



The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson, Invalid Corps

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Organized in May 1863 to meet the Union Army's growing manpower needs, the Invalid Corps?later renamed the Veteran Reserve Corps?was a unique military unit. With more than twenty-four regiments of troops, nearly all of them men disabled by illness or combat wounds, it was at one point twice as large as the entire pre-war United States Army. During four years of service its troops enforced the draft, guarded prisoners and vital outposts, protected rail lines and supply depots, and served as military police in cities all across the country. Members of the Corps escorted President Lincoln's body home to Illinois, and after the war its officers formed the nucleus of the new Freedman's Bureau.

This volume brings together some 143 letters written by Colonel Charles F. Johnson, an officer who served with the 18th Veteran Reserve Corps after sustaining debilitating wounds during the Seven Days' Battles in June 1862. Edited with an introduction by Fred Pelka, the letters describe the day-to-day circumstances of "The Cripple Brigade," as it was derisively called, as well as guerrilla warfare in Missouri, combat in Virginia, and barracks life in Washington, D.C. Johnson was a keen observer of his nation at war, and his correspondence with his wife Mary is by turns literate and comic, objective and personal.

In his introduction and annotations, Pelka provides a detailed history of the Invalid Corps and explores the experience of disability in nineteenth-century America. He looks at how the nation responded to the sudden appearance of tens of thousands of newly disabled young men, and traces how members of the Invalid Corps fought not only to restore the Union but also to retain their dignity as Americans and as human beings.

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