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## **CHAPTER XX.**

### *Final Statement of the First Brigade—Some Suggestive Statistics— Testimony of its Commanders to the quality of the troops of the Brigade—End of Volume I.*

A few suggestive figures must close this record of the service of the First Vermont Brigade, though there are many details of it, over which the historian could proudly linger. The five original regiments of the First Vermont brigade entered the service of the government with 4,747 officers and men. To these were added, during the war, under the policy, early adopted by the State, of keeping the ranks of existing regiments well recruited in preference to creating new organizations, 4,070 men—giving an aggregate of 8,817 officers and men. Of this number 578 were killed in action, and 395 died of wounds received in battle, a total of 973. One hundred and ten men in every thousand were killed outright or received wounds in action resulting in death. Those who died of disease in Union hospitals numbered 774. Those who died in Confederate prisons were 135 in number. The total number of wounded was 2,328. The latest tabulations from the records of the War Department, completed in June, 1885, show that the proportion of killed in action in the armies of the Union, was 2.88; and of those dying from wounds 1.85. The percentage of Vermonters killed, in the five original regiments of the First brigade, was 6.55, and of those dying of wounds, 4.48. Of all the States, Vermont had the highest percentage of men killed in action, namely 3.65; but it will be seen that the killed of the Old brigade far exceeded even this proportion.

The Eleventh regiment was a member of the brigade about one year. In material and fighting quality it was not inferior to the older regiments and its losses in action in proportion to the length of its period of active service with the brigade, even exceeded the remarkable percentage of the five original regiments. It had 1,315 original members and received 1,005 recruits, making an aggregate of 2,320. It had 69 killed, 418 wounded, 86 of whom died of their wounds; 213 died from disease in Union hospitals, and 167 of its number died in rebel prisons. These numbers swell the figures for the brigade to 6,062 original members; 5,075 recruits; aggregate 11,137; killed 647; died of wounds 481; died of disease 987; died in rebel prisons 302. One third of the men sent from Vermont to defend the flag, served in the ranks of the Old brigade, and of their number 2,417, or more than one in every four, gave their lives to the cause of the Union. The brigade was engaged, as a whole or in part, in *thirty* battles and engagements, deemed of importance enough to be included on the official lists. If the separate actions, on successive days, included under the single titles of Fredericksburg, the Wilderness, Spottsylvania and Cold Harbor be included, this number is swelled to *thirty-seven*. The marches of the Brigade in Virginia and Maryland, exceeded two thousand miles in aggregate length.

The losses of the Vermont brigade in action were not to any considerable extent chargeable to reckless handling in battle. Certainly none of its brigade, division or corps commanders were rash or regardless of the lives of their troops. These losses, it is the simple truth to say, were owing to the character of the troops—to the facts that they were so often put in where the hardest fighting was to be done, that they stayed when others fled, and that they did not know when they were beaten—if they ever were beaten. Not one of the colors of the brigade, though so often flying in the very front of battle, was ever permitted to be for a moment in hostile

hands. "The heroism of our boys," as one who carried a musket with them has finely said, "had little of pride or pomp, of crashing music and royal banner and *vive l'Empereur!* Boisterousness about it. It was, like themselves, homely and self-contained. They stood up firmly, fought stubbornly; when they dropped they had grim humor and queer wit quite as often on their lips as groans, or cries or prayers. There was gold and there was dross in them." But they were in large proportion of the sort of whom this comrade adds "The soldiers who did their devoir most nobly in the awful solemnities of a great battle were not those who brawled and boasted either before or after the conflict; but those who with a humane hate of bloodshed, turned it may be pale faces but stout hearts to the enemy, and fixed their unyielding feet firmly in the earth as a badger's claws, and made a badger's bitter fight, simply because it was the hard but single road to their full duty."<sup>1</sup>

To the fighting and staying and marching qualities of the brigade, as an organization, their superior commanders, not of their own number or connected with them by any tie of State pride, often bore testimony. General Howe seldom alludes to them in his reports without words of especial praise. General Wright said of them to the author of this history: "As marchers they were unsurpassed, and as fighters they were as good as the best, if not a little better." General Sheridan said, in the State House in Montpelier, in 1867: "When I saw these old flags I thought I ought to say as much as this:--I have never commanded troops in whom I had more confidence than I had in the Vermont troops, and I do not know but I can say that I never commanded troops in whom I had as much confidence as those of this gallant State." This praise belongs in part to three Vermont

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<sup>1</sup> Address of Sergeant Lucius Bigelow before the Reunion Society of Vermont Officers.

regiments who served under Sheridan outside of the First brigade, but it belongs also to that brigade. General Sedgwick's opinion of the brigade was expressed by his chief of staff, General McMahan, when he said: "No body of troops in or out of the old Sixth Corps had a better record. No body of troops in or out of the Army of the Potomac made their record more gallantly, sustained it more heroically or wore their honors more modestly. The Vermont brigade were the model and type of the volunteer soldier."

After all, as has been said of it, the highest compliments paid the brigade were the orders which placed it in positions of extreme danger and responsibility. That distinction, as the preceding pages show, was over and over again conferred upon it. The facts of its record, even thus imperfectly related, are its sufficient eulogy. The succeeding chapters of this work will show that its example was not lost on other Vermont regiments and another Vermont brigade.

END OF VOL. I.