

## On Far-Flung Battlefields Nutley's Sons Have Died | Nutley Yesterday - Today - 1961

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FROM FRANK SPEER

NUTLEY has sent contingents of her sons into every American War since the battles with the French and the Indians, long before the Revolutionary War.

They have died at Okinawa, in the Argonne, at Princeton and Trenton, at Fredericksburg and in the fever camps of Florida during the Spanish-American War.

The long War of Secession saw 58 men leave Nutley; all but three came back. To its glory, Nutley, then but a town of 1,500 population, escaped President Lincoln's 1862 draft by furnishing a number of volunteers greater than her draft quota.

For a half-century after the return of the volunteers from the Civil War, they marched every Memorial Day and established a tradition which carried on long after the last of the warriors of the War of Emancipation had died.

Even after World War I, there were still a few Civil War veterans to parade on Decoration Day, although they rode in carriages or in cars from the Methodist cemetery to the Reformed cemetery and, in keeping with a simple tradition, planted a bright new flag and geraniums on the grave of every soldier, not overlooking the burial place in the old Dutch cemetery in Brookdale of Major Isaac Kierstead, one of Nutley's few volunteers against the return of the British in 1812.

Stephen Vreeland, one of the town's few officers in the Civil War, was the traditional grand marshal. A stately man, he used to lead the Memorial Day parades on a white horse, a sword slung at his side by a red sash. With his death, the few survivors gave up marching and the veterans of the Spanish-American War and the First World War took up the tradition.

When Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves and the Southern States seceded, Nutley was ardently abolitionist. It took time, however, for the town to get the war spirit. None of Nutley's eventual 58 volunteers was a "three months' man," those soldiers of the First New Jersey Brigade who were the first to arrive for the defense of Washington and were held in reserve there during the Battle of Bull Run.

The First Brigade, called the "Jersey Blues," was composed chiefly of Newark militiamen, although there was an entire company, Company F, recruited in Belleville. Its commander was Brigadier-General Theodore Runyon, who owed his sudden promotion in life to an act of Governor Charles Olden. Equipped by the state, it was the first fully equipped brigade to reach Washington for the

capital's defense. Moving the brigade was quite a problem and it finally had to travel by canal boat on the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal from Trenton to Annapolis, making the trip in six days.

The First Brigade sat on a hill as reserves and watched the stampede of Bull Run, the first great battle and the first disgraceful rout of the Union troops. Later it was to see stiff fighting all the way from Antietam to Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Cold Harbor, Petersburg, Manassas to Lee's surrender at Appomattox-the full campaign of Virginia.

It was only after General Robert E. Lee invaded Pennsylvania that Nutley became alarmed. Henry Stager, "Big Abe" Stager, Simon Tuers, Silas Chappell, Bob Day, John Dodd, Jim Blair, and Hiram Van Winkle rose in their anger at the invasion and walked all the way to Newark where they enlisted "en masse."

Another military company of 40 men was formed here under Cornelius McClees and went into training at the Old Military Hall. It was there that McClees gave them their first lessons in the manual of arms. They learned the simple squad movements on what is now a corner of the High School playground.

One morning, when McClees was satisfied that his trainees were ready, he marched 26 of them down to Newark and they joined up, forming the nucleus of Company C, 26th New Jersey Volunteer Regiment. They were still raw recruits, however, when they fought in three engagements before the Battle of Fredericksburg as part of the army of General Burnside who took a terrible beating in mid-December 1862, but they learned the art of war and the following spring took and held the heights of Fredericksburg.

The 26th regiment, which had companies from Newark, Caldwell, Bloomfield, and the Oranges, as well as Nutley, was mustered in at Camp Frelinghuysen on September 3, 1862, at the very same time that the disgraceful draft riots were taking place in Newark and New York.

It was a "nine-months' regiment" which saw action at Fredericksburg, Salem Heights and Franklin's Crossing before it was mustered out. After waiting out Burnside's indecision in the woods near Fredericksburg, the Nutley soldiers proved gallant in action in the affair at Franklin's Crossing just a short time before the term of enlistment expired.

When the Confederates had been shelled out of their positions across the Rappahannock, below Fredericksburg, two regiments - the 26th and the 5th Vermont - were ordered to take boats and cross the river to capture the rebel position. It was a boat race and the 26th won, capturing a big bag of prisoners.

Seven other Nutley men were members of the 39th New Jersey Volunteers and had their share of fighting, principally in Virginia, where they joined in the long siege of Petersburg (1864) and assisted in the capture of Fort Mahone

(1865). Four other Nutley volunteers fought with an elite regiment, the First New York Mounted Rifles.

Many Nutley and other Essex volunteers went to New York to enlist because there were too many volunteers to be absorbed speedily by the New Jersey regiments. Others went as units, piqued by delays or accusing New Jersey military authorities of playing politics. Captain Toler took his company of elite militia, known as the Montgomery Guards, to New York and enlisted in Sickles' famous Excelsior Brigade (71st N.Y. regiment), blaming "politics" when his company was refused a place in the First Brigade. Four other Essex militia companies joined the defection and fought gallantly with the Excelsiors.

George Symonds, who volunteered in the 12th N.Y. "Old Guard" and was taken, even though he was under age, became an orderly to General Warren. He served with him all through the battles from the Wilderness to Petersburg.

When the war ended, he returned to the Oxford Academy and then went to Cornell. He then came to Nutley and was for 17 years the first school principal. For seven years he was the town engineer. He was the father of the late G. R. B. Symonds.

Although they saw plenty of fighting, Nutley's sons came through the Civil War with comparatively light losses. Only three were killed in action: James Cunningham, John Donaldson, and Byron Lawton. The 26th regiment lost an officer and 35 men in its long service, while the 39th lost three officers and 36 men, most of them buried in war cemeteries throughout the South.

When the men came home from the war, they formed a veterans association which lasted until death cut down the ranks of survivors and then, Nutley's few old soldiers transferred their membership to Garfield Post of the G.A.R. in Newark.

Preserved in the archives is a sketch of Company C which Sam McNaughton made in the field in a woods outside of Fredericksburg, Md., and dated September 3, 1862. With a tremendous amount of talent, the Nutley soldier pictured his fellows on a day when a food package arrived in the name of "A. H. Stager, Co. C, 26th regiment."

The sketch was made about three months before Burnside's Army of the Potomac took a bad beating at the hands of Lee and Longstreet in the vicious battle for Fredericksburg, fought in mid-December, 1862. The New Jersey regiment was one of Hooker's Brigades in the center of the line which was given the impossible task of attacking the stone wall along the foot of Marye's Heights, opposite Fredericksburg.

On the autumn day when Sam McNaughton felt the urge to draw, the Nutley volunteers were cutting timber—just as "Big Abe" Stager had been doing the day he was drawn into the war. Jim Blair was pictured brewing coffee, while Josh Dodd, with corporal's stripes, was making wheat cakes. Dick Cueman

moved into the portrait with a log on his shoulder.

While "Big Abe" opened his box with a hatchet, expressing regret that his brother George was not there, Bob Day stood at the opening of the company lodging which appears to have been a tent erected over log walls. This was named "Squirrel Hotel" with an evident disregard for spelling, because a squirrel is pictured on its way across the drawing. Over all flies the Union Flag with its circles of stars.

It was "Big Abe" who kept the field sketch for many years and in turn, passed it on to Frank Speer.

Nutley's volunteers in the Spanish-American War shared the lamentable memories of fever camps, with their long lists of sick and dead, the direct results of careless sanitary arrangements and greed and negligence in feeding and caring for the troops.

President McKinley's call for 125,000 volunteers on April 23, 1898, was met in Essex County by calling out the companies of the first three regiments of the National Guard which proceeded to fill up their ranks by enlisting volunteers. The State camp at Sea Girt was made the mobilization center, called Camp Voorhees in honor of the governor, Foster M. Voorhees.

Barely three weeks after the President's call, the first regiment, N.J. National Guard, left Sea Girt for Camp Alger, across the Virginia line from Washington. A month after the McKinley call, the 2nd regiment was on its way to the national camp at Chickamauga Park but while it was still entrained, its destination was changed to Camp Cuba Libre, outside Jacksonville, Fla., one of the worst of the fever ridden camps.

The 3rd regiment had the misfortune - at the time it was considered misfortune - to draw guard duty at the powder works at Pompton Lakes and at Fort Hancock, Sandy Hook. As it turned out the regiment remained healthy and saw as much action as the other two regiments.

The 1st regiment, under Brigadier-General Joseph W. Plume, was converted into the 1st Brigade, 1st Division, 2nd Army Corps, at Camp Alger, and was then shifted to the 4th Brigade of the 3rd Army Corps under Major General Wade and ordered to Puerto Rico. Before it could embark, however, the war was over.

The 2nd regiment fought with fever at Jacksonville and returned to Sea Girt for demobilization.