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## A Brookfield Soldier's Report: The Civil War Recollections of Edwin C. Hall

*On the 7th . . . there was a truce and men of both armies sprang over their works to see the bloody work that had been done. Enemies met as friends.*

*Edited by* NORBERT A. KUNTZ

**T**he Wilderness; Spotsylvania; Cold Harbor. These names are part of the litany of Civil War battles familiar to students of American history. Recollections, memoirs, and letters abound concerning these and other military activities of the 1861-65 war period. Yet, we continue to uncover vital and fascinating material.

Few participants in Civil War battles were able to compose their thoughts until sometime after the event. How much could be recalled and in what detail explains some of the differences between authors. Where was the author when the event took place? There was a substantial difference in perspective if one was in the command post rather than on the firing line. Historians' narratives too often have assumed the perspective of the commander and failed to communicate the foot soldier's view of the war.

What causes a young person, age seventeen, to enlist in the army? Edwin C. Hall was born in Brookfield, Vermont, in 1845. The evidence indicates that he came from a loving family. His father, Silas Hall, had six children over the course of two marriages. Edwin's letters to his father and to his brothers and sisters reflect his closeness to them. In particular, there was a special relationship between Edwin and his younger brother, George.

Whatever the reason, Edwin enlisted in the 15th Vermont Regiment in September 1862. That tour of duty included assignments in Virginia

as part of the defense of Washington and later with the Army of the Potomac. In August 1863, his nine months of service completed, he was mustered back into civilian life. Within months, however, Edwin re-enlisted for three years, or the duration of the war, this time with the 10th Vermont Regiment, Company G. Family descendants have stated that Edwin did not want to return to school or work on the farm; joining the military, consequently, was a more acceptable alternative.

Edwin and the 10th Vermont Regiment participated in some of the war's bloodiest battles. He received wounds in the knee at Cold Harbor, Virginia, on June 1, 1864, and in the thigh during the fighting at Petersburg on April 2, 1865, where he was also briefly captured by Confederate soldiers. Edwin was finally mustered out of service on June 29, 1865. He was twenty years old at the time. In the years that followed, he worked as a newspaper editor in Vermont and New Jersey. On September 11, 1913, at age sixty-eight, he died at the Old Soldier's Home in Bennington, Vermont, where he is buried.

Between his two enlistments, Edwin wrote a narrative entitled "Nine Months Campaign in Virginia," recounting his experiences with the 15th Vermont Regiment. In addition to his voluminous collection of wartime camp letters, written to family members and friends, this literate and articulate man, in the years following the war, composed an extensive memoir of his second enlistment.

Family descendants preserved Hall's letters, writings, and other memorabilia. William C. Hall, the great-grandson of Edwin, compiled and annotated his papers. The typed manuscript numbers 230 pages, divided into four parts: Edwin's letters to family and friends; his experiences while in the 15th Vermont Regiment; his history of the 10th Vermont Regiment; and his description of military activity immediately after Appomattox.

Edwin Hall's writings convey the passion of war, but also the respect between "men at war" regardless of the uniform. They reflect Hall's readiness to do what was necessary as a foot soldier, but they also recount significant moments when humanity overrode violent passion. In short, if one seeks evidence of a soldier overwhelmed by the cause—the desire for Union or the abolitionist's zeal for freedom—Edwin Hall does not provide it. He gives witness to other things.

He presents a realistic vision of the battlefield. Throughout the letters and other writings, the reader is confronted with a description of war that is far removed from stereotypical images of "heroes at work." Presented instead is the day-to-day life of a soldier, including a little humor and much horror, told in a dispassionate but not detached voice.

What follows are selections from Hall's recollections of life with the

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*10th Vermont Regiment as he wrote them except for occasional changes in punctuation made by William C. Hall, the compiler of the papers. Material added by the editor is bracketed. The account begins with Edwin's experiences in the winter of 1863-64 and includes descriptions of the "final push" toward Appomattox and the days immediately following the surrender of Robert E. Lee's army on April 9, 1865. Hall joined the 10th Vermont Regiment in its camp at Brandy Station, Virginia, in early January 1864. Camp life, particularly during wintertime, was not glamorous. Common drudgery was the order of the day.*

Near the camp was a brook—more properly a ditch which supplied the camp with water. The mixture was not more than 2 parts mud to 3 of water and when it was diluted further with our coffee it became a drinkable beverage. This fact will more plainly appear if it is stated that the whole vast plain drained by this stream had been the theatre of 13 battles and skirmishes—mostly cavalry engagements after which the combatants had not always taken the trouble to bury the dead horses, though they had slightly buried the bodies of their fallen comrades, and in order to drink this water with a relish we were obliged to wait until thirsty—then by closing our eyes, shutting our teeth firmly together we could strain a little of it down. There were few who were too fastidious in their tastes to use it at all—only as they mixed small quantities with a certain "qui Perrgoit" which being interpreted signifies Commissary Whiskey. We remained in this camp from Dec. to March [1864]. The occupation of the men these pleasant months were various—they were Yankees—our quarters were well furnished. Some were turned into cobbler shops, tailoring establishments, jewelry shops, etc. All professions were represented. The rank and file of the 10th contained men who had served in the State Legislature—lawyers who had won local distinction—ministers of the gospel who carried knapsacks and bore the hardships of the field uncomplainingly, fought bravely and did nobly. Our military duties were of the usual variety. Lucky ones received furloughs. Wives of the officers came to camp. Select dinner parties and other entertainments were the order of the day with the field and staff—and the rank and file looked on while off duty.

On Feb. 6, 1864, our Brigade got marching orders with 3 days rations. A reconnaissance toward the Rapidan [River]—another "mud campaign." We went to Raccoon Ford and formed in line of battle all one night—then went back without seeing a Reb or firing a gun. On Feb. 27, the Governor of Vermont, John Gregory Smith, and staff spend several days with us as did also the Hon. Henry Hall and wife of Bennington, Vt. During Feb. and Mar. the old 3rd Corps was broken up and the troops



*Edwin Hall was born in Brookfield, Vermont, where his father, Silas M. Hall, was a farmer, town schoolmaster, and justice of the peace. This photograph of the Hall family home was made in 1893. Courtesy of Mrs. William C. Hall.*

transferred to the 2nd, 5th and 6th [Corps].<sup>1</sup> . . . We got into a dirty mud hole and dirty huts, but did not enjoy them long for orders soon came to remove the surplus baggage to the rear. Citizens, visitors, and sutlers<sup>2</sup> were ordered to be off by March 29. The sick were sent to Northern Hospitals and everything was made ready for the spring campaign which commenced May 13, 1864.<sup>3</sup> Col. [A. B.] Jewitt resigned Apr. 25, with Col. [W. W.] Henry succeeding to command. We crossed the Rapidan . . . May 4 and faced the rebel works and commenced the bloody work in the wilderness.

*In 1864, the Confederate States of America remained intact despite three hard years of war. Ulysses S. Grant had been appointed the Union's new General-in-Chief in the spring of that year, and Grant understood that the army of Robert E. Lee was his most important target. Grant's strategy was to stretch Lee's Army of Northern Virginia until a break appeared. To accomplish his goal, he moved his forces south and east, predicting that the final confrontation probably would take place somewhere south and west of Richmond.*

*Union military planners hoped that this southern push would end the war within a few months, but such was not to be the case. The violent Wilderness Campaign, May 5 to May 12, 1864, indicated that the coming months would bring more bloody and costly combat. Grant was*

*determined, however, to continue his offensive operations regardless of the costs. Robert E. Lee demonstrated equal determination.*

*Edwin Hall's commentary represents the view of a front-line participant.*

#### THE WILDERNESS

Grant and [Gen. George Gordon] Meade both made their headquarters with the 6th Corps. Two divisions of the Corps moved at the next sunrise [May 5, 1864]—our division moved by the plank road to Ord Wilders Tavern—going into position to the right of the road North of the Orange Pike. The 2nd brigade reinforced the 1st Division and the 1st Brigade supported the 2nd Division. We were not in close action that PM though constantly under fire. While moving on the Orange Pike, we encountered a tornado of shot and shell from 4 brass pieces up the road. This was our first experience in dodging solid shot. Going along, a shot came down just over the heads, laying us even more low by its wind, and before we could rise another came up the height of breast as the Gen. and staff emerged from the bush and crossed the pike. 1 officer was hit and 3 horses. We suffered comparatively little this first day. The 2nd Brigade lost 3 officers and 38 killed and 174 wounded—mostly of the 110th Ohio. Col. Kifer—its gallant commander—who had just been relieved from command of the Brigade by the arrival of Gen. [Trumen] Seymour, was severely wounded. He went to the rear hatless and pantless—nothing on but a pair of army shoes, a pair of indescribable colored socks, a shirt bloody from top to bottom. His right arm had been terribly shattered and was hanging at his side while in his left hand he held his sword. All this, with his long hair—for he was a Nazarite (sworn not to cut his hair till Richmond fell)—gave him a most weird appearance. . . .

On the 6th, we were kept moving from point to point as supports and under fire except as we moved to the rear to reach position—1 officer and 6 men killed and we did not fire again. A square fight did not cause one half the pitiless anxiety that this expectant dubious state did, nor did a position of this kind afford a severe test of courage. While moving from the South to the North side of the pike in the morning—the Rebs made a sudden dash upon the right. After 3 or 4 desperate charges on this part of the line during the day and as many countercharges by Warren, Hancock and Burnside,<sup>4</sup> in which they [the Confederates] were successively defeated, simply because they did not defeat us, they again renewed the attack on the extreme right of the 6th Corps. This came near being a success. An eye witness thus describes it: “About sunset the Rebels made an attack on the left of the 6th Corps . . . With the lines in great disorder they [the Union] retreated to a breastwork just behind a ravine in front of which they were posted, and many even went back to the plank road

where they caused momentary panic among the teamsters and Hospital Dept. stationed there." In this break, Seymour was captured. The Rebs made a right wheel and were pouring in between the broken lines, picking them off and pressing up to the rear of our right center when Gen. [Charles] Griffin promptly brought the troops from the breastwork . . . reinforcing them with a battery which opened fire upon [the Confederate] flank and rear. . . . The 10 Vt. and the 106 NY sprang to their feet and changing directions by the right flank on the double quick, formed a line facing North across the path of the retreating 2nd Brigade. . . . At this time, the 2nd Brigade rallied in our rear and this movement checked them (the Rebs) and they fell back beyond the ravine to the positions from which they had just driven . . . Seymour. Our lines were now put in order facing North whereas before it was SW. The matter of entrenching was but a matter of a few moments and the Battle of the Wilderness was virtually over.<sup>5</sup> On the 7th there was desultory firing and skirmishing but the enemy had given up the contest and withdrawn from behind his strong entrenchments. The wounded were cared for the best they could—and the dead buried—detached brigades and regiments rejoined their commands and all things put in readiness to make a flank movement.

On May 7th at 11:30 PM, the whole army was on the move toward the right of the enemy's position. Our Division moved by the Chancellorsville Pike toward Spotsylvania Court House—crossed the battlefield—saw where "Stonewall" was wounded and the house where he died.<sup>6</sup> The field was a sepulchre—silent and full of dead men's bones. It seemed worse even than the one we just left—all slippery with the blood of 50,000 men.<sup>7</sup> Here was all the debris of battle, white and mouldy—splintered gun carriages, torn saddles, broken muskets, battered canteens, shriveled cartridge boxes and knapsacks, blankets stripped into shreds and hanging on bushes. Skeletons of horses and men were scattered about the field and everything covered in a common dust. Around the cannon ball and fragments of shell here were stout frames of men with the blue uniform of patriot soldiers still clinging to the unsightly messes just where they were hurled down in the awful rage of battle. Scores of human skulls were kicked over and went rolling away from the path we were treading to other fields of courage—and simply because it were only possible and not certain, could one march away from such ghastly realities of war to become unflinching actors in other parts of the awful bloody diorama, with results precisely the same.<sup>8</sup>

#### SPOTSYLVANIA

*Many Union soldiers believed their units would retreat following the Wilderness campaign as the Army of the Potomac had often done in the*

*past. General Grant, however, informed President Lincoln that there would be no retreat. When the soldiers realized that a southward push was in order, they cheered.<sup>9</sup> Grant's objective was to race southeast in order to flank the Confederate forces. The Army of the Potomac, not known for speed, proved unable to achieve its flanking mission, setting the stage for the Spotsylvania campaign, May 7-19, 1864. The most intense fighting and highest death tolls in the Spotsylvania battle were experienced in the period May 10-12.*

From the Wilderness down the Chancellorsville Pike we went, . . . occupying the crest of a hill on the right of the Corps with the enemy in position to our front and right. It was supposed that Hancock's [II] Corps had driven them back there so our attack would be a square fight, but soon after the order was given, it was found that we would be exposed to an enfilade fire<sup>10</sup> from a Reb Battery posted on a rise of ground across the Ny River. Consequently, our order to attack was countermanded for the time, and we drew back to the left. . . . Going forward, we charged across the Ny River and up the slope meeting an advance of the rebels advancing over the crest in solid lines of battle. The water in the Ny was to our armpits and to keep our powder dry we were compelled to take up our cartridge boxes and hold them above our heads and on meeting the enemy many had not had time to buckle on their cartridge boxes again and we gave them one volley holding them slung over the shoulder or in the hand. After the first volley, which stopped their advance, we lay down in the tall grass and got better prepared for further action. The Jenny Brigade on our right fled back down the slope as soon as the first volley was given. Finally our forces were rallied and with a shout we gained the crest—then filing to the right turned back the left so that it rested on the river, threw up entrenchments and remained in this position until the PM of the 11th.

During all this time [John Cleveland] Robinson's Division of Hancock's Corps further on the right was fighting desperately and becoming exhausted.<sup>11</sup> [Charles] Griffin's Division was sent to their assistance. Both then charged capturing 2,000 and losing 1,000. We only lost 16 men. After dark we moved one half mile to the left down the hill and 300 yards to the front—up to the edge of an open field beyond which the enemy was entrenched—and threw up breastworks which were strengthened next day. The batteries were placed in position and we got a terrific shelling—besides being the target of their sharpshooters. Officers and men hugged the ground with an affection that was truly touching and which might have been inspired by childish instincts of security in a mother's embrace. Each man feels at such a time as if he weighed a ton and was as tall as a meeting



Hall, right, posed with his Vermont friend, Horace T. Smith, for this 1864 picture. Both men were wounded in the battle of Petersburg, April 2, 1865. Courtesy of Mrs. William C. Hall.

house. Several batches of coffee were spoiled. Gen. [John] Sedgwick was killed here. He was placing a battery in position—struck by a sharpshooter's bullet under the left eye. Just before he had been jesting with some who dodged the whizzing bullets—"Poor man—they couldn't hit an elephant." Uncle John was the idol of us all. His name and the glory of the Old 6th Corps are forever identical. For 2 days after we lay hugging the ground, except those detached to go forward on the skirmish line. On the 12th May, the Corps moved to the left into the works of the 2nd Corps to support Hancock in the furious assault made on the next day.<sup>12</sup> The attack was made in the grey dawn [about 4:30 A.M.] and continued into the darkness of the night with unabated fury. Charge followed charge in quick succession. The roar of artillery was incessant and the rattle of musketry sounded like the tearing of some monstrous web into a million shreds at the same motion. It belched forth in one solid sheet of flame. 5 times the enemy hurled their heavy assaulting column against us and 5 times were sent staggering back with forceful loss. Many hand to hand conflicts occurred and it is safe to assert that 3/5 of all who were wounded by bayonet during the war received them here. Troops from both armies clung to the same breastwork at the same time and planted their flags upon it together to be swept down by the same volley. To say that both sides were equally determined is the exact truth. We found an advantage when we burst upon them through the thick fog in the early morning and we firmly held the advantage—that was all. Thus was this gained—the sleeping foe had been caught napping. We had advanced a mile, but the carnage was frightful—the dead lay in heaps and the soil was miry with blood—the slain were piled upon each other, literally packed up so as to form a defense for those who prolonged the battle and the whole field was one quivering mass of flesh. In one spot in their trench, I counted the dead and dying lying 5 deep and on the trunk and in the branches of an oak tree which had been felled before the battle commenced, I counted 27 dead men—shot as they were passing through or over it. Many other such scenes were witness. One tree, standing just behind their lines—16" in diameter—had been completely cut off by bullets, etc.<sup>13</sup> We had struck them at an angle of their works which was a key point to both armies and whoever held this angle commanded the whole line of works. Hence the struggle to retake and hold it and their awful punishment. When all, and more than one lived to tell the story of this conflict, were borne away and the battle was over—when the still night came down, coming with dark damp silence—those who had struggled and earned the tribute of the Nation's gratitude and tears or the just rewards of treason—there were packed into 5 square acres 1500 dead men—but by far the largest number wore the gray.<sup>14</sup>

On May 13th, we moved back across the field to an old position on the right. . . . The 11th Vt. Heavy Artillery and 9th NY joined us from the Defenses of Washington. Other commands also received reinforcements and the places of 40,000 men who had fallen out of the contest since we crossed the Rapidan were partly made good. Our Division, going into position just at dark on the 15th, charged across the Ny River and relieved a Brigade of the 1st Division which had been vainly endeavoring to carry the crest of a hill held by the enemy. This brigade had been badly cut up but refused to be driven off.

#### SPOTSYLVANIA HEIGHTS

The Army remained in this vicinity until the 21st [May]—the troops by Corps and Divisions moving from right to left—now massing—now combining before some supposed weak point on the enemy line and then quickly withdrawing to old positions to await the attack—but they made none. On May 21st, while withdrawing from our works just before dusk, we were spitefully attacked in our rear. The 1st & 2nd Divisions had already moved out but a part of them rushed back and got on their [Confederate] flank, capturing a number, and the balance made haste to get out, badly punished for their pains in attempting to gobble up our rear guard.

We had crossed a number of small streams which the inhabitants and map makers called rivers. They formed the waters and syllables for the name of a larger stream below. They were called Mat, Ta, Po and Ny. Running South a short distance they formed geographically as well as literally, the Mattapony River.

On May 22nd we received our mails from the North for the first time in 19 days. It was a joyful event and yet there were thousands of unclaimed letters—never could be claimed—that saddened the joy. When the names borne upon those letters—the very writing of which inspired a prayer as the pen traced the familiar supersonification, were called—the responses to many of them that silently impressed themselves upon the understanding were: “wounded, Dead, prisoner, or missing.” But the emergencies of the hour forbade a long contemplation. On May 24th, our Division with the Corps crossed the North Arm River at Jericho Mills [Virginia] at 8 AM. The 5th Corps had fought its way over the night previous. We lay on the bank of the river til 6 PM when we moved toward the South Anna, marching by Grant’s headquarters while the Gen. and staff were having tea. Marching through a terrific rainstorm to Quarles Mills, we ran into the Reb pickets and after skirmishing a while with them, we withdrew a short distance and fortified. Next morning we marched to Nolan’s Station on the Va. Central RR, which we burned and also destroyed the track for 8 miles beyond. That night we went on picket

below the RR—South of the station. Our post was at a place so wet that those who were allowed the privilege were allowed to pile up fence rails to keep above water. During the 10 days we were there our Corps did not become closely engaged although we were in several skirmishes. . . . On the 26th, another “flank movement” was commenced, led by our Corps, recrossing at Jericho Mills—marching in the direction of Richmond, arriving at Chesterfield Station at midnight. The 10th Vt. did not leave the picket line until 3 in the morning of the 27th. We reformed our Division at 7 AM and at sunset were in sight of the Pannunkey River, which we crossed at noon on the 28th at “Widow Nolan’s Bridge.” The Widow’s bridge was gone, however, so we crossed on pontoons. The whole Corps took positions on the high ground beyond and threw up breastworks in order to cover the crossing. Here the cavalry preceded the infantry and aided by the 2nd Division captured 2 guns from the enemy and several prisoners. Our Brigade occupied a position SE of Dr. Polland’s house—our breastworks running through his orchard and across a cottonfield where the young plants were about 6” high. Polland Estate was the finest plantation we had yet seen—rich in broad fields and thrifty orchards—adorned with shade and ornamental trees and supplied with every domestic convenience. We approached this place through long avenues shaded by the magnolia and catalpa—and the long egg-shaped flowers of the former and the clusters of smaller trumpet shaped blossoms of the latter variegated with yellow and purple, loaded the air with delicious fragrance and filled the scene with most tranquil beauty—strangely contrasting with the smell of powder, the tumult and the gory exhibition of battle. Abandoning the position on May 30th, we took a westerly direction, crossing Crumps Creek toward Hanover Court House. Approaching Atlers Station about noon we were ordered back to support the 2nd Corps then hotly engaged with the enemy near Tolopotamy Creek. Hurrying along through pathless woods and fields, crossing a swamp, through a dense oaken forest where “pioneers” were clearing a track for artillery, we went into line of battle on the left of Beaver Dam at 3 PM. Skirmishers were immediately thrown forward and at dark the order to advance along the whole line was given. But little heading was made however and the movement resulted only in a sharp and vigorous skirmish firing all night long and when the morning light broke, the main body of the enemy had left and in the far distance their skirmishers were on the doubt quick to the rear. Withdrawing from this position we moved around their army 15 miles or more to Cold Harbor—relieving the cavalry force at 10 AM. These troopers received us with wild demonstration of joy. They had been fighting “dismounted” all the morning and been hard pushed—yet they were led by officers who never knew when they were whipped. Gen. [George Armstrong] Custer

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had his brigade band out on the skirmish line playing "Hail Columbia." As we approached we thought these gay troopers were celebrating a victory but on the contrary had been roughly handled and did not propose to let the enemy know it. It was here we witnessed one of the most horrible sights of war. Over the ground in which these troopers had fought so gallantly, the fire had swept — and many a brave fellow wounded and dying, unable to move from where he had fallen — was either suffocated by the heat and smoke or burned to a crisp.<sup>15</sup>

#### COLD HARBOR

*Union strategy after Spotsylvania was designed to force the Confederates out of their trenches or into retreat. For a number of reasons the strategy failed. Grant, once again, began a series of flanking movements, reaching south and east attempting to stretch the Army of Northern Virginia. On June 2 he found that a gap had appeared in the enemy line and he ordered the attack. The Army of the Potomac hit the Confederates at Cold Harbor on June 3. Grant's soldiers knew what to expect. Before the charge, they printed their names and home addresses on slips of paper and put the paper in their pockets. If killed, the undertakers would know where to send the bodies. The magnitude of the losses was terrifying.*<sup>16</sup>

Our Division went into position at Cold Harbor to the west of the old tavern at the cross roads<sup>17</sup> in an open field behind a narrow belt of woods bordering on a swamp perhaps 100 yards across. The troops were formed in 4 lines of battle by regiments — the 2nd Division on the left — the 1st in the center and ours on the right — and the 18th Corps just arrived from the Army of the SW [South-West] to the right of the 6th Corps. While the formation was being made, we of the 3rd Division having first got into position, rested at will and many betook themselves of a small bayou a little to our right to wash the thick dust and dirt off and some overstepping the rules of war took off their clothes and had a bath in the muddy water. I was one who happened to be in at the time the bugle sounded to prepare to charge. In my haste to get dressed, I caught my vest from an overhanging branch and my big brass case watch flew from the pocket and sank in the deep water. With a sudden dive I recovered it before it had touched bottom. I thrust it into my pocket and ran and took my place in the ranks somewhat in "dishabille" but with equipments all on and powder dry, I met the enemy and were not "hisen." It was 6:30 when the order to charge was given — our Division to guide on the 1st. For some reason our guides did not move when the 18th Corps did which caused some confusion for a time and was in danger of being fatal to us as we

were under a heavy fire from the right. The 1st Division also not advancing as fast—owing to the nature of the ground—somewhat retarded the advance of our own brigade and caused an angle in the Division front between the 1st and 2nd Brigades. This soon became an acute angle which subsequently became the most advanced part of the line where works were finally constructed. Our advance was through this belt of pine woods . . . over a ploughed field from which we drove the enemy's skirmish line—through a ravine and swamp into a thick wood where their entrenchments were carried after a fierce struggle. The 10th Vt., in the advance over the works, captured the 51st North Carolina Regt. and its Commanding Officer surrendered his sword to Capt. E. B. Frost of Co. A—at the time acting major of the Regt. . . . When the Rebel Regt. surrendered, Col. Henry of the 10th sprung upon a log and called for 3 cheers which were given with a will and this was the first exultant voice that had broke the noise of the conflict since it commenced. It was now 9 PM and there was a lull in the battle—the captured works were strengthened and others thrown up. The left of our Division line extended out of the woods into an open field and was much harassed by an enfilading fire from the enemy's batteries which the troops of the 1st Division failed to carry, though they nobly stood their ground. Although in the first charge our Regt. lost heavily—yet in the three attempts within 2 hours after, of the enemy to regain their works, we lost many more. At one charge we were forced back for a time—perhaps 10 rods—while they rained a shower of bullets into us as we lay flat on the ground facing them. Only the flash of our muskets revealed to them our position and I have always believed that had we not fired a shot in the darkness but waited till they had delivered their fire and then charged them again with the bayonet—very many more might have escaped with their lives. It was right here that I received a shot in the knee which turned out to be harmless of permanent injury—yet at the time I suffered more pain in 60 minutes than one could with 40 bee stings in one hour. While in this position we kept up such a constant fusilade that the firing on their side soon ceased and Cos. I & G, advancing closer to the breast works for better protection, discovered that a part of their force had gone to another part of the line and the word being passed along, someone shouted an order for our brigade to charge, which they did, only to find the works abandoned—the enemy retreating to their 2nd line 50 rods or so. After a time spent in ascertaining the casualties, the orders came that the troops were to be relieved, and accordingly, those of the 1st Brigade came back over the breastworks again to pass to the rear and allow the troops then coming near at hand to take their places. Hardly had they all got over before the enemy again took possession and gave us another volley.

The advance Regt. of the troops then coming up immediately formed line of battle and charged. Their Col., a tall soldierly looking man, led them on and was the first one to leap on top the breastwork and while standing there, urging his men on, was shot—falling on our side of the works—his body riddled with bullets—but the works were retaken and that was the last riddlet of the enemy that night. The losses of our Brigade was: Officers—7 killed, 10 wounded, 4 prisoners: Enlisted—70 killed, 225 wounded, 28 prisoners. Among the killed was . . . Lts. [Ezra] Stetson and [Charles B.] Newton, 10th Vt. Wounded . . . Col. Henry 10th Vt. . . ; while among the captured were Lt. [J. S.] Thompson 10th Vt. The 10th Vt. lost more officers and men than any other Regt. in the Division on account of the crossfire that came in on them from the break between the 1st Division and our own left. There was no fighting on the second day. On the third day there was a general assault all along the lines in which we lost as many men as on the first day. . . . Every day from the first to the twelfth, we were under fire—scarcely a day we did not lose blood. . . . No man could show his hand or go 20 yards from the breastworks to the rear without exposing himself to the bullets. On the 7th from 11 to 12 [A.M.], there was a truce and men of both armies sprang over their works to see the bloody work that had been done. Enemies met as friends. There was no boasting—no joking. Hundreds of dead and many wounded and helpless beyond the reach of friends by night or day lay between these lines that in some places were not more than 100 yards apart—reaching from Tolopotony Creek to the Chickahominy River.<sup>18</sup> Some had lain dead since they fell 6 days before but now swollen and torn by the leaden and iron tempest that had swept over and around them thicker than the flakes of a blinding snowstorm, so as to be scarcely recognizable by friends who eagerly sought them. There were some wounded who yet survived all the shocks that meted death to so many others. Sheltered in some sunken part of the ground to be brought off now and saved. The dead hastily buried or taken away.<sup>19</sup> Then this sublime hour—holy for its brief lease of life—an hour of peace when the earth was calm and the air so still that the gods of war slept—was at an end—friends were enemies again and all hurried back to renew the contest. Another assault was made upon our lines on the 9th and was bloodily repulsed. On the 11th, the Division moved to the left—into the works vacated by the 2nd Corps—which were very high and close up to the enemy's lines that "Yank & Jonny" could easily converse with each other. Behind these works were vast excavations covered with logs in which officers and men now sheltered themselves from shot and shell and the burning sun.

## ON THE MOVE AGAIN

*A critical part of Grant's strategy was to have General Benjamin F. Butler assault Richmond from the east via Fortress Monroe and the James River line. Grant gave Butler thirty thousand men for the task. In one of the most ineptly led campaigns of the war, Butler managed to tie up his army and achieve nothing. By mid-June of 1864 the 10th Vermont Regiment temporarily joined Butler's army for support and began moving toward Richmond. The objective was to disrupt Confederate communications and supply lines. However, because of Butler's incompetence his army became "corked in a bottle" across a neck between the James and Appomattox rivers. Butler could not move forward, held in check by a handful of Confederate defenders. The 6th Corps, including the 10th Vermont Regiment, rejoined the Army of the Potomac by way of a return march and began to participate in the siege of Petersburg.*

On the night of [June] 12th, we were drawn from the works a few at a time. We crossed the Chickahominy on the 13th at Jones Bridge, marched via Charles City Court House and reached Wilcox Landing on the James [River], the 15th. Works were thrown up and the 6th Corps covered the crossing of the Army on their way to a new base around Petersburg. Then on transports, we sailed for City Point and from there to Bermuda Hundred, where we arrived midnight the 16th. After landing, we took position in the rear of Butler's fortified lines. We were ordered to attack that night and the troops formed outside for the assault — three successive nights did we thus form but each time found too much force to risk it. Daytimes, we lay behind the works under heavy fire while Butler's troops burrowed in the ground. On the 19th, we crossed the Appomattox at Point of Rocks and struck off to the left of Petersburg — hot and dusty with no water.

On the 21st, we reached Jerusalem Plank Road where cavalry were skirmishing. We formed a line of battle and with skirmishers out, advanced and drove the enemy back capturing prisoners and at 9 PM commenced to throw up entrenchments. The Corps now constituted the extreme left of the army investing Petersburg. . . . On the morning of the 22nd, we advanced 1/2 mile and entrenched. Skirmishers from the 10th and [Pennsylvania] 87th advanced 1 1/2 miles to the Weldon RR — found the enemy in force and were forced to run. Had it not been for the bravery of Col. Shure, the 87th would have been captured entirely. . . . By the 23rd June, the picket line was pushed out as far as the Weldon RR and they commenced to destroy track but were attacked by a superior force on the right and left — overwhelmed in front and were mostly killed or captured and the whole line was forced back to the position of the 21st.

I was on the skirmish line that day and ran till I fainted dead away but came to and finally made our lines in safety.

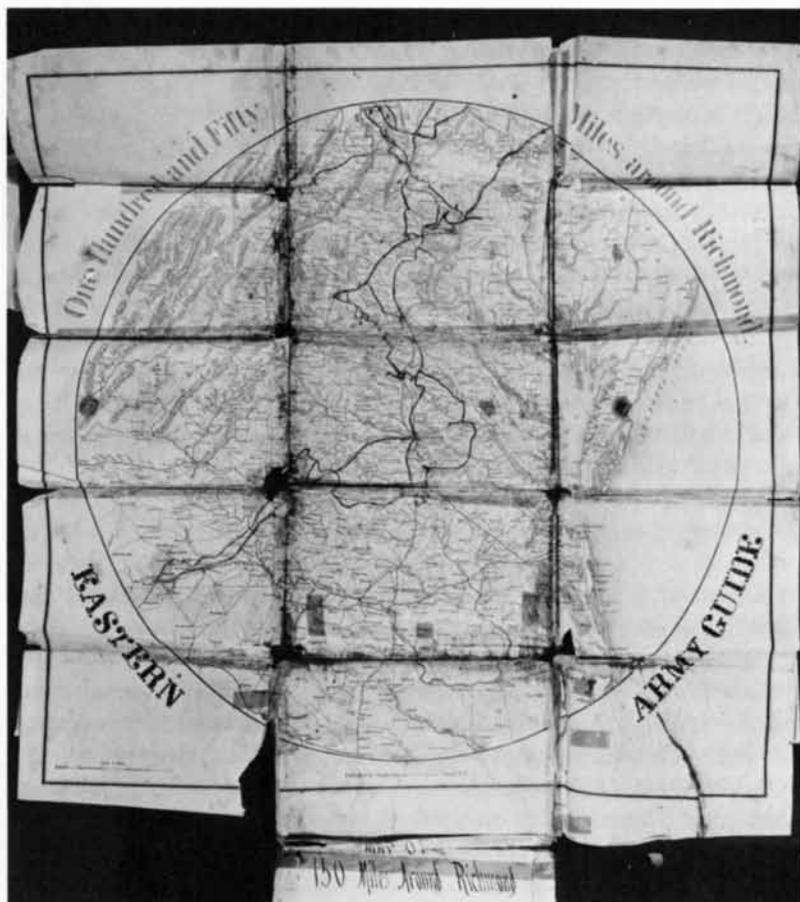
*Edwin Hall was hospitalized on June 28 with "Cronic Disease," similar to battle fatigue. Army doctors sent him via hospital boat to DeCamp General Hospital on David's Island in New York harbor. By early August 1864 he was resting in the army hospital at Brattleboro, Vermont. At month's end he was transferred to the Sloan General Hospital, Montpelier. He desired to return to the front despite his illness. By mid-December he had obtained his wish and had rejoined the 10th Vermont Regiment near the Weldon Railroad, south and east of Petersburg, Virginia. Hall wrote to his parents on December 18, 1864: "Have at last got home again. Got to City Point Thursday last—found the 6th Corps back from the Valley. . . . Found the boys well. They were as glad to see me as I was to see them."*

*Robert E. Lee surrendered the remnants of his Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865. Lee's surrender did not allow Johnny to come marching home, however. There was additional work to be done. Grant assigned the 10th Vermont Regiment along with portions of the 6th Corps to "pressure" the army of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston as it retreated in front of the forces of General William T. Sherman. In what was to be the beginning of a pincer-like movement, portions of the 6th Corps marched from the Richmond area to Danville, Virginia. In the section of his regimental history that follows, Edwin Hall gives witness to those last days of the war. Logic dictated that "the war was already over," but the 10th Vermont Regiment nevertheless had many more miles to march. There would be little unit action, but no small amount of excitement.*

*Edwin C. Hall wrote this particular section long after the war and presented it at a reunion of the 10th Vermont Regiment held in Boston during August of 1890, as part of the national encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic.*

#### OUR MARCHES AFTER SURRENDER

Of all the various impressions of our Army life, there are none we can refer to with more pride or recollection of more anguish of "sole," than the fact that we were able to "keep up with the column" on a march, whether it was on the first march after arriving at the seat of war, where, fresh from the green hills of our native state, we struggled bravely but almost breathlessly along the usual day's march of 10 to 15 miles in very "heavy marching order," or in the extra light marching order adopted after the first year's experience and by the way—can any member of the



*Hall carried this military map, "One Hundred and Fifty Miles around Richmond," during some of the 10th Vermont Regiment's bloodiest battles in 1864 and 1865. Courtesy of Mrs. William C. Hall.*

regiment tell, even approximately, how many miles he marched during his term of service? I have never since found one who could tell. One answer received comes as near the truth perhaps as any one of us could tell—"I walked as far as I was able and crept the rest of the way."

But as to the miles marched by the regiment, in column, it can be demonstrated so far as the correctness of a map "One hundred fifty miles around Richmond" goes to show by careful measurement. This map I carried through the war and still retain it as one of my most valuable relics. Its margin bears the signatures of many of the officers of the "Old Tenth"

who borrowed it on occasion. Our route of march was traced along the most direct roads between given points and the location of battlefields designated by a red cross. In so far as approximate accuracy may be relied on — it shows that the regiment as an organization marched 2,067 miles, was transported by rail 1,090 miles and by boat 1,400 miles, making the total approximate distance traveled 4,557 miles. This does not include detours or countermarching which if it could be computed would make the total number of miles marched several hundred more. Of course, no one member of the regiment marched this distance in the “column” but there were a few privates who fortunately were able to be “on duty” a greater part of their term of service who no doubt outwalked the regiment by counting their regular detail work of picket and sentry tramps.

What particular march during the whole service was the hardest is not to be discussed. All the long marches from Washington in 1862 to Appomattox in 1865 taxed to the utmost the physical power of men from which effects the best of them who survive, never recovered. But after the surrender of Appomattox — what? Who thought of any more hard marches?

When the defeated Army of the Confederacy passed through our lines<sup>20</sup> and we withdrew to the railroad junction at Berksville [Virginia] it was in anticipation of a ride towards home. But while the Army waited there for final disposition and after having passed through the excitement occasioned by the assassination [April 15, 1865] of our beloved president, Abraham Lincoln, the word came that there were “other foes to conquer” as the capitulation made by General Johnston and General Sherman of the Union Army could not be acceded to by the powers at Washington.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, General Grant was forced to detach a portion of the Army of the Potomac and by a forced march toward North Carolina head off the supposed retreat of Johnston’s forces. To this end the 6th Corps and [Gen. Philip H.] Sheridan’s cavalry were detached and with 5 days rations — “to march on Johnston’s rear — or bust.” And Comrades — you know what that means.

It means, then, that those of you who had accidentally “lost” your muskets for fear you wouldn’t need them anymore had to hustle around and accidentally find one, and one too that would fit your cartridges (even if you had to swap nine times in one night).

The 3rd Div. of 6th Corps broke camp early on the morning of April 24, 1865, and in advance of the Corps. A Division of Cavalry had preceded us the evening before. Advancing in a Southwesterly course parallel to and often on the Richmond and Danville RR, we struck a quickstep which made our small stock of tinware rattle like two peas in a pepper box and not until 15 miles were scored did we halt — to take a drink of coffee and

a fresh "chaw of tobaccy" which besides hard tack and salt pork was the sum total of our 5 days rations.

Sunset of the first day out found us leaving the telegraph poles behind us and the next morning's sunrise found us hunting for those ahead of us. Scarcely a straggler could be seen. Every nose pointed Southwest and the feet seemed to be trying to get there before the nose did.

Any comrade who was in line that morning never could forget the scene while he lived; it was the most enthusiastic march I ever took part in — but by afternoon there was a noticeable change. Footsore and weary were many, really sick were some, and all lightened their burdens except the actual necessities and even those were dispensed with for the time being — for as one jolly Irishman remarked as he slung his musket over a fence, "Faith — its aisyer to steal than to die."

About sunset of the second day we crossed the Staunton River below Turnip Creek several hours in advance of the Division of Cavalry, which had preceded us from the camp at Berksville Jct., and took considerable pride in the fact that the infantry could outmarch cavalry on a forced march.

That night we laid on aching bones and blistered feet upon the "sacred soil" of a sweet scented clover field full of bumble bees and bugs — not far from the river. A rail fence skirted that field — one of those "now you see it — now you don't" kind of fences that were so extensively appropriated wherever found and this one in particular, I remember, quickly vanished into smoke — sizzlin' hot coffee and salt pork with the hottest fires that ever was kindled in that section of the country. Rest? — there was none that night for anyone — except he who was nerveless. What with the swarms of bugs holding battalion drill on his prostrate body, the aching limbs, the bruised and blistered feet, put rest out of the question. The subject uppermost in everyone's mind was "how to keep up tomorrow." Already, many had given out with blistered feet and swollen limbs and such were coming into camp and busily engaged in fitting themselves for the morrow's march, for none wanted to be left behind. The main trouble with many was they had failed or had no opportunity to provide themselves with a change of socks before starting on the march and the rapid march of two days had left them completely barefoot and many a one marched the remaining distance in that condition. The time had come, when those who thought themselves not equal to the task of a rapid days march on the morrow, to get leave of their officers to go ahead of the column and everyone who wished, got consent. Consequently everyone who cared to "keep up with the procession" started on the next day's march without any sleep at all. The writer certainly got consent of his C.O. to take his own time but he added, "if you are not up with us tomorrow night, I'll

TAKE GREAT CARE OF YOUR DISCHARGE.

**Honorable Discharge**  
 WAR OF REBELLION, 1861-1865.  
 PAPERS and MEMORANDA  
 OF  
*Edmund C. Hall*  
 Co. *10th* Regiment,  
*1st* Volunteers.

PRESENTED BY  
**WILLIAM R. WOOTERS,**  
 PENSIONS & BOUNTY,  
 512 E. GIRARD AVE., Philadelphia, Pa.,  
 and WASHINGTON, D. C.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

COMRADE:

If the Soldier, named in the enclosed Discharge, his WIDOW or MINOR CHILDREN should at any time need the services of an Attorney, to prosecute a claim for Pension or Bounty, they should write to me at once, with the assurance that their letters will be promptly answered. The Act of June 27, 1890, provides Pension for all who served 90 days or more during the Rebellion. The Widows and Minor Children are also entitled. REJECTED CASES SOLICITED. No Cost unless successful.

Fraternally, **WILLIAM R. WOOTERS,**  
 Co. F., 1st Del., and Co. D., 203d Pa.

TO THE SOLDIER:

Never Part with your Discharge.  
 A Discharge is of no value to any one except the Soldier or his heirs; but to them it is of  
**THE GREATEST VALUE.**  
 The country will never forget its Soldiers, and they will need their Discharges to prove their service.  
 This Envelope is made and presented so that this discharge can always be safely preserved.

*The envelope in which Hall preserved his Union Army discharge papers also served as an advertisement for an enterprising Philadelphia lawyer. Courtesy of Mrs. William C. Hall.*

have you shot." So taking my shoes in my hand, I took to the road, stocking feet, and at daylight had come up with the extreme advance guard and gained a good start for the day so that by frequent halts by the way and at every spring and creek soon got my feet in good marching condition. There were many others taking the same advantage of privileges given and the monotony of marching was somewhat relieved in having practical knowledge that "misery loves company."

My experience that day was probably not unlike many others of our regiment. . . . Individually, we had our experiences as "flanker"—some kept within sight of the marching column—some took the risk of foraging upon the enemy. At one village I remember (I think it was a place called Mount Laurel, said to be the home of ex-governor [Henry A.] Wise of Va.) as we passed through, all the bands played and the troops sang "John Brown's Body Lies a Moulding in the Grave" until the ex-governor went nearly crazy.<sup>22</sup> We flankers didn't stop there long after the "head of the column" had passed. Pushing forward as fast as our tired feet would allow, we soon got ahead of the advance guard and "hauled up for repairs" at a small creek just across from which was a stately Virginia mansion. A "spring house" was between and like hungry soldiers we were led to examine the contents thereof.

Evidently it had been in recent use as a milk depot and there seemed to have been a mounting in hot haste of numerous milk pans leaving only slops upon the floor and threshold. In fact the sable female<sup>23</sup> on guard at the door said so, though I cannot believe to this day—remembering her "vinegar visage"—it was moved for the very fear of her watching it would curdle the milk before the cream had time to rise. But . . . the milk was not there and we marched on to the mansion on the top of the hill. The doors were locked and no one answered our respectful call. Across the lawn were the customary negro quarters and in the door . . . [of] the cook's house stood the cook who signaled us to come—and like hungry Yanks—we went of course. Once inside, we saw a steaming kettle of mush, in the fireplace, nearly cooked—but before we had time to appropriate any of it to our "own used and behoof" there loomed up between us and the mush, a female—tall, angular, fiery eyes, a Roman nose, that roamed from her frontal bone to the peak of her chin and with every lineament of her face portraying the most intense hatred and disgust. And as she stood there with uplifted poker in her hand and fiercely declared that "No Yankee sons of \_\_\_\_\_ should taste one morsel of her food" it completely psychologized our bravery and we very willingly and hastily retreated to the shade of our trees outside. Not long did we rest however, for the cooling shade or the pangs of hunger dispelled the psychological effects of the vehemence—we filed bayonets and advanced in solid phalanx

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to smell once more—not powder—but that steaming mush. She stood her ground—or rather in the doorway—with what she called a “pistill” in her hand and dared “the foe to steal her mush.” But when the steel of the bayonet touched the steel of her corset, she retreated as we advanced. But oh, how the fire did fly from out those gold bowed specs. We got our mush and traveled on.

The third day of our march was full of adventures to us flankers (perhaps those in line too). We were marching through a different country than we had ever seen before—rich, fertile and more beautiful scenery compared with Northern Va. Little wonder we cared whether we had one or ten days rations with us. But some of us came to grief before the march was finished—though footsore and weary we still kept up with the head of the column on the march and before 12 o’clock midnight had beat any record then made. Along in the afternoon of the third day it was hard to tell which were stragglers and which the main line. Headquarters flag showed where the head of each brigade should be but where was it? Scattered all along the line—yet everyone was trying to get there somehow. Those who rode horseback had a comparatively easy time but the privates and line officers had a sore time of it. Those having permission to take their time but “get into line at night camp” fared rather better than those in line for they were privileged to “cut cross lots” at any opportunity. Such a one the writer enjoyed on the afternoon of the third day. About 6 miles from Mount Laurel, the main road wound around a mountain and by going over it would save some travel so taking advantage of it, he with many other footsore comrades crossed the mountain. On the further side, nestled under the hill, was a plantation house and in the grove back of it, we comrades laid ourselves down under the trees and “swapped lies” of how comrades had discovered fortunes in such out of the way places by digging for jewelry and silverplate which had been secreted by those wealthy Southerners from the hands of advancing Yanks. One related how, on a previous march, he had mined for treasure in a flower garden which produced wealth. Another, how he had come rich by mining in the sandy soil on the pine woods. There were 4 of us—representing 4 states—Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa and Vermont. Suddenly one exclaimed, “Look, there’s a prize,” pointing to a mound of freshly piled dirt. Another rushed to examine it and reported that it looked as though the “old planter had salted his treasure there.” That settled it. Like a general planning a campaign did we organize our force to capture that prize. No other soul in sight to snatch it from us—when gained. We resolved ourselves into an Engineer Corps at once—each member given his number and proceeded to business. Our only available tools were one picket spade, one hatchet, one jack knife, and a frying pan. #1 won the toss for the spade, #2 the



*Veterans of Company G, 10th Vermont Regiment, posed for this reunion picture in Boston in 1890. Hall is seated in the second row, third from the right. Courtesy of Mrs. William C. Hall.*

frying pan, #3 the knife and #4 the hatchet. Each was to dig for 5 minutes with his allotted instrument and there was to be a change about the next 5 and so on until the treasure was discovered. Then lots were to be drawn again for the first grab—but each was to share and share alike as near as could be done. This in brief, was the agreement, sealed with clasped hands and anything but dirt. But after a sweaty task, we reached a plank beneath which we supposed our treasure rested. #3 with his hatchet soon had a hole through that when it was found there was another box underneath the two inch plank. Thinking our everlasting fortunes were made and not wishing to exhibit a too great eagerness to grasp it we decided to halt “15 minutes for coffee” after which lots were again drawn to see who should make the first grab at the buried treasure. #3 drew the hatchet and was to cut through the box and then give way to #4 (who it was decided had the biggest hand) to pass out the watches and silverplate. Although the cover to that box was probably not more than one inch thick, it seemed to us who were waiting to be at least half a mile thick. But t’was through at last—and #4, with a wild Comanche yell, sprang into the chasm and after a while in fumbling around (presumably to select the most valuable pieces first) withdrew his hand and straightened up to his full height—with uplifted hand—so all could see there was no deception—and displayed to our anxious gaze—not wealth but a handful of . . . the mortal remains of a deceased African. . . .

"Few and short were the prayers we said and we spoke not a word of sorrow—we stopped not to gaze on the face of the dead, but bitterly thought of the morrow"—and our already blistered feet and the rear guard, and all the other side shows incident to "being left." Taking a hurried hand bath with the last drop of water in our canteens and swearing ourselves to secrecy, we picked up our traps and on reaching the pike along which the main column had passed we struck a dog trot toward North Carolina. The sun had nearly set. Along the dusty highway tramped thousands of weary war-worn veterans, while other thousands stretched their weary bodies in the fence corners and along the roadside. For a time we four "busted fundholders" kept together but after darkness set in it became a "go as you please" tramp and it pleased them all to leave me behind—without even a word of farewell and never since have I seen or heard of any of my comrades of the "forlorn hope." The scenes of that night's march could better be described by an artist pencil than by words. It was known that we were nearing the state line and therefore must be more or less in proximity of the enemy. The main column was still in motion, though it was hard to distinguish where was an organized Company or Regiment, and where the stragglers. Every nose was pointed Southwest and every foot was on the jump for fear the nose would get there first. Infantry, Cavalry, and Artillery were mingled in one common herd. The darkness grew denser, the day shorter, and the miles longer. At last, the head of the column halted and went into bivouac for the night. Around each regimental flag gathered its tired defenders, as they arrived in squads. Here are officers with a few men—there a few men without an officer, but everyone around their regimental colors as far as could be found, but each one bringing up a rail or pine knot, with which to make a fire for coffee. Nearly all night, stragglers were coming in. But few slept, for by the time a cup of coffee had been made and blistered feet attended to, it was nearly the hour for the bugle to sound "fall in," for the last day of our forced march, as it was then generally known that we were to proceed only to Danville. I dare say that when we started that nine-tenths of our command either had no shoes or were unable to put them on their swollen feet. Only excitement kept those who were able to start in the morning within sight of their brigade flags through the remainder of the march and many were utterly unable to keep up, although it was a comparatively short day's march and when the column halted in the mid-afternoon for the stragglers to catch up, there was not a very large accession to the ranks. According to my remembrance, the thought uppermost in mind on coming within sight of the city was, "Well now surely we will find something to eat and drink," for most of us had disposed of our five days rations on the second day and had been living by our

wits since then. About 4 o'clock that afternoon we crossed the bridge over the Dan River and never shall I forget how clear and sparkling looked its waters and many a comrade left his post, against orders, to fill his empty canteen. Before entering the city, strict orders had been given that no one should fall out of the ranks and under any pretext whatever while passing through, but it was not obeyed—for many a hungry and thirsty veteran forgot the orders when he read the many signs of invitation to the hungry and thirsty on either side of the main street of the city—up which we passed. The column proceeded through and out into the suburbs—some three miles or more—before going into camp. But I dare say not one half that crossed the Dan River slept in camp that night for those who did not fall by the wayside stopped at the various public resorts in the city and, after sunset when a cordon of pickets had been placed at the outskirts and “patrols” had made their rounds within the city limits, found themselves within the jurisdiction of the Provost Marshall and spent the night either in the guard houses in the city or in the “bull pens” on the outskirts. The writer enjoyed the night at a guard house in the city after having procured two loaves of soft bread by waiting his turn three hours at one of the bakeries on Main St.—paying 50 cents for the two loaves of bread and the disgrace of not getting into camp at the close of this forced and forcible march of 120 miles in 56 hours marching time—from 6 AM April 24 to 6 PM April 27. The intervening time from that date to the time of departure was principally occupied in “rest and rations” with occasional drill and inspections. Many, who had longed for a sight of the “rebel-dom” in its pristine glory, took long tramps southward into the “enemy’s country” and went the short distance over the state line into North Carolina and called in the neighbors only to boast that they had been in “the Carolinas.”

On the 15th of May, the orders came to pack up and on the next day we were put aboard the cars for Richmond and hardly less endurable the journey than it was on foot, for we were packed in freight cars, like sardines in a box and the top of every car was crowded to overflowing, so much so that anyone who did not keep awake and hung on for dear life was in danger of sliding off and some were thus unfortunate. What remained of us were landed at the depot in Richmond the next forenoon and marched across the James River to Manchester where we made camp and during the week we remained there, were given opportunity to visit the historic city and became somewhat acquainted with its people who remained, and view with much interest the places of captivity of our unfortunate comrades who had come before the hospitalities of the city had been secured to us.<sup>24</sup> For one week only we did enjoy such hospitality as was forced from the citizens of the rebel capital and then, in obedience



*Edwin C. Hall in 1911, shortly before his death at age sixty-six. Courtesy of Mrs. William C. Hall.*

to the dictum of high authority did we “strike tents” and set our faces toward Washington and home, and few stragglers there were then. Those not able to march had been provided with a shorter route by steamer, and some who were not really able, chose the foot route from choice. Early on the morning of May 24th, the 6th Corps formed line of march on Main St. in the city of Richmond and waited the bugle sound to march. During the hours of waiting, however, the boys gave an exemplification of “how to forge on an enemy” and many were the barrels of beer rolled out into the streets and boxes of cigars passed around before we started and when at length the bugle did sound and the head of the column started and the veterans marched down the street and up past the state house to the inspiring music of the Union — none but the most bitter rebel could find fault with the hilariousness which seemed to reign supreme. 12 miles was our record the first day out of Richmond and we camped near Hanover Court House. That night it rained and so continued the following day, so that by the time we had reached Polecat River its waters were so high that we had to remain on the southern bank one day before we could get across. From there we made slow progress to Fredericksburg, and by the time we arrived there our “eight days rations” with which we had started from Richmond were “sadly demoralized” to say the least — and no enemy to draw from — not even a stray “razorback.” I have often heard it remarked that there was more ‘red tape’ on that march from Richmond to Washington, after the war was over, than any other time during the

whole war—but I don't believe it. I think it arose from just one order that was issued the morning that we were to march through Fredericksburg viz: "No hats to be worn through the streets of Fredericksburg." It so happened that after reaching Danville and finding that the war was really over, the 'file' and some of the 'rank' of the Army had become possessed of straw hats, wool hats, and other hats calculated to keep the hot southern sun from tanning their fair complexions and until now, they had worn them without molestation. But now, the edict had come and to enforce it, a guard had been placed at the crossing of a stonewall in the suburbs of the city. Some heard the edict of the guards and donned their regulation caps. Others heard it and doffed their hats and passed on bare headed for the very good reason that they had left their regulation caps behind—thinking they would have no more use for them. Gaily they all paraded through the streets of Fredericksburg. Joyfully they passed beyond—over the pontoons and toiled up the steeps of the heights beyond—their faces sheltered from the scorching sun by their favorite hat. But the sunset gained and a halt made—then joy transformed into sorrow. Our adjutant came down the lines and stopped at each head of Company, gave orders "Every man who has a hat report at the head of the column immediately." I don't recollect how many hats were cast at the feet of Col. Darion but one wide brimmed soft hat that came from Vermont only a few weeks before was reluctantly left among the number and the owner thereafter was forced to march bare headed in the scorching sun until Major [J. A.] Salisbury took pity on the unfortunate and bought him one—not half as good. Major Salisbury was the hero that hot day for he saved many a victim of that 'red tape' order from being sunstruck by furnishing them with some kind of head covering—by the way—I should like to know what became of all those hats.

The next day was the hardest day's march of all. We were passing through that part of the country where nature had failed to embellish it with variegated foliage becoming to the season, save an endless show of laurel and sage brush, and where architecture could not be found.

We made 30 miles that day—most of our 8 days rations had disappeared and it was a hungry crowd that crossed Wolf Run Creek and on through for miles of dense forest to Fairfax Station where we expected a fresh supply of hard tack and salt pork, but as none had arrived we pressed on and went into camp for the night at Fairfax Court House. Too tired for looking after any rations, we dropped on the ground and slept.

About midnight, we were aroused by the announcement that there was fresh beef to be issued and to turn out and help get it to camp, which was done and much of it eaten raw because we were too tired to cook it.

The next day we started at sun up on the final march in the field. We had been 10 days from Richmond with 8 days rations of hard tack, salt pork, and coffee on which to subsist. We were far from disheartened but rather weak in the knees—and who would not be?—the stoutest, ablest men that exist could hardly do more and little wonder that with the few day's rest we got at our Camp at Hall's Hill, Va. that so many as did endured the tramp of the Grand Review at Washington<sup>25</sup> when we had been on the march almost continually for 24 hours.

All things considered, our marches after the surrender were as great a test of the physical endurance of men as any which preceded it.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In March 1864 Ulysses S. Grant was appointed general-in-chief of the Union armies by Abraham Lincoln and given the title lieutenant general. Immediately the Army of the Potomac along with all Union armies was reorganized. The 10th Vermont Regiment was moved from the III Corps to the VI Corps under the command of Gen. John Sedgwick. The 10th formed part of the 1st Brigade under the command of Gen. William H. Morris.

<sup>2</sup> A sutler traveled with the army, selling food, drink, and supplies.

<sup>3</sup> Grant's forces actually began their movement across the Rapidan River on May 4, 1864. Grant was in charge of the Union armies' strategic planning; George Gordon Meade was the commander of the Army of the Potomac.

<sup>4</sup> Gouverneur K. Warren, Commander of V Corps; Winfield Scott Hancock, II Corps Commander; Ambrose E. Burnside, Commander of IX Corps. Burnside later oversaw the disastrous Battle of the Crater, July 30, 1864, about which Grant commented: "It is the saddest affair I have witnessed in the war." Historians have concluded that Burnside's career was a sad affair at best.

<sup>5</sup> This statement is misleading. The campaign continued through May 12. Union losses, killed, wounded and missing, were about eighteen thousand while the Confederacy lost almost ten thousand. Those seeking specific numbers should consult Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861-1865* (1900; reprint, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1957). Military historians accept Livermore's figures as "the best available."

<sup>6</sup> This is a reference to the Battle of Chancellorsville, May 1-5, 1863. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson was wounded on May 2 and died on May 10. Robert E. Lee was said to have "lost his right arm" when Jackson died.

<sup>7</sup> This is an exaggerated figure. Casualties totaled less than thirty thousand. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>8</sup> This paragraph, written with the advantage of hindsight may present an exaggerated and composite picture of individual experiences.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Catton, *A Stillness at Appomattox* (New York: Doubleday, 1953), p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> Enfilade fire is gunfire directed from either flank along the length of a line of troops.

<sup>11</sup> Robinson had been severely wounded on May 8 and his leg amputated. He later received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions.

<sup>12</sup> Hancock's assault took place on May 12.

<sup>13</sup> Numerous accounts of Spotsylvania refer to the oak tree. Those same accounts indicated that Hall was not exaggerating in his description of this battle.

<sup>14</sup> In round figures the casualties at Spotsylvania numbered more than twenty thousand for May 12. The campaign from May 5 through May 12 cost Grant 26,815 killed and wounded and another 4,200 missing. See Livermore, *Numbers and Losses*, pp. 112-113. Specific records for the Confederates do not exist but estimates are more than eleven thousand for the same time period.

<sup>15</sup> The most well-known episode of wounded being burned to death occurred during the Battle of the Wilderness. Conservative estimates for that battle place the number around three hundred during one night alone.

<sup>16</sup> The Union lost about twelve thousand men over three days with at least seven thousand killed or wounded in the first few minutes of the battle. Confederate losses were estimated at not more than fifteen hundred. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses*, pp. 114, 140, 141.

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<sup>17</sup> Cold Harbor takes its name from the tavern that provided cold drinks and overnight lodging; hot meals were not served. The crossroads location of the tavern was isolated and lonely before the arrival of the two armies.

<sup>18</sup> The Vermont 10th lost heavily in this battle because its left flank became exposed when Union troops failed to keep up the pace. The distance of the battle line was roughly six miles.

The phenomenon of gaining "friends" while tending the wounded was not uncommon. The size of the battlefield and the number of troops engaged at Cold Harbor make Hall's statement all the more significant.

<sup>19</sup> Many of the soldiers were buried in shallow graves only to be exhumed and reburied in April 1865. A national cemetery was created at Cold Harbor.

<sup>20</sup> Edwin Hall is referring to the Army of Northern Virginia commanded by Robert E. Lee. Lee had been named general-in-chief of the Confederate Armies on February 6, 1865. General Johnston surrendered to General Sherman on April 26, 1865. See footnote 21 for additional information.

<sup>21</sup> Sherman's peace terms were overly generous. In discussions between the two opposing generals, April 13-18, Sherman guaranteed to Southerners their "political rights and franchise, as well as their rights of person and property." The latter clause meant retention of slaves. This was something that the government in Washington could not tolerate. A new surrender agreement was drawn up; on April 26 the generals agreed to duplicate the terms between Grant and Lee.

<sup>22</sup> Virginia governor Henry A. Wise (1856-60) was the man who ordered the execution of John Brown after his conviction for treason, murder, and fomenting insurrection in his attempt to seize the U.S. armory and arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in October of 1859. Wise served in the Confederate Army, achieving the rank of major general in 1865.

<sup>23</sup> This was an expression sometimes used among whites in the nineteenth century for a black woman.

<sup>24</sup> Libby Prison in Richmond was one of the most infamous Confederate prisons. The three-story, 150 by 100 foot building was overcrowded, inadequately ventilated, and poorly staffed. Andersonville, Georgia, was the location of the best-known prison of the Confederacy.

<sup>25</sup> The Grand Review of the Armies took place on May 23 and 24, 1865. General Meade's Army of the Potomac (eighty thousand veterans) and Sherman's Army of Georgia (sixty-five thousand veterans) marched in review down Pennsylvania Avenue. Sherman's troops had just completed a two thousand-mile march through Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia. Edwin Hall's dramatic description of the 6th Corps march after Appomattox may have been provoked by the competition between the two armies before, during, and after the Grand Review.