

AN ARTIST GOES TO WAR



When the Civil War broke out in 1861, artist Larkin Mead was just finishing the Ethan Allen statue. Many of his friends and neighbors from Brattleboro **volunteered** for the army. Larkin, too, wanted to serve. But how could his **artistic** gift help his country during wartime?

As it turned out, there was a **military** need for his talents. Most of the Civil War was fought in the

farmland of the south. Often this territory was poorly mapped and sometimes there were no maps at all. The Union army needed artists to sketch pictures of the landscape and enemy positions. Officers then used these pictures to plan the army's movements.

By February of 1862, Larkin was at Fortress Monroe in Virginia with the Vermont Brigade, an army unit of Vermonters who would fight in many battles. He traveled with them to Lee's Mills where they fought an **engagement** and lost many men. He was also along during their advance on Richmond, the **Confederate** capital, and the Seven Days Battle where the Confederates stopped the Union army.

Though Larkin was a **non-combatant**, his duties took him into dangerous situations. Once, while drawing an enemy position, he was spotted by a sharpshooter who sent a bullet whizzing past his head.

Larkin also drew scenes of the war for weekly magazines. His drawings were **reproduced** by a process called engraving. Engraving is done by scratching small grooves into a metal or wooden plate to form the image being reproduced. Next, ink is rolled over the plate. Then the plate is wiped clean so that ink stays only in the grooves. On a printing press, paper is pushed against the plate and into the grooves, touching the ink. The picture that appears on the paper is called an engraving.



In 1862 *Harper's Weekly* reproduced this battle sketch by Larkin Mead, Jr.

Much of the information in this article comes from "The Shaping of an Artist: Larkin Mead and the Civil War," published by Faith Learned Pepe in *Vermont History News* in 1986.



PICKETS CONVERSING BEFORE YORKTOWN—A COMMON SCENE.—SKETCHED BY MR. MEAD OF THE VERMONT BRIGADE.—[SEE PAGE 315.]

Here pickets, or guards, from opposing sides call to each other across a river near Yorktown, Virginia. They are discussing what states they are from. Does it surprise you that enemies would talk to each other? Engraving of a sketch by Larkin Goldsmith Mead, Jr.

Many of Larkin's field sketches were turned into engravings and printed in this way. *Harper's Weekly*, a national magazine, paid Larkin forty dollars a week to sketch scenes of the war.

Unlike many of his friends who had enlisted as soldiers, Larkin could leave the war when he wanted to. To grow as an artist, he felt that he should study in Europe. Although he was in the war for only six months, he was **influenced** by it for the rest of his life. After the war, many communities and organizations asked him to sculpt monuments to honor the soldiers who had fought so bravely.

VOCABULARY

volunteer - to join of your own free will

artistic - having ability to create

military - having to do with the army

engagement - battle

Confederate - describes the eleven southern states that withdrew from the United States during the Civil War.

non-combatant - member of army who does not fight or carry weapons

reproduce - to copy

influence - to change