## The David Whitney Story

# Part I

# The Whitney Family Line

### English Origins

Long before David Whitney's birth, three of his ancestors made a journey westward in 1635 to the northeastern corner of America, crossing the Atlantic Ocean by sailing ship from England and landing on the eastern shore of colonial Massachusetts. John Whitney and his wife, Elinor, brought several of their children to New England, including the infant Jonathan, who had been born in England the previous year. John and Elinor, and their son Jonathan, were David's original American Whitney forebears, separated from him by seven and six generations, respectively. These generations continued a steady westward movement but in smaller increments than David.

### Massachusetts Base

John and Elinor Whitney settled in Watertown, Massachusetts, a short way up the Charles River from Boston Harbor and on the north bank of the Charles, just west of Cambridge. Jonathan Whitney lived at Watertown through his youth but as an adult settled further along the Charles at Sherborn on what becomes the west bank of the river as it meanders south and west of Watertown.

The next Whitney in David's family line, Jonathan's son. Joseph, left home and moved straight north to Chelmsford, very near the New Hampshire border, and a considerable distance from the family home in Sherborn. Joseph Whitney also owned property west of Chelmsford in Pepperell, Massachusetts, which remained in the Whitney family for more than a hundred years. Joseph and many of his family stayed in the Chelmsford area for several generations, although some moved west, even leaving the state of Massachusetts.

Joseph's second son, also named Joseph Whitney, lived in Groton and Pepperell, both west of Chelmsford. This Joseph's oldest son, Benjamin Whitney, was born in Pepperell in 1741, a little more than 100 years after John and Elinor Whitney had sailed west from England and had launched the family movement westward from Boston Harbor. Benjamin was known as Lieutenant Benjamin Whitney, although his reason for bearing that title is not recorded. He is also listed in DAR records as Sergeant Benjamin Whitney, having enlisted in the militia in 1775.

**Revolutionary War Serviceand Westward to the Frontier**

Duly recorded, however, is the Revolutionary War service of one of Lt. Whitney's sons, also named Benjamin Whitney, who in 1781, at age 17, joined the service in rebellion against foreign rule by England. This Benjamin, though not directly in David's line, did eventually move westward in the late 18th century, out of Massachusetts into Orange County, Vermont. Along with Benjamin went two of his brothers, Abel and David, the latter the grandfather and namesake of the Vermont-born David.

The 1790's saw a surge of migration from the older, southern New England states to Vermont, the new American state. Prior to the Revolutionary War, the governors of New York and New Hampshire had battled over the right to grant property claims to this mostly undeveloped territory lying between their colonies. In 1777, the independent Republic of Vermont was formed, which then entered the American union as the fourteenth United State in 1791.

**The Whitneys Get Established in Orange County, Vermont**

The three Whitney brothers were no doubt lured from an increasingly crowded Massachusetts by the promise of plentiful land in what was by then the New England frontier, as yet unspoiled by the nearly two centuries of tilling that had taken its toll on the soil of the southern New England states. The Whitneys were joined by many other New Englanders, and Vermont's population increased rapidly, although the state remained mostly rural.

The Massachusetts-born David Whitney, at age 27, married Susannah Huntington in 1793 at West Randolph, in Orange County. He also established a farm in Orange County at North Tunbridge, upland from the valley of the First Branch of the White River, which flows southeasterly toward the Connecticut River, the natural boundary between Vermont and

New Hampshire. This David Whitney's farm remained in the family until 1971. In 1907, Lester Whitney, a great-grandson of David and Susannah who was then living there, built what is called a 'round barn'—actually octagon-shaped—which still stands today.

Several Whitneys settled in the surrounding area in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and the prominent ridge dominating the Whitney farms was named, and is still called, Whitney Hill. Whitney Hill Road runs past the Whitneys' original farmland in Orange County, leading to the Whitney Hill School and, behind it, Whitney Hill Cemetery. This David and his wife Susannah, the grandparents of Civil War veteran David, are buried in Whitney Hill cemetery, along with several other Whitneys.

**David's Immediate Family – Daniel and Julia Hall Whitney**

One of David and Susannah's sons, Daniel Whitney, was born in Tunbridge and married Julia Hall, also from Tunbridge. Daniel and Julia had eleven children, including David, and, at some point, moved their family westward to settle in Brookfield, just across Whitney Hill, in the valley of the White River's western Second Branch. Daniel and Julia remained in Brookfield until the end of their lives and are buried in a cemetery there.

Five of Daniel and Julia's children had direct connections to the Civil War. Following the war, several of their children, including Army veteran David, moved even further west, to Iowa.

# The David Whitney Story

# Part II

# The Whitney Family in the Civil War

**Preface —The Effects of War**

Great wars have long-range effects on their participants, especially the combatants who survive and then must re-establish themselves in a post-war society. In the often comparatively brief periods of service, a soldier's future may be greatly influenced by the harsh experiences of combat. Great wars also may greatly affect the path of societies engaged in such wars. And long-range effects of war also may be sensed in relation to the unfulfilled hopes and dreams of those combatants who do not survive.

It is easier—although not necessarily easy—to measure the effects on those who do survive, as their subsequent lives may provide testimony to their war experiences, directly or indirectly. For those who do not survive, it can only be surmised as to what they might have done after the war, had they been given the chance.

David Whitney and his brothers-in-law can be viewed as examples of war veterans who went on to contribute greatly to the surviving society, in part in the way they persevered in their pioneering push westward despite many hardships and obstacles—which must have had similarities to some of the events of war they had experienced—and in part in local leadership roles they assumed—which must have drawn on their leadership experiences in war.

In the case of David's brother who served in but did not survive the Civil War, the few things known about his brief life before the war, combined with some things he did and said during the war, allow a guess—but only a guess—at what Alonzo Whitney might have done had he survived.

**The Hierarchy of Military Units: Terminological Note**

Included in the organizational and battle descriptions that make up a large part of the story of this Whitney family in the Civil War are references to army units of varying size. Together such units form a command hierarchy, so that a serviceman who is a member of a unit lower in the hierarchy is considered a member of each of the units in a direct line up his hierarchical chain of command.

Most of the unit references in David Whitney's story—and those of his brother and brothers-in-law—are to only a few levels in the hierarchy, mostly low to mid-level units. For example, David served two separate enlistments, each in a distinct unit. From 1862 to 1863 he was in Company C of the 15th Vermont Regiment in the Second Vermont Brigade and then, from 1864 to 1865, in Company G of the 10th Vermont Regiment. References are usually to the regiment of service, even though the regiment is normally a part of a larger organization and contains smaller, subordinate units.

During their longer term of service—as strategic situations required higher-level commanders to regroup their forces—the 10th Regiment was assigned or temporarily detached to various higher levels. But both of the units David served in remained intact up to the regiment level, except for a few tactical skirmishes .

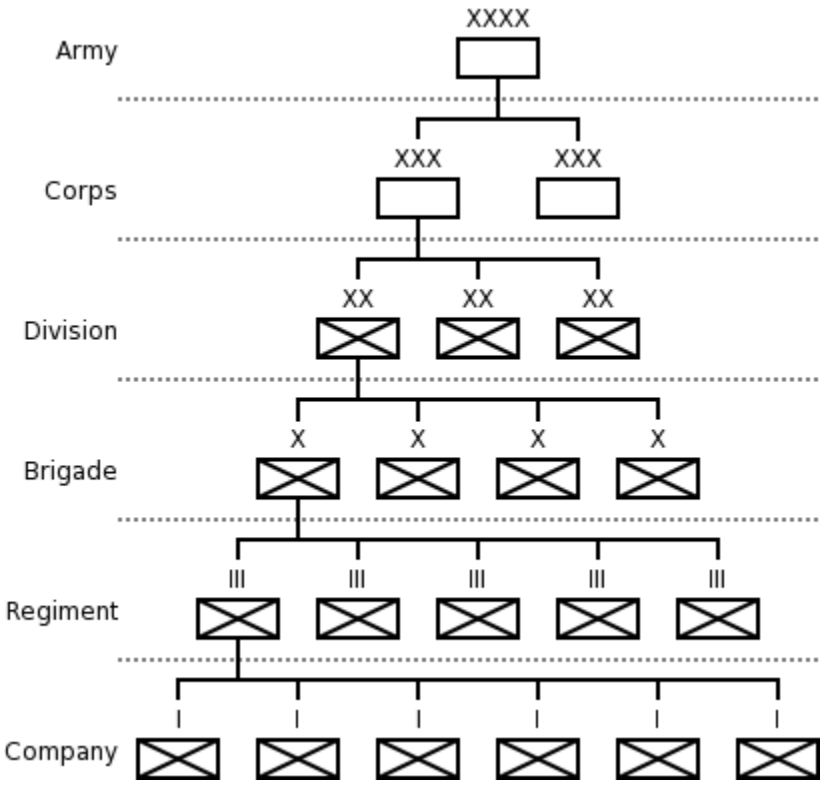
Since David and his kin served mostly in infantry units, most of the references here are to that kind. However, since artillery, cavalry, and other branches have somewhat varying unit designations, any references to those are slightly different. Nonetheless, the hierarchical principle remains.

In the infantry, the hierarchy from lowest to highest at the most common levels is team, squad, platoon, company, battalion (sometimes), regiment. In the artillery, units at the company level are called batteries and, in the cavalry, troops. Cavalry units at the battalion level are called squadrons.

At the next level, infantry regiments are grouped—often along with units from other branches of the army—into brigades, brigades into divisions, divisions into corps, and corps into armies. Occasionally a unit or part of a unit will be detached from their position in the hierarchy and assigned to a 'detail' or special temporary duty, either on their own or as part of another hierarchy.

On the following page is a schematic representation of the typical hierarchy of army units in the Civil War. As presented here, the units up

through division are marked as infantry units with crossed bars representing the crossed rifles of the infantry insignia but without specific branch markings for the more comprehensive units beyond that level.




**Typical Unit Hierarchy during the Civil War**

Each higher level unit usually has command over more than one unit of the type subordinate to them at the next level: for example, an infantry regiment might include six to eight subordinate companies.

In the diagram, only the units at the very left side are shown linked to their subordinate units. In an array representing a real formation of units each unit symbolized at the various levels would be shown linked to their own subordinate units at lower levels.

At times the exact organization at the higher levels may change, but the relative position in the hierarchy remains the same for the designated unit.

Each level of units has a characteristic number or letter to distinguish it from other units at the same level in the same command. In addition, units may also have distinctive names, such as the '15th Vermont Volunteers'.

Each unit at each level has one person in charge. 'Leader' is the designation for an officer or non-commissioned officer commanding the lower level units subordinate to a company up through platoon (not shown in the diagram on p. 7). From company level on up, the commanding officer is designated as the 'commander'. Each leader or commander holds an army rank appropriate to his level of command. For instance, a squad is led by a sergeant, a company is usually commanded by a captain, and a regiment by a colonel.

In today's U.S. Army, the number of 'X's' above the unit symbols in the hierarchy schematic from brigade on up correlates to the number of stars that the commanding general of each respective unit wears. During the Civil War, Union Army officers generally wore one less star than their modern counterparts. Their Confederate counterparts, however, generally wore the number of stars closer to the modern correlations.

Commanders at each level have command over all units lower in their hierarchical chain. As the unit commands get larger, commanding officers acquire deputies and other officers and non-commissioned officers as part of their unit's administrative staff.

David Whitney remained an infantry private throughout his total service, but his brother and one brother-in-law gained commissions as officers and commanded combat infantry units. That brother-in-law also served subsequently as a staff officer of a higher level unit.

# Part II – Chapter 1

# Alonzo B. Whitney and Alpheus Cheney with the 10th Vermont Regiment

### Line of Defense along the Potomac

Daniel and Julia Hall Whitney's oldest son, Alonzo B. Whitney, volunteered in the first call for troops in Vermont. He and a future brother-in-law, Alpheus Cheney, enlisted in Brookfield in August 1862 and went on active duty with Company G of the 10th Vermont Infantry Regiment in September of that year. They were sent immediately to the Washington, DC, area and took part in the Union defense of the nation's capital in lines westward from Washington along the Maryland side of the Potomac river.

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### The Coolidge School and Letters to the Coolidge Family

In the year just before the war, these two young men from Brookfield had taught at the Coolidge family school in Plymouth, Vermont. During an early encampment along the Potomac, where their regiment was performing guard duty about 20 miles up from Washington, the young recruits wrote letters to the Coolidges, expressing their feelings about their service and describing conditions in their camp. Both emphasized the prevalence of disease among the troops.

### Alonzo's Letter

In a letter dated October 15, 1862, Alonzo wrote that although he had not been off duty due to sickness since he had enlisted—despite having to sleep on the ground in open air through dew and rain—his company had at least 20 to 25 soldiers unfit for duty. This was not as bad as in some of the other companies, including a death each of the two previous nights.

Because of the lack of medical provisions, Alonzo was pressed into caring for the sick in his company, remarking to Mrs. Coolidge that he might have "to take up with the advice you gave me last winter which was to study medicine and become a Physician as I have got to be a nurse and

perhaps by the close of the war shall need but little study in order to be ready to practice."

**Cheney's Letter**

In a letter two weeks later, Cheney noted that both he and Alonzo had become sick in the interim. Cheney had gotten wet one night crossing the Potomac and caught a very bad cold. He had gone to sleep in his wet clothes and woke up "to all appearances about 40 years older than at night." Cheney took cold again the next night by getting wet once more and consequently suffered severe, feverish chills, without, however, becoming delirious. He broke out in a "very hard sweat" and then improved greatly. He managed to stay away from official medical treatment through the care of friends in his company.

Cheney also noted that Alonzo was now sick, though on the mend and out of danger. Three men had died in other companies in the past 10 hours, and another would probably not live till morning. But such deaths had not yet struck Company G.

**Alonzo's Sense of Patriotic Duty**

In his letter to the Coolidges, Alonzo Whitney spoke of a sense of patriotic duty that had moved him to enlist when the call for troops went out in Vermont. He had done so willingly, leaving behind friends and family with few men to till the fields back home. He also noted that he would lay down his life and believed most others in his unit and many other units would do the same, "if by so doing, peace could be restored in this land." Alonzo thus spoke prophetically.

Company G had not engaged in battle in the period prior to the October 1862 letters, but Cheney had seen armed Confederates on the other side of the Potomac and was prepared to fire back if they had fired on him.

**Watch toward the Monocacy**

In December of that year, the 10th Vermont Regiment moved their headquarters further north in Montgomery County, Maryland, to Poolesville, from where the various companies were sent to guard strategic sites along the Potomac. Company G, along with two other companies, were stationed overlooking the Potomac at Conrad's Ferry; the other 10th Regiment companies were at White's Ford and at the mouth of the Monocacy river where it enters the Potomac.

In these positions, along with other Union units in the general area, the 10th served rather light duty, experiencing only false alarms without engaging Confederate troops.

This was not the 10th's only acquaintance with the Monocacy. A little further north on this Potomac tributary, the 10th contributed twice in the defense of an important position close to Washington. In July 1863, the 10th Regiment guarded an important railroad bridge over the Monocacy during the battle at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. And again, a year later, the 10th Vermont was instrumental to the success of "The Battle that Saved Washington". By that time, July 9, 1864, both Alonzo Whitney and Alpheus Cheney had become officers transferred out of the ranks of Vermont volunteers. However, David Whitney had in the meantime joined the 10th Vermont Regiment and was a part of the later, very significant, Battle of the Monocacy.

**Supporting the Battle of Gettysburg**

On June 24, 1863, just before the decisive battle at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the 10th Vermont Infantry Regiment was moved up the Potomac to Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, where they became a part of the Army of the Potomac for the rest of the war.

On June 30th, in the build-up to battle at Gettysburg, the 10th was dispatched to Frederick, Maryland, south of Gettysburg. It moved again on July 2nd to a position southeast of Frederick to defend the strategically important Monocacy River railroad bridge from possible Confederate use or abuse. On July 6th, following the Union victory at Gettysburg, the 10th joined the Army of the Potomac in their pursuit of retreating Confederate forces into Virgina.

The 10th Vermont Regiment was subsequently engaged in many of the fierce battles in Virgina, including the very final ones around Petersburg leading to the Confederate surrender at Appomattox in April of 1865. However, neither Alonzo Whitney nor Alpheus Cheney completed their service with this unit.

**The David Whitney Story**

# Part II – Chapter 2

# Alpheus Cheney's Further Service

## Overview

While in the 10th Regiment, Alpheus Cheney was promoted first to the rank of Sergeant and subsequently to First Sergeant. But on September 26, 1863, he was discharged from his enlistment to accept a commission as an officer at the rank of First Lieutenant, second in command of Company C of the 7th Regiment of the United States Colored Troops, one of the infantry units formed subsequent to President Abraham Lincoln's order establishing commands made up of enlisted African-Americans.

For Lieutenant Alpheus Cheney's first duty as an officer, he was detached from Company C and, from the end of September 1863 until mid-February 1864, operated as a recruiter in Baltimore, Maryland. In February Cheney returned to Company C and remained with that unit until late September 1864 when, while in combat near Richmond, Virginia, he was promoted to Captain, Commanding Company H, to replace the previous commander, who had been killed in action.

On March 1, 1865, Cheney was transferred to the 41st U.S. Colored Troops to become a staff officer at the rank of Major. In recommending him for the position as acting Assistant Inspector General, one of his superior officers noted that Cheney was "a most excellent soldier, brave and collected on the field ofbattle," and another called him "the best drill officer in the Brigade."

### The 7th United States Colored Troops

Cheney's first non-Vermont unit, the 7th USCT, was organized in Baltimore in the fall of 1863 and assigned initially to duty in the deep south, based primarily in Jacksonville, Florida. In late June 1864, they were deployed to Hilton Head, South Carolina, where they participated in expeditions and skirmishes on the islands in that area. The unit moved

back to Jacksonville in mid-July but in early August was transferred to Virginia to participate in the siege of Richmond and Petersburg.

In Virginia, from mid-August to late October 1864, Cheney's unit was engaged in battles around Richmond, including the Battle of New Market Heights. This battle took place at a location north of the James River southeast of Richmond, also known as Chaffin's Farm or Chapin's Farm, and was considered one of the most heroic engagements involving African Americans. It was just a few days before this battle that Captain Cheney took over as Commander of Company H.

On September 29th, after being pinned down by Confederate artillery fire for about 30 minutes, the Colored Troops charged earthworks and rushed up the slopes of the heights from which the fire was directed. During an hour-long battle the division suffered tremendous casualties; several African Americans were awarded the Medal of Honor as a result of their actions at New Market Heights.

Beginning in late October 1864, the 7th USCT was entrenched at the edge of Richmond until March 31, 1865, when they joined the final siege of Petersburg. Cheney, however, did not finish his war service with this unit, having been promoted to a staff position with another African-American unit.

**The 41st United States Colored Troops**

The 41st U. S. Colored Troops, to which Alpheus Cheney was transferred in March of 1865, had been organized at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the last few months of 1864.

They were initially assigned guard duty along the James River below Richmond and eventually joined the trenches outside that city. The 41st then took part in the last siege of Petersburg and the brief pursuit of Lee until final Union victory in April 1865.

This last unit of Cheney's remained in Petersburg until the end of May, when they were sent to Edinburg, Texas. There the troops were assigned guard and provost duty, acting essentially as policemen. On September 30, 1865, the regiment was reduced to battalion-size and Alpheus Cheney was mustered out of the service at the rank of Major. The 41st as a unit was mustered out in Brownsville, Texas, on November 10th and disbanded in Philadelphia on December 14th.

**Pioneering in NW Iowa**

When the war ended, Alpheus Cheney already had commitments back in Vermont. On March 19, 1863, during the time that the 10th Vermont Regiment was posted for guard duty along the Potomac River in Montgomery County, Maryland, and three-and-a-half months before the Battle at Gettysburg, Cheney married Alonzo and David Whitney's sister, Emma.*

Alpheus and Emma Cheney left Vermont shortly after the Civil War as part of the late 19th century American expansion to the west. They stopped first in northeastern Iowa, east of the Cedar Falls-Waterloo area, in Buchanan County, where their first of two daughters, Nellie, was born in 1867 or 1868. They soon moved on to Northwest Iowa and staked out a farm claim in Clay County, on the west side of the town of Spencer in Riverton Township. Their second daughter, Gertrude, is listed in the 1895 Clay County census as being 15 years old and born in Clay County. Her older sister, Nellie, was listed in the census as a milliner, her mother as a housewife, and her father as a merchant.

As a recognized leader from his service as a Union Army officer, Alpheus Cheney was elected early on as a Clay County official and was active in county government for several years. From 1875 to 1876, he was the County Recorder and from 1887-1894 the County Clerk of Courts. Cheney's life, however, apparently did not end in Iowa. He reportedly died around 1927 and is buried in acemetery in Los Angeles.

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* For a picture of Major Cheney and his bride, Emma Whitney, David's sister, see the Appendix, p. 94.

# Part II – Chapter 3

# Alonzo Whitney's Further Service in Union-Controlled South Carolina

### The 26th USCT

Alonzo Whitney followed his brother-in-law, Alpheus Cheney, out of the 10th Vermont Regiment also into an African-American unit, but not until March 4, 1864, when he was commissioned a Captain, commanding Company I of the 26th Infantry Regiment of the United States Colored Troops.

**Captain Alonzo B. Whitney**
**Commander**
**Company I, 26th USCT**

The 26th USCT was organized at Riker's Island in New York Harbor, February 27, 1864, just a week before Alonzo was assigned to it. In April they were sent to Beaufort, South Carolina, operating from that area until after the war, when the unit was mustered out in August 28, 1865.

**Coastal South Carolina**

The South Carolina Sea Islands had been under the control of Union forces since November 1861 when those forces took over Hilton Head along with other islands and Port Royal Sound at the sea entrance to Beaufort. The Union assault on St. Helena Island, across from Beaufort, caused white plantation owners to flee, leaving behind their homes, possessions, and 10,000 slaves.

In April 1862, a military order freed the blacks in the Sea Islands, anticipating Lincoln's later Emancipation Proclamation. Soon civilian northerners came to the Union-controlled area and organized efforts to educate and otherwise provide for freed blacks in what came to be known as the Port Royal Experiment. The Penn Center, currently an important cultural and educational institution on St. Helena Island, had its origins in this experiment. Penn Center has a long-standing tradition of serving many community-based projects, such as bringing public water to the islands, helping farmers to buy and market co-operatives, and advocating better housing and health care for low-income people.

Alonzo and the 26th Regiment reported to Beaufort on April 13, 1864, as the Union Forces in the deep south were close to embarking on a final major campaign, beginning with the march on Atlanta.

**Early Combat Action**

The first action the 26th saw in the Sea Islands was in early July, when they were involved in an expedition to Johns and James Islands. During these actions, Alonzo and his brother-in-law, Alpheus Cheney, were joined again as company-grade officers in separate regiments of the Colored Infantry, not privates in one company. After this brief taste of combat, the 26th continued to fill their role as part of the Beaufort District occupying-forces for the rest of the summer going into the fall of 1864.

**A Union Plan to Block Rail Travel North of Savannah**

In October 1864, the 26th USCT was reassigned to the Department of the South, as General William Tecumseh Sherman's forces had completed the capture of Atlanta and were preparing for an advance first toward

Savannah, lying on the Georgia coast next to the Sea Islands, and then a subsequent campaign through South Carolina.

The major battle for the 26th that Alonzo participated in came at the end of November 1864. Sherman wanted the troops stationed in South Carolina to break the Charleston and Savannah Railroad just upriver from Beaufort by the 1st of December. He was moving his forces north from Atlanta in the middle of November and wanted the railroad destroyed, cutting off Savannah's only avenue of retreat or reinforcement. Two brigades were organized from various regiments, including the 26th Colored Infantry as part of the Second Brigade.

**Boyd's Neck and Honey Hill**

Early in the morning on November 29th, ships loaded with troops and landing materials set sail up the Broad River heading from Port Royal Sound located south of Beaufort with Boyd's Neck as their destination. From there the troops would march to take control of the railroad to prevent the expected evacuation of Savannah and afford a more rapid advance on Charleston.

The plans did not work, as the ships moving up the river got lost under heavy fog, especially those carrying engineers and landing materials. The troop landing was delayed until late in the afternoon and, without the engineers, was rather haphazard in its execution. Some troops got mixed up after reaching land and set off in the wrong direction, having to maneuver in the darkness and operate with faulty maps. Confederate troops, in the meantime, gained reinforcements that had been transported up the still-intact rail line from Savannah.

On November 30th, Union forces reached Honey Hill, where they engaged the entrenched, reinforced Confederates but were repulsed. Alonzo's unit did not see action in this battle, as they and another regiment had not yet arrived that morning. After the defeat, Union troops withdrew to Boyd's Neck where they remained until December 6th.

**Killed in Action**

Alonzo's service came to an end at Boyd's Neck. On December 4th, while out on the picket line, he was struck by what is today called 'friendly fire' and apparently died the next day. What actually occurred is unrecorded, but the official I Company muster roll for November and December 1864, reporting on the status of individual unit members, states that Alonzo "Died on Dec. 5 at Boyd's Neck from accidental shot wound."

However, the word "accidental" is crossed through with an annotation, made at a second audit on March 5, 1866, that it "So appears on Roll".

Whitney family legend has it that Alonzo might have been "fragged" by his own troops, meaning someone from his unit killed him on purpose for personal reasons. However, the tense situation surrounding the failed attempt to capture the rail line, when combined with the necessity to remain vigilant in unfamiliar territory at Boyd's Neck, could result in misidentification at the front picket lines, where secure identification of friend or foe is absolutely necessary.

# Part II – Chapter 4

# Alonzo
# Returned to Vermont

### Burial at Brookfield

Alonzo Whitney's body was returned to Brookfield for burial in East Hill Cemetery, where his parents were later buried. A large monument marking Alonzo's grave still stands today in honor of his service to his country in its only internal war suppressing rebellion.*

On December 16, 1864, a 26th Regiment staff officer, Major Ira Winans, received Alonzo's personal effects from the Regiment Chaplain, Benjamin Franklin Randolph.

Randolph was an African-American but had been born a freeman in Kentucky. He had studied at Oberlin College in Ohio and became the only black commissioned officer in the 26th USCT. After the war, Randolph returned to South Carolina with the Freedmen's Bureau, was elected State Senator for Orangeburg County, and served as state chairman of the Republican Party in South Carolina. While campaigning for election in October 1868, he was assassinated by the Ku Klux Klan in Abbeville County as he stepped from a train.

Included among Alonzo's belongings that Chaplain Randolph had secured were a wallet containing 30 cents postage currency, a money order to the Paymaster P. Edwin Dye, Captain of C Company, signed by Joseph B Mason, Company Sergeant of Company C in the amount of $25.00, to be paid to the bearer and deducted from Mason's pay, two 3-cent postage stamps, a small porte-monnaie, a small knife, and a check on the Assistant Treasurer of New York, drawn by Captain Dye, to be paid to the order of Amanda Williams.



* For a picture of Alonzo's monument, see the Appendix, p. 94.

### An Unfulfilled Dream—A Wish—Perhaps a Promise

Probably few, if any recruits go off to war without having plans or developing plans for what they will be doing after the war. Alonzo Whitney was no exception, apparently having had such plans, or at least a dream, even a wish for what might lie in the future.

Before Alonzo left the 10th Vermont Infantry Regiment to become, like his brother-in-law, a white officer in a Union-organized, African-American unit, he was detached from Company G—where he had been an infantryman—and was assigned temporarily to another element. From August 1863 until the end of February 1864, Alonzo performed other duties involving skills he had become informally familiar with as an infantryman.

These new duties were foretold in Alonzo's letter to the Coolidges a year earlier. As he reported to Mrs. Coolidge in the fall of 1862 from the 10th Regiment's Potomac encampment, he had been acting as a nurse, caring not for wounded—as they had not yet engaged the enemy—but rather for his many comrades who were sick due to conditions in the camp. Alonzo recalled that Mrs. Coolidge had suggested he consider becoming a physician, and he had mused that by the end of the war—since he had already become a *de facto* nurse in the camp—he might need little study to take up the practice of medicine.

Now, a year later, Alonzo was formally attached to a field hospital where he served as a nurse for seven months, assigned as a hospital attendant. Maybe his dream was turning into a promise.

### A Mystery?

Why Alonzo left his duties as a nurse to become an officer with the U. S. Colored Troops is a good question, but less than a mystery. In his letter to the Coolidges, Alonzo pledged himself to patriotic duty, which could include dying for his nation if that would help restore peace. Perhaps that sense of duty overrode his plans for a future in medicine.

If Alonzo's motive for leaving his field practice as a nurse was to contribute to the struggle for preserving his country by voluntarily leading freed African-Americans into battle, then he was furthering a long-standing tradition of concern by Vermont's white citizens for the status of their black brethren. Vermont entered the Union in 1777, not as a former colony but as a separate republic, with a constitution firmly proscribing slavery. The state also adopted universal male suffrage with no distinction between the voting rights of Whites and African-Americans.

During the Civil War, at least 150 Vermont citizens of African-American origin served in all-black units, many in the very first such northern unit organized, the 54th Massachusetts Regiment. This unit served in the same area of South Carolina as Alonzo's 26th Regiment and gained glory in combat early on in a frontal assault on Fort Wagner on Morris Island, part of the Confederate defenses near the entrance to Charleston Harbor. In that battle, despite heavy casualties, the 54th proved to the nation and the world the valor of black soldiers in general and the men of that regiment in particular. The 54th Massachusetts Regiment's story has been told in the 1989 motion picture “Glory”.

**Still a Mystery**

One mystery concerning Alonzo's post-war plans, however, does remain. In addition to the money, postage, and checks that the 26th Regiment's chaplain found among Alonzo's possessions, there was one very personal item Alonzo had been carrying with him: a gold locket containing the picture of a young lady and a lock of hair. Who this young lady was, and what she meant to Alonzo's future, is, and probably will forever remain, a mystery.

**David Whitney**

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Preface
## Patriotic Duty Twofold

Chapter 5 of David Whitney's story is by far the largest portion presented here. It is longer than either of the other two main parts, and some of its sub-chapter sections are longer than other complete chapters. It is the story of his military service to his country over two periods of enlistment, one from September 1862 to August 1863, and the other from just after Christmas 1863 until the summer of 1865.

In the first enlistment, David saw little combat but many deaths of comrades due to disease in the camps of northern Virginia. Even David did not entirely escape being sick, having spent a brief period in the infirmary early in 1863. But he did survive and was present at a well-known battle just before his first enlistment expired.

David's second enlistment took him through many of the fiercest battles of the last year of the war that led to the Union victory. Most of these are described here at length, but, as far as possible, from the standpoint of the frontline, lowest level soldier, as Private David Whitney was for the duration.

Unlike many war histories that focus on well-known, leading figures—the celebrities of war—this account mentions very few high-ranking officers by name. It is based on a variety of sources, including individual National Park Service battle accounts, a two-volume history of Vermont's service in the Civil War, and various other books and articles. Most important to understanding David's standpoint were the letters another young man his age from the same town and serving in the same units wrote home to his family during his and David's two enlistments.

In this chapter, sections 1-4 describe his first enlistment and his return to Vermont, sections 5-13 his second enlistment. Four of the battles David

fought in have sections of their own. Three of these are well known and generally considered important turning points in the war. The fourth one, describing the Battle of the Monocacy (Section 10, pp. 55-61), was brief in duration but fiercely fought and has been considered—by some observers at the time as well as subsequent historical judgement—the battle that saved Washington from capture by the Confederate Army.

The description here of the Battle of the Monocacy is the longest of the sections and goes the furthest in detailing what a frontline soldier such as David must have experienced from the time of being ordered to a battlefield, through preparations for battle, the battle itself, and, finally, its immediate aftermath.

During David's two enlistments, he covered a lot of terrain, especially in the states of Maryland and Virginia. He traveled extensively by train in various accommodations, passenger cars as well as cattle cars. He also sailed on various steamships and steamboats, first along Long Island Sound through New York Harbor and on to New Jersey, and later down and up the James River in Virginia, up and down the Chesapeake Bay, between Virginia and Maryland, and into Baltimore Harbor, as well as out of the Washington waterfront and down the Potomac back to the Chesapeake. But most of the time he marched from battlefield to battlefield on foot, including a six-day, 120-mile forced march from northern Virginia across Maryland to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

This account of David's journeys through combat is written in such a way that a reader interested in tracing, on maps, David's path during the Civil War, should be able to do so. If you are interested in any particular battle, the brief descriptions in the Synopsis (pp. V-viii) will give you a concise overview of the account of each section and direct you to the page the complete version starts on.

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 1
## Nine Months with the 15th Vermont Volunteers

### Enlisting

When David Whitney's older brother, Alonzo, and their future brother-in-law, Alpheus Cheney, volunteered at the beginning of August 1862 to serve the Union for three years with the 10th Vermont Regiment, David was only 18 years old, Nonetheless, the call to duty must have been strong; in September he signed up in Brookfield for nine months with the newly-formed Second Brigade.

**David Whitney, Vermont Volunteer**

**Forming the Militia**

Vermont's Second Brigade was formed in compliance with an order from President Lincoln on August 4, calling for 300,000 men to be activated from the various state militias for a period of nine months, anticipating that the war against the rebellion would not last long and calculating that more men would volunteer to sign up for a shorter term of service. Vermont's quota for the militia was set at 4,898 men.

By September 20, a total of 50 local Vermont companies, each containing a maximum 101 men and officers, were organized and assigned to five new regiments. David's unit, the West Randolph Company, including recruits from the towns of Northfield, Brookfield, and Randolph, was organized on September 11 and became Company C of the 15th Regiment. The 15th, along with the 12th, 13th, 14th, and 16th Vermont Regiments, comprised the Second Vermont Brigade.

As was the case with Alonzo when he joined the 10th Regiment, David did not go off alone into the 15th. He was joined on active duty with the military by a man already his brother-in-law, Edwin Sprague, who had married Maria Whitney in Brookfield in October of the previous year. Maria was six years older than her brother David, and her husband was another two years older.

**Training at Brattleboro**

On October 8, 1862, the 15th Vermont Regiment was transported by rail to a training area at Fort Dummer near Brattleboro in the southeast corner of the state, adjacent the Connecticut River separating Vermont from New Hampshire. Fort Dummer was the site of the first permanent settlement in Vermont by European-heritage migrants. The fort was built in 1724 on what was then the frontier, guarding the passage to early settlements along the Connecticut River. On its path along the Connecticut River toward Fort Dummer, the train bringing the 15th Vermont Regiment stopped once, at Bellows Falls, where they waited for another train to pass. At this brief stop, guards were posted at the doors to ensure no recruit deserted.

**Daily Schedule**

On arrival at Fort Dummer, the 15th Regiment encamped in newly established barracks near a pond at a site named Camp Lincoln, recently vacated by the 12th Vermont Regiment, which had been sent south to Washington, DC. David and his comrades of the 15th were immediately

issued field eating utensils and canteens and then—two days after arriving —military uniforms.

The recruits' initial training was aimed at establishing military-like attitudes in their daily operations and fostering overall cohesion as a unit. The daily schedule included the following duties, reveille at 5:30am, policing (cleaning up the immediate area) at 6:30, sick call at 6:30, breakfast at 7:00, guard mounting at 8:00, squad (smallest unit) drill from 8:30 to 9:30, company drill from 11 to 12:30, dinner at 1:00, company drill again from 2:30 to 4:00, supper at 5:00, a dress parade at 5:30, tattoo (signal to end the evening) at 8:30, and finally taps (lights out) at 9:00pm.

**Picket Duty**

After the first few days, a good deal of David's training time was devoted to practicing picket duty. Such duty involves being posted at the perimeters of the defense of an encampment, prepared to challenge anyone who attempts to cross the lines into the protected area, thus preventing unauthorized access.

Picket-duty training began at 8:45am when groups of six men were sent to specific guard sites where they set up tents for shelter and then took their post at 11:00. A rotation of picket shifts was to include two hours on duty and four off. A man on picket must remain alert and vigilant, not an easy job when you are staring into space looking for something unusual, but hoping not to see it.

Practice for the 15th Regiment at challenging on the picket line was achieved by the random appearance of men who had to give the appropriate daily password or be arrested and taken to the guardhouse. This training proved to be a very important part of the regiment's preparation for war, as a major part of their nine months of service that was to begin shortly was spent in northern Virginia guarding against possible Confederate advances on the nation's capital.

**Going to War**

As the preparatory training proceeded for the five regiments of the Second Brigade, each regiment, when ready, was sent south to war duty. The 12th Regiment had left for Washington on October 4th, 4 days before David and his fellow 15th Regiment volunteers arrived in Brattleboro. The 13th Regiment left on October 11th, but four of its members reportedly deserted on the way. Also at that time, it was said that the 15th and 16th Regiments were to be sent to New Orleans. But as is often the case in

rumor-ripe, intensive military training camps, this proved to be a false claim: the 15th, when their turn came, was sent directly to Washington.

**Mustering In and Shipping Out**

On October 21, the 15th Regiment, along with the 14th and 16th, participated in a grand review at Brattleboro conducted by Vermont's Governor Holbrook, to which other Vermont notables plus families of the volunteers were invited. On Thursday, October 22, David's regiment was mustered in, that is, officially made a part of the Union-organized armed forces.

They left then the next day at 1:30pm via rail from Brattleboro, following the Connecticut River across the states of Massachusetts and Connecticut until they reached New Haven on Long Island Sound. Along the way their train made stops in Massachusetts at Greenfield, Deerfield, Northampton—where the troops were treated to apples and bread and butter—and finally Springfield, just short of the Connecticut border. By this time it had turned dark, and the only recognizable place the rest of the way to New Haven was the city of Hartford.

**Setting Sail for New Jersey**

David and his regiment arrived in New Haven at 11:00pm and boarded a steamer that sailed down Long Island Sound toward New York City. The next morning at 8:00am the steamer anchored somewhat short of the city and then, about an hour or two later, after having soup and coffee for breakfast, the troops transferred to a ferry that transported them down New York Bay, through Verrazano Narrows and along the Atlantic Ocean shore to Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey.

**Train Rides through New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Baltimore and finally on to Washington**

After a wait at Ft. Monmouth, the Vermont 15th traveled by passenger rail across New Jersey, arriving at 12:00 noon across from Philadelphia, in Camden, on the Delaware River, which they then crossed by ferry to Philadelphia. After supper in Philadelphia, the regiment was loaded into freight cars that took them to Baltimore, arriving there the next morning. They were fed around noon but had a long wait for passenger cars to take them to Washington. Their train did not depart until after dark and moved slowly and stealthily through the border state of Maryland, not arriving in the capital city until around 7:00am on Sunday, October 26. David and his comrades were greeted at their destination by a heavy rainstorm.

**Marking Time in DC on the way to Virginia**

Upon arriving in Washington, the 15th Regiment was initially housed on the edge of Capitol Hill in a building named Soldiers Rest, which was established as a transitional point for newly arriving Union troops assigned to duty with The Military District of Washington. The Vermont 15th got to Soldiers Rest in time for breakfast and were allowed to stay in the building overnight. However, the next day, while the rain continued, they had to seek shelter elsewhere. As the 15th's tents had not yet arrived, some of the troops found friends to stay with among the other Vermont regiments that had left Brattleboro a few days previously and already had their tents.

The following morning, the entire Second Vermont Brigade, which had been assigned to duty with The Military District of Washington, marched over the Long Bridge crossing the Potomac and into Arlington, VA. They stopped briefly at the edge of what had been Confederate Commanding General Robert E. Lee's farm and then set up camp about a mile further on at Arlington Heights. David Whitney's 15th Regiment spent eight of their nine months in Northern Virginia, initially at a site that came to be known unofficially as 'Camp Vermont', an area of rather low-lying wetlands, not conducive to good health for men sleeping in tents. Disease took its toll at this site.

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 2
## In Defense of Washington

### Camp Vermont

At Camp Vermont, David Whitney and his 15th Regiment comrades performed mostly drilling and picket duties, protecting the national capitol region from possible attack from the south. At the end of November, the 15th Vermont, along with the 13th and 14th Vermont Regiments, were ordered to Bull Run, which at the time was the very front line in the defense of Washington.

These three Vermont regiments were sent to reinforce the troops guarding the strategically important Orange and Alexandria Railroad. On the march there, they ran into early winter weather, with drizzling rain turning to snow. They bivouacked the first night at Fairfax Court House and the next at Fairfax Station. The following day, the 15th Regiment went on to Union Mills near Bull Run where they stayed until December 4th, marching then the thirty miles back to Camp Vermont.

Back in Camp Vermont too late for Thanksgiving, the 15th Regiment was granted the day off on December 8 as their day of celebration. Many spent their free time reading and playing games, but the highlight of the day was the distribution of a pint of oysters to each man. The regiment's commanding officer, Colonel Redfield Proctor, had purchased the oysters using the money, over $100, that his quartermaster had raised by selling off provisions and other supplies. Many men cooked their own oysters, but some pooled theirs and had plenty of stew to go around. It was a very satisfying holiday meal in comparison to their usual daily fare

### Fairfax Court House

On December 12, the Vermont Regiments left Camp Vermont for good and moved to Fairfax Court House; the 15th set up camp about a mile south in a chestnut grove. Here the soldiers from Vermont—familiar with the resources of forests—split large, straight-grained chestnut trees into planks and boards to construct stockades and officers' quarters for their encampment, replacing the tents they had lived in at Camp Vermont.

### A Raid by Confederates

About two weeks later, on December 28, the 15th Vermont was dispatched to the nearby town of Centreville because of artillery fire heard in the vicinity at Wolf Run Shoals. A subsequent Confederate cavalry raid behind Union lines at Fairfax Court House led to a first response of ordering the 15th Regiment back to the court house. But changes in the raiders' actions required the 15th to remain on guard all night at all approaches to Centreville.

The next morning, the Confederate cavalry left the Union-held area, and the 15th returned a few days later to their camp in the chestnut grove. Before long, however, the regiment moved on to Fairfax Station, where they remained till spring, being occupied primarily with military drill and training and with the construction of rifle pits in defense to the southeast.

### Supply Train Skirmish

Elements of the 15th saw action that spring, but contact with Confederate units was limited. On May 7th, the regiment went to Bealeton Station in Fauquier County further west, where they were joined the next day by a calvary unit. These two units shared picket duty for several days before David's regiment returned to duty at Bull Run in Fairfax County, where they set up camp at Union Mills.

On May 30th, a small detachment of 25 men from the 15th Regiment's Company E were on a supply train attacked by another group of Confederate raiders accompanied by artillery fire, but they apparently survived. Around June 10th. the 15th Regiment was ordered further down the Orange and Alexandria railroad but, after a few days there, returned to Union Mills, using improvised transportation from what was left at two stations that had been burned previously by Confederate forces.

The David Whitney Story

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 3
## A Great Battle at Gettysburg

### Joining the Army of the Potomac for Duty at Gettysburg

On Tuesday, June 23, 1863, the 15th Regiment—along with the four other Vermont Regiments making up the Second Vermont Brigade, all nearing the end of their nine-month voluntary enlistment—were detached from the 22nd Army Corps in the defense of Washington and reassigned as the Second Brigade of the 3rd Division, 1st Corps of the Army of the Potomac. On the afternoon of June 25th, the brigade left Union Mills in Fairfax County, Virginia, on a long march north to join the rest of the Army of the Potomac for the coming battle at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

### Crossing Northern Virginia into Maryland

That first night the Second Brigade bivouacked in a hard rainstorm just beyond Centreville and then the second night at Herndon Station, both still in Fairfax County. On the third day, the Fifteenth Regiment became the rear guard for the brigade, providing protection for the others, especially the accompanying animals, supplies, and ammunition, as they proceeded up to a crossing on the Potomac River. Late that day, David and his Second Brigade comrades used pontoons to cross at what is now White's Ferry in Montgomery County, Maryland, and then set up camp near the town of Poolesville.

### North to Frederick

On the morning of June 28th the Second Brigade began their march across Maryland, heading around Sugar Loaf Mountain and then north towards Frederick. On the way, most of the men got rid of their extra clothing and blankets to make their load lighter in the humid heat of a

typical Maryland summer. They stopped that night short of Frederick and camped along the Baltimore and Ohio railroad tracks just north of Adamstown.

After arriving in Frederick the next day in the midst of a steady, daylong rain, the Brigade rested for three hours. At this point, the troops had been marching for four days and felt the effect on their feet. In an apparent economic decision, the chief quartermaster, the officer in control of supplies, had decided that those volunteers who were very near the end of their nine-month enlistment should not be issued new boots. Most men's feet were blistered and bleeding, and 90 members of the brigade were left at Frederick, unable to continue the march to battle.

**On toward Pennsylvania**

In the afternoon, the Second Vermont Brigade continued northward from Frederick and camped that evening at Creagerstown, MD. The next morning, June 30th, they slogged through more mud on the way to an overnight bivouac at Emmitsburg, just three miles short of the Mason-Dixon line: on the other side, in Pennsylvania, was Gettysburg, only 10 more miles away.

During the six days of their march across northern Virginia and the state of Maryland on their way to Pennsylvania, David Whitney and his fellow Vermonters had covered 120 miles. They actually took one less day to arrive at their destination than the rest of the First Corps.

**Joining the Battle at Gettysburg**

The next day, Wednesday, July 1, 1863, just before combat broke out on the first day of the Battle at Gettysburg, the Second Brigade, as part of the 3rd Division, was ordered to leave the encampment at Emmitsburg and join the rest of the 1st Corps for the ensuing battle at Gettysburg. For this portion of the march, the 12th and 15th Vermont Regiments were separated from the rest of the brigade and assigned as rear guard for the corps train.

The Second Brigade, minus the 12th and 15th regiments, reached the battlefield early in the afternoon, but the Corps train, with its wagons and teams guarded by the 12th and 15th Regiments, moved more slowly on the muddy roads caused by a late morning rain.

About five miles short of Gettysburg, the train halted in some woods, anticipating camping there for the night. However, the Union's 3rd Corps,

which had diverted to the Emmitsburg Pike from movement along a route further to the east, came upon the train at that point, The 3rd Corps commander ordered the 1st Corps train to take another road, guarded solely by the 12th Regiment, and had the 15th proceed to the battlefield with his unit.

**In the Midst of Battle**

The next morning, July 2nd, the Vermonters awoke on the second day of battle to the sound of cannon fire from the Union artillery battery positioned on Cemetery Hill. At 9:00am the Second Vermont Brigade was ordered to a position to the right in support of the artillery until 11:00, when the 13th Regiment was moved directly behind the battery. At that point, the 15th was directed along the skirmish line in front and proceeded to the extreme left.

At noon, the 1st Corps Commander, alerted to possible Confederate cavalry raids on his supply train, ordered the 15th to return and reinforce the 12th Regiment in their guard duty. The 15th set off to return on the route it had come in to battle on, which took them between the line of battle and the skirmish line of the 3rd Corps in front of Little Round Top. The 3rd Corps staff, however, warned the 15th's commander of the hazards of continuing on that route: Confederate lines were not far down the projected path across a field towards Emmitsburg Road.

The Regiment was then ordered to go to Rock Creek Church, not far from the battlefield, where the 1st Corps supply train and the 12th Vermont Regiment were located. To get there, the 15th passed between Little and Big Round Top Hills and experienced the beginning of the fierce battle at Little Round Top, announced by preliminary artillery fire as David Whitney and his comrades were crossing the ridge between the two hills.

That afternoon, the 15th Regiment found the supply train along Taneytown Road and stayed there overnight. The next morning, the 12th and 15th regiments set off with the supply train for Westminster, although two companies from each regiment were left behind to guard the 3rd Corps ammunition supply that was retained closer to the battlefield.

**The Aftermath in Maryland**

The 12th Vermont Regiment, whose enlistment expired on July 4th, was sent by rail to Baltimore as the guard for 2,500 Confederate prisoners captured at Gettysburg, and then from Baltimore on back to Vermont. But the 15th Regiment continued serving in Maryland for two more weeks.

Still guarding the 1st Corps wagon train, the 15th stayed in Westminster until Monday, July 6, when the train left in the morning during a hard rain storm on their way to rejoin the rest of the 1st Corps. After two-and-a-half miles, however, when they were warned again of Confederate cavalry operations nearby, the train stopped in the woods and waited until dark. Then, with David's Company and one other 15th Regiment company acting together as the advance guard—clearing the way through the mud and the woods—the train proceeded another 14 miles until stopping at 3:00am to catch some sleep. They set off again Tuesday morning for Frederick and arrived there in the afternoon, having traveled a total of 31 miles in 15 hours over a stretch of two days.

On Wednesday, July 8th, David Whitney and his 15th Regiment comrades moved across the Appalachian Trail near South Mountain and into Middletown, while the 13th Vermont Regiment, at the end of their enlistment, left for Vermont. On Thursday, the 15th Regiment was relieved of wagon-train guard duty and was ordered to join the rest of the Second Brigade.

**Joining the Pursuit**

The 15th Regiment then moved out on their way toward South Mountain where the rest of their brigade was bivouacked overnight. It was dusk before they reached the summit, and they had to search further in the dark for a while before coming upon their brigade comrades on a steep stone ridge. Those men were setting up stone fortifications to guard against possible attack, and the men of the 15th joined in. But the Second Brigade did not stay there long enough to need protective walls.

Early the next morning the pursuit of the Confederates resumed. The brigade marched as far as Boonsboro, where the sound of artillery fire signalled that armed conflict was still going on. But the Union forces managed to keep driving their foe backward as far as the outskirts of Hagerstown, where the Confederates halted and began to hold ground.

Both sides were holding their positions in place for the next day and a half with skirmishing going on between them. On Sunday the Confederates resumed their withdrawal, and the 15th Regiment and the other Union forces resumed their pursuit. After a brief Confederate halt at Funkstown on the south side of Hagerstown—answered by Union artillery shells—the race towards a Potomac crossing continued the rest of the day.

By late afternoon the Confederates had reached the vicinity of Williamsport, where at about 7:00pm the Union forces found them dug in. Then after some skirmishing by sharpshooter snipers, the 15th Vermont

Regiment settled in for the night at the center of the second line of battle in front of the Confederate position.

The next morning, Union troops including David's 15th Regiment advanced on the Confederate entrenchment but found their foe had apparently slipped away in the night. The Confederate movement could be heard in the distance, and the Union forces gave chase. However, the Confederates reached their river crossing at Wlliamsport, and the Union forces gave up the chase, remaining on the Maryland side of the Potomac.

**Homeward Bound**

With their nine months of contracted service now ending, David Whitney and his 15th Regiment comrades marched back down along the Potomac River and on Saturday, July 18, headed home, departing the Maryland shore of the river via rail from Berlin (more recently renamed Brunswick) eastward to Baltimore and then north to New England.

On the way back to Vermont, the 15th Regiment reached New York City in the midst of draft riots that had started after the announcement of a second draft and in reaction to the method of exemptions allowed under the draft law. Even though their term of service was officially over, David Whitney's regiment remained in New York for a short while until order was restored and then continued their journey home.

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 4
## Back in Vermont

### Mustering Out at Brattleboro

The 15th Vermont Regiment eventually returned to their point of origin, Brattleboro, where the unit then was mustered out, leaving service in the Union forces officially on August 5, 1863.

There is no record of the specific duties of David Whitney or those of his brother-in-law, Edwin Sprague, during their nine months of service with Company G of the 15th Vermont Regiment. It is clear, however, that a good deal of their time was spent becoming soldiers in their regiment's various camps in Northern Virginia, just outside Washington, DC, but they were not entirely deprived of 'seeing the elephant', Civil War soldier slang for "combat".

David's service, as well as that of his brother-in-law, reached its climax just before the end of their enlistment with participation at Gettysburg in the most famous battle of the Civil War. Although they were not deployed in combat on the fields of Gettysburg, the 15th Regiment played an indispensable role in guarding the supplies, especially the ammunition, of the troops in combat. Materiel, that is, crucial supplies, is one of the two basic M's—the other being Morale—that is burned into the brains of all young infantry officers as necessary elements for success on the battlefield.

David did not avoid being sick during his service in Virginia, having been noted as in the regimental hospital sometime between January and February 1863. At least he did not become an official casualty of the 15th Regiment, which saw 78 men die of disease in the nine months of mostly non-combat duty.

**At Home in Brookfield**

When David Whitney returned home in August 1863, he was only 19 years old, but his brother-in-law, Edwin Sprague, was nearly 27 and already a married man. Sprague had taken David's sister, Maria, as his bride on October 26, 1861, exactly a year before the day he and David arrived in Washington with the 15th Vermont Regiment. Edwin and Maria thus spent their first wedding anniversary and nearly the whole following year separated by Edwin's war service.

After returning home, Edwin remained in Brookfield, and with his wife, Maria, had two children, a son and a daughter. Their son was born on March 7, 1865, a month before the end of the Civil War, and they named him Ulysses G. Sprague.*

David, however, did not stay long in Vermont after his first term of service. Four months later, on the day after Christmas, 1863, he re-enlisted, this time for a three-year term with Company G of the 10th Vermont Regiment, the exact unit where his brother Alonzo and another brother-in-law, Alpheus Cheney, had been serving for more than a year.

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* For a picture of Edwin Sprague, his wife—David's sister Maria—and their two children—David's niece and nephew, see the Appendix, p. 95

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 5
## The 10th Vermont Regiment
## A Second Tour of Duty

### The 10th Regiment in Northern Virginia

The 10th Vermont Regiment, following reassignment during the build-up to the Battle at Gettysburg in late June 1863, became part of the 1st Brigade, 3rd Division, 3rd Army Corps of the Army of Potomac. After recrossing the Potomac River into Virginia in pursuit of Confederate forces fleeing Pennsylvania through Maryland, the 10th was stationed for six weeks, beginning August 1, in southern Fauquier County, Virginia, just above the Rappahannock River at Routt's Hill, west of Bealeton.

The 10th Regiment got their first genuine taste of combat late that fall when Union forces crossed the Rapidan River and the 10th faced off with the enemy at Orange Grove as part of a campaign along the Mine Run in Orange County. The 3rd Division's 1st Brigade was placed in an offensive position at the right in a charge against a location known as Robertson's Tavern. The 10th was in the center of this charge and led the skirmish there on November 27th: the battle was intense but inconclusive. With winter setting in, the 10th Vermont Regiment was moved back to a position between the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers at Brandy Station in Culpeper County.

David Whitney's brother Alonzo and their brother-in-law, Alpheus Cheney, were still serving with the 10th Regiment when they originally set up operations in northern Virginia, but before long, both of them were headed for other assignments. In August Alonzo was assigned duty with a field hospital, and in September Cheney left the 10th Regiment completely to accept a commission as an officer with the newly forming African-American units.

### David's Re-enlistment and Mustering In

After arriving back in Brookfield in August, 1863, David remained there long enough to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas that year with his family. But on December 26 he rejoined the Union forces by signing up for a three-year tour. David was recorded as being a 19-year-old farmer, with a light complexion, blue eyes, and brown hair, and standing 5' 5-3/8" tall.

On New Year's Day, 1864, David found himself once again in Brattleboro, Vermont, preparing to go off to war near the nation's capital. He was mustered in on January 2nd and assigned to Company G of the 10th Vermont Regiment, the unit his brother and brother-in-law had been serving in.

### Returning to the War Zone

By mid-January, 1864, those assigned to the 10th Regiment—including the re-enlistees as well as fresh recruits who had also assembled at Brattleboro—had shipped out and reached their new unit's camp at Brandy Station, Virgina. The recruits new to military service were drilled in preparation for combat, but veterans, like David, who had been trained the previous year and had served in combat zones, were allowed to forego the new training.

As with his previous experience with the 15th Regiment at various camp sites in northern Virginia, David was required to do picket duty defending the camp perimeters, but there was a generous amount of time off in between picket duty and a few other formal functions. Wives and lady friends of some of the officers had been present at the camp for Thanksgiving and New Year's, and on January 25th the 3rd Corps Commander hosted a grand ball attended by 10th Regiment officers and their ladies.

### A Diversionary Skirmish, Followed by a Mud Race

On February 6th, as the 10th Regiment was coming back to camp from picket duty, the Union Army's 1st and 2nd Corps were setting up along the Rapidan River as a diversionary tactic for a Union invasion toward Richmond further south in Virginia. The 1st Brigade of the 3rd Division of the 3rd Corps, including David's regiment, was ordered to support the 1st Corps, and marched seven miles in drizzling rain before reaching their position for bivouacking overnight.

In the morning, the brigade proceeded a few more miles to the river, where they found some skirmishing between the 1st Corps and Confederate sentries. The 1st Brigade stood at the battle line all day before they were ordered back to Brandy Station. David's regiment raced the rest of the brigade back to camp after dark, slogging through deep mud. Half of their members were the first to return to their home post that night, beating the 1st Brigade's other two regiments there.

**Reorganizing for a Spring Offensive**

At the end of February there were signs in the Brandy Station encampment of the beginning of an anticipated spring offensive. The Union's 6th Army Corps moved past David's unit on the way to the Rapidan River south of the encampment. The 6th Corps was to be ready to fight against Confederate troops positioned in defense there, the area where three weeks earlier the 10th Regiment was sent temporarily to back up a brief skirmish.

Early in March, the 3rd Corps, to which the 10th Vermont Regiment belonged, was dissolved and its component units reallocated in a major realignment of Union forces. This was a strategic move for the purpose of conducting an offensive against the Confederate Army of Northern Virgina which has been called the Overland Campaign. The 3rd Corps' 3rd Division, including David's regiment, was reassigned to the Union's 6th Army Corps. The brigade the 10th Regiment was a part of was expanded by the addition of two infantry regiments to its previous structure of three infantry regiments and one heavy artillery regiment.

Private David Whitney now belonged to the 10th Vermont Regiment in the 1st Brigade of the 3rd Division of the 6th Army Corps in the reorganized Army of the Potomac and later, for a brief period, also in the newly incorporated Army of the Shenandoah, Middle Military Department. He served in these commands through many bloody battles until his last day of combat duty at the very end of the war.

**Anticipating the Overland Campaign**

The Overland Campaign towards Richmond, Virginia, did not start immediately, however, and a large part of the 10th Regiment's time from March through the month of April was spent on the picket line at various locations in Culpeper County, often under considerable rain.

In mid-March, David's Company G also was required to drill four hours a day. On Tuesday, March 15th, the new 6th Corps held a general inspection and, on the next day, a corps review. The review was a formal

parade of the entire corps, including its infantry, cavalry, and artillery units, plus the wagon trains and ambulances supporting these combat elements. The soldiers were dressed in full uniform to march before their commanding generals, and a rumor spread through the Corps that President Lincoln also had attended the review.

During the next week, reminders of Vermont arrived at the camp in Virginia. A winter storm on Tuesday, March 22nd, dumped an estimated 12 inches of snow on Culpeper County, which delayed the plans of some of the Vermonters there to tap for sugar in their area. However, some of the men received maple sugar from home wrapped in newspapers sent from Vermont.

### Final Preparations for the Spring Offensive

In mid-April, orders started coming down through the Union chain of command signalling an imminent beginning to the planned offensive pushing south across the state of Virginia. A final Corps review was conducted on April 18th. April 25th was set as the date mail delivery to and from military units would be halted for at least a 30-day period. Non-standard clothing items were sent for storage in Alexandria, Virginia. Field hospitals in northern Virginia were taken down, and patients were transferred to other facilities in Washington. On May 3rd, David's unit was ordered to be ready to march the next morning at 4:00am. Each man had been issued 3 days of rations and 50 rounds of ammunition.

**Combat-Ready Union Infantryman**
Image from FCIT Clipart Collection

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 6
## The Overland Campaign
## Battles in Spotsylvania County

### Six Weeks of Intense Combat

Beginning May 5, 1864, David Whitney's 10th Vermont Regiment was a part of an intense offensive by Union forces against the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. In this push south towards Richmond, the 10th Regiment left the camp in Culpeper County nearer Washington for good. Many of the following days of marching and combat were accompanied by heavy rains, resulting in the discomforts and hazards of mud that permeated the paths, the fields, and the trenches the soldiers had to operate in.

Along the way David fought in battles in the Virginia counties of Spotsylvania and Hanover, including the last major battle of this campaign at Cold Harbor just east of Richmond . At Cold Harbor he was a part of a very bloody conflict that lasted nearly two weeks, ending on June 12 with no clear victory for either side.

### The Wilderness

On the first night of the push south, David's division formed the rear guard for the first elements in the column moving out to battle. The rear guard then camped overnight at Germanna Ford on the Rapidan River to secure that crossing for the Ninth Corps, which was to follow.

The first battle in the offensive began the next morning, May 5th, at Wilderness on the Spotsylvania County line due west of Fredericksburg, Virginia. That morning, after the Ninth Corps column arrived, the 10th

Vermont Regiment moved out with the rest of the 3rd Division along Germanna Plank Road toward the Old Wilderness Tavern.

The division set up at Wilderness Run along the Orange Turnpike, and David's brigade was dispatched south across the turnpike to be positioned at the left flank of the 6th Corps, where they could support the rest of their own corps plus the right flank of the 5th Corps. As the brigade moved across the road, Confederate artillery opened fire on them, killing two men from the 10th Vermont and wounding several others before they could scatter into the thick woods for protection.

During the rest of that day, May 5th, the brigade held their position out of the direct line of battle but within earshot of fierce fighting going on on either side of them. They could not actually see the battle because of the wood thickets surrounding their position. On the morning of May 6th, after spending the night in position along the Orange Turnpike, David's brigade was pulled back and held in reserve for most of the rest of the day. They were positioned just behind the battlefront and experienced enemy artillery shells whizzing overhead, with some bursting close to them.

Just before sunset, Confederate troops assaulted the 6th Corps line to the front of David's brigade's support position. That portion of the corps fell back, allowing the enemy to push through to the rear. David's brigade was then ordered forward, and so the 10th Vermont Regiment, along with one other regiment, flanked the movement on the double and succeeded in forming a line between the retreating Union troops and the oncoming Confederates.

When David's unit reached their new position and turned forward, their commander ordered the men to cheer, astonishing the Confederate troops and halting their advance. The Union's retreating 6th Corps troops were able to restore their position, and this tactic effectively ended the fighting at that location, as dusk soon settled in on the heavily-wooded area.

In this battle at the Wilderness, the 10th Vermont Regiment lost three men who were killed and eight others who were wounded. Union forces had many more total casualties than the Confederates and seemingly suffered a tactical defeat though not a clear loss. However, this time, instead of pulling back after the battle as they had done in several previous engagements, Union forces continued the Overland Campaign, advancing through Spotsylvania County toward their goal of reaching Richmond ready to face off again against Confederate forces who might be barring their path.

**Spotsylvania Court House**

Late on May 7th, Union troops marched south toward Spotsylvania Court House, an important site for controlling the route to Richmond. At the same time, Confederate troops were assembling there for a defense of this position. David's unit, the 10th Vermont, was part of the movement southward, and on the way they passed the gruesome sight at Chancellorsville of skulls and bones left unclaimed and unburied after a fierce battle there the previous year.

The next day, May 8th, the 10th Vermont Regiment, along with the rest of the 6th Corps, took up a support position behind two other Corps. That evening, the 3rd Division, of which David's unit was a part, was drawn back from their position on the crest of hill and moved to the left. The following day, May 9th, was spent digging in at their present position, but under heavy artillery fire from the Confederate side.

**The Mule Shoe Salient**

By the time Union forces were digging in, Confederate troops had already set up reinforced positions across from them. At the outer edge of their line of entrenchments, Confederate forces had fashioned a semi-circular bulge, also called a salient, pointed toward the Union lines. The salient was in the shape of a horseshoe—or mule shoe, which is what the troops called the location, Mule Shoe. The shape of this salient allowed attacks from the side as well as from the front.

On May 10th and 11th, the 10th Vermont Regiment was up in the skirmish line, firing at the troops opposite them. On the second of these days, a contingent of Union troops attempted an attack on the Mule Shoe salient from the west side and succeeded in penetrating the confederate defenses, although ending up being pushed back.

As a result of this partial success, a more massive attack on the Mule Shoe was designed for the next day. On May 12th, the Union's 2nd Corps attacked the salient from the east and succeeded in surprising the Confederate troops there, who lacked artillery support. The Confederate command had misjudged the Union intent after the attack the previous day and had pulled out their artillery, thinking that the Union forces would be moving on. During this day's initial assault, Union forces captured more than 2500 Confederates, including one general.

However, in the aftermath of the assault, as Union troops were distracted while accumulating war booty at the scene and in moving the large numbers of prisoners-of-war to the rear of Union lines, general disorder reigned and the momentum of battle was lost. The Confederate

command mounted a countermove, in which they pulled additional brigades from their rear elements and managed to restore most of their original line of defense

**The Bloody Angle**

At this point David's 10th Vermont Regiment became intensely involved as part of the Union's 6th Corps's assault on a corner of the west side of the salient that came to be known as The Bloody Angle. This battle earned its name from the amount of carnage that resulted from the very intense man-to-man struggles after Union troops had breached the log walls that had been set up as part of the Mule Shoe defense. Soldiers soon ran out of ammunition and resorted to using their bayonets and rifle stocks to ward off attackers.

David's company was not among the first to breach the Confederate lines at The Bloody Angle, as the 3rd Division took their usual support position in the Corps formation. But David and his Company G comrades did eventually charge the position as reinforcements, working their way through ground covered with dead Union troops who had moved in advance of them and finding, inside the salient, Confederate casualties strung all over on top of each other, as much as two and three deep, including the severely wounded among and sometimes under the dead.

**The Last Week in Spotsylvania County**

As combat subsided that night, the 10th Vermont Regiment pulled back to their starting position. During the next day, May 13th, they moved to the left to support an artillery battery, and that night, the entire 6th Corps was moved further to the left. At the same time, one of the 6th Corps divisions advanced toward the foot of a hill protected by Confederate troops and, after artillery bombardment, managed to take the hill.

David's unit, as part of the 6th Corps 3rd division, had moved up quickly in support of this offensive and had to make their way across the Ni River. The men of Company G waded through swift currents up to their chests but managed to keep their weapons dry by holding them above water as they crossed and their powder dry by carrying their cartridge boxes on their shoulders. The 10th Regiment reached the top of the hill late that night and subsequently entrenched there, where they remained for a week.

In the battles of Spotsylvania County, the 10th Vermont Regiment had one killed, seven wounded, and one who died later from wounds received there. This list of casualties was relatively low, in comparison to other

units, as the 3rd Division was often held in reserve in support of the other 6th Corps divisions in this phase of the Overland Campaign.

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 7
## The Overland Campaign
## North Anna River
## and Totopotomoy Creek

### Moving out of Spotsylvania

Following the fierce battles the previous week, the Union command decided to quit the positions facing the Confederate defense lines in Spotsylvania County and move on to the south—but to do so by circling to the east of the Mattaponi River in order to avoid having to cross its rain-swollen branches, the Ma, Ta, Po, and Ni lying directly in front of them.

As a diversionary measure, meant to draw Confederate forces out from their lines and across the Mattaponi tributaries, one Union corps was sent southeastward on the night of May 20th through the town of Bowling Green and on to Milford Station in Caroline County. The Union strategy depended on Confederate troops being slowed down as they slogged through the swollen streams and so becoming vulnerable to attack by the remaining Union forces.

The Confederates, however, did not take the bait and thwarted the Union attempt by sending a part of their army out to block the main highway south —Telegraph Road (today's U.S. Route 1, directly west of today's I-95 in Spotsylvania County)—thereby cutting off the direct route south and separating the Union's diversionary corps from the rest of the Union forces.

In response, the Union command had another corps withdraw from its position at Spotsylvania Court House and proceed to support the isolated diversionary corps. But chaos reigned, as this corps' advance was halted by the Confederate Troops on Telegraph Road and the diversionary corps was faced by supplemental Confederate troops that had been sent as

reinforcements up from Richmond. Union forces then backtracked from their move southward on Telegraph Road and set off to follow the southeasterly route the diversionary unit had taken into Caroline County.

**Redeploying to the North Anna**

That night, Confederate forces completely left their positions at Spotsylvania's Court House and moved further on towards Richmond to the south side of the North Anna River in Hanover County. They set up camp at Hanover Junction, site of the intersection of the Virginia Central Railroad into the Shenandoah Valley and the north-south Frederick, Richmond, and Potomac Railway. Their line of defense was arranged in the shape of an inverted V with the two sides of the V connected at the rear by the Virgina Central rail line.

On the next day, May 22, the Union command also moved their troops southward and encamped with two of their corps on the north side of the North Anna facing the right (eastern) flank of the Confederate lines. The Union's 5th Corps crossed the North Anna to the west and set up facing the Confederate left flank.

**North Anna**

On May 24th, the 6th Corps, including David's 10th Vermont Regiment, also crossed the North Anna and took a temporary position to the rear of the 5th Corps. They moved that night, in the midst of a heavy rainstorm, out to Quarles Mill, where they engaged the Confederate picket line in a brief skirmish The next morning, the 6th Corps resumed the march and reached a railroad station, which they burned, and then destroyed eight miles of track. That night the 10th Regiment was assigned to picket duty south of the station, but in such a wet place that the troops piled up fence rails to be able to sleep above the water.

On May 26th, after several attempts to breach the Confederate lines, the Union command realized that their opponents' defense was well entrenched and insuperable at this location. Deciding to pull out and move on again toward Richmond, Union forces again staged a diversionary movement, this time by a cavalry unit flanking the Confederate lines to the west.

Unlike at Spotsylvania, this diversion worked, allowing the rest of the Union forces to move to the southeast along the Pamunkey River to a position much nearer the Confederate capital city, on its east side. The 6th Corps retraced their steps back across the North Anna and joined the movement along the Pamunkey.

**Totopotomoy Creek**

As Union forces were moving along the north side of the Pamunkey, Confederate forces also moved south towards Richmond but then stopped and entrenched at Totopotomoy Creek. The Confederate defense had been weakened, however, by a shortage of supplies due to the destruction of a portion of the Virginia Central railroad in which David and his comrades of the 10th Regiment had played a part.

On May 29th, the Union command probed the Confederate defenses with infantry units from three of its corps while the 6th Corps was continuing down the Pamunkey toward Hanover Court House from their position to the rear.

The following morning, the 6th Corps was ordered to turn south to support the Union right flank in an assault at Totopotomoy Creek but got bogged down in heavy swamp and thick oak forest. Intense fighting ensued at Totopotomoy, and elements of the 6th Corps reached the battle only later in the afternoon.

On the night of May 31 to June 1, the 6th Corps was withdrawn from position and sent 15 miles further on to Cold Harbor. In this maneuver, a detail from David's regiment was left in position on picket until sunrise. Then, in an attempt to keep Confederate forces from pursuing them, the detail withdrew in a way that gave the impression they were being relieved by another unit. They joined up with the rest of the 10th Regiment at Cold Harbor later that day.

At Totopotomoy Creek, both sides incurred heavy casualties. The 10th Regiment was spared much loss, when once again, as a part of the 6th Corps, they were deployed mostly in supporting roles. But such was not the case at Cold Harbor or in other battles to come, where David and the 10th Vermont Regiment were at the forefront of some of the harshest combat of the war's last ten months.

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 8
## The Overland Campaign
## Cold Harbor

### Cold Harbor's Strategic Location

Cold Harbor was an old tavern standing at the junction of five separate roads. This location was strategically important in any advance on Richmond, because the Union command had established their main supply base further down the Pamunkey River in New Kent County at White House Landing, allowing resupply access up the river from the Chesapeake Bay. Cold Harbor stood on the direct route from the Union supply base to their troops in the field.

On May 31, 1864, a Union cavalry unit was sent to take Cold Harbor but found Confederate infantry already setting up a defensive line there. However, after dismounting, the cavalry troops managed to take control of the crossroads.

Union reinforcements were then proceeding from two directions. One contingent of troops were coming up the Chesapeake from their position below Richmond and would approach Cold Harbor from White House Landing to the east. From the west, the 6th Corps, which—including David Whitney's 10th Vermont Regiment—had been pulled from their position at the extreme right (west) flank of the Union lines along the Pamunkey, were marching stealthily but swiftly behind those lines toward Cold Harbor.

### At the Forefront of Two Assaults

After a 15-mile march, the 6th Corps reached Cold Harbor on June 1. Late that afternoon, the Union command launched a frontal attack on the Confederate entrenchment with the 6th Corps in position on the right.

David's regiment had to advance through pine woods, over a plowed field, through swampland, and up an embankment to the Confederate trenches. As dusk settled in, David and his comrades charged the Confederate position in front of them and breached their lines with much fierce fighting. The Confederates at that position then surrendered with at least 600 of them passed back as prisoners through the 10th Regiment's lines to other Union forces at the rear.

The 10th Regiment regrouped and were advancing again, when their remaining Confederate opponents charged. The 10th Regiment hit the ground and, returning the fire, managed to drive off their attackers. By this time, around 9:00pm, David's Company G and two other companies had gotten separated from the rest of their regiment. As they waited for orders from their regiment command, they were approached by a line of soldiers whose identity wasn't clear in the dark.

After a short while, two members of the approaching line stepped forward and ordered David and his comrades to surrender. The 10th Vermonters again hit the dirt, but neither side used their weapons. Both sides called back and forth to each other to surrender, and the Confederate line kept advancing a little at a time. Finally the Vermonters fired shots, and their opponents withdrew. David and his comrades then moved off quietly but were the last to leave the field that night.

During the fighting on June 1, the 10th Regiment took several casualties, including two officers killed in action, one of which was a lieutenant from David's Company G. The regiment's commander was wounded and was replaced by his Executive Officer.

The following day, skirmishing and artillery fire were used in preparation for a massive frontal assault the next day. On June 3, David's unit was in the center of the 6th Corps assault and, although being driven back, managed to hold a position 40 yards from the Confederate entrenchment. In this, their second major engagement at Cold Harbor in three days, the 10th Vermont Regiment again took heavy losses at the forefront of very bloody combat.

**A Deadly Toll**

Union forces as a whole took severe losses in their unsuccessful assaults these two days, Wednesday, June 1 and Friday, June 3. No more such grand maneuvers were undertaken at Cold Harbor, and both sides dug in facing each other. From June 4 to June 12 there were minor attacks, artillery shelling, and sniping by sharpshooters.

In the overall conflict at Cold Harbor, Union forces suffered 12,000 casualties, including the killed, wounded, missing, and captured. David's regiment had 30 killed, 47 wounded, two captured, and two missing and unaccounted for. Of the 47 wounded, 17 died subsequently from the effects of their wounds. David survived this fierce battle unscathed and was one of 364 men now remaining in the 10th Vermont Regiment.

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 9
## The End of the Overland Campaign Around Richmond to Petersburg

### Moving on to Petersburg

Beginning on June 12, Union forces pulled out of their entrenchment facing the Confederate defenses at Cold Harbor and moved around to the east before turning south on a march toward the James River, which runs through Richmond and on down the state of Virginia to the Chesapeake Bay at Hampton Roads. Navigation on that route, a very important element in the movement and resupply of Union forces in Virginia, was by this time under the control of the Union Command.

David Whitney's 10th Vermont Regiment, as part of the 6th Corps, spent the first night at a location down east along the Chickahominy River at Despatch Station, resting from the extreme combat conditions at Cold Harbor and the march out of there that day. The next day, Sunday, June 13, they continued eastward along the Chickahominy and then after sunset crossed the river southward at Jones Bridge, camping overnight on the south bank of the river. From there they marched the next day just beyond Charles City Court House to Wilcox's Landing on the James River, where they waited until June 16.

On June 16, David and his comrades boarded steamboats on the James and were transported upriver to the junction with its tributary Appomattox River and disembarked at midnight on a peninsular-shaped piece of land between Richmond and Petersburg at Bermuda Hundred . From there they moved up to support another Corps' fortified position and became part of a planned assault that began to move out on the evening of the 17th. However, the plans changed, returning the Union forces to their defensive

position—but not before several men of the 10th Regiment were wounded by artillery shells fired in response to the aborted attack.

Two days later, on June 19, David's Regiment, as part of the 6th Corps, crossed the Appomattox River on pontoons at Point-of-Rocks northeast of Petersburg and moved into position at the left of the Union lines south of that city. The Overland Campaign toward Richmond had ended and the siege of Petersburg was about to begin. David and his 10th Vermont Regiment comrades contributed only minimally at the start of the siege of Petersburg and was soon redirected to another combat zone of great importance to the fate of the Union's capital.

**Jerusalem Plank Road**

Before leaving Virginia, however, the 10th Regiment was involved in one of the Union Command's attempts to cut off the Confederate resupply line from the south. The Weldon and Petersburg Railroad line, linking North Carolina and points south to Petersburg was the first target of this strategy.

The First Battle of Weldon Railroad, also known as the Battle of Jerusalem Plank Road, began on June 21 with a Union calvary division tearing up track on the Weldon line in advance of a movement by the 2nd Corps across Jerusalem Plank Road, a wooden highway paralleling the railroad. David's 6th Corps was used in a support position, but mis-calculations in the attack turned it into a disaster with 1800 men from the 2nd Corps captured by the Confederates.

Regrouping on June 22 found the 10th Vermont Regiment dug in to the right of a 6th Corps division that included other Vermont units. On the 23rd, Confederates were able to outmaneuver the 6th Corps and succeeded in capturing 400 Vermonters from the 4th and 11th Vermont Regiments.

The Union Command's attempt to disrupt Confederate rail service from the south did not completely succeed in this first attempt, but they did manage to set up new positions further west toward Petersburg in preparation for the long siege that ended the following April with the Confederate surrender.

David's 10th Vermont Regiment returned to participate significantly in the final stages of the siege at Petersburg but not before they made even more significant contributions to the Union cause back in Maryland and in the Shenandoah Valley further north and west in Virginia.

**The David Whitney Story**

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 10
## Back North to Maryland
## "The Battle that Saved Washington"

### A Possible Threat to Washington from the North

In the aftermath of the Overland Campaign, while the Union Command was concentrating on efforts establishing positions around Petersburg, the Confederate Command sent a force of at least 15,000 troops into the Shenandoah Valley in the western part of Virginia to clear Union forces from Lynchburg and Lexington and open a path north into Union territory in Maryland. The possible targets of this northern offensive were the port city of Baltimore and the Union's capital, Washington, DC. Both cities had been left with minimal defenses since the start of the Overland Campaign.

A strategic Maryland location on the Confederate path north was the city of Frederick, at which converged the Baltimore Pike/National Road (now Maryland Route 144) leading to Baltimore and the Georgetown Pike into Washington (also called the Washington Pike, now Maryland Route 355). On the Baltimore Pike, a stone bridge known as Jug Bridge crossed the Monocacy River east of Frederick. A few miles south, a wooden, covered bridge across the river was part of the Georgetown Pike, the best route south to Washington. In addition, very near the covered bridge was a railroad bridge on the Baltimore and Ohio line (now the CSX) into Baltimore. On the river's west bank was the B&O's station at Monocacy Junction.

The railroad line extends from Frederick southward toward the Potomac River and then follows the river westward to Harper's Ferry at the northern end of the Shenandoah Valley. In early July B&O employees alerted the Union Command to the Confederate advance on Maryland,

and one element of the Union's 6th Corps, the 3rd Division, was sent to Baltimore while the rest of the corps followed, but to Washington.

On Wednesday, July 6, 1864—the same day the last Confederate troops were completing crossing the Potomac into Maryland at Shepherdstown, West Virginia—the 3rd Division marched from their position south of Petersburg to City Point (now Hopewell, Virginia) on the James River. There they boarded steamers that took them downriver to the Chesapeake Bay and on up to Baltimore Harbor.

The men enjoyed the water voyage as a cool, refreshing relief to the marching and fighting they had been doing since early May. Some even took advantage of the water to clean their clothes, by stringing them on lines in the water behind the vessels they were on.

Late in the afternoon of July 7th, the first steamer arrived in Baltimore carrying David Whitney and his 10th Vermont Regiment comrades as part of the 3rd Division. Around midnight they, along with a New Jersey Regiment, were loaded into crowded cattle-cars and rode the B&O line west to Frederick, arriving there about 9:00am on July 8th.

**Maintaining and Simulating Defenses at Frederick, Maryland**

Waiting in Frederick for the arrival of these experienced combat veterans was a force of about 3,000 men made up of home guards of Baltimore, some militia, and various short-term new enlistees, none of whom had yet faced enemy fire. These troops had been moved to Frederick to prepare for putting up the initial defense against a Confederate onslaught on either Washington or Baltimore.

Also very near Frederick, approaching from the west at Middletown, was the bulk of Confederate forces. Part of the Confederate forces had set fires in Williamsport, Maryland, and, as they moved east towards Frederick, extorted a ransom from Hagerstown of $20,000 plus a large amount of clothing under the threat of destruction to that city. They also subsequently got an even more substantial ransom of $200,000 from the city of Frederick.

When David Whitney's regiment arrived on the east side of Frederick, they were immediately deployed in a deceptive maneuver, marching back and forth all day and setting up mock defensive positions in the hills of eastern Frederick in plain sight of the Confederates waiting in the Catoctin Mountains west of the city.

Later that day, July 8th, when Confederate cavalry started streaming into Frederick and a large contingent of Confederate infantry moved south of the city toward Buckeystown, the Union Command concluded that the

Confederate Command was apparently preparing an offensive against Washington. It was time to move Union troops south of Frederick to defend the bridges on the Monocacy River and attempt to block the Confederates' passage.

For many of the men of the 10th Vermont Regiment, this was a return to a familiar site, as they had been assigned there just a year previously, in early July 1863, to guard the strategically important Monocacy Station railroad bridge as part of the defense of Frederick during the Battle of Gettysburg. David Whitney was not a part of the 10th Regiment at that time, having experienced that great battle much closer up as a member of the 15th Vermont Regiment. However, in the current effort, David was retracing the path of his brother Alonzo and brother-in-law Alpheus Cheney, who had preceded him as members of Company G of the 10th Regiment in the Gettysburg-related defense along the Monocacy.

**Repositioning along the Monocacy**

By the time the Union troops were ready to leave their positions in the eastern part of Frederick and move down along the Monocacy, Confederate forces were blocking the most direct route. As a result, the Union Command ordered a march eastward for a few miles on the Baltimore Pike and then across farm fields and through woodland to a position across from the rail station, which they reached by midnight that night.

On the morning of July 9th, David Whitney's 10th Vermont Regiment took up their battle position at the very south end of the Union defense line that stretched three and a half miles along the east bank of the river from the stone bridge at the north across the railroad and on to just below the covered bridge on Georgetown Pike. The east bank offered the advantage of higher ground from which to fire on advancing foe. Deployed on the west bank in the vicinity of the railroad terminal was one detachment made up of 200 inexperienced Maryland home guards augmented by 75 men from the 10th Vermont Regiment and led by a 10th Vermont Infantry Company First Lieutenant.

**Standing Ground at the Monocacy**

In the meantime, the Confederate Command had found a fordable point on the river about a mile and a half south of the bridges. Confederate cavalry used that route to cross and move back upstream to attack the Union defenders in an attempt to drive them away from the bridges. The Union forces managed to hold off this attack, repulsing the initial assault

and two subsequent follow-up assaults by the dismounted Confederate cavalry. The battle here lasted from late morning until around 2:00pm, with both sides taking heavy losses. The 10th Vermont Regiment was in the thick of battle because of their position at the southern extreme of the Union line behind the fences of the private farmland through which the Confederate charge came..

This attack was followed by a Confederate infantry division crossing the same ford and moving under cover of the woods along the east bank to face off against the Union's 3rd Division units. The Union Command repositioned their line along the Georgetown Pike with the 10th Vermont Regiment pulled back to a protected position on the Georgetown Pike but again at the extreme southern end of the Union formation. The Union Command concentrated their meager number of artillery guns at this point and ordered troops from the west bank to support this defense by crossing the wooden bridge and then burning it to prevent the Confederates from using it.

Beginning around 2:30pm, the overwhelming number of Confederate forces inflicted great damage on the smaller Union defense but also suffered many casualties in return, as the tenacious Union soldiers, experienced in the combat of the Overland Campaign,refused to give ground.

David's 10th Regiment was again at the extreme left of the Union line and, despite the heavy onslaught of Confederate troops, managed to maintain their position by lying low and holding their fire until the attacking soldiers were within easily visible range. Subsequent assaults by the Confederate forces, however, left the Union position untenable, and around 4:30pm the Union Command ordered a withdrawal of all their forces along the Baltimore Pike to reassemble to the east in New Market, Maryland.

**Leaving the Monocacy**

As the furthest down the Union line of defense, David and most of his 10th Regiment comrades were almost the last to receiveorders to leave their position. By the time they pulled out, the route along which the other Union troops had preceded them in the retreat was blocked by Confederates. To escape, David's unit had to climb a high fence and proceed on high ground through a cornfield making them vulnerable to Confederate fire. Under a hail of whizzing bullets, they scrambled over the fence, weaved their way through rows of corn, and ran around a hill and through an orchard to the B&O railroad track. They then marched along

the track until they came to the Monrovia station, just a few miles south of New Market.

At Monrovia the 10th Vermont found a train engine with a string of empty cars, which they commandeered and rode to where the track crossed the Baltimore Pike east of New Market. They waited there for the rest of the Union forces that had assembled in New Market to come and join them on the way back to Baltimore. When the other troops arrived that night, they were surprised to see the 10th Regiment, who they assumed had been captured without being able to flee.

The very last Vermonters to leave their position on the Monocacy battlefield were those remaining from the 75 men who were part of the 10th Regiment detachment set up on the west side of the river guarding the railroad bridge. These men had been the first to engage the Confederates as they moved down the Georgetown Pike, and they were the last to leave as Union forces withdrew. Under severe pressure from advancing Confederate troops, these Vermonters had to flee by skipping from tie to tie on the floorless railroad bridge, since the Georgetown Pike bridge next to it had been burned by Union troops to prevent its use by the Confederates. The young commander of this detachment and the reg-imental national-flag-bearer were each awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for their actions at the Battle of the Monocacy

**Returning to Baltimore**

On the morning of July 10th, the entire, reassembled Union command that had survived combat at the Monocacy marched eastward along the Baltimore Pike until they reached Ellicott's Mills (located at what is now Ellicott City). Here the combat-weary troops were fed by local loyal Union supporters. The men of the 10th Regiment, however, weren't able to rest long there, as David and his comrades were sent on to march six more miles to the Relay House (at the site of present-day Relay, Maryland).

The Relay House was at a junction on the B&O line where the track splits, with one line going south into Washington, the other north to Camden Station in Baltimore; the 10th Regiment probably had the mission of securing that junction. The next day, July 11th, they took the train to Baltimore, where they stayed for three days, presumably resting.

The men of David's regiment deserved a brief rest. They had been under arms for 70 hours, marching back and forth all day Friday in the mock defense of Frederick, marching down to Monocacy Junction Friday night, standing intensely in the line of battle all day Saturday, and marching in retreat for 40 miles back to Relay House south of Baltimore

on Sunday, except for their brief train ride from Monrovia to New Market. And this was all with only meager rations left and in the midst of mid-summer middle Maryland's hellish heat and humidity.

On July 14th David Whitney's 10th Vermont Regiment, along with the rest of 6th Corps's 3rd Division,.were sent on to Washington to rejoin the 6th Corps for pursuit of the Confederate forces the 10th Vermont Regiment had helped stymie at the Monocacy.

**Saving Washington at the Battle of the Monocacy**

The Confederate forces that had come up the Shenandoah Valley in June 1864 and on down through Maryland in early July had an obvious mission: if not the actual capture of Washington—at least dealing a serious psychological blow to the Union cause with a massive assault on the capital city. The right turn they took at the city of Frederick was meant to get them along the Georgetown Pike to Washington while the capital was left without sufficient forces for its defense.

But the intense resistance the outmanned Union troops put up at the Battle of the Monocacy dealt serious blows to the Confederates in the amount of casualties they suffered and in the delay by a day of their advance on Washington. After that battle, while David Whitney and the rest of the Union survivors were moving eastward on July 10th away from the Monocacy along the Baltimore Pike, their Confederate foe were on their way down the Georgetown Pike into Montgomery County on the northern edge of Washington. The battle-weary Confederate soldiers rested that night by bivouacking around the cities of Gaithersburg and Rockville.

Early the next morning, Monday, July 11th, the Confederate forces continued their march on Washington and met little resistance until they got close to Silver Spring, where outlying Union pickets fired on the advancing Confederates but without halting their movement. By the time the Confederates reached Ft. Stevens, the Union's main fortification at the northern peak of the District of Columbia, the Confederate commander decided that his troops were too fatigued by the long march in the mid-July humid Washington-area heat to sustain any attack that day.

In the meantime, the rest of the Union's 6th Corps—from which David Whitney's 3rd Division had been detached and sent sailing to Baltimore—arrived in the Union's capital on their own steamships after coming up the Chesapeake and into the Potomac to the Washington waterfront. They were then rushed up to the opposite end of the city to Ft. Stevens where they set up a defense against the Confederate forces outside the gates.

There was some firing between the two forces, including, on July 12th, the shooting of a Union officer standing next to President Lincoln, who visited the fort briefly on that day and the day before. But by the next morning, July 13th, the Confederate Command gave up their plans to attack Washington and followed the Potomac River back up through Maryland to a place where they could cross back into Virginia.

Union forces did not follow immediately but did so before too long. David Whitney and his 3rd Division comrades soon rejoined the 6th Corps and participated in the pursuit of their foe from the Battle of the Monocacy in a campaign in the Shenandoah Valley that was to last for several months and take them into several more fierce battles.

**The Fierceness of the Battle of the Monocacy**

The Battle of the Monocacy was one brief but deadly battle. It lasted only one day, July 9th, 1864—from the first sign of Confederate movement around 7:00 in the morning until the last Union troops had withdrawn from their positions by about 5:00 in the afternoon—and was confined to a very small area along the banks of a tributary of the Potomac River. But on that day, the reported total of casualties between the two sides was set at 2,359. With about 1600 hundred of that total, the Union forces suffered a little more than twice as heavily as the Confederates .

David Whitney's regiment—despite their exposed position on the Union's left flank of the fiercest parts of the battle and despite the fact that they were the last to leave the field—reported only three killed and 26 wounded, four of whom later died of their wounds. In addition, 32 men were reported missing, nine of whom later died in Confederate prisons.

The fierceness of the battle was perhaps best summed up in the after-action report forwarded to his corps headquarters by the commanding general of the Confederate infantry division that had made a frontal assault on David Whitney's division. In his description of what he called a "rare occurrence"—witnessed at a point near the river where Union troops had had to pull out while leaving their dead and wounded in the water and on the river banks, and where his own men had set up for their final assault—the Confederate general said there was such a "(p)rofuse...flow of blood from the dead and wounded that it reddened the stream for more than 100 yards below."

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 11
## Ending the South's Penetration of the North

### Pursuing the Monocacy Foe into the Shenandoah Valley

Upon returning on July 14, 1864, to Washington, DC—after stalling the Confederate assault on the capital city at the Battle at the Monocacy in Maryland—David Whitney's 10th Regiment rejoined the rest of the Union's 6th Corps as they moved westward along the Potomac River. The combined forces of the 6th Corps, made up of the men who had survived that fierce battle in Maryland—along with those who had reached Washington in time to put up an impressive enough defense within the District at Ft. Stevens to make their foe shy away from another face-off—spent the next four weeks pursuing those same Confederate troops in the northern part of the Shenandoah Valley

These Confederate troops had conducted an offensive north in mid-June 1864 that succeeded in thwarting a Union plan to destroy railroads, canals, and hospitals in Lynchburg, Virginia, at the southern end of the valley. The Shenandoah Valley, with its agricultural wealth, was an important source of supply and support for the Confederacy during the Civil War, and the Union Command had tried several times to take control, or at least prohibit the Confederate military from controlling the valley and its resources. The pursuit of their foe in mid-July by David Whitney and his 6th Corps comrades was part of this general concern.

On July 17th the Union contingent caught up with the Confederates in the northern end of the valley in Clarke County, Virginia, and attempted to control passage over the Shenandoah River in that area. But they did not succeed, as on the next day a Confederate division attacked the Union division that had arrived furthest downstream and held them immobilized

until dusk. This set back the pursuit for several days, as the rest of the Confederate troops had managed to leave the area during the fighting..

On July 20th a brief surprise assault by Union troops at Rutherford's Farm in the adjacent Frederick County, Virginia, caught the Confederates in the midst of deploying there, causing them to retreat to the town of Winchester. The main Confederate forces then set up their primary defenses further south at Fisher's Hill, leading the Union Command to decide that the Confederate cause was over in the Shenandoah Valley. The 6th Corps and other units were ordered back to Washington to prepare to return to Petersburg and rejoin the Union siege of that city.

**A Confederate Blow to Pennsylvania**

However, on July 24th, the Confederate command launched an assault on the diminished Union defense at Kernstown on the south side of Winchester, causing a Union withdrawal north and across the Potomac River into Maryland at Williamsport. Then on July 30th, the Confederate cavalry unit that at the beginning of July had gained handsome ransoms from the Maryland cities of Hagerstown and Frederick, now had pushed even further north, across the Pennsylvania line to Chambersburg, where they set fire to many buildings when that city refused their demand for an even handsomer ransom, $500,000 in US currency, or $100,000 in gold.

As a result of this renewed Confederate activity in the north, the Union Command reconsidered the decision about sending the experienced combat troops back south and kept David Whitney's 10th Vermont Regiment and the rest of the 6th Corps in the northern sector of Virginia for further combat action in the Shenandoah Valley.

**Finishing off the Confederate Threat to the North**

On August 8, 1864, the union Command set up the Army of the Shenandoah and gave their newly appointed commander, a cavalry general, command over all the Union forces in the area with the task of driving Confederate forces from the valley and eliminating its economic value to the Confederacy.

For the first month many of the battles involved primarily cavalry units. On August 21st, in the battle of Summit Point near Charles Town in Jefferson County, West Virginia, David's unit was in formation at the end of the 6th Corps line that succeeded in delaying the Confederate pursuit of Union cavalry. At the Battle at Smithfield Crossing, that started on August 25th and took place in Jefferson and Berkeley Counties, West Virginia, the 6th Corps's 3rd Division, of which the 10th Vermont Regiment was a

part, was brought in on August 29th to halt the Confederate infantry offensive that was forcing Union cavalry back along the road to Charles Town.

By the beginning of September, the Union forces had engaged the foe mostly in brief skirmishes. The Confederate Command had assumed that the Army of the Shenandoah was not a great threat and had spread their troops north of Winchester, Virginia, to Martinsburg, West Virginia in attacks against the B&O railroad.

On September 19th, the Union Command launched an attack on Winchester, Virginia, from the east along Berryville Pike but was somewhat slowed in arriving there through narrow canyons and roads, allowing the Confederate troops to regroup at Winchester. The 6th Corps was one of two corps that formed the main attack across the Opequon River and formed their assault line to the right of Berryville Pike.

As part of the 6th Corps, David's regiment charged through some woods and across an open field in the face of Confederate musket firing. Confederate divisions—units that David and his comrades had faced at the Monocacy—charged, initially beating back portions of the Union's assault, but eventually the Union troops were able to countercharge and drive the Confederates out of Winchester and back down to Fisher's Hill. The 10th Regiment, as part of this routing of the Confederates, felt vindicated in turning the tables on their Monocacy foe.

Both sides took many losses in this intense battle at the Opequon near Winchester, with David's regiment having 11 men killed and 42 wounded. Four men who were initially reported missing rejoined their comrades subsequently.

After the defeat on the 19th, the Confederate forces set up a strong defensive position at Fisher's Hill, just south of the town of Strasburg in Shenandoah County, Virginia, which was south of Frederick County. On September 21st the Union forces, which had followed their foe down to Fishers Hill, advanced on these defenses and managed to gain important high ground. In the afternoon of the 22nd, David's regiment was part of a final rush at the remaining Confederate line and overpowered their foe, whose total defense collapsed. The 10th Vermont had one man killed and six wounded at Fisher's Hill.

The overwhelming power that the Union's Army of the Shenandoah demonstrated at Fisher's Hill led the Confederate Command to pull their troops a long distance further south to Waynesboro, in Augusta County, Virginia, between Staunton and Charlottesville.

With half of the Union Command's assigned mission apparently completed—the elimination of the Confederate military as a force to reckon with in the valley—they proceeded to their second task, cutting off the supplies for which the Confederacy had relied on the Shenandoah Valley's rich farmland as a main source. For the next month the Union forces practiced a 'scorched earth' policy, destroying crops and burning barns, mills, and factories from Strasburg in the northern part of the valley to Staunton in the south. This was the forerunner of a similar policy carried out in November and December in the Union's march to the sea across Georgia from Atlanta to Savannah.

**One Last Confederate Stand in the Shenandoah Valley**

With the Confederate forces encamped in the higher mountains in the south Shenandoah Valley, the Union troops, including three corps and two separate cavalry units, had set up their camps along Cedar Creek in Frederick, Shenandoah, and Warren Counties at the northernmost tip of Virginia's portion of the valley.

In the middle of October, David's 6th Corps was initially designated to return to Petersburg on the assumption that the Confederates in the valley were sufficiently weakened to prevent them from attacking again. However, the Confederate Command did launch an offensive northward after planting a rumor that additional Confederate troops were coming up from Petersburg to reinforce their diminished units. The 6th Corps was recalled, and all the Union forces returned to the Cedar Creek encampment with David and his 6th Corps comrades in the northernmost position of the Union line, west of Middletown, south of Winchester.

On the night of October 18th, the Confederate Command launched a surprise attack by moving part of their troops up the valley and around the base of the Massanuten Mountain to begin their attack from the south instead of from an easier route on the west side of Cedar Creek, as would have been expected.

At sunrise on the 19th, under heavy fog, the first Union troops that were struck by the surprise attack were those of the southernmost-positioned 8th Corps, who, after putting up a brief fight, broke and ran. Many were taken prisoner, a good deal of them not dressed for battle, having been caught off guard in their sleep.

The Confederates then moved on to the position of the next Union Corps, the 19th, and was joined in this assault by another Confederate division coming from the west. The 19th Corps broke also, with many of them scattering back across their own defenses.

That left only David's 6th Corps, who put up a vigorous defense and, though withdrawing, managed to slow down the Confederate advance, something the 10th Regiment was good at, based on their previous experience against these same forces at the Monocacy.

As Union forces were withdrawing to Middletown, word got back to the Union commanding general, who had been in Winchester overnight. He came racing on his horse toward Middletown and arrived at the battlefield later that morning.

The Confederate Command misjudged the extent of their success and let up on their attack, thinking they had completely routed the Union defense from which they had taken more than 1000 prisoners and had captured 18 artillery pieces. But before the Union general arrived and reassembled his forces, David's 10th Regiment charged Confederates holding an abandoned Union artillery position and succeeded in recovering some of the Union guns that had been taken. They then were forced to retreat but did so in increments, continuously turning and firing as they moved back, certainly somewhat less than a rout.

Around 10:30, the Union commander starting rallying his subordinates, while Confederate troops, mostly hungry and exhausted from their overnight march and morning battle, were busy pillaging the abandoned Union Cedar Creek camps.

Around 3:00 in the afternoon, the Confederate command launched another, less massive assault; but by that time it was too late. The restored Union forces easily turned back the attack and by 4:00pm were launching their own counterattack. One Union cavalry unit joined the infantry in the offensive while other cavalry units cut off the Confederate escape route by destroying a bridge. Union forces captured hundreds of their foe and 48 guns—including the rest of the 18 that the Confederates had captured—and confiscated irreplaceable Confederate supplies.

David Whitney again survived one of the fiercest and most important battles of the Civil War, a battle like those at Gettysburg and at the Monocacy that turned the tide of the war in the Union's favor. In this day of combat at Cedar Creek, 15 members of David's 10th Vermont Regiment were killed, 66 were wounded, of whom nine subsequently died from their wounds, and four were reported missing.

**Return to Petersburg**

The Battle at Cedar Creek effectively ended the fighting in the Shenandoah Valley for David's 10th Vermont Regiment, but they remained in the valley through the month of November. On the first

Tuesday of the month, November 8, 1864, David, along with 194 other members of the 10th Regiment, voted for Abraham Lincoln for a second term as President; 12 of his regimental comrades voted for Lincoln's opponent, former Union General George McClellan. On the fourth Thursday, November 24th, they celebrated Thanksgiving, feasting on turkey that had been sent to the Union army by citizens of New York City.

At the end of November, the 6th Corps was ordered to rejoin the Army of the Potomac for the final siege of Petersburg, Virginia. On December 3rd, David and the other surviving members of the 10th Regiment, as part of the 6th Corps' 3rd Division, marched to the railroad station at Stephenson, Virginia, where they loaded into crowded freight cars for transport to Washington.

Early in the morning of December 4th, they set sail from Washington on a steamer down the Potomac, then back down the Chesapeake Bay and up the James River to City Point where they arrived later that day. They continued on to Petersburg via one of the the Union military railroads that had been set up during their absence from that area. This voyage on the Chesapeake and the James retraced in reverse a portion of the water route that had taken them to Baltimore in July.

When David Whitney arrived back in Petersburg, it was the beginning of the end of the Civil War. The Union's success with the 'scorched earth' strategy in the Shenandoah Valley was being repeated in Georgia, and Union forces around Petersburg were building significant fortifications in preparation for a final assault.

The day David returned to Petersburg, that very day, December 4, 1864, was also the beginning of the very end of life for one of the members of his family. In South Carolina, in the aftermath of a maneuver that was meant to support the consequences of the 'scorched earth' offensive in Georgia, David's brother Alonzo was shot by his own troops and died from his wound the next day, December 5, 1864.

The David Whitney Story

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 12
## Return to Petersburg
## David's Last Battle

### Digging In and Waiting It Out

Upon their return to the Petersburg, Virginia, area, in December 1864, David Whitney's 10th Vermont Regiment took up a position with the rest of the Union's 6th Corps along the Weldon Railroad on the southeast side of the city. While the men of the 6th Corps were away in Maryland, the District of Columbia, and the Shenandoah Valley, the Union Command positioned their forces to build trenches and fortifications in preparation for a final siege of Petersburg. The aim was to drive Confederate forces from the Richmond area.

The men of the 10th Regiment settled down into camp life, sleeping initially that cold December in tents but keeping busy building more permanent quarters between shifts on guard duty and picket duty. This routine must have offered some relief from the extensive series of battles they had experienced starting in May with the Overland Campaign moving south to Richmond and Petersburg and extending into the important battles from mid-summer into late fall that considerably lessened the Confederate threat back north. During the previous eight months David's regiment had marched long distances, but now they could stay in place for a while and wait out the start of the final siege.

### Face to Face and Voice to Voice

The men of David's regiment were no strangers to camp life, most of them having served in units guarding Washington from camps in northern Virginia in late 1862 into 1863 before the battle at Gettysburg and again early in 1864 before the start of the Overland Campaign. One of the haz-

ards from their previous encampments was present here too, disease. A few of the men in Company G got mumps in mid-January and then early in March and other diseases also. Something new that gave them caution was the close proximity of their picket line to that of their Confederate foe.

Out on the picket line, David and his comrades often faced off against their confederate picket-duty counterparts without much firing of their weapons but within easy shouting distance of each other. Once in a while the one side would whistle and the other side would whistle back. Once at midnight confederates asked the men of Company G if they had a lot of hardtack, a simple biscuit or bread made of only flour and water that soldiers often carried with them on the frontline. Company G men in return invited them over to their side to see but got no further response.

Another time one man from Company G went up to the Confederate fence, grabbed a fence rail, and took it back to the Union side without interference from the other side. And one morning, just before dawn, somebody from one side crowed like a rooster. This was followed by others joining in with raucous noises of more crowing plus dogs barking, sheep bleating, and whatever kind of loud sound they could produce. Company G thought this was fun for a change. But in store for both sides was much more serious noise-making with consequences that were other than fun.

**Crossing the Lines**

In late March, the number of Confederate deserters coming across to the Union lines began to increase, and the frequency of desertions was high enough to easily keep the 10th Regiment on picket duty awake all night. For example, one night six Confederates came across to give themselves up to the 10th Regiment, and another morning ten more passed through on their way to surrender. Those deserters that brought along their weapons and turned them in were given a bounty of $30 each.

The Confederates who did cross Union lines maintained that for every one of them who did so, five more were deserting and returning to their homes in the South. The prospect for a more general surrender soon seemed more real to the men of David's Company G as the number of men and weapons available to the Confederate cause continued to decrease.

**Confederate Assault on Fort Stedman**

By the end of March 1865 Confederate forces were taking heavy losses in the Carolinas and the Shenandoah Valley was essentially closed down

by Union forces. The Confederate Command decided to try a surprise attack on the Union build-up in the Petersburg area with the hope of effecting an orderly Confederate withdrawal from the Richmond area.

Early in the morning of March 25, 1865, about one half of the Confederate forces in the area attacked Fort Stedman on the northeast portion of the Union line. This position the least fortified wooden obstructions to its front and was close to a supply depot on the Union's military railroad connecting to the Union command and logistical center at City Point.

On the night before, David and 230 others of the 10th Vermont Regiment were out on the picket line at the front of their parent 3rd Division of the 6th Corps. The first wave of Confederates, starting at 4:00am, overran and captured the fort and supporting artillery batteries and took almost 1,000 Union troops prisoner in the process. But Union forces, including the 10th Regiment, counterattacked and were able to put an end to the Confederate success. In this counterattack, the 10th charged from the left and took 160 prisoners and their guns and equipment.

David and his comrades played a significant role in the Union counterattack because of how they handled their defensive position during the initial attack by the Confederates. The 10th Regiment was part of a charge over open ground to the front that was meant to engage the oncoming enemy assault. As other Union regiments halted and some retreated in the face of the onslaught, the 10th Regiment halted and fell to the ground, holding that position while other pickets generally fell back to the original line.

After pulling in more troops as reinforcements, the Union counterattack began, moving forward to the ground the 10th was holding. When the other Union skirmishers reached the 10th's advance position, David and his comrades leapt up and double-timed forward with loud cheering, storming the trenches where the Confederates had halted, overtaking them without firing a shot until they reached the trenches. It was here that the 10th took prisoners.

Although there were numerous casualties in this battle, the hardened veterans of the 10th Vermont Regiment suffered only two losses. Their contribution by holding the ground in the face of overwhelming opposition was similar to the one they had made in the battle of Cold Harbor the previous June. It also was reminiscent of the role they played at the Monocacy, when they held their position there in the face of overwhelming odds until the very end, being the last Union unit to leave that battle.

**The Final Siege**

A severe Confederate loss southwest of Petersburg on April 1 cut off the best Confederate route out of the Richmond, the Southside Railroad, and marked the beginning of the end for the Confederate cause. That night, the Union Command assembled their troops facing across from the Petersburg defenses in formations ready to charge the heavily fortified Confederate trenches

The men of the 10th Regiment had just gone to bed when artillery fire broke out in the distance to their right. They were ordered to get in formation in their defensive trenches in anticipation of combat. Between 11:00pm and midnight, the men were served coffee, and then moved out to a position in line just behind the Union pickets, about 200 yards from the Confederate pickets facing them.

David and his comrades remained in this position in the cold darkness for another 3-4 hours while musketeers among the pickets sporadically exchanged volleys of bullets. During a lull in the firing, one of the Confederates yelled, "Haloo, Yanks. Guess it's nothing but an April Fool after all." Not letting this barb go unanswered, a Union picket replied, "Not so much of an April Fool as you may think," upon which the exchange of metallic barbs began again.

Around dawn on April 2, the Union's 6th Corps was ordered to charge the Confederates entrenched in Fort Welch immediately to the front. The Corps' 3rd Division, which included the 10th Regiment, made up the foremost line of the formation and led the way toward a strong earthwork protected by a deep ditch and behind which were six artillery pieces. The men of the 10th leapt into the ditch, with some mounting the high wall while others jumped over the lower walls to the left and right.

Once inside Fort Welch, the 10th regiment found resistance to the right but swarmed the open position and took several prisoners. The remaining Confederates then gathered at a position where two artillery guns were being re-aimed at Union troops inside the fort. But a battle line formed by men from the 10th and joined by other Union troops who had just arrived advanced on the artillery position and managed to clear it of the Confederate artillerymen.

After regrouping, the 10th Regiment and other 6th Corps troops pushed on across a ravine and some swampy ground toward another, stronger Confederate entrenchment, which they overtook, capturing 100 of the defenders there. Other defenders remained in the woods nearby and put up a fierce struggle, firing their muskets and holding back further Union movement. Confederate reinforcements then assaulted and retook the fort.

In response to the Confederate assault, one of the 6th Corps artillery batteries was drawn up and started shelling the fort's occupants. Before long, the Confederates completely abandoned Fort Welch, a phenomenon that was happening more generally in the Confederate defensive fortifications.

**The Fall of Petersburg and the Pursuit up the Appomattox**

After the victory at Fort Welch, the 10th Vermont Regiment rejoined the rest of the 3rd Division as the 6th Corps marched toward Petersburg. The Division stopped that afternoon within about two miles of the city. Later David's regiment, along with the rest of the 1st Brigade, moved on forward from this position. That evening they took over a line that had been abandoned by Confederate pickets in front of an important position between Fort Lee and the Petersburg lead-works and bivouacked there for the night.

Early on the morning of April 3, the 6th Corps' 3rd Division marched through the evacuated lead-works and soon joined in on the general pursuit of the Confederate Command up the Appomattox River, leading, after another battle on April 6th, to the surrender of the Confederacy Command at Appomattox Court House three days later, thus formally ending America's only war of internal rebellion

**Among the Surviving**

During his service with the 10th Vermont Regiment, David Whitney had survived much bloody combat in which many of his comrades were either killed or wounded, including the battles in Virginia at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, Cold Harbor, and Cedar Creek, as well as the strategically very important battle at the Monocacy in Maryland, Before the final siege of the city of Petersburg, 82 men from the 10th Vermont had been killed in action, 317 were wounded, of which 49 died of their wounds, two had died of accidents, and 36 who had been captured in combat died in Confederate prisons.

In the final siege of Petersburg the 10th Vermont had the honor—though a rather deadly and not necessarily highly sought-after honor—of being the first to plant their flag inside Fort Welch. As a result of their heroic efforts in the final siege, one man of the 10th Vermont Regiment was killed, 39 were wounded, nine of those dying later, and two were missing and unaccounted for. Among the wounded, though surviving, was David Whitney: he had taken a Confederate bullet in his leg. David's time on the line with his veteran comrades was now finished.

# Part II – Chapter 5

# David's Military Service

## Section 13
## Recovery and Restoration in the Nation's Capital

### David Returns to Washington

After being wounded on April 2, 1865, during the last week of the Civil War, David Whitney, along with other Union soldiers wounded at Petersburg, road via rail in a freight car to Washington, DC, and convalesced there in Campbell Hospital, one of the Army hospitals established in the nation's capital during the war.

### History of Campbell Hospital , Washington, DC, 1862-1865

Campbell Hospital had been a cavalry barracks and was located at the northern outskirts of Washington, DC, on Boundary Street (today's Florida Avenue), between 5th and 7th St NW. Eleven wooden buildings that had made up the barracks were used as wards, containing a total of 600 beds, and ten tents with 50 beds each were soon added. One building served as the mess hall, and a small building housed the hospital's administrative headquarters. The Campbell Hospital grounds also had buildings for nurses' quarters, guard rooms, quarters for other employees, and, ominously, a mortuary.

Opened in September 1862, the hospital was used for military purposes through July 1865. Later that year, the War Department's Freedman's Hospital, which had been established in 1862 with the purpose of providing healthcare to the nation's newly freed slaves, was moved to Campbell Hospital and administratively placed under the Freedmen's Bureau. In 1869 the Freedmen's Hospital was made a part of nearby Howard University and ultimately incorporated into Howard University Hospital during the Civil Rights era of the 20th century.

Very near the site of today's Howard University Hospital is the African American Civil War Memorial, established to honor African-Americans who served in the Civil War, including all those in the United States Colored Troops. A wall of honor containing the names of men who served in the USCT includes inscriptions for David's brother, Captain Alonzo B. Whitney, and his brother-in-law, Major Alpheus H. Cheney, both USCT white officers.

**The 10th Regiment also Returns to Washington**

When David left his Vermont comrades behind in Virginia, they were still busy with frontline war duty. The 10th Regiment was involved in one more battle, on April 6th at Sayler's Creek (also called 'Sailor's Creek') just off the Appomattox River due west of Petersburg. In this swan-song battle for the Confederates, the 10th Regiment was an instrumental part of forcing the surrender 0f 6,000 Confederates. Three days later the Confederate Command realized that their cause was lost and surrendered totally.

After the surrender, the 10th Vermont Regiment camped with the rest of the 6th Corps' 3rd Division at Burkeville, Virginia—not far from the site of the Sayler's Creek battle—until April 23. The division then joined the rest of the 6th Corps in a march to Danville, just short of the North Carolina border in southwestern Virginia.

During the war, Danville had been the site of a Confederate prison made up of six tobacco warehouses converted to storing Union prisoners. At this location disease and hunger ran rampant, claiming among its many victims the life of the great-grandfather of the wife of one of David Whitney's great-grandsons, a Union soldier from southeastern Ohio captured at the Battle at Chickamauga, Georgia, in September 1863.

On May 16, the 10th Regiment returned by rail to the Richmond area, camping at Manchester (formerly an independent city and original county seat of Chesterfield County across from Richmond on the south bank of the James River, famous as a port of entry for slave ships. but today a part of Richmond's Southside). On May 24, they set off on foot marching north to Washington and arrived on June 2 at Ball's Crossroads just across the Potomac River from Washington (located in present-day Ballston in northern Virginia). All Vermont units were then reviewed in a formal ceremony by their state's governor.

The men of the 10th Vermont Regiment were now in a holding position, marking time for a while at a camp near Georgetown in the District of Columbia, waiting for further orders and possible dismissal. On

June 22 all 10th Regiment members whose contracted terms of service were due to expire before October 1 were mustered out and sent home the following day.

**The 10th Regiment Returns Home**

On a march through Washington on their way toward departure for Vermont, the 10th Regiment and another regiment from the 6th Corps' 3rd Division stopped and cheered at the home of the general who had led their division in their valiant effort stymieing the Confederate penetration at Monocacy but who had been disabled by a wound at Cedar Creek, the last significant battle in the Shenandoah Valley.

After departing for home with an overnight stopover in New York City, the 10th Vermont reached Burlington, the capital of Vermont, at 2:00 in the morning of June 27th. Waiting for them at the train station in the dark of night and amidst rain were a gathering of ordinary citizens greeting them as well as an artillery salute marking their arrival. They were then taken to the Burlington city hall, where the State Governor welcomed them home, and were subsequently treated to a large meal prepared by local ladies.

The next morning the 10th regiment marched to the Burlington Military Hospital, where they were granted a six-day leave. When their leave was over, they reassembled for one last time, received the pay they were due, and went on home as civilians.

**David Recovers**

David Whitney, however, did not return home immediately. On June 22, the date that part of his regiment left for Vermont, David was transferred for administrative purposes to the 5th Vermont Regiment. There were two reasons why he could not yet end his military service. First, he had signed an agreement for a 3-year enlistment on December 26, 1863, and thus did not qualify for mustering out with the 10th Regiment. Second, David was still recovering from his combat wound and needed to be carried on some unit's roster in order to qualify for treatment in a military hospital.

On June 29, the 5th Regiment was mustered out, but David still hadn't received his walking papers. When he was deemed recovered, when he was actually discharged, and when he arrived home is not recorded. But it is highly unlikely that he experienced the robust civic welcome that his 10th Regiment comrades received on their return.

**The Union is Restored**

The Civil War with its cruel and bloody battles is one of the most unfortunate periods of American history. Men who shared a common heritage and might be friends outside the battlefield had to face off against each other and kill or be killed in the name of competing and contradictory causes. In his two terms of enlistment David Whitney not only survived to the bitter end, as his brother had not, but contributed greatly to the Union cause of not allowing the United States to be disassembled for highly factional purposes.

Since July 4, 1863, when West Virginia was admitted to the United States, after that portion of Virginia had separated itself from the state of Virginia, Union military units had flown the 35-star flag symbolizing the total union of states, including those that had seceded in an attempt to form a separate country. When David Whitney was finally discharged from military service, he could proudly say that that flag still symbolized his native country now reunited in its national totality.

# Part III – Chapter 1

# Young Man and Siblings go West

**David Returns Home to Family in Vermont.**

When David Whitney returned home to Brookfield, Vermont, in 1865, he was no longer the teenage farmboy who at age 18 had followed an older brother into the volunteer army in the fall of 1862. He was now a 21-year-old young man and a veteran of 28 months of war service, the last eleven of which involved him in some of the most intense and deadliest battles of the Civil War.

During his first enlistment David saw many of his comrades-in-arms die of diseases spread in the harsh and unsanitary conditions of their encampment in northern Virginia during their defense of Washington. In his second enlistment, many of David's closest comrades fell around him at the many scenes of battle he witnessed first hand, some of them dead where they fell, others severely wounded, many mortally so. Still others were taken captive, many of them dying as prisoners in the squalid conditions of Confederate prisons. David was fortunate to have escaped with only one, fairly minor wound, which he suffered at the very end of the war.

Since the loss of his brother Alonzo the previous December, David was now Daniel and Julia Hall Whitney's oldest surviving son among the original five. In addition to his three younger brothers, David still had all six of his sisters, four older than him.*

Of these four older sisters, two were already married, both to Civil War veterans—Emma to Alonzo's original comrade-in-arms, Alpheus Cheney, and Maria to David's co-combatant from his first enlistment, Edwin Sprague. The other two, Roann and Rosette, were to be married within the next two years. His younger siblings—Daniel Frank, Cyrus, Walter Eugene, Amine, and Julia Ella—ranged in age from seven to nineteen. He



* For pictures of David's father and mother, his brothers and sisters, two brothers-in-law, and one niece and one nephew, see the Appendix, pp. 93-96.

also had one nephew, Ulysses G. Sprague, born just before the end of the war. When he returned home healthy and recovered from his leg wound, David must have received from his family in Vermont a lot of warm greetings expressing joy and relief.

**David Migrates West to Iowa**

When he returned to Vermont, David was due to receive at least $260. He had been promised a bounty of $400 when he re-enlisted in December of 1863 but had received only $140 of it before mustering out. He also may have saved part of his private's pay during his term of service. What money he had at this point may have become part of his plans for the future.

David remained in Vermont for a brief time, but the promise of new, unspoiled lands must have lured him to start his migration west, ending ultimately in Osceola County near the town of Sibley, in extreme northwestern Iowa. If the promise of land is what took him westward, then he was sharing an experience with his Massachusetts-born grandfather Whitney, who had migrated to Vermont on the promise of fresh farmland. It is also possible that with so many siblings still at or near his parents' Brookfield home—especially his brothers aged 9, 13, and 19, and his brother-in-law, Edwin Sprague, who lived nearby—David felt no need to stay and support the family. Whatever his reason or reasons for heading west, before long he was a farmer with his own land in Black Hawk County, Iowa, soon to be married and moving on to Sibley.

**Establishing New Family Ties in Iowa**

In September, 1871, Civil War veteran and novice Iowa farmer David Whitney married Mary Jane Cutshall of neighboring Buchanan County. Like David, Mary Jane came from a family of 11 children and was born in 1850 in Indiana. Her father, Eli Grant Cutshall, had moved across country himself, having been born in Hagerstown, Maryland, and then transplanted with his family to Fort Wayne, Indiana. Her mother, Dorcas Price, born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, had also traveled west before getting married. In 1856, six-year-old Mary Jane and her family migrated to Iowa in a covered wagon.

One of Mary Jane's brothers, Sam Cutshall, was a year younger than David and, like David, had volunteered as a teenager for service in the Civil War. Sam was a member of an Iowa cavalry regiment that fought in the war's western sector. Thus by his own marriage, David acquired a third war veteran brother-in-law. After the war, Sam also became a farmer for a

short time in Black Hawk County, but after getting married in March of 1870, he took his bride further west that winter to Clay County, Iowa. Uncle Sam, as he was known later to Mary Jane's children and grandchildren, lived the rest of his life in Clay County, first on a farm he homesteaded in Lake Township in the county's northeast corner that includes the county's lakes, later in Dickens, and finally Spencer.

Another of David's war veteran brothers-in-law Alpheus Cheney, brought his wife, David's sister Emma, to Buchanan County, Iowa, where their first child was born before 1870, and they ended up homesteading in Clay County around the same time as David's other brother-in-law, Sam Cutshall. It is highly likely that David came to Iowa at the same time as Alpheus and Emma, and there may be a link between David's two brothers-in-law leaving Buchanan County and migrating further to the same place at the same time. David, however, waited a short while before moving to the wide-open high plains of Northwest Iowa in 1872, the year after he was married.

Mary Jane had another brother, Thomas Jefferson Cutshall, who moved from Buchanan County to Northwest Iowa, this one also preceding David and Mary Jane, coming in the spring of 1871, to Wilson Township of Osceola County, northeast of Sibley. There he staked a claim to land in the south half of a section bordered by present Iowa highways 9 and 60. Jeff, as he was called, was nominated for the post of Sheriff in the first Osceola County election, held in October that year. He tied his opponent, but when neither of them showed up in January for a drawing to determine the winner, another man was appointed to take the position.

Jeff Cutshall had a wife named Catharine and a daughter named Edna, born in 1876, and remained in Osceola County for several years, splitting his time between working his claim and cobbling shoes in Sibley. But by 1892, he had moved on to Omaha, Nebraska.

**Other Siblings in Iowa**

In addition to his sister Emma, David wasn't the only other member of Daniel and Julia's family to find a home in Iowa. His brother Daniel Frank, who was two years younger, was married at Dayton in Webster County, Iowa, in 1874 and settled subsequently at Sumner, in Bremer County, bordering on Black Hawk and Buchanan Counties. David's youngest brother, Walter Eugene, studied medicine at Rush Medical College in Chicago and also became a registered pharmacist. He then practiced medicine and established a drug store in Tripoli, near Sumner and also in Bremer County.

David's youngest sister, Julia Ella, was the only one of his siblings to settle in Sibley. By 1879, when she was 21 years old, Ella, as she was called, was teaching school in Osceola County. That year she was married to Hiram Neill Sibley and Osceola County's pioneer doctor. Dr. Neill had a few things in common with Ella's brothers: like Walter Eugene he became a practicing physician in a small Iowa town; and, like David, he was a Civil War veteran, having served in a Minnesota infantry regiment.

Dr. Neill was not a Minnesota native, however, but had eastern origins similar to his bride's. He was born in 1844, the same year as David, in Canada at Granby, Quebec, only about 30 miles north of Vermont or about 130 miles from Brookfield. When he was eleven, his family moved west, settling near Lake Minnetonka in Hennepin County, southwest of Minneapolis.

Hiram Neill was one of six brothers or brothers-in-law from Minnesota who served in the Civil War, but only he and one other survived. One had died of disease in 1862, one was killed at Gettysburg, another at the Wilderness, and one died of wounds suffered at Cold Harbor, all battles David Whitney had participated in. If Alonzo Whitney had survived the Civil War, he might have done what his youngest sister's Civil War veteran husband did, become a pioneering physician.

**The Rest of the Family**

David's oldest sister, Roann, was married in 1866 and lived in Vermont until she died in 1878, only four years after her only child, David's nephew, was born. Both of David's other two sisters, one older, Rosette, and one younger, Amine, were married in December 1868 and, like most of their siblings, migrated west, both settling in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

This multiple migration west by their children left Daniel and Julia with one son and one other daughter besides Roann remaining in Vermont. Their daughter Maria, who was married to Civil War veteran Edwin Sprague, lived there the rest of her life. Their only surviving son who hadn't gone west, Cyrus, married Edwin Sprague's sister, Luthera, and remained in Vermont, perhaps on the original family farm.

Daniel and Julia may never have seen most of their children again after they left home and headed west. Julia died on March 11, 1873, at the age of 57, and Daniel, aged 64, followed her that same year on July 25th. They are buried in Brookfield's East Hill Cemetery in the same family plot as their son Alonzo, daughter Maria, and son-in-law Edwin Sprague. Their son Cyrus and his wife, Luthera, are buried in that cemetery also.

Daniel and Julia's two youngest children, Walter Eugene and Julia Ella did not leave home or set off on learning a profession until after their parents had died. That winter 17-year-old Walter Eugene taught school in Vermont but left the next year for Ft. Atkinson, Wisconsin, where two of his sisters lived. There he taught school again, this time for three years, but then joined his oldest surviving brother David at Sibley. Here he studied medicine for a year, probably with Dr. Hiram Neill, who soon would marry David and Walter Eugene's sister Julia Ella. Walter Eugene then went on to three years of medical school in Chicago before settling permanently in northeastern Iowa.

The youngest of David's orphaned siblings, 15-year-old Joela Ella, possibly left Vermont at the same time as her brother to stay with family in Wisconsin. At least it seems likely that Julia Ella was drawn further west to Sibley at the invitation of an older brother who was becoming established as a pioneer Iowa farmer.

The David Whitney Story

# Part III – Chapter 2

# A Pioneer Farmer with Family

### Breaking Sod, Starting a Family, and Building a House

When David arrived in July 1872 at the site west of Sibley where he settled with his bride of nine months, Mary Jane was already six months pregnant with their first child. Since they were intending to make their home on this spot of the high plains where prairie grass dominated the landscape with no native trees in sight, David provided the first shelter for his soon-to-be young family-of-three by carving a dugout sod house from the rich black loam of Northwest Iowa just a few miles below the border with Minnesota.

On September 12, 1872, Mary Jane delivered a son, who they named Walter Eugene Whitney after David's youngest brother born exactly 16 years earlier, on September 12, 1856. With the first signs of winter weather due to approach this portion of Northwest Iowa not too long after his son's birth, David bought some lumber in LeMars and built on his farmstead a frame house with some common rough boards and tarpaper for siding, completing it on November 10, 1872. Although it was a one-story house, it did have a loft in which they could sleep above thecold ground-floor

### Surviving NW Iowa Winters

Northwest Iowa in 1872 was not the most comfortable place in the winter, especially for people with meager resources. The flat plains with no trees for protection allowed winter winds to drive fine snow fiercely across open fields in such a way that has come to be known as a 'blizzard'. This term is reputed to have first been printed in the early 1870's in a newspaper in Estherville, a Northwest Iowa town about 50 miles east of Sibley. It appeared in an article reporting a description of the winter storm, perhaps incorporating a word from German spoken by someone from the town of Marshall in neighboring Southwest Minnesota. Whatever its true

origin—and etymology is more of an art than a science—the term is used with first-hand knowledge by natives of Northwest Iowa.

The winter before David and Mary Jane arrived in Osceola county had been a harsh one. Railroad construction, important for new settlements, had to be delayed until spring. One man froze to death in January when he was caught out in a blizzard east of Sibley while cutting firewood from willow trees along the Ocheyedan River. In February, another man died while on his way home bringing provisions he had bought in a store in town.

But the Whitney family's first winter was even harsher. A three-day storm that struck in early January 1873 kept Mary Jane and her infant son covered up in bed for the duration. The tarpaper walls were not as sheltering from the cold wind as were the thicker walls of the sod dugout, but David did manage to provide some firewood to burn during the storm He had returned home just before the blizzard got heavy with a wagonload of firewood he had cut at the Rock River in Lyon County, west of their farm. He parked the wagon next to the house with handy access for the constant stoking of the fire necessary during the three days of the storm.

At various times that winter, more storms piled layer upon layer of snow on top of each other—as it does in that part of Iowa where there is usually no thawing until spring—so much so that by March the railroad line through Sibley was blocked. As a result, fuel was in short supply, and many people burned hay and marsh grass to keep themselves and their livestock warm.

Spring was late that year and fields were plowed and crops planted behind schedule. Then a drought followed from the beginning of May until the middle of June. Even so, the crops, though their growth retarded, were making progress towards a possibly fair harvest. But in June something came from the sky that changed the farmers' prospects in the fields.

### A Grasshopper Assault in the Summer

One Sunday morning in June 1873, people in and around Sibley were astonished by the appearance of a dark cloud in the west approaching swiftly as if driven by the wind. Along with the cloud came a terrible, buzzing roar, making some people think it was a tornado, a hazard well known to many residents of the plains. Instead of sucking up things from the ground, however, this cloud started falling apart with tiny specks swooping earthward. It was the prairie scourge, grasshoppers, vast multitudes of them!

The bright green stalks of the grain planted for crops turned dark as the swarms landed on them, and the roar of grasshopper wings changed to the munching of all vegetation in sight. Attempts to save the crops went for naught as these long-time insect denizens of the prairie made short shrift of whatever the new prairie residents had planted and of many other things in addition. It was reported that the grasshoppers ate willow leaves as well as boots and overcoats that had been left outside and even gnawed on the wooden handles of farm implements. Some farmers claimed to have seen grasshoppers eating the wool on the backs of their sheep.

After destroying the planted crops, the grasshoppers moved on to open prairie-grass fields. Within ten days the insects were gone, but the devastation they caused was felt by everybody in the area. With that year's source of income destroyed, and despite that fact that they were expecting their second child in January, David and Mary Jane left their farm for four months and worked in Cherokee, about 50 miles southeast of Sibley.

**A Family Farm Tragedy**

Following their first, fierce winter on their prairie homestead and the grasshopper invasion that ruined their first crops that summer, David and Mary Jane returned to the land they had claimed west of Sibley where, unlike many neighbors, they intended to remain despite the hazards of nature peculiar to the area. In fact, they soon increased the size of their landholding, as David claimed the quarter section of land just on the west edge of his original quarter section. Its ownerhad left in despair of the harsh winter and grasshopper attack, and David, under provisions of the Homestead Act, planted trees on that land to support his claim. David also probably enjoyed anticipating having something on his farm that would remind him of the green, forested hills and mountains of his home in Vermont, even if he couldn't conjure up the hills and mountains on the endlessly flat prairie.

David and Mary Jane also soon increased the size of their prairie family, with two more sons born in 1874 and 1875, one daughter in 1879 and another soon thereafter. By 1884, their oldest, Walter Eugene, was a 12-year-old farmboy who, with several younger brothers and sisters for his parents to feed, had man-like duties to perform, a common experience, especially for the first-born of farm families. However, this farmboy and his family suffered another farm experience, which though not common directly in most such families, is also not rare, a farm accident.

On September 22, 1884, just ten days after his twelfth birthday, Walter Eugene was out in one of the fields with a team of his father's horses turn-

ing the soil with a plow. The horses bolted and Walter was thrown under the plow and cut by its sharp blade. When they found their injured son, David got on a horse and raced to town to fetch the doctor to try to help his son while Mary Jane stayed in the field, cradling her bleeding first-born in her arms. However, Walter died, probably very soon, as a femoral artery—the major circulatory link through the thigh down the leg—had been severed. Such injuries bleed profusely and are hard to stanch.

Their son's tragic death must have been extremely difficult for David and Mary Jane. For a first child—with whom a mother often has special attachment—to die so violently and in his mother's arms must have given Mary Jane sad memories for years to come. And his son's death couldn't have kept from stirring up vivid memories of the death and dismemberment of fallen comrades from David's time in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.

But David and Mary Jane still had two growing sons, aged nine and ten at the time. By ten years later they had added one more daughter and five more sons, giving them a total of ten surviving children after nearly 22 years on the prairie, with their last one being born in January of 1894.

**A Substantial Farm Despite Another Prairie Hazard**

The Whitneys had started with a little house on the prairie that David had built their first year in Northwest Iowa in 1872, but before long they were adding other buildings, including a more substantial house for their expanding family in 1889.

David also had a stable, wells with pumps, and what he called his 'forest', the trees and some shrubbery he had planted.

In 1884 David built his first barn but experienced another hazard of the prairie with that basic farm building. In 1894 a tornado, this time the genuine kind with monstrously roaring winds—not the roaring wings of miniature monsters—destroyed his first barn. But before long he built a new one to go along with a granary and other small farm buildings.

For his tree claim David had planted maple, cottonwood, box elder, ash, and catalpa trees and later added fruit trees and shade trees closer to the house. He also had a love for horses and raised many of them, and he also raised and marketed many cattle and sheep. At various times he had planted wheat, oats, barley, flax, and corn as crops in the virgin, rich black soil of Northwest Iowa.

**Achieving Standing in the Community**

From their lonely beginning in 1872 as young, Osceola County pioneers living on open, treeless prairie in a sod dugout with their first child on the way and facing the fierceness of NW Iowa winters, David and Mary Jane had, by the turn of the century, become prosperous members of their local community with an elegant looking farm.

They fostered the education of their children by helping establish a school across the road from the southeast corner of their homestead. This school was called 'The Whitney School' throughout its existence into the middle of the 20th century, and all their children and many of their grandchildren got their start in formal education in this one-room country school. David and Mary Jane also were active early members of the Baptist church in Sibley.

# Part III – Chapter 3

# The 20th Century and Beyond

### Moving into the 20th Century

David and Mary Jane remained on their farm west of Sibley until 1916. By that time most of their children had moved away, some of them west to South Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, but others stayed nearby. David had acquired land not far away in southwestern Minnesota, where his youngest son eventually set up farming. The Iowa homestead remained in the Whitney family until 1940, but in 1916 David and Mary Jane moved back to her family's home area in Buchanan County, Iowa, and lived in the town of Independence until her death two years later.

When they left for Independence in 1916, David and Mary Jane's second youngest son, Charles Wesley, who had married Lilly Salzman the previous year, took over operation of their farm. Charlie and Lilly already had a son and another child on the way in 1916, with seven more to come over the next 19 years. All of Charlie's children, David's grandchildren, were born on the family farm except for the youngest, who, in 1935, insisted on being born in the Sibley hospital.

After Mary Jane's death, David returned to live with his children, primarily with Charlie and his family on the Sibley homestead. David lived long enough that seven of Charlie's nine children were born during his lifetime. But he also visited and stayed at times with other of his children, especially in the winter, when he escaped the fierce Iowa blizzard country to keep warmer at the home of one of his daughters in Oklahoma.

David took at least one other long distance trip outside Iowa. In 1913 he returned to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, for the 50th anniversary reunion of participants in the Battle of Gettysburg, sponsored by the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), an organization of Civil War veterans to which David belonged. David was the only war veteran then in Osceola County eligible to attend, based on his service at Gettysburg with the 15th Vermont Volunteer Regiment.

In September 1927, when David Whitney was 83 years old, he died at the home of a daughter in Nebraska, His body was returned for burial in his family plot in Holman Township Cemetery near Sibley, where he lies in rest alongside his wife, Mary Jane, their oldest son, Walter, and two other sons who had never married.

**David's Legacy**

This ends the story of David Whitney, Vermont native, Civil War veteran, Iowa pioneer, and gentleman farmer.* But those Whitney family experiences shared by many in David's family line continue. Several of his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren have served in the military, some of them during wartime. Of the children and grandchildren of David's son Charlie, who were mostly born in Iowa, many have remained in Iowa. But others, including some from even later generations, have migrated west, even as far as the border and continental limits of the United States, to places like Texas, New Mexico, California, Oregon, and Washington.

Some third and fourth generation Iowa-based descendants of David Whitney have reversed the westward trend. Three great-grandchildren make their homes near the sites of the Civil War battles where David fought: one great-granddaughter lives in Petersburg, Virginia, where the Civil War ended, both for David with his wounded leg and the Union with the Confederate surrender; another great-granddaughter and her children have their home in Hagerstown, Maryland, in the midst of the area north of the Potomac David knew so well; and one great-grandson and his son live further down the road in Maryland, at the edge of the nation's capital whose integrity David helped restore. In addition, one great-great-grandson from California, whose father was born in Northwest Iowa before migrating west with his family, now lives in New Hampshire, the state next to David's home state of Vermont.

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* For a picture of David based on one published in 1914 in a history of Osceola County, see the the Appendix, p. 97.

# Afterword

This version of my great-grandfather David Whitney's story took its inspiration from a journey the co-authors, my mother, Hazel, and I, Tom Eichman, made in early June 2000, to Orange County, Vermont, where David was born and raised before he went off to war at the end of 1862. When David, her grandfather, died in 1927, my mother was nearly ten years old and, until her death on Christmas Day, 2006, had vivid childhood memories of him and his stories about Vermont.

In our trip to Vermont we visited the areas my mother had only heard about. We saw the ancestral farm established in Orange County by the original David Whitney, my mother's grandfather's namesake grandfather, who came to Vermont from Massachusetts at the turn of the 18th Century. This farm lies on a part of the prominent feature in the area, Whitney Hill, named for the three brothers from Massachusetts who settled there.

Up from the farm, along a road named Whitney Hill Road, we saw the Whitney Hill School and up behind it Whitney Hill Cemetery at the edge of Whitney Hill. In the cemetery we found the graves of several Whitneys, including the original David Whitney and his wife, Susannah, but only these two in our direct lineage.

These Whitney places, the farm, the hill, the road, the school, and the cemetery are all on the east side of the hills that separate two forks of the White River, and they are all located in the north part of the town of Tunbridge. In New England tradition, 'town' is the designation for an area more like 'township' in the midwest.

After we attended a Sunday church service in South Tunbridge and met there with some Whitney descendants and a few officers of the local historical society, we realized that David Whitney had moved at an early age with his parents and siblings to the town of Brookfield in the western part of Orange County. Since we hadn't found any graves from that family in the Tunbridge area, we continued our search the next day, our last day there, at cemeteries in Brookfield Town. A historical society officer had given us clues about the location of Brookfield cemeteries.

Our search in Brookfield Town turned up many Whitney gravestones but none from David's immediate family. When we were getting ready to leave Vermont, a man in Randolph, another Orange County town, told us about an old cemetery up a hill to the northeast in Brookfield Town. Unfortunately, my mother and I had to leave before we were able to visit that site.

But most fortunately, two years later, in May 2002, another David Whitney descendant, my cousin Jennifer Whitney—who my mother and I had visited in 2001 at her home in Petersburg, VA—traveled to Orange County Vermont on a path similar to ours. I provided Jennifer information about the family locations in Tunbridge Town and tentative directions to the cemetery in Brookfield Town that mymother and I had been unable to visit.

Jennifer did indeed find that cemetery and in it the graves of David's father and mother and his brother Alonzo and sister Maria, along with that of Maria's husband, Edwin Sprague, who had served with David in the first part of the Civil War. Jennifer's discovery of that burial ground with its towering monument to Alonzo, the family's Civil War casualty, was further inspiration for me to continue the research into David and his family's story that my mother had begun.

In July 2006, my wife, Alice, and I traveled to Barre, VT, where, at the Vermont Historical Society Library, I read letters home from the Civil War written by Edwin C. Hall, another young Brookfield volunteer and comrade-in-arms to David Whitney during his war experiences, serving with him in the same units from beginning to end. Alice and I also visited the East Hill cemetery in Brookfield that my mother and I had been unable to find in 2000.

I based all of my research on the very substantial resources my mother had discovered and assembled while tracking the genealogy of her Whitney family and her grandfather's story. She had prepared and distributed as an educational project a summary of her findings to her brothers and sisters and some of their children—David Whitney descendants all—at a family reunion in July 1999 that celebrated hermother's teaching career.

I supplemented my mother's research with many details from several sources: copies of the official Civil War records of David and his brother and brothers-in-law that I obtained from the National Archives; copies of the letters Alonzo Whitney and Alpheus Cheney had written to the Coolidge family that I obtained from the Vermont Historical Society's library; the letters by David's comrade-in-arms that I read at that library; and the substantial two-volume work by George Benedict, "Vermont in the Civil War", along with a few other historical books and articles.

My formal training as a U.S. Army infantry officer allowed me to understand and interpret the military-style notations I found in the records as well as the references to military things in the letters and books. My long professional experience as a teacher, educational writer, and author of numerous official intelligence reports, editor of even more, has contri-

buted substantially to my presentation of David's story in an educational format. My son's exquisite knowledge of web design has made possible the appearance of David's story in another format on the internet.

The Osceola County portion of David's story is a somewhat revised version of an article my mother had previously published in the Sibley Gazette in 1972, the centennial of the establishment of Sibley and Osceola County and also the centennid of David's arrival in Northwest Iowa.

The present story is a work of love by my mother for her grandfather and his family and by me for my mother. Thank you, David, for establishing our Whitney heritage and for inspiring us, your descendants. And thank you, Mother, for inspiring me to follow David's trail.