Herbert Bennett in the Civil War

Private, Company B, 25th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry

13 September 1861 – 20 October 1864

written by Patricia Roy and Claude AI

The regiment's movements come from the two histories written by men who marched with it: J. Waldo Denny's Wearing the Blue in the Twenty-fifth Mass. Volunteer Infantry (1879), and David L. Day's My Diary of Rambles with the 25th Mass. Volunteer Infantry (1884). Day served in Company B, Herbert's own company. Battle dates, casualty figures and background have been checked against the published regimental records and the reference sources listed at the end.

What is known about Herbert personally comes from his 256-page pension file from the National Archives.

Milford and Camp Lincoln, September–October 1861

In the summer of 1861, after the first battles had shown that the rebellion would not be put down quickly, President Lincoln called for a great expansion of the army. Massachusetts answered by raising new three-year regiments, and one of them was recruited at Worcester and lodged at the city's Agricultural Fairgrounds in a camp named for Levi Lincoln Jr., a former governor of Massachusetts and Worcester's first mayor. Seven Massachusetts regiments were trained at Camp Lincoln during the war; the 25th was the second of them.

Company B was the Milford company, and its story begins with one man. George Draper, a manufacturer of Hopedale in the town of Milford, proposed raising a company from Milford and its neighboring towns, put up his own money, and persuaded four other Milford men to contribute fifty dollars each. Willard Clark, William Emery and Draper's son William F. Draper opened the recruiting on 6 September 1861. Thirteen days later they had a full company. Herbert Bennett, a farmer of Mendon — the next town, a few miles from Milford — put his name down on 13 September 1861, in the middle of that thirteen-day rush. The War Department's own abstract of his service is unambiguous about the place: he “was enrolled on the 13th day of September, 1861, at Milford, Mass., 3 years” (pension file 1 p.40). His descriptive roll gives him as five feet five and a half inches, light complexion, dark hair, blue eyes, occupation farmer (pension file 1 p.53).

On 18 September the recruits were sworn in at Milford by T. G. Kent, Esq., and for the next week they drilled daily in the manual of arms, each man paid a dollar a day for his time. On the morning of 25 September, the company paraded with full ranks and was escorted to the depot by the Milford band and a crowd of townspeople. There they got their first practical proof that they were soldiers: they were put aboard freight cars for South Framingham. At South Framingham they were transferred to passenger cars, and they reached Worcester at nine in the morning, one

hundred and three men — the first company of the 25th Massachusetts to go into camp. They slept that first night in Agricultural Hall and pitched their tents the next day.

Camp Lincoln was laid out with wide company streets, and each company named its own. Company A had Pickett Avenue, Company E had Jackson Street, Company G — which Denny notes indulged in lager — had Liberty Street. The Milford company named its street Draper, in honor of the man who had raised it. George Draper's son William went to war as a second lieutenant of Company B and came home a lieutenant colonel.

A little vocabulary is worth having. A company was about a hundred men under a captain; ten companies made a regiment under a colonel. Company B's first captain was Willard Clark, and the regiment's colonel was Edwin Upton. The men had signed for three years, at the pay of a Union private, thirteen dollars a month.

To Annapolis, October–November 1861

The men were mustered into the service of the United States on 31 October 1861 and left the same day, under orders to report to Brigadier General Ambrose E. Burnside at Annapolis, Maryland. They marched down Highland and Main streets to the Common, took the train to New York, spent the night there, and the next day marched down Broadway to the Jersey City ferry and boarded a train for Philadelphia.

They reached Philadelphia at about one o'clock in the morning and found the Cooper Shop refreshment saloon lit up, the tables spread and the food hot — the Philadelphia volunteers fed passing regiments at any hour, day or night, and no Union soldier ever forgot it. At three in the morning the regiment formed again and marched two miles to the Baltimore station, singing as it went through the sleeping city. It reached Baltimore at one in the afternoon in a drenching rainstorm, and the men were quartered in a large warehouse.

On Sunday morning, 3 November, the steamer Louisiana carried them down to Annapolis, where they were given temporary quarters in the buildings of the Naval Academy alongside the 21st Massachusetts. The following day they moved out to a dry, elevated field about a mile and a half from the landing — Day calls it Taylor's farm — and pitched their tents. The camp was named Camp Hicks, after Thomas Hicks, the governor whose efforts had kept Maryland in the Union. Other regiments camped around them, and Burnside's orders called for eight hours of drill a day. They stayed there for two months.

The Burnside Expedition and the storm at Hatteras, January 1862

On 6 January 1862, in a driving snowstorm, the regiment boarded the transports lying in the harbor. Company B, with most of the other companies, went aboard the steamer New York. The fleet lay in the harbor until the 9th, then sailed, anchoring for the night below the mouth of the

Potomac, and the next day reached Fort Monroe, Virginia, where it joined the gunboats, tugs and supply vessels of what became known as the Burnside Expedition — an armada of more than sixty vessels under Brigadier General Ambrose E. Burnside.

Burnside's object was Roanoke Island, on the North Carolina sounds, and the difficulty was water. Navy warships could not cross the shallow inlet at Hatteras, so merchant steamers and river boats had been bought or chartered and converted. The captains did not know where they were going: their orders were sealed, to be opened as the fleet neared Cape Hatteras.

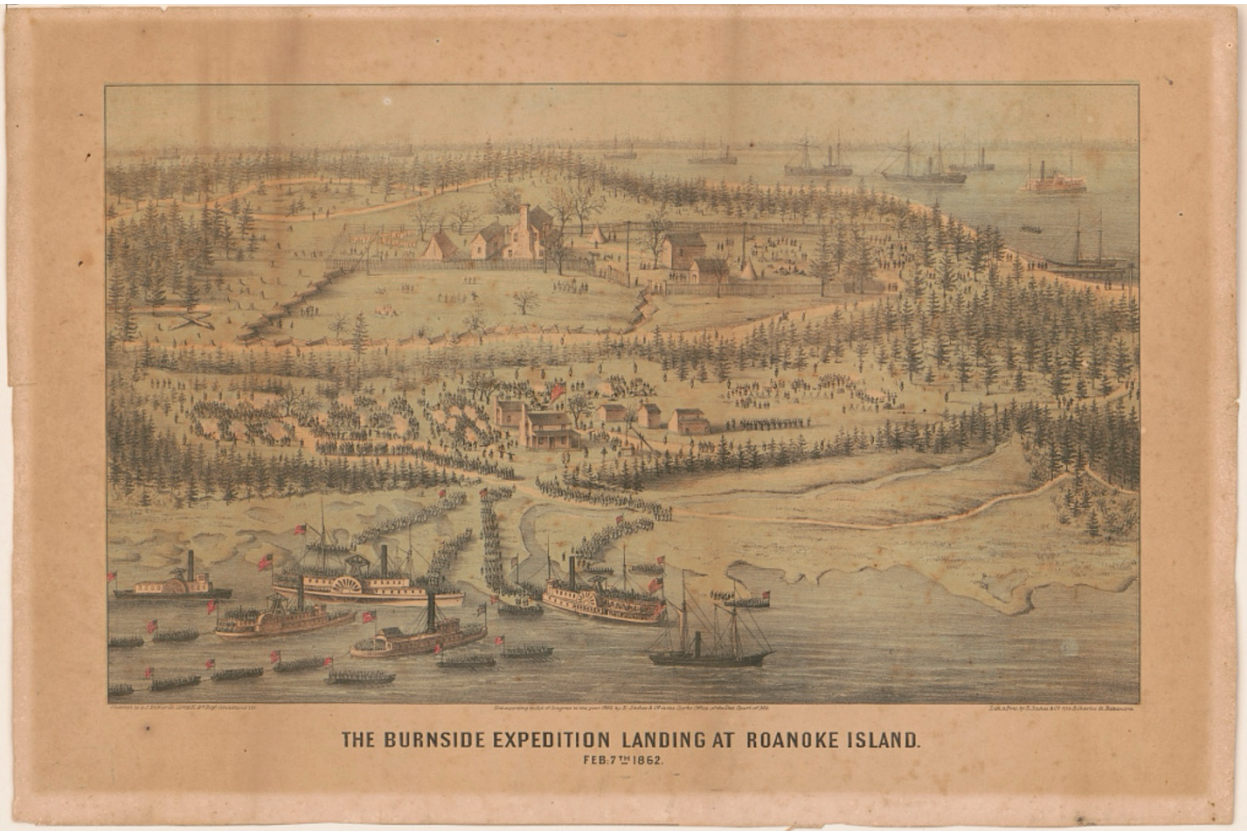
At Hatteras a great gale struck them. It blew for days. Vessels dragged their anchors and were driven ashore. The gunboat Zouave, with Companies D and H of the 25th aboard, went to the bottom — the men were saved, but their rations and much of their equipment were not, and the next day they breakfasted on raw salt pork and hard bread. The City of New York, a large steamer loaded with ordnance stores, supplies and horses, struck the outer bar and was a total wreck within twenty-four hours; her distress signals were seen, but no boat could live in that sea to reach her. The colonel and surgeon of the 9th New Jersey were drowned when a small boat upset. Water ran short aboard the New York, and men caught rainwater off the filthy upper deck and were offered seventy-five cents a cupful for it.

Then came the sandbar. Between the anchorage and the sound lay a bar — the “swash” — with seven feet and one inch of water over it at high tide. Every transport had been chartered on the stipulation that it drew no more than seven feet loaded; many drew more than eight, the contractors having cheated the government. Burnside decided to make an issue of it with the master of the largest transport, the New York. Captain Clark protested that his steamer drew eight feet two inches and that he could not cross seven feet of water without losing her. Burnside answered that the owners had contracted she drew seven feet, and if they had lied about it they could suffer for it — the steamer would go over the swash or be lost in the attempt. Clark refused. A file of soldiers came aboard, arrested him and took him off in a small boat. Burnside then let it be known that the order would be obeyed or the captain would hang at the yardarm (outer tip of the ship). Clark agreed to try.

On 27 January the troops were taken off the New York, Companies B, F, G and K going aboard the ferryboat Curlew. Emptied of men and freight, the New York got up a full head of steam on 31 January and went over the swash without touching bottom, to hearty cheering from the fleet. The rest of the vessels followed, and the way to Roanoke Island was open.

Roanoke Island, 7–8 February 1862

Almost a month had gone by since the fleet left Annapolis before it could move up the sound. On 7 February the gunboats opened on the Confederate forts, and late in the day the troops began going ashore. Company B landed with the rest and, because it was late, camped where it stood. It rained that night and few of them slept.



The Burnside Expedition Landing at Roanoke Island
Feb 7, 1862
https://www.loc.gov/resource/ds.00119/

In the morning they pushed inland. The Confederates had built their line behind ground they believed impassable, but the Union regiments waded the swamp on both flanks, worked around behind them, and the garrison surrendered on 8 February 1862. It was the regiment's first action, and it cost the 25th Massachusetts six enlisted men killed and three officers and forty-one enlisted men wounded.

New Bern, March 1862

The next objective was New Bern, North Carolina. The regiment landed on 13 March 1862 and marched about a mile up the riverbank. They slept in the rain. In the morning there was no time to make coffee — the enemy was close and the order was to move — so breakfast was cold meat and hardtack.

On 14 March the Union force drove the outnumbered Confederate defenders from their works and out of the town. Before they left, the retreating troops set fire to part of the city, and many of the inhabitants fled with them. New Bern stayed in Federal hands for the rest of the war, and its loss cut one of the routes by which supplies reached the Confederate armies in Virginia.

The 25th Massachusetts was the first regiment to enter New Bern. That night the men of Company B slept in a small house on Craven Street; the next day they moved into a two-story brick house on East Front Street with a flower garden. The regiment stayed in the town until early May, doing heavy provost duty — military police work — to keep order.



25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in front of the 'Ambrotype & Daguerreotype Gallery' of photographer J.L. Cowling, which was on the second floor above a drug store in New Bern, N.C. Photo taken by George H. Nickerson.

The Red House and Camp Bullock, May 1862

On 9 May 1862 the regiment marched thirteen miles out to the Red House, a farmhouse belonging to an inoffensive gentleman named Bogey, standing where three small roads converged between

the Trent road and Bachelor's Creek. They relieved the 23rd Massachusetts, which had been holding the position. The camp of Sibley tents pitched a few rods from the house was named Camp Bullock, in honor of the Hon. Alexander H. Bullock of Worcester, who had been the city's mayor and who in January 1862 became Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives. He would be elected governor of Massachusetts after the war.

The work here was picket duty. A picket was a chain of small posts — three men or more, spaced out along roads, paths and any other line of approach — pushed out ahead of the main body as an early-warning screen. It was tedious and it was nervous work, and Denny tells one story on the regiment's behalf. On the night of 19 May the camp was twice turned out by firing on the picket line. Farmer Bogey's white mare had been let out to graze, wandered up to a post held by Company G, was properly challenged, declined to answer, and was fired at. She turned aside, unhurt. The whole line took up the firing. After things quieted down, she came back, was challenged again, again said nothing, and was fired at again — and was found safe and sound in the morning. Company G was sent out to scout and spent the rest of the night on duty. Denny's dry conclusion was that an enemy might safely approach that particular picket.

On 15 May, at three in the morning, the regiment left Camp Bullock in light marching order and joined the 17th Massachusetts, seven companies of the 3rd New York Cavalry and Belger's Rhode Island battery on the Trent road. The object was to drive off a Confederate force at Trenton that was starting to build entrenchments. The cavalry found the enemy, a sharp fight of ten minutes left the field in Union hands, and the 25th Massachusetts marched back into the Red House camp before dark, having covered twenty-five miles without firing a shot.



The above photo was found on Facebook in the Massachusetts Infantry in the Civil War group with the following caption:

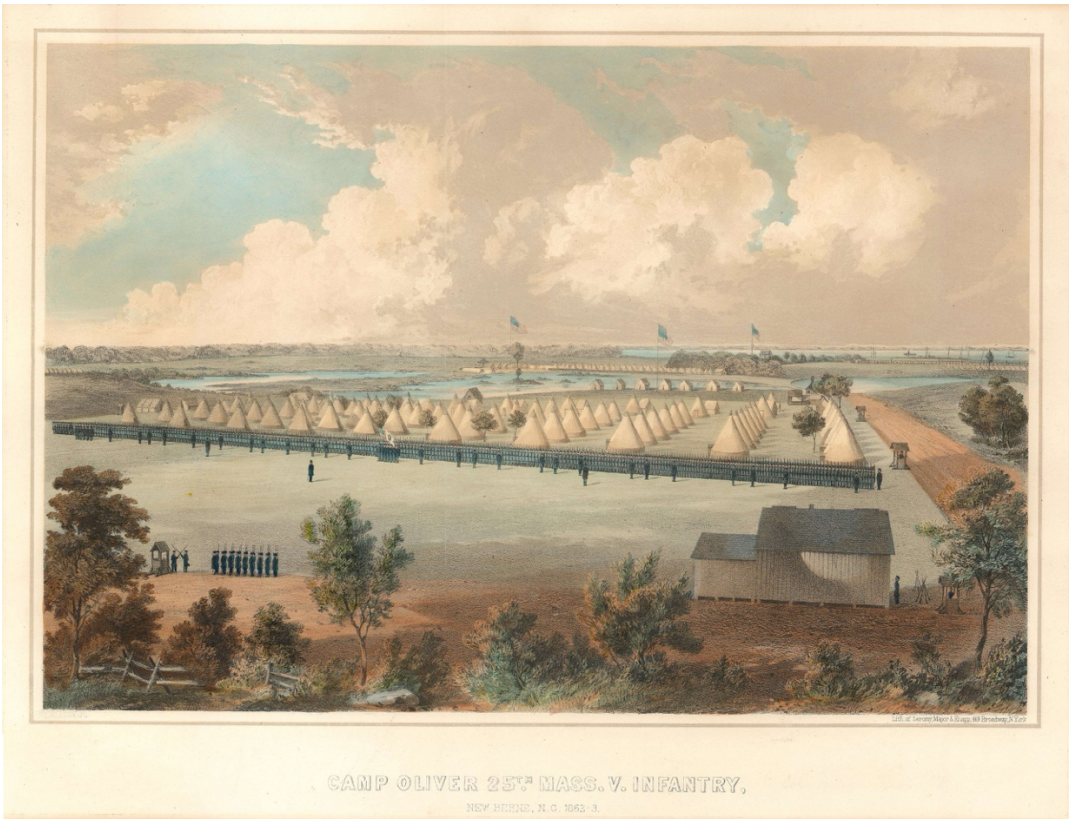
> *Camp of the 25th Massachusetts Infantry and 3rd N.Y. Cavalry, Harrison House, Trent Road, New Bern, North Carolina*

This is not the same camp as the one at Red house. The Red house is about nine miles from New Bern. The Harrison house was about two miles from New Bern. This photograph was probably taken in November 1862 when the 3rd New York Cavalry had its headquarters at Harrison house.

After the capture of New Bern, the Union maintained many camps and picket stations outside of New Bern along Trent road. The camp showing the 25th Massachusetts Infantry and the 3rd New York Cavalry was one of them.

Camp Oliver and the New Bern summer, 1862

Camp Bullock came to an end on 29 May 1862, when the regiment was ordered back to New Bern. A new camp was laid out on rising ground at the west end of the town, north of the Trent road and a quarter of a mile behind Fort Totten. It was named Camp Oliver, after General Henry K. Oliver, formerly Adjutant General of Massachusetts. This camp would be Herbert's home, on and off, for the next year and a half, and its name turns up again and again in the pension file in the mouths of men who lived in it.



Camp Oliver 25th Mass. V. Infantry, New Berne, N.C.

The summer was hot, the flies were worse than anything the men had seen, and the thunderstorms came down hard enough that tents had to be staked with care.

On 26 June, Companies B and C, with a New York company, crossed the Neuse on an expedition and came to Latham's plantation. Latham was a battery captain in the Confederate service and was not at home; his wife and the people she held in slavery were left to feed the soldiers. When the party left the next day, several of the enslaved women went with them. Mrs. Latham demanded to know who was going to pay her. She was told to make out a bill, and that one of these days Uncle Sam and her husband would have a settlement. The detachment was back in camp on 29 June.

On 15 September the 25th and 17th Massachusetts and the 10th Connecticut went aboard steamers for Plymouth, on the Roanoke River, and anchored there for the night. In the morning they learned the expedition had been cancelled — the officers had concluded that pushing further at Plymouth would gain nothing — and they returned to New Bern.

By 20 September the regimental bands had been mustered out and sent home across the army. The reason given was cost. The men noticed, and did not fail to remark, that the officers received a pay raise at about the same time.

Foster's raid to Tarboro, 30 October – 10 November 1862

On the morning of 30 October 1862, Major Josiah Pickett took six companies of the 25th — the other four were on picket up the Trent road — out of New Bern aboard the steamer Highlander, bound for Washington, North Carolina, on the Pamlico River. There they joined an expedition of about five thousand men under Major General John G. Foster, made up of the 17th, 23rd, 24th and 25th Massachusetts and the 10th Connecticut, three nine-month Massachusetts regiments, five batteries of the 3rd New York artillery, Belger's Rhode Island battery, seven companies of the 3rd New York cavalry, and a heavy wagon and ambulance train.

On Sunday morning, 2 November, the column left Washington to march across country to the Roanoke River. The 23rd and 25th Massachusetts were detailed to guard the wagon and ambulance train, which meant they were at the back. In the middle of the afternoon, they heard firing ahead: the advance had reached a wide swamp with a creek running across the road, and two Confederate regiments were disputing the crossing. The fight lasted an hour or so before the cavalry and two batteries charged across and the enemy fell back. Union losses were about a dozen killed and wounded. The wagon train, meanwhile, crawled. It was late evening when the train reached the swamp; the rest of the troops were already across, and the guard was ordered to halt where it was. The mules were fed, the men made a supper of cold meat, hardtack and coffee, and lay down by a fence to sleep.

The next morning the teams began the passage of the mudhole at Rawls's Mill creek, and Day — who went down to watch — wrote the best paragraph in his book about it. A file of men stood on either side of the road in mud and water up to three feet deep, armed with hoop-poles,

encouraging each team as it ran the gauntlet. A careless driver then ran his wagon off the corduroy and sank it to the axle, blocking everything behind. The wagon was unloaded — the beef and hardtack went into the creek — but the mules, who knew only that they were stuck, braced their forelegs, stuck their ears in the air and refused to move. No amount of swearing or hoop-poles had any effect. Captain Schenck offered one of his eight-horse artillery teams. When the order "Forward, march!" was given, the horses stepped smartly off; the mules, not understanding the order, did not, and three or four of them went heels-up and came down on their heads. In that condition, kicking and floundering and sometimes under water, they were dragged out through the mudhole, to the great delight of everybody watching.

The column marched to Williamston on the Roanoke — a pretty town of twelve or fifteen hundred people — and found no enemy. That night they camped in a large cornfield, which fed the horses and mules and gave the men bedding and firewood.

The next day they marched up the Hamilton road, reaching Hamilton about two in the afternoon, and resumed the march at six. The inhabitants had seen the army coming and had cut their well ropes and filled the wells with rubbish before leaving, so there was no fresh water. In return, the town was set on fire. Day, who thought little of the men who set the fires, noted that they had cause to regret it: that night was cold and snowing, and the army had burned its own shelter.

They camped in another cornfield and next morning marched toward Tarboro, halting some ten miles short of it. Scouting parties reported the Confederates in position and ready, and the troops could hear trains bringing more of them in. Foster had come out to observe and forage rather than to fight a battle, he did not have the men for one, his provisions were running down and his troops were worn out, and he turned back.

Coming back through the ruins of Hamilton — nothing left but a few outlying buildings — Company B found one small two-story house still standing and took the upper floor; a company of the 5th Massachusetts had the ground floor. By morning there were two inches of slush on the ground, some of the men were barefoot, and a good many were sick. The surgeons put the sick and the barefooted aboard the gunboats for Plymouth and the boats went slowly down the river keeping pace with the army.

They reached Plymouth on the afternoon of 10 November 1862, after a fortnight out. They brought back with them, in Day's words, upwards of a thousand freed people and several hundred horses and mules. He also recorded what he could not do anything about: coming down the river they passed a large plantation, and forty or fifty people ran to the shore and begged to be taken aboard, some of them following the boat nearly a mile.

The Goldsboro expedition, December 1862

The regiment garrisoned Plymouth until 8 December, when it embarked on the schooner Skirmisher and returned to New Bern on the evening of the 10th. Waiting for them was an order to be ready to march in the morning. Large reinforcements had come into New Bern, and Foster

was taking about ten thousand men against Goldsboro. The object was to break the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad and so keep reinforcements from reaching Lee at Fredericksburg, where Burnside was about to attack.

On 14 December the column met the Confederates near Kinston, drawn up behind a wet swamp half a mile wide that made accurate artillery fire impossible and turned the battle into an infantry fight. The 25th Massachusetts was drawn up in line on open ground near the river, to the left of the swamp, and was not under fire. After about three hours the Union brigades got through the swamp and charged, the 9th New Jersey leading, drove the Confederates across the river and through the town, and took eleven guns and three hundred prisoners. Union losses were about two hundred, some fifty of them killed. When the brigade came up onto the battleground it was halted and burial parties were detailed — to bury the Confederate dead, who covered the higher ground around an old church. The men did not take kindly to the job, being in a hurry to get into town, but they dug their trenches and wound the capes of the dead men's overcoats about their heads and covered them over.

The next morning the column destroyed the road and railroad bridges over the Neuse as it left, and marched eighteen miles up the river road.

On the morning of 16 December word came that the enemy was in force across the river at Whitehall, three or four miles off, where a steam ram was being built — a steam-powered warship with an armored bow meant to run down and hole enemy vessels. The bridge that crossed there had been taken up, so the fight became an artillery duel across the river, ten Union batteries against the guns the Confederates had saved from Kinston. Confederate sharpshooters along the bank made trouble for the Union gunners; Major Pickett was asked for a hundred men to deal with them and more than half the regiment stepped forward. Of the hundred who went, one was killed and three wounded. After nearly three hours the fire slackened and the enemy drew off. The soldiers were told, and believed for the rest of their lives, that the ram had been blown up and destroyed. In fact, it had not been: the vessel — she was later commissioned as the CSS Neuse — was only slightly damaged, and her completion was delayed by a few weeks. She never did any harm, running aground before she reached open water and being burned by her own crew in 1865.

Early on 17 December the brigade took the advance and found the enemy in the woods near the railroad bridge over the Neuse, about two miles below Goldsboro. The fighting began about ten in the morning and lasted, with pauses, until the middle of the afternoon, when the Confederate guns were silenced and their infantry driven off. Volunteers were called for to burn the bridge under fire; Lieutenant George H. Graham of the 23rd New York Battery got to it, fired it, and escaped by jumping from the burning structure down the riverbank, and came back down the lines to loud cheering. Three Massachusetts regiments were set to tearing up the track — the ties burned, and the rails heated and twisted into knots. Day recorded that with the help of the cavalry ten or twelve miles of track and trestle were destroyed. Foster said the object had been accomplished and ordered the retreat.



Neuse River Bridge
Wilmington & Goldsboro R.R.
taken 1860s
https://www.loc.gov/resource/ds.05731/

Leaving the field, the brigade crossed a small creek about twenty feet wide with almost no water in it, steep-banked except at the ford. They halted at a farmhouse just beyond to load the dead and wounded into ambulances — and a battery officer came galloping up shouting for an old regiment, because the enemy was charging the guns. The Union batteries had been left alone on their knoll to cover the withdrawal; the Confederates, reinforced, had seen them standing there unsupported and thought they could take them. The 25th Massachusetts went to Belger's support at the double-quick, through a crossfire from a Confederate battery in the woods. The guns opened on the charging columns, and when the enemy saw the infantry come up, they turned and made for the woods.

The battery in the woods kept firing. At first the shots went well over the men's heads; then the Confederate gunners corrected their range and the shots came lower, and Captain Belger ordered

everyone to lie down. Day, lying at the rear of his company, describes shots passing directly over him about once a minute and striking the ground a few feet behind, each one a little lower than the last, until he had “flatted out as thin as a sheet of tissue paper” and finally pushed ten feet to the left — a movement barely completed when a shot ploughed a furrow through the space he had left. That was the last shot: the Union guns were turned on that battery and silenced it.

When they came back to the little creek they had crossed dry-shod an hour before, they found a roaring torrent running bank-full, with barrels, rails and pieces of timber turning in the current — a dam upstream had been destroyed. They had to go through it. The men held their rifles, cartridge boxes and blankets over their heads and waded in, waist deep.

That night was freezing, and their clothes were soaked. The advance had set the woods on fire, and the men marched four or five miles through a roaring blaze that at least kept them warm and lit the road. They reached the camp late, wet, cold and hungry, went half a mile for rails to build fires, and made coffee. There was no meat left in the wagons. Supper was coffee and hardtack. At sunrise the army was on the road for New Bern, and they came in a little after noon on Sunday, 21 December 1862, nearly dead from hunger and exhaustion. In ten days, Foster's army had marched a hundred and fifty miles, fought three times, burned the Goldsboro bridge, wrecked a train and an engine at Mount Olive station and torn up the line between.

Plymouth and the siege of Washington, March–May 1863

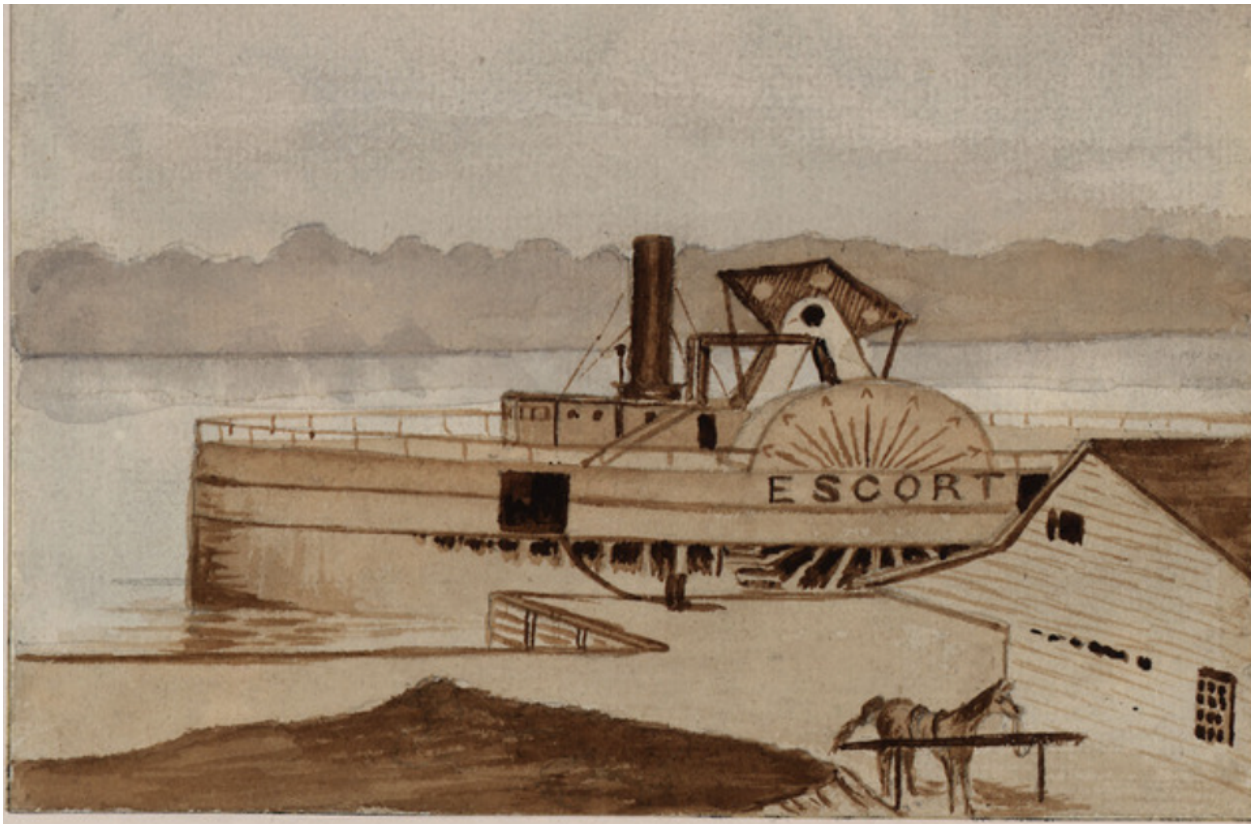
The regiment then had the quietest stretch of its service, three months in camp at New Bern. On 17 March 1863 it held a field day on the parade ground of Camp Oliver, three days late for the anniversary of the capture of the town — sack races, catching the greased pig, foot races, wheeling a barrow blindfolded, a sparring match between Captain O'Neill and his brother — with Generals Foster and Palmer and the officers and men of neighboring regiments looking on.

The next afternoon, 18 March, orders came at four o'clock to break camp and be ready to march in half an hour. By dark seven companies were aboard the steamer Escort, bound for Plymouth; Companies A, E and H followed on another boat. The night was dark and stormy, and the steamer waited until morning.

The 19th was a heavy northeast gale. The steamer entered the sound about ten, the water grew rough, the boat rolled, the men were seasick and the sea broke over the deck and soaked them. They anchored for the night near the entrance to Croatan Sound. The storm was still blowing the next day; they passed Roanoke Island, entered the Albemarle, and reached Plymouth late in the afternoon, quartering in a large warehouse on the wharf.

Plymouth had changed since they had garrisoned it the previous autumn. During the winter the Confederates had made a dash into the town and burned the central business district. By 27 March the regiment had cleared debris off part of the burnt ground and pitched a camp there and set to building a fort.

What happened next needs a word of background. Thirty miles away at Washington, North Carolina, Major General Foster had been shut up since the end of March by a Confederate force under D. H. Hill, which had planted batteries along the Pamlico and cut the town off. On 13 April the steamer Escort ran the batteries and got into Washington with supplies and a Rhode Island regiment aboard, taking heavy fire and losing her pilot; on the night of 15 April Foster went out on her, through the same gauntlet, to organize the relief from New Bern. The Confederates lifted the siege and were clear of the area by 20 April.



At Plymouth, however, the news had not yet arrived, and on 19 April it was decided that the garrison was too small to hold the place. The other troops were to be withdrawn, and the 25th Massachusetts was to stay behind as rear guard, blow up the fort and destroy the entrenchments before it left. At the last moment word came that the blockade of the river at Washington had been broken and that Foster had got out, and that the Confederates had left the vicinity. The evacuation was countermanded.

On 3 May the regiment took a steamer back, reaching New Bern at six on the evening of the 4th, and the next day pitched its tents once more on the old ground at Camp Oliver.

Gum Swamp and Hill's Point, May–October 1863

At midnight on 21 May 1863 the regiment marched for Bachelor's Creek to join an expedition against the Confederate post at Gum Swamp, under Colonel J. Richter Jones of the 58th

Pennsylvania. The attack next morning succeeded — about a hundred and forty Confederates were taken — but the column stayed too long. The enemy, reinforced from Kinston, cut it off from the railroad, and by the following day had it surrounded on every side but one. The only way out was through Dover Swamp.

It took four hours to get across. The men ran out of water and drank what they could find in the swamp. Several fell exhausted and were carried out on stretchers; two men died in the swamp before they could be brought out, and several of the 25th did not reach Camp Oliver for two days. Those who came through found a long train of freight cars waiting, and men coming along the line with great pots of old-fashioned New England baked beans, which were greedily devoured. The train reached New Bern at five in the afternoon. That same evening, at Bachelor's Creek, Colonel Jones was shot dead leading two companies out against the enemy.

The regiment stayed at New Bern until 3 July, when orders came to be ready in an hour. Company B went aboard the steamer Mystic, bound for Washington, North Carolina, on the Pamlico. They anchored for the night a few miles short of the town and went up in the morning and were then ordered three miles back down the river to Hill's Point, a bluff on the Pamlico that had been one of the Confederate battery positions during the siege that spring. Companies B, C and F relieved a New York company there and held the work — keeping the river open and the point out of Confederate hands — for the rest of the summer and into the autumn.

Sick at Camp Oliver: the summer of 1863

Somewhere in this period comes the first event in Herbert's service that the pension file describes in detail. He fell seriously ill at New Bern, was carried to the regimental hospital, and was there about three weeks. Each regiment had its own surgeon and its own hospital, which followed the troops when they moved.

Three men who shared his tent and his blankets swore to it separately, in the autumn of 1888, without having seen each other's statements.

> *I enlisted in same Regt & Co. B, shared blankets with him, both on the field & in camp. I remember of him being sick at Camp Oliver, Newbern N.C. He had to be carried to the Regimental Hospital at Newbern N.C. He remained there about three weeks. I think this was in the Fall of '63... I remember of him being very yellow & showed signs of jaundice very much. In fact he was a rather sick looking man. He also had chills & fever.*
>
> — Lewis W. Smith, aged 45, of Douglas, Massachusetts, 23 November 1888 (pension file 1 p.89)

> *Bennett was sick with jaundice & liver trouble contracted while we were in camp at New Bern N.C. in the fall of 1863. He was at the Regimental Hospital for several weeks at that time and was one that never gave up at triffles, so must have been very sick.*
>
> — Dexter P. Vent, aged 46, of Milford, Massachusetts, 8 December 1888 (pension file 1 p.71)

> *I... tented most of the time with Herbert A. Bennett of the same Co. & Regt. Considered him sound up to the summer or fall of 1863 when he was taken very sick with jaundice*

> *& liver complaint & was sent to Regt. Hospital at Newbern, N.C. Recollect he looked yellow & bad & that he never looked well after he came back to the Co.*
>
> — Alderman C. Cook, aged 49, of Mendon, Massachusetts, 12 October 1888 (pension file 1 p.93)

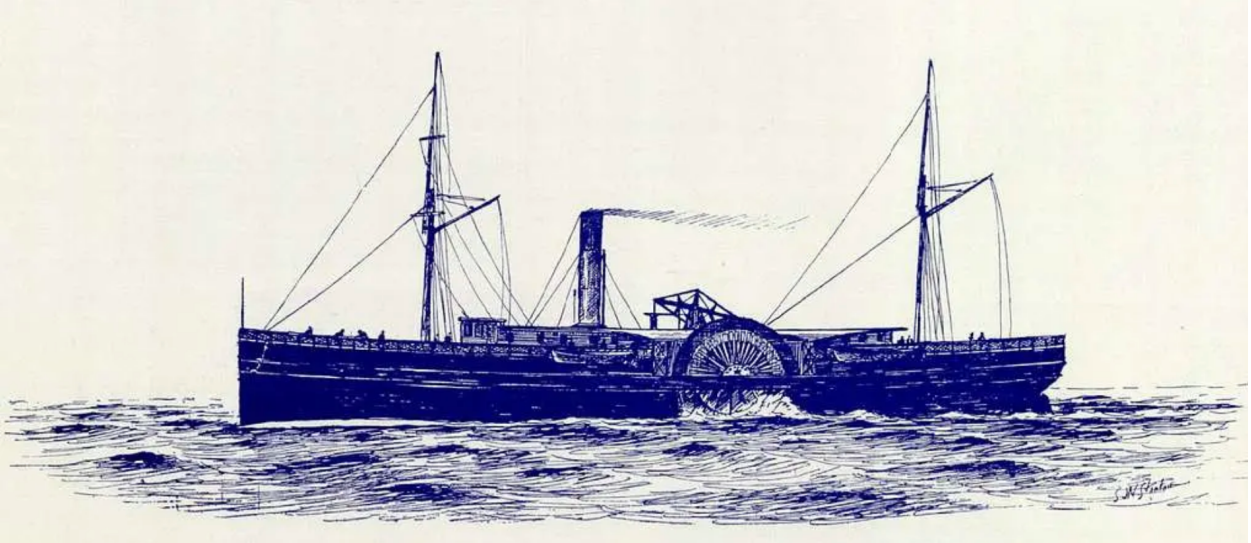
They agree on the place, the illness, the destination, the rough length of it and the season. Smith adds that Herbert had to be carried there. Vent adds the judgement that mattered most among men who knew each other: he was not a malingerer — "one that never gave up at triffles." Cook adds the observation that runs through the whole file: "he never looked well after he came back to the Co."

Company B was living at Camp Oliver, in New Bern, from 5 May to 3 July 1863; from 4 July until 23 October it was at Hill's Point, thirty-odd miles away, though a sick man from an outpost would still be sent back to the regimental hospital at New Bern. Herbert's own first statement, in June 1888, put the illness at about June 1863. Later he said it was November 1863. His three comrades put it in the summer or the fall. The one period in which he was actually living at Camp Oliver, where all three of them place him, is May and June of 1863 — which makes his original answer look like the best one he ever gave.

Out of North Carolina, October 1863

On 23 October 1863 a special order was issued at New Bern sending the 25th Massachusetts, the 23rd and 27th Massachusetts and the 9th New Jersey north to report to Major General Foster at Fortress Monroe. Late that evening the three companies at Hill's Point — B, C and F — together with Company I from Rodman's Point and Company K at Washington, boarded a transport sent for them and went round to New Bern and on by rail to Morehead City. On 24 October the four companies at the outposts marched into New Bern and occupied old Camp Oliver for a brief last time before taking the cars that night.

At Morehead City the whole regiment went aboard the steamer S. R. Spaulding. It started on 26 October for Fortress Monroe, but a severe storm forced it back; a second start next morning got no further than an anchorage off the lighthouse; a third, in the afternoon, held. They reached Fortress Monroe on 29 October, and Foster ordered the regiment into camp at Newport News, on the bank of the James River, where the tents went up and the camp was named Camp Upton after the regiment's first colonel.



S.R. Spaulding

Re-enlistment and Herbert's decision

At Newport News in the winter of 1863–64 the men were asked to re-enlist. Their three years would be up in the autumn of 1864. Those who signed again as “Veteran Volunteers” got a $100 bounty and a thirty-day furlough home. Those who did not were left in an awkward and, as it turned out, punitive position.

The counting went slowly: thirty-eight men had re-enlisted by 1 December 1863, one hundred and nine by the 17th, and sixty-four more on 2 January 1864. In the middle of January, the re-enlisted men left for home on furlough in two detachments, the second of them a hundred and seven strong, accompanied by Colonel Pickett. Then an order arrived from headquarters at Fortress Monroe stating that those who did not re-enlist would be permanently transferred to other organizations to serve out their time, and that non-commissioned officers among them would be reduced to the ranks. Denny, who was there and who wrote the regiment's history fifteen years later, thought this order indefensible and said so at length. There was also a strong hint that the non-re-enlisted men would be marched to Yorktown, where, it was said, they would probably die of malarial fever.

There was one way to make it all go away. If three-quarters of the regiment re-enlisted, the whole regiment could go home together, and from 17 January the officers worked hard at persuasion. By 20 January two hundred men had re-enlisted — not enough.

Herbert Bennett did not re-enlist. He had signed for three years in 1861, and he meant to serve them and go home. He was one of two hundred and twenty-five men who had not signed again, and on 21 January 1864 they were ordered to march to Yorktown. Day, who was among them, calls it going into exile. They took their belongings on their backs, though a boat went round with the camp equipage and could as easily have carried them — “but that would be no punishment for

our stubbornness." They had no officer of their own left with them; Captain Parkhurst went along out of kindness. They took their last dinner with the boys at Camp Upton, and at two in the afternoon marched off.

They halted for the night at Little Bethel and took over an old meeting house that had been stripped of its seats and pulpit. Whatever was expected of a punishment detail, what happened was a dance: the men set candles along the gallery, Company G furnished the music, the pickets heard the noise, stood their rifles in a corner and joined in, the captain remonstrated and was told never mind the pickets, and the fun went on until the candles burned low. In the morning five carts came up loaded with oysters; the men bought the oysters and hired the carts to haul their knapsacks to Yorktown.

They reached Yorktown at six on the evening of 22 January and kept going, past Lee's Mills and Warwick Court House, camping at two in the morning of the 23rd at the junction of Queen's Creek and the York River, near Williamsburg. They named the camp Camp Hancock, after Major General Winfield S. Hancock, whose brigade had fought over that ground at the battle of Williamsburg on 5 May 1862 — the action that earned him the nickname "Hancock the Superb."

On 27 January three officers came down from Newport News to try to get the men to re-enlist again. Captain Parkhurst laughed at them and told them they had come to the wrong market to peddle their wares; the men crowded round and joked about tar and feathers. The officers then asked the surgeon to put as many men as possible on the sick list, which would have reduced the number of duty men and improved the proportion who had re-enlisted; the surgeon replied that men who had just made a fifty-mile march under heavy knapsacks could not be supposed very seriously indisposed. The visitors left with two recruits.

On 4 February Camp Hancock was broken up and the detachment marched into the camp of the 139th New York, a Brooklyn regiment. Colonel Roberts received them at dress parade, told them plainly that they were not permanently transferred and that the non-commissioned officers would not be reduced, and asked his own men to share their quarters and blankets. The Massachusetts men cheered him, and the New Yorkers cheered back. Herbert and his comrades were divided among the New York companies; about twenty-five were sent over to Fort Magruder. The New York camp was a revelation — log houses with board floors, glass windows, stoves, chairs and bunks, officers' quarters built of logs with the bark left on, some of them two stories, a few with cabinet organs, and officers' wives and sisters living in camp. The 139th had been stationed there almost since it was raised and had seen very little of the war, and they wanted to hear everything the Massachusetts men could tell them.

Herbert's own record for this period is thin, and the gap is the Army's, not his. His company muster roll for January and February 1864 shows him "absent on detached service at Williamsburgh, Va.", and the regimental return for January 1864 shows thirteen privates on detached service there without giving names. The detachment muster roll was never on file, which is why the Pension Bureau could never learn what duty he had performed. It asked the War Department twice, in November 1897 and again in September 1899, and both times was told the

records furnished nothing further (pension file 1 p.40, p.85, p.87, p.88). The regimental histories fill in what the muster rolls could not: the men of the 25th who did not re-enlist spent those weeks at Williamsburg, attached to the 139th New York.

On 6 February the combined force marched. Day describes the column forming with New York and Massachusetts men shoulder to shoulder, the women of the camp in tears, and the Massachusetts veterans watching the farewells and laughing. The brigade — the 139th and 118th New York, two regiments of United States Colored Troops and a battery, under Brigadier General Isaac Wistar — took the road toward Richmond, with a cavalry brigade of three or four thousand under Colonel Spear coming up behind. This was Wistar's raid on Richmond, and the infantry were the supporting column. The march was long and hard; men fell out through the afternoon, and it went on some thirty hours, ending after midnight at New Kent with three hours' sleep before they were on the road again a little after daylight. Then word came that the bridges over the Chickahominy were down and the enemy was guarding the river. The raid was off. They marched back to New Kent and pitched their tents.

On 13 February the 139th New York was ordered to Newport News, and the men of the 25th Massachusetts stayed behind on guard duty at New Kent. They were relieved by the 11th Connecticut on 2 March and left the next day for Newport News, where they rejoined the rest of the regiment, home from its furlough. The March–April muster roll shows Herbert present again (pension file 1 p.40).

Portsmouth and Camp Wellington, March–April 1864

By 26 March the whole regiment was at Portsmouth, Virginia, and was then sent out to Getty's Station on the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad, about four miles west of the town. They camped between the station and the Nansemond River and named it Camp Wellington, after T. W. Wellington of Worcester, whose work at home for the soldiers had earned the regiment's gratitude. The ground was mud, and some men preferred to sleep in the woods; they set about draining the camp and stockading the tents.

On 22 April the regiment embarked for Plymouth, North Carolina, to relieve Brigadier General Wessells, who was besieged there by a Confederate force under Robert F. Hoke with the ironclad ram Albemarle in support. On reaching Pamlico Sound they learned the garrison had already surrendered — it capitulated on 20 April — and they landed instead on Roanoke Island. They left on 25 April and were back at Camp Wellington early on the 26th.

On 27 April the 25th Massachusetts was assigned to the brigade of Brigadier General Charles A. Heckman, in the 2nd Division of the Eighteenth Army Corps. This was the brigade the men knew as the Star Brigade: the 23rd, 25th and 27th Massachusetts and the 9th New Jersey, all of them old North Carolina regiments who had served together since Roanoke Island. From here to the end of Herbert's service, the story is the brigade's story.

Bermuda Hundred, May 1864

On 5 May 1864 the Army of the James, under Major General Benjamin Butler, landed at Bermuda Hundred, the neck of land between the James and the Appomattox about ten miles from Petersburg and twenty south of Richmond. At six the next morning Heckman's brigade moved forward, reaching Cobb's Hill at noon, where the men could see the Confederate battery at Fort Clifton and, beyond it, the church spires of Petersburg.

At four in the afternoon of 6 May the brigade was sent to reconnoiter (look ahead) the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad a few miles beyond Cobb's Hill. This was the first of three attempts on that railroad, known as the action at Port Walthall Junction. The men could hear trains and locomotive whistles bringing Confederate reinforcements up, and after sunset the force was withdrawn. They went back the next day to bury the dead and found that the bodies had already been stripped of clothing and belongings.

Then came the second attempt, fought through 7 May, which Denny calls Chesterfield Junction and which is often listed as Chester Station. While the fighting held the enemy's attention, another division got at the line and destroyed track, telegraph poles and wire.

On Monday 9 May a third attempt was made, at what the regiment called Arrowfield Church and the official records call Swift Creek. It was close, brutal fighting, and it cost the regiment heavily.

Drewry's Bluff, 16 May 1864

By 13 May the Confederates had been pushed back into their entrenchments at Drewry's Bluff, a high bank on the James with Fort Darling at its summit, the position that guarded the water approach to Richmond.

Early on the morning of 16 May a heavy fog came down. A little before five o'clock, under cover of it, Confederate troops struck the Eighteenth Corps on Butler's right flank, near the river, and Heckman's Star Brigade took the blow first. In that fog it was impossible to tell friend from foe at a few yards. The pickets thrown out on the right flank could not get back to the main body and scattered into the woods. The brigade was rolled up; General Heckman himself and roughly five hundred of his men were taken prisoner. The 25th Massachusetts lost sixteen men killed, one officer and fifty-nine men wounded, and sixty-nine men captured — one hundred and forty-five in all. By noon Butler had ordered the whole army back to Bermuda Hundred.

It was in that pre-dawn battle that Herbert Bennett was hurt. He was not on the official list of injured, because he was not carried off the field and did not go to hospital. But four men described the injury independently, and one of them, Thomas Farrar of Company B, swore to it in 1889, five years before the Pension Bureau ever thought to question it:

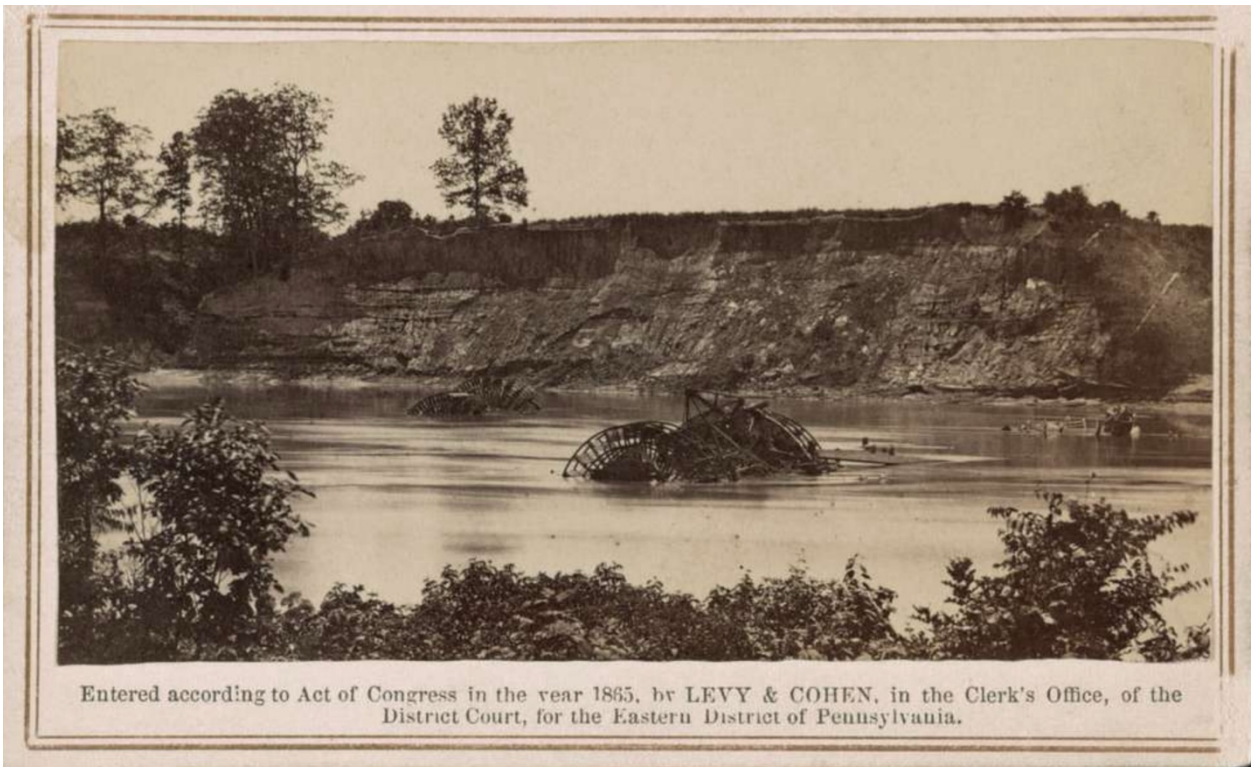
> *In May 1864 at the battle of Drury's Bluff while in the line of duty, he received an injury to his back and side, by falling on a log, caused by the stampede incident to our being outflanked by the enemy. During the engagement he was pushed by comrades, resulting*

> *in said fall, it being early in the morning before light. I saw him the following night and learned of him in relation to said injury. He complained then of severe lameness in back & side.*
>
> — Thomas Farrar, aged 48, of East Peru, Oxford County, Maine, 30 April 1889 (F1 p.80)

Notice how exactly that fits the battle, a quarter of a century after the event: outflanked, before light, a stampede. That is precisely what happened to Heckman's brigade in the fog on the morning of 16 May 1864.

The others agree on the mechanism. Alderman Cook: “At the battle of Drury's Bluff May 1864 he fell from the breast works & hurt his side & back, and I remember I wanted him to go with me on business that concerned us both, but he was so lame he could not go” (pension file 1 p.93). Dexter Vent: “He also received a severe injury to his back & side by falling over breast works at the Battle of Drurys Bluffs in May 1864 and was badly used up at that time” (pension file 1 p.71). Lewis Smith: “He told me he fell over the breastworks & struck on a log causing injury to side & Back while in said Battle” (pension file 1 p.89). And Herbert himself, writing in 1888 before he had seen any of these: “I received an injury to my side & back by being pushed & falling on a stump or log. Was not seriously laid up at the time but from then have always had a bad side & weak back” (pension file 1 p.67).

He was an infantry private and he was on foot. He was pushed by his own comrades in the stampede, went over the breastworks in the dark, and came down on a log. The regiment fell back to Bermuda Hundred and he fell back with it, lame. Forty-five years later a government surgeon examining him at Randolph, Vermont, recorded a scar about two inches to the right of the spine, opposite the first lumbar vertebra, a curvature of the spine, wasting of the muscles on that side, limited movement and tenderness (pension file 2 p.66).



Drewry's Bluff with the remains of the paddle-box tops of the Confederate side-wheel gunboat CSS Jamestown in the James River after the battle fought in 1862

White House Landing and Cold Harbor, June 1864

At the end of May the Eighteenth Corps was pulled out of Bermuda Hundred and sent by water up the York and the Pamunkey to reinforce Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant. The War Department's return puts the regiment's station on 31 May 1864 at White House, Virginia (F1 p.78).

The corps was ordered first to New Castle and spent a day marching to a place where there was nothing and nobody expecting them. At about nine in the morning a courier came in at a gallop with orders from Grant to move on Cold Harbor with all possible speed. The order to New Castle had been a copying error: the clerk who transcribed it had written "New Castle" where Grant had written "New Cold Harbor," and the corps had marched fifteen miles for nothing.

The march of 1 June 1864 — twenty-five miles from New Castle ferry to Cold Harbor — was remembered by everyone who made it. The day was intensely hot, and the column moved in a cloud of its own dust so thick that, as Denny put it, a man would not know his own brother if he met him on the road; the dust turned the blue uniforms grey. Along the route lay hundreds of dead and decaying horses and mules, the wreckage of a recent cavalry raid, and the stench was intolerable. More than a thousand stragglers were picked up by the provost guard during the day. Heckman's brigade carried off the honors: fewer than seventeen of its men were stopped by the

patrols, and only one of those belonged to the 25th Massachusetts — a man of Company F who really could not march and was given a place in an ambulance. They reached Cold Harbor about four in the afternoon, fatigued, hungry, thirsty and so covered in dust that neither faces nor uniforms could be made out, and were put into the line at once, because they were badly needed.

Herbert made that march with an open wound on his back. Lewis Smith's affidavit is the only account of it, and it is the most vivid passage in the whole pension file:

> *He was reported sick at White House Landing. The Dr. applied a fly blister, after which he marched from said place to Cold Harbor next day & participated in battle there, while his back was sore with a blister nearly the size of a man's hand.*
>
> — Lewis W. Smith, 23 November 1888 (pension file 1 p.89)

A fly blister was a caustic plaster made from powdered blister beetle, laid on the skin to raise a large blister. It was the standard nineteenth-century treatment for deep-seated pain, and it was an extremely painful one. Smith is describing a man who was treated for his back at White House Landing, marched twenty-five miles the next day in that heat and dust, and went into the line at Cold Harbor with a raw blister the size of a man's hand across his back.

On 2 June there was firing all day; the Confederates tried more than once to force the Union line back and failed.

Before daylight on 3 June the attack was launched. General W. F. Smith, ordered to assault the position, was directed to put in his best brigade — which, as he remarked before the battle, was simply an order to slaughter his best troops, and he was given no discretion. The Star Brigade went in with fewer than six hundred men: the 25th Massachusetts in advance under Colonel Pickett, with the 23rd and 27th Massachusetts and the 55th Pennsylvania. The 9th New Jersey was still aboard a transport and did not arrive in time.

It failed. The brigade lost three hundred and forty-seven men killed, wounded and missing out of fewer than six hundred. The 25th Massachusetts lost two officers and fifty-one men killed, thirteen officers and one hundred and twenty-six men wounded, and two officers and twenty-six men captured — a total of two hundred and twenty out of three hundred who had reported for duty that morning. Only four officers of the regiment came out of the battle uninjured. The next day, sixty-two men of the 25th Massachusetts answered for duty.

Herbert Bennett was one of the sixty-two.

There was constant firing for the next several days. Not until the afternoon of 7 June would the Confederates allow a truce to bury the Union dead of the 3rd, and the truce was only two hours long — too short to finish, but two hours in which not a gun was fired, and men on both sides climbed onto the earthworks and looked at each other.

The regiment held the trenches near the Confederate lines until the night of Sunday 12 June, when it withdrew. It had to be done quietly, and it was more dangerous than it might have been because

the sky was clear and the moon and stars were bright enough for the enemy to see movement. They got out.

Petersburg, June–September 1864

On 13 June the regiment — now mustering two hundred and twenty-five men — embarked at White House and went down the Pamunkey and the York, and the next day up the James to City Point and on up the Appomattox, landing at Broadway Landing, a Union supply and ordnance depot, at nine in the evening. At two in the morning of 15 June the call to fall in ran down the thin line, and the regiment crossed the Appomattox on the pontoon bridge at the head of its division and moved on Petersburg, where five railroads met and through which the Confederate army at Richmond was supplied.

By daybreak they were deployed and advancing in line of battle under fire. They pushed through a dense thicket of small trees and out into a cornfield, crossing a deep, wide ditch between the wood and the corn. The fire was heavy enough that the men were ordered to lie down, and they pulled the cornstalks over their heads for shade. They stayed there for twelve hours in the burning sun.

At seven in the evening the Union guns opened, and the regiment could go forward again. Petersburg that day was barely defended — the works in front of them were held by militia and boys — and by the time the 25th Massachusetts reached the breastwork of earth, logs, fence rails and stones, the position had been abandoned. It was the best chance the Union army had at Petersburg, and it was not taken.

By the next day Confederate reinforcements had come up. The regiment stayed where it was; that evening the Union artillery opened on Petersburg, and a series of attempts to break the enemy line came to nothing. On the morning of the 17th the regiment advanced and reached the enemy's line near the river, then lay down in a ravine for shelter and worked up the river to a position about halfway between the two lines, where it stayed through the night and until about noon on the 18th. When it advanced again the fire was so heavy that the advance became impossible; six men were killed and thirteen wounded in a few minutes, and the regiment fell back. It held the riverbank that night and the next day and crossed the river on the 20th. Having lost so many men, the regiment was reorganized into four companies.

Then came the siege. The men dug trenches, and there was almost no shade; some dug caves into the walls to get out of the sun and out of the line of fire. Food was carried in to them. They served forty-eight hours in the trenches and forty-eight in relief, and half the men had to always be awake. The company muster rolls for May–June and July–August 1864 both show Herbert present (pension file 1 p.40). Whatever condition he was in, he was on duty.

On the evening of 29 July, the 25th Massachusetts, with the rest of the Eighteenth Corps, was relieved from the trenches, drew rations and twenty extra rounds of ammunition, and at midnight marched to the left to the position held by Burnside's Ninth Corps. Men of the 48th Pennsylvania

had dug a tunnel under one of the strongest Confederate forts on that front and charged it with three hundred and twenty kegs of powder — four tons. The Eighteenth Corps was there to act in support.

The fuse failed to light at the proper time. By the time it had been re-spliced and relit, and the mine went up, throwing men, guns, and earth two hundred feet into the air, more than an hour had been lost and the Confederates had time to organize. Then there was a further, unaccountable delay. When the charge finally went in, the men tumbled into the crater and most of them stayed there until they were killed or captured. Denny thought the plan good and the execution wretched and said so bluntly; he was near the troops who were sent in last and thought they should never have been given the work. Union losses were about four thousand. The Eighteenth Corps was held in reserve; only one of its brigades was brought into action, though all of them were under fire.

About noon the corps went back to the trenches, the 25th Massachusetts to a new position where the lines were so close that men could see each other through the loopholes and rifle barrels were pushed into the openings in the hope of a shot. On 1 August a flag of truce allowed both sides to bury the dead, and from six until eleven in the morning not a gun was fired along the whole length of the line.

The regiment stayed in the Petersburg lines until 25 August, when it went to Cobb's Hill, and on 4 September it was withdrawn from the front. It had been in active service for four months, nearly all that time under fire. The regiment's losses from 1 May to 4 July 1864 alone were three officers and thirty-one men killed, twenty officers and two hundred and eighty-six men wounded, and two officers and ninety-three men captured — four hundred and thirty-five in all.

Going home, September–October 1864

On 5 September the 23rd and 25th Massachusetts embarked on the steamer Winona at Bermuda Hundred, bound for New Bern; the 9th New Jersey and 27th Massachusetts went on another boat. The Winona's captain objected that she was a light river boat, entirely unfit for an ocean passage and chartered only for the bay and rivers. He was told the boat was going to New Bern or going to pieces, and that he could take her out or go into the fort wearing a ball and chain. He took her out. The passage was rough. They landed at New Bern on Sunday, 11 September.

They had come back to a city with yellow fever in it. Denny's account of that autumn is bleak: on Sunday 25 September none of the churches were open and only the hearse went up and down the streets, and Chaplain Rouse, worn out, told him he had buried thirteen soldiers that forenoon and as many more were waiting. By 4 October the treasury and telegraph offices had closed for want of clerks, and everyone who could leave the city had left. The fever got into the regiment's camp, though there were few deaths there.

On 2 October the orders came for the journey home. At one in the afternoon on 5 October the men entitled to be mustered out — the originals of 1861, whose three years were up, Herbert among them — took a special train from the point opposite the camp, near Fort Spinola, gathering up

stragglers on the way to Morehead City. There they went aboard the steamer Dudley Buck, Captain Merriman, for New York by way of Fortress Monroe. At the wharf everyone aboard was examined to exclude anyone with the fever; many civilians were ordered off, and some soldiers were sent to hospital. It did no good. Once at sea it was found that several people in the first stage of the disease had smuggled themselves aboard, hidden among the barrels and boxes. Denny gave up his own stateroom to a sick civilian and slept in the wheelhouse. There was no surgeon on board; Denny and Sergeant Whitney, the hospital steward, dosed the sick with quinine and calomel.

Before noon of the first day one of the civilians was brought up dead. The men held an indignation meeting. They declared it wrong and cruel of the government to have let these men aboard — they had just been sent to sea in a boat that was not fit for it and might have drowned them all, and now, as though they were too obstinate to die, a party of fever cases had been smuggled aboard to go home with them. It was voted to throw the stowaways overboard. The captain pointed out that this would be too harsh and done without any legal authority and would expose them to a charge of mutiny and murder at sea. Day, who was there, was clear that it was not any lack of will but only their better judgement that saved the men in question.

They reached Fortress Monroe on the forenoon of 7 October, with twelve cases of fever aboard, and were ordered to anchor under the guns of the guard ship. Quarantine there, with the fever already on board, meant death for many of them, and every man knew it. Denny went down onto the port surgeon's tug, took hold of the man by the buttonhole and argued the case on grounds of humanity; the surgeon would not board the steamer but agreed to put the facts before the commanding general at Norfolk. After several hours of waiting the tug came back with an order to proceed to New York, and the whole ship cheered.

On 8 October the wind blew a gale. Two young men who had come aboard at Beaufort and hidden themselves died of the fever and were buried at sea with a bag of coal at their feet.

They sighted Sandy Hook on the morning of 9 October and ran up to the quarantine station off Staten Island, within sight of New York, where the health officer asked how many days out and how many deaths, heard the answer, and sent them straight back to the lower quarantine to anchor near the hospital ship. Private Samuel G. Champney of Company D and several sick passengers were taken off to the hospital ship. Champney walked to the chair that swung him over the side without help, reluctant to leave men he had served three years with. He died the next morning.

They lay at quarantine until the afternoon of 12 October, when consent was finally obtained for the regiment to leave. They landed at the Norwich steamer pier in New York, had the liberty of the city for an hour, and were aboard the steamer by five. They reached New London at two in the morning on 13 October in a heavy rainstorm, where friends from Worcester met them, and went on to Norwich. The mayor of Worcester had asked that the regiment be held back until nine in the morning so that the city could receive it properly, but the railroad officials refused to lay on a special train and insisted the men go through on the regular express — which suited the men perfectly, since after three years the last thing they wanted was a parade.

So, they came onto Worcester Common at four in the morning, in pouring rain, three years after they had marched off it amid the cheers of thousands and were met at the Front Street crossing by exactly one man with a lantern. He swung his lantern and he cheered as heartily as if there had been ten thousand of him. Denny, writing fifteen years later, still thought that one man had voiced the welcome of a sleeping city.

At nine o'clock the City Hall was full. The mayor made a speech of welcome, Colonel Pickett answered, the city gave the regiment its breakfast, and the men were dismissed to their homes with orders to gather again on 20 October for muster out. There were many kind words as comrades of three years parted on that cold, wet October morning. On 20 October 1864 they met again at Worcester and were mustered out and given their discharges.

Afterwards

Herbert was in poor shape at the end. In his own account, written twenty-four years later:

> *When discharged I was so sick that my Captain got a pass for me to go home a few hours before we disbanded, or rather before the regt. did. I was confined to the house for several weeks with liver difficulty & it was several months before I done any work.*
>
> — Herbert A. Bennett, August 1888 (pension file 1 p.67)

Lewis Smith confirms the aftermath: “Fever & Ague were bad after arriving home. I know he was not well enough to work for a year or more, & was treated by Dr. Cummings of Milford Mass who said his liver troubles were caused by his infirms received in the war” (pension file 1 p.89). Thomas Farrar saw him at home in Massachusetts in July 1865: “We were in Boston sight seeing together then, and had to stop at the hotel several times for claimant to rest, on account of his injury” (pension file 1 p.80).

He was twenty-four years old. He married in May 1865, farmed in Massachusetts and then in Iowa, came east to Vermont in 1880 with a new wife, and lived at South Royalton from 1887 until his death in 1915. He first applied for a pension in June 1888 and was carried on the rolls, at rates that rose from two dollars a month to thirty, until he died.

The rest of the regiment — the men who had re-enlisted — stayed in North Carolina, consolidated into four companies, and served through the last campaign of the war. They were finally mustered out at Readville, Massachusetts, on 28 July 1865.

Over the whole war the 25th Massachusetts lost 330 men: 7 officers and 154 enlisted men killed or mortally wounded, and 169 enlisted men dead of disease. More men of this regiment were killed by the climate of eastern North Carolina than by the Confederate army. Herbert Bennett served the full three years, went through Roanoke Island, New Bern, Goldsboro, Drewry's Bluff, Cold Harbor and Petersburg, and came home with a bad back, a damaged liver and recurring chills and fever — which, for the 25th Massachusetts, made him one of the fortunate ones.

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