

James R. McGibbon was not from either Ireland or Scotland as you might guess from his surname, at least not directly. He wasn't even from the United States originally. He and the family he grew up in were immigrants from Canada.

James was born in Sorel, Canada in 1839. ^[1] His father and mother were also both born in Canada. Their names are unknown at this time. ^[2] In fact, there is not much that is known for sure about James or his family. Little information appears in the public records about any of them. It is unknown if James had any siblings, for example. The discovered records do tell us when he was born and that he died on August 31, 1898 in Goshen, Vermont. He left behind a wife, Ellen, and a young daughter named Jessie Josephine. Ellen's maiden name was Noyes and their marriage occurred sometime before 1881 which is the year Jessie was born. ^[3]

The McGibbon family crossed the Canadian-USA border sometime after 1839 (the year James was born) and 1861 (the year he enlisted in the Union Army) when James was living in Goshen, Vermont. ^[4]

In 1880, James was back living in Goshen and farming. He was married to Ellen and had a daughter, Jessie. ^[5] Since the 1890 Federal Census was destroyed by a fire, we don't know where James and his budding young family were living for sure, but it is assumed he continued to reside in Goshen. He died there in 1898. ^[6] His widow remained in Goshen for the rest of her life, dying there in 1925 at the age of seventy-four. ^[7]

James' military records did not tell us much more about him than his civilian files did. His war time experiences remain somewhat a mystery and uneventful as well. He enlisted in the cause on August 31, 1861 in Brandon, Vermont. He was twenty-two years old, stood five feet seven and one quarter inches tall with a dark complexion that matched his black eyes and hair. He was a farmer by trade and was born out of the country in Sorel, Canada E. He was given to Company H of the Fifth Regiment Vermont Infantry for three years. ^[8]

The Fifth was organized in St. Albans, Vermont. Its companies were raised in various towns throughout the State. Company B, for example, was comprised of only men from Middlebury; Company E was from Manchester; Company H, from Brandon; Company F, from Cornwall; and so on. The Regiment was mustered-in on September 16, 1861 at St. Albans. It was immediately sent to Washington, D.C. and joined the other Vermont troops already at Camp Advance (Griffin) near the Chain Bridge in Virginia where it was assigned to the Vermont Brigade with which it served during the rest of the war. Throughout the fall of 1861, and the first few months of 1862, it was on duty in the defenses surrounding Washington.

March 10, 1862 the Fifth moved to Alexandria, Virginia. Two weeks later, the Regiment boarded transport ships for the Virginia Peninsula landing at Fort Monroe and moving to New Port News on the twenty-third and twenty-fourth of March, 1862. By April 16, 1862, the Regiment was at Lee's Mills with the Vermont Brigade. On June 29, the Fifth brought four hundred men to the action at Savage's Station. In one half hour of fighting, it lost one hundred eighty-eight of them on the field. Company E of Manchester suffered the heaviest losses of any company from Vermont. Company E went into the engagement with fifty-nine muskets. In that one half hour of fierce conflict, it lost forty-four of the fifty-nine; twenty-five were killed and nineteen were wounded. Five Cummings brothers and one cousin from the company were among those killed or wounded. Only one of the six recovered from his wounds. The Regiment as a whole suffered the heaviest loss in killed and wounded at the Battle of Savage's Station, Virginia on June 29, 1862 of any Union regiment in a single action of the entire war. In the following few days, the Fifth along with the rest of the Vermont Brigade, went on to be involved in more fighting at White Oak Swamp and Malvern Hill as the Federals retreated from General Lee towards Harrison's Landing.

On August 16 - 24, 1862, the Regiment returned to Fort Monroe and reached the Bull Run battlefield by August 30, just missing the fighting there. During the Maryland Campaign of 1862, the Fifth took part in Crampton's Gap (South Mountain) and Antietam. It ended 1862 engaged in the Battle of Fredericksburg. In January (23-24) of

1863, it joined Burnside's "Mud March" on its way to Marye's Heights and Salem Church. It celebrated the Fourth of July at Gettysburg. The Fifth took a break August 14 through September 16, 1863 and relaxed in New York during the draft riots there. The Regiment rejoined the Army of the Potomac at Culpeper Court House in Virginia on September 23. It went into winter quarters at Brandy Station where the veterans of the Regiment re-enlisted on December 15, 1863 and was the first Regiment granted a veteran's furlough for a month's duration.

On its return from furlough in Vermont, the Fifth continued as a veteran organization and participated in the bloody month with the Army of the Potomac from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor, and took an active part in the siege of Petersburg. The Regiment began the campaign with five hundred men. In one month, it lost three hundred forty-nine killed, wounded and missing, including thirteen officers. September 15, 1864, the term of service for original members who had not re-enlisted expired. They were mustered-out leaving present for duty one assistant surgeon, a quartermaster, three first lieutenants and three hundred enlisted personnel. After the October 19 Battle of Cedar Creek, the Fifth moved to the Siege of Petersburg again and went into winter camp at Squirrel Level Road in December, 1864.

When Petersburg finally fell in April of 1865, the Fifth Vermont was the first Regiment to plant its colors on the Confederate defensive works. The unit was present at Appomattox Court House for the surrender of Robert E. Lee and his army. June 8, 1865 the Fifth marched in the Corps Review held at Washington, D.C. On June 29, the veterans were mustered-out. At its discharge, there were only twenty-four officers and two hundred eighty-eight men on its rolls - three hundred twelve total out of an original strength of 1,618 . For the last ten months of its service, the highest ranking officer in the Fifth present for duty was a captain; for more than three months of those last ten, the highest ranking officer present for duty was a lieutenant. Every officer present for the Grand Review went out as a private.

During the Fifth's four years of service, the Regiment sustained the following losses: killed and mortally wounded, eleven officers and two hundred two enlisted men (213); deaths from disease and accidents were one officer and one hundred twenty-four enlisted, including twenty-one who died in prisons (125). The Fifth was one of forty-five infantry regiments in the Union Army that lost over two hundred men killed or fatally wounded in battle during the War of The Rebellion. ^[9]

Whether by good fortune or clever design, James ended up missing out on all of the Fifth's strenuous combat experiences. By December of 1862, James was assigned to detached duty as the Colonel's "private servant". He held that position at Brigade headquarters from December 1862 to the end of 1863. At Brandy Station on December 16, 1863, he re-enlisted as a veteran. From February of 1864 until May of 1865, James was on duty as an orderly for the Fifth's Brigade commander at the Second Brigade headquarters. ^[10] On June 29, 1865, James mustered-out in Washington, D.C. He was paid \$210 bounty money and owed \$190 more. He was in debt to the Government for \$8.17 worth of clothing. ^[11] James filed for a pension right after his release from active duty and received payments for the next twenty-nine years of his life. Four months after his death in August of 1898, Ellen, his widow, applied for and was granted a widow's pension which she received until her death in 1925. ^[12]

NOTES

1. Ancestry.com/Family Trees/George Alexander Family Tree/James McGibbon; www.findagrave.com, Find A Grave Memorial #40493052 for James R. McGibbon; Vermont in the Civil War/Cemeteries/Vermont/Goshen/Goshen Cemetery/McGibbon, James R.
2. Ibid., 1880 U.S. Federal Census under James McGibbon.
3. Op cit., George Alexander Family Tree for James McGibbon.
4. Vermont in the Civil War/Cemeteries/Vermont/Goshen/Goshen Cemetery/McGibbon, James R. and Fold3.com, Compiled Service Records of Volunteers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Vermont, p. 3, image 311614150. Hereinafter referred to as Compiled Service Records....
5. Ancestry.com, 1880 U.S. Federal Census under James McGibbon and Ancestry.com 1880 U.S. Federal Census under James McGibbon.
6. Ibid., George Alexander Family Tree for James McGibbon.
7. Op cit., Vermont, Death Records, 1909-2008 for Ellen Noyes McGibbon.
8. Fold3.com, Compiled Service Records..., p. 3, image 311614150.

9. Ancestry.com, U.S. American Civil War Regiments, 1861-1866; Vermont in the Civil War/Units/1st Brigade/Fifth Vermont Infantry; <http://civilwarintheeast.com/us-regiments-batteries/vermont/5th-vermont>.
10. Fold3.com, Compiled Service Records..., pp. 32-33, images 311614207 and 311614209.
11. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., p. 34, image 311614211.
12. Ancestry.com, U.S. Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934 for James R. McGibbon.