

Ellicottville Post  
Wed., Sept. 5, 1888

Brave Boys in Blue  
First Annual Encampment and Reunion of the 154th N.Y. Vols.  
August 30th & 31st  
Interesting Reminiscences of battles fought and won.

Last Thursday and Friday this village was filled with veterans and others in attendance at the first annual encampment and reunion of the 154th New York Vols., which was held in Hunter's Grove, nearly a mile from the village. The Hon. A.D. Scott, of this village, delivered the address of welcome, which was appropriately responded to by Maj. W.S. Cameron of Jamestown. The oration was delivered by Judge A.W. Benson, of Kansas, a very eloquent and gifted speaker. The Hon. W.G. Laidlaw addressed a few remarks to the veterans on the subject of pensions, which was loudly applauded. The Hon. Henry Van Aernam also made a few remarks. Music throughout the 2 days was furnished by a glee club of male voices, and a drum corps of 12 men from Jamestown. Everything passed off pleasantly, and ended with 3 cheers for T.R. Aldrich, the ex-president of the association. The following letter giving a history of the 154th was read at the encampment.

Comrade Wellman's Letter

Lawrence, Kansas, Aug. 10, 1888

Dear Comrades of the 154th Regiment.

I received through your secretary, Comrade Bird the kind invitation extended to all the members of the dear old regiment to meet on the 30th of August at Ellicottville, to revive the memories of the past, and grasp again the hands of comrades made dear to us by associations never to be forgotten. Glad indeed I would be to have the pleasure of meeting with you, but circumstances prevent; yet in my heart I am with you today. I can see again your dear old faces as you are met in one common love feast of joy and good will. Memories of the days of war come rushing by me in grand review as I think of you today. 26 years ago this month a regiment of 1,000 stalwart young men (most of them with beardless faces) stood in line in the camp near Jamestown, N.Y. and took an oath to defend the flag of their country and sustain the union of states or give their lives in the attempt. A finer looking regiment of young men never donned the blue, or shouldered a musket to fight for their country. Pages might be written on the ludicrous episodes of the camp at Jamestown, of the Sour Bread war, etc., but I leave them to others. But were they brave? Let us see. They have received their colors, and on the folds of the beautiful state flag is the number, 154th Regiment New York State Vols. Init. Let us follow them to the front. They have crossed the long bridge and are on rebel soil. The school of evolutions necessary to actual war has begun, the camp, the march, the drill, the picket duty, all had their turn, still the regiment began to feel that they were old soldiers, and to prove this I have only to quote company B, a member of which voiced the general feeling. While on general duty at a battery near Falmouth, Va., in December 1862, a regiment which had been through the Peninsula campaign, was doing ~~pick~~ picket duty in front of the battery. They were complaining to our boys about the hardships of war. Our comrade of B, silenced the whole squad with the remark: "Oh, you fellows think you are having a hard time, but when you have been through what we have you will begin to think you know something about war." Well let us see what



this regiment found out about war. They have successfully crossed the Rappahannock and the Rapidan and on the 2nd day of May, 1863, found their colors floating just south of the plank road at Double Tavern, the headquarters of Gen. Howard commanding the 11th corps, and the right wing of the army at Chancellorsville. The left of the regiment rests near the old tavern, the line extends to the south east, through the orchard and fronting east. Away to the right and rear, and on the other side of the plank road, are the 1st and 3rd divisions of the corps. All day long the regiment has been gathered in little groups discussing the coming contest. 'Tis 5 p.m. , Hark! suddenly like a thunderbolt from the cloud of war, comes a sharp report of musketry from the right and rear along the plank road. Quickly the Colonel gave the command. "Fall in! take arms." The alignments are made and the regiment faces to the rear to meet the coming storm. The first rattle of musketry has increased to a roar like thunder. Down the plank road comes the flying and routed divisions of Devins and Schurtz. But need I portray the shameful sight? Comrades, the picture is too vivid in your minds. "Behold the flying half moon." The moments pass and with them the last of the panic stricken corps. All seems lost; will nothing check the victorious foe? Oh there stands that untried regiment with 154th floating on their colors. They look upon the flying veterans with blank astonishment mingled with contempt, but there was no time for comments. Look, yonder comes a long line of grey and butternut yelping like devils, waving a queer rag of stars and bars; all along their line are little puffs of smoke, while among the ears of the regiment are strange sounds, zip zip, buzz buzz; can it be they are being shot at? For a moment only this continues, and then the cry is raised that the rebels, give them h\_\_ll. The order is given "Fire at will, fire." Instantly from that living wall bursts forth a sheet of fire. The rebel line in front falters, reels, and goes down; they cannot stand that murderous fire. Everywhere you hear the voice of the Colonel and the officers encouraging the men, "fire low, and keep cool." The combat deepens, the regiment is enveloped in smoke and their guns are hot from rapid firing. In the center both the colors are waving proud defiance while their folds are being riddled with bullets. Col. Jones has been wounded and near the colors is Col. Loomis, his resonant voice can be heard above the roar of battle. Near the left of the line can be seen Adj. Noise, his sword flashing mid the smoke, while his sharp clarion voice rings out defiance. A few moments more and his voice is hushed. He has gone down midst the crash of battle, with his face to the foe. For a time Jackson's 20,000 veterans are checked and thrown into confusion: the center is broken and held by that one regiment. But soon the flanks of that long gray line are in motion, they are leaping like a huge wave past, and in the rear of that devoted regiment/. Suddenly the men become aware that they are being surrounded and shot from the rear and flank. The order is given "fall back, retreat." Comrades you all know what that retreat cost the regiment, none of you will ever forget the vortex of leaden hail and bursting shell the regiment passed to reach the cover of the woods in the rear. A little later on when the regiment again formed line on those shattered colors, and they faced to the foe, only 300



answered the roll call in place of every 700 that stood in line at Doubles. Comrades that seemed a terrible sacrifice, but it was not in vain. Gen. Hooker, years after in riding over the field, pointed out the spot where our regiment fought and said "There is the place where a regiment of Buschbeck's brigade did noble work. They held Stonewall' Jackson's men in check for nearly one hour and saved the rest of the army from any disorder." But I started out to prove that the 154th was a brave regiment. Let us pass to July 1st, 1863. Look, there are the colors of the 154th in the cemetery overlooking Gettysburg. Before them lies the field about to be made memorable as the arena of the most terrible conflict of arms in the history of civilized nations. Col. Allen is in command; about him are gathered 200 dust begrimed veterans. Early in the morning of that fateful day Col. Warner (then Major) was detailed with 50 men of the regiment for a scouting party, and well indeed was it for the regiment that it so happened. But let us turn to the cemetery ridge. To the left and northwest the 1st corps has been fighting ~~the~~ Gen. Lee's main column since early morning over seminary ridge. Gen. Reynolds has been killed, Gen. Howard has assumed command, and the 3rd division of the 11th corps has been thrown forward to support the 1st corps which is being forced back by overwhelming numbers. Gen. Von Steinwehr has formed our 2nd division on Cemetery ridge. Meantime the rebel columns of Early and Rhodes have reached the field from the northeast and are deploying to sweep up through Gettysburg and take the ridge. Again the 154th must be sacrificed to bad generalship. Two regiments only are ordered out a half mile in front of the main line to hold a corps of rebel veterans. 'Tis 2 or 3 p.m., the command is given the 154th and 134th "Fall in." The 134th with Col. Custer in command leads off a quick step down the main street of Gettysburg. The sidewalks are lined with the wounded of the 3rd division which has been forced back on the town. But the regiments move on through the town, across the railroad and over a bridge, while from the left on Seminary ridge a rebel battery opens on their devoted heads. Comrades I saw a sight then which you could not all see as I saw it. I was with company B, at the ~~very~~ rear of the regiment and could look over the whole length of the marching column. As they uncovered from the town, the shell from Kee's battery came shrieking closer to their heads and every shot a little closer, you all know how it was. I looked for some disorder, but I swear to you today, not one man broke step from the head of the column to the rear. I said they were brave. I wanted to take off my hat and cheer them then. A little farther on and the head of the column files to the right through a brickyard, the order is given, "halt, front, right dress," then forward in the line of battle. Had the regiment been on dress parade it could not have done better. But there comes the rebels right in front. "Ready, commence firing." Instantly the whole line is a blaze of fire. But look, on the right the 134th is being doubled up and broken. An order is given to retreat, but in the crash of battle it is not heard, soon a rebel division sweeps into the rear from the left and the 154th is cut off, surrounded. In the midst Col. Allen and 16 others make a dash and escape. Comrades you know the rest, all but the dead are taken prisoner. The brave sergeant who carried the colors so proudly through the battle of Chancellorsville, fell flag in hand, his brother seized the colors, and he too fell, how many more I do



not know. The prisoners were hurried from the field to the rear of the rebel army. The ground over which we passed to reach the rear was thickly strewn with the dead and dying, showing that the first days fight at Gettysburg was no idle play. Had I time I could tell you of the 150 brave men who refused the parole on the field offered them by their captors because it would have been disobeying an order of the government. Of those 150 men 75 perished in rebel prison. Let us not forget them.

We will now pass from the army of the Potomac to that of the Cumberland. The remnants of the regiment have been gotten together and in October 1863 we find them in Bridgeport, Alabama, about 200 strong in command of Col. Warner, and ready for the campaigns that follow. Need I speak of Wauchin, of Chattanooga and Missionary Ridge, of Rocky Faces, and Resaca, you were all there. You remember the line of battle at Rocky Faces when Gen. Geary made his little speech and asked the boys to go to the top. The 154th regiment went there and no other regiment did. The colors were planted on the very crest. There by that flag Sgt. Shippi fell and with him 7 other brave men. That was a terrible day, comrades, but the 154th always obeys orders. Then at Resaca you all remember when Gen. Hooker charged with his whole corps into the charging corps from the rebel works. The Johnnies were routed and driven back within their fortifications; but once there they turned on us such a storm of leaden hail and shell that for a short time our corps was like to be driven back. I can see again that line of wavering men. On the left is Gen. Butterfield, commanding the 3rd division. Three times he ~~grasps~~ grasps the colors of a regiment whose bearer has been shot down and calls on the men to follow him. And they did. While in our division and right in our regiment stood brave Joe Hooker; with one wave of his hand he ordered every man in the line down upon the ground, while he, proud old hero, stood up amongst the blast of leaden death without a quiver, despite our entreaties to shield himself as well. Then you remember the little round top fort in our front that evening our regiment was sent to capture, and get the guns. The 27th or 29th Pa. were with us. There had been terrible fighting there that day. The ground in front of the fort was thickly strewn with the dead comrades of our corps. The 154th was posted close to and on the right of the fort, the other regiment just in the rear of them. Your humble servant was directed by Col. Allen to take a squad of those Germans and dig out the guns. It was 11 p.m. at night; the job was nearly done, when presto Gen. Johnston got up those little fireworks for the especial benefit of those Dutchmen. They went down that hill as though the devil was after them. The officers of the 154th in their vain attempt to stop the stampede were carried with them down to the main line. But what of our 154th, did they go? Not any. They just stayed there with their guns cocked, waiting for the Johnnies or orders.

Then came Peachtree Creek. None of you have forgotten that gallant charge, starting in the 5th line of battle the regiment found themselves at 9 p.m. in the darkness and plumb against a rebel battery. Then came Dalton and Kenesaw Mountain. Then the long



seige of Atlanta and the 20th of July when Hood attempted to crush the 20th and 24th corps. You remember the 154th distinguished themselves that day by the capture of Gen. Geary's hat and afterward had reason to regret it by reason of an order compelling every man to draw a forage cap and wear it.

Then came the capture of Atlanta and the March to the Sea, the campaign of the Carolinas and the final surrender of Gen. Johnston's army near Raleigh. The march homeward through Richmond and last but not least the welcome home. All are fresh in your memories; the many deeds of personal bravery and heroism incident to those years of war are buried deeply into your hearts and are for you to tell. I started out to say the 154th was a brave regiment. If I have failed to prove it I call on Col. Warner to vindicate the assertion. You all know that he was the brave of the bravest. Did he ever say to the regiment "let us go there" unless they always got there?

Very truly yours

John F. Wellman