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## Vermont Historical Society

### Vermont sharpshooter's Civil War memoirs, 1888.

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**Title :** Vermont sharpshooter's Civil War memoirs, 1888.

**Physical Description :** 1 folder.

**Summary :**

Two handwritten speeches about the 2nd United States Sharpshooters, possibly written by William H. Humphrey, who served in Company E from 1861 to 1865. The first speech, 66 pages long, was written for a "campfire" at Essex Centre, Vermont on March 9, 1888, on the topic of the Battle of Antietam and the role of the 2nd United States Sharpshooters. The second speech, 15 pages long, was written for a reunion of the Fourth Vermont Infantry Regiment held at Montpelier, Vermont on October 19, 1888, and gives a summary of the service of the 2nd United States Sharpshooters from 1861 to 1864.

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PART 1 OF 3

**Biographical or historical data :**

William Harrison Humphrey was born on December 18, 1835 in Underhill, Vermont, the son of Daniel C. and Anna (Douglass) Humphrey. He enlisted as a private in Company E, 2nd United States Sharpshooters on October 30, 1861 and was with them in the Army of the Potomac through all its campaigns. He was promoted to Sergeant on January 3, 1863 and to 1st Sergeant on March 13, 1864. He was given a brevet commission for bravery on May 12, 1864 at the Battle of Spotsylvania and was confirmed in the rank of 1st Lieutenant in November, 1864. In February, 1865 his regiment was broken up and his company was transferred to the Fourth Vermont Infantry Regiment. While his regiment was storming the works at Petersburg on April 2, 1865, Humphrey was wounded in the legs and was forced to have the right leg amputated. He was mustered out of service on August 3, 1865. He died on November 13, 1922 in Jericho, Vermont.

**Corporate Subject :** United States. Army. Sharpshooters Regiment, 2nd 1861-1865

**Subject Term :** Antietam, Battle of, Md., 1862.  
Soldiers Vermont Anecdotes.

**Geographic Term :** United States History Civil War, 1861-1865  
Campaigns.  
Vermont History Civil War, 1861-1865  
Personal narratives.

**Added Author :** Humphrey, William H., 1835-1922.

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I have been troubled in my mind  
to decide of which campaign to tell you  
of having been in 27 heavy battles and  
over 50 skirmishes I did <sup>not</sup> know which  
one would interest you the most but  
thinking that of Antietam that was  
fought September 17<sup>th</sup> 1862 might be  
of interest to you I have chosen that  
it being one of the most stubborn  
fought battles of the late war

But before going on with my story I  
think best to tell you of the organization  
which I belonged to that you may know  
something of us we were known as  
the Second Regiment of United  
Sharpshooters and composed of  
eight companies recruited from  
six different States as follows one  
from Maine two from New Hampshire  
two from Vermont one from Pennsylvania

one from Michigan and one from  
 Minnesota (which completes an  
 rifle Regiment) each Company has  
 one Captain, one first-Lieutenant  
 one Second Lieutenant, five Sargents  
 one first or orderly Sargent, four  
 duty Sargents, eight corporals and  
 eighty five privates making one  
 hundred and one officers and men  
 before any could be accepted off  
 he must make his string or shoot  
 his target (that is he must take  
 an open sight-rifle and shoot one  
 hundred yards and put ten successive  
 bullets into a five inch ring (that  
 is a ring five inches in diameter)  
 if he could not do that he was re-  
 -jected, having passed the test we  
 as a rule got good men rather  
 above the average of other Regiments

in intelligence, large men well formed, with a quick sharp eye and not a man but could write his name with several who had left this college course to join us. The company to which I belonged had our rendezvous at West Randolph Vermont and left there for Washington, D.C. November 21<sup>st</sup> 1861 and went into camp with the other companies of the Regt. on 7<sup>th</sup> Street our camp was known as camp of instruction we were drilled in company and Battalion drill also in skirmish drill as we were told we should be used as skirmishers mostly when we come to go into action we were armed with sharp breach loading rifle by actual test

we could load and fire our breech loading rifles fourteen times to the muzzle loading rifles three times therefore we had our ideas up to that point where we were a going to whip Lee's whole Army but in this engagement of which I am about to tell you we had our ardor cooled off a bit. | We had been in Central Virginia under Gen McDowell had been through the battles of Slaughter Mountain Gainsville Second Bull Run with several skirmishes and plenty of hard marching beside one trail road Smash up where we had one man killed and 39 wounded we thought we had seen enough to call ourselves veterans we had seen some of the best part of war

got we knew nothing of hardship to  
 what we did after passing through  
 the summer of 1864

on August 8<sup>th</sup> 1862 we left Falmouth  
 Va and marched for Slaughter  
 Mountain arriving in time  
 to help finish up the battle  
 and drive the enemy across  
 the Rapidan River and then  
 went into camp near the  
 banks of the river in a peach  
 orchard. We found well here  
 Gen John Pope was in command  
 he had issued his order No 5  
 that we were to subsist on the coun-  
 try through which we were then  
 marching and as there had been  
 no Yankees through that part of  
 the country cattle sheep hogs  
 hens Turkey geese and Ducks

Horses and mules of all kinds  
were plenty we were so willing  
to carry out our stores and  
draw our rations from every  
farm we came to All the  
Sharpshooters remember the  
Peach Orchard which was a  
large one you might have seen  
the white tents standing between  
the rows of trees while there  
was scarcely a tree but what  
had the carcasses of an sheep  
hog quarter of beef chicken  
Turkey duck or goose something  
hanging upon it - yes about  
every tree looked like a well  
stocked meat market we  
lived well eat only the choicest  
cuts and those that were well  
fatted no old tough ones

would do though often killed  
 through mistake of course  
 but if found to old and tough  
 were rejected left to ripen for  
 the enemy when they came  
 along that way) we did not  
 take kindly to marching orders  
 when they came to be ready to  
 march at short notice it might  
 made you laugh if you could  
 have heard the boys as they cut  
 a few choice cuts to put into  
 their haversacks to carry along  
 with them to hear the reports  
 that we must leave so good  
 Commissary stores for when  
 you touch a soldiers rations  
 you have touched a tender spot  
 when you give the soldier plenty  
 and good rations he is happy

and contended but when his rations are short and for you has a growl that would make you sick, we went in and bade our rebel friends good by there were a number of badly wounded near our camp they were those so badly wounded to be moved after the slaughter Mountain battle they had been carried to safety under the Peach trees there left without surgeons or attendants of any kind we carried them into some buildings near by and carried in straw and made them as comfortable beds as we could dressed their wounds buried 4 or 5 dead and had given them rations the best we had and

cared for them the best we could  
for a fellows when we told them  
we had marching orders and  
must leave them as we reached  
out the hand back. then good  
bye tears came to their eyes and  
trickled down their sun burned  
cheeks, they would tell us they  
wished the war was over I told one  
fellow the war was over with  
him yes said he but it is to  
dad that such kind good fellows  
as you should be wounded or  
perhaps killed. Well said I  
you commenced this scrap  
and now we are going to end  
it yes said he I hope you will  
soon end it. The most of them  
claimed to belong to the Texas  
kangas or Louisiana Texas two

noted Regiments they were all good looking men soon came orders Strike tents boys pack up all through camp you could have heard the long roll sounding then came the hurry of packing up bonds fires were built of all the hundred and one thing we would not carry soon came the commands fall in boys fall in we are soon in line when an aide rides up to our Col<sup>l</sup> and tells him our Regiment would act as rear guard we then knew we were to march on Washington it is now August 18<sup>th</sup> 1862 we leave the Proppidan with 53 men in our company for duty the boys are jubilant as we are going to Washington to

visit Father Abraham while some  
 say let me once cross the Potomac  
 and you will never see me in  
 Virginia again there were many  
 of them who never cross the  
 River as they were left on the  
 field of battle dead

our march was slow as we soon  
 commenced work the enemy  
 soon found we were on the  
 retreat and were soon following  
 in our rear often to close we  
 were deployed as skirmishes the  
 enemys Cavalry grew bold and  
 came near enough to send our  
 and then a bullet over our heads  
 from their carbines we did not  
 reply to them for some time  
 we thought it best to let them  
 get bold and careless then

• We would teach them it was dangerous to meddle with the business end of the trap soon we came to a good place where we could secrets ourselves along the edge of some woods the ground was rising so we should be shooting up hill and be more apt to hit the mark while the enemy shooting down hill would be apt to shoot over the mark we did not have long to wait we soon saw the enemy come out of the opposite wood with caution they were mounted we held our fire until they were within 200 yards of us then gave them an volley not but very few shots were fired in return but all who could wheeled about and got

out of our sight - as soon as possible  
 we had no further trouble with  
 them. The next morning  
 found us across the Wappahannock  
River

of our skirmishing along the  
 banks of the Wappahannock River  
 the battles of Grainville Second  
Bull Run and Chantilly I shall  
 tell you nothing of from the  
 18<sup>th</sup> of August to the 1<sup>st</sup> of September  
 we had been continuously  
 marching and fighting night and  
 day during the whole time there  
 was scarcely an interval of an  
 hour without the roar of artillery or  
 the crack of the rifle or musket  
 It is now Sept 2<sup>nd</sup> our troops had  
 been continually marching  
 and fighting for so many days

were in a state of great exhaustion we had had but little to eat and for two days no rations had been issued to us, whole of the time we were so near to the enemy we could cook nothing not even a cup of coffee we had eaten our salt pork raw with our hard bread and most of the time drank very poor water I have seen these men and have done the same myself gone about with cup in one hand spoon in the other dipped up water that had settled in holes made by horses and mules feet and drank it poor and strong as it was it quenched our burning thirst Artillery and Cavalry horses had been in harness and saddle night and day for the

Whole Time and had had no  
 forage for two days you can  
 easily imagine after undergoing  
 such hardships and privations  
 and severe labors our condition  
 for active service

We are now Sept-2<sup>nd</sup> in and  
 around the intrenchments  
 of Washington rations new  
 clothing blankets Tents with  
 everything the Government Supp-  
 lies are issued to us while we  
 are getting rested from the  
 severe campaign we have  
 just passed through also the  
 reorganizing of the Army is  
 going on Gen Pope is relieved  
 at his own request and returns  
 to the Northwest Gen Geo B Meade  
 has is restored to command

of the Army of the Potomac, while  
Gen McDowell is granted leave  
of absence Gen Joe Hooker  
is placed in command of our  
corps other officers are removed  
and others are promoted in their  
places while rumors of all kinds  
are afloat if you could have been  
at our campfire at night you  
would have heard much that  
was absurd and much that  
would have pleased you  
I do not care to criticize any  
of our officers yet I have always  
believed had Pope corp commanders  
given him the support that Grant  
gave to him through the summer  
of 1864 Pope would have struck  
such blows on the army to have  
crippled him to have shaken the

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rebellion many months if not  
to have ended it then and there  
While the work of reorganizing  
was going on reconnoissances  
were being made to know where  
the enemy are and what they  
are doing it was found that  
Lee with his whole Army were  
crossing the Potomac by the  
various fords in the vicinity  
of Leesburg Va into Maryland  
this Campaign in eastern Va  
had relieved their anxieties for  
the safety of Richmond and  
opened the way as they fondly  
hoped to Washington Baltimore  
and perhaps Philadelphia ven-  
-tured upon a scheme of invasion  
which they had long contemplated  
and now believed could be

accomplished, having crossed the Potomac almost without opposition they moved into the interior of Maryland.

The night of Sept. 6<sup>th</sup> we crossed the Potomac by way of Long Bridge all night long we were marching through Washington going west to meet the command to which I belonged. I knew where we were going as we had been on reconnoissances and knew of Lees Army whereabouts, we also knew there must be an hard fought battle just where we could not tell. After two or three days marching we were placed to the front we soon fell in with or came up with the enemys Cavalry they done all

they could, to obstruct our way we found it only sport to let them go, we could easily shoot them down while their bullets from their carbines would not reach us we felt safe while the enemy learned to keep a good distance from us for some days we were kept to the front we were pleased with our duty for we were now marching and fighting among friends how often we came to good looking homes the all appearance closed and deserted, no signs of life about them but as soon as we came up blinds and doors were thrown open and would come people with arms and hands full of bread doughnuts

pies cakes and milk how good  
and sweet they tasted and how  
eager and thankful we were for  
all I need not tell you after  
living on salt pork and hard  
bread with short rations too  
the first cup of cows milk  
I drank I thought - Tasted  
the sweetest of anything I  
ever drank we could only  
catch our hands full we were  
not allowed to stop long as  
there were bridges across the  
Monocacy river that must  
save us not allow the enemy  
to burn or blow up the one we  
crossed was built of stone and  
wood the enemy had it tared  
and pitched ready to fire they  
did not work lively enough

they done all could be done with  
rather force they had, which was  
two pieces of artillery rather light  
and poorly manned this whole  
force was mounted we made  
a rush for the river bank the  
enemy made a stubborn resistance  
~~as they could~~ we soon emptied  
several saddles shot a number  
of their horses when they limbered  
up their guns and left we were  
lively crossing the bridge put  
out the fire while we were thus  
employed quite a number of  
coloured people came out of some  
wood but a short distance away  
one old and gray darkie came  
up to me salutes me and says  
Lord Massa how young does  
make um see the colour.

people had been frightened by being  
told there was to be a great  
battle fought on the banks of  
the Monocacy that Yankee  
blood would flow down the river  
but when the enemy left so  
easily and without spilling  
one drop of Yankee blood  
it pleased the colored people  
very much we were not  
troubled with the enemy until  
we arrived at South Mountain  
here we had quite a hard battle  
The Army under Gen G. B. Meade  
-llan were marching on differ-  
-ent roads running parallel  
and all verging towards the same  
point thus we were driving the  
enemy together and at the  
same time concentrating