[BY MICHAEL J. McAFEE]

uncommon soldiers

IN A WAR WITH ENDLESS VARIETIES OF UNITS, UNIFORMS, AND SPECIALIZED JOBS, SOME SOLDIERS WERE A LITTLE LESS COMMON THAN OTHERS.

FROM A STATISTICAL STANDPOINT, the common American soldier of the Civil War was a native-born farmer with a light complexion, blue eyes and brown hair, standing five feet eight and one-quarter inches tall. He was most likely to be a "doughboy" and serve in the infantry.

Once he had decided to join the army, however, any average volunteer had the chance to become an *un*common soldier. He could join a special type of infantry regiment, such as the French-inspired zouave and chasseur units, with their colorful and distinctive uniforms—or become a hussar with a European cavalry uniform of braided jacket and jaunty cap. Or he and his comrades in arms might find a less obvious way to mark their regiment as special, as did the 124th New York Volunteer Infantry—the "Orange Blossoms"—who wore orange ribbons on the front of their uniforms to match their nickname. Such special uniforms or insignia were a source of esprit de corps for a regiment and were maintained throughout the entire war, not discarded as most believe. In fact, the Army of the Potomac mustered more uniformed regiments of zouaves in 1865 than it did in 1861.

Other soldiers became uncommon through occupational specialties, such as the farriers who cared for horses, or the pioneers who cleared the armies' paths of obstacles and worked on fortifications. The brave men who carried their regiments' flags through storms of iron and lead were certainly uncommon soldiers. Then there were the soldiers of the engineer and ordnance departments, who not only worked in their specialties, but also supported combat units in battle. The men of the two regiments of green-clad U.S. Sharpshooters were an especially uncommon breed, carefully selected for their skill with firearms and used on the battlefield as elite marksmen and snipers.

The portrait gallery that follows features soldiers uncommon for all the reasons listed above and more—including some who were uncommon in and of themselves. These, however, are only a handful of the Civil War's innumerable uncommon soldiers—men who helped reshape their nation.

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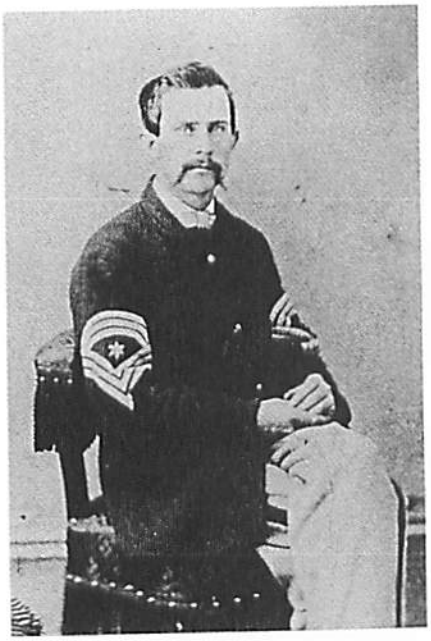
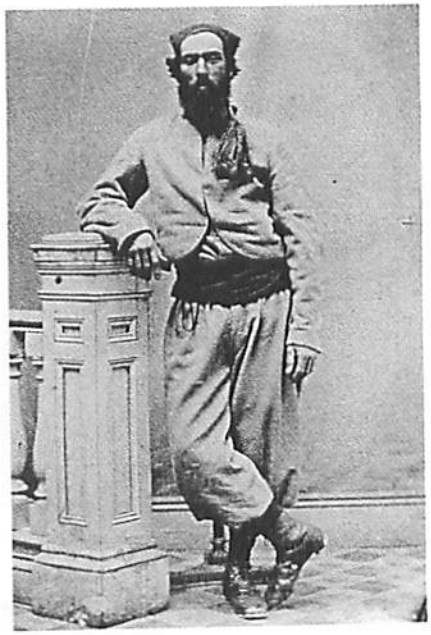
Chauncy S. Maltby served in the 2d U.S. Sharpshooters. It is fair to say that all the sharpshooters were uncommon soldiers, because they had to demonstrate their skills as marksmen before they were allowed to join the regiment. Wearing distinctive uniforms of dark green with emerald green trim, the sharpshooters proved their value on all the major eastern battlefields of the Civil War. In this Brady Studio portrait, Maltby still carries the Colt revolving rifle his regiment carried until Sharps rifles were available.



Moses P. Ross of the 124th New York Volunteer Infantry wears the inconspicuous orange ribbon that denoted the "Orange Blossoms" of Orange County, New York, looped about the second button of his sack coat. His chevrons denote the rank of principal musician.



Chauncey Monroe of the 146th New York nonchalantly sports the sky blue Turco uniform of his regiment. The uniform, based on that of North African native troops in the French Army, was first worn at the Battle of Gettysburg. Monroe's uniform inexplicably lacks the yellow tape trim normally worn on the jacket and vest.

Sergeant Major Frederick W. Gerber of the U.S. Engineers was not a typical soldier. Born in Germany in 1813, he had been in the U.S. Army for 22 years when the Civil War began in 1861. He retired in 1871, after receiving a Medal of Honor for "distinguished gallantry in many actions and in recognition of long, faithful services." His Medal of Honor was rescinded in the next century when prior awards were reviewed.

This unidentified Massachusetts pioneer is from a veteran regiment, as shown by the veteran's stripes above his cuffs. The crossed axes insignia symbolized the tools these special soldiers used. As one writer remarked, "no regiment is well fitted for service without pioneers completely equipped." These men cleared any obstacles to the army's march.

Each cavalry or mounted artillery regiment had ten farriers, or blacksmiths—one per company. Responsible for, among other things, seeing that the horses were properly shod, these men received $18 per month rather than the enlisted man's normal $13. This unidentified farrier displays the symbol of his job—a horseshoe—on each sleeve.

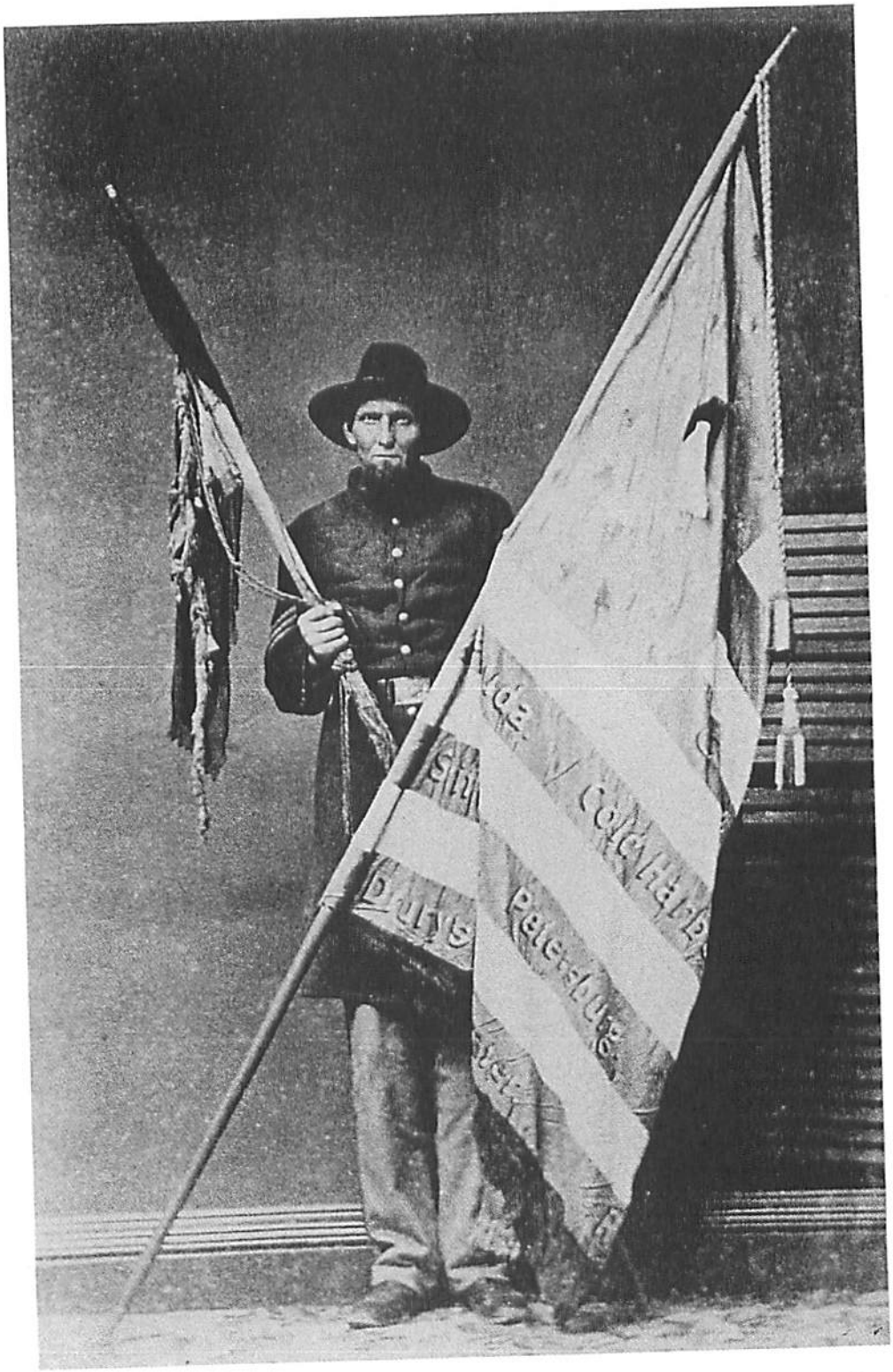
Sergeant Major Charles Seager of the 62d Pennsylvania Volunteer infantry posed in the famous Brady Studio for this portrait in his regiment's French-made chasseur uniform. Seager would be discharged from service by a surgeon's certificate of disability.

"As Marching from Annapolis." This inscription on a Brady Studio portrait of an unknown private in the 1st Rhode Island Detached Militia refers to the regiment's trek from Annapolis to Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1861. The regiment, under Colonel Ambrose Burnside, was recruited from militia companies and would disband and return home shortly after the First Battle of Bull Run. Many of these men would volunteer for other regiments and more service, but they would never again wear the distinctive blue blouse and felt hat of these "Minute Men of 1861."

Civil War hospital stewards had many duties. They were pharmacists, performed minor surgery, took care of supplies, and generally assisted surgeons. In the prewar army, hospital stewards were assigned to camps or bases, but during the war each volunteer regiment had a hospital steward to assist the regimental surgeon. The half-chevron of green with yellow caduceus was the insignia of the hospital stewards, whose uniforms were trimmed in crimson.

One of the war's most colorfully uniformed regiments was the 3d New Jersey Volunteer Cavalry, or 1st U.S. Hussars. This regiment was recruited in late 1863 and early 1864, and its bright hussar uniform was possibly a recruiting gimmick. Trimmed in fancy braids of yellow-orange and with flashes of red, these gaudy uniforms earned the regiment the nickname the "Butterflies." Sergeant James H. Baird served with the hussars through the terrible battles in Virginia in 1864-1865, mustering out in August 1865.

Once said to be "the only Chinaman in the Army of the Potomac," Joseph Pierce of the 14th Connecticut Infantry was indeed an uncommon soldier. Pierce served with his regiment at such battles as Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg, mustering out with his fellow Connecticut soldiers and settling in Meriden, where he was "well known and liked."



Color Sergeant Joseph A. Hastings was truly uncommon. Born in Canada, he was 6 feet 6 inches tall, which would make him an "outstanding" man even today. Hastings proudly and bravely carried the colors of the 118th New York Volunteer Infantry, returning them safely home at the end of the war. Here he holds the national colors—edged in black in mourning for Abraham Lincoln—and the remnants of another flag.