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## Vermont Historical Society

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

#### Holdings

Library	Call Number	Copy	Material	Location
Vermont Historical Society Library	MSC 212:11	1	Manuscript	Vault-Manuscript

**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.

#### 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.

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PART 3 OF 3

**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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in fact every thing that goes  
to make up the outfit of the  
soldier I saw an arm which  
looked as though come from  
the body and bent in the form  
of an Square and throws some  
30 feet in the air and then  
falls back again. now the  
bullet begins to fly over our  
heads our colonel shouts  
give them hell boys we give  
them a volley but see this  
color bearer has climbed the  
fence alone he is advancing  
across the field he wavers he  
he falls he endeavours to wave  
his lone Star flag in our faces  
but he is dead now who shall  
get the colors. Bill Rice of Company  
C of our Regiment is some little

distance in front of me following close  
 to me is Cyrus Howard of Randolph  
 It- we are all after the colors but  
 our adjutant thinks to do something  
 brave he jumps up and runs down  
 to where the colors went down  
 he picks them up the staff is broken  
 off close up to the flag he drops them  
 draws his sword jabs it into the  
 broken staff raises the colors high  
 above his head and starts for  
 our lines he goes but a short dist-  
 -ance when he falls pierced by 7  
 bullets had he taken to the fence  
 behind which we these boys were  
 he might have come on all right  
 he falls near Bill Hurr and he reaches  
 out takes the flag brings it safely in  
 now some one cries look over the  
 fence at our right is the Sharpsburg



and Hagerstown like road with  
fences on both sides next to us is an  
half wall built of stone with posts set  
in the wall and boards nailed on the  
posts on the other side of the road is  
a common rail fence while beyond  
all is a small clearing then woods  
out of the woods comes the enemy  
quite a number of our boys had now  
gathered behind the wall as we saw  
the enemy coming out of the woods  
we commenced to fire at them  
there was quite a sharp grade that  
they came down so that it placed  
them on higher ground our bullets  
told on them it seemed to me  
as though every bullet hit the  
mark they could not stay long  
and face our bullets they broke  
for the woods and as they ran

up the hill it looked to me as though  
 they went on all fours as our bullets  
 would strike them they would turn  
 a complete somersault and lay down  
 to rest our boys would cheer see they  
 cry see the dust fly out of their  
 clothing as our bullets strike them  
 as the enemy gain the wood there  
 comes a volley among them Ah!!  
 now Meredith Brigade of Indiana  
 and Wisconsin boys are in they  
 had formed on our right just  
 the other side of the pickets also  
 also Gibbons battery is there just  
 behind the hay stacks now some  
 one calls out look to our front  
 the second line of battle comes  
 up we turn and give to them as  
 our boys cheer we fall back a  
 little to be in line with others

we keep loading and firing as  
 fast as we can but see on on  
 they come with arms at right  
 shoulders shift with heads bowed  
 like men facing the storm but  
 soon they come in range of  
 Gibbons' battery manned by the brave  
 sons from Erin's green Isle God  
 bless this noble Irish hearts see  
 they give them round after round  
 of grape and canisters see what  
 great swaths is mown through this  
 ranks but they close up and on  
 they come cheering and yelling  
 like devils run mad now our  
 officers cry give them hell boy fire  
 at will we load and fire as fast  
 as we can no human beings can  
 face such a fire they wave they  
 break and run to this rear now



~~our~~ boys cheer and we advance  
 a little I drop down behind a post  
 there had been a board fence but the  
 boards had been nailed off the  
 posts left the third line follows  
 close on to the second all my  
 ammunition in my cartridgebox  
 is gone 40 rounds but in my  
 sapsack is 100 more I off with the  
 sapsack out with the cartridges  
 then put my sapsack up in  
 front of me to help shield me  
 the enemy come on we keep up  
 our fire I put some one come  
 up beside me I look up it is one  
 of the Wisconsin boys I tell him  
 to lay down as the bullets are  
 so thick to stand up there the  
 air seems alive with them  
 he pays no attention to what I say



soon a bullet pierces his brain he  
falls a corpse across my hands  
arms and rifle dies without a  
word in my endeavors to free  
myself from him I get covered  
with blood Oh! the sickening  
sensation that comes over me as  
the warm blood flows on to me  
I cannot describe it

Now our boys cheer they have rallied  
and are driving the enemy I jump  
up pick up my rifle but drop it  
again I had fired it so long and  
so rapidly that it had become hot  
enough to burn my hand to a blister  
now the enemy rally and drive our  
boys back then our boys rally and  
drive the enemy back again I  
go back to the place where I left  
my traps and lay down

I hear some one call I look around  
 a short distance lays a rebel lieut.  
 he asks for water I creep out <sup>to</sup> him  
 and give him a drink out of my  
 canteen water that I took from  
 Antietam creek the night before  
 I tell him it is from but he drinks  
 says it is wet he tells me he is  
 wounded through both legs and  
 cannot walk and that he belongs  
 to a South Carolina Regiment  
 I get back to my place keep firing  
 my hand smarts with the burn  
 but I keep at work soon a shell strikes  
 my rebel friend after the smoke  
 and dirt settle down I look for  
 him all I can see is his legs and  
 arms his body had been torn  
 in pieces I die it is getting to  
 be to close and warm for me

I fall back as I am going back I  
 hear my name called I look and  
 there lays B. Brown Mc O'Callen of our  
 company he came from Westford  
 corner his leg has been nearly torn  
 off by a shell or solid shot he says  
 to be carried of the field he has freed  
 himself of his napsack and other  
 equipments I undo his rubber  
 blanket to use as a stretcher to  
 get him off with I look about for  
 help I see one of our own company  
 I hail him then hail two of the  
 104<sup>th</sup> N.Y. each man takes hold  
 of a corner of the blanket and  
 we start for the rear we did not  
 get but a short distance when  
 one of the New York boys was shot  
 dead the other dropped his corner  
 and ran as ~~fast as he could~~



we look around for others to take hold we soon hail two more that belong to some New York Regiment they take hold we go on again but soon one of the New York boys is wounded and he goes to the rear we then get our man behind a small stone house that stood near as the bullets were flying pretty thick we were glad to take shelter the enemy were advancing our boys were in the retreat in some confusion I look in my cartridge box I have only three rounds left I look around out a short way I see one of Company G's boys of our Regiment laying dead I take the risk of going out to see if he has any left I find 11 rounds

I got back behind the stone house again we would step to the corner fire step back to load while one is loading another is firing we kept up our work soon we had quite a crowd some wounded others were not soon some one speaks and says we had best get out from here we shall all be taken prisoners soon the wounded plead to be carried off while some few did skip out - as each man skipped out some of the wounded began to be taken along it did seem hard to go and leave them I had fired away about all my cartridges had but two left when we hear a noise in our rear I look about there was the 5<sup>th</sup> corp charging across

the field they soon pass by where  
 we are at double quick drive  
 the enemy before them as they  
 pass by it leaves us so we can  
 breathe a little. Now we give  
 them a cheer they send the  
 enemy back some distance  
 but they in turn are driven back  
 yet they hold the battle field till  
 just at sun down the 6<sup>th</sup> corp comes  
 in charges across the field  
 and holds it. We carry poor  
 Byron back he has his legs  
 taken off but he has lost so  
 much blood he lives only a  
 short time we dig a grave  
 under a large oak tree roll  
 him up in his own woolen blanket  
 with another that we find there  
 spread his rubber blanket over



him fill up the grave mark the  
 place ~~the best we could~~ and  
 hurry back to our Company  
 when we were back of the stone  
 house some one asked what  
 time of day it was some one  
 answers 20 minutes past one  
 Oh! said I your watch has gone  
 out others too all told the  
 same story I looked up at the  
 sun shure enough it was but  
 how time had slipped away it  
 seemed to me as though we had  
 only just got up but we had  
 taken no notice of time we had  
 all we could look after without  
 watching the clocks or sun  
 when we got back to our Regiment  
 it was almost dark a good sized  
 bullock is driven up slaughtered

one days ration. hard bread coffee  
and sugar is dealt out to us  
we are where we could build  
a fire we done so. made a good  
cup of coffee the first we had  
eaten for 36 hours we picked  
up ramrods put our buff on  
~~the~~ end and roasted it in the  
fire we had a very good meal  
but a sad one of our company  
only 4 and our Captains were  
present we knew one to be dead  
while others were mortally woun-  
ded how many we did not  
know ammunition was brought  
up we were told to take all we  
was aimed to it was expected  
we would renew the battle in  
the morning we knew nothing  
of our success wild rumors

of all kinds were told that evening  
 Around our campfires we knew  
 many of our officers had been  
 wounded our Colonel was wounded  
 Hooker our corp commander  
 was wounded while we were told  
 of others killed and wounded but  
 never mind the Yankees are  
 not all dead yet we had no  
 idea of letting Lee march  
 on to Baltimore or Washington  
 we knew nothing <sup>had</sup> but we had used  
 the enemy we lay around were  
 told to be ready to march at a  
 moments notice But Lee is a  
 long way from his base of supplies  
 he is badly whipped, his ammunition  
 is nearly out therefore he could  
 not renew the conflict it is now  
 the morning of the 19 as there



is not any firing we will stroll  
 about the battle field men  
 are at work caring for the  
 wounded and what sights  
 we see about us Oh! angel  
 of love and mercy spread thy  
 wing over the scene and change  
 man into administering angels  
 of love and mercy that they may  
 bind up the wounds that man has  
 inflicted on his brother man  
 the blue and the gray the loyal  
 and the rebel are laying mingled  
 together as we pass along there is  
 now and then a shot or shell drops  
 on some part of the field to make  
 the scene more gaily if possible  
 a shell comes near us strikes  
 a wounded man or perhaps a dead  
 body tearing it in pieces throwing

the contents of this Stomach  
and bowels over us Oh! what a  
stunck and what scences

Oh was cruel and relentless when  
will nations and men learn to settle  
their differences without invoking the  
aid what thought can tell of the  
horrors as we pass along over the  
field we are seen by some of  
the poor fellows they ask us for  
water we give to all alike the blue  
and the gray now and then one  
is delirious we stop to listen to  
ones ravings hears him he imagines  
he is at home among loved ones he  
tells them how the battle was fought  
and how wone he tells how he was  
wounded and then how he pleads  
with with them to give him water  
to quench his thirst to cool his

burning aching head and bind up  
 his wounds we stop over him  
 raise his head and pour the old  
 canteen wet his lips and bathe  
 is face he revives and looks up  
 and around, he sees and realizes  
 we are friends then he knows his own  
 condition that he must soon die  
 then Oh! such a message of love he pours  
 into our ears for the loved ones at home  
 we receive it and promise it shall be  
 sent but Oh! what a task! how can we  
 break the news to the anxious waiting  
 ones at home we pass along from  
 one to another we walk down to  
 the lane known in history as the  
 bloody lane here is where the Lone  
 Star Regiment from Texas fought  
 you can count 500 dead here  
 in a short distance you see



Colonel Lieut Colonel Major Cap-  
 -tains Lieutenants and privates all  
 mingled together you see men  
 of all ages and conditions in  
 life mingled together you see  
 men on their hands and knees  
 their muscles grasped eyes wide  
 open watching the gambles but  
 look there is a bullet hole through  
 this head they were killed so  
 quick they did not have time  
 to lay down I know you are  
 sick and weary of scenes like  
 this we will go back to the  
 regiment the next morning  
 we find Lee has fled gone back  
 across the Potomac onto the  
 sacred soil of Virginia we are  
 deployed as skirmishers we go to  
 the river banks we pick up what

Stragglers and deserters there is or  
 all we can find gather them toge-  
 -ather they are sent away with  
 other prisoners then we go into  
 camp soon we have some  
 recruits then the slightly woun-  
 -ded and the convalescent are  
 returned to us so that our com-  
 -pany looks like it used too  
 and for many an evening, as  
 we gather about the campfire  
 you could have heard stories  
 of personal bravery of narrow  
 escapes of scenes gashly in the  
 extreme also of those that would  
 have made you laugh and here  
 to about the camp fire the dead  
 were spoken of all about him  
 was bad low or degrading was  
 thrown into the grave with



the  
 dead body to moulder away to  
 dust - but all that was good,  
 all his bright and witty sayings  
 all that was noble all his virtues  
 are treasured up to be practiced  
 and remembered to help us to be  
 better men and soldiers

And the battle of Antietam  
 passes into history I read in  
 Barnes history page 242 "The  
 Union Army was over eighty thou-  
 sand strong and the Confederate  
 but half that number. I am  
 one will take the trouble to look  
 up the official report they will  
 find the Union Army to be  
 87,164 the Confederate 97,445  
 Union loss killed wounded and  
 missing on the 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Sept was  
 12,469 Confederate loss 25,542



Major Davis who superintended  
the burying of the dead reports about  
3000 rebels buried on the field  
of Antietam by our Troops  
beside this the enemy buried on  
the distant portion of the field  
they held over 500 Major Davis  
reported of Union dead buried  
2010 we are not allowed to  
remain in camp long we soon  
cross the Potomac and again  
we hear the cry on to Richmond,  
but here let my story end.

I thank you for your kind  
attention to my story so poorly  
told.

The story of Antietam read  
at campfire at Essex Centre  
March 9<sup>th</sup> 1888

Capt. Hayward