

Alson Denston Atkins was so ordinary that it hurt. Like eighty per cent of his peers, he was a farmer his whole civilian life. He was born, raised, married and died in Lincoln, Vermont. The only real estate he saw that was not green was the places he visited while a member of the Ninth Vermont Infantry. He was a good husband; a good father; a good neighbor; a good friend; a good mason; and a good citizen of the small mountain village of Lincoln. He was patient man who took physical suffering in stride without complaint. He never drew attention to himself in any way. He was a quiet man who minded his own business and was beholden to no one. Alson was the type of man you would call the salt of the earth; dependable, reasonable, responsible. He took care of his family, his farm and his community. His peers considered him to have the “exemplary habits” of kindness, indulgence and patience. He was the kind of man anyone would like to have as a friend.

Alson was the sixth child of nine children. He was the son of Joel Atkins (1800-1887) and Betsy S. Chase.^[1] Calculating from his age at the time of his death, Alson was born about August 29, 1840.^[2] His father was born in Sutton and his mother in Weare, New Hampshire.^[3] There was some uncertainty around Betsy’s exact date of birth. Some sources suggested 1810 as the date. From the historical records, it was known as a fact that she and Joel were married on December 9, 1822 in Henniker, New Hampshire. If 1810 were her correct birth date, then she would have been only twelve or thirteen at the time of her marriage. Even for 19th century standards in the Western world, that seemed extremely young. Other sources offered a more reasonable date of 1801, which would have made her twenty-one, a much more reasonable age for a first marriage.^[4] Alson had eight siblings; six brothers and two sisters. Five of those siblings were older: Orrin T. (1828-1909); Hiram T. (1831-1909); George A. (1833-1910); Mary Jane (1834-1852); and Alfred Winslow (1835-1924). He had three siblings younger than himself: Joel Chase (1843-1901); Izora M. (1847-1893) Ferguson; and Sylvester N. (1849-1924).^[5] It seemed from the public records that Joel and Betsey (sic) with Orrin in tow came to Lincoln, Vermont sometime between 1828 and 1834.^[6] The first three boys born into the Atkins’ family were born while Joel and Betsy still lived in New Hampshire. The rest of the offspring were born in Lincoln, Vermont starting with Alfred Winslow. The only exception may have been Mary Jane whose birthplace could not be verified. The 1850 U.S. Federal Census indicated that her place of birth was in Vermont.^[7]

Joel was an average farmer then, living with his large family in Lincoln. He had a modest estate valued at \$1,000. Most of his neighbors were not much better. Joel had the advantage of having three young, brawny boys old enough to be labeled as “farmers” in the Census as well. He was fortunate to have three cheap laborers to assist with the work that needed to be done on the farm. As always happens with children, they grow up and want to move out of the nest and go off on their own. By 1860, three of Joel’s children had chosen to leave home. Two of Joel’s sons, George and “Alford” (sic) Alfred Winslow, had struck out on their own. Mary Jane, however, had died in 1852 from unknown causes.^[8] His son, Hiram, stuck with his father and remained tied to the farm and home. Joel and sons had built the farm’s value up over the years with their hard work. The 1860 Federal Census listed Joel’s real estate value at \$3,500 and his personal at \$1,000. His finances were in much better shape in 1860 than they were ten years earlier. Alson, Joel Chase, Izora and Sylvester all attended school in 1860. Although Joel and Betsy had lost a daughter in 1852, he had gained a daughter-in-law in 1859 when Hiram married.

The 1860 Federal Census listed her as an eighteen year old female member of Joel's household who was born in Vermont. Her maiden name was Carrie P. Atkins (1841-1924).^[9]

The residents of Lincoln were too far away from South Carolina to hear the first shots of the Civil War, but everyone certainly felt the pandemic wave of patriotism that swept through the village on or about April 14, 1861 when the news arrived in the little mountain town tucked away in the Green Mountains. None of the Atkins boys who were old enough to be eligible for military service (Orrin, Hiram, George, Alfred, Alson or Joel) appeared eager to join the Union Army and go off to glorious war following Sumter's fall in April, 1861. They all were still safely at home two years later when, in 1863, Congress passed a draft bill. The War Department was prepared to use it liberally if the trickle of volunteers didn't pick up. The initial gush of enthusiastic recruits had evaporated as the war dragged on and people back home began to see the results of real combat. But the need for replacements increased as the fighting continued, terms of service expired and casualty lists grew bigger. When Captain C.R. Crane, Provost Marshal, circulated through Lincoln, Vermont in June, 1863, he recorded the names of four Atkins boys as eligible for the draft: Hiram, George, Alfred and Alson. He left off Orrin and Joel. All were farmers. Orrin was the oldest of the boys being around thirty-five in 1863. Joel was about twenty and the youngest of the boys in the family. Of the four, only Alson was single.^[10] It appeared that the good Captain had a heart. He left something of the Atkins family exempted from eligibility for service so that all of the members of this one family would not be exposed to harm or worse.

Military records revealed that only two of the four Atkins boys actually served during the Civil War; George and Alson. Each ones' records show they went into the service as "recruits" not as "conscripts". The distinction between the two terms is meaningless to us today, but in 1863 there was a real difference. Then a "recruit" was someone who volunteered willingly to become a member of the military and offered to serve his country in time of need. A "conscript" on the other hand, was someone who was forced to join the military. "Recruits" were accepted and respected by the rank and file whereas "conscripts" were shunned and despised as malingerers, disloyal and cowards. In an age where people took pride in their family name, no one wanted to be branded a coward. Both George and Alson served in the Ninth Vermont Infantry and, briefly, were even in the same company. They served as "recruits", not "conscripts".^[11]

George was the first of the Atkins boys on the 1863 draft list made out in June of that year to be offered a choice by the Selectmen of Lincoln to either voluntarily join the army as a recruit or go into the service as a conscript. George chose to enlist as a recruit. His date of enlistment was December 26, 1863. George became a private in Mr. Lincoln's army when he was officially mustered-in at Brattleboro, Vermont January 6, 1864.^[12] According to his own statements, he was thirty years old, a farmer from Lincoln and married. He had blue eyes, brown hair and a light complexion. George claimed to have been born in Bradford, New Hampshire. He stood an average five feet seven inches in height. His records state that he was paid \$25 in bounty at enlistment and owed an additional \$242 which would be paid in installments during his term of service. He was also given one month's pay of \$13 in advance, a \$2 premium (which usually went to the recruiter) and \$35 more bounty from the "Commutation Fund".^[13] This pool of money came from those men who paid a \$300 fee to be exempted from the draft altogether. It

was given as a kind of bonus to those “volunteers” who agreed to serve in the armed forces sort of as a substitute for another man. The war had financial rewards even for the most common of individual civilians.

From his mustering-in on January 4, 1864 to November 1864, Private George Atkins served continually on active duty with the Ninth Vermont. He was present for Newport Barracks and Fort Spinola near New Berne, North Carolina in 1864. He took part in the siege of Petersburg and Richmond in September. He fought in the Battle of Chaffin’s Farm and at Fort Harrison. In October 1864, he was present at Fair Oaks. In November, the Ninth was detached for duty at New York City during the presidential election of 1864. It was here, on November 7, Private George Atkins was taken ill and was confined to a hospital in the city.^[14] What laid him low was never discovered, but it must have been a very serious illness that completely debilitated him. From a New York City hospital, he was admitted to the General Hospital in Brattleboro, Vermont before the end of December 1864.^[15] He remained there throughout January and February, 1865.^[16] On March 16, he was transferred as a patient to Baxter General Hospital in Burlington, Vermont.^[17] Private Atkins stayed at Baxter until May 8, 1865 when he was returned to Brattleboro by orders of the War Department.^[18] Here, on May 13, 1865, he was given a medical discharge only two-thirds the way through his original enlistment period of three years.^[19]

During the summer of 1864, various detachments of the Ninth were employed in dealing with Confederate activity around the New Berne area. Private Atkins (George) and his company (Company C) were stationed at Fort Spinola at this time. September 15, 1864 was the second anniversary of the surrender of the entire Regiment at Harper’s Ferry and was also the date that the Ninth arrived in front of Petersburg. Meanwhile, back in August in Vermont, the second of the four Atkins boys listed on the 1863 draft for Lincoln, was called upon to decide if he wanted to be recorded as a recruit or as a conscript. Alson chose to “volunteer” like his brother, George. Alson claimed to be twenty-four, born in Lincoln, and a farmer. He was a bit shorter than George, standing only five feet five inches tall. But he shared the same complexion, eye and hair color as his brother. However, he did not make out as well financially as George did when he enlisted. Alson only got a \$100 bounty; \$33.33 up front and the rest later at discharge. What he lacked in compensation was more than made up for by being placed in the same regiment and same company as his big brother.^[20] How Alson managed to get assigned to the Ninth Vermont, let alone put into Company C with his brother, defied standard military procedure of the time. It was the War Department’s policy to split men from the same community, region and even state up and assign them to various units rather than lumping them all together in one place to avoid the emotional devastation that heavy casualties in the ranks would cause if they were allowed to serve together. Vermont, in fact, was the only state in the Union Army allowed to form a brigade completely of Vermont troops during the War of Rebellion.

Two days after its arrival in front of Petersburg, September 17, 1864, the Ninth received a detachment of recruits increasing its numbers to 1,129. Among those new arrivals was Private Alson Atkins. For the next three months, George and Alson fought side by side. Together, they saw action at Redoubt Dutton shortly after Alson joined the Ninth. They were both at the Battle of Chapin’s (Chaffin’s) Farm on September 29. On October 27, 1864 they took part in the Battle of Fair Oaks. The brothers went to New York City together in November of 1864 to control the

rioting there during the presidential election. Before the Ninth was sent back to the front at Richmond, Virginia, the brothers became separated due to George becoming hospitalized with an illness. He remained in a New York City hospital while his brother returned to the war in the South.

When Richmond finally fell, Private Alson Atkins was among the rank and file who ran through the burning streets of the Confederate capital and didn't stop until they reached the front steps of the Confederate White House. The Ninth then remained in Richmond as Provost Guard until the shooting war ended April, 1865. On June 13, 1865, the original members of the Ninth were mustered-out. About four hundred recruits remained in the service until December when they were disbanded and sent home. The Ninth Vermont Infantry then became a thing of the past.^[21]

The two brothers were returned to civilian life within a month of each other; George on May 13, 1865 and Alson on June 13, 1865. George had been discharged early due to being unfit for duty because of an illness. Alson was let go due to his expiration of his one year term of service. The Atkins' family was a tight-knit group. George's wife, family and farm had been looked after by his father and brothers while he was in the service. George's home was right next door to his mother and father's place in Lincoln.^[22] Alson most likely returned to his father's farm and went to work assisting him and his brother, Hiram, run the place. But it wasn't too long after his return to Lincoln from the war that Alson's marital status changed from single to married.

His bride was Orissa Rublee (1849-1938). She was the daughter of Samuel Rublee (1799-1866) and Sophia Philips (1813-1902).^[23] The clerks of history had a field day with both her first and last name. Some of the variations for her Christian name were: Oriza; Oresa; Oressy; Orisa; Ariza; Irina; Orison; and Orza. Her surname also received numerous aks forms: Rubilee; Ruberlee; Rubalee; and Rouble. Her death certificate listed her name as Orissa Rublee Atkins. Her grave stone said she was Oriza Rublee. No one seemed to know how to spell it the same way twice which made it difficult to settle on a correct form. This writer chose Orissa Rublee for the sake of moving on. A warning to anyone who wishes to find Alson and Orissa's marker in the Greenwood Cemetery in Bristol; look for a tall, sculptured figure with "Hanks" chiseled on the base of it!! Orissa was a local gal having been born in Monkton, Vermont. She grew up in the towns of Hinesburgh, Bristol and Starksboro.^[24] Her father, Samuel, was a day laborer working for wages to support his family of six children. His entire estate was worth only \$800. The Rublees were not living high off the hog in 1860.^[25] Orissa and Alson were joined in holy matrimony on February 6, 1870 in Starksboro, Vermont. The couple settled on farmland in Lincoln afterwards, snuggling in right next door to George and his wife, Lucinda, who lived next door to Joel and Betsy, their mother and father. The apple did not fall far from the tree! The newlyweds were off to a good start financially speaking. "Elson's" farmland was valued at \$2,500. His personal estate was worth another \$800.^[26] He wasn't the wealthiest farmer in the neighborhood, but he was doing a little better than his brother, George, and was in the race to catch up with his father, Joel.

Alson and Orissa had their first, and only, child in June, 1873. He arrived on the fourteenth of the month as Burton A. Atkins, the newest addition to the Atkins family clan. Burton was adored by his parents; the apple of their eyes. Tragically, his life was cut short by a virus. Burton was suddenly struck with pneumonia and died in 1905 at the age of thirty-one. He left behind a wife, Gertrude, and three young children. The irony around his death was that he was a druggist by

profession. His parents were nearly crushed by their son's early death.^[27] Catastrophe almost struck, literally, the Atkins family in the summer of 1877 when a severe thunderstorm passed through Lincoln. The St. Albans Daily Messenger reported in June: "Lightning struck Alson Atkins' house in Lincoln, the 15th, killing a dog in the kitchen, but doing no other damage."^[28]

The 1880 Federal Census revealed an interesting picture of the Atkins' clan in Lincoln. In sequential order on the census form was listed Joel, Hiram, Alson and George – all of them farmers and married. Joel and Betsy had no children in their home anymore (he was eighty and she was seventy-seven). Hiram had three children. Alson had one child, Burton, despite the fact that the census taker listed a "Murtie" age six as a daughter in the household. She was actually Hiram's daughter. The same man mistakenly placed one "Hurbie" as a member in Hiram's household when it was really Burton who was Alson's son.^[29] Although Alson was a life-long resident of Lincoln, he did not always live next door to his relatives. In 1888, the newspapers reported that Alson had sold his farm to Charlie Atwood for \$1,700.^[30] Alson then bought another farm in Lincoln called the Clark farm.

When the Special Schedule was completed for surviving veterans in 1890, Alson's residence was given as Lincoln. For some reason unknown to anyone but the recorder, the information given about his military service was all wrong. It said he served in the Fifth Vermont, Company G. His date of enlistment was given as July 15, 1862 with a discharge date of July 25, 1864, a period of two years, ten days. Alson actually served in the Ninth Vermont, Company C enlisting on August 20, 1864 and being discharged on June 13, 1865, a period of about ten months. It was noted under disabilities that he suffered from "rheumatism".^[31] When Alson initially applied for a government pension on July 18, 1879, he did not list any rheumatism as his reason for qualifying.^[32] However, when he reapplied for an increase in payments in 1901, he not only used rheumatism as a reason for qualifying, but he added piles, catarrh (an inflammation of the throat and nasal passages) and total deafness in the left ear! For all these disabilities, the Government paid him \$17 per month.^[33]

In the early 1900s, Alson and Orissa were busy buying and selling various tracts of farmland in Lincoln. William Orcutt purchased the Clark farm from Alson in May of 1902.^[34] In June, 1903, Alson sold to Lewis Dwire the Alair lot of about sixteen acres for \$300.^[35] All these real estate transactions were being conducted in the midst of both Alson and Orissa being touted in the local newspapers, even in the State's largest paper, the Burlington Free Press, as the "banner" and "lead" turkey farmers in "this part of the country". The Free Press reported they "had 130 this season which sold for 33 cents per pound. Something of the size may be realized from the fact that one sold for over \$9."^[36] That was about a twenty-seven pound bird. All the positive publicity came to an abrupt halt with the death of Burton A. Atkins, Alson's only son who died of pneumonia in 1905 leaving a grieving daughter-in-law and three young grandchildren behind.^[37] Then tragedy struck Alson again when Orissa was struck down by the same disease that Burton died of. However, Orissa recovered and went on to live a long, prosperous life.^[38]

Alson's own health was rapidly declining as well. In 1909, Sylvester, Alson's youngest sibling, moved into Alson's tenement.^[39] Although not stated in so many words, Sylvester's moving seemed to be purposeful and designed to bring the younger brother to the aid of his older sibling who now needed more constant care. A month later, May 1909, The Bridport Sun in fact

revealed that Alson was “in very poor health”.^[40] A month after that, the Burlington Free Press noted that “Alson Atkins, an old veteran, is in a critical condition from bleeding from the nose and complications.”^[41] The bleeding was a symptom of a condition called “purpura”. Usually it was a skin condition where the small blood vessels rupture, leaving patches of tiny blood spots all over the body. Normally purpura was not fatal to humans and was most often seen in horses. It could be an inherited genetic condition or could be a blood infection caused by things like cancer or scurvy. Sometimes the spots could form in the mucous linings of the mouth or throat. If untreated in humans, purpura could lead to uncontrolled bleeding and death through hemorrhaging.^[42] From June 1909 until October, Alson remained in a low state. Individuals within and outside of the immediate family were called upon to tend to him. Finally, on October 29, 1909 the “old and respected citizen” was relieved of his painful suffering. His death put an end to a long, protracted period of anguish which he bore with “patience and fortitude”.^[43] The entire community mourned the passing of the old veteran. Alson’s official death certificate listed the cause as “Purpura Hemorrhagin”.^[44] He was sixty-nine at the time of his death in Lincoln. The old farmer left his wife, Orissa, three grandchildren and two brothers, Sylvester and George, behind.^[45]

Orissa survived her husband by twenty-nine years. She continued to live in Lincoln. She applied for and received a widow’s pension of \$12 per month commencing on March 3, 1910. This was increased in 1917 to \$25 and then again in 1920 to \$30 per month.^[46] In the meantime, Orissa went to work for the Hill family in Starksboro as a servant.^[47] By 1920, Orissa was seventy-one and no longer worked to support herself. She had income from her widow’s pension to sustain her. She owned her home in West Lincoln free of any mortgage and lived alone well into the 1930s in that \$500 house.^[48] Finally, at over ninety years of age, Orissa became too ill with cancer of the uterus and pneumonia to linger longer.^[49] She died in her home on November 14, 1938.^[50] She lies with her husband, Alson, in Greenwood Cemetery.

NOTES

1. www.ancestry.com, Parrott Family Tree for Joel Atkins.
2. Ibid., Vermont, Vital Records, Death for Alson Denslow Atkins.
3. Ibid., Parrott and Bickford/Barber/Chase Family Trees for Joel Atkins and Elizabeth Betsy Chase.
4. www.findagrave.com, Memorial #69203119 for Elizabeth “Betsy/Betsey” Chase Atkins.
5. www.ancestry.com, Parrott Family Tree for Joel Atkins.
6. www.findagrave.com, for each Atkin sibling.
7. www.ancestry.com, 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Alson Atkins.
8. www.findagrave.com, Memorial #68899039 for Mary Jane Atkins.
9. www.ancestry.com, 1860 U.S. Federal Census for Alson Atkins.
10. Ibid., U.S., Civil War Draft Registration Records, 1863-1865 for Atkins, Alson D.
11. www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Records Of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations From The State Of Vermont, images 311536933 and 610437094 for Alson D. Atkins and George A. Atkins respectively. Hereafter referred to as Compiled Service Records.

12. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, image 311537048 for George A. Atkins.
13. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, image 311537051 for George A. Atkins.
14. [https://civilwarintheeast.com/United States Regiments/Ninth Vermont](https://civilwarintheeast.com/United%20States%20Regiments/Ninth%20Vermont); www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Records, image 311537069 for George A. Atkins.
15. www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Records, image 311537071 for George A. Atkins.
16. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, image 311537076 for George A. Atkins.
17. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, image 311537083 for George A. Atkins.
18. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, image 311537088 for George A. Atkins.
19. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, image 311537106 for George A. Atkins.
20. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, image 311536936 for Alson D. Atkins.
21. Vermont in the Civil War/units/9th VT INF/Regimental History and Introduction.
22. www.ancestry.com, 1870 U.S. Federal Census for Joel Atkins.
23. www.findagrave.com, Memorial #46112895 for Oriza "Orissa" Rublee Atkins.
24. www.ancestry.com, Bickford/Barber/Chase Family Tree for Oriza Ariza Rublee.
25. Ibid., 1860 U.S. Federal Census for Orisa Rouble (sic)
26. Ibid., 1870 U.S. Federal Census for Alson Atkins.
27. www.findagrave.com, Memorial #46083050 for Burton A. Atkins;
www.ancestry.com, 1900 U.S. Federal Census for Burton A. Atkins;
www.newspapers.com, Rutland Daily Herald, Tue., Jan. 24, 1905.
www.newspapers.com, Burlington Free Press, Wed., Jan 25, 1905.
28. Ibid., Rutland Daily Herald, Sat., Jun. 23, 1877.
29. www.ancestry.com, 1880 U.S. Federal Census for Joel Adkins (sic).
30. www.newspapers.com, Burlington Weekly Free Press, Fri., Dec. 7, 1888.
31. www.familysearch.org, 1890 Special Schedule for Alson Atkins.
32. www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Records, image 22815528 for Atkins, Alson D.
33. www.familysearch.org, U.S., Veterans Administration Pension Payment Cards for Atkins, Alson D.
34. www.newspapers.com, Bristol Herald, Thu., May 22, 1902.
35. Ibid., Bristol Herald, Thu., Jun. 11, 1903.
36. Ibid., Bristol Herald, Thu., Nov. 17, 1904; Ibid., The Burlington Free Press, Tue., Nov. 22, 1904
37. Ibid., The Burlington Free Press, Wed., Jan. 25, 1905.
38. Ibid., Montpelier Evening Argus, Wed., Dec. 16, 1908.
39. Ibid., Middlebury Record, Thu., Apr. 8, 1909.
40. Ibid., The Bridport Sun, Thu., May 27, 1909.
41. Ibid., The Burlington Free Press, Sat., Jun. 19, 1909.
42. <https://healthline.com/health/purpura>.
43. www.newspapers.com, Bristol Herald, Thu., Dec. 2, 1909.
44. www.ancestry.com, Vermont, Vital Records, Death for Alson Denslow Atkins.
45. www.newspapers.com, The Orwell Citizen, Thu., Nov. 4, 1909.
46. www.fold3.com, Widows Pension Files for Atkins, Orissa, image 583496642.
47. www.ancestry.com, 1910 U.S. Federal Census for Irina Athins (sic).
48. Ibid., 1930 U.S. Federal Census for Orissa Atkins.
49. Ibid., Vermont, Vital Records, Death for Orissa Atkins.

50. www.newspapers.com, The Burlington Free Press, Tue., Nov. 15, 1938.