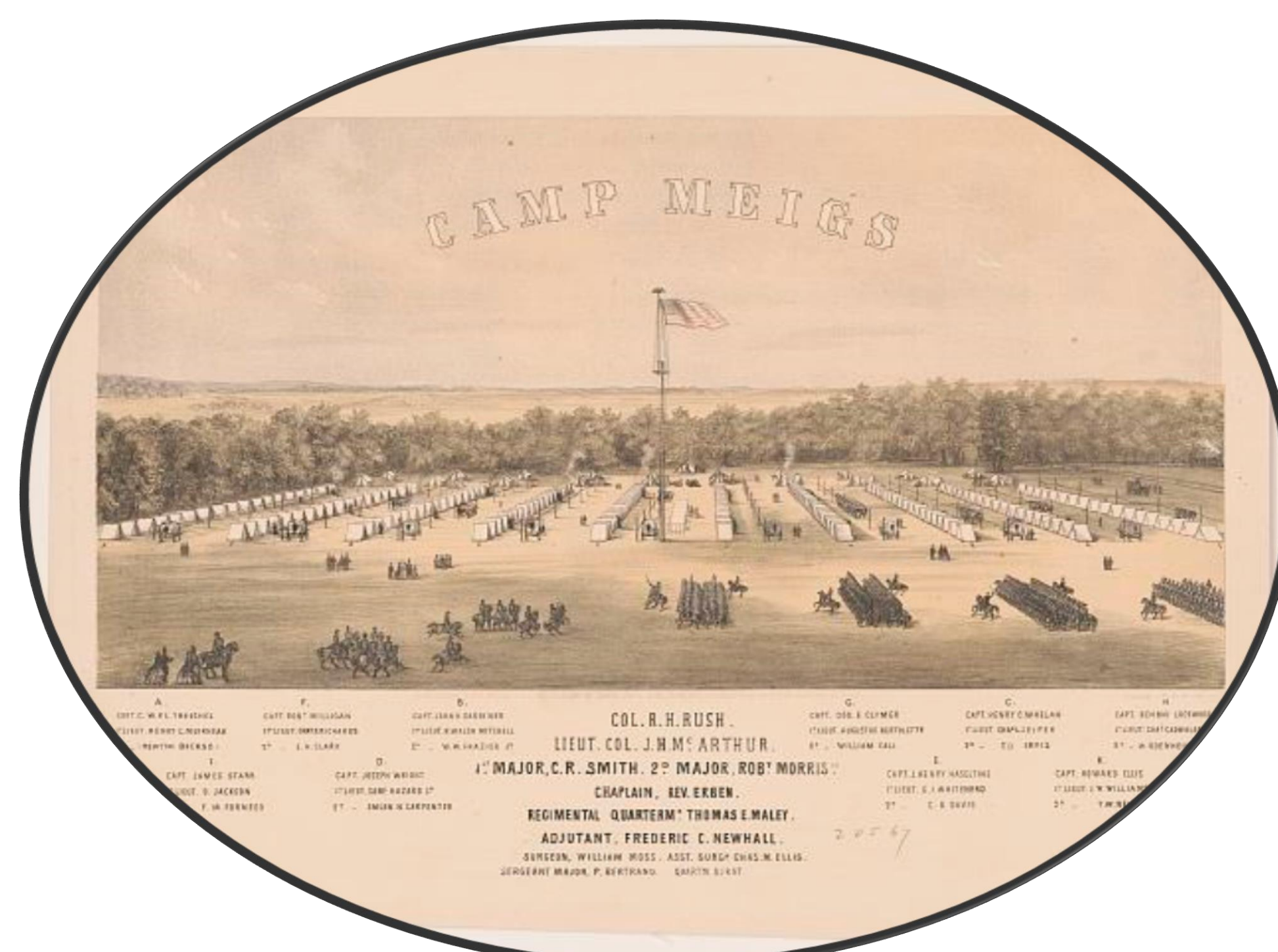
Painting of Camp Dennison
Cincinnati, Ohio

Training Camps

In the years before the American Civil War, the methods used to train, and drill novice soldiers were left to the discretion of the regimental commanders. No pre-designated locations existed for training new recruits in the school of the soldier. This situation changed when the American Civil War broke out. After the attack on Fort Sumter, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers. The Federal military leadership had to figure out a way to train this influx of new recruits. Both the regular army and individual volunteer regiments established camps to train their new recruits. The volunteer regiments usually set up temporary camps that would only train one or two regiments, while the regular army created more permanent camps that lasted the length of the war.

Even with President Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers, men were still enlisting in the regular army, so that camps were required to house and train these men. The regular army addressed this need by setting up four major camps: at New York City; Elmira, New York, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and Cincinnati, Ohio (F. A Shannon, *The Organization and Administration of the Union Army 1861-1865*, 1928. These camps were in operation for the duration of the war. These camps along with training new regiments for the regular army, these camps also trained the newly-created volunteer regiments in the surrounding small towns.

When volunteer regiments started to form across the country, many small towns became home to temporary camps, usually small in size. These new camps served multiple purposes: as recruiting stations; as rally points for regiments; and for training the new recruits. Examples of camps that trained volunteer regiments include Camp Union in Potsdam, New York, and Camp Meigs in Readville, Massachusetts.



Painting of Camp Meigs
Readville, Massachusetts

Training Manuals

Training has been a staple for the United States military since the Continental Army trained at Valley Forge. Between the years of Valley Forge and the American Civil War, manuals that military leaders used to train their men went through a number of changes.

The first training manual used by the United States Army was created by General Winfield Scott. This manual, *Scott For Infantry of the Line*, was the official text used up until the American Civil War. It explained everything that a military officer would need to know to move units during battle.

In the years preceding the American Civil War, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis wanted to create a more modern training manual. With this aim, he chose General William J. Hardee for this task. Hardee spent many years in France observing their army's training methods, making him well versed in this subject. Hardee's manual was the primary training manual used during the Civil War. Military Commanders for both the Union and Confederacy adopted his it.

Occasionally, other manuals also were used during the war. One of these manuals was Silas Casey's *Manual of Arms*. This text was a Union adaptation of Hardee's *Tactics*. The biggest difference between the two texts was that Casey's *Manual of Arms* focused on larger groups of men (Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and Southern Heritage*, 1984).

Several military academies located in the South conducted their own styles of training. One such institution was the Virginia Military Institute (VMI). In 1860, Major Gilham, an instructor at VMI, wrote his own training manual, titled *Manual of Instruction for the Volunteers and Militia of the United States*.