

For Elmer Miller King, joining the Army to go fight a war was less threatening than staying "safely" at home in Vermont. In fact, that alternative was downright tame in comparison to what he had been undergoing as a teenager in his hometown of Salisbury, Vermont in the fall of 1859.

Elmer was the youngest member of a rather large rural family in 1850. Besides his father, Daniel, there was his mother, Lucy, and four brothers and four sisters in the clan. His father was sixty and his mother was forty-seven. The oldest child was twenty-five and the youngest, Elmer, was four. All of them lived on a farm in Salisbury. They seemed to be a very tight knit family, staying close to one another and everyone contributing to keeping the family surviving. Four of the King offspring were of marriageable ages: Amos, twenty-five; Miranda, twenty-three; John, nineteen; and Norman, seventeen. Yet, at the beginning of 1850, they all were still living with their parents and younger siblings on the farm in Salisbury. ^[1] Before the next ten years expired, the King family would see times of great joy and celebration come to them and times of great tragedy and grief in quick succession.

By the Fall of 1859, four of the King children had married and set up homes of their own in and around Salisbury. John had married; Miranda had become a Hale; Esther was a Powers; and Julia's name had changed to Cloyes.^[2] That left Daniel and Lucy on the original homestead with their five remaining children: Amos, Norman, Austin, Mary and Elmer. The marriages must have provided many days of joy and celebration in the King household. And since some of the newly weds moved very far away from the ancestral farm, they were all able to stay in close contact with one another.

Then came November of 1859 and with it an outbreak of typhoid fever among the remnants of the King homestead. Typhoid is caused by contaminated water, often from human excrement that gets into the drinking water of people. Somehow, that was what must have happened to the King's potable source of drinking water. For, by November of 1859, Mary, the youngest female of the clan, was the first to die of the disease. Then, in December, Lucy, the mother, and her son, Norman, became ill and died of the fever. On

New Year's Day of 1860, Austin D. fell victim to typhoid and was quickly followed by the oldest King, Daniel and his son, Amos, all within the first week of the new year. ^[3] Within three months time, every member of the King family still living on the original farm was dead of typhoid fever except Elmer. For all intents and purposes, Elmer was an orphan at thirteen.

The 1860 Census, taken in the Spring of that year, placed Elmer living with his sister, Esther, and her husband, H.C. Powers in Leicester, Vermont. H.C. was a Methodist minister. He and his wife, Esther, along with their two children aged five and two and H.C.'s sixty-seven year old mother, Mary, plus the orphaned Elmer all lived with an unmarried twenty-three year old Leicester farmer named Frank Moosman. ^[4] Circumstances did make for strange bed fellows.

The living arrangement must have been strained to say the least. By 1864, most likely out of necessity for their sanity and probably because of the financial strain on H.C. and Esther, Elmore (Elmer) ended up living with a Mr. Stephen M. Colby whom the Probate Court had appointed as Elmer's legal guardian. If there was some blood connection between Mr. Colby and the Kings, I could not find it. Why Mr. Colby, an apparent stranger, became Elmer's legal voice and what precipitated the necessity of having him fill the role is not explained in any of the public records examined thus far. But when Elmer enlisted in the Army at seventeen years eleven months and three hundred sixty-one days old, it was he, Colby, who signed the minor consent form on the paper work. ^[5] Stephen Colby's family was just as much a patchwork unit as H.C. and Esther's had been. It consisted of Stephen, a farmer, his wife, Arvilla, three other children besides Elmer ranging in age from seventeen to nine, a farmhand and a Methodist minister. ^[6] None of it, apparently, much to Elmer's liking. Maybe he had something against Methodist ministers!

Elmer must have seen the coming of the war as his golden opportunity to escape his intolerable situation. From his point of view, I'm sure he felt that there wasn't much holding him here in the Green Mountains of Vermont since he had lost, one way or another, his entire family. He had tried living with a sister and that had not worked out

very well. He was forced to live with strangers because he was a minor. So, it was understandable that he couldn't wait to take matters into his own hands and strike out on his own. At least the Army would take care of his basic necessities until he could get a bearing on where he wanted to go. Four days before he actually turned eighteen, Elmer Miller King, farmer from Salisbury, Vermont became a recruit in Father Abraham's army. August 10, 1864 at Lincoln, Vermont, Elmer completed his declaration and enlistment papers. Two weeks later, his guardian signed the Consent In Case Of Minor form. ^[7]

When the ink had dried on the paper, Elmer was accepted into the Army as a private on August 25, 1864 for one year. The blue eyed, brown haired, lightly complexioned eighteen year old diminutive, orphan was now officially a soldier. The five foot three and one half inch private was assigned to Company B of the First Vermont Artillery. He was paid one third of his \$100 bounty and owed the rest. ^[8]

The regiment, to which Elmer was a member, was originally mustered-in as the Eleventh Vermont Volunteer Infantry in September, 1862. In mid-December of that year, it was re-designated as the First Heavy Artillery. Unfortunately, official and personal records used both designations which has caused great confusion.

The Eleventh Regiment was the largest Vermont regiment sent to the war, both in original membership and in total enrollment. It was recruited as an infantry regiment at the same time as the Tenth, under the call of July 2, 1862 from President Lincoln for 300,000 volunteers. By the middle of August, ten companies had been organized. The Regiment rendezvoused at Camp Bradley in Brattleboro, Vermont where they were mustered into the U.S. service September 1, 1862 for three years. It left the State on September 7 for Washington, D.C. where it arrived on the ninth and was immediately assigned to duty in the chain of forts constituting the northern defenses of the capital. By order of the Secretary of War, dated December 10, 1862, it was made a heavy artillery unit becoming re-designated as the First Heavy Artillery.

The Eleventh remained in the defenses of Washington, D.C. for a period of eighteen months, during which time it was chiefly employed strengthening the works, constructing and garrisoning Forts Stevens, Slocum and Totten. During the latter part of its artillery service at Washington, the Regiment garrisoned four other forts and occupied a line of about seven miles. It experienced little of the real hardships of war during 1863 and the first months of 1864. It had comfortable quarters, the men enjoyed excellent health and rations - even luxuries were abundant for a price. It maintained an excellent state of discipline typical of Vermont troops, and was rated the best disciplined regiment in the defense of the capital. After the terrible Federal losses at the Battle of the Wilderness, the Eleventh was ordered to join the Army of the Potomac. It reported for duty as infantry near Spotsylvania Court House with nearly 1,500 men.

During the severe Overland Campaign that followed, the Regiment participated in every major engagement of the Sixth Corps from May 1864 to April 1865: Spotsylvania; Cold Harbor; Petersburg; Weldon railroad; Fort Stevens; Charlestown; Gilbert's ford; Opequan; Fisher's Hill; Cedar Creek; Petersburg siege. In the debacle at Weldon railroad, June 23, 1864, the Regiment suffered the greatest loss sustained by any Vermont Regiment in a single action. It lost nine killed, thirty-one wounded and two hundred sixty-one captured. All the captives were sent to Andersonville prison where two hundred thirty-two of them died.

Original members, recruits for one year (like Elmer) and recruits whose term of service expired before October 1, 1865, were mustered-out on June 24, 1865. The remainder of the Regiment was consolidated into one battalion of heavy artillery and stationed in the defenses of Washington until mustered-out on August 25, 1865. The original members of the Eleventh numbered 1,315. Recruits and transfers amounted to an additional 1,005. The total rank and file was 2,320. Of that number, 152 were killed in action; 210 died of disease; 457 were wounded; 339 were captured; 2 died by accident. ^[9]

Private King missed the embarrassment of Weldon and the subsequent vacation in Andersonville and most everything else the Regiment participated in except for the

monotony of guard duty. Elmer hadn't enlisted until August 1864. He was still in Vermont in September. He arrived in New Haven, Connecticut where he was given equipment such as a knapsack, haversack and canteen. He was stationed at New Haven through December 1864, not joining his Regiment until January, 1865 just in time to do garrison duty in the forts around the capital while waiting to be discharged. ^[10] Before leaving the service, Elmer had to collect his \$11.17 extra clothing allowance he was owed, plus the final installment of his bounty money. He also had to return (unless he lost it) his 1865 model musket.^[11]

Upon his return to civilian life and to Vermont, Elmer ended up living with a family called Spoor (Hiram and Marion) in Middlebury, Vermont. In 1870, he was earning a living doing carpentry work. He was now twenty-three, still single and alone. ^[12] Between 1870 and 1872, Elmer met and married a young lady named Ida E. Capen. Their wedding was held in Ripton on March 14, 1872. ^[13] During the next eight years, Elmer and Ida had three children: Mabel, 1873; Mary, 1875; and Nathan C., 1879. Elmer, now thirty-three, was supporting his family by working as a "hair dresser". His wife, Ida, worked with him as his assistant "hair worker". ^[14]

Just the year before, in December of 1879, Elmer had made application to the Pension Bureau for an invalid pension. ^[15] No documentation was found that would shed light on the evidence he offered in support of his claim. So what his ailment (s) was/were remains unknown. However, he provided enough proof of disability to be granted a pension by the Government. He did not collect his benefit for very long. Elmer died suddenly on July 6, 1881 at only thirty-three years of age. ^[16] Since there were young children and a young widow left behind to care for, it is no surprise that Ida filed a claim for widow's benefits immediately after Elmer's unexpected death. ^[17]

NOTES

1. Ancestry.com, 1850 U.S. Federal Census under Almon King.
2. Ibid., 1860 U.S. Federal Census under Miranda Hale, John King, Esther A. Powers and Julia Cloyes.
3. Op cit., Vermont, Vital Records, 1720 - 1908 under Daniel, Lucy, Amos, Norman,

- Austin D., and Mary King.
4. Op cit., 1860 U.S. Federal Census under Elmore King.
 5. Fold3.com, Compiled Service Records of Volunteers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Vermont. p. 13, image 309691557. Hereinafter referred to as Compiled Service Records....
 6. Ancestry.com, 1860 U.S. Federal Census under Stephen M. Colby.
 7. Fold3.com, Compiled Service Records..., pp. 12 - 13, images 309691553 and 309691557.
 8. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., pp. 2 - 3, images 309691521 and 309691525.
 9. Vermont in the Civil War/Units/1st Brigade/Eleventh Vermont Infantry and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/11th Vermont Infantry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/11th_Vermont_Infantry).
 10. Fold3.com, Compiled Service Records..., pp. 4 - 9, images 309691527, 309691530, 309691534, 309691537 and 309691544.
 11. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., p. 9, image 309691544.
 12. Ancestry.com, 1870 U.S. Federal Census under Elmer King.
 13. Ibid., Vermont, Vital Records, 1720 - 1908.
 14. Op cit., 1880 U.S. Federal Census under. Elmer King.
 15. Op cit., U.S. Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861 - 1934 for Elmer King.
 16. www.findagrave.com, Find A Grave Memorial #40603063 for Elmer Miller King.
 17. Ancestry.com, U.S. Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934 for Elmer M. King.