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George H. Coffin

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THREE YEARS IN THE ARMY

BY

GEORGE H. COFFIN

First Sergeant, Company H.
First Maine Heavy Artillery.
CIVIL WAR — 1861-1865

For my Grandchildren
March 3, 1925
To my Grandchildren:

You will read in your "School History" all about the great "Civil War" between the States.

On one side was the northern states. On the other side was the southern states.

The war lasted four years, and during that time, over two million of men were employed in the Army and Navy of the United States.

Your Grandfather was one of that number, and now sixty years after at the age of 80 years I take up the pen to relate from memory my experience in the great conflict.

You will find nothing very remarkable in my story, and as a literary production it will not rank very high.

Although one of the youngest boys, I was promoted to be the First Sergeant of my Company. I mention this fact to show you that I was a fairly good soldier.

I hope my story may interest you.

Your Grandfather
(Signed)
George H. Coffin

March 3, 1925
George H. Coffin in Civil War Uniform.
THREE YEARS IN THE ARMY

CIVIL WAR - 1861-1865

George H. Coffin, First Sergeant, Company H, First Maine Heavy Artillery

On the 28th day of July 1862 I enlisted to go to the War. I was then 17 years and six months old. The age of a soldier at that time was 18 years. I was full grown, stood 5 feet 10 inches in my bare feet and weighed 175 lbs, and looked older so I had no trouble in passing the mustering officer when the time came for inspection.

I had been possessed of the War fever for some time, but my father would not give me any encouragement, as he was strongly opposed to the war and all things connected with it.

I would say right here that my father's family were all Democrats. My father when he voted cast a Democratic ballot, but he was not so radical as some of the others of the family and did not approve of the course taken by his party during the war. I don't think he cast a Democratic vote after I went into the army.

My mother's family were Republicans. So I suppose I was born half Democrat and half Republican. What Democratic blood I had in my veins I left upon the battlefield at Petersburg, Virginia.

My father was the owner of a hay farm in the town of Columbia, about a mile north of the village. This farm was but a few years before covered with a heavy growth of pine, but a fire swept over it and destroyed the timber. My father cleared it up and sowed grass seed, and for many years it yielded a heavy crop of Timothy hay.

On the 27th day of July 1862 he started in to get the hay from that lot. Of course he took me along with him, provided with a nice new scythe. It was a hot day, the ground was rough, having never been plowed, the black snakes were plenty and savage, so the work did not suit me very well. I rebelled, stuck my nice new bright scythe into one of the numerous cradle knolls, and left the burnt land and mowing field for good. I told my father I had done with haying and was going down to the village to enlist. He realized the situation and when he came home at supper time, he gave me his consent for me to go.

The next day my name was on the list with ten other men and boys from Harrington.


The townspeople turned out and gave the squad a Grand farewell reception in the town hall. Where everybody made a great time about nothing, that is that's the way I looked at it at that time, as I thought we were only going away a short time on a picnic. I changed my views later on.
We started the next morning by Stage Coach for Bangor, where the men were gathering to make up the 18th Maine Regiment Infantry. This Regiment was after changed into the First Maine Heavy Artillery.

We went into camp on the Fairgrounds, where we found tents already erected for our use.

As fast as the doctors could attend to it we were examined to see as to our fitness for the duties of a soldier. A few of the older men were rejected, but none of our squad.

In about two weeks the Regiment was full: ten companies of 100 men each, including the officers. Our Company was "H".

Officers of Company H.

Captain  Harrison G. Smith  Columbia Falls
1st Lieut. Thomas H. Palmer  Millbridge
2nd  Wm. R. Newingham  Cherryfield

Sergeants.

1st  Allen E. Berry  Whitneyville
2nd  Jotham L. Buzzell  Harrington
3rd  George S. Farnsworth  Jonesboro
4th  Ira M. Bowers  Millbridge
5th  Wm. N. Flynn  Whitneyville

Corporals.

Jonathan Pineo  Addison
Charles Emerson  Addison
Fernando C. Plummer  Harrington
George H. Coffin  Harrington
Arthur B. Tibbetts  Cherryfield
Eben S. Church  Jonesport
Phllander D. Low  Columbia
Augustas C. Bond  Cherryfield

Musicians.

George Norcross  Addison
Gilman P. Smith  Jonesport

Wagoner.

James P. Wakefield  Steuben

The balance of the company was made up by 79 Privates, coming from Machias west to Steuben, making a total of 98 officers and privates.
As soon as the Company was full we were provided with our uniforms. Our clothing that we wore to Bangor was discarded and sent home, as a soldier is not allowed to wear or have in his possession any citizen’s clothes.

We were provided with:
- One dark blue Frock coat
- Light blue Pants
- Dark blue cap with stiff visor flat top
- One pair Brogans
- One pair cotton shirts & Drawers
- Two pair cotton socks

The uniforms were issued in four sizes and sent to company headquarters, where each man selected a suit that came the nearest to fitting him, and so by trading back and forth with other members of the company, all would come pretty handy to having a fit, so when the company appeared on the drilling grounds for inspection we made quite a respectable looking company.

Next we were given our arms & equipment. An old Enfield Rifle, made in England & Bayonet Cartridge Box with shoulder strap, Cap Box, Bayonet scabbard, Belt, Knapsack & Haversack, Tin Plate & Dipper.

On the 21st day of August 1862 every man belonging to the company including the officers were formed into company line, and after inspection we were mustered into the United States Service by holding up our right hands and swearing to do the most wonderful things for the United States if we were only given a chance.

On Sunday the 24th day of August, we broke camp and marching to the depot, took the train for Washington, where we arrived about noon on the 27th. After a dinner of Bread without any butter, a piece of salt beef and a dipper of coffee, we marched across the east branch of the Potomac up a very long hill to Fort Baker, where we camped for the night on the side of a hill. This was a hard march for us green boys loaded as we were with our arms, Knapsacks and Equipments. Four men in our company died within two months from the effects of that march, and many others never recovered from it.

The next day we returned to Washington, marched through the city and camped that night at Tenleytown. Here we remained for two months, and were employed in Company drill and cutting bushes around Fort Simons, nearby.

FORT SUMNER

The last week in October 1862 my Regiment moved from Tenleytown to Fort Alexander.

I was sick with the "Janduice" so I was not on duty that day, so I did not march with my company, but I had to walk just the same. It was about two miles, quite a long walk for a sick man but as I had no gun and equipments to carry I had no trouble in finding my way over there about as soon as the company.
Fort Alexander was located on a high hill on the north side of the Potomac River about four miles above Washington.

Our Regiment remained at this fort until we were ordered to join the Army of the Potomac in May 1864.

FIRST MAINE HEAVY ARTILLERY

On the 1st day of January 1863 the Regiment was reorganized, and named the First Maine Heavy Artillery, and recruited to the full strength of an Artillery Regiment, 12 companies of 150 men each. The recruits came from the same locality that the original 18th Maine was from.

We lived in tents outside of the fort for over one year; after December 1863, in barracks inside the fort.

We rebuilt and enlarged the fort in the year 1863, and the name was changed to Fort Sumner. We slashed down all the growth outside of the fort within half of a mile, and that was no small job, as many of the trees were large Oaks.

The land where the fort was built was all hills and valleys. The highest hill next to the river was occupied by the main fort. I think the top of the parapet was about sixty feet higher than the river.

Between the fort and river was the Baltimore and Ohio canal. This canal started at Alexandria, Va., crossed the Potomac to Harpers Ferry, thence through Maryland, Pennsylvania to Ohio. There were a few canal boats passed up and down by the fort when we first went there, but it was not used much during the war. We boys used it for a swimming pool. Next to the canal was the River road that led from Washington to Harpers Ferry. By this road in September 1862, part of the Army of the Potomac under the command of George B. McLellan marched to meet and defeat the Confederate army under Lee at Antetam. In June 1863 the Army of the Potomac, then under the command of General Hooker, took this route to overtake and fight General Lee at Gettysburg.

Our Regiment was ordered to join the army when they came along. We packed our knapsacks and shouldered our rifles and marched about five miles when we went into camp for the night. The next morning at break of day we marched back to the fort.

We boys did not know what to make of that strange performance. Later we found out that the Engineer who had charge of building the forts in the defences of Washington told the War Department that our Regiment was worth more for slashing trees than any other Regiment he could get, and he put up such a kick that we were ordered back.

DRILLING

Col. Daniel Chaplin, the Commander of our Regiment, was a military man, a veteran and an excellent Drill Master.

After all the special details had been made for the day, there remained about 100 men for drill, two hours in the forenoon and two hours in the
afternoon.

In the forenoon the drilling was by company by the Commanding Officer, generally the Captain.

In the afternoon it was by Regiment by the Commanding Officer, generally the Colonel, this was called Battalion drill.

Our Captain, Harrison G. Smith, was a nice clever man but not much interested in military matters, and did not give much of his time to study, so he did not enjoy the drilling business very well, so he would put the job over to Lieut. Newingham when he could find some excuse for doing so, but of course he could not play that on the Colonel very often, as he expected the officers to be well drilled as well as the rest of the company.

There was a large cleared field not far from the fort. It was not quite level but nearly so after being smoothed up a little, it made a very good drill ground.

Well Captain Smith would march the company on to that field and form us into line at the northwest corner. Then the order would be "Company Right Wheel".

He would then place himself in his proper position six paces in front of the center. Then the order would be "Forward March" to the southwest corner, then "Left Wheel" to the northeast corner, then "Left Wheel" to the northwest corner. This brought us back to where we started from, then it was "Left Wheel" around the field again. Well this was good exercise for the company, but after we had marched around that old field 8 or 10 times it became monotonous. We called it plowing.

Well we got along all right with the Captain. We knew he would rather be in camp building a chimney for somebody than out there plowing. So after we had plowed ten ferrows he would stack arms and give us a good long rest, then take us into camp.

The afternoon "Battalion Drill" with Colonel Chaplin in command was an entirely different matter. Our Regiment had a Band and Drum corps so for the battalion drill, either the Drum corps or the Band would be on the field.

All of the Company did not fall in for battalion drill, and there were a few members of the company among the recruits that were never seen on battalion drill or Dress Parade.

I think as a general thing the boys most of us enjoyed the Battalion drill, as there was something new going on all the time, marching by flank, breaking into company while marching by flank, instantly changing into line again, forward in line of battle, etc. All this was interesting and necessary to keep us in trim for the time when we got our call to go to the front, where we all expected to go and were glad when we got the order.

**BIG GUN DRILL**

The principal Battery at Fort Sumner was composed of what were called "Seacoast 32 pounders". They were cast iron guns of 6 inches bore and the solid cast iron shot weighed 32 lbs. The gun weighed about
7000 lbs. and was mounted on a wooden carriage on a platform made of 3-inch pine plank. The end of the carriage next to the parippett turned on a pivot, the rear end was on two iron wheels that run on an iron rail in a circular form, so that the gun could be pointed to the right or left as the occasion should require to hit the target.

There was a detail from my company about twice each week to learn the Artillery drill. Whenever I was in the detail my station was at one of the Seacoast guns. I was gunner and had command of the gun while in practice. The sights of the 32 pounders were white chalk marks on the top of the muzzle and breach. We went through the motions of loading and firing same as in battle with the exception that we did not handle the powder and ball. I remember of firing my gun only once, that time I aimed for a target on the side of a hill 1000 yards away, hit the ground under it.

There was one 100 lb. Parrott Rifle Gun, this was the largest gun in the fort. It was of six inch bore and the shell was about 16 inches long and weighed 100 lbs. This gun was 16 feet long and weighed 17000 lbs. Mounted on a steel carriage. The first time they fired this big gun at a target up on the north side of the Potomac three miles away, it rebounded and slid off the rear end of the carriage and tumbled over into the middle of the fort. Had to send to Washington for a derick and crew to get her back on the carriage. Nobody hurt. Did not hit the target. Don't remember whether the shell landed in Maryland or Virginia.

There was a little Rodman steel rifle, 3 inch bore. She was mounted on wheels, same as all small cannon that were used with an army in the field.

**DRESS PARADE**

In the summer time after supper we would have Dress Parade. This was a fancy affair. We all turned in the ranks in our best uniforms. Frock coat, paper collar, white gloves, shoes blacked, and with guns and full equipment, with brasses and guns shining. The company would form in company avenue, then march to the Battalion drill ground and there take its proper place in Regimental line. When each company was in position the Adjutant would take command. The first order would be "Attention Battalion, Shoulder arms, To the rear open order March", the rear rank would step backward four paces. "Right Dress, Front, Order arms, Parade rest." At this command every man would bring his right foot backward, at the same time throw the muzzle of his gun over to his left shoulder, clasp his hands over his gun, cast his eyes straight to the front and remain motionless.

"Troup Beat Off". At this command the band would take its proper position and march down in front of the Regiment with slow music, just as if they were attending a funeral, then countermarch back to the right of Regiment with a quick lively tune.

"Attention Battalion. Shoulder arms. Close Order march", then the adjutant would march down to the center of Regiment and take his position.
about halfway towards the Colonel, and give the command, "Present Arms". Turn to the Colonel, present arms and say "Sir, the Parade is formed". The adjutant then takes his position in rear of the Colonel. The Colonel draws his sword and salutes, then comes the command "Shoulder Arms", then he puts us through the "Manual of Arms" and if everything goes all right to suit him the drill is over, but if when we order arms those gun butts don't all strike the ground at the same instant, then we repeat it until they do. The Adjutant takes his place again in front of center, "First Sergeants to the Front and Center". Each First Sergeant reports the condition of his company, then at the command returns to his post. "Captains to the front and center" - the Captains then march to the center, the Adjutant takes his position in the center, and they then are marched up to the Colonel and salute. If the Colonel has any remarks to make to the company commanders he takes this opportunity, otherwise he dismisses them and the parade is over. One of the Companies with the Band will escort the Flag back to the Regimental Headquarters. Each company will march back to camp where the men are dismissed, break ranks, and that ends the day's work.

There was another form of Drill that we used to call "Midnight Dress Parade". About midnight or a little after, when everything was quiet and peaceful, and every member of the Regiment in camp was sound asleep, the Picket Guard about a mile away up the River Road would discharge a volley. This would be heard by the guards at the fort, they would discharge their guns and then the fun commenced. The Drum Corps would turn out and sound the "Long Roll". This was the signal for every man on duty in each company to get out of bed, get on his uniform, get on his equipments and get into company line without delay. The 1st Sergeant would call the Roll, note absentees, and woe be to the poor Private that could not show a good reason for his absence. The Captain would march the company to its position in Regimental line, where we found the Colonel in command already to assign each company to its position in the fort.

This matter of signals was all prearranged by the Colonel, but the boys did not know it, and the first time we were called out in this manner I thought sure that the Rebs were making a raid on Washington, but I lost interest in the raiding business when I noticed we were not ordered to load our guns. We practiced this midnight drill often during the warm weather, and we became quite efficient. I think the best time we ever made in getting into Regimental line was 7 minutes.

MASON'S ISLAND

In August 1863, four companies of our Regiment including Company H were detached and ordered to take up their march for Mason's Island as a guard for the Conscript camp. Mason's Island is located in the Potomac River on the Virginia side opposite the city of Georgetown. The island is about 1/2 mile long and belonged to a man by the name of Mason.
There was a large brick house on the island with a fine lawn and beautiful shade trees surrounding. Lieut. Col. Thomas A. Talbot was in command of the Battalion and he made his Headquarters at this house. I was ordered to report to Headquarters and served as clerk there during our stay on the island. Besides Col. Talbot, the other officer at the house was Lieut. Newingham who was acting as an aid to the Colonel. My duties were very light, employing not more than one hour each day, and some days I had not anything to do but sit on the piazza and smoke my pipe or walk about among the trees.

The Conscripts would arrive on the island in squads of ten or more, and line up in front of Headquarters. It was my duty to take their names and addresses and search them, to see that they had no citizen's clothing concealed about their persons. I was assisted by the guard that was always on hand. About one half of the Conscripts that arrived while I was there were "Bounty Jumpers" and nothing else. They would arrive clothed in a long overcoat over their uniform and in one pocket I would find a pair of thin pants and in another pocket a cap. They were preparing to skip the first opportunity. Of course I took charge of all that stuff and stowed it away in a large room in the second story of the house. When I left, that room was half full, and I should like to know whatever became of all those coats, etc. I attached a card with the names of the owners to the coat and told them they could have them when they called and showed an Honorable Discharge from the U.S. Army.

We remained on that island until the last week in October when we were glad to get orders to march back to the fort. About two weeks after our return I was taken with Chills and Fever and was quite sick, so they sent me to the Regimental Hospital and I was there two weeks. I don't think I ever recovered from the effects of that fever.

WE JOIN THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC

On the 15th day of May 1864 our Regiment received orders to join the Army of the Potomac. We packed our knapsacks with all of our clothing, Haversacks with three day's rations, Cartridge Boxes with 40 rounds of ammunition, shouldered our Rifles and marched down through Georgetown, and Washington, crossed the Potomac on the long bridge and thence to Alexander where we took a steamer down the river to Belle Plain landing, from thence through Fredricksburg to Spotsylvania Court House where we joined the Second Army Corps, commanded by Major General Hancock on the evening of the 16th of May.

On the next day we occupied the rebel works that were captured on the 12th of May by the Second Corps called the bloody angle. There was a line of battle in front of us in the woods out of our sight and there was continual firing all day, and wounded men were passing through our line all day, and occasionally a shell from the enemy would pass over our heads rather too close for comfort. Next day we moved to a new position nearby, and all day long troops were passing going south. The next day
was the 19th of May and a day long to be remembered by the First Maine Heavy, as it was on this day we received our baptism of fire and learned the stern duties of a soldier. We were camped in an open field with a heavy growth of pine surrounding. We stacked our guns in the field and lay down under the trees, as it was a very hot day. About 4 o'clock in the afternoon black clouds began to roll up in the northwest with very heavy thunder. Soon it began to rain and it came down in torrents. Firing was heard up on our right and soon a staff officer came dashing up and spoke to our Colonel. In an instant he was mounted on his horse and the order rang out "Fall in First Maine". We knew something was up and in five minutes we were in line and on the double quick towards the firing. We soon arrived on the scene of action and from the top of a hill we discovered the rebel skirmish line down in the meadow, and as soon as we came into view they commenced firing at us. Our Regiment was terribly excited and every man was giving orders, but Col. Chaplin drew his sword, placed himself in front of the Regiment where he could be seen, and he soon restored order, and we marched down across a road.

There was one noticeable incident in our first encounter with the enemy that I think worthy of mention. When we arrived in sight of the Jonnies, they were in the meadow while our position was on the high land about three hundred yards away. They were the skyline firing as they retreated to join the main line on a ridge beyond. Our men were terribly excited and we were all giving orders and there was a terrible racket. There was one boy in our company that did not lose his head, and attending strictly to business he jumped in front of the left of the company and rested his gun on his knee and fired. By this time the Colonel was out in front and had the Regiment under control. That boy was Johny Welch of Company H. The Colonel noticed that Johny was commencing the battle a little too soon and ordered him back into ranks, and we took up our position further to the right. I think that was the first shot our Regiment fired in that battle. We found the rebel skirmishers plundering a provisions train. They had captured the teamsters, shot the mules, and were smashing the pork barrels when we arrived. We did not stop, but marched through the woods, and when we came out into the open we fetched up against a rebel line of battle about forty yards off. They gave us a terrible volley and we returned the fire, and for over one hour we stood up there and blazed away. After a volley or two it was all smoke and confusion and we could see nothing to fire at, but we kept on until the rebs, about dark, gave it up and retreated.

I fired my rifle about twenty shots and it got so hot that I could not touch the iron barrel. At one time during the battle I discovered the rebel flag through the smoke. I spoke to Otis Coffin who stood next to me on my right to "see the flag" and we both fired at the same time. About dark reinforcements came, and we were relieved and went to the rear. Our Regiment lost 529 men killed and wounded. That night we camped along side of a road in a swamp and it was so cold that I don't think I slept a wink all night.
The next day, the 20th of May, we moved to the North Anna River, crossed the bridge under the fire of a rebel battery that was dropping the shells upon that bridge as fast as they knew how. Nobody was hit in our company. We took possession of an old breastwork a short distance from the river and went without anything to eat all day, as the trains were unable to keep up with the army. We remained at the North Anna two days with no fighting on our front.

On the night of the 26th we recrossed the bridge that was covered with brush, so that the rebs could not discover that we were on the move again.

On the 30th of May our Regiment crossed Tolopotomy Creek and drove the first line of rebs from the top of a hill, where we halted and lay down on the hot sand, in plain view of a rebel battery about 300 yards in front. I think I recall the next two hours as the most trying two hours that I experienced while I was in the army. It was a very hot day, there was no shade and the sun beat down upon us, and laying upon that hot sand it was very uncomfortable. And to make matters doubly worse, that rebel battery would toss a shell at us. Most of them would pass screaming overhead and burst in the rear, but there was one that they cut the fuse just right and it burst directly over the company. One fragment hit Sergeant F. C. Plummer in the top of the head and he was killed instantly.

In a few minutes he was buried a few rods from where he fell in a rebel skirmish pit. Sergeant Emerson was severely wounded in the arm by the same shell.

There were three lines of battle behind our Regiment, and no doubt it was the intention to make a strong attack at this point, but for some reason it was abandoned, and in about two hours much to our relief we moved off to the right out of range of that battery.

The next day, the 31st of May, after a short march, we fetched up at Cold Harbor.

In the attack of June 2nd, our Regiment was in reserve. We lay behind a hill to the rear, about half a mile, Occasionally a solid shot from the enemy would come bouncing over the hill, but there was no one injured in my company that day. This was a terrible battle and the loss was very heavy, and our army was repulsed all along the line. General Grant afterwards expressed his regrets that this attack was made. After this battle our Regiment took a position in an old breastwork near a millpond and remained there until the 12th day of June.

Every afternoon about six o'clock that millpond would be full of boys in swimming. At the same time the band at Brigade Headquarters would strike up, across on the other side of the pond and soon after, from our front would come the strains of "Dixie" from the rebel band. Then to make things interesting, the batteries on each side would open and bang away at each other for about half an hour.

On the 1st day of June I was promoted to Sergeant, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Sergeant Plummer.

On the 12th day of June we again took up our march and crossed the
Chickahominy River on our way south. We reached Charles City Court House and on the night of the 14th of June, crossed the James River on ferry boats. We waited the next forenoon on the south bank for rations that did not come. That afternoon we marched on, and late in the afternoon we came to the outer defences of Petersburg.

A small part of one hardtack was all I had to eat that day. Howard Stratton had a small piece of pork and I had one hardtack, so we pooled our rations and made a "Hungy-Gungy", and just as we sat down to enjoy our banquet, along came Captain Smith, so we shared our small allowance with him.

Three days afterwards as we were about to start on the fatal charge, he returned the compliment by offering both comrade Stratton and myself a drink from his canteen. We both declined with thanks. In less than half an hour, we all three lay wounded upon the bloody field. The Captains wounds were slight, comrade Stratton died the next day. I survived and 60 years after write this story.

Soon after we had finished this last hardtack there was a detail from Company H of twelve men to go to the skirmish line. I was detailed to take command of the squad. Just as we went over the breastworks, I noticed three dead Jonnies laying in a heap, that were killed the day before when the cavalry attacked and captured this outer line.

My orders from the Lieutenant in command of the skirmish line was to advance slowly, keep under cover as much as possible, and shoot when we found the enemy. We advanced as ordered about 200 yards when there was a scattering discharge of musketry from our front about 100 yards away, so we jumped behind a big tree and returned the fire. There was nobody hit but we made quite a lot of noise. Looking to the rear I discovered our Regiment advancing in line of battle. Soon after passing us the rebel skirmishers opened fire. The Regiment gave them one volley and charged and drove them out of the woods, across a field and out in the woods beyond. As soon as they got to the edge of the woods they halted, threw up breastworks, stopped there all night and the next day. The skirmishers joined them later.

While the company was laying behind the breastworks the next day, I was ordered by the Captain to take one man and go to the rear and bring up the whiskey rations. I took Frank Bennett, and with four canteens each we went back about a quarter of a mile until we found the train that had just arrived with all kinds of rations. We had our canteens filled and hurried back as quick as we could for we knew the boys were awful dry.

Just before we reached the company, the darned Jonnies commenced firing from a bunch of trees about 200 yards in front, so we had to wait some time before we could join the company. We got there at last with the eight canteens full and were very welcome. We divided that whiskey the best we could among about 75 men. A few of the company did not take any, Sergeant Buzzle was one. I never saw him take a drink while in the army. Sergeant Buzzle was my guardian appointed by my mother and he set me a good example. There was not enough in that ration to do much good, or much harm either for that matter.
THE FATAL CHARGE JUNE 18TH

On the morning of the 18th there was no sign of the enemy in front. All was quiet as the sun rose. It appeared that the enemy had retired during the night. Our Regiment was formed into line faced to the right in columns of four and marching by file left over the breastworks directly towards where we last saw the enemy the night before. We marched through the now deserted picket line of the Jonnies and a little way beyond the Regiment was massed in an open field. We remained there about half an hour. The Colonel knew perfectly well what he was about, but the rank and file could not understand such a movement as that. This was what is called "Armed Reconnoissance". We were placed in this exposed position to draw the fire of the enemy, but they let us entirely alone. We marched back over the breastworks into the woods and lay down in the shade of the pines. About 3 o'clock in the afternoon we marched a short distance to the right and formed in three lines in a sunken road.

THE FATAL CHARGE

We could see by looking over the embankment of the road a cleared field in front and on the further edge of the field a line of breastworks about 300 yards away. There was a large brick house on the left side about halfway across the field. We could plainly see that the breastworks were occupied by men and cannon, and we were informed that we had been ordered to assault and take the breastworks. I think every man present realized the hopelessness of the undertaking, but it is a soldier's duty to obey orders, and when Colonel Chaplin from his station in front rang out the order "First Maine Forward Charge", we sprang forward with a cheer upon what we all knew was a forlorn hope, and as soon as we showed ourselves out of the sunken road the Jonnies opened on us with musketry and artillery.

That field became a seething hell. Our supports on the right and on the left recoiled and refused to go. We were left entirely alone to receive the fire. They poured it into us from the front, from the right and from the left, and inside of ten minutes over 600 of the First Maine Heavy lay either dead or wounded upon the bloody field.

WOUNDED

The position of my company that day was in the left center of the second line. My position as Sergeant was in rear of the right of the company, that brought me directly under the colors. I remember that the waving flag slapped me in the face as we started. This brought me in the vortex of the fire.

I was hit by the first volley. A rifle ball struck me in the right hip and I fell forward. I can't remember what occurred afterward until I regained consciousness just before sunset. When I came to I was very
thirsty. I managed in some way to get my canteen to my mouth, and although it was about full I drained it to the last drop, and then was just as thirsty as ever. The bullets were zipping by me and striking the ground around, and there was a small red cedar tree a few feet in my front, and I thought if I could get behind that it would be some protection. I tried to get upon my knees but I found my entire right side was paralyzed, but with my left toe and hand I dragged myself up to the tree, and just as I was working around to get the tree, if possible, between me and the Jonnies, a bullet zipped me in the left leg. After that I lay still.

The enemy was firing at everything moving, but soon darkness came on, and then the survivors began to rescue the wounded. I was soon rolled into a blanket and carried to an ambulance near and taken to the Division Hospital about half a mile away. I noticed Colonel Chaplin standing by the ambulance when they put me in. I was laid on the ground near the tents but received no attention from anyone, as the doctors and nurses were all busy with the cases where it is necessary to amputate to save life. I lay there on my face suffering from thirst and a terrible pain in my hip until about 2 o'clock next morning when somebody came along and rolled me over, and I discovered that it was E. L. Hall, the drummer of my company. "Hello, do you want anything?" Well I should smile. Do I want anything? Well I should say I did. I never was so glad to see anybody in my life. "Get me a drink of water and a doctor." He was gone over an hour and it seemed a week, when he came with a Sanitary Doctor and some coffee and whiskey. I drank the coffee and oh, didn't that taste good.

The doctor was an old grey-whiskered man sent to the front by the Sanitary Commission; they were a great help in time of need like the present. He turned me over to examine my wound, put his probe in the bullet hole looking for the bullet. His probe fetched up against the hip bone. I told him if he would turn me over on my face, I thought I might locate the ball. I felt around with my left hand the best I could and finally I told him it was right under my finger. He examined the spot with his fingers and said that I was right, there it is. He jabbed his lance in and struck the ball the first time. It was about three inches deep and about three inches from the lower end of my backbone. He could not get it the first time he put his nippers on it, as he had to cut again to make a bigger hole. He brought it out with three pieces of cloth on the end of it. He gave me the ball, told me I had the toughest hide he ever saw and away he went, and I have never seen him since.

When the doctor left, Link Hall went also to carry his kit of instruments, and I didn't see Link Hall again.

About two o'clock the next afternoon along came Charley Beale of the Band and Drum Corps, and he removed my bloody clothing, washed me the best he could, dressed my wound and got me a cotton flannel shirt and pair of drawers, so I felt better. The next day I was moved into a tent out of the hot sun. I had hardtack and coffee to eat, but I did not have much appetite.
Two days after I was moved to City Point. The ambulances were all in use so they put about a foot of pine boughs in the bottom of the baggage wagons to make a little spring and used them instead. I was placed in one of those wagons with three other wounded men and carted to City Point. The horrors of that ride cannot be described by my pen. I remember nothing that occurred soon after we started. I got to City Point and found myself in a tent laying on the bare ground with nothing over me and almost dead. I survived, however, and remained at City Point until the 2nd day of July, when I was sent by hospital boat to Wolfe Street Hospital, Alexander. I arrived at the Wolfe Street Hospital on the Fourth of July. I was placed on a cot bed with some nice clean soft blankets to lay on. My wound was properly dressed and although I could not sit up I felt that I was almost well. I went to sleep right off and slept most all day. When I waked up I found an orange on my bed; some good Samaritan had been in. That was the sweetest orange I ever tasted.

I was in Wolfe Street Hospital over seven months; that is it was over seven months from the time I got there to when I left to join my company. During this time I was absent on furlough 2-1/2 months.

The hospitals provided for the common soldier during the Civil War would not be tolerated at the present day. I judge from my own experience. I did not have proper care while I was badly wounded and helpless. One day I discovered maggots in my wound; that was because it was not properly dressed. The nurses were mostly cowardly shirks, no good at the front or anywhere else. The government furnished condensed milk and whiskey to make into punch for a stimulant for those who were badly hurt. The nurses drank most of the whiskey. The food was poor and not enough of it when a man became convalescent and hungry.

BACK TO THE FRONT

I made two applications before I gained the doctor's permission to join my company, and then he told me that he did not think I would be able to do much marching under the conditions at the front. However, I got started after a while, went by transport to City Point, thence by the Military Railroad sitting on a bale of hay to the end of the road.

From there to the 2nd Corps, then to the Third Division, then to my Regiment and Company H, all tired out. I reported to Captain Smith for duty, but I told him I was afraid I should not be able to do much marching. He informed me that the regiment was under marching orders, and would pack up and start next morning. There would be a detail for picket duty, and he would send me in command of the squad. So that night I went on picket about one mile from camp. The next morning along came the 2nd Corps, with a squadron of cavalry in advance. The pickets were ordered to fall in with the Regiment. It was supposed we were going on one of those raids, so the Captain gave me a pass and ordered me to go back to the camp and look after the company property that was left in his tent. I stayed in that tent a week and had a
good rest. The next day after I arrived at the tent there was heavy firing at the front, and the Chaplain of the Regiment who happened to be in the tent with me at the time was very much disturbed and groaned to beat the band. He said our Regiment was being slaughtered again, but it did not happen to be our Regiment that day. Well, when we learned that the Regiment was back in quarters again, I packed up what pork and beans I had left, and getting some of the boys to help me we sacked them back to camp. I found the company all right in winter quarters again.

From now on to the 25th of March there was nothing doing and we had quite an easy time. But on the 25th the spring campaign opened in good earnest, and from that date until the 9th day of April, when Lee surrendered, there was something doing, there was no doubt of that.

THE LAST CAMPAIGN

General Lee opened the campaign on the 25th of March by making a desperate attempt to break through our lines on the right near City Point. They crept upon the pickets in front of Fort Steadman just as the day was breaking, overpowered them and rushed on for the fort. Before the garrison of Fort Steadman had time to man the works, the Jonnies were inside the fort. They captured part of the garrison, the rest escaped. The Jonnies held the fort for an hour or more, but our troup from every direction poured in such a terrible fire of shot and shell that they finally gave in and surrendered. This Fort Steadman was built on that bloody field where the First Maine Heavy Artillery met such a heavy loss on the 18th day of June 1864.

Thus ended Lee's attempt to break through our lines. From this time on he was on the defensive, making a desperate struggle to save the Southern Confederacy.

To relieve the pressure from his right, General Grant ordered the 2nd Corps at Hatcher's Run to attack the picket line. Our Regiment was engaged that day, charged and captured the picket line twice. Our loss was 20 killed and wounded. From this time on it was march and counter-march through the woods and swamps over corduroy, through rain and mud. Our Regiment was engaged again at Hatcher's Run on the 28th.

On the afternoon of April 1st, our Regiment occupied a breastwork close up to the enemy's line on the extreme left of the army. Along in the middle of the afternoon there was a great cheering heard on our right, it kept coming nearer, and bye and bye there burst from the woods a troup of officers carrying the United States Flag. We knew then that it was General Grant, as all other generals carried a corps flag. We joined in the cheering, and as he passed our Regiment the Rebels opened a battery on him firing three shots. The shells burst near his party but nobody was hit, and they soon got under cover down on the left and out of sight. This was the first, last and only time I ever saw General Grant.
On the morning of April 2nd my Regiment advanced and found that the Jonnies had abandoned the works in our front from which they had been shelling General Grant the day before. We halted just outside of their breastworks in front of a large white house. Some of the boys in the rear of the Regiment strolled over to the house to take a look inside. They soon came out on the run, and when we took up our march again the house was in flames. About noon we came upon the inner line of the defenses of Petersburg, and we could see that they were fully manned. Across a valley in our front we could see a large fort with flag on the flag pole and men in the works. To the left of the fort was a field battery with the horses hitched up already to give us a dose of canister if we should make an assault and then skeedaddle, While laying on the ground there resting I witnessed the assault and capture of the fort mentioned above by the troops from the corps on our right. They had a hard struggle, there was lots of firing with cannon and musketry, but our flag finally went over the works and the enemy surrendered. I learned from history that the 10th Connecticut Regiment lost 250 men in that charge.

The next morning, April 3rd, it was found that the Rebel Government and army had abandoned both Petersburg and Richmond. Then commenced the race to overtake Lee and his army.

I marched one-half of the first day when my hip failed me and I was obliged to fall out. As it happened, Colonel R.B. Shepherd who was then in command of the Regiment had got something in his eye the day before and was almost blind, so he was marching in rear of the Regiment instead of at his station in front. He saw me limping along and asked me what's the matter. I told him. "Why don't you get a pass?" I told him I could not find the doctor. He put spurs to his horse, and away he went for the front of the Regiment. Inside of ten minutes I had a pass. I sat down along side of the road and I did not see the Regiment again until after the surrender of General Lee and his army. I was joined by other cripples like myself, and we made up a squad of ten and hung together until we arrived at Berksville Junction on the South side R.R., where there was a hospital.

I don't remember who we had in command of that army of cripples while we were wandering in the rear. We slept nights in old barns and tobacco sheds, and we took turns in standing guard against any Gorillars that might be on the warpath. We begged, borrowed or stole something to eat as we went along. My pass admitted me to the field hospital at Berksville Junction.

I joined my company as soon as they got within hailing distance and two days after they started on the march for Washington by the way of Richmond. So again I had to leave the company and get along the best I could. I was lucky enough this time to fall in with an empty baggage wagon and a good-hearted teamster, and he took me aboard and we arrived at City Point as soon as the army.

At City Point I met Doctor Paine in the road near the Steamboat wharf. I spoke to him and he recognized me, as he was our Regimental Surgeon.
when I was in the hospital with Fever & Ague while at Fort Sumner. He gave me a pass that took me aboard the transport to Washington. I was sent to the camp for cripples near Alexander, Va. As soon as the army began to arrive in that vicinity, I heard of the 31st Maine and I went over there one day to see the boys from Harrington. Here I met Capt. Jack Cole, who was in command of the good schooner Cypress of Harrington. His ship was in the employ of the Government, and at that time was lying in the Potomac River near Alexander waiting orders. He told me if I would come aboard the next day he would give me a dinner of fish and potatoes. So the next morning I run the guard and went aboard and stayed all day. I don't think I ever had such a good dinner, before or since.

A few days after, I heard of the arrival of the 2nd Corps, so about the 20th of May I joined my company at Bailey's Crossroads, Va., about four miles from Washington. In the meantime our Captain Smith had been promoted to Major, and a man by the name of Saunders was in command of Company H. The boys hated him worse than poison because he came from another company.

Captain Saunders was glad to see me, however, and I found I had arrived just in time to be of some use as 1st Sergeant of my company. Already the arrangements were being made to discharge the army and send the soldiers home. It was the duty of the 1st Sergeant to make out the company rolls in duplicate. This was no small job. On that roll was the name of every man that ever belonged to Company H, from the 21st day of August 1862 to the present time, with Rank, Age, Height, Completion, Color of Hair, Color of Eyes, where he was born, Occupation, when he enlisted, Killed, Wounded, in Hospital, Died of Disease, Prisoner, or Missing. This all had to be done in pen and ink in duplicate. I detailed Jim Wakefield to help me and we worked at the job day and night about ten days before we had finished it.

In the meantime we went on the:

**GRAND REVIEW AT WASHINGTON, MAY 23, 1865**

On that day the Army of the Potomac passed in review before the President, General Grant, General Meade, Members of the Cabinet, Senators, Representatives, and a vast crowd of people from all over the United States.

On the next day the Grand Army of the West, under the command of General William T. Sherman repeated the performance, and the Great Review was over. This was the last time the Great Army ever marched together. Soon after, they were disbanded and sent to their homes.

After finishing the job of making out the company rolls, I had to make a discharge for every man present with the company. This took some time but I had my documents all ready when the proper officer came along to muster our Regiment out of the United States service. We were mustered out on the 6th day of June and our Discharge was signed on that date, as follows:
We took the train at Washington on the 8th day of June and arrived in Bangor on Sunday morning the 12th, where it appeared as if the entire city of Bangor had come to the depot to welcome us home. We marched to the City Hall escorted by a uniformed company that wore bearskin caps that were half as big as a barrel. Hanibal Hamlin was a member of the company, and after we had enjoyed a hearty breakfast of beans & brownbread he gave us a short address of welcome.

On the 14th day of June 1865 we were paid off. I left Bangor that afternoon with my brother, Joseph A. Coffin, Jr., who had come to meet me with a team, and we arrived home at Harrington about noon the next day.

Thus ended my duties as a soldier, (at the age of 20 years).

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**First Maine Heavy Artillery**

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This Regiment lost more men killed and died of wounds received in battle than any other Regiment in the Union Army during the Civil War.
WAR RECORD - FIRST MAINE HEAVY ARTILLERY

Aug. 21, 1862  Mustered into the United States Service at Bangor as 18th Maine Infantry Regiment.

Aug. 24  Left Bangor for Washington.

Aug. 27  Arrived at Washington.

Aug. 28 - Oct. 25  At Camp Stetson near Tenlytown

Oct. 25  Moved to Fort Alexander, Md.

Jan. 1, 1863  Transferred to First Maine Heavy Artillery

Jan. 1, 1863 to May 15, 1864  At Fort Alexander, which we rebuilt and named Fort Sumner. Regiment recruited to 1800 men.

May 15, 1864  Left to join the Army of the Potomac.

May 17  Arrived at Spottsylvania, Va.

May 18  Bloody Angle

May 19  Fight with Ewell's Corps. Regiment lost 82 killed and 394 wounded.

May 20  Congratulatory Order by General Meade, praising the Regiment for its conduct.

May 24  Crossed the North Anna River. Loss - 5.

May 30  Totopotomy Creek. Loss - 5.

June 2  Cold Harbor. Loss - 5.

June 5-12  Barker's Mill, Cold Harbor.

June 14  Crossed the James River.

June 18  Charge on enemy's works at the Hare House. 115 killed, 489 wounded.

June 22  Attack on Weldron Railroad. 3 killed, 17 taken prisoners.
Aug. 18, 1864  At Deep Bottom. 2 killed, 7 wounded. Colonel Chaplin wounded, died in Philadelphia Aug. 20.

Sept. 9-30  Under fire at "Fort Hell". Loss - 25.

Oct. 2  Battle of Squirrel Level Road. 3 killed, 7 wounded.

Oct. 27  Boydton Plank Road. 5 killed, 27 wounded.

Dec. 7  Raid at Weldon Railroad. Loss - 5.

Feb. 5, 1865  Battle at Hatcher's Run.

March 25  Assault on Rebel picket line. 4 killed, 17 wounded, 6 prisoners.

April 2  Broke enemy's line in front and moved on Petersburg.

April 6  Battle of Sailor's Creek. 4 killed, 25 wounded.

April 9  Surrender of Lee's Army.

May 23  Grand Review at Washington

June 6  Old Regiment discharged.

June 12  Arrived in Bangor.

June 14  Disbanded.