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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 2 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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our own forces we were now marching on the fire road leading through Fredric City Boonsboro and Middletown and when the enemy were leaving Fredric City on one side we were marching in on the other side the enemy thus hard pressed made an stand in a strong position in the notch or gap of South Mountain of the Catoctin range between Boonsboro and Middletown as we had been at the front for some days and were out or nearly out of ammunition and wholly out of rations we were halted Gen Sumner's corp with Gen Cox's division was put to the front

It was Sunday morning Sept 14
as they advanced in line of
battle. The enemy had chosen
a strong position and had it
well guarded with infantry
and artillery well posted and
as Gen Cox's troops came into
line as the regiment after the reg-
-iment swung into position
and advanced the ball opens
We are now resting on an
elevated piece of ground we
can see almost every move
of our own troops and most
of the enemy it was difficult
to know which to admire the
most the beauty of the landscape
spread out before me dotted
here and there with fields
of ripening grain waving

in the Sundays mornings
 breezes or the roar of the
 artillery the floating rings
 of smoke the scream of the
 shells as they wing their way
 over the valley. The sublime
 and the beautiful were stran-
 -gely interrupted. Gen Cox
 troops did not drive the
 enemy from this position
 as was expected of them just
 at night or late in the afternoon
 Hooker was ordered to ^{night} ~~the~~
 flank the enemy and to help
 rout them where we went up
 the Mountain was a winding
 road going in a zigzag form
 to our right was a division of Pennsylvania
 Buck Tails called so by their wearing
 a piece of bus or buck's tail on their
 caps

we could see their skirmish line and that they were hard at work. We sat on the ground watching the battle we had a fine view both right and left soon an aid comes from brigade headquarters telling us all is ready and giving us orders to advance and drive the enemy off the Mountain we fell in pretty lively as we had been sitting there watching the battle we kept growing mad all the time and were glad to have our turn come to try our hand with the enemy at first we advanced slowly and as still as we could soon bullets came whistling over our heads then we gave one grand rush for the Mountain top every man

you himself to see who should
be first to reach the top fire
at will was the command
that is fire when you see any
thing to shoot we were soon
at the top and were gathering
in the firminers when darkness
comes upon us to put a stop
to our work the Gen in com-
mand of our Brigade com-
plimented us for doing our
work so well and excused
us from picket-duty for that
night we made our beds on
the Mountain Top and slept well
Monday morning we were up
early I made a cup of coffee
roasted some salt pork on the
end of a stick with hard bread
sat down to breakfast after

it was over I packed up all of my household effects ready to march when called on.

I see we should have a little time to spare I thought best to look over the battle field of the night before I found the side of the mountain we had climbed was the steeper of the two and most difficult to climb we had one advantage it was covered with woods and brush until we got to the top then there was a brush fence behind which the enemy was posted. Then there was quite a level and looked as though some one had a farm there the land was divided into village mowing and pasture.

there was an log house with
 out buildings it was here the
 enemy had a battery posted
 in this house to get away
 they forgot to take two of their
 guns left them for the jankies
 or because of the loss of horses
 I went back to the breast fence
 there I counted 127 dead all
 from the 37th N. C. Regiment
 none of the dead were shot below
 the heart mostly through the
 head as we shot up hill our
 bullets told while they shooting
 down the Mountain their
 bullets went over our heads
 hurting no one we had one
 man slightly wounded he
 did not belong to our company
 we soon hear the command

fall in dogs fall in we were soon
in line and marched down
the road on the opposite side of
the Mountain. The road had
been dug into the Mountain side
leaving a steep bank on the
upper side with a steep and
almost straight bank down
on the other side the road was
just wide enough for one team
or carriage to get by if anyone
wished to get out of the road
he must climb up one side or
jump down on the other it
looked to us that when the
enemy batteries went down
they must have gone in haste
did not stop for any one to get
out of this way as we saw
several dead bodies that had

been run over and crushed
 we made up our minds
 they were wounded men
 trying to get off to the rear
 and were caught by the
 batteries wrecked down and
 run over and killed at least
 every thing looked that way
 when we were down the mts
 we were deployed as skirmish-
 -ers we did not have much
 shooting to do but were all
 the while picking up stragglers
 and deserters from Lee's army
 and a raggeder set it would
 be hard to find they were
 without shoes caps and many
 without coats what little
 clothing they did have was
 dirty and ragged. As we

were going along through some
 wood I came up to an Irish
 -man as I spoke to him I see
 that he was an Irishman
 I said Hello Paddy what
 were you doing here Oh I
 got a bit tired and sat me
 down to rest when your
 fellows came along and took
 me in out of the net he
 was without shoes cap or coat
 as we took him prisoner he
 threw down his musket off
 with his cartridge box and
 seemed glad to be taken in
 I asked him well Paddy
 how do you like it over there
 Oh to the devil with this Con-
 -federacy I will not fight for
 them if they will give a man

no shoes or coat he fell in
with the other prisoners and
was sent away with them we
saw no more of him

We soon came up with some
of the enemy who show fight
we were halted for a while
until other troops that were
marching to our left came
up soon we piled into a
large field here we had
ammunition and rations only
one day rations was given to
us Tuesday the 16th we were
ordered with Devolus whole
corps to the right we were
to get into position that
night ready to attack the
enemy early in the morning
there were none of the enemy

in sight - our Regiment took
 the front we soon came to
 Antietam Creek (it is ~~not~~
 a) ^{small} large stream (about the
 size of Browns river only
~~with~~ steep banks with a muddy
 bottom we soon came to a
 ford where we were to cross
 here we found gravel bottom
 there was a call for volunteers
 to cross some half dozen
 with myself stepped forward
 waded across we saw nothing
 of any rebels neither were we
 fired at - until our adjutant
 rode on top the bank when one
 bullet came whizzing over we
 heard no more until we had
 marched up the stream some
 distance and it had grown

quite dark we could see the flash
of the muskets of the skirmishes
to our left - some one of the boys
speaks and says seems to me
it is rather late for fire flies
another that kind are seen
at all times of the year other
remarks were made in a jocular
way to keep up the boys spirits
and courage soon we were
halted on a slight elevation
and told we were to stay over
night and not to wander about
much as we might wander into
Mr Mubs camp we had not got
to calling them Johnnies it was
Mr Mubs we lay down without
our supper as we could have
no fires we could cook nothing
I do not think many of the boys

know we were so near the enemy
as we were we slept sound once
in the night we were awakened
by the firing of a volley but we
afterwards learned it was the enemy
shooting themselves Lee had learned
of our move and sent Troops to
meet us it being dark did not
use cautions got mixed up that
they mistrust each other and went
to firing it was all right so
long as they injured no one but
themselves I was up early the
next morning I could just see
in the East the red light of the
sun I knew it would soon be
day light I walked out a short
distance I went through the New
Hampshire battery I passed on
but a short distance when I hear

a bugle sound which I knew belonged to the enemy by stooping down I can see a battery moving along by the edge of some woods, wheel into position unlimber and seemed to be getting ready for action.

I hurry back to the New Hampshire boys Lieut Hobbs is in command I awake him he jumps up I show him what I think is going on he calls on his boys to fall in lively I get back to my company call out fall in Sharp Shooters fall in lively just then a shell or solid shot comes in among the New Hampshire's cutting the throats of two horses there is no further need of telling our boys to hurry up they are soon in line the New Hampshire's

boys are soon replying to the enemy
 and soon silence this battery
 soon an aid comes to our help
 we are advanced some little
 distance through a narrow strip
 of woods and then across a
 field while crossing the fields
 shot and shell drop about as
 in a careless manner we think
 some of the boys speak how careless
 they are with their shell while
 others thought they meant to be
 careless there is always some
 one to get off something to make
 a laugh even when we were in
 the greatest danger I have often
 thought if it had not been for now
 and then a good joke cracked
 just in the nick of time it would
 have been hard to have kept the boys

in line had some one put on a long face and moaned out the horrors of the battle field the dogs could not be kept they would have broke for the rear and there would have been no way to have stopped them I know many a time I would have been glad to run away but pride kept me from doing so I knew that every man in the company would have jeered and laugh at me and that is what kept me not myself alone but every one of the company who had any pride for themselves or their friends at home But I am wandering from my story after crossing the open field we came to a rail fence the command is down with fence I heard

the word down and lay down
 as I done so a minute bullet
 wounded the man in rear of
 me passing through right breast
 and arm had I not lain down
 just as I did I should have
 received the wound instead of
 Luke M. Lewis soon the com-
 -mand is repeated down with
 fence we all get up each man
 takes hold of the bottom rail
 and down goes fence we then
 advance into the cornfield that
 history speaks of and now we
 hear the command to lay down
 we gladly do so. It is now
 day light we can see what
 is in front of us as we look
 about us we see there is quite
 a piece of level ground looks

like a meadow and is a little
 ascending not a sharp ascent
 but a gradual grade for some
 distance there were some fences
 some one of the boys speak of
 there being so many fences
 while another says it is not
 all fences you see out there
 there are troops there see
 there is two lines of battle
 see this guns as they glisten
 in the morning sun light
 see they are moving they are
 advancing in line of battle
 this arms at right shoulder
 shift and see look right
 down here behind this first
 fence is the lane that runs
 down to those buildings there
 is another line of battle

yes it is it is Lees army in all its pride and glory, flushed and buoyant over its past successes they think to march on to an easy victory now see that which looked so much like fences moved forward towards us

But now let us turn and look within our own lines to see what has been going on there has nothing been done to meet Lees advancing columns yes you could have seen aids & ordies riding as fast as horses could go from Army headquarters to Corp headquarters and from Corp headquarters to Division headquarters from Division headquarters to Brigade headquarters

and from Brigade headquarters to
 Regimental headquarters back and
 fourth they were riding carrying
 orders and commands it had been
 move your Regiment to the right or
 to the left advance this one a
 little and this one fall back
 to straighten and strengthen the
 line here and there Comrades
 did you ever lay flat on your
 faces in line of battle where
 you could see the enemy ad-
 vancing how nervously you
 grasped your rifle how often
 your finger would press the
 trigger of your gun as some
 good mark appeared before you
 how anxious you were to have
 the ball open if ^{so} you know
 something how I felt laying

there that morning But now all
 is ready and look right down
 here less than 300 yards see the
 rebels are arising up to advance
 Now the command passes down
 the line steady boys steady
 hold your fire for close range
 now the earth seems to
 tremble as though some internal
 force was about to burst forth
 or some mighty upheaval of the
 earth was about to engulf us.

But not from the mouths of
 many pieces of artillery vomits forth
 death hell and destruction

but look see see the line of
 battle down there look some
 half dozen voices cry look the
 air is filled with hats caps coats
 blankets muskets haversacks