The Eighth Vermont

.... IN THE ....

Battle of Cedar Creek

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as related by

MOSES McFARLAND,

Late Captain of Company H, 8th Vt. Vet. Vols.

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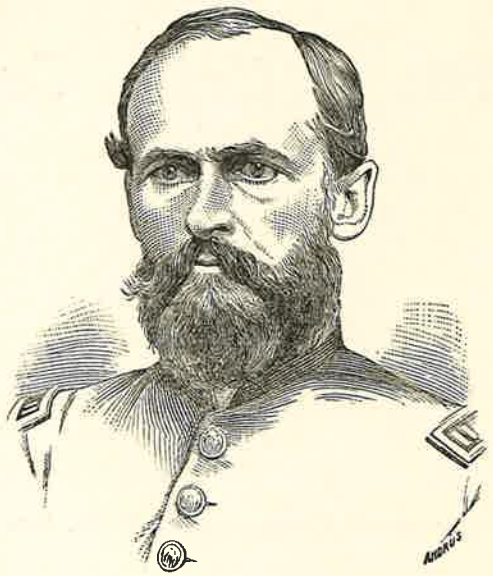

THE EIGHTH VERMONT in the BATTLE of CEDAR CREEK

The possession of the Shenandoah Valley was of vital importance to the Confederacy. No other section of the same area within the limits of the South was equal to it in its feeding capacity. The army of northern Virginia looked to its rich harvests for its support, and the South through the fortunes of war had been able to secure the crops for upwards of one hundred miles down the valley from the commencement of the war to 1864. Through the repeated success of the Confederate troops, and our defeat, the valley had come to be known to us as the "Valley of Humiliation."

The valley of the Shenandoah was a great thoroughfare leading down to Washington. It was down this valley that Lee led his army to invade the North. Along this route went McCausland, the fire-fiend, on his way to Chambersburgh, a beautiful city of three thousand inhabitants, where he demanded as a ransom the sum of five hundred thousand dollars, there being at the time not more than fifty thousand dollars in the place, and, in default of payment, burned the city to the ground, giving no time even for the removal of the sick.

The enemy had been successful so far not only in making the valley his granary but his victorious battlefield, his vantage ground for a possible attack upon Washington, his avenue of successful and murderous assault upon defenceless cities. The condition had become serious. Sigel, Banks, Torbert, Averill and Hunter all had had a hand in the matter with no success. Something must be done. The strength of the enemy had been persistently underestimated or an insufficient force had ever been opposed to him. Perhaps both. In any event only disaster had come to our forces and people. Grant and the authorities at Washington determined to strike an effective blow at the enemy whose stamping ground had been from the beginning of the struggle the rich fields of the Shenandoah.

With this end in view, about the 1st of August, 1864, Grant sent Sheridan to Washington, at the same time telegraphing Halleck that Sheridan was to be placed in command of all troops in that section, with orders to put himself south of the enemy and follow him to the death. Accordingly, on the 7th of August, Gen. Sheridan took command of all the forces in Washington, Maryland and West Virginia, with headquarters at Halltown, Va. His army now consisted of the Sixth corps of about twelve thousand men, two divisions of Crook's army, and cavalry to the number of eight thousand. A second division of the Nineteenth corps, added soon after, made an army of about thirty-six thousand men.

Gen. Early at this time lay at Bunker Hill, about ten miles west of Halltown, with an army of twenty thousand men. He was reinforced about a week later by Kershaw's division of infantry, a battalion of artillery and Fitzhugh Lee's division of cavalry.

On the 10th of August Gen. Sheridan moved his army toward the enemy and Gen. Early promptly withdrew to his stronghold at Fisher's Hill, a position admirably adapted by nature for defensive operations, and strengthened, withal, by formidable earthworks. Here Early determined to wait for further reinforcements then on the way from Gen. Lee. Sheridan spent the 14th and 15th in reconnoitering the enemy's position, and, finding that Early's reinforcements had given him an army of superior numbers, deemed it wise to retire down the valley, which he did, taking position near Harper's Ferry. This action was doubtless influenced by the fact that Moseby was harrassing our rear, having but recently taken our supply train of seventy-five wagons at Berryville, leaving the army short of rations. On reaching our new position, the lines were promptly extended from the Potomac to the Shenandoah, and we awaited an attack by Early. He declined to take the offensive, and so on the 28th of August we again advanced, only to find the enemy a second time facing us at Bunker Hill.

This is but a specimen of the marching and countermarching that had been going on in this valley almost from the beginning of the war, but with Sheridan in command there was to be a change. Between the time of which we are writing and November 1, two import-

ant battles were fought—Opequon or Winchester, September 19, and Cedar Creek just one month later, October 19—both splendid and decisive victories for the Union forces, splendid in their results and decisive as forever thereafter settling the question of supremacy in this valley. My purpose in this paper is to speak of the battle of Cedar Creek and more particularly of the part taken therein by the Eighth Vermont.

After the battle of Winchester, September 19, and Fisher's Hill, September 22, the enemy retreated up the valley, pursued by our troops to Harrisonburgh, a point well up toward the head of the valley, where we remained until the 6th of October, when the army again began a march down the valley amid a cloud of smoke, arising from burning barns, mills, storehouses, stacks of hay and grain—in fact everything felt the torch that could in any way give aid and succor to the enemy as the valley had done heretofore. In summing up this wholesale destruction, Sheridan says that upwards of seventy mills and storehouses and two thousand barns were burned.

On reaching Cedar Creek we went into camp, and Sheridan, thinking Early had had enough of it and the campaign ended, on the 10th of October, ordered the Sixth corps to Front Royal *en route* for Petersburgh by way of the Manassas Gap railroad; but, finding that there would be some little delay by this route, by reason of needed repairs to the railroad, he directed the corps to proceed on foot by way of Ashby's Gap to Alexandria. After the corps was well under way, another order was issued to return to Cedar Creek.

When the order was first given the corps to move, Gen. Early was supposed to be at Gordonsville, sixty miles away, but, on learning that Sheridan's troops were leaving the valley, he had advanced rapidly to his stronghold at Fisher's Hill and immediately sent a strong reconnoitering force to Hupps' Hill, a point about midway between the two armies. This force was withdrawn two days before the battle, which served to give the impression that Early was again retreating up the valley. Such impression, however, was false, for, supposing that the Sixth corps had left, Early came to the conclusion that now was the opportune time for one more grand effort to regain possession of the valley and retrieve his reputation. His supplies being nearly, if not quite, exhausted, with no possibility of obtaining more from the valley in its present condition, Early saw that what was to be done must be done quickly, and so he threw himself with his accustomed energy into the development of those plans of attack which were to materialize so brilliantly in the early morning not many days thereafter.

The 18th of October, 1864, found Gen. Sheridan with an army of about twenty-five thousand men, facing the south. Cedar Creek, a small and comparatively insignificant stream, sought out its meandering way slowly down the valley directly in front; while Gen. Early, who was anxiously watching for an opportunity to avenge the loss of two important battles within a month, lay at Fisher's Hill, about four miles away. There was no great disparity in the size of the two armies as they stood facing each other on that

autumn day, waiting for the word of command, the tocsin of war which was to be the death knell of many a brave soldier, alike of the blue and the gray. The fortune of war was to be decided now not so much by superiority of numbers as by the bravery of the men and the strategy of commanders. On the morrow the God of battles was to sit in judgment on a contest to be won rather by tact and courage than by brute force, a battle that was to be a victory and a defeat for the one side, and a defeat and a victory for the other.

Early had obtained from his signal station on Three Top Mountain, and otherwise, a very good knowledge of our position and the placing of our forces. He knew full well that the key to our position was the pike between the Eighth and Nineteenth corps. He also knew from the short but rather close acquaintance he had formed with us at Winchester, and renewed a little later at Fisher's Hill, that in a square fight by daylight he would stand a poor show for success; so resort must be had to some strategic movement, for the battle must be won at all hazards and at whatsoever cost, for the mighty struggle then eminent was to be decisive of the campaign.

"If the rich valley with its harvests wide
Shall with the North or South abide."

The morning of the 19th of October found Gen. Sheridan on his way to Washington, leaving Gen. Wright in command and Col. Thomas corps officer of the day. The battle was to open in the early morning on our extreme left. Gen. Early had an account with Gen.

Crook, dating back to September 22 at Fisher's Hill, which he was anxious to balance. Crook by taking a long, circuitous route and climbing the mountain at Fisher's Hill, was able to strike Early's left unawares, routing Lomax, doubling Ramseur back on Pegram, capturing eleven guns and driving Early from his stronghold. All this Early distinctly remembered and we find him in that early morning planning and executing his attack with especial reference to squaring this account.

Every move is made with the utmost secrecy. He leaves behind his cannon, more than forty pieces in number, until the action commences, for fear of giving an alarm. Well matured plans are being silently, yet swiftly, carried into execution in the gray twilight of that autumn morning. Lines are being formed which all too soon, like the dread lightning's stroke, are to belch forth the horrors of awful war upon a bewildered and defenceless foe. Kershaw is to surprise and rout Crook in front, Wharton to strike our center along the pike, Gordon in the rear and on the flank of Crook, while Pegram and Ramseur are to attack our left. Everything is being made ready while our army is sleeping in fancied security, little dreaming that the dread dogs of war are about to be let loose.

Surprises in the army are always censurable. In this case particularly so, for Col. Thomas had personally warned Gen. Wright of impending danger. Col. Thomas as officer of the day had discovered persons in citizens' clothes, with glass in hand, reconnoitering our left. These proved to be Gen. Gordon and Col. Hotch-

kiss, looking over the route for the morning attack. The warning given by Col. Thomas should have commanded attention and investigation. Ignorance regarding the near proximity of an enemy in so large force is little less than culpable. Such knowledge as would likely have resulted from following up Col. Thomas' discoveries would probably have prevented disaster by making impossible the surprise of Crook and consequent rout.

Morning at length dawns and all is quiet with the army of the Shenandoah. Nature's stillness is first broken by the sound of musketry heard on our right. Rosser has made a feint on Custer to divert attention from the main point of attack on our extreme left. Then comes the sound of a terrible volley in front of Crook, and the battle is on. Everything is confusion and dismay. Added to the consternation of being driven from bed and sleep to meet an unknown foe, comes the astounding intelligence that Crook is surprised and his men, the Eighth corps, in panic stricken flight. Soon the flying fugitives come in sight, half dressed, shoeless and hatless—all in the wildest confusion. A crisis such as comes but once in a lifetime is at hand. It must be met quickly or it will be too late. Something must be done to check the rebel hordes now advancing with terrific yells and the crack of ten thousand muskets, or the advantage gained by the enemy in the morning will be his victory in the evening. Our forces must be given time to form or the rout will be general. This must be done at once and at whatever cost. To move across the pike and stay the maddened course of victory-

flushed hosts, if but for a moment, was the lot of the second brigade, first division Nineteenth corps, composed of the Eighth Vermont, Twelfth Connecticut, and 160th New York. It was a sacrifice to the God of war of the few that the many might be spared, a propitiation offered against hope that out of defeat might come victory.

"Never in my experience," says Gen. Emory, "had I given an order which caused me so much pain as this one sending these men on such a hopeless errand and into such a vortex of death." The men, however, went promptly into line, moving by the left flank away from the pike about a hundred rods, and then advancing by the front about forty rods into the woods, there to begin the bloody work.

"The sabre gleams, the rifles flash,
The forest echoes to the crash,
While over all, the war cloud rolls
Electric with dead heroes' souls.
Before that charge, the bravest flinch
And yield the ground but inch by inch."

To successfully contend with this overwhelming force, exultant with success, into whose path we had been thrown, was not expected. To have done this would have been to stay the awful rush of a Johnstown flood with the puny obstruction of man's building. All that was human to do or expect was momentarily to stay the enemy's mad advance. To do this was to sacrifice the life of many a brave soldier. The terrible exigency of war demanded this sacrifice and it was given by brave men cheerfully, yes, gladly. It was a sacrifice on the altar of a glorious country, that that country might endure, "that government of the people,

by the people, for the people, should not perish from the earth."

History repeats itself. At Chancellorsville a similar sacrifice was required. At the time of the rout and stampede of the Eleventh Corps, Gen. Pleasanton, who had been put in command of the artillery, was at Hazel Grove, an eminence which commanded the situation. To lose the position was to give the enemy a decided advantage, if not the victory. He hastily put Martin's battery and other pieces to the number of twenty-two in line to receive Gen. Jackson's men, but saw at once that there was not time to load and aim the guns before the enemy would be upon them, and all would be lost. The advance of the enemy must be stayed. Maj. Keenan of the Eighth Pennsylvania cavalry with about four hundred men was ordered to charge ten thousand. A seemingly hopeless task, yet the charge, costing Maj. Keenan and many of his brave men their lives, momentarily checked the enemy, giving the gunners time to load and aim their guns, and saved the position.

So went the gallant brigade at Cedar Creek down into the dread valley, stayed the advance of four of Early's victorious and exultant divisions and made possible the victory of the evening.

No sooner were we in position than our work began. So hot came the shot that we were ordered to lie down, loading and firing as best we could. The fugitives from Crook's corps were streaming through our lines. To check their panic-stricken flight was as impossible as to repeal the onslaught of the enemy. Close on the heels of the fugitives came the enemy, howling and yelling.

Many of the rebels wore blue overcoats which they had plundered from the camp they had just left, making it very difficult to tell when we had only the enemy in front. Here Lieut. Cooper, deceived by our overcoats worn by the enemy, lost his life. He was lying a little at my left, where he could see some distance ahead down a wood road. Seeing men approaching, dressed in blue, he rose and said to me, "Captain, we are firing on our own men." I replied, "I think not." Just at that moment he fell, exclaiming, "I am shot by our own men!" Surgeon Ross, who helped bury Lieut. Cooper, said that he was hit by six bullets inside a five inch circle. Sergt. Seth C. Hill saw one rebel who shot Lieut. Cooper as he stepped from behind a tree, and sent a ball through him before he had time to regain his cover.

In a very short time this line became untenable and a change of position, always difficult under fire, was well executed, and a new one taken in a ravine at the edge of the woods. Word was brought at this time that Maj. Mead and Capt. Hall were wounded, leaving me the senior officer in command.

Shortly after taking this new position a posse of rebels from the woods in our front confronted the flags and demanded their surrender. The reply went back, "Never!" and then followed one of the most desperate hand to hand encounters around the flags of which there is any record, and which I will attempt to describe to you, following very closely the language of our late departed and well beloved comrade, Capt. Geo. N. Carpenter.

A rebel of powerful build attempted to bayonet Corp. Worden of the color guard. Worden, a tall, sinewy man, having no bayonet on his gun, parried the thrust while some one shot the rebel dead. Another of the enemy then leveled his gun and shot Corp. Petre, who had the colors, in the thigh, making a terrible wound from which he died that night. As he fell he cried, "Boys, leave me and take care of yourselves and the flag!" but not even in that vortex of hell was it necessary to remind men to look after the flag. As Petre crawled away to die the colors were seized and carried aloft by Corp. Perham and at once demanded by a rebel who attempted to grasp them, but Sergt. Shores placed his musket at the rebel's breast, fired and killed him. Another flash and a cruel bullet from the dead rebel's companion laid Corp. Perham low, and the colors again fell to the earth, and again, amid terrific yells, they were raised by Corp. Blanchard. A rebel discharged his musket within a foot of Corp. Bemis of the color guard, wounding him, but in turn was shot by one of our men. So the fight went on.

A little later Sergt. Shores and Lemuel Simpson were standing together by the flag when three of the enemy attacked them and ordered them to surrender, but, as the rebels had already discharged their pieces, they were not in good condition for either offensive or defensive warfare. Simpson fired, killing one of the three, and Shores bayoneted another. Sergt. Moran, whose devotion to the flag was intensified by forty-three days of heroic service which the regiment gave at Port Hudson, marvelously escaped death, holding as

he did the United States flag all through the hottest of the fight, and also assisting now and then in protecting the colors.

Well might the angels in heaven look down in pity. It seemed as though we were passing into the very jaws of death and that the gates of hell were open to receive us. The correspondent of Harper's Magazine says: "After the battle was over we found on this part of the field corpses with skulls crushed by blows of muskets and bodies with the life blood clotted around triangular shaped wounds made by bayonets." C. F. Walker in "The Vermont Brigade in the Shenandoah," says: "Gen. Thomas' brigade was swept back overpowered, leaving in the forest the largest proportionate loss suffered by any brigade during the day." Jed Hotchkiss, chief of staff with Gen. Gordon, speaking to Gen. Thomas, said: "The soldierly honors of the day on your side, the honors that have been and always will be awarded to the men that unflinchingly take any odds when duty calls them to action, appear beyond question from the standpoint of present information to belong to the brave men of your command. In recognition of their display of such courage, it gives me pleasure to have it in my power to salute them, whether honored among the living or dead on the field of honorable combat."

Shortly after the hand to hand conflict around the colors, and while we were doing our utmost to beat back the howling mass of demons in our front, Adjt. Shattuck said to me, "Captain, look to the left." Looking, I saw a new line of the enemy advancing on

our flank, and but a few rods away. What was to be done? The rebel colors are in our rear and the brigade has given way on our right. Shall the "old Eighth" run? Yes, and at once; every man for himself and to his utmost, if he does not want to take his chances of testing the hospitality of some Southern prison. So the order was given in two words, "Run, boys," and in an undertone, lest the enemy, so close were they upon us, should be apprised of our intended movement. No order of Gen. Thomas' to shorten step, as on a former occasion, would then have been obeyed. Every man took his own course and way out of the corner in which we now found ourselves, happy indeed if he succeeded in getting out at all. We crossed the pike, whence we had come in the early morning, amid a veritable shower of bullets, and took our position a little in rear of the camp we had but recently left. The "old Eighth" had turned its back upon the enemy for the first time, but not until the regiment was surrounded on three sides and crushed by the fierce attack of an overwhelming force.

The heroic struggle of the Eighth Vermont and the other two regiments of the Second Brigade was an event of mighty power in deciding this great battle. The golden hour thus gained, coupled with the delay the enemy made to plunder Crook's camp, enabled the Sixth Corps to escape the first terrible blow and swing into line on higher grounds near Middletown. This delay of the enemy was his first great mistake. Had the pursuit been pressed with the same vigor for the next few

hours, the advantage of the morning would have been the enemy's victory in the evening. Instead of disastrous and ignominious defeat, his would have been the glory crowned banner, his again, if only for a time, the supremacy in the Shenandoah.

Wharton soon appeared on the plain before us, and the enemy's artillery, left at Strasburgh until the battle opened for fear of giving an alarm, together with twenty-four of our own pieces—captured and turned upon us—began to pour out upon us its volleys of death and destruction. Kershaw and Gordon united their forces and made a combined attack on the Nineteenth Corps, and, as Gordon's right far, overlapped Emory's left, brigade after brigade received a deadly enfilading fire and was compelled to retire to escape annihilation or capture. In this state of affairs Wright ordered Emory to extricate his men from their perilous position as best he could and form on the right of the Sixth Corps, but, before Emory could execute this order and before Getty of the second division of the Sixth Corps could form on Wharton's left, Kershaw and Gordon with great fury attacked the second and third divisions of the Sixth Corps. This onslaught was bravely met and the advance of the enemy held in check for about forty minutes, when followed a rough and tumble fight, during which we were driven from one position to another until we were forced back about three miles.

It was indeed a dark look for the army of the Shenandoah. We had been driven far from our camp of the day before. Our artillery, such as had not been captured, had gone to the rear, while before us was an

exultant, victorious foe. But a change is at hand. The enemy is becoming more cautious in his pursuit. Our troops find time to face about and already are giving up the idea of reaching Harper's Ferry that night, when cheer after cheer is heard along the pike towards Harper's Ferry. Soon the black charger appears, bearing Sheridan all the way from Winchester to save the battle. The fainting heart takes new hope, for under Sheridan the army knows no defeat. Up and down the lines he rides, inspiring confidence by his encouraging words. Getty, who was the last to get into line, now holds the most advanced position in front of the enemy, on whom Sheridan orders a new alignment. As soon as the infantry are in position, with the gallant Custer on the right and Merritt with a division of cavalry on the left, we are in readiness to advance and crowd the enemy back over his morning's victorious course, to regain the camp and the guns we had lost, and to show the enemy that, though defeated in the dawn, we are yet powerful in the struggle for victory in the twilight. The Army of the Shenandoah has fought its last fight on the defensive. Already the pinions of victory are hovering over its banners. An advance is made. The enemy wavers, he turns, he flees with the bridge across the creek as his objective point, it being the only available place at which he can cross the creek with his artillery. Custer makes a grand left wheel, doubling Wharton's left back on the center, Merritt looks carefully after the enemy's right, while the infantry forces the fighting in the center with the intent to crush Early at the bridge, the result being

the capture of more than five hundred men and twenty-five pieces of cannon at this point.

The cannon taken at the bridge added to those taken at other points made an aggregate of fifty pieces, including the twenty-four borrowed of us in the morning. Early's rout was complete. Kershaw's, Gordon's and Wharton's men fled in disorder, while Ramseur and Pegram were able to control only a small part of their commands. Gen. Early says he tried in vain to rally his men, first at Cedar Creek and then at Hupp's Hill, but failed, not being able to get more than five hundred to stand by him.

We recovered our old camp just at night and, having eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, were in a condition to appreciate a cup of coffee, but, before we had time to make it, we were ordered again to fall in to still further pursue the enemy. Tired and hungry we followed him four miles farther, bivouacking for the night close to his one time stronghold at Fisher's Hill.

Thus closed a long and eventful day for the Eighth Vermont and for all who took part in this memorable battle—memorable because of its bloody field, the matchless bravery displayed, its uniqueness. There was no other battle like it during the war. Out of a crushing defeat of the whole line in the morning, without reinforcements, came a glorious victory in the evening. No more disastrous defeat had been suffered by either side since the battle of Bull Run. To the South it was of equal, if not greater, importance than the fall of New Orleans or the capture of Vicksburgh, for it settled forever the question of supremacy in the Shenandoah.

Probably no portion of the South heard the tramp of hostile feet more constantly than the hundred miles from Harper's Ferry to Harrisonburgh. It was almost a constant advance and retreat from the very beginning of the war. Some of the good people of Winchester told us when on our visit there in September, 1885, that that city changed hands twenty-three times during the struggle, yet they were ready to receive us with open arms and generous hearts and to extend to us in a public way marked hospitality both at Winchester and Harrisonburgh.

A monument now marks the spot on the field of Winchester made memorable by the gallant bayonet charge of the Eighth Vermont. There is also a monument on the battle field of Cedar Creek to point out the scene of the terrible struggle in the early morning of the nineteenth of October. On each monument are suitable inscriptions. The one at Winchester is as follows:—

HONOR THE BRAVE.

Erected to
Commemorate the Bayonet Charge of the
EIGHTH VERMONT VOL'S
Led by
GEN'L STEPHEN THOMAS,
Sept. 19, 1864.
Committed to the care of those once a brave foe, now our generous friends.
Gift of Comrade
HERBERT E. HILL,
Boston, Mass.
Dedicated Sept. 19, 1885.

At Cedar Creek one may read:—

"The Eighth Vermont Volunteers, General Stephen Thomas commanding the brigade, advanced across this field on the morning of October 19, 1864, engaged the enemy near and beyond this point, and before sunrise lost in killed and wounded 110 men, three color-bearers were shot down, and thirteen out of sixteen commissioned officers. Whole number of men engaged, 164. Dedicated September, 1885. Gift of Herbert E. Hill."

These marble shafts from the Green Mountains of Vermont, commemorating our victories and standing as they do on once hostile soil, are faithfully guarded by those who were once our deadly foes. It is a most fitting and fortunate ending of the fratricidal strife so cruelly begun a generation ago. It was a most terrible war, as is always the case where people of the same race and religion are pitted against each other, where brothers fight against brothers. But the bloody strife is happily over. Brothers are brothers again and we are once more a united people, never again, let us pray Almighty God, the Maker and Ruler of nations, to be divided. Whatever of bravery was shown in the struggle, whether in the fierceness of the attack or the gallant defence, whether with Grant in the Wilderness or in the sublime charge of Pickett at Gettysburgh, it was the bravery of Americans and is the crowning heritage of the American people. In this let us glory, and, not unmindful of the manifold blessings we enjoy, as well as the great responsibility that rests upon us as a people, let us zealously devote ourselves to the arts of peace and the upbuilding of our national greatness.

Addenda.

The loss on the Union side at Cedar Creek was about 4000 men killed, wounded and prisoners. Gen. Early gave the Confederate loss as 1860 killed and wounded and 1200 prisoners.

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The following shows the relative losses sustained by the Sixth and the Nineteenth Corps in the battles of Winchester and Cedar Creek:—

The Sixth Corps had 47 regiments, including the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Tenth and Eleventh Vermont, at Winchester, losing 213 men killed and 1424 wounded; total 1637.

The Nineteenth Corps had 33 regiments, including the Eighth Vermont, at Winchester, losing 275 killed and 1228 wounded; total 1503.

The Sixth Corps had 43 regiments at Cedar Creek, losing 255 killed and 1666 wounded; total 1921.

The Nineteenth Corps had 39 regiments at Cedar Creek, losing 243 killed and 1352 wounded; total 1595.

The loss in killed and wounded is the true test of the fierceness of the fight. From the foregoing it will be seen that the losses of the Nineteenth Corps in killed and wounded in these two battles are a small per cent. more than the losses of the Sixth Corps, which stood second to none in the army for its fighting qualities.

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In September, 1861, forty men were enlisted at Hyde Park and ordered to proceed to Montpelier,

where they met thirty more enlisted at Worcester, expecting to unite with them to form a company for the Sixth Vermont, then being organized by Col. Lord. In this they were disappointed for the regiment was made up of companies recruited elsewhere. As some of the companies selected were short of the maximum number of 101 men which they were required to have, they were very anxious to recruit from our little company then quartered in the old straw shed, but in this they were not successful. Adjutant-General Baxter then took the matter in hand, attempting to force us to do by virtue of his authority what we would not do willingly, and issued his order that our company organization should go for nought and the men be apportioned out among the companies of the Sixth regiment lacking in numbers. Gen. Baxter appeared at our quarters and, ordering the men into line, read his order and called the roll, in which my name happened to be first, when all but one promptly refused to obey. Gen. Baxter replied, "You shall suffer the consequences." This order was read to us on Wednesday and on Saturday another one was issued more agreeable to us, that we return to Hyde Park and fill up the company, which was gladly obeyed. The company being filled to the number of 108 men, seven of which were afterward transferred to other companies, we were ordered to report to Brattleboro the latter part of December, and were made ranking company in the Eighth Vermont, leaving for the Department of the Gulf, March 4, 1862. Company A not only went out as ranking company, but after going from right to left as governed by the seniority of the officers in

the regiment, worked its way back to the right, and led the regiment home as the ranking company.

The Legislature was in session at the time of our experience at Montpelier, and the bold stand taken by us created quite a feeling in our favor, having much influence in defeating Baxter for a re-election which he was then seeking.

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The people of Waterville may well feel proud of its record in the war. Her quota was 48 men. She furnished 79 men, showing the largest surplus, except one, of any town in the State and never paid a single dollar as bounty money. Of the 48 men required of the town, Company A furnished in the two enlistments 31.

In the winter of 1863-4 the term of enlistment of the Eighth Vermont was cancelled by special order of the War Department to enable it to re-enlist, which it did, securing on re-enlistment three-fourths of the men enrolled, thus saving its organization. Company A led the regiment on this re-enlistment, re-enlisting 43 out of 45 men reported for duty. Out of 17 men originally joining the company from Waterville, 14 were with the company at this time and re-enlisted for another term of three years.

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As it may be of interest to know something of the experience of a prisoner of war, I will relate a few incidents concerning the capture and imprisonment of Sergeant Geo. E. Mudgett, a soldier of Company A, and one of the bravest and most faithful in the service.

On getting into line after crossing the pike in the early morning, having left our camp rather unceremoniously, I sent Sergeant Mudgett back to gather up and take to the rear certain papers and such other valuables as he could. He did as ordered, except that instead of going to the rear himself he sent a substitute, and shortly afterward returned to the line with the excuse for disobeying orders, that he had never been absent from a fight or a skirmish in which the regiment had been engaged up to that time and did not want to begin then. When the order, "Run boys," was given, Sergeant Mudgett and some eight or ten others did not hear it and soon found themselves left behind, with the enemy so near upon them that escape was impossible. It was either death, or life in a rebel prison. Three out of the number were killed, and the remainder taken prisoners and hurried to the rear. For awhile the rebels corralled the prisoners, nearly 1,500 in number, at Fisher's Hill in plain sight of the battle at Cedar Creek, but, when it became evident that the struggle was going against them, they hurried the prisoners forward with all possible speed, and with such brutality as to kill several on the march who were thought to be hanging back for the purpose of giving our cavalry a chance to get in ahead. As it was, the cavalry crossed the path of our brothers in arms being pushed at the point of the bayonet and under sabre stroke to the unspeakable torture of Southern prisons, only two miles in their rear.

Going into the fight breakfastless, these prisoners were marched all night and until the afternoon of the next day before they tasted food. Then they were each

given one-half pint of clear, uncooked corn meal, which was wet up with water and eaten on the march. About midnight the 20th the prisoners were loaded on cars at Staunton and sent forward to Richmond, where they passed in review before President Davis. From the time of their capture until inside Libbey prison, the only food given the prisoners was the meal above referred to and three crackers to each man.

After a stay of nearly a month in Libbey prison Sergeant Mudgett and his associates were transferred on flat bottomed cars to the infamous prison-pen at Salisbury, N. C., stopping on the way two or three days at Danville. Here those who survived the untold hardships of a life within this prison-pen remained until paroled in March, 1865. As they entered Salisbury so they left—on flat bottomed cars—and Sergeant Mudgett says that when they reached the place where the exchange was to be made, the cars were literally covered with the bodies of those who had died on what they had hoped to be the way of deliverance—their journey to the longed-for "promised land" of freedom.

The prison at Salisbury was formed by enclosing about four acres by a stockade made of white oak plank 14 feet long, bolted to a frame-work on posts, giving a smooth surface inside. The prisoners had neither coats, blankets nor tents. Their only resource for protecting themselves in any way from the rain and snow and cold was to literally burrow in the ground. These holes were dug with the hands, aided perhaps by a chip or some small piece of wood. Fortunate, indeed,

was the prisoner who might be the possessor of an old spoon or knife to aid him and his friends in digging his burrow. The hole being dug, it would be bottomed with leaves, grass, small sticks, or anything available to keep the inmate off from the bare ground.

The rations furnished during Sergeant Mudgett's stay was the first day a little soup, after that a pound loaf of corn bread to each man. The bread was made from meal obtained by grinding cob and all, without salt. Meat was furnished three times during about four months' imprisonment. No tea nor coffee. The only water for upwards of 12,000 men was from three wells that received more or less of the surface water of the pen. To drink of this water was almost certain death. To drink no water, indescribable torture. Sergeant Mudgett says that for four days at a time he drank no water and for weeks at a time felt not the warmth of a fire, though the weather much of the time was not unlike the cold, sleety weather common in Vermont in October and November. Is it any wonder that under such conditions the death rate was appalling? Sergeant Mudgett says that while he was there the number of deaths each day was from 25 to 50, and that during his stay 6,780 were carted out of the pen and dumped into a hole for burial. Every morning the death cart, drawn by a pair of mules, would be driven in and the dead here and there picked up and carried away, and Sergeant Mudgett came very near being one of the number. When he entered the pen he weighed 170 pounds and when he left or was carried away, as he was sick the last two weeks, 93½ pounds.

He relates that an ordinary brass button was worth $5 Confederate money. A pound loaf of corn cob bread, a day's ration, could be bought for $20 and a $1 greenback was equivalent to $50 Confederate money. At one time an effort was made to enlist some of the prisoners in the Confederate service, offering as inducement $50 in Confederate money, clothes and food. The temptation was great, but few, however, accepted of the terms, preferring rather to die where they were than to swear allegiance to a cause and a government that they hated with a supreme hatred.

He also relates that at one time an attempt was made during his imprisonment to overpower the guards and escape, but the attempt was unsuccessful. When the trial was made he says the guards in the sentry boxes began shooting the prisoners down, and a trap door in the stockade, heretofore unknown to the prisoners, was opened and grape and cannister poured into the pen, killing nearly if not quite 200, though the rebels claimed only 70 were killed. Twenty of the prisoners claimed to be implicated in the plot were taken out, and were supposed to have been executed.

Such was life, or rather death, in the prison pens of the South. No wonder that they who suffered then so terribly, and yet lived, find it hard to forget the treatment they received; but it is far better to let the wrongs of the past, though great they be, be swallowed up in the greatness of our united country, remembering that we are brothers, of one race, speaking one tongue and having a common inheritance in the glory and achievements of our great republic and the manifold blessings it has to bestow.