



An Unvarnished Tale: The Public and Private Civil War Writing of Porter Farley 140th N.Y.V.I.

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Porter Farley managed to find himself in the middle of some of the more dramatic episodes of the 19th century. As a youth growing up in Rochester, his aunt and uncle helped runaway slaves along the Underground Railroad. He was in the audience when William Seward famously termed the differences between north and south to be leading to an "irrepressible conflict." At Gettysburg, as acting adjutant of the 140th N.Y. infantry, he found himself alongside Col. Patrick O'Rourke when the regiment was diverted by Gen. Gouverneur Warren to the defense of Little Round Top. In the battle of the Wilderness, Farley ran alongside Col. George Ryan as the regiment made its dramatic and costly charge across Saunders Field. Farley was an original member of the 140th, serving as an officer from September 1862 until his discharge in the fall of 1864, seeing action in all of the major campaigns for the Army of the Potomac during that period. He also kept an attentive eye on the happenings of the regiment in camp, on the march, and all other times in between. In the 1870s, he began writing his history of the 140th, based on war-time letters and diaries. His interest in presenting an accurate and fair account of the 140th's service led him to correspondence with some of the Civil War's notable leaders. The result of Farley's work ran in 17 installments in a Rochester newspaper. Not only did it garner interest and praise from his former colleagues in the 140th; his writings found their way into books and articles written by veterans of other units. His work was praised as being fair and impartial. He spent the rest of his life clarifying and writing about the proud service of the 140th NY. Despite encouragement, Farley never had his history published in book form. An Unvarnished Tale not only presents his entire "Reminiscences of the 140th Regiment, N.Y. Volunteer Infantry," but also all of his known post-war correspondence and writings, much of it previously unpublished.

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