

BOOTS & SADDLES

**CIVIL WAR RELIVED
BY JOSEPH ELSOM**

**WITH DEAN LADD
GREAT GRANDSON**

2010

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INTRODUCTION

“Boots and Saddles” was a Civil War bugle call but what was the result? For a meaningful answer, let’s saddle-up and take a ride back to the living past and join Joseph Elsom in the 8th New York Volunteer Cavalry as he relives our country’s Civil War. He kept a diary starting in January, 1864, that referred to mounting-up for a possible engagement with the Confederates as “Boots and Saddles time”.

In reviewing Josephs’ diaries, my interest was enhanced as I visited many Civil War battle sites, while visiting my daughter in the Washington D.C. area. The idea for this manuscript was born. It couldn’t have happened but for the previous research done by my cousin, Larry Elsom and another great grandson of Joseph, Keith LeMay.

My writing interest shifted in earnest to the Civil War after I completed writing my own WWII memoirs of combat with the Marines in the Pacific Island campaigns as recounted in my book, *Faithful Warriors*. I have since had that book rewritten and published through the Naval Institute Press in May, 2009.

Then I became further aware of the historical information about Joseph’s regiment on web sites and from Henry Norton’s book, *Deeds of Daring—History of the Eighth NY Volunteer Cavalry* published in 1889. The web sites included reports to *The Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser* newspaper by their combat correspondent, “Genesee” who was with that regiment until he was captured during the long siege of Petersburg.

I have used some cavalry illustrations from *Arms and Equipment of the Civil War* by Jack Coggins for the cover and the pictorial chapter.

So, with the combination of these sources of historical information and my walking over the battle sites as a combat veteran, I reasoned, “Who could be better prepared to relate to those momentous and sad events in the most interesting and realistic manner to scores of other descendants and buffs?” To accomplish this, I decided to use journalistic license and have an imaginary discussion with Joseph similar to talking to a person “in the period” at a historical site. This will be in the period of 1926, at his Northville, SD home a few months before he died.

Josephs’ many descendants, far after my generation, will be particularly interested in my personal collection of old photos on pages 14 and 17 that even show his homestead farm life, with buildings and farm animals, before he moved into town. Two of the photos show my first visit to his town home as a baby in 1921.

Joseph was born December 13, 1840--the second oldest of at least eight children--in Louth, Lincolnshire County, England. I visited Louth in 1977 and looked at the same buildings as he had done as a youth. His family immigrated to New Brunswick, Canada in 1853 and moved on to Orleans County, NY the following year after his father had died from falling on ice.

On August 26, 1860, at age 19, Joseph married Jane Harmer, age 18, of Norfolk, England. A year later, he enlisted in Co. F, 8th New York Volunteer Cavalry, October 13,

1861. The regiment was assigned to the Army of the Potomac. He served for the duration of his enlistment, three years and four months, and was discharged December 15, 1864 without being wounded while fighting in 49 of the 54 engagements his regiment participated in. His brother, Thomas, served in the same regiment but was wounded at Burkeville Junction, VA and died with chronic diarrhea later on April 11, 1865 while home on furlough. Death, due to this cause, was common during that war. Joseph was one of only nine survivors from his company F in 1889.

Being in the cavalry, rather than participating in the midst of the major battles, he was involved in ongoing skirmishes back and forth over a large area. When the armies were on the move, the cavalry played an important role. It screened and protected a marching army and gathered information about the opposing force's locations and intentions. When there was a retreat, it bore the brunt of the fighting. For this reason, his action encompassed Gettysburg in the north to Petersburg in the south and from Fredericksburg in the east to the Shenandoah Valley in the west.

He narrowly escaped capture at Harpers Ferry on September 14, 1862 and again on June 27, 1864 during a daring raid to disrupt railroads connecting Petersburg to the southwest about 26 miles southwest of Roanoke. That operation was carried out because Union attacks on Petersburg had failed miserably due to poor leadership coordination and hesitation to attack the formidable defense breastworks.

To better comprehend his constant moving about, I soon realized that special maps were needed to record his tracks. Civil War buffs will find the maps in chapter 1 very useful, as they did for me when visiting battle sites and preparing this manuscript. The Virginia State Civil War Trails map, with the added listing of his cavalry engagements, on page 9, along with my overlay of it on page 10, became very helpful for geographical orientation and for visualizing the far-ranging routes of movement. Also, note research information on page 23 regarding the "Hall" carbine that Joseph complained about in his early service.

Between actions, his approximate major camp areas were located near Alexandria 11/61--3/62, near Winchester 6/62--8/62, near Warrenton 11/62--3/63 and near Cedar Creek 10/64--12/64, where his enlistment expired and he was discharged December 15, 1864. I was surprised to realize that the north discharged at the end of enlistments during that war, whereas the south didn't.

My mother recalled how he enjoyed singing "Marching through Georgia" during his four visits to Spokane, WA to be with his son, Thomas, my grandfather. I have his letter, written to my mother shortly after she was married October 4, 1919. I also have a photo on page 14 she sent to her grandfather, showing her sitting in her 5th grade class at Easter time. She had printed "Happy Easter" in large letters on the black board.

After the Civil War, Joseph lived in Carlton, Orleans County and then farmed near Oak Orchard until 1881 when their last year in New York became such an economic struggle that they decided to sell most of their belongings and start a new life in the mid-west. They homesteaded two miles north of Northville, Spink County, South Dakota (then Dakota Territory) where he farmed and bought and shipped grain. The

family grew to six living children—Thomas (my grandfather, who was the oldest), Anna, Charles, Everett, Wilson and Mary.

In 1904, after the family was raised, Joseph and Jane moved from the farm into the town of Northville. My grandfather, Thomas, had left the homestead in 1886 to seek his fortune in Spokane Falls, as it was then called and became known for installing the first telephone in that area later that year. I wrote a book, published through the Westerners, Spokane Corral, about his accomplishments based on his diary and many photos of early Spokane area development during his forty-year telephone career.

Joseph remained very active in the Grand Army of the Republic, attending many reunion encampments. I have several photos of him wearing his Civil War campaign medals. He was the first Postmaster of Northville and served one term as a Republican state representative. During a depression period he was responsible for providing supplies to many needy families-- some who became prominent in later years.

Although he told few details about his war experiences his emotions were expressed in singing patriotic songs and he participated in a debate as to who was the greatest –Washington or Lincoln. He died May 4, 1926 at Northville about a month after he saw me at age five. Jane followed six years later on July 15, 1932.

CHAPTER 1

PICTORAL OVERVIEW ABOUT JOSEPH ELSOM, CIVIL WAR VETERAN

CHRONOLOGY OF DECISIVE CIVIL WAR BATTLES

1st Manassas (Bull Run)	July 21, 1861 (Note 1)
Shiloh	April 6, '62 (Note 2)
Mechanicsville	June 26-July 1, '62 (Note 2)
2nd Manassas	Aug. 29-30, '62
Harpers Ferry	Sept. 12-15, '62
Antietam	Sept. 17, '62
Fredericksburg	Dec. 11-15, '62
Chancellorsville	May 1-3, '63
Vicksburg	May 19-July 4, '63
Murfreesboro	Late June, '63 (Note 2)
Gettysburg	July 1-3, '63 (Ended day before Vicksburg)
Chickamauga	Sept 19, '63 (Note 2)
Chattanooga	Nov. 23-25, '63 (Note 2)
Wilderness	May 5-7, '64
Spotsylvania	May 8, '64
Atlanta	May 14-Sept. 2, '64
March to Savannah	Nov. 15-Dec. 21, '64
Petersburg	June 9, '64-April 1, '65
Appomattox	March 29, '65-April 9, '65 (Note 3)

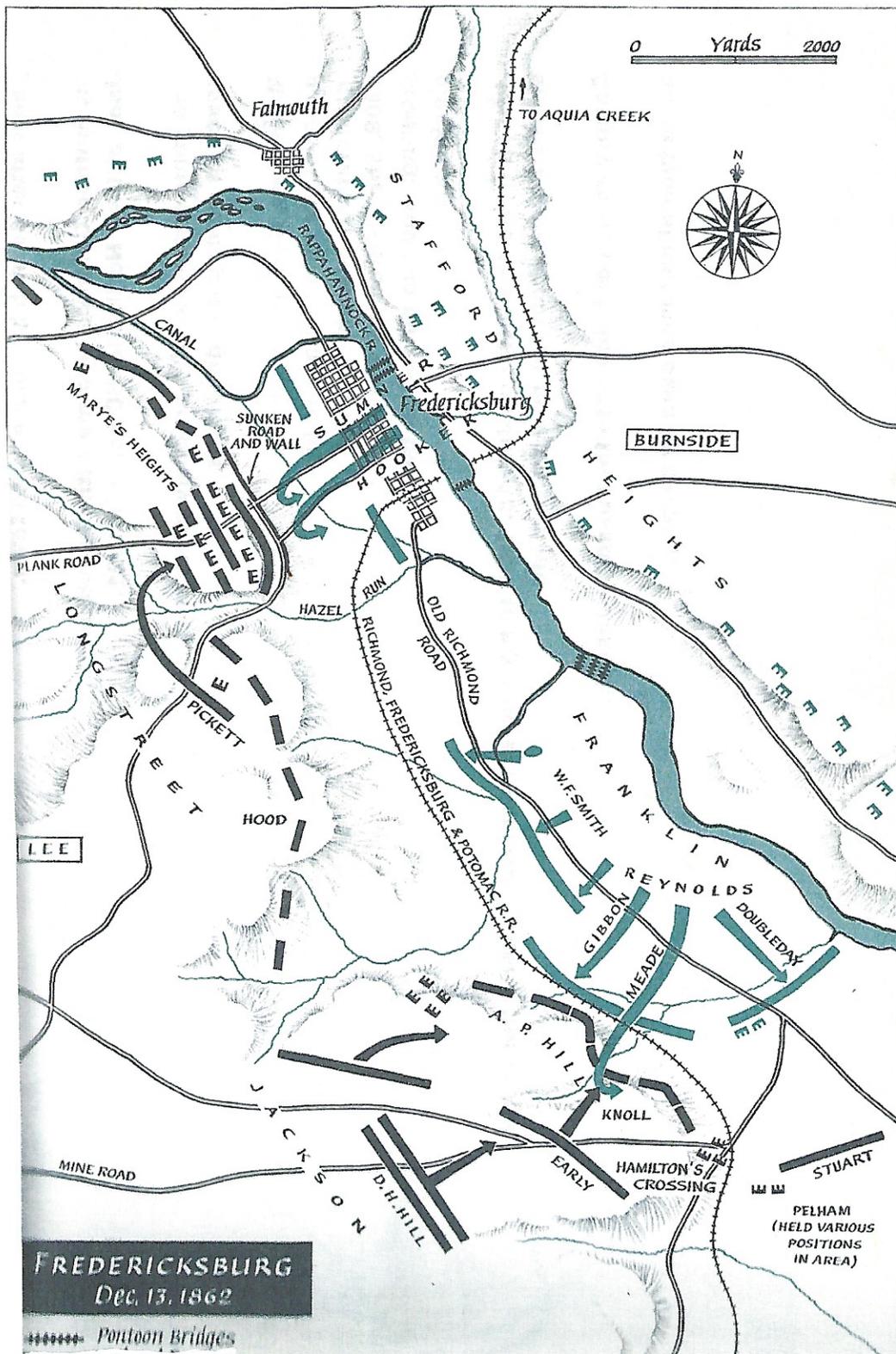
Note 1: Joseph Elsom enlisted in the 8th New York Volunteer Cavalry at Rochester, NY Oct. 13, 1861. His unit didn't get horses until nearly a year later.

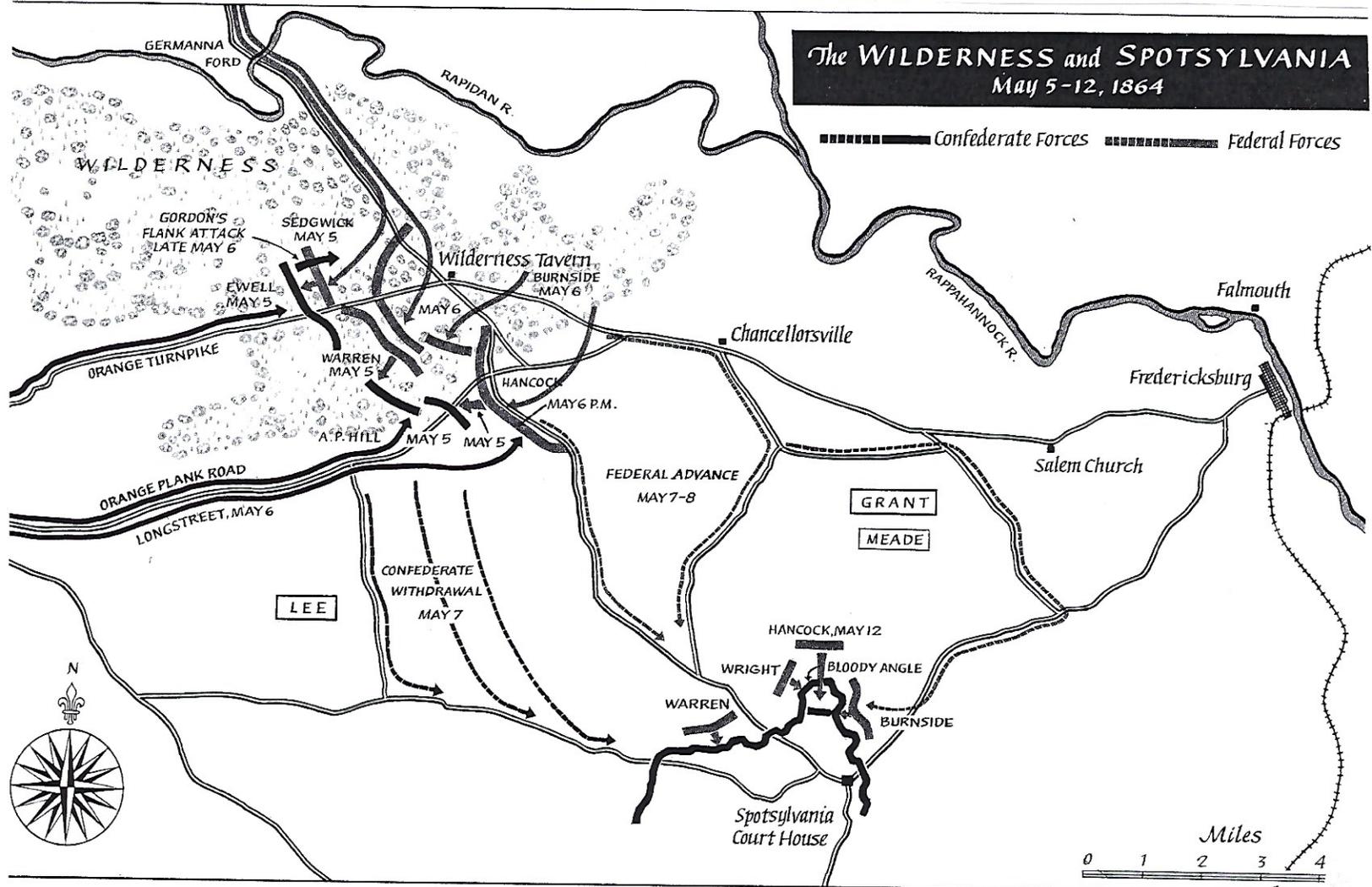
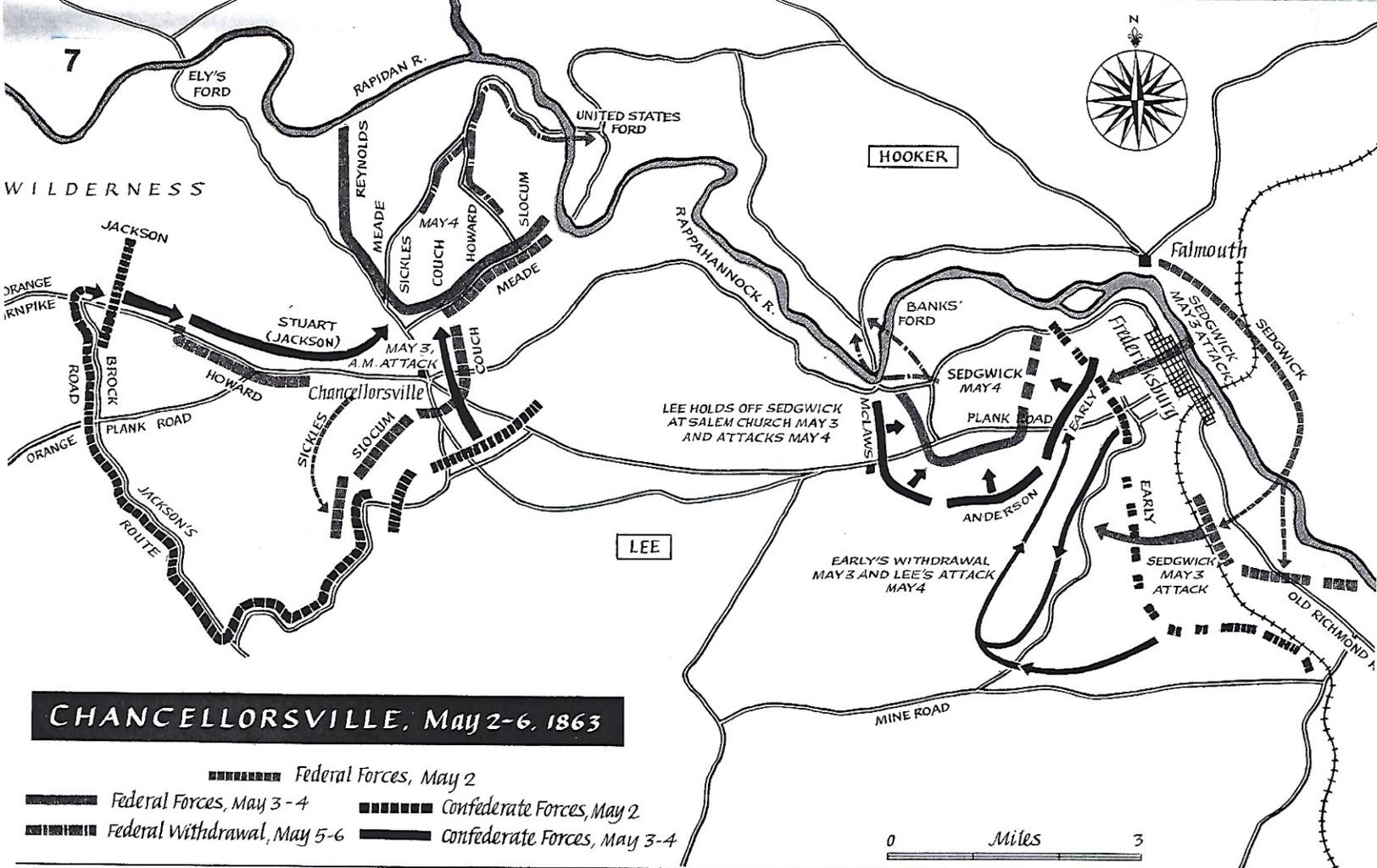
Note 2: The 8th New York Cavalry was in other lesser engagements or in camp during this period and is covered during the dialogue with Elsom.

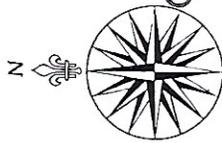
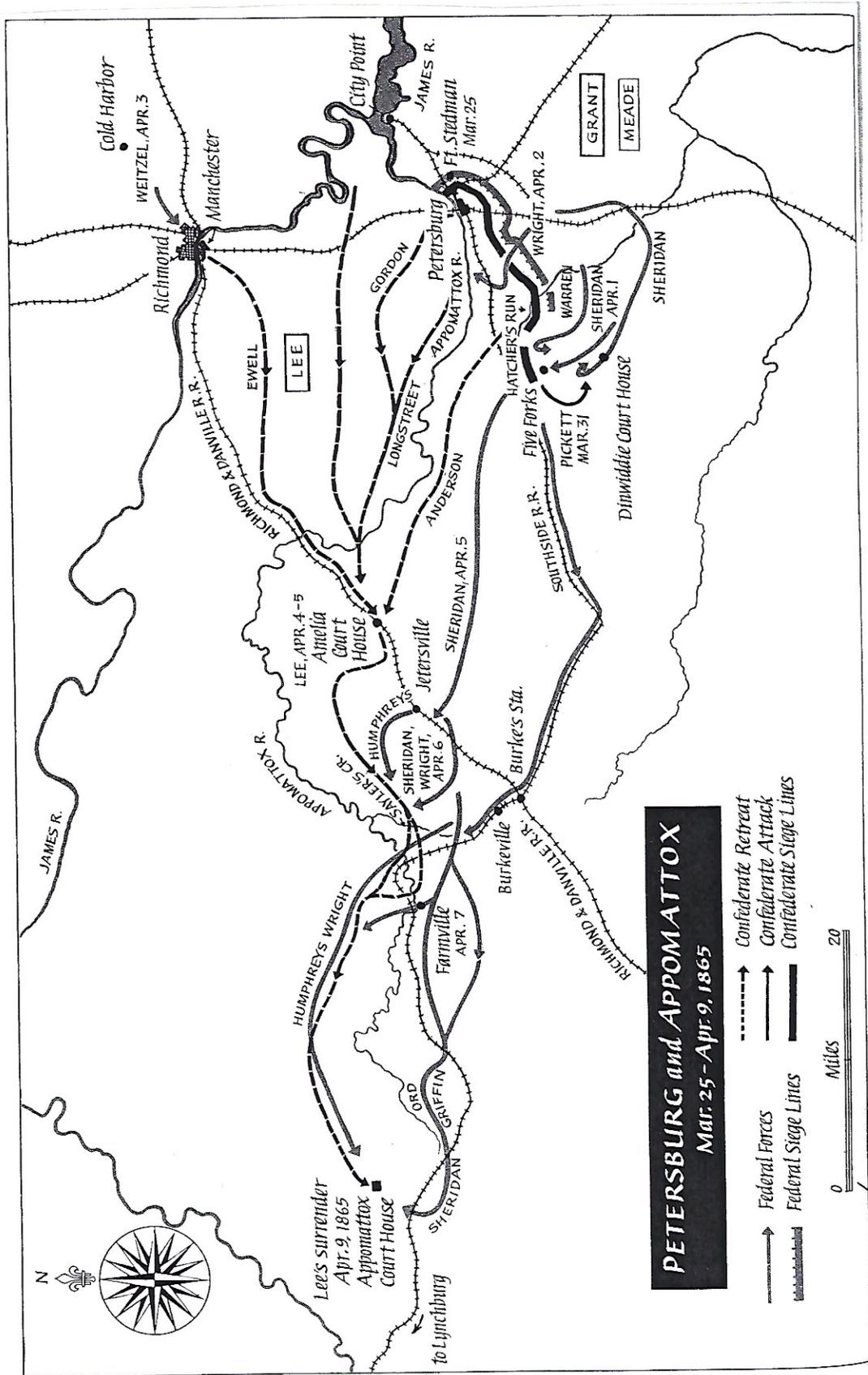
Note 3: Lee surrendered but resistance by his western army continued a month longer, with surrender of all remaining Confederate forces on May 26.

Some of these battles are displayed on the next four pages, from *Never Call It Retreat* by Bruce Catton.

These are followed by a Virginia State map I have used in visiting sites and in preparing this manuscript. I have placed large dots where Joseph Elsom campaigned with the 8th New York Cavalry and then I made a map connecting those dots, along with captions, to display his track. The state map shows battle sites, old railroads (so unique to that war), rivers and today's roads for access to these historic sites.





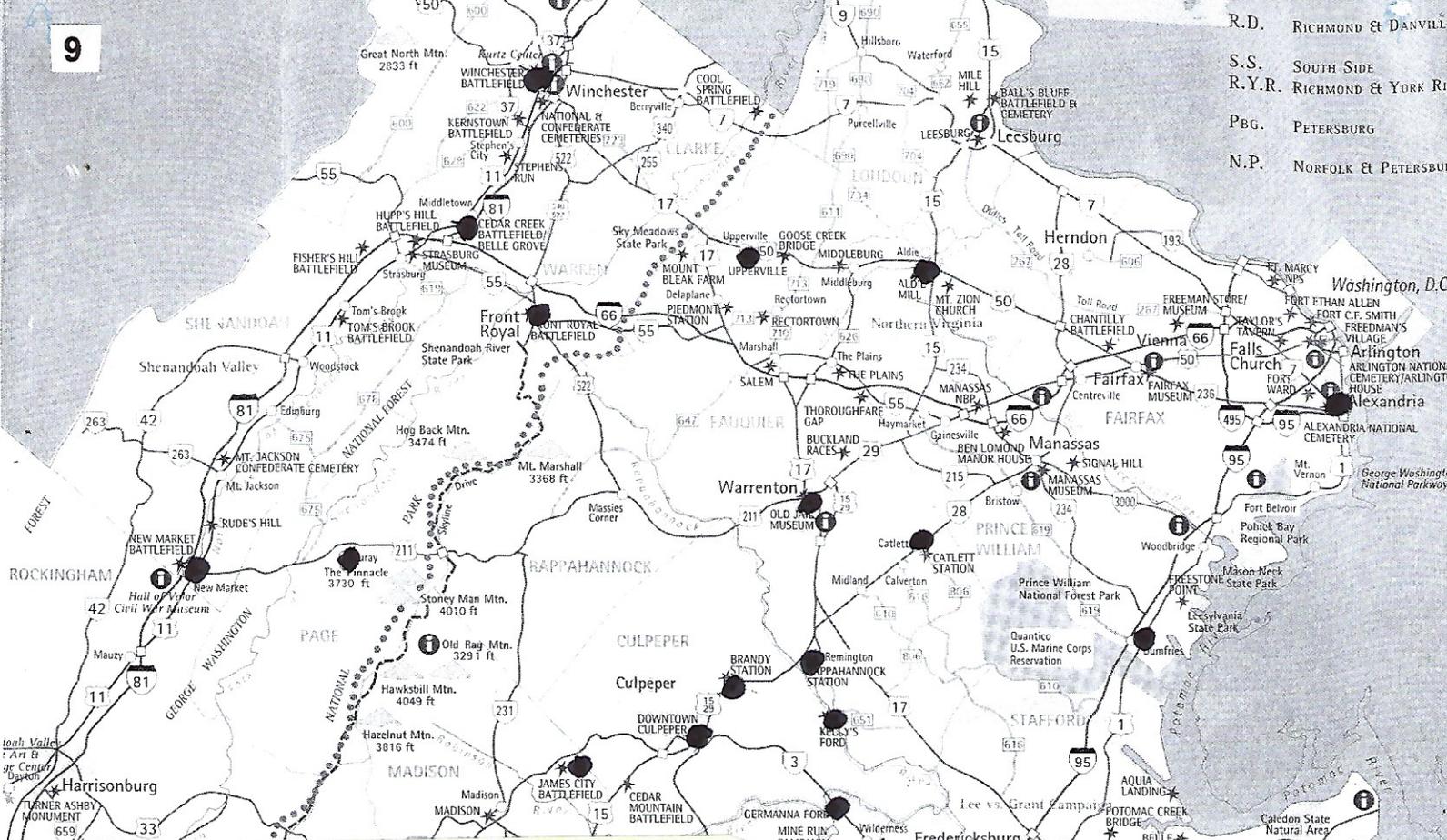


PETERSBURG and APPOMATTOX
Mar. 25 - Apr. 9, 1865

- ↑ Federal Forces
- Confederate Retreat
- Confederate Attack
- ▬ Confederate Siege Lines

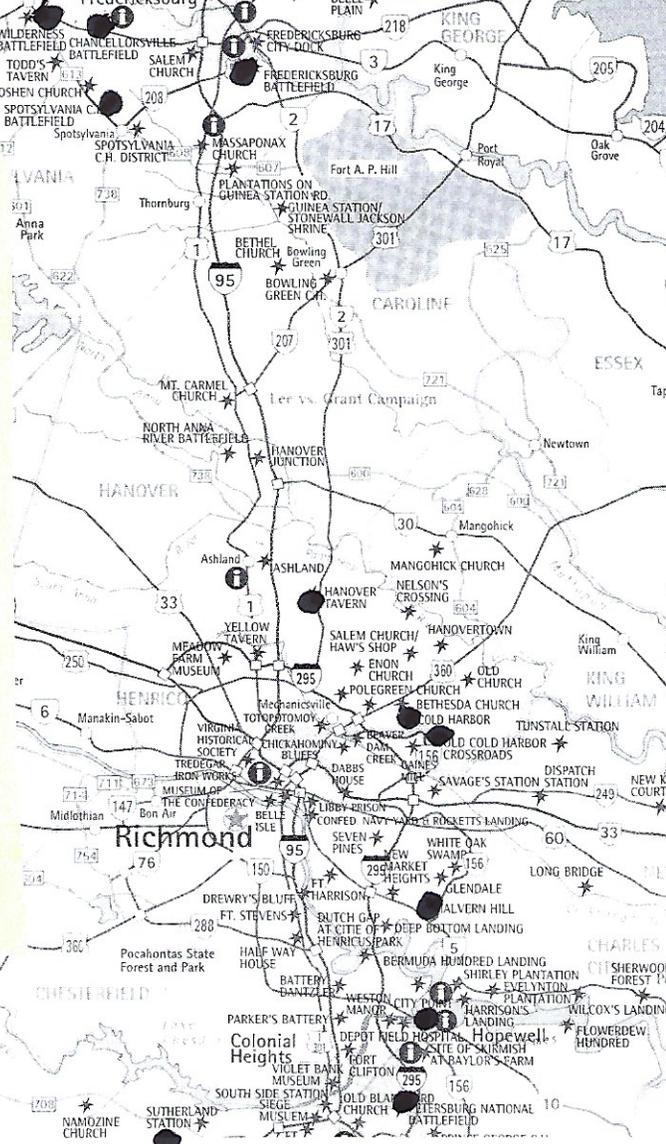
0 20 Miles

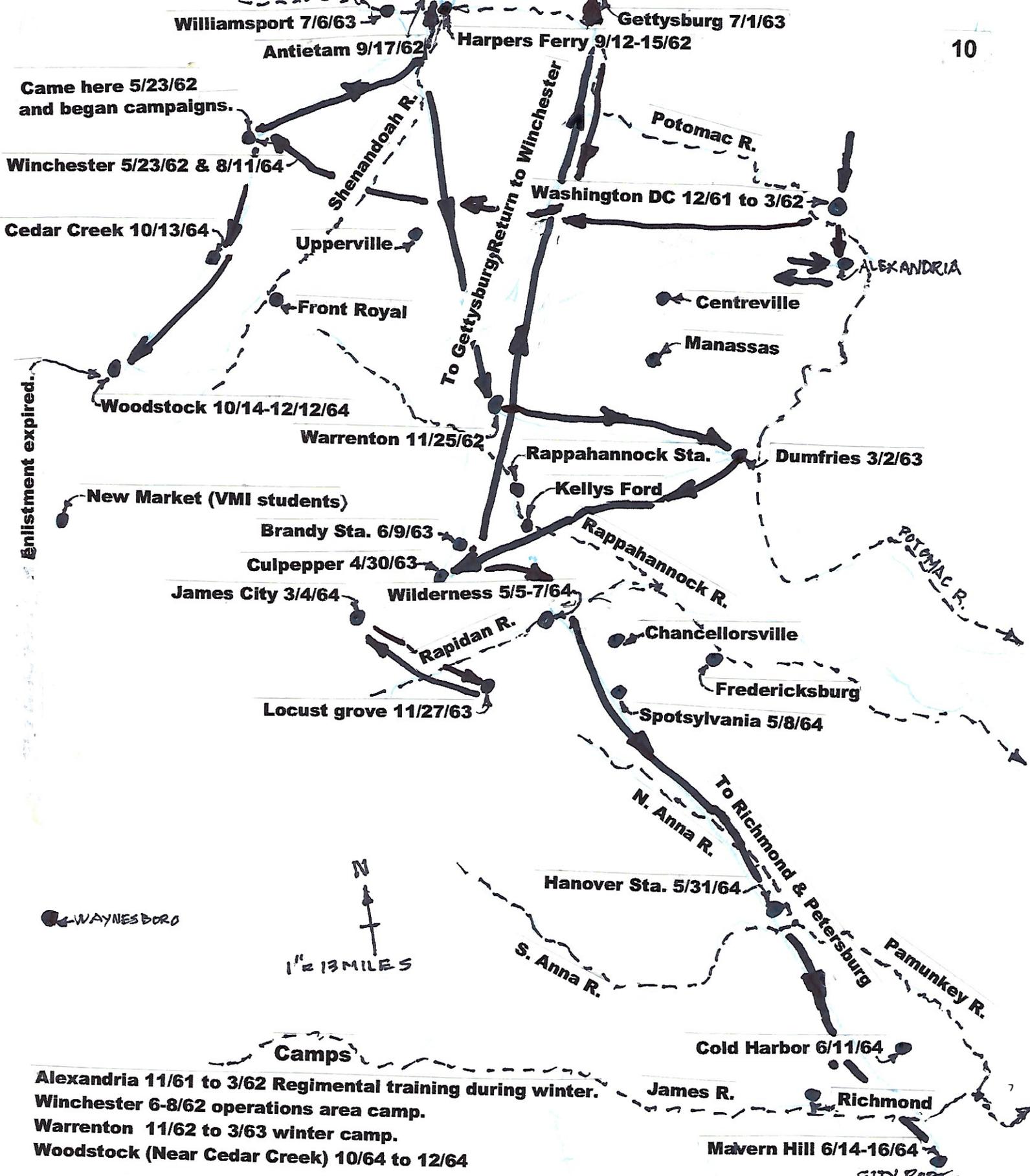
R.D. RICHMOND & DANVILLE
S.S. SOUTH SIDE
R.Y.R. RICHMOND & YORK RIVER
P.B.G. PETERSBURG
N.P. NORFOLK & PETERSBURG



NAMES AND DATES OF ENGAGEMENTS.

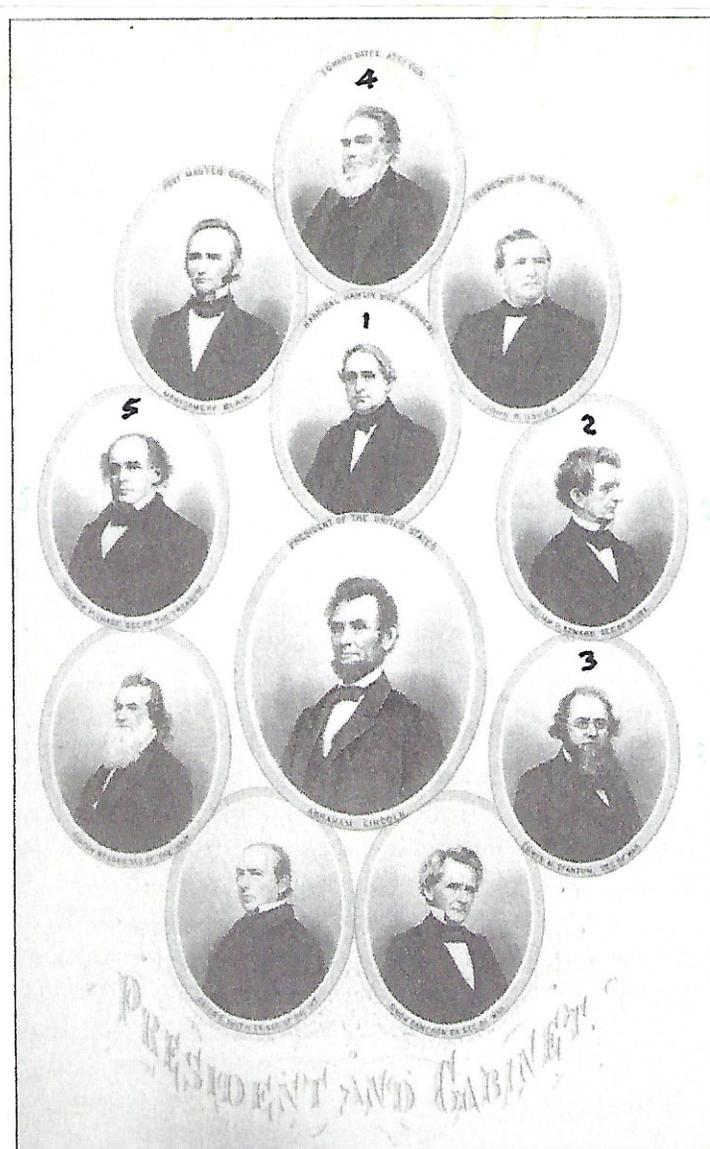
- Winchester, Va., May 25th, 1862.....
- Harpers Ferry, September 14th, 1862...
- Antietam, Md. September 17th, 1862...
- Snickers Gap, Va., October 27th, 1862...
- Philamont, Va., November 1st, 1862...
- Union, Va., November 2d, 1862...
- Upperville, Va., November 3d, 1862...
- Barber's Cross Roads, Va., November 5th, 1862...
- Amosville, Va., November 7th-12th, 1862...
- Jefferson, Va., November 18th, 1862...
- Sulphur Springs, Va. November 15th, 1862...
- Skirmish, Freemans Ford, Va., April 11th, 1863
- Skirmish, Beverly Ford, Va., April 14th, 1863
- Skirmish, Kelleys Ford, Va., April 29th, 1863
- Skirmish, Rapidan, Va., May 1st, 1863
- Chancellorsville, Va. May 2nd-4th, 1863
- Beverly Ford, Va., June 9th, 1863.....
- Middleburg and Upperville, Va., June 14th, 1863.....
- Gettysburg, Pa., July 1st-4th, 1863...
- Williamsport, Md., July 6th, 1863.....
- Boonsboro, Md. July 8th, 1863.....
- Funkestown, Md., July 9th, 1863.....
- Falling Waters, Md., July 12th, 1863.....
- Brandy Station, Va., August 1st-4th, 1863.....
- Culpeper, Va., September 13th, 1863.....
- Raccoon Ford, Va., September 14th, 1863.....
- Germania Ford, Va., October 10th, 1863.....
- Stevansburg, Va., October 11th, 1863...
- Oak Hill, Va. October 15th, 1863.....
- Bealton Station, Va., November 2nd, 1863.....
- Culpeper, Va., November 8th, 1863...
- Skirmish, Hesiers Gap, Va., July 18th, 1863.....
- Skirmish, Brandy Station, Va., October 12th, 1863.....
- Skirmish, Barnett Ford, Va., February 6th-7th, 1863.....
- Craig's Meeting House, Va., May 5th, 1864.....
- Spottsylvania Court House, Va., May 8th, 1864.....
- Yellow Tavern, Va., May 11th, 1864...
- Meadow Bridge, Va., May 12th, 1864...
- Hanover Court House, Va., May 31st, 1864.....
- Haines Shop, Va., June 3d, 1864.....
- White Oak Swamp, Va., June 13th, 1864.....
- Malvern Hill, Va., June 15th, 1864.....
- Nottoway Court House, Va., June 23d, 1864.....
- Roanoke Station, Va., June 25th, 1864.....
- Stony Creek, Va., June 28th, 1864.....
- Reams Station, Va., June 29th, 1864.....
- Winchester, Va., August 17th, 1864.....
- Kearneys town, Va., August 25th, 1864.....
- Winchester, Va., September 19th, 1864.....
- Front Royal, Va., September 21st, 1864.....
- Tom's Brook, Va., October 9th, 1864...
- Cedar Creek, Va., October, 19th, 1864.....
- Middletown, Va., November 12th, 1864.....
- Lacy Springs, Va., December 21st, 1864.....
- Gordonsville, Va., December 23d, 1864.....
- Waynesboro, Va., March 2nd, 1865.....
- Beaver Dam Station, Va., March 13th, 1865.....
- North Anna Bridge, Va., March 14th, 1865.....
- Five Points, Va., April 1st, 1865.....
- Scotts Corners, Va., April 2d, 1865.....
- Dinwiddie Court House, Va., March 31st, 1865.....
- Sweet House Creek, Va., April 8d, 1865.....
- Amelia Court House, Va., April 4th-5th, 1865.....
- Sailors Creek, Va., April 6th, 1865.....
- Appomattox Station, Va., April 8th, 1865.....





CAVALRY ENGAGEMENTS OF JOSEPH ELSOM

This map displays the track of Joseph Elsom's 8th New York Voluntary Cavalry Regiment during the Civil War. It shows the major combat engagements and camp locations by date, to visualize his units' constant movement.

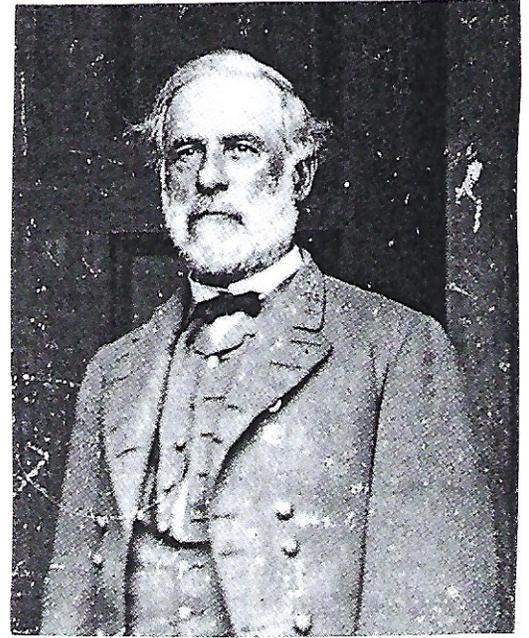


This was Lincoln's beginning cabinet. The more important ones were (1) Hannibal Hamlin, VP; (2) William Seward, Sec. of State; (3) Edwin Stanton, Sec. of War. (4) Edward Bates, Att. Gen. and (5) Salmon Chase, Sec. of Treas. Some had even been Lincoln's previous political rivals.



66

Lincoln went through a succession of generals, including Ambrose E. Burnside (*below left*) and Joseph Hooker (*below right*), before he found a winning team in Ulysses S. Grant (*above left*) and William T. Sherman (*above right*).



Gen. Robert E Lee,
commander of the Confederate South
shortly after the war.

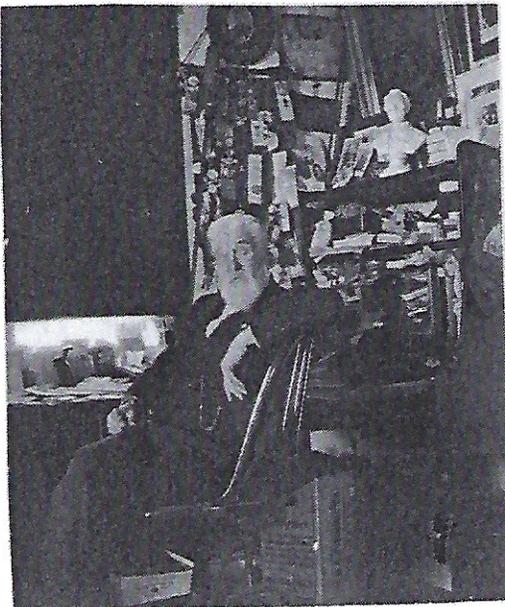


68



69

Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, final commander of the Union North and other Union generals.



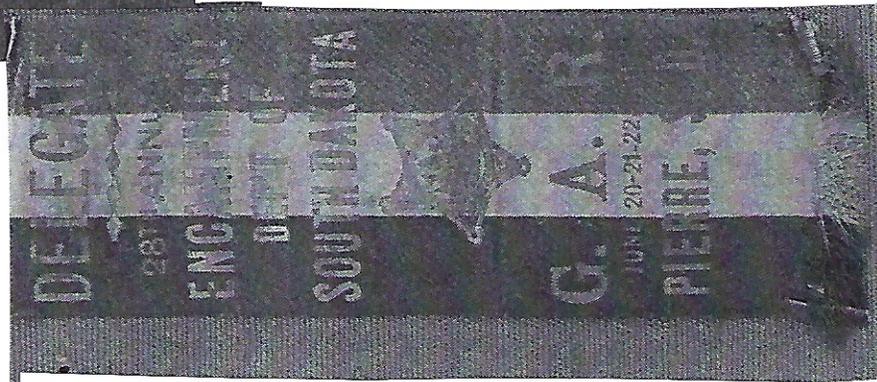
Joseph in his home office, surrounded by flags, where his Civil War experiences came back alive.



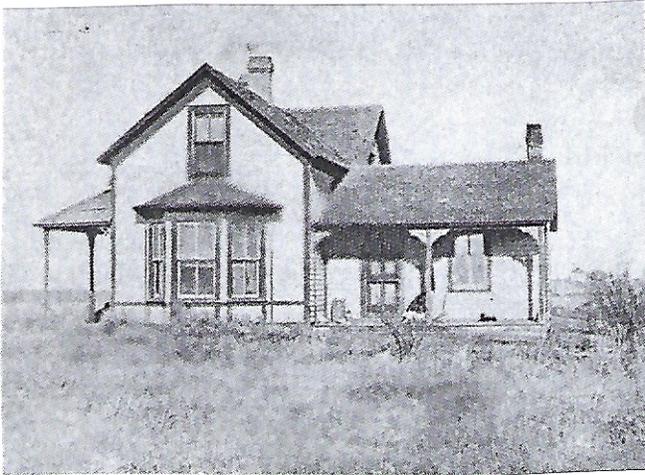
Joseph and Jane in about 1871 with probably their second child, Ellen Mary. Their four later children were Anna L, Charles W., Evert J., and Mary E.(Elsom) LeMay.



Attending a GAR reunion with his medals. Perhaps at the same date as the below ribbon when he was 71.



His delegate ribbon from the 28th Annual Encampment, Dept. of South Dakota at Pierre, SD on June 20-22, 1911.



The SD homestead as it looked in 1921, 17 years after Joseph had moved into town.



My mother, Gertrude, and me with Joseph and Jane at their Northville, SD home in 1921.



The same gathering with probably some of Joseph's other grand daughters.

Joseph and Jane visited their son's family in Spokane four times. This is a picnic at nearby Liberty Lake on June 6, 1902. L. to R. are Jane, my grandmother, Nell, uncle Russell, my mother and Joseph looking on.



My mother, Gertrude, sent this photo of her school class to her grandfather, Joseph, in about 1908. She pointed out the Easter greetings she had placed on the blackboard.

Joseph Elsom

Notary Public

Northville, S. D.,

Jan 18th 1920

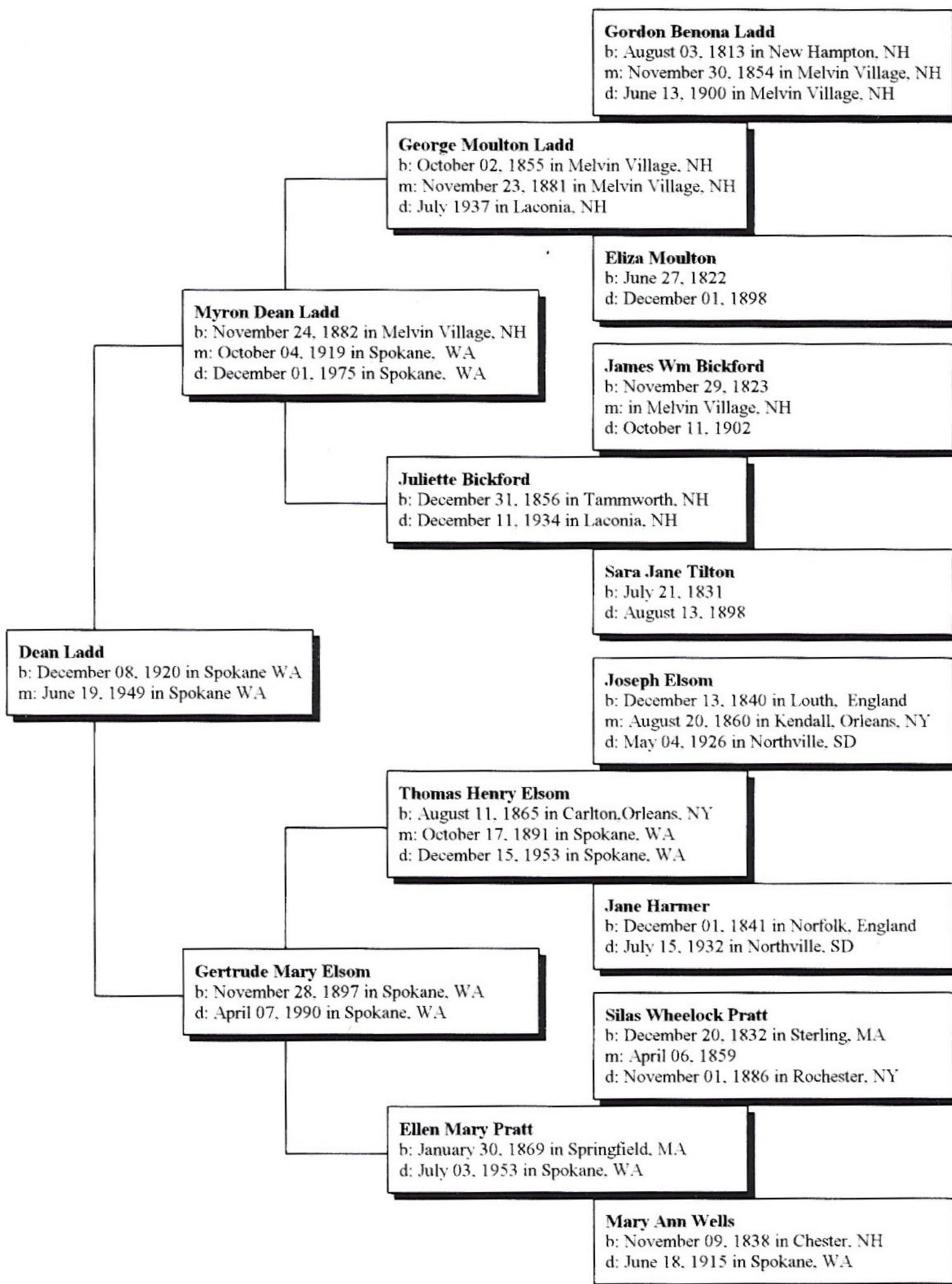
Mr & Mrs M. D. Ladd

Spokane Wash

Dear Grand Children your welcome letter of the 12th is at hand and we was glad to hear that you was well your time pass quick and spring will soon be here we have had a very sharp winter it as been cloudy and stormy since Oct 23rd as been as low as 25 below zero some of the time we have had very little snow so far but night it snowed 1/2 inches to day the clouds have hung over us so heavy that it seemed as if I could reach up and shake the snow Day we received your pictures and Grand Ma thinks that you are a good looking pair I must have forgot to mention them in my last letter we keep our usual health the children are all well so far as we know and we hope that you both keep well with Best of Wishes and love from Grand father & Mother
Joe Elsom

Joseph wrote this letter on Jan. 18, 1920 to my mother in answer to her letter to him shortly before about her new married life.

Ancestors of Dean Ladd



- 1 William Elsom* 1719 - 1745
 .. +Elizabeth Kell 1723 - 1746
 2 William Elsom 1746 47 - 1768
 ... +Rebecca Skipton 1748 - 1769
 3 Mary Elsom 1769 - 1792
 .. +Christopher Wilson 1758 - 1791
 4 Thomas Elsom 1792 - 1873
 +Ann Ingram 1796 - 1868
 5 Mary Elsom 1815 -
 ... 5 Wilson Elsom 1816 - 1856
 +Rebecca Forman 1817 - 1906
3 ... 6 Joseph Elsom 1840 - 1926
 +Jane Harmer 1841 - 1932
1 7 Thomas Henry Elsom 1865 - 1953
 2 +Ellen Mary Pratt 1869 - 1953
 8 Russell Elsom 1896 - 1978
 +Laura Post 1896 - 1968
 9 Floral Ann Elsom 1923 -
 9 Arta Lee Elsom 1925 -
 9 Russell Elsom, Jr 1933 -
 8 Gertrude Mary Elsom 1897 - 1990
 +Myron Dean Ladd 1882 - 1975
 9 Dean Ladd 1920 -
 +Vera Mae Michel 1921 -

ANCESTORS OF DEAN LADD TO THE ENGLISH ELSOMS AND COLONIAL PRATTS



This is Joseph's widowed mother, Rebecca (Forman) Elsom, in about 1905, shortly before she died at age 79. Her husband, Wilson, had died from a fall in 1853 in Brunswick, Canada after previously migrating from near Louth, England. She started living with Joseph's family when they moved to the SD homestead in 1881 and continued there to her death 24 years later.



Farm life on the Joseph Elsom homestead in SD from 1881 to 1904 when he moved into the town of Northville.

1 THOMAS H. ELSOM

Thomas was born at Carlton, Orleans County, NY. He moved to Oak Orchard, NY and later to Northville, South Dakota with his parents in 1881.

In Nov. 1886 he went to Spokane, WA and started working with the telephone company. He installed the first telephone in Spokane that year and stayed with the company for 41 years of service. He was responsible for much of the construction throughout the Inland Empire.

His grandson, Dean Ladd, has written his biography, published by "The Westerners" history group, 2000, based on Thomas's many diaries and photographs.

2 ELLEN MARY PRATT

Nellie was born at Springfield, MA. She moved to Brockport, NY and then to Rochester, NY. At age 18 she then moved with her family to Spokane in 1890 where her brothers got started building homes

She met Thomas while she worked as a telephone operator and they were married in one of these homes. In her older life she was very active in the WCTU, attending conventions around the nation until she wasn't physically able due to old age. Her daughter, Floral, wrote an account of her active life.



Nellie (Pratt) Elsom in 1888. Thomas Elsom in 1889.
They were married in 1891.



Nellie and Thomas Elsom at their 60th
wedding anniversary in 1951.

3 JOSEPH ELSOM

He moved to New Brunswick, Canada in 1853 and then to Orleans County, New York the following year. He enlisted in Company F of the 8th New York Cavalry October 13, 1861 a year after he was married as a teenager. He served three and a half years and was discharged December 15, 1864 miraculously unwounded after fighting in 49 of the 54 engagements his regiment participated in. Those included such major battles as Harpers Ferry, Fredricksburg, Gettysburg, 2nd Battle of Bull Run, Antietam, Beverly Ford and Sherman's march through Georgia to the sea.

He moved his family to a farm near Oak Orchard, New York and then in 1881 to the mid-west on a homestead two miles south of Northville, Dakota Territory. He became the first postmaster at Northville and served a term in the state legislature. He was a Republican and an active member of the GAR, attending many encampments. He died at Northville and his wife, Jane died six years later.



**Dashing cavalryman,
1862 age 22.**



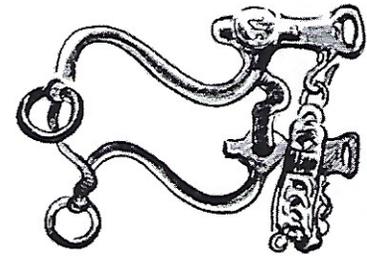
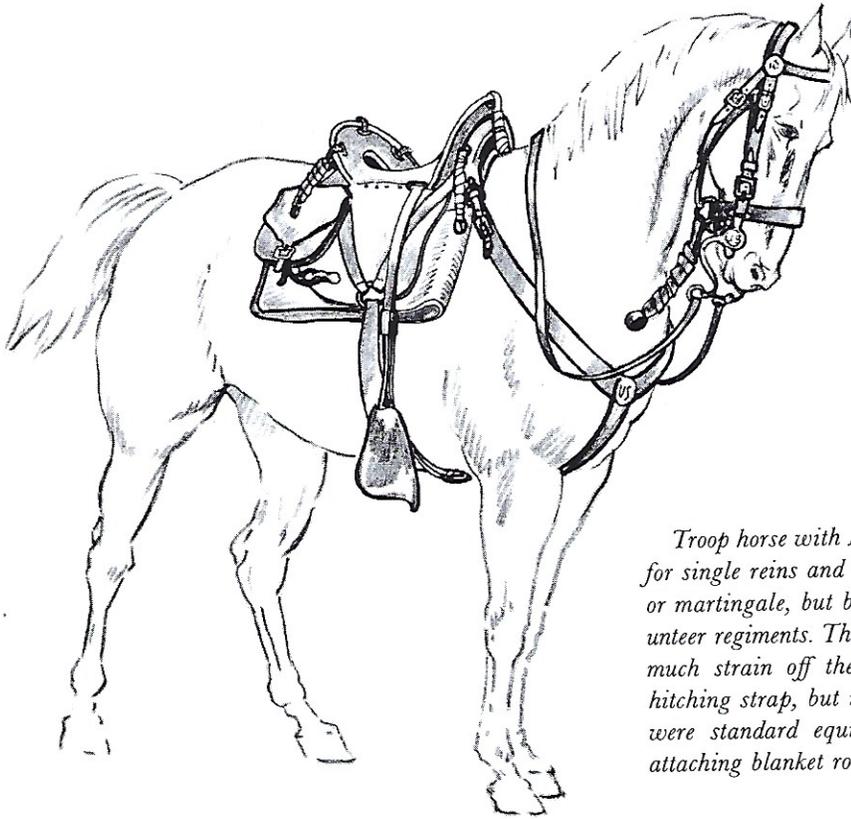
**Their first child, Thomas H. (my
grandfather), in about 1866.**



**Joseph & Jane; newly-wed
teenagers in 1859 before the war.**

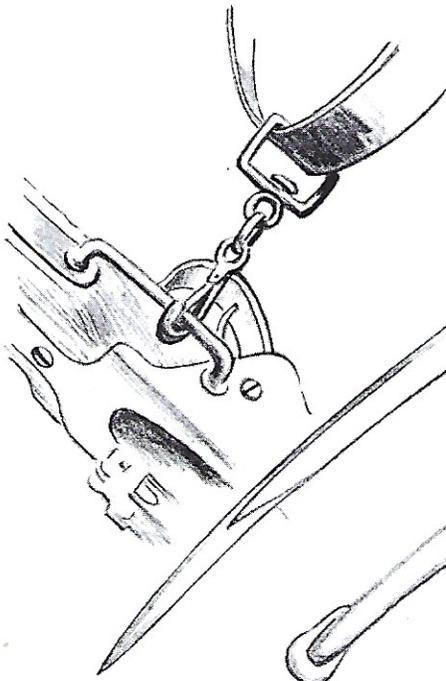
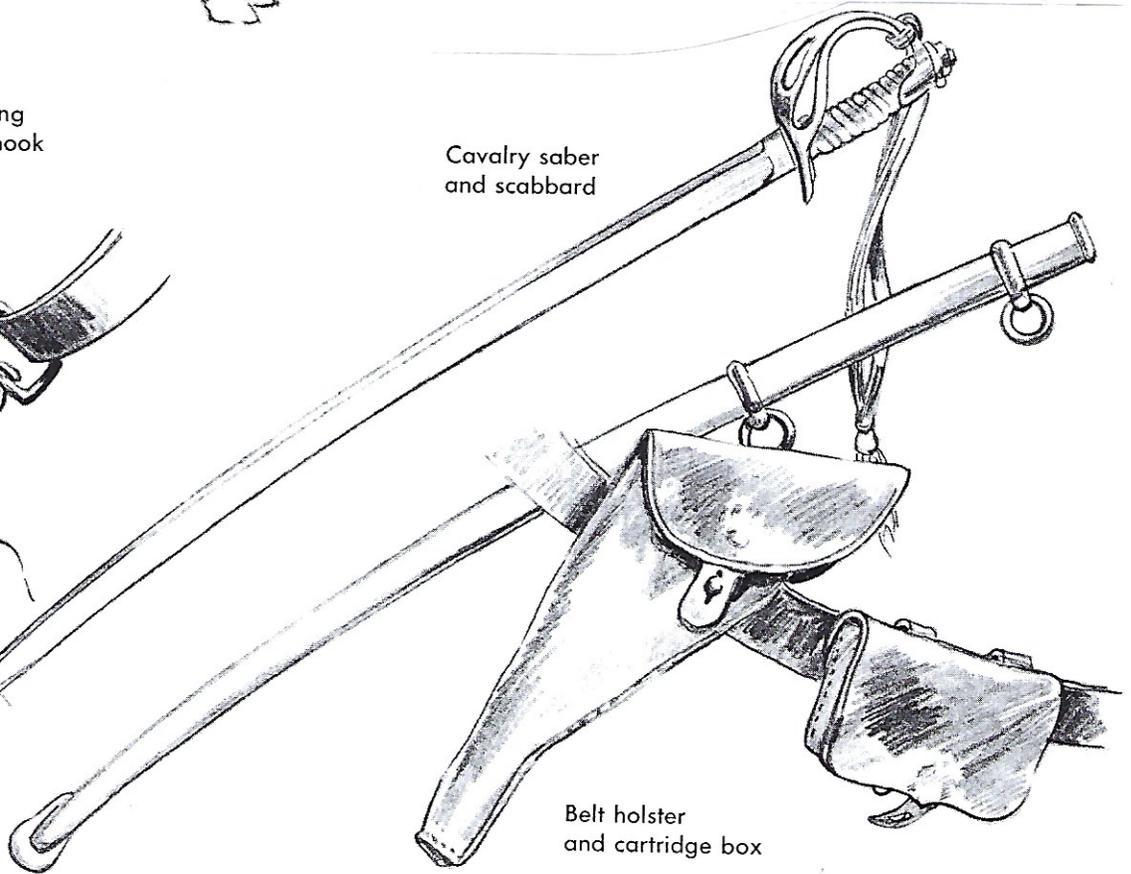


**50th wedding anniversary; 1910
in Northville, SD.**



U.S. curb bit Model 1863

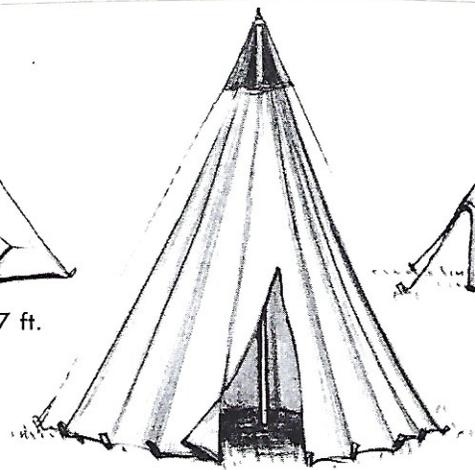
Troop horse with McClellan saddle. Regulations called for single reins and curb bit. No breast or crupper strap or martingale, but breast straps were used by many volunteer regiments. They were useful in rough going, taking much strain off the bellyband. Halter is shown with hitching strap, but it was not always worn. Saddlebags were standard equipment. Straps on saddle were for attaching blanket roll, poncho, etc.

Carbine sling
and snap hookCavalry saber
and scabbardBelt holster
and cartridge box

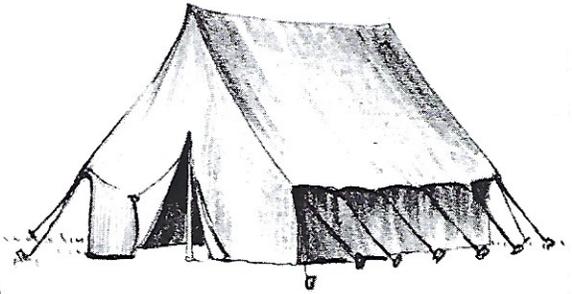
Cavalry equipment similar to that used by Joseph.



Wedge tent, four men. 7 ft. x 7 ft.



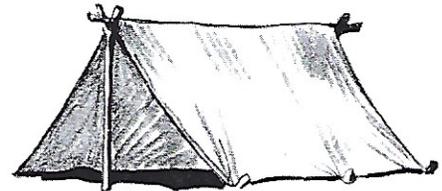
Sibley tent. Central pole, adjustable vent



Wall tent

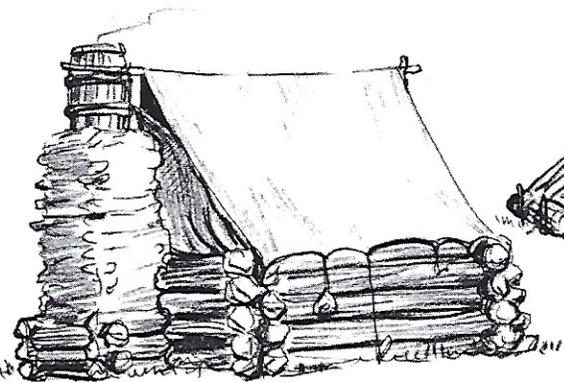


"Umbrella" type tent

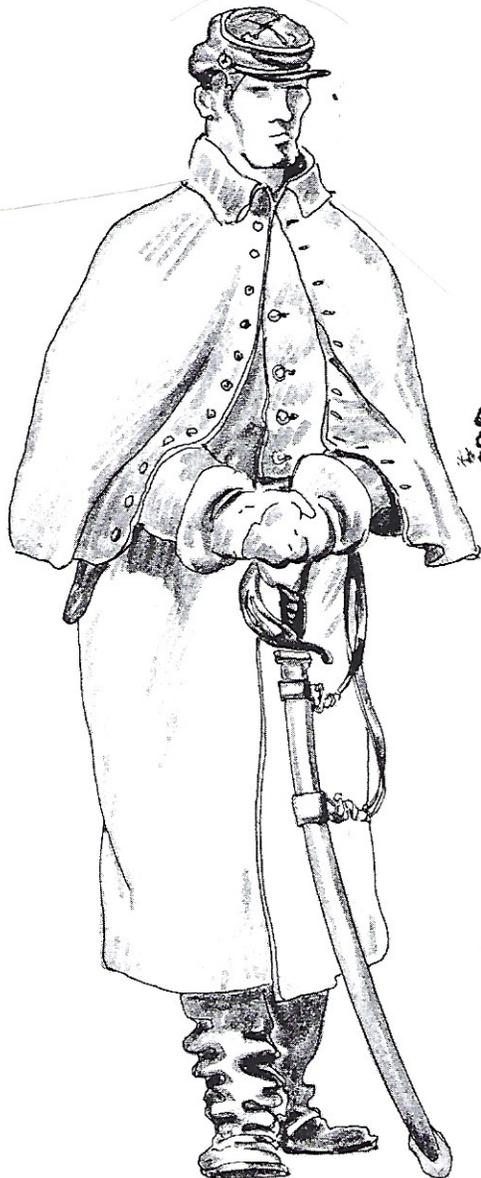
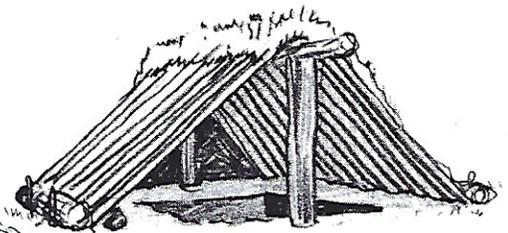


"Pup" tent (two shelter-halves)

Log cabin with canvas roof. Note elaborate chimney



Confederate sapling and sod shelter. Dugout center

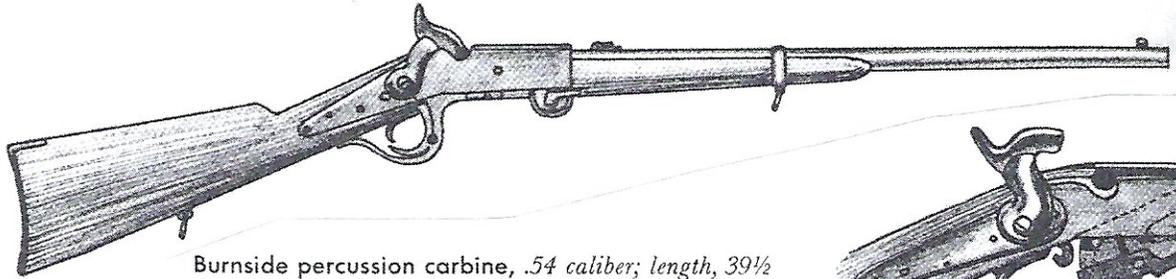


A wide variety of winter camp quarters.

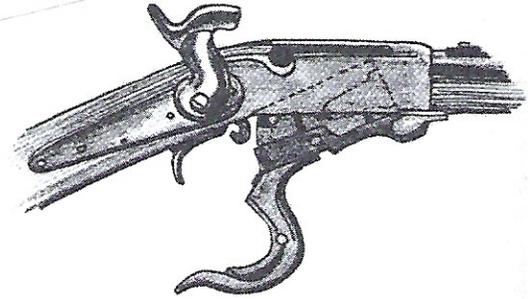
A Union cavalryman with a double-breasted overcoat and forage cap.

Carbines were well suited to cavalry operations. They were shorter and handier than rifles (average length was about thirty-eight inches, as compared to fifty-six inches for the rifled musket) and weighed considerably less. Rate of fire was high, as a majority, at least in the Federal service, were breechloaders, and many were repeat-

ers. Accuracy was fair, considering the short barrels and comparatively weak loads. Some were capable of making a good percentage of hits at 500 yards (machine rest), but 150–200 yards was considered effective range. There were more than 30 different makes and models, though not all used different ammunition.



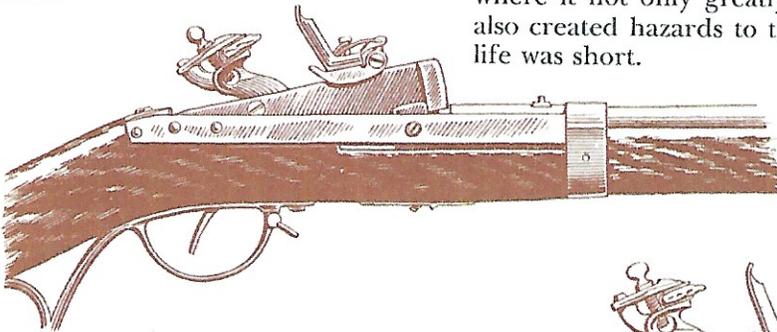
Burnside percussion carbine, .54 caliber; length, 39½ inches. Block rotated into vertical position by pressing two trigger guards together and lowering. Brass cartridge loaded end-first into breechblock. Extraction was by hand. Over 55,000 bought by Federals.



Hall Rifle An early American breech-loading flintlock rifle invented and manufactured by John Hall, and for a time a standard U.S. martial rifle. The Hall was manufactured privately from 1813 and at Harper's Ferry Armory from 1819 to 1824, and by North until the 1840s.

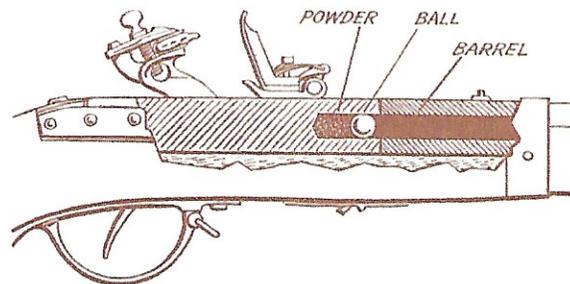
The Hall used a rectangular breech block, bored from the front with a chamber to accept the round ball and powder charge. Hinged at the rear, the breech block was pivoted upward by a finger lever beneath the gun, exposing the mouth of the chamber for loading with either loose powder and ball, or paper cartridges of the day. The breech block was then lowered into proper alignment with the bore by the finger lever, after which it was fired in typical flintlock fashion.

Even when carefully fitted selectively by hand, the Hall allowed considerable gas to escape at the barrel and breech block junction, and extensive firing increased this to the point where it not only greatly reduced the power of the gun, but also created hazards to the shooter. For this reason its service life was short.



The Hall breechloader.

Schematic of Hall rifle with action open.



Some typical carbines used by cavalry.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY SERVICE THROUGH HARPERS FERRY

This is a “discussion” with Joseph Elsom, Civil War veteran, “in the period” 1926. He is at his home in Northville, SD shortly before he died at age 85. His pension certificate is dated only several weeks after his passing. Imagine me having this imaginary session with him, sitting in his office like in the photo, near his desk with Civil War information laid out on it and a flag on a pole leaning nearby. The other photo, on the cover of this manuscript, shows him standing in front of his home with that flag and pole following this discussion. Other photos show him as a nineteen-year-old newlywed with his eighteen-year-old bride, Jane, and then shortly after as a dashing cavalryman, with resemblance to popular movie actor, Randolph Scott.

(Dean) Hello Joseph, I am your great grandson—we have met twice before. You will recall the first time in 1921 when I was a baby being shown off at this same place by your proud granddaughter, Gertrude.

The second time was a few years later when I was five. I don’t remember much about that second visit except that we had come by train across the plains of Canada with other passengers who had strange accents and that my younger brother, George, tripped and hit his face on a spittoon while running from where he had just been scolded for using too many paper drinking cups! Although less than age three he remembers that incident more than any other part of that trip. Finally, we had transferred to a freight train caboose for the last part and you picked us up at a freight yard! I remember you were walking with a cane.

It’s hard to realize that I am now older than you were then. At this stage of retirement I have been writing my own wartime memoirs and biographies of various ancestors. This discussion about your experiences in the Civil War is the current project. Over the years, I have walked over most of the major battle sites, studied your journal entries and read various history books.

You are probably very familiar with the combat reports to *The Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser* by “Genesee.” I’m also using *Deeds of Daring—History of the Eighth NY Volunteer Cavalry* by Henry Norton, published in 1889, as a prime source. It must have prompted many “I remember” sessions during your Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) reunion encampments.

(Joseph) Hello Dean, I certainly do remember when your family visited us both times. My health had started failing that year so I was very pleased to see my young families again. I fondly remember the four trips Jane and I made, visiting the Thomas Elsons in Spokane, WA when your mother was a young girl. I have a photograph of a picnic

we had there in the wooded country which is so different from this plains country.

I haven't talked much about my war experiences other than to other veterans because it's very emotional to recall the deaths of so many of my friends. But let's see how it goes. I know it will be more interesting to you, considering your combat experience and knowledge of Civil War battles. Yes, Norton's book is very good on details about my old regiment.

(Dean)

I have read that you participated in about 49 of your regiment's 54 combat engagements during the war and found it difficult to correlate those engagements with the major battles. So I prepared a chronology of the critical Civil War battles and noted where your regiment's specific engagements occurred, with the great help of Henry Norton's book about your regiment's history, published about 34 years after the war. This enabled me to understand the very mobile nature of cavalry in those days on the fringes of the major battles.

I would like to discuss those engagements in more detail by building upon your journal entries, the newspaper reports and books such as Norton's. Then I can use this information to better illustrate your regiment's movements in relation to the critical battles on simplified overall maps.

Before we continue further into your combat experiences, look at these photos, taken during my parent's first visit here in 1921. One shows you wearing your GAR medals and this one shows my mother holding me as a baby next to you. Then see these taken when you and Jane were married as teenagers, followed about a year later when you were a dashing cavalryman with the 8th New York Cavalry and long afterward, at your 50th wedding anniversary. I have noticed that my great grandmother, Jane, never smiled in any of these photos. Probably one reason is that you had to hold still for the earliest ones.

(Joseph) Regarding Jane's stern look--she is indeed a serious person. When I first returned from army life, she glanced at me with a similar disapproval expression whenever I unwittingly reverted to some rough language of those inhuman days or even sometimes when I lit up a cigar like in that photo of me as a soldier. Her photos don't do her justice though. She has been a wonderful wife and mother during some very difficult times during the war and later, such as during the rough winters farming on the homestead.

Back to the "war of the rebellion", as it could also be called--I have some records somewhere here in my desk. Oh, here they are! This shows the various higher commands that my regiment served under:

Defenses of our nation's capitol from December 1861.

Department of the Shenandoah from March '62.

Middle Department, 8th Corps from June '62.

5th Brigade, Pleasanton's Div. of Cavalry, Army of the Potomac, mounted, from

August '62.

1st Brigade of the same Division from December '62.

1st brigade, 1st Division, Cavalry from February '63.

2nd Brigade, 3rd Division, Cavalry from March '64.

Army of the Shenandoah from October '64.

Army of the Potomac from March '65.

My regiment was mustered out of service June 27, 1865 at Alexandria

VA, having suffered the following casualties:

Killed in action: 8 officers and 60 enlisted men.

Later died of wounds: 5 officers and 32 enlisted.

Died of disease and other causes: 6 officers and 213 enlisted.

Three of the above officers and seventy enlisted died in the hands of the enemy.

(Dean) That's exactly the kind of information I can use. I was recently watching a "broom" hockey game involving two of my grand children in Alexandria near where your regiment was mustered out. I also recently toured the Gettysburg battle site and was at the exact location on McPherson Ridge where your unit was the first to confront Lee's advance troops as they entered Gettysburg from the northwest.

Looking at the casualty report though, I'm surprised that there weren't many more casualties as I compare it with my own combat experience in the Marines during WWII. I also note that over four times as many died of wounds, disease and other causes as those killed in action. That is typical of all wars in previous history because there was very limited medical knowledge and care.

(Joseph) What more information would you like? I have had a stroke that has limited my memory capacity but let's get going and you can help keep me from rambling along like we veterans do at reunions.

(Dean) Let's start with your first year of service. I know that you enlisted in the 8th New York Volunteer Cavalry Regiment October 13, 1861 and was assigned to Company F shortly before Col. Samuel Crooks was authorized to recruit the regiment. It was mustered for three years of service at Rochester, NY and left a month later to defend Washington DC for the next three months.

I have copies of entries you made in five journals, the first two were during the war and the other three were after your return to farm life during the years 1866, 1871 and 1881. You started the first journal January 1, 1864 and continued for only two months during a cold winter lull of picket duty and routine camp existence while in a holding position on the Rappahannock River. Then you started entries again June 21 when you had received orders to begin raiding operations near Petersburg. Your entries about farm life express times of struggle too but you always rolled with the punches starting most entries with "Up early, do my chores" and ending with "Fine day."

I imagine that, while facing those raiding operations, you were becoming ever more concerned that your luck was about to run out without your wife and mother knowing

what you were going through.

General McClelland was noted for his emphasis on training so that was certainly your main early activity. You probably agree that McClelland was an adept administrator but later proved to not be aggressive enough and was inclined to over-estimate the enemy.

Although you were trained as a cavalryman, I understand that you weren't issued horses until nearly a year later, causing you to serve as infantry during your first two engagements. That was at Winchester on May 8, 1862 and at 2nd Manassas on August 29-30. Fortunately you were mounted at Harper's Ferry where you narrowly avoided capture on September 14, 1862.

(Joseph) Your comment about McClelland is correct—Lincoln certainly found him difficult to work with. But, being aggressive also means tough fighting. You probably know what it's like going into battle. I prayed often for my safety. Yes, we trained as cavalry, drilling with the saber down to perfection. It was the long, straight Prussian style, replaced later with a curved blade. Cavalry in combat would normally be deployed with a forward line consisting of small outposts backed up by detachments large enough to provide at least two relief's of the forward outposts. (See the sketch in chapter 1)

I had heard that the Government thought they had enough cavalry at the time and were considering discharging our regiment. Eventually, though, the Union had 258 cavalry regiments at the end of the war. The Confederates were far ahead of us at that time in employing their cavalry with their personal horses. Therefore, we were handicapped without mounts and even using the old Hall breech-loading flintlock carbine, such as during the Winchester engagement. (See research information on page 23 about the problem of escaping gas, with the resulting effect on the shooter and reduced power of the weapon). We were outnumbered and nearly surrounded there as we retreated to Williamsport on the Potomac River. Fortunately we were in a reserve position about three months later at the Battle of 2nd Manassas.

About three weeks later, during the Battle at Harpers Ferry on September 12-15, 1862 we held a defending position on South Mountain. The enemy was intent on seizing that important Union arsenal factory and besieged us with overwhelming numbers and heavy bombardment.

Our commanding officer, General Miles, realized that he couldn't hold out and decided to surrender. But our regimental commander, Col. Benjamin Davis, didn't agree on surrendering and decided on a breakout attempt. We made our escape after dusk and even fooled a Confederate ammunition supply train into delivering its supplies to a wrong place!

(Dean) Norton's book goes into some detail about the amazing night-time fighting escape through Longstreet's corps from Harpers Ferry to Sharpsburg (soon the Battle of Antietam) under the able Col. Davis and the scouting assistance of a local settler who knew the countryside well. Davis was promoted to Brigade General after this.

CHAPTER 3

ANTIETAM THROUGH GETTYSBURG

(Joseph) We certainly took the rebels by surprise, getting through Longstreet with about fifteen hundred men. When Harpers Ferry defenders surrendered the next day, Stonewall Jackson asked, "Where's that cavalry that was here yesterday?" When informed of the escape, he asked which way they went and commented that Longstreet should have them by now.

That wagon train encounter, you mentioned, was a major accomplishment! It included about seventy-five wagons and was a great impact on the rebel's supply for the Antietam battle. Our cavalry unit arrived September 17, in the afternoon of that battle, but was not committed. I remember watching our nearby artillerymen work their guns as fast as they could load and fire. The rebels charged them but were driven back with heavy loss.

(Dean) I have walked that battle site and was overwhelmed, realizing the back and forth hand-to-hand fighting in that corn field. That battle prevented further Confederate advance to bring Maryland into their influence and both sides were so fought out that the south withdrew without effective pursuit by the north. I saw on a map there where you were located and where General Burnside was slow in crossing that bridge and resuming his advance. You were fortunate to have not been called in for cavalry probing by him!

I understand that you then went to rest up at nearby Hagerstown where you received replacements and had to chase away some elusive Confederates trying to steal your horses. Then in late October you were heading south, responding to the cry, "On to Richmond".

(Joseph) We were indeed fortunate to escape involvement in that massive slaughter. Burnside later also performed badly at Fredericksburg and was replaced with General Hooker. Our regiment was now joined with elements of two other cavalry regiments to become the First Brigade, First Division, Cavalry Corps, Army of the Potomac.

On October 26, we broke camp, crossed the Potomac and engaged rebel pickets who were covering their army's retreat. It was all cavalry against cavalry until we found the rebels making a stand at Snicker's Gap in the Blue Mountains. They had a cannon planted on the road loaded with canister that forced our regiment to take a different route along the foot of the mountain.

A few days later we made a cavalry charge with sabers against a rebel force at Philomont and drove them back to Unionville where they made a brief stand. Then on November 3 we again came upon the rebels near Upperville where we halted in some woods and dismounted to fight on foot. But after receiving some rebel artillery shelling, we decided to out-flank them and continue on toward Fredericksburg.

Then the rebels tried to check us with artillery fire at Barber's Cross while we were still marching by fours but luckily they shot slightly over our heads. Our regiment ended up overcoming over three times our number and taking about fifty prisoners while we had only a few wounded. What really saved the day for us, was our timely counter-charge and the just-in-time added support of the Third Indiana Cavalry.

We continued to advance, arriving in Jefferson on November 8 where we found the rebels well reinforced, the weather turning colder, and a shortage of food. We continued advancing the next day, marching by fours, when we saw a regiment of rebel cavalry charging down on us but they strangely halted and went back. Then their artillery started shelling our wagons and our artillery tried to counter-fire but the rebels were in a more commanding position so we had to withdraw for cover.

The next minor engagement was at Sulfur Springs a few days later before arriving at Fredericksburg.

(Dean) So you were very busy those few weeks making a steady advance against a very mobile Confederate rearguard action.

(Joseph) At Fredericksburg we were sent to guard Banks' Ford on the Rappahannock River. I heard that at first there was some unauthorized friendly conversation across the river between a few of our men and the rebel pickets to trade such as coffee and tobacco. During those two weeks, guarding the Ford, we had to do some foraging off the land, especially for hay for our horses and hogs for fresh meat rather than just salt pork and hard tack. One way of getting the hogs was to drive them past dismounted men lined up with sabers along a road.

Then we were sent ten miles below Fredericksburg to guard a ferry and fortunately remained there during the great battle of December 13. All that day we could hear the roar of artillery that we later learned was mostly from rebel guns, mowing down our men as they unsuccessfully assaulted the rebel hill position, known as Marye's Heights.

(Dean) I understand that for the next month or so Burnside's intention was to draw the Confederates out of their fortified position and then attempt another river crossing above Fredericksburg.

(Joseph) There is quite a bit of detail in Norton's book that I will summarize for you as it applied to me. After that battle we were relieved and went into camp near Bell Plain Landing where we started to build comfortable four-man log house winter quarters while everything remained quiet on the Potomac.

Then we were unexpectedly ordered to march immediately, in the dark with threatening rain, to a hill site about ten miles below Fredericksburg. About two miles back from the river, we were ordered to halt, secure our horses and build fires to make the rebels think we intended to cross the river at that point and to draw them off their fortified position. But they didn't budge from Marye's Heights so we went into winter

camp near Stafford Court House where three more new companies joined our regiment. I remember that cold snowy site well, with its scrub oak and pine trees.

We had a lot of picket duty there. The rebels gave us a lot of trouble because they seemed to know a lot about us and would especially go after any of our new men out on picket. We were finally relieved from this picket duty by the Third Indiana Cavalry and started for the Rappahannock River again in mid-April in brigade-strength.

As we started for Freeman's Ford we came upon rebel pickets that we chased across the river and took some prisoners. Then, as we crossed the river at Beverly Ford, the rebels charged our rear guard and captured some of them before we withdrew.

Then, on April 29, we moved into position at Kelley's Ford where we forded the river and formed in line of battle as we advanced in the rain about three miles toward Culpepper. The next day we groomed and fed our horse and resumed the advance without any opposition and arrived at the Rapidan River about sundown, after some rainy and muddy traveling.

Finally we were welcomed by a few rebel artillery shells and went into camp among some woods. That was typical activity to the end of June, where we were located, with pickets from both sides often probing each other for possible larger scale battle.

(Dean) You were constantly on the move with the call to Boots and Saddles like this for the next several months weren't you? I can imagine how great a physical and mental strain it was too. Then you were involved in ever increasing intensity of combat leading up finally for the big show-down at Gettysburg, later referred to as the high-water mark of the war.

General Benjamin Davis had been your very popular regimental commander before his promotion but was killed a week before Gettysburg. Tell me what you recall about that and the engagements during those last few days leading-up to Gettysburg, such as the most significant cavalry battle of the war at Brandy Station which I understand involved nearly 8,000 Union cavalry.

(Joseph) The general was killed when we surprised Jeb Stuart's rebels in their camp south of Warrenton Station which was on the Alexandria Railroad connecting further east at Manassas Junction. The day before, on June 9, we had charged them through the woods near Brandy Station with saber in hand and broke through the rebels like a wave on the bow of a ship. What a charge that was with all the fast action and confusion of battle! I was in the midst of all this and had only passing glimpses of what was happening around me as "I was having as much as I could do."

But the rebels quickly recovered and surprised us by counter-charging in great numbers. General Davis, acting as Division Commander, was killed as he shouted, "Stand firm Eighth New York". Our regiment alone lost eight killed and fifteen wounded. Some of our other cavalry regiments were the First Jersey, the First New York, the Second New York, the Tenth New York the First Pennsylvania, the First Maryland, the First Maine and the Third Indiana. So that was indeed a major cavalry engagement.

We fell back under cover of the woods to wait for reinforcement from the Third Indiana Cavalry but then drove the rebels away in a very spirited manner to avenge our General's death and to prove to the rebels that our cavalry was now very capable. Although the battle was a draw, it was a humiliating embarrassment for Stuart, who had the reputation of being such a capable cavalry leader.

Then Lee's plans were captured, revealing his plans to march on Washington and Baltimore. So we, in the cavalry, had to make quick-time marching on the flank of his army. Our route took us from Beverly Ford to Catlitt's Station into camp for five days before moving on through Manassas Junction and on to Aldie. On the 21st, as we were moving beyond Middleburg, we attacked some rebels and drove them beyond Upperville, where we bivouacked for the night before moving on.

Then we went through Leesburg on toward Edward's Ferry to cross the Potomac River and then on to Point of Rocks where we bivouacked over-night. Then it was on through South Mountain, Boonsboro and crossing over the mountains in the direction of Gettysburg. On the 30th we resumed our march at daylight toward Fairfield where we found a force of rebels in town. But rather than engage them at that point we took a different route through Emmetsburg to Gettysburg.

(Dean) I have recently walked the Gettysburg battle site and seen where your cavalry regiment blocked Lee's troops as they approached the north end of town.

(Joseph) We arrived at Gettysburg just in time to check the rebels as they advanced from the northwest end of town toward McPherson's Ridge. As part of the First Cavalry Division under General Buford, we kept the rebels in check for two hours until the First Corps of Infantry and additional reinforcements could get into position.

Finally, at 2 P.M.. the Union troops fell back to Cemetery Hill. Our regiment then formed a line of battle on the left, supporting the sharp shooters before receiving orders to leave the field on July 2 and join the rest of our Division at Taneytown and then on to Westminster. The battle raged on for several more days after we left.

Looking back, there has been a lot of conjecture in our reunions as to the reason we were ordered to leave while the battle was still waging. The consensus was because we had already done our part very well and we were expecting another possible rebel movement threat to check. This did happen several days later at Jone's Cross Roads.

CHAPTER 4

ON TO RICHMOND AND RAILROAD DESTRUCTION

(Dean) So the Confederates then retreated from Gettysburg the same time that Vicksburg fell to Grant, opening the Mississippi River to Union shipping. Your cavalry regiment pursued them south over the same general route you had previously taken, moving north toward Gettysburg. This involved numerous small engagements with the Confederate rearguard and continued until you went into winter quarters from late November, 1863 to early May, 1864 near the Rapidan River. You started journal entries on January 1, 1864 during this winter quarters period.

(Joseph) Because you have well summarized that period, I can now recall some details about that constant picket duty, involving occasional rebel contact. It is difficult to recall most of the more routine events, since I didn't start journal entries until when you mentioned. So I will tell about a few of the more exciting engagements after Jones Cross Roads, where we suffered a few wounded.

At Boonsboro the rebels attacked and we fought all day before driving them off. We continued to run into them over the following week until we crossed the Potomac River into Virginia again. Then, over the next ten days, we passed through such small places as Upperville, Barber's Cross Roads, Chester's Gap to Rappahannock Station, where we engaged the rebels in force back and forth during the months of from August 1 to the end of December. On September 13, 1864 we crossed the Rappahannock and drove the rebels about four miles beyond Culpepper. Then the action continued for several more days, involving sharpshooters on both sides trying their skill shooting across the river, artillery exchanges and some scouts taking prisoners.

Then, on the 29th, there was considerable action, starting around Germania Ford near the junction of the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers which continued off and on in the surrounding area through November. For instance, on October 11, the rebels drove us back to Rappahannock Station before we eventually drove them back beyond Brandy Station.

The action resumed on October 18 when, with hard fighting, the rebels tried to capture our wagon train. Then, on November 27, after some heavy firing in the direction of Germania Ford, we were relieved and joined the brigade near Richardsville. The area between the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers had been fought over several times because the rebels wanted to keep the Union Army north of the Rappahannock but they finally lost.

(Dean) According to the first entry to your journal on New Years Day, 1864 you were still near the Rappahannock on picket duty, now during cold weather and at times with a nearly played-out horse that you had to lead part of the time.

(Joseph) Combat life really tests one's endurance and leaves lasting memories. Some typical routine situations were: cold, can't sleep much, get up early, feed and groom my horse, pack up and march, have to lead my horse, wet snow all day, Sit for 2 hrs. upon a shivering horse, facing the biting wind and peering through the storm of sleet, snow and rain. Then 4, 6 or 8 hrs. off-duty best as one can.

(Dean) Your journal entries continued through February, describing this same routine camp life between minor engagements. Then you became too busy on picket and guard duty to continue writing entries and didn't resume writing until start of your second journal on June 21.

I understand your regiment was transferred in April, 1864 to General Wilson's 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Division under General Sheridan and headed for the raid of May 5 on Richmond by doing a rear flank movement to try to cut off General Lee's communication and draw him out of a fortified position.

(Joseph) Fortunately for me, our cavalry couldn't be used to any great advantage in the major battle of the Wilderness as we passed nearby so we were sent to the flank and rear of the rebels to cut off their communications as you mentioned.

Then on May 8 we engaged the rebels and forced them back to Yellow Tavern for a lively fight there on May 11 where the great cavalry rebel leader, General Stuart, was killed. The first Michigan Brigade was on the advance that day and bore the brunt of the battle.

Then we marched on, engaging the rebels at Meadow Bridge the following day before continuing on to Richmond, burning depots and rebel supplies as we went. When we approached the city fortifications, we received heavy resistance and sustained heavy losses so we withdrew back to Harrison's Landing to regroup and rest the horses.

After that rest, we marched toward Hanover Court House, across the Chickahominy River and made a detour around Lee's whole army with engagements at Hanover C.H., Haines Shop, White Oak Swamp and Malvern Hill. After that there was much more strenuous marching, with occasional skirmishes that become a blur in my memory, until we finally reached the James River.

By June 21, 1864, we were committed to heavy combat and the most trying days of my life when we received orders to be ready to march at a moment's notice. We went out foraging to try to find some corn, pack saddles and have them inspected. We drew five days' rations and got ready at 1:00 am for ten hot days' of marching.

This was the beginning of the Wilson and Kautze raiding operation to the west of Petersburg June 22-July 1, 1864. (not to be confused with a later famous "Wilson's Raid" through Alabama and Georgia in March-April, 1865 after Joseph had been discharged) Raids were daring attacks behind enemy lines to take prisoners, destroy railroads and communications and seize supplies. The tactic in this case was to force Lee into a siege and thus restrict his opportunity to maneuver his main force. We

crossed the Petersburg & Weldon (P&W) Railroad at Ream's Station, and then we continued to Dinwiddie Court House. We finally reached the Petersburg & Lynchburg railroad and bivouacked at Southerland's Station about five miles west of Petersburg.

On the next day it was "Boots and Saddles" at one and then march at two. We then burned Loon's Station on the P&W Railroad where the rebels shelled us. We next passed Dinwiddie Court House. We finally stopped to feed at midnight, having destroyed the railroad by the normal manner of burning the ties in piles, heating the rails in the middle till red hot and bending them.

The P&W Railroad was a major supply line to Richmond and Petersburg. This effort disrupted the rebels. Col. Wilson next lead two cavalry divisions toward Burkeville to disrupt the South Side Railroad. There was a skirmish with rebel pickets at Ream's Station but they were driven off and we destroyed cars, buildings and considerable track. Then we moved by way of Dinwiddie Court House to continue destruction of five more railroad stations before proceeding to Burkeville, the junction of the Southside and Danville Railroads. The Southside Railroad was destroyed both north and south of the junction.

The following day we started early at 2:00 am, burning two trains of cars at Ford's Station on the South Side Railroad. Next, we destroyed Wilson's Station and then stopped at ten to feed and get some coffee. We ran into the rebels near Burkeville Junction and had a hard fight, with our company losing five men. My brother, Tom, and my friend, CP, were wounded and two others were missing. But we continued on to the next fight at Nottoway Court House and then destroyed the Danville railroad depot and tracks. We had pushed ourselves to exhaustion with less than 4 hrs. rest a day. After that I sat up with Jim Werner who had just lost his brother. It had been a very hot day and one of sadness. Jim died just after day light and we buried him.

We then fell-back for a few hours giving me a chance to visit my brother at the field hospital. Thankfully, he appeared to be recovering well from what seemed a non-life-threatening wound. So he was sent home on furlough but unfortunately later died of chronic diarrhea which was a common outcome of wound recovery.

We resumed our raid of destruction by destroying track past Machern's Station and then stopped overnight near Keysborrow. That completed a long hot and dusty day of hard marching, with a great deal of track destroyed.

I was just a small part of that momentous effort to disrupt the critical rebel rail system. Their system linked the W&P to the Richmond & Danville at Burkeville. Union cavalry under Kautz hit Burkeville. Fitz Lee (Robert's hard charging brother) then came between the Union forces of Kautz and Wilson. But Wilson attacked Lee and the two Union divisions linked-up again and destroyed six Danville stations. Then, as they attempted to destroy the railroad bridge over the Staunton River, they were kept at bay by rebel defenses, well supported by artillery and therefore moved eastward. That was how it started out.

(Dean) I should read more about the big picture but activity at your level is the focus of this discussion.

(Joseph) We continued hard marching on June 25, burning Keysburrow Station, and a large amount of other property. We were then performing rear guard and were attacked just before dark near Roanoke. Our regiment lay on the skirmish line till one P.M. in a very hot day while the rest of the command was fighting in the front line.

The next day at one P.M. we burned Roanoke Station and then crossed Roanoke Creek on toward Christiansburg. (Far off the lower left corner of the map) It had been another hard march during a very hot and dusty day. We finally stopped for two days five miles from nowhere where “hope and mercy never comes tonight.” I had the chance to visit my recovering brother and found him fine.

On June 27, 1864 we started out early without any breakfast, being placed now in the advance. We found a few rebels and had to stop and guard the flank until all the column went past us. Then the next day we again started early and marched all day, finally crossing Stony Creek where we came onto the rebels and fought all night. From my perspective it was a grand sight with us drawing in line at the rear of the artillery! It was a fine but hard day. I later learned that we were expected to be at Ream’s Station so Wilson decided to block the rebels to allow Krautz to move there. It took the rebels sixty-three days to repair the damage to the railroads.

(Dean) Shortly after this you were nearly captured.

(Joseph) Two days later, on June 29, we had been on the skirmish line all night, surrounded by rebels. Our company lost seven men. The rebels headed our cavalry off at that place and we couldn’t break through them. They stampeded us and cut us to pieces. So we had to burn our wagons and make a hard run for it back south again. That was one of the “greatest get up and go marches that ever was known.” We saved ourselves only by putting spurs to our horses and scattering around the country, taking cross roads.

We had to move overland, using a compass, traveling for nine days with little sleep, escaping rebel pressure from the rear. Our artillery got bogged down in dense woods and deep swamps that immobilized our horses and artillery carriages. We had to spike the gun barrels and abandon them. The Union lost about 1500 men—mostly captured.

(Dean) That was a narrow escape from what could have been a starving time in a Confederate prison,

(Joseph) The following day we still had a hard night’s run for it after crossing Stony Creek and then crossing the Nottoway River. We halted at Littleton for feed and then left at dark to continue the march all the next day.

Looking back at the big picture, Lee’s supplies were carted from the Stony Creek junction of the W & P RR to Petersburg. Our 8th NY Cavalry, under Col, Wilson, skirmished there June 28-29.

On July 1, just before daylight, we waited a few hours for a temporary bridge to be

built over the Blackwater River. Then we halted at Cabins Point where I was on stable guard while we got some corn and fed our horses.

Then on the next day it was Boots and Saddles at 3:00 A.M. We moved out at daylight, passed Prince George's Church and got into camp all right.

(Dean) Your journal entries ended here for some reason. Perhaps you can explain, why at this time, when you should have had a lot to tell about. That ended one of the greatest raids during the war. Men suffered untold hardships, traveled day and night, marching and fighting and tearing up railroad tracks for ten days. It was thought at first that more than half of the regiment had been taken prisoners but a large number wandered around for two days and finally got back to their regiment, narrowly escaping capture.

Many of the men who lived through the war and made it home died a few years later from the hardships of that raid. About a fourth of your regiment were taken prisoner and ended up in Andersonville prison. Up and down the Rappahannock River your regiment rode and scouted and fought by night, sometimes saddled for sixty hours, and sleeping on the slowly moving columns of horses.

You survived over three years of living in tents, hastily built shanties or out in the open. Virginia has some harsh winters even that far south. To have fought in so many engagements and survived four winters out in the elements year-round with less than sanitary conditions and without balanced meals, is truly remarkable.

Let's now go through some of the main events, described in Norton's book as a guide, to see how it involved you. If you don't recall any more detail I will re-state them as being general to your regiment rather than specifically involving you. What else would you suggest?

(Joseph) Years ago I had a much clearer memory but, thanks to you, I feel we have done well so far. There is so much more written in great detail about that horribly sad time in our country's history. I agree that Norton's book, although scanty regarding the big picture, would best suit our purpose. I am so pleased to get my typical part of this history passed on to future generations who would like to better comprehend what their ancestors went through.

(Dean) Great! Let's pick up with all the constant moving about that was typical for cavalry troops and end with Lee's surrender. I realize that cavalry typically operated only on the fringes of the major battles such as at Antietam, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg and others. But there were plenty smaller skirmishes and constant picket duty which often developed into major showdown battles by the infantry, supported by artillery.

Norton tells about continuing action around Petersburg for another month until your regiment was relieved to move back to northwestern Virginia.

(Joseph) We were relieved by the First Vermont Cavalry on July 28, 1864 and moved

back again toward Petersburg where we were surprised to hear heavy cannonading and other explosions. We later learned that our infantry had charged some rebel works and taken many prisoners. We prepared to make an attack but instead withdrew and resumed picket duty.

CHAPTER 5

SHENANDOAH VALLEY, CEDAR CREEK AND THE END

(Dean) After your withdrawal from the Petersburg area your regiment headed by boat up the Potomac River and marched on to the Winchester vicinity where the Confederates were a threat.

(Joseph) On August 1 we were relieved by the Eighteenth Pennsylvania Cavalry and marched back to the Blackwater River at City Point where we camped for a week until we embarked on board the steamship, John Rice. After anchoring for the night, we sailed up the Chesapeake Bay and into the Potomac River, arriving at Leesboro about noon the next day where we camped.

We left that camp on the 12th and bivouacked at Drainsville before crossing Goose Creek and continuing through Leesburg. Our regiment was detailed to guard wagons that day because we had some trouble with the rebels harassing us. Then the rebels chased us around with overwhelming numbers for the next two weeks.

A few days later we moved through Snicker's Gap across the Shenandoah River through Perrysville and around to Winchester where the rebels attacked and drove us about three miles toward Summit Point. We held there for a few days before we were driven further back to Charlestown by a heavy force of infantry.

Then on August 22 the rebels attacked again and drove us to Hallstown where we camped near the 114th New York Cavalry. Three days later we moved toward Martinsburg and were driven back again after some hard fighting. Then we started about midnight and crossed through Pleasant Valley on to Boonsboro, thinking that the rebels were crossing into Maryland again.

(Dean) Now I understand why you stopped making entries in your journal. What a busy time!

(Joseph) That indeed was the reason. We did a lot of marching and picket duty for about three weeks until September 11th when our whole Third Division got into quite a fight towards Winchester and were driven back. The rebels, possibly planned by Mosby, tried unsuccessfully to break into our camp on that evening which put us on special alert. Picket duty was especially risky during this period, with various encounters.

On the 19th we left early in the morning for Winchester as a full brigade and soon came upon the rebels, driving them from their position at Opequan. Then our infantry came up when a fight commenced in earnest and resulted in a rebel rout for a change. Our cavalry made a number of successful charges during the day with only a relatively few casualties. It was finally a great day for us. Next we moved across the North

Branch of the Shenandoah and drove the rebels through Front Royal back into the mountains in the vicinity of Chester Gap.

We continued along the mountain with some minor skirmishing through Milford to New Market Gap and continued on through Harrisburg and Taunton to Waynesboro, when the rebels flanked us and drove us back toward Staunton. Our regiment, along with the Twenty-Second New York Cavalry, were cut off and had to make a long detour to escape. We finally made it to Bridgewater about noon after a hard night's march.

The next day, about Sept. 20, 1864, General Custer assumed command of our Third Cavalry Division. We liked him because he had a lot of get up and go, brandishing his saber. Two days later the rebels were reported to be advancing upon us again so we saddled up for picket duty and on the 6th we were again on the move at daylight heading over to the mountain road, passing Dayton, Turleytown and Rockingham before making camp. Then it was foraging and farm-burning while there was some skirmishing by our rear guard.

On October 9, the rebels hit us at Mill Creek, driving our rear guard back upon us, giving the Johnnies (rebels) a chance to "give us Jesse," (a difficult time). They drove us about a mile before we rallied to stop them. Then on the 9th we found and attacked them, driving them about five miles and taking about seventy-five prisoners and six pieces of artillery. Then on the 11th we moved through Strausburg, across Cedar Creek and bivouacked.

At sundown of the 13th, the rebels temporarily drove our New Jersey Cavalry from the ford above ours but they recovered. Then there was some minor picket activity for several more days until the 19th, when things really heated up leading into the great Battle of Cedar Creek, about twelve miles south of Winchester, on October 19th. The big picture was that Sheridan's army had been surprised and routed into a lively retreat that was checked by our cavalry so that our lines could be reformed to regain the advance. Lee had wisely sent Longstreet to reinforce Early and attack the Union Army while Sheridan was temporarily away.

But Sheridan arrived back about noon of the 19th and proclaimed, "We are going the other way." Soon, an advance was made and the tide turned the other way. The rebels were sent flying back, demoralized, the other way, leaving several thousand prisoners and about fifty pieces of artillery. The cavalry had saved the day.

(Dean) This timely ride into battle has been immortalized by "Sheridan's Ride", a spirited but partially inaccurate poem. The outcome of battles, in this northern part of the Shenandoah around Winchester, was critical because that area supplied granary needed by Lee's army. Up to that time it had been written that the Confederate soldiers were famished, but, although outnumbered two to one, felt victory in their grasp and were permitted to stop and forage for supplies.

After that turning-point battle your regiment was consolidated into eight companies, after losing some due to expiration of enlistment and receiving replacements. Then your routine was moving about on picket duty.

(Joseph) We discussed this battle a lot in our reunions but mostly about each of our experiences. Yes we resumed the endless moving about on picket duty with only minor rebel contact until after we stopped to camp a few miles south of Winchester on November 10.

The next day we had just finished putting up a picket line for our horses when a few rebel pickets attacked. We finally stopped them after quite a skirmish but we resumed before daylight the next day and it developed into a lot of charging and counter charging. Then there was a lull until we had been relieved by the First New Hampshire Cavalry and had marched in a pelting rain to Woodstock on the 21st under the command of General Powell.

Then on the next day we saddled before daylight in very cold and windy weather and marched to Mount Jackson, about fifteen miles north of New Market, where we encountered Early's troops and after several hours of severe fight we fell back to Woodstock. General Custer inspected us on the 27th.

Then it was back again to camp routine, moving about and picket duty in miserable weather and short rations of food through the cold winter months. It had recently become especially cold but it was starting to warm up on December 12th. We veterans especially recall that date as when we were issued new forage caps with the letter of each man's company, crossed sabers and the number of his regiment.

Then came December 15, 1864, which I thought I would never see; my honorable discharge notice as of that date while I was in Alexandria near Washington D.C. I was now free to return to civilian life and finally start raising a family.

(Dean) I am surprised that you were not held beyond your enlistment term for the duration of the war, another seven months to early May, 1865. At reunions, no doubt you learned what your regiment went through on to Lee's surrender.

(Joseph) That was the way it was in that war and I was certainly ready for it. On the next day we received confirmation of General Thomas' victory over General Hood at Marshville and our artillery fired a salute of one hundred guns, honoring it.

Norton's book covers this too, which I used to find what happened after I was discharged. On the morning of the 20th the regiment marched about eight miles south of New Market and were resuming the march the next morning when the rebels charged into our brigade and drove it about a half mile before it reformed and drove them back, inflicting very heavy loss upon them in killed, wounded and prisoners. It then returned to Woodstock.

The day after that the weather grew colder as they marched further north to Winchester again. That was one of the hardest, slippery marches for horses that had been experienced. Part of the time the regiment was in rear guard. On Christmas day there was an inspection but no turkey! The next day, the regiment received good news of General Sherman's capture of Savannah.

Then, on the 29th, they moved into routine tedious winter camp life at a good site up the Romeny pike, where they worked on their shanties for protection from the cold

and stormy weather until February 27, 1865.

Someone wrote a letter home about that kind of camp life:

“Some people think there is no work in soldiering. The first thing a cavalryman does after he gets up is to attend to his horse. He feeds his horse grain consisting of oats and corn. While he is eating he has to groom him for about an hour. After that he cooks his own breakfast and waters the horses, sometimes quite a way off.

Guard mounting for camp guard follows. Then your equipment has to be kept clean. A cavalryman has more equipment than any other branch of the service—a saber, carbine and a revolver. At night we have to feed and water our horses again. When a soldier is on duty, someone else cared for his horse.”

(Dean) That letter is important to this discussion because it is the common soldier, expressing himself as a youth, having experienced this seemingly never-ending life of tough times and low spirits. But that boring camp life changed back into a great deal of hard marches and picket duty again in March, with charging breastworks at Waynesboro and then marching on to Lynchburg, destroying railroad tracks and bridges.

Your regiment’s contribution to the war’s big picture had now shifted and requires an understanding of how it relates to the other sea sawing campaigns paying out simultaneously in the east and south as well as naval operations.

(Joseph) We were too busy where we were to know very much about what was happening at other battle areas of the war. However, we later exchanged memories at reunions. The regiment finally concentrated on the capture of Richmond and chasing General Lee to his surrender.

So, on March 8, they crossed the Tye River and burned the railroad bridge. They crossed over to New Market on the Hames River, joining the rest of the corps. Then they proceeded through Scottsville and Columbia to Frederick’s Hall where they captured a few prisoners and tore up railroad tracks until the 14th. Then they made a hard march to Squirrel Bridge on the South Anna River and continued on to Ashland where they found the rebels in force. So they moved back over the river toward Hanover Junction to cross it. Then they moved about twenty miles toward Azlitt’s Landing continuing on to the Mataponi River and King William Court House where they bivouacked. On the 19th they crossed the Pamunky River and went into camp where they took a steamboat on the 24th for City Point on the James River near where the battle for Petersburg was in progress.

They got heavily committed on April 1st, marching over some rough roads as part of the Second Brigade around the right flank of the rebels and then charging their breastworks near Five Forks. The brigade was repulsed twice before sending the rebel flying in all directions and thousands were captured. The regiment suffered severely but by the 3rd the Union Army was in possession of both Petersburg and Richmond.

Sheridan then headed off the rebels at Appomattox where General Lee surrendered on April 9. Except for a few holdouts, this closed the war. The

regiment remained in Petersburg vicinity until May 7 when they started a three week march to Alexandria for a regimental mustering out dress parade and discharge.

(Dean) So that completes your 8th New York Cavalry Regiment's service during that horrible war that unfortunately had to be played out to finally settle differences between the northern and southern states, which had been building to a breaking point.

I have read that, at one time in your older years, you participated in a program that compared Lincoln and Washington as presidents. I realize that you would still get a good argument from any who opposed him then and likely would still feel that way about preserving their rights. Lincoln is especially remembered in history for his concise statements such as in his address after the Battle of Gettysburg and later for his Thanksgiving Day proclamation that is so applicable for today and future generations.

(Joseph) As an active Republican I consider him a great President even though our fellow citizens from the South have reason to still harbor the old grievances from the war. I have filed some of Lincoln's speeches, such as this one here in my desk, about the need for establishing a national day of thanksgiving.

It reads in part, "...but we have forgotten God, we have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken excess, we have become too self-sufficient to feel a necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us. It seems to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently and gracefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people..."

(Dean) To the reader—this completes the imaginary discussion with my great grandfather, Joseph Elsom. He passed away a few months later at age 85, leaving these history-based memories of a typical Civil War cavalry veteran.