

## **The Civil War in Dartmouth's History: A Convergence of Patriotism and Pride**

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Dartmouth College prides itself on a long institutional history of student soldiering, spanning from the Revolutionary War to present conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. President Emeritus James Wright's personal campaign to support wounded U.S. veterans in both their recoveries and pursuits of higher education exemplifies this tradition. Zeroing in on the years of the early 1860s, defined by the bloodshed of the U.S. Civil War, reveals a campus culture characterized by wartime fervor. In today's divisive political climate, partisan concerns eclipse the possibility of such passionate overtures for national unity, rendering analysis of the Civil War both relevant and instructive. With the outbreak of war in 1861, an exodus from the Dartmouth campus took place as students from the North, by far the majority of the population, left to join the Union army, and students from the South rushed to join the Confederacy. The documents written by Dartmouth's soldiers from the battlefield reflect a seemingly conflicting theme of simultaneous contentment and angst. Overall, despite the tension voiced in their accounts, the contributions of students in the U.S. Civil War showcase Dartmouth's long-standing patriotic character and culture of military service.

The enthusiasm and zeal that characterized the immediate response of Dartmouth students to the declaration of war were founded upon the bedrock of a dignified college military tradition. A temporary state act making military duty compulsory for all New Hampshire youths over the age of eighteen led to the 1834 formation of the Dartmouth Phalanx, "the first and most famous of the student military companies." The Phalanx flourished for eleven years as a unit of the 23<sup>rd</sup> New Hampshire regiment. In *The College on the Hill* (1965), author Ralph Nading Hill

describes how the Phalanx evinced the pride of Dartmouth students at the time through drills, processions and parades.<sup>1</sup> While Hill depicts the Phalanx as chiefly ceremonial, students continued to foster a penchant for military culture even after the retraction of the act mandating military service, as evidenced by the formation of another military company known as the Dartmouth Grays in 1856.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 1860s, Dartmouth men, drawing upon this history of military ardor, rushed to enlist in the imminent “War Between the States,” sparking campus-wide fervor and military ethos. In *Men of Granite: New Hampshire’s Soldiers in the Civil War* (2008), historian Duane Shaffer claims that Abraham Lincoln’s oration had a galvanizing effect on the enlistment of volunteers from New Hampshire. Referencing an article from the *New Hampshire Statesmen* regarding a speech Lincoln delivered in Concord in March 1860, Shaffer writes, “Lincoln’s speech was one of the most powerful, logical and compacted speeches to which it was ever our fortune to listen...a political speech of greater power has rarely, if ever, been uttered in the capital of New Hampshire.”<sup>3</sup> It is therefore no surprise that President Lincoln’s call to arms on April 15, 1861 was met with widespread eagerness in the Granite State. Daniel E. Bouttelle, Dartmouth class of 1862, captures the energy on campus in a letter written to his brother just a week after Lincoln’s proclamation: “This past week has been one of immense excitement here in Hanover...our patriotism seems thoroughly aroused...the only objects in view at present are the preservation of our Union and the defense of our honor.”<sup>4</sup> Bouttelle’s letter reports on the sheer number of students who stood ready to offer their services in the name of their country, should

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Nading Hill, *The College on the Hill* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth Publications, 1965), 216-7.

<sup>2</sup> William Carroll Hill, *Dartmouth Traditions: Being a Compilation of Facts and Events Connected with the History of Dartmouth College and the Lives of Its Graduates from the Early Founding of the College, in 1769, to the Present Day* (Hanover, New Hampshire: The Dartmouth Press, 1902), 123.

<sup>3</sup> Duane E. Shaffer, *Men of Granite: New Hampshire’s Soldiers in the Civil War* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 13

<sup>4</sup> Daniel E. Bouttelle to his brother, April 22, 1861.

they be called upon. It was this patriotic pursuit of honor through military duty that served as the principal aspiration of Dartmouth students in the 1860s.

The *Dartmouth College Catalogue from 1846-1865* (also known as the “ORC”) provides a more detailed picture, through annual quantitative records, of the patriotism implicit in Dartmouth social life during the U.S. Civil War. A glance at the pages of the ORC, which lists the names and hometowns of all students enrolled, reveals that the vast majority of the Dartmouth student population in the mid-nineteenth century continued to hail from New England.<sup>5</sup> While a trend towards eventual geographical diversity was already in motion, as indicated by the inclusion in the late 1850s of students from states such as Illinois, Georgia, and Ohio, the outbreak of the Civil War promptly reestablished regional divides. In terms of relative numbers, from the class of 1863 alone, fifty-three students fought for the Union, while only three enlisted for the Confederacy. Early Dartmouth historians John King Lord and Frederick Chase illustrate this point in their co-authored *A History of Dartmouth College, 1815-1909*: “on the first news of the firing on Sumter the half dozen students in college from south of Mason and Dixon’s line immediately packed their trunks and departed.”<sup>6</sup> Lord and Chase suggest that leaving the College was a matter of honor for Southern students, who sought fulfillment in defending their traditional way of life. The resignation of President Nathan Lord in 1863 reveals the political and geographical leanings of the majority of students, alumni and faculty at the time. Under pressure from the Board of Trustees, President Lord was forced to resign due to his pro-slavery position. President Lord’s views, inspired by an ultra-conservative Biblical interpretation of slavery, came

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<sup>5</sup> *Dartmouth College Catalogue 1846-1865*, Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College, 1865, Rauner Special Collections Library.

<sup>6</sup> John King Lord and Frederick Chase, *A History of Dartmouth College, 1815-1909* (Concord, New Hampshire: The Rumford Press, 1913), 315.

into opposition with the overwhelming popular support of the Union on campus.<sup>7</sup> Few, if any, students from the South attended Dartmouth during the Civil War, highlighting the divide between the regional patriotism of the two warring factions.

The *College Catalogue*, in tracking total enrollment on a year-by-year basis, also supplies quantitative evidence of the exodus that took place at Dartmouth during the years of the war, between 1860 and 1865. In 1860, the ORC recorded 368 students enrolled (including medical and scientific students). This number dropped steadily during the war, reaching a low of 230 in 1864 and climbing to just 273 by 1865-6.<sup>8</sup> The data from the *College Catalogue* captures the patriotism and enthusiasm that Boutelle describes in his letters. The record of the Civil War as described by historians such as Hill, Shaffer, Lord and Chase, focuses on the patriotism of enlisted students. However, with nearly a third of the total student body involved in the hostilities, those students remaining on campus also undoubtedly found themselves caught up in wartime fervor in support of their brethren on the battlefield.

The first-hand battlefield accounts of two New Hampshire soldiers, George H. Sargent and Jared P. Hubbard, express the coexisting sentiments of fulfillment and trepidation that I argue characterized the student wartime experience. In letters to his mother and brother, Private George H. Sargent of Company C of the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Hampshire Regiment, discusses daily life as a soldier. While Sargent appears generally high-spirited, at one point even declaring, “we are all as happy as clams,” his writing betrays an overwrought tone. For example, George regularly inquires about his mother’s health, laments the lack of money in the camps, and demands immediate responses to his correspondence. His most acute concerns center around his younger brother Charles, to whom he repeatedly cautions: “Charles don’t you enlist...I shall never like it

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<sup>7</sup> “The Wheelock Succession of Dartmouth Presidents” (Hanover, New Hampshire: Office of the President), <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~president/succession/lord.html>.

<sup>8</sup> *Dartmouth College Catalogue 1846-1865*.

if you do come.” Although Sargent seems content and proud of his military service, he strongly advises his brother not to enlist due to the associated risks. Ultimately, in a somewhat tragic turn of events, Charles does enlist and ends up deserting the Union Army.<sup>9</sup> The desire to achieve honor drives Charles to go against his brother’s admonitions and enlist. Yet, unprepared for the violent reality of warfare, Charles surrenders to an overwhelming sense of trepidation.

In the case of Jared P. Hubbard, sergeant and later corporal of Company B of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry, we can detect the simultaneous feelings of satisfaction and fear through his diction. In an 1863 letter to his wife, Judith, recounting the Battle of Gettysburg, Hubbard writes: “The cannonading was the most terrific ever seen. The shells passed over our heads so close that we could feel the wind of it...The ground was actually covered with dead and wounded men, union and rebels all together, with hundreds of horses, and the stench was awful.”<sup>10</sup> In his account, Hubbard juxtaposes “terrific” cannonading and the rush that accompanies narrowly dodging shells with gruesome images and smells of warfare. The absence of evident alarm in his account undoubtedly reveals Hubbard’s underlying fear. Sargent and Hubbard’s letters suggest that living in the early 1860s entailed juggling both great excitement and great apprehension—pitting the prestige of military service against the brutality of warfare.

While the zealous conduct of Dartmouth students in the U.S. Civil War demonstrates the College’s patriotic character, the memorialization of the event offers insight into Dartmouth’s understanding of its own institutional history. Over the years, Dartmouth commissioned various texts on the subject of the College and the Civil War. Ralph Nading Hill, in *The College on the Hill*, for example, includes two decisive assertions emphasizing, with pride, Dartmouth’s role:

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<sup>9</sup> George H. Sargent to Charles H. Sargent, July 28, 1861.

<sup>10</sup> Jared P. Hubbard to Judith Hubbard, July 5, 1863.

first, that Dartmouth sent six hundred and fifty two volunteers, the largest number proportionally of any college in the North, to the battlegrounds of the South, and, second, that Charles Douglass Lee of Hanover was the first enlisted student in the North.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, a 2013 issue of the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* features an article titled “Dispatches from the Civil War,” bringing to life for present-day alumni the noble travails of their compatriots from another era. The article recounts the contributions of four individuals, including Sanford S. Burr (‘63), who organized the Dartmouth Cavaliers, a company of cavalymen distinguished by a three-month stint in the war.<sup>12</sup> In terms of more formal memorialization, two bronze plaques listing the names, ranks, and military units of the students who served in the Civil War reside in the vestibule of Webster Hall. A book written by Dartmouth historian Charles T. Wood entitled *The Hills Winds Know Their Name: A Guide to Dartmouth’s War Memorials*, accompanies the physical plaques, providing further background and detail.<sup>13</sup>

The wartime fervor that gripped campus in the early 1860s—emerging in spite of the underlying tension between fulfillment and trepidation expressed in individual student accounts—produced an enduring link between the College and this fateful moment in the nation’s past. Dartmouth’s ongoing association with America’s military campaigns remains a point of pride in the College’s institutional history, encompassing both patriotic ardor and a clear-eyed recognition of the inevitable loss of war. With President Emeritus Wright at the forefront of veteran affairs and the reinstatement of a Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) program on campus, Dartmouth’s military culture—and the patriotism it symbolizes—remains a defining element of the College’s identity.

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<sup>11</sup> *The College on the Hill*, 221.

<sup>12</sup> Lauren Vespoli, “Dispatches from the Civil War,” *The Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*, June 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Charles T. Wood, *The Hill Winds Know Their Name: A Guide to Dartmouth’s War Memorials* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Office of Public Affairs and the Office of the Vice President and Treasurer, 2001).