



Army Heritage Center  
**Foundation**  
*Telling the Army Story...  
one Soldier at a time*

# Voices of the Past

## CIVIL WAR

### Highlights:

- Charles Perkins served through some of the most significant battles of the Civil War, such as Chancellorsville, Bull Run, and Gettysburg.
- Perkins kept a daily diary from May 1861 until the end of his service in May 1864.
- The US Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, PA has a copy of the diary in the archival collection where it is available to the public for research.

Read more at  
[www.armyheritage.org](http://www.armyheritage.org)

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*Part of the Army Heritage Center Foundation's Educational Series*

## High Private of the Rear Ranks: Charles C. Perkins

**(United States, 1861-1864)** Private Charles C. Perkins, a native of Salem, Massachusetts, was born on June 16, 1841. An excellent student, Perkins graduated valedictorian of his high school class. He spent the summer of 1858 with a surveying team laying out the cog railroad at New Hampshire's Mount Washington, then moved to Boston to work for the civil engineering firm of Shedd & Edson, taking a room in the home of Mrs. Elizabeth Pickering, who continued to write to him during his enlistment and is mentioned in the daily diary Perkins kept during his time of service.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, Perkins enlisted K Company of the 1st Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. The Regiment began forming on May 23, 1861. Perkins enlisted the following day and served for the next three years. He was mustered out on May 25, 1864. In the years that followed Perkins was known to refer to himself as "HPRR", which meant "High Private of the Rear Ranks".

Between 1861 and 1864 the 1st Massachusetts took part in some of the most famous battles and campaigns of the Civil War, including the Peninsula Campaign, Bull Run, Manassas, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. For at least some of that time Perkins served as a bugler for his unit.

Well educated and a keen observer, Perkins kept an exceptionally detailed diary of his experiences as a Soldier. The selections presented here cover the period of Battle of Bull Run, Christmas and Thanksgiving 1861, and the Battle of Manassas.



PVT Charles C. Perkins shortly after enlisting in May of 1861.

This is an extraordinary period in American history. Before Bull Run most Americans on both sides expected the Civil War to be short. Many civilians travelled to the battlefield to watch the grand spectacle. The battle, a defeat for the Union, provided a preview of the long road ahead. The Union Army retreated to lick its wounds as the leaders considered what they now knew—that victory would come neither soon nor easily.

Little of this comes through in the first passages presented here. Writing from the perspective of an ordinary Soldier



Perkins age 21, Falmouth, VA,  
March 28, 1863.

*"I thought my time had  
come now sure but was  
bound to go in did so  
fired number of Shots  
while the bullets  
whistled round me like  
hail..."*

*-Charles C. Perkins  
describing Battle of  
Manassas*

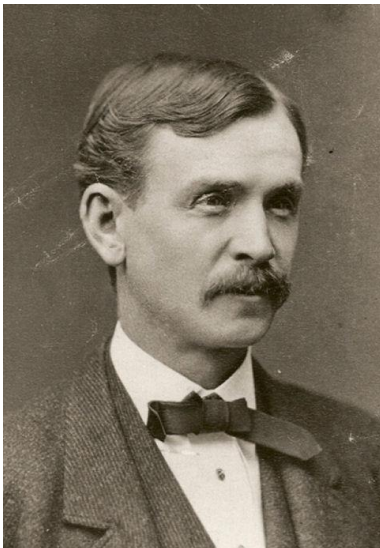


Photo taken Oct 20, 1875, age  
34.

with little awareness of the larger picture, Perkins wrote about food, weather, and the conditions of his daily life. He frequently borrowed money from his friend, Whit, to purchase food to supplement his rations. He marched from place to place, reveled in a good night's sleep, and painted a picture of a life of tedium and toil. From time to time, however, his writing is punctuated by the terror of battle. He appears to have written some passages while on the actual field of battle during a lull in the fighting.

By the time of the Battle of Manassas Perkins has clearly matured as a Soldier and an observer. His writings indicate a greater awareness of the overall picture, and his descriptions of battle, and of the dead and wounded, suggest that he has become accustomed to the sights and sounds of war. Perkins' writings provide a priceless window into the lives the ordinary people who lived through the

Civil War.

After the war Perkins returned to Massachusetts and worked as a surveyor for the remainder of his life. During his later years, he amassed a substantial collection of Civil War memorabilia, which he stored in his home. On June 25, 1914, a fire swept through Salem, destroying hundreds of homes, including Perkins'. Most of his collection was destroyed but the diaries, stored in an iron safe, survived despite being scorched around the edges. These diaries were loaned to the U.S. Military History Institute in the 1970's and transcribed by hand. The diaries were returned to the family, and the transcriptions are now part of the Civil War Times Illustrated collection in the archives of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and are available for public research.

Charles C. Perkins died March 26,  
1915.



Stone wall of Marye's Heights, Fredericksburg, Virginia, Confederate dead in the trenches near Fredericksburg, May 3, 1863. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC, MASS-MOLLUS Collection.