

FIRST N.H. CAVALRY

On April 12, 1861, the Confederate forces at Charleston, South Carolina fired upon the Federal Garrison at Fort Sumter. Two days later the garrison was forced to surrender. The bloody war between the states had begun. President Lincoln declared Civil War and called for 75,000 militiamen to "put down the rebellion."

In the fall of 1861, a New Hampshire battalion of Cavalry consisting of companies I, K, L and M were raised. The first rendezvous was at the Fairgrounds, near Concord, New Hampshire, east of the river. They joined two Rhode Island Battalions at Pawtucket on January 22, 1861, forming the First New England Cavalry.

At the outset, the men were armed with sabers, Colt revolvers and the Burnside carbine, which was later replaced by the Sharps carbine. On March 31, 1862, the name of the regiment was changed from the First New England Cavalry to the First Rhode Island Cavalry by order of the War Department; unsupported by any preliminary correspondence with Governor Berry of New Hampshire. This act was grievously received by the men and bitterly felt throughout the State, however, the men continued to proudly perform their duties.

On January 7, 1864, after having participated in 16 engagements, the War Department restored the Battalion to the custody of New Hampshire. The men immediately reenlisted for three years, forming the four veteran companies (I, K, L and M) of THE FIRST NEW HAMPSHIRE VOLUNTEER CAVALRY. After mustering companies A, B and C, the seven companies with 1,522 men were ordered to Washington, going into camp at Camp Stoneman. John L. Thompson who was born in Plymouth, NH and who originally served as the Lt. of Company "K" (when it was the First New England Cavalry) became Colonel of the unit.



Colonel Thompson

On the 17th of May 1864, they were ordered to the front to join the Army of the Potomac. They distinguished themselves at the battle of Winchester on Sept. 19, 1864. The regiment was engaged well into the night and Colonel Thompson was wounded. After the battle, General Custer sent his compliments to Col. Thompson saying, " You with your regiment, have saved the battle." On December 18, 1864, the FIRST N.H. led the charge at Waynesboro, VA, which resulted in the capturing of Jubal Early's army.

The FIRST NEW HAMPSHIRE CAVALRY was involved in 27 engagements before being mustered out on July 21, 1865, having suffered the loss of 129 members.

Battle Engagements

Hanover Court House, Va.	May 31, 1864
Cold Harbor, Va.	June 2, 1864
White Oak Swamp, Va.	June 13, 1864
Wilson's Raid on the Weldon Railroad, Va.	June 22-30, 1864
Ream's Station, Va. *	June 22, 1864
Nottoway Court House, Va. *	June 23, 1864
Roanoke Station and High Bridge, Va. *	June 25-26, 1864
Stone Creek, Va. *	June 28-29, 1864
Ream's Station, Va.	June 29, 1864
Winchester, Va.	Aug. 17, 1864
Summit Point, Va.	Aug. 21, 1864
Charlestown, Va.	Aug. 22, 1864
Kearneysville, Va.	Aug. 25, 1864
Berryville, Va.	Sept. 15, 1864
Opequan, Va.	Sept. 19, 1864
Front Royal Pike, Va.	Sept. 21, 1864
Gooney Manor Grade, Va.	Sept. 21, 1864
Milford, Va.	Sept. 21, 1864
Waynesborough, Va.	Sept. 28, 1864
Columbia Furnace, Va.	Oct. 7, 1864
Tom's Brook, Va.	Oct. 9, 1864
Mine Run Ford, Va.	Oct. 13, 1864
Cedar Creek, Va.	Oct. 19, 1864
Middle and Back Roads, Va.	Nov. 11-12, 1864
Lacey's Springs, Va.	Dec. 20-21, 1864
Waynesborough, Va.	Mar. 2, 1865
North Fork, Shenandoah, Va.	Mar. 6-7, 1865

* During Wilson's Raid

James Monroe Meserve

James Monroe Meserve was born in Banstead, New Hampshire, on May 20, 1820. Although he was a family man with six living children and a seventh on the way and was considered (at 44) to be past the age of enlistment, he nevertheless volunteered for service with Company A of the First New Hampshire Cavalry in March 1864. His natural abilities gained him the rank of sergeant a month after his enlistment, but he was captured by Confederate forces shortly thereafter and sent to Andersonville prison in Georgia. Sergeant Meserve died in Andersonville on August 22, 1864. Although Sergeant Meserve was not a poet by training, this poem, which he wrote for his family while he was away fighting, illustrates the highly literate nature of the 19th century mind. Even men and women with little education, whose spelling, grammar, and punctuation left much to be desired, were nonetheless capable of turning a flowery phrase with the best of them. Thanks to Regina Hallmark, the great-great granddaughter of Sergeant Meserve, for sharing this poem, which she received from her mother, Eva Littlefield Scott of Bristol, New Hampshire.

UNTITLED by James Monroe Meserve

Cherished one, do not grow weary,
God is ever up on high;
Have you not got still above you
The same calm and lovely sky?

It is painful now to leave you,
Yet there's pleasure with the pain,
In the thought, so sweet and cheering
That we both may meet again.

In life's storm and in life's sunshine
Oft I've fondly turned to thee,
And I can forget thee never,
Though fate far may beckon me.

Though I go to scenes of battle,
O! it is a golden thought,
I've left those who still can love me,
And I cannot be forgot.

Let me speak about my children --
Ere I leave the Granite State
For the scenes of war and danger,
Let me speak about the eight.

Ann has reached the age of woman
And a grandchild now have we.
Evard's mother is our daughter --
Happy may his mother be.

Yet we've seven other children;
Christie's a girl of nineteen,
And then Clinton, a year younger,
Next our James Leroy is seen.

Then a boy of eight bright summers
Does to play with comrades go;
Yet he'll tell you of his father
Who forgets not John Monroe.

Then we've little smiling Addie;
She's the youngest of the eight;
But she oft speaks of the father
Still within his native state.

Ah, but there are yet two others,
They've far from the fireside gone;
Yet we love them just as fondly --
David and his brother John.

They are living with their grandma,
They are from earth's sorrows free,
Yet when I my watch am keeping,
Will they not watch over me?

When my lonely post I'm walking
In some distant grove or glen,
O, will not the wand'ring angels
Watch their loving father then?

When I'm on the field of battle
And see comrades fall or die,
Then, to aid me and preserve me,
Will their images be nigh.

And when I'm writing homeward,
To the wife and mother dear,
Will the thoughts of those I'm missing
Give the sheet an extra tear?

Home! I never can forget thee!
Wife, my love for thee is great;
Children, thou my heart art wedding
To the good old Granite State

Yet I must leave thee, New Hampshire,
Bid farewell to mountains high,
Go to meet the foe and strangers
And to see the war clouds nigh.

And how often in my fancy,
In my dreams I'll travel far
From the comrades who're around me,
From the crowning scenes of war.

And in dreams I will embrace thee,
Oh my wife so fond and true,
And be angry with those who wake me
When my dreams were all of you.

Thus could I continue dreaming,
But I hope again we'll meet,
And thy presence will be real,
And the friends of yore we'll greet.

Far thee well, my loving Addie,
Ah, the word doth take my breath,
No -- my heart is clinging to thee,
As the ivy clings in death

Sidney Way



Sidney Way (taken 29 May 1863), Mary Boynton Way, Emma Phylliss Way, Solymon Way, Sidney Way (notice the GAR ribbon)

Sidney Way joined the 2nd Vermont Infantry in May of 1861 when he was 18. He contracted typhoid and was discharged in November of 1861 and sent home to die. However, he recovered and soon got bored at home while all his friends were away at war. He then enlisted in the 1st Rhode Island Cavalry on August 29, 1862 and later became part of the 1st New Hampshire Cavalry. In August of 1863 he had a recurrence of fever, vomiting and bleeding and was hospitalized in Mount Pleasant. President Lincoln came to the ward and "shook hands with all the boys". His rank varied from Private to Corporal to Sergeant and back again, mostly for refusing to "buck and gag" other miscreants and for punching officers who called him names as well as a few drunk and disorderly complaints. He spent some time as General Sickles private orderly, but asked to be relieved as it was boring. In his diary he talks of being in the group chosen to ride with Sheridan when they "turned back the heart of the column" to Cedar Creek. A great sadness of his life occurred when his brother, Solymon Way, also of Co. L, 1st New Hampshire Regiment, was taken prisoner while "out flanking near Reams Station" on 29 June 1864. Solymon was released to West's hospital in Baltimore on 10 March 1865, but died a few days later from "starvation in rebel prisons", according to the hospital Chaplain. Sidney Way was discharged on June 5, 1865. He was however with the regiment when they were mustered out in July, and contributed to the \$400 silver tea set that the boys presented to Col. Thompson. Although he admired Col. Thompson, he often spoke of Col. Alfred N. Duffie of the 1st Rhode Island Cavalry as the best officer he ever served under. He was proud of his service, and was an active member in the GAR.

Alston Brown



Alston Brown was New London New Hampshire's last Civil War Veteran before he died on April 20, 1938. He was born in Wilmot, NH on December 12, 1847, the son of John and Sophronia Brown, he attended school in the old North Wilmot schoolhouse until his enlistment in the First New Hampshire Volunteer cavalry at the age of 16 years. He saw considerable service before having his arm shot away just below the shoulder during Wilson's raid at Nottoway Court House Virginia on June 23, 1864. He also had the misfortune to be captured six days later, and suffered untold agonies from his untended wound in rebel prisons for two months before being released. He returned to his native town shattered in health, and although handicapped by the loss of his arm, worked at mechanical trades for years. In fact, he built almost entirely alone a house in which he lived in for many years. He was also a charter member of the Anthony Colby Post G.A.R.

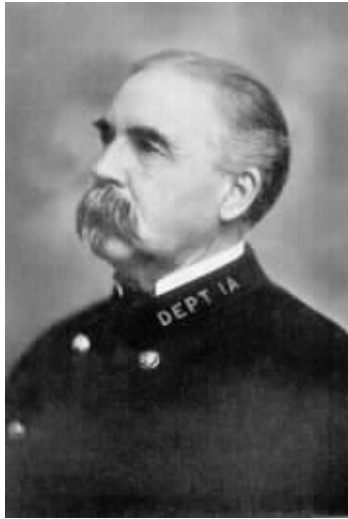
Lyman Wilder



Lyman Wilder was a weaver by trade from Nashua New Hampshire. He enlisted in company M of the First Rhode Island Cavalry (a.k.a. 1st New England Cavalry) on Dec. 19, 1861. He was captured on March 17, 1863 at Kelly's Ford and sent to Libby prison. He was paroled on March 31st and missed participating in Middleburg. He rejoined his regiment in time for Gettysburg. In January of 1864 his state won back their name and the unit became the 1st NH Volunteer Cavalry. At the end of that year Lyman was wounded at Tom's Brook, getting shot in the left leg and right hand. After recovering from his wounds he was transferred to the Veteran Reserve Corps. He was a mail carrier for Hancock riding from Washington to Winchester Virginia.

Lyman spent the rest of his days in Rochester New York a member of the GAR. His gold medal is shown in his picture. Which was taken shortly before his death in 1924.

Madison B. Davis



Madison Bartlett L Davis was born at the town of Canaan NH on November 12, 1837, and grew to manhood in that vicinity. In August, 1861, he enlisted as a private in Company I, First New England Cavalry, which later became the First Rhode Island Cavalry, and still later the First New Hampshire Cavalry, and served chiefly in the Army of the Potomac. He arose to the rank of corporal and sergeant. In January 1864, he was discharged from service, but reenlisted in the same company with the rank of orderly sergeant. During almost four years of service he was in many cavalry raids and skirmishes, and had many narrow escapes. He was at the battles of Fort Royal, Cedar Mountain, Groveton, Second Bull Run, Chantilly, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and most of the prominent engagements of the Army of the Potomac. He was twice captured and long held as a prisoner - being transferred from prison to prison. Only after great suffering was he exchanged and allowed to rejoin his company. After the war, Sergeant Davis moved to Iowa, was admitted to the bar, and practiced his profession for a time in Fort Madison. In 1874 he moved to Sioux City where he resided until the end of his career on July 24, 1914. He was always prominent in Grand Army affairs, and was one of the organizers of General Hancock Post No. 22, at Sioux City.

Pvt. Henry J. Day



Pvt. Henry J. Day was a member of Co. K of the 1st NH Cavalry; he was captured at Middletown, Va. He subsequently died on his way to Richmond.

Jacob Sleeper



Bugler Sleeper was from the Sunapee NH area, he enlisted in Company I of the 1st NH Cavalry and was wounded at White Oak on June 13, 1864.

Edgar H. Wood



Bugler Wood was from the Keene NH area.

Major Joseph F. Andrews



Joseph F. Andrews was born in New Boston, NH. He enlisted on December 24th, 1861 at the age of forty-four. On that day he was commissioned as a First Lieutenant and made Quartermaster for 'M' Co. of the 1st Rhode Island Cavalry. He was listed as a POW on October 31st, 1862, at Mountville, VA. He returned on December 19th, 1862 from Camp Parole, Annapolis, Md. On January 7th, 1864 he was transferred to the 1st New Hampshire Cavalry. On March 18th, 1864 he was promoted to Major. Andrews died on June 29th, 1888 in Nashua, New Hampshire.

John J. Prentiss

John J. Prentiss was commissioned Captain of Company L of the 1st New England Cavalry on Dec. 3rd, of 1861. After being in the field a few months, and soon after the Battle of Culpepper Court House, he was detailed on recruiting service, to fill the Rhode Island Cavalry of which name the regiment of the four companies from this state was attached, had taken after reaching the field. He was discharged Nov. 3, 1863.

William Parker Prentiss

William Parker Prentiss was commissioned 2nd lieutenant of Co. L of the 1st New England Cavalry Dec. 3rd, 1861. Promoted to 1st lieutenant Aug. 4th, 1862. Promoted to Captain Apr. 21st, 1864, and assigned to Co. K of the 1st New Hampshire Cavalry. Resigned and mustered out Jan. 18, 1865. He was almost constantly with his company, and participated in all its battles, raids, and skirmishes until the regiment came home on its veteran furlough in Feb 1864. Soon after his arrival at Concord, Lieutenant Prentiss was ordered to Claremont on recruiting service, where he remained until Apr. 21st. When he was promoted to Captain he rejoined his regiment, and on the 25th of April started out for the front. In November, 1864 he was appointed acting Adjutant and Inspector General to Col. Provost, at the Draft Rendezvous, Springfield, Ill, and on the 28th of the following December was assigned to Duty General Court Marshall at Winchester, Va., in which position he remain until his resignation was accepted. He was with his regiment on the celebrated Wilson-Kaus Raid, which was unequalled during the war, either in hardships or results, and here as well on all other occasions, he exhibited coolness and bravery. It is only necessary to refer to history of his regiment to know what part he took in the war of the rebellion. He was almost always with his command, and bore his full share in their hard marches, bloody battles, and almost all unprecedent privations and hardships. He several times lost his horse, saber, all his equipment, and cap; he went through the fight at Middlebury bareheaded, was repeatedly reported killed, wounded, and prisoner. His garments were shredded with bullet holes, but he was never seriously wounded. While he was usually where the battle raged the fiercest he seemed to bear a charmed life, and when his men and fellow officers were shot down all around him, he was protected by a kind of providence from harm at the hands of the rebels. Captain Prentiss was an officer of more than ordinary ability, devoted to duty in whatever position placed, and commanded the respect and confidence of all the men and officers with whom he was connected. It was such men as he who gained for our New Hampshire Cavalry the enviable reputation it has always honored and lived up to. He is the brother of John J. Prentiss jr. of the 5th NH Vol Inf. Both the sons of Capt. John J. Prentiss of the 1st New England Cav.

THE NEW HAMPSHIRE CAVALRY CHARGE, A letter from Sgt. William H. Briggs

Born in Montpelier, VT and resided in Claremont NH. He enlisted and was mustered into Troop L, of the New England Cavalry as part of the New Hampshire contingent on Dec.27th, 1861. He was promoted to sergeant. He was wounded in the side by a piece of shell at Chantilly Sept.1, 1862. He was subsequently injured in another action (Front Royal, Va.) by falling off his horse, and was discharged on account of the injuries he received from these actions on Jan.16, 1862. He was discharged on Jan 16th, 1863 in Providence, RI. After his discharge he was appointed Superintendent of the Government Wood-Yard at Wasington, DC. When he returned home he became engaged in manufacturing of cabinets and furniture.

Front Royal, Va. June 2 1862

John S. Walker - Dear Sir: - Thinking you and the good people of Claremont might be glad to learn of our whereabouts, I take pleasure in informing you that we arrived here on Friday last, as the advance guard of Gen. Shields. On arriving within three miles of this town we discovered the evidence of the presence of rebels. We brought up two pieces of Capt. Dorme's battery and fired three shells into a clump of bushes, and they scattered like chaff before the wind. Very soon we saw dense volumes of smoke issuing from the depot, they having set it on fire. We were ordered to charge on them and save the bridges. - We immediately started at a furious rate, and for three miles we were going at a fearful rate. We saved several cars loaded with grain, and others containing arms etc... were burned. We pursued them for three miles further, capturing eleven baggage wagons, two pieces of artillery, five hundred stands of arms, about one hundred sabers and one hundred and forty prisoners. - - Glory enough for one day. We saved the bridges so that yesterday our army of forty thousand men passed over in pursuit of Jackson, he having had all of his baggage train captured, in retreating over the mountains. Shields is after him. We lost eight men killed, and seven wounded, four mortally. I think we lost about 20 horses in all and captured about the same from them. The "Valiant Sugar boys" (secessionists) numbered from eight to ten hundred, while our own number did not exceed one hundred and seventeen. All admit it to have been one of the most daring charges on record; sad now when I think it over I can but wonder how many of us escaped alive. - We were on the march nine days before we arrived here, part of the time also in the night. Please recollect that we, the New Hampshire battalion, were detached from the Rhode Island regiment for Gen. Shields, and that New Hampshire alone was represented in the fight. I tell you that not a man faltered, but all came up boldly to the work. There was no one killed in one company, but one wounded by the name of Hardy. I was somewhat injured by being thrown from my horse, but did not notice it until all was over. I am now in the hospital, but hope soon to be out again. You will excuse my writing with a pencil, as it is impossible to obtain pen and ink. Gen. Shields says the charge was glorious and wonderful. Had the bridges been burned we should probably have been delayed here for a week at least; so you see we have done some good for our country, and if they only catch the rebel Jackson we shall be more than satisfied, and all the people will say, amen.

Most respectfully,

W. H. Briggs