

## Ohiowa Soldier

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Mr. Rosenberger, the nephew of John W. Rumpel, has devoted his life to the teaching profession and has served as Professor of Philosophy in Colleges and Universities of five states. He retired in 1954 and since that time has given his time to study and writing. He wishes to thank the grandchildren of John W. Rumpel for permission to use the Civil War papers, diary, and letters of their grandfather.

John and Nancy Rumpel were deeply anxious as they awaited news at their Ohio farm. They knew another big battle had been fought at Bull Run in Virginia and that hundreds of Union Army soldiers had been killed and wounded. Somewhere in that holocaust of blood and violence was their 17-year-old son who was a private in the 55th Ohio infantry. Like all parents since the dawn of history, the Rumpels waited in an agony of suspense for news from the front.

At last came a letter written in John's handwriting and dated after the battle. He was still alive! Better than that, he was not even injured though he had apparently come pretty close to death.

"In the battle," he wrote, "I got a hole tore through my trousers leg just at the top of the boot leg and had my bayonet scabbard tore from my belt. That is close calling hante [aint] it?"

The letter is dated September 12, 1862, shortly after the Second Battle of Bull Run. The Civil War was at a grim stage. More than two and one-half years of bloody fighting remained to be endured before the North would finally vanquish the South.

The Rumpel family lived on a farm in Ohio on which the present city of Fostoria was later built. Their oldest son, John, enlisted in the Fifty-fifth Ohio Regiment September 30, 1861, for a term of three years, re-enlisted January 1, 1864 for the rest of the war, and was mustered out of the service at Louisville, Kentucky, July 11, 1865. At the close of the war he was not yet twenty-one years of age, having at that youthful age attained the rank of "Veteran Volunteer."

Like so many Ohio veterans, Rumpel and his parents turned

their faces westward after the war and came to Iowa to establish their new home. They settled on a farm near Ladora in Iowa County. By 1886, twenty-one years after the war ended, there were 3,212 veterans of Ohio regiments living in Iowa and those Ohioans constituted nearly 10 per cent of the 39,800 Civil War veterans of all states living in Iowa at that time. The Ohio group had their own organization and were known as the "Ohiowa Veterans."<sup>1</sup>

Rumpel was plagued by illness through much of the latter part of the war, the letters disclose, but rather than go home, he remained in the army as a hospital worker. The time of his service may be divided into three periods, varying according to the area in which the service was rendered, in the objective sought, and the general in command, as follows:

1. Two years in Virginia, first in West Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley, then the campaign to take Richmond, ending with the critical battle of Gettysburg and Lee's retreat in 1863.

2. The Chattanooga campaign, first to relieve the Federal army under Rosecrans from siege by the Confederates, then to drive Bragg's army out of Tennessee into Georgia.

3. The march through Georgia to the Sea, taking first Atlanta and then Savannah. The advance of Sherman's army from Raleigh to Washington was not so much a military campaign as a triumphal march which ended in the Grand Review on Pennsylvania Avenue, May 24, 1865.

#### THE BATTLE OF CROSS KEYS

Concerning Fremont's raid up the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, one writer says, "On June 1st [1862], Jackson being routed, we set out after him. This is known as Fremont's raid up the Shenandoah Valley. . . . Fremont [had] gathered by this time an army of 30,000. Jackson had perhaps 20,000."<sup>2</sup>

John Wesley Rumpel wrote in his diary at the time:

Mon. June 2nd. We are still in pursuit of Jackson's army in the Valley. We found numerous burnt bridges, the longest one was at Edinburg Mills where we stopped and took dinner. After dinner marched 8 miles to Mt.

<sup>1</sup> William L. Alexander, *Ex-Soldiers, Sailors and Marines, Living in Iowa* (by order of the General Assembly). Des Moines: Geo. E. Roberts, State Printer, 1886.

<sup>2</sup> W. A. Keesy, *War As Viewed From the Ranks* (1904), p. 31.

Jackson and camped on account of high water. it is still raining.

Frid. 6th. We went to Harrisonburg and as we were getting Supper the 55th. was ordered out to advance a few miles. We got through town and were ordered back, were not needed. when we got back Gen. Schenck made us a Speech.

Sat. 7th. Schenck's Brig[ade] went out on a reconnaissance towards Port Republic to find the whereabouts of the enemy. Returned to camp in eve.

Sun. 8th. The Army left Harrisonburg by the Port Republic road to Cross Keys where the enemy made a stand in which a number was killed or wounded. Our Brig[ade] was not engaged though several men in it were killed by chance shots. The fight ended with the day. The result was about equal. we rested on arms for the night.

Mon. 9th. the enemy retreated to Port Republic We followed him. At P[ort Republic] the bridge was burned across the Shenandoah and we were brought to a stand still.

Tues. 10th. we returned to Harrisonburg 12 miles. it rained hard all day.

Wed. 11th. we marched to New Market.

Thurs. 12th. we marched to Mt. Jackson and camped for to rest and clean up for we were very tired ragged and dirty. We remained here until

Thurs. 19th. when we started by daylight and marched to Woodstock

Frid. 20th. we marched to Strausburg and camped until

Tues. 24th. when we marched to near Middletown and camped.

Sat. 28th. We drew clothing and washed up

In the diary Rumpel reports, "The result was about equal." This would be true if we consider the one action at Cross Keys on June 8th. But the wily Stonewall had spent most of his life in the Valley, and knew it from A to Z, and he had a way of making lightning-like thrusts at his foes, followed by rapid retreats. His tactics were confusing to one unfamiliar with the rough country over which they fought, and his retreats were often intended to draw the enemy into ambush. So the question is: Were the Federals under Fremont really driving Jackson, or were they following him while he drew them into a trap?

Fremont had divided his forces, placing the two armies on

opposite sides of the river, hoping to catch Jackson between the two and crush him. But instead, Jackson used the division of the Federal armies to defeat them in separate actions. All he needed in the battle of Cross Keys was to blunt the attack of Fremont and stop his advance. The next morning he withdrew his army across the river and burned the bridge, so that Fremont could not cross the river to help the Federal army under Shields. While Fremont was retreating to Harrisonburg on June 10th, Jackson was dealing with the army under Shields. When Shields could get no help from Fremont he had to face Jackson alone and was defeated. In light of the second day's battle, it is clear that Jackson's *retreat* across the river at Port Republic was a retreat to victory.

Among the Rumpel papers there is preserved the fragment of a letter that was written to his father a few days after Cross Keys and telling of the devastation seen on the battlefield. It was written about June 19 at Woodstock, as the army of Fremont was on its way down the valley toward Winchester. It is to be regretted that almost half of this four-page letter has been lost, for it evidently gave a full description of the battle. The third page of this letter (so far as it can be made out) reads:

...and saw the enemys position in a field containing about 20 acres. there were 20 dead horses laying in it, 7 in one pile which our cannon balls had Shot from one of their batterys. dead horses were strung along all the way to Port Republic. Our loss was about 20 [?] killed wounded and missing. Our regiment did not lose a man. You must understand we are going back the Same way we came. . . . We have stacked . . . and will Stay here to night and to morrow we will probably get to Strausburgh. . . . When we get . . . knapsacks I will write often. I wish you would write Soon. please send a Sheet of paper and envelopes in the next letter you write. I have plenty post Stamps but I cant get paper handy. I want you to tell me whether you received that money that I Sent you with William Chamberlins. Write Soon and tell me all about the things around home Our captain is sick and expects to go home. he has the rheumatism in the back Nothing more at present but remaining

Yours truly

J W Rumpel

To John Rumpel

Direct to me Co. B 55th  
 Regt O.V.I. In care of  
 Capt Bement Via New creek Va.

I forgot to tell you the name of our battle It is called the  
 battle of Cross Keys.

[Then follows a drawing of two keys crossed, to represent  
 the battle.]

Ten days later, on June 29th John wrote:

Camp Near Middletown Va June 29th 1862

Dear father & mother I sit down in my shade this  
 forenoon to write you a few lines and to inform you that I  
 am well at present and hoping this will find you the  
 same we are camped on a beautiful clover field on a nice  
 hill and the scenery of the blueridge mountain is beautiful  
 and the weather is warm Middletown is a beautiful town  
 by sight pleasantly situated about half way between  
 Strausburg & front royal it is about . . . Middletown to  
 front royal Mr. Chamberlain came back to the regiment  
 when we were at Strausburg & brought some things which  
 you sent me a letter two cases of likenesses and some  
 thread I wrote an answer to the letter as soon as I re-  
 ceived it we are expecting our knapsacks and tents to  
 come every hour they are on the road back about 5 or 6  
 miles as we have not had them since 5 weeks ago next  
 tuesday We have slept out in the open air ever since and  
 have had some very hard marching and sometimes pretty  
 slim rations But however the slimness of the rations could  
 not be helped as we were marching in pursuit of the  
 enemy and at a very fast rate the country is very moun-  
 tainous through here but we have been marching in the  
 valley and on a beautiful piked road I have stood it very  
 well ever since we have been on the march and in fact  
 ever since I have been in the service with very few  
 acceptions Capt Bement has got a furlough and has gone  
 home and before you get this letter you will see him and  
 get the letter I sent with him If when the Capt comes  
 back you hear that we are on the railroad where trans-  
 portation is handy because you will know it if we are  
 Please send a small box of provision and if you send it  
 send some butter especially if not much else if it is not  
 too much trouble to you and Capt B dont send it unless  
 we are some place where we can get it dont send any  
 meat for we have plenty of it here I must send this  
 letter without a stamp as our knapsacks hante here yet I  
 have plenty stamps in it I must close for this time So  
 good bye

John W. Rumpel to John Rumpel

How Rumpel and a comrade observed Fourth of July, 1862 he relates in another letter, a portion of which follows:

Camp near Middletown Va.

Fourth of July 1862

I just came off Picket and eat my supper. when I was on picket this morning I and Solomon Sheller got a lot of ripe cherrys and when we came in we stewed them for Supper for a 4th. of July feast. we boiled some rice and had got some light cakes last night. so when we came in camp I washed myself and we went right to cooking. Solomon he Stewed the cherrys and I boiled the rice and then we ate our suppers. I knowed yesterday that if I would go out on picket, I would have something else to eat except hard crackers [and] beaf. We just finished . . . So I thought I would Sit down and write you a few lines which will inform you that I am well at present and doing well I received your letter day before yesterday and was glad to hear from you that you were well. The wheat crops are fine here, the citizens are engaged in cutting what the army did not destroy, it is well filled there is not much corn in this country this summer. As to the body guards [bedbugs or lice?] I have not got any yet although they are in the whol regt. and in the company I have got plenty of that salve yet. . . . [I wish you] would write and tell me all about the 4th. of July at home. In this letter I will send you some of our crackers, taste him and see how you like him. I would like to be at home and help you harvest but I guess I cant come home but if I could I would come and help you!! later the male has Just came in and I received the Fostoria news of June 27th I get it regular now but when we are on the march I cannot get it . . . As to the Soap that you Spoke about We get [plenty] of it it is no job to keep clean when in camp. I will herein enclose a letter which I received from Elijah Nieble when we were in Strausburg. I understood that the 5th. regt. O V has gone to Camp McClellan where we was camped at Norwalk to recruit up, they were pretty badly cut up by Sickness and in battle.

Nothing more at present

But write Soon Yours as ever truly

J W Rumpel

To John Rumpel

#### BATTLE OF SECOND BULL RUN

This battle, fought on August 29 and 30, 1862, is called Second Bull Run, or Second Manassas, because it was fought over much the same ground as First Bull Run in 1861, and was

one of the severest contests of the war. The so-called Ohio Brigade, commanded by General Robert C. Schenck, composed of four Ohio regiments—25th, 55th, 73rd, and 75th—took an active and strategic part in this battle and suffered severe losses in killed and wounded.

A personal account of the battle is preserved for us in a letter written by J. W. Rumpel to his parents a few days after the battle:

Washington City,  
Sept. 12th 1862

Dear Father & mother,

I sit down this evening to write you a few lines & to inform you that I am well at present and I hope this will find you the same. I would have written often but the mail rout was stopped until the fighting was over, But I still recd. letters. Since I wrote last I have recd 2 letters from cousin John and one from Jacob. I got a letter from John night before last He is at Rienzi Miss. and is well. Jacob is at Memphis Tenn. and is well. Since I wrote you last we have been in a pretty hard battle, the battle of Bulls Run fought Saturday August the 30th There [was] artillery firing nearly all day But about 3 o'clock the [battle] commenced with musketry and cannonading both. Our Regt. was in it first of our brigade We were guarding a battery in front of the rest of the brigade The Shells commenced coming and some lit in our ranks So the Col thought it time for us to be doing something too So we deployed out in line of battle & marched on the hill & fired a round But the bullets came too strong for us So we retreated back through a piece of woods and joined our brigade. By this time the enemy had flanked us on the left So we had to change direction to the left We fought for more than 2 hours Our Regt made 3 charges up on the hill They came from the woods into a large field and about the middle of the field was a house There were a column of rebels on each side of it We broke the column to the right of the house & cut them all to pieces But to the left they were 5 columns deep Then they pored the grape and cannister into us with a cross fire and cut our Brigade up pretty badly Our Regt lost 90 in killed wounded and missing Our company lost 17, 3 killed 12 wounded & 2 missing . . . Corporal Theodore Hunt fell out of the ranks 3 days after the fight as we were marching from Centerville to Fairfax coming this way We marched in the night & we all got very sleepy and he being not very well fell out and it is supposed that he was picked up by the rebels as we heard

nothing from him since & the rebels were at our heels. In the battle I got a hole tore through my trousers leg just at the top of the boot leg & had my bayonet scabbard tore from my belt That is close calling hante it.

Well, we are camped about 2 miles from the city [Washington, D.C.] we have a nice view of the capital & the white house from the hill above us. I was over in town day before yesterday, it is a nice town. Our Brigade is reported unable for duty So will rest a while. Col. McClane commanding the Brigade is trying to get our Brigade to go to Cincinnati as it is composed of Ohio Regts. I am Sorry to Say that our old Bull dog Gen. Schenck was wounded 3 times twice in one arm He will recover Soon As it is getting dark I will bring my letter to a close.

Direct to me Schencks Brigade

Sigels Corps

Co B 55th Regt. O.V.

Via Washington D.C.

Nothing more

Yours truly

John W Rumpel

To J & N Rumpel

All accounts of the struggle on the Federal left wing praise the heroism of General Robert Schenck and his Ohio Brigade. The strategy of the Confederates had brought the Federal army where it was shut up within a curve of Bull Run creek, with but one road on which to retreat, which road led across a narrow stone bridge. Bald Hill must be held while the rest of the army retreated across the Stone Bridge, otherwise the withdrawal toward Centreville could have been turned into a rout and the loss of a large part of the Federal army. To the credit of the Ohio Brigade it must be said that they held the hill long enough to enable the remainder of Pope's army to cross the bridge and continue their withdrawal toward Washington.

A year later, in a letter dated September 5, 1863, when his regiment was about to leave the Army of the Potomac and join the forces under Grant in the Chattanooga campaign, Rumpel sent to his father some pictures of his favorite generals:

I will Send you the pictures of the first and second generals that we was under. Gen. Schenck the first and Gen. Fremont the 2nd. He [Fremont] commanded the Army when we went up the Shenandoah Valley after Old



Jackson. Gen. Schenck commanded our Ohio Brigade at the Same time You can tell by his looks what kind of a nature he is. I call him the best General that we ever was under He was wounded at the battle of Bull Run He thinks all the world of the 55th. We used to hollow a good deal for old Bob Schenck . . . The next time I write I will Send you the 2 next ones, that is Seigel and McClean and the last one I will Send Gen Meade alone I want you to put these in little frames and keep them nice.

#### CHANCELLORSVILLE

It is interesting to note the brief account which Rumpel gives of the Battle of Chancellorsville in his diary on May 2, 1863. There is no letter left to us which even mentions Chancellorsville though he no doubt wrote to his family after the battle, to notify them of his survival.

An account of the Army's march to the fateful field of battle, as given by Rumpel's diary, is as follows:

Mon. 27th. [April] We broke camp at Brock's Station at 6 o'clock and marched in the direction of Kelly's Ford 12 miles.

Tues. 28th. We started at 6 o'clock and marched near Kelly's Ford and camped at 2 o'clock At 4 we started and crossed the [Rappahannock] river at midnight. Formed a line and marched 5 miles, and laid down and slept till morning.

Wed. 29th. We started at 11 o'clock and marched to the Rapidan [River] and camped for the night, distance 8 miles.

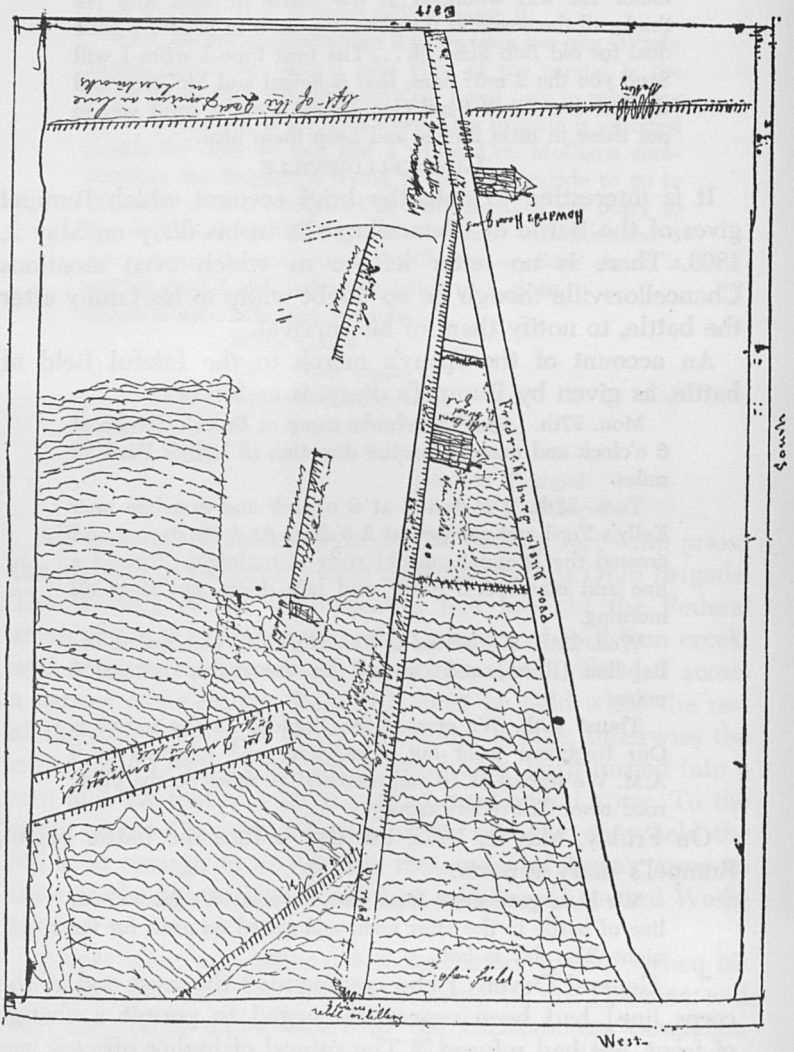
Thurs. 30th. We crossed the Rapidan in the morning. Our Regiment went out skirmishing and returned at 9 A.M. We started at 10 and marched 10 miles on the plank road towards Fredericksburg.

On Friday, May 1, 1863, the day before the battle began, Rumpel's diary reports:

We have good news from Gen. Hooker. We formed our line of battle in the after noon and rested on arms for the night. The day is hot.

" . . . General Devens [who commanded the west end of the corps line] had been repeatedly urged to permit a change of front, but had refused."<sup>3</sup> The refusal of higher officers was due to their belief that the rebels were retreating, but the under-officers who were on the spot knew that they were

<sup>3</sup> Captain Hartwell Osborn and Others, *Trials and Triumphs The Record of the Fifty-fifth Ohio Volunteer Infantry* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1904), p. 71.



Map drawn by J. W. RUMPEL of the Battle of Chancellorsville

massing to attack. The regiments on the right wing where the attack was soon to be made were in position facing south, but Jackson was about to attack from the west and would strike them in the flank. And this was what occurred. "The Twenty-fifth Ohio at last changed front and began to fire. The Fifty-fifth [Ohio] formed behind it. After about three volleys the Twenty-fifth broke. The Fifty-fifth held for two volleys and then broke back, and the whole clearing became one mass of panick-stricken soldiers flying at the top of their speed."<sup>4</sup>

The account in Rumpel's diary reflects the same confused notion that the rebels were retreating instead of attacking. It also records the death of the captain of his company [B] and his own escape from the rebel trap:

Sat. [May] 2nd. The battle of Chancellorsville. The morning is clear and the rebels are said to be leaving us. We marched back to our old position and our Co went out on picket to relieve Co C. We were relieved at 6 P.M. by Co K. . . . The enemy attacked us at half past 6, we are obliged to fall back. Capt Sauter is killed. We went back to the Chancellors house, reorganized and rested on arms.

Sun. 3rd. The morning is clear. Our corps is on the extreme left behind the breastworks. Fighting again commenced on the right and kept up all forenoon. We drove the enemy's left flank. I am sick, and went to the hospital near the ford.

Mon. 4th. The Regiment is still lying at the breastworks. I am at the Hospital. There is not much firing going on to day.

Tues. 5th. The morning is clear. Dr. Kling gave me a pass to go across the river [Rappahannock]. I went towards Brock's Station. It rains in the after noon. I Staid in a corn crib all night.

Wed. 6th. It rained nearly all day. I started to walk, went one and a half mile and got into an ambulance and rode to Stoneman's Switch. Got off and rode the cars to Brock's Station to the Hospital. The Regt. came back in the eve.

Two letters which John Rumpel sent home during the month of June seem to indicate that he did not accompany his regiment when they were engaged in the battle of Gettysburg, but was a helper at Camp Convalescent near Alexandria, Virginia, where the wounded from the battles around

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Washington were cared for. The first letter, dated June 5, was written a few days before the army broke camp and started north, and shows that he was employed as cook in a division hospital of the Eleventh Corps:

First Division Hospital  
11th Army Corps  
June 5, 1863

Dear Father—I Sit down this afternoon being I have a little leisure time to write you a few lines to inform you that I am middling well at present, although I am a little lame from the rheumatism in my right knee. Whenever I have a good deal of walking to do it bothers me considerable, therefore I will not be able to march probably not this Summer for it is getting worse than it was. I will Stay here as long as I can. I like it first rate, we have got a good boss, he is well pleased with me. If it had not been for him I would not have got this place. He will keep me as long as he can, he has charge of the whole concern. We are cooking for the convalescents of the whole 11th. Corps. His name is Silas G. Linebook [Linebach ?], Co. B, 157th. [151st ?] Regt. New York Volunteers.

Since I last wrote our Regt. has been put in the 2nd Division under General Stineware [Steinwehr]. We have to wear the white half moon instead of the red. the half moon is the mark of the 11th. Corps. Each corps has its own mark and each Division is known by its color. the 1st. Div. red, the 2nd. white, and the 3rd. blue. there are 3 Divisions, the red, white and blue. I will herein send you my old badge that I had when I was in the 1st Div. I am going to get me a white one for the 2nd. Div.

I got my likeness taken yesterday, I will Send it to you. We received 2 months pay the other day I will Send 10 dollars, the number of the bill is 88233 in red figures. I received that book and the letter which you Sent by D. Stackhouse.

In the closing paragraph of this letter of early June, we find an ominous forecast of things to come, the promise of a second movement of the Army of the Potomac in its summer campaign. In spite of the humiliating defeat of Gen. Joseph Hooker at Chancellorsville, Rumpel still has confidence in him. He thinks the Federals may soon cross the river and "go at the rebels again," but he does not realize that Gen. Lee has already seized the initiative in a second invasion of the North, and that Hooker and his army will soon be marching northward toward Gettysburg:

Old Joe is about ready to go at the rebels again. He went across the river with part of his force and captured Fredericksburg yesterday evening. We could hear the cannonading here quite plain. I expect there will be a grand move inside of a week. I think a couple more battles will close the war. If our boys goes across the Rappahannock again they will fight pretty hard before they come back. If I could stand it I would be along with them. But I cant Stand it to carry a knapsack with 8 or 10 days rations and 60 rounds of cartridges, there is no use for me to try it. I will have to close for this time as it is Supper time. Still direct to the 1st. Division.

Write Soon

Yours truly J W Rumpel

Dont direct to the Regt.'

To John Rumpel

From the following letter, it is reasonably certain that Rumpel was not with his regiment at the opening of the battle of Gettysburg, on July first, 1863. Since he was at Alexandria near Washington on June 30th, he could not have been with the Fifty-fifth Ohio which, on that date, was at Emmitsburg, Maryland, reached Gettysburg the next day at noon, and was immediately engaged in the battle for the possession of that strategic town:

Camp Convalescent, Alexandria, Va

(Near Fort Lyon) June the 30th. 1863

Dear Father—I thought I would Sit down this morning . . . to inform you that I am middling well at the present time hoping that this will find you all the Same. I have written you Several letters and Sent 10 dollars of money and have not received any answer from any of them I wrote you a letter when I first came to this camp I wish you would write and let me know whether you have received any of them I am now detailed to work in the convalescent cook house. I have nothing to do but to sweep a little. That is not hard work and I can do it very easy. We have to cook for about five thousand men. We have a large furnace to cook in and can do it up pretty quick.

We have got a new Commander of the army of the Potomac it is Gen Mead. Gen Hooker has been removed this was done to blindfold the enemy while they are on the move. I hope and think that they will accomplish something good and that the Army of the Potomac can have the name of gaining one victory at least, which they have not done Since we belonged to it. I think that they have got old Bob Lee in a pretty tight place and I hope they will get him in the Same fix that Gen Grant has Gen Pemberton at Vicksburg. then I think that this rebellion

is about at an end and then we can all go home and be contented. It must take a good while to crush Such a rebellion as this but when it is put down it will be down to Stay there

I want you to write and tell me what you think about the war and how they are getting along with raising the Militia in Ohio I have not heard anything from that State I don't get any letters or papers from there I have not got the Fostoria News for about a month and only one Protestant Since you commenced Sending it I would be glad if I could get some letters from you so I could tell whether you have heard from me or not If I get Sick so I will have to go to the Hospital I will try to get a Sick furlough to go home and Stay till I get well. . . I will have to close for this time hoping that you will write soon.

Yours Respectfully

Direct to Camp Convalescent  
Near Alexandria, Va. Via Washington D.C.

If you want to write to any of the boys in the Regt.  
Direct to Co B 55th. Regt. O.V.I. 2nd. Brigade 2nd.  
Division 11th Army Corps.

Smith's Brigade  
Steinwehr's Division  
Howard's Corps

It is of interest to note in the above letter of June 30 the reason given for the change of commanders from Hooker to Meade, which took place on June 28, as the army was approaching Gettysburg. It was to deceive the enemy. We now know that the real reason for the change was a disagreement between Hooker and the Federal authorities, plus a long standing lack of confidence in him on the part of President Lincoln and certain members of his cabinet, especially Secretary of War Stanton.

#### THE MOVE WESTWARD

After Gettysburg, in the summer of 1863, there was a lull in the fighting and some changes in strategy, as both sides reviewed the situation and reorganized their forces. Due partly to the stalemate in the East, more attention was given to the West where, though Grant's brilliant campaign had cleared the Mississippi Valley for the Union, there was still much land to be possessed. The most important stronghold east of the Mississippi River was Chattanooga in southern Tennessee, which could serve the Union as a gateway for the

invasion of the southeastern states of the Confederacy. The Federal army in this area was commanded by General Rosecrans, the Confederates were under General Bragg. These had met in September of 1863 at Chickamauga Creek in northern Georgia, with the result that the Federals were driven back into Chattanooga, where they were under siege by Bragg's army which held the heights surrounding the city. If Bragg should succeed in the capture of Chattanooga, with the whole of Rosecrans' army, Grant's victory at Vicksburg would be largely nullified, and the Western campaign would have to start over again. Both sides rushed help to the area, but the Confederate force under Longstreet arrived some weeks ahead, so that the situation hung in the balance, with the prospect of an early victory for the Confederates.

It is at this juncture that the second phase of John W. Rumpel's army career begins. The first intimation we have that the shifting of troops might involve a change for the 55th Ohio regiment is seen in a letter dated September 5 and addressed to his father:

The report is at headquarters that they are going to Send us into Some other Army, that is, the Ohio troops. . . . There are only 4 Reg[imen]ts of Ohio troops in this Army any more. There used to be 13 Ohio Regts. They have all been moved from here Since the battle of Gettysburg except the 4 Regts, they are the 55th, 61st, 73rd, 82nd. Neither of these has over 300 men in. The 82nd. has only 150 men for duty. When a reg[imen]t gets reduced that low I think they ought to send them some place to guard and do garrison duty.

The transfer from East to West meant at least three things for J. W. Rumpel and the 55th Ohio Infantry: First, they leave the Army of the Potomac, which up to Gettysburg had known nothing but defeat, and join the Army of the Tennessee, which in the future was to know only victories. Second, in the battles around Chattanooga they came under the command of Ulysses S. Grant, fresh from the victory of Vicksburg. Thirdly, they would be included in the Western army under Sherman, which was to cut a destructive path through the Southern States and bring the war to an earlier close.

On September 23, this telegram was sent by Secretary Stanton to the heads of two railroads, for the purpose of securing

transportation for the troops to be sent to the help of Rosecrans, "Please come to Washington as soon as you can."<sup>5</sup> On September 25, "The Eleventh Corps reported at Washington to General Hooker, who had been assigned to command the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps. The movement of the two corps from Washington to Bridgeport, Alabama, a distance of 994 miles, was a remarkable achievement. In addition to the 7500 men of the Eleventh, the Twelfth Corps required transportation for some 10,000 men. The batteries of the two corps numbered 25 guns and 20 guns respectively, while the trains of wagons and ambulances numbered 717 vehicles, requiring 3403 animals for their use. This immense army and its materials were transported to their destination in 9 days. . . . The journey was full of incident and interest. The men were conveyed in box-cars, rudely seated, and accommodating some 30 to 40 men each. One passenger coach to each train provided partial quarters for the officers. . . . The route followed was via the Baltimore and Ohio and Pennsylvania lines, thence via Louisville and Nashville and Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroads."<sup>6</sup>

Let us notice the life of the camp, as Rumpel records it in his diary just prior to the change from East to West:

Mon. [Sept.] 14th. We are still in camp at Bristow Station. Tues. 15th. I am on guard. We stand guard every other day. Sat. 19th. [Written later in pencil] Battle of Chickamauga, Ga. Tues. 22nd. I was out to Brentsville after boards to build shanties. Thurs. 24th. We have orders to be ready to march at 6 o'clock tomorrow morning.

Then notice a letter written hastily the same evening, filled with the excitement incident to the breaking of camp and rumors as to their destination:

Bristow Station, Va.  
Sept. 24th [Year omitted]

Dear Father—

I sit down this evening to write you a few lines which will inform you that I am well at the present time hoping this will find you all the same. I wrote Margaret a letter today and since I wrote that, we have got orders to be ready with 5 days cooked rations to leave at a minutes notice after 6 o'clock in the morning. We are going Some-

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 115.



where on the cars. All the teams and ambulances have been turned over to the Government. We dont know where we are going. Some think we are going down in the Southwest to reinforce Rosecrans and others think that we will go to Charleston [S.C.] The next time you hear from me we will be some where else probably a thousand miles from here, its hard to tell.

Your affectionate Son

J. W. Rumpel

Resuming the diary report of Sept. 24th:

Thurs. 24th. We started in the night at 10 o'clock and marched to Manassas Junct[ion] and rested till morning Frid 25th. We got aboard the cars and went to Washington Via Alexandria. Rode all night on the Baltimore & Ohio R. R.

Sat. 26th. We reached New Creek [Va.] in the evening. went via Cumberland [Md], rode all night, reached Grafton [Va.] in the morning at 4 o'clock and took breakfast.

Sun. 27th. We reached Bellaire at noon, took dinner and crossed the Ohio River after dinner. We got aboard the cars, rode all night Via Belmont, Ohio, to Columbus, O., arrived there at 4 o'clock A.M.

Mon. 28th. We took breakfast at Columbus. Dayton at 8 A.M. Richmond [Ind.] at 11. Cambridge City at 1 P.M. Indianapolis for Supper . . .

Tues. 29th. Got aboard a boat, crossed the Ohio to Louisville, Ky. Breakfast at Soldiers Home. Aboard the cars Via Bo[w]ling Green, Ky. to Nashville, Tenn., arriving in evening. Started on, rode all night, reached Stevenson, Ala. in the morning.

Wed. 30th. We went on, arrived at Bridgeport, Ala., and went into camp awaiting arrival of the remainder of our troops . . . There was an explosion of Shells at the Battery above our Camp, 25 were killed and wounded.

The first letter, that has been preserved, from J. W. Rumpel after his arrival in Alabama is dated October 15, 1863, and addressed to his father from Stevenson. It gives a brief review of the journey westward and some of his first impressions of the South:

Stevenson, Jackson Co. Ala.

Oct. the 15th. '63.

Dear Father—

I sit down this evening to write you a few lines which will inform you that I am well at the present time hoping that this will find you enjoying good health. I wrote you a

letter when we first came into this State at Bridgeport, I did not know whether you had received that one or not, I thought I would write another One. We came to Bridgeport last Saturday, it is 10 miles. We are guarding this Post We have been assigned to Gen. Hookers command He has taken command of the railroad from Nashville to Chattanooga We expect to Stay here all winter It has been raining here for the last 4 days Study [steady] and the roads are very bad We have Seen Several of the 49th. But we have not Seen the Regt. If you See Wm Franklin tell him to let me know about what time he comes through here and I will be at the Station and See him tell him if he gets a Chance to stop at Stevenson Alabama. Our Regt. is here and tell him to write me Soon.

When we came through Maryland I Saw Ira Willis and Joseph Myers they belong to the 123rd. I did not get to to talk long as we were just coming through. I must tell you that we were in old Virginia just 20 months and one day. We went into it on Sunday and came out of it on Sunday and crossed the river at the Same place. We have not quite a year to Stay yet. Some Say we will be discharged 4 months before our time is out. They allow us 40 days furlough every year and we have not had any at all that is allowed us by the regulations they mean those that enlisted under the first 7500[0] call If they do that we will get home in June or July next.

Solomon Sheller is well and hearty When we came down here I Saw the negroes picking cotton for the first time It is a pretty nice thing if I had Some I would Send Some to you When we were at Bridgeport our Lieutenant went out and got a Stalk of corn the Stalk was 15 feet long and the ear had 22 rows of grain on it That is bigger than you can raise in the Buckeye State

I will have to close for this time Write Soon and give me all the news

Yours truly  
J W Rumpel

Direct to Co B 55th Regt OVI. Via Nashville Tenn.  
Tell Uncle Dan to write to me Please Send me Some post Stamps

#### COPPERHEADISM

The dictionary defines a Copperhead as a term applying to "a Northern sympathizer with the South during the United States Civil War." The word was probably derived from the fact that members of a secret organization of Northern sympathizers with the Southern cause wore on the lapels of their

coats a round copper insignia to identify themselves to one another. Later, it became a term of reproach and was used by their opponents to associate them and their secret methods with the activity of a poisonous reptile bearing the same name. It is almost impossible for later generations of Americans to understand that a large element of Northern population was opposed to an aggressive war to force the seceding states back into the Union. We need to recall that even as loyal a Northerner as Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, had said, after the Southern states had seceded, "Let the erring sisters go," meaning that, while secession was not a constitutional right, still it was better to have an independent nation to the south of us than to carry on a devastating war to force their return to the Union.

The Copperhead issue first came to a head in the election for governor of Ohio in the fall of 1863, where a main issue was whether Ohio would continue to support the Union or move toward secession. John Brough was the candidate on the Union ticket, while those who favored withdrawing from the war and possibly leaving the Union, placed as their candidate a certain Clement Valandigham, whose disloyal sentiments had caused President Lincoln to send him to the South as an exile from whence he fled to Canada, where he stood as Democrat candidate, in absentia, for governor of Ohio. In a letter dated October 15, 1863, Rumpel writes to his father: "We had our Election here day before yesterday. there was not a valandigham vote in the Regt, there was 296 votes for Brough. Bully for John Brough! We have no doubt but he will be elected."

Evidently this movement among the people of the North troubled the minds of a good many soldiers at the front by giving them the uneasy feeling that they were not fully supported by the home folks. Rumpel was heartened by the account of a large mass meeting held in the home town of Fostoria, news of which had come to him through the local paper. Writing to his father from Bristow Station, Virginia, on September 24, 1863, he says:

I recd the Fostoria News in this evenings mail. I have read the details of the Grand Union Mass Meeting at Fostoria. it is indeed cheering to read such news as that. We

are glad to hear that we have so many lovers of our Cause at home yet. You don't know what good it does a soldier to hear Such news It strengthens his courage and encourages us to fight on in our glorious Cause. I will have to close for this time.

As to the results of this election in Ohio, we learn that Valandigham was defeated by Brough by nearly 100,000 votes.

But the letter in which young Rumpel most thoroughly airs his views on Copperheadism and castigates them with severity, is dated August 30, 1863, and sent from the Camp at Bristow Station, Virginia:

Dear Father—

I Sit down with pleasure this Sabbath afternoon to answer your letter dated the 23rd of this month, it came to hand last night. it found me middling well and in good Spirits The report is at Headquarters that our Regt and the 73rd Ohio are going back to the State Somewhere on the Ohio river This seems to be a true report I just wish they would take us there and let us fight the Copperheads Our Regt would fight there as well as any where The 55th is for John Brough Unanimous and this is just the kind of Regt they want there

We have been in Service almost 2 years and as much as we have marched and fought we are not too tired to fight the Copperheads. Our Ohio boys here are aching to get back there to fire a couple volley at them and then laugh to see them Scatter and Skedaddle If we go there you will hear from us We have got a gallant Colonel and all good officers and we will follow them through the Struggle

I would like to know what the 43rd Ohio Militia is doing why dont they arm them and let them go to work May-be they are all copperheads too. Well suppose they are, we are enough to clean out all Such trash I receive the paper every week I have not received that paper and envelopes that you sent me I am on guard today I will have to close for this time, it is almost time for me to go on guard I am for Brough and Union.

Give my advice to the Copperheads, and tell them that when we get there we will give them Some medicine

Yours truly

John W Rumpel

To John Rumpel

We have already learned that Rumpel's regiment did not return to his native Ohio to quell the Copperheads, but was sent farther west and south to assist the forces under Grant

in relieving the siege of Chattanooga and driving the forces of Bragg out of that area.

The next mention of the Copperhead movement to be found in Rumpel's letters appears in one dated August 11, 1864, when the Army of Sherman had laid siege to the city of Atlanta. In it we find evidence that J. W. Rumpel was not with his regiment in active service, but was serving in the hospital corps, in the United States Field Hospital, located at Vining Station, Georgia. This hospital was a vital part of Sherman's Army which had enveloped the city:

U. S. Genl. Field Hospital,  
Vining Sta., Ga.  
Aug. 11, 1864

Dear Father—

I See by the papers that the copperheads are trying to raise a fuss in the North. I think there ought to be enough Union men in the North to quell them. I have took notice that they are the worst when our Army is the most Victorious. Last fall, the time of the New York riots, our Armies were gaining victory after victory. So it is now. I have no more faith in the copperhead, not even in his honesty as a neighbor or friend. They are as the bible says like the devil. I'll warrant you that there are a good many who would delight in killing a Union man or Soldier if they could do it and no body find it out. They may wear a pleasant face and countenance But they are murderous at the heart.

Solomon Sheller was all right the last I heard from him. I See Wm. Carlisle nearly every day. He belongs to the 9th O. V. Cavalry. They just got in off that raid the other day with Gen. Roussau away down in central Alabama and Georgia. They made a very Successful raid in tearing up the railroad and burning Rebel Government Stores. They also captured a good deal of Silver and gold.

I would like to be at home this fall about election time. I expect there will be a good many noses Stuffed about that time. The boys are all in for old Abe. I have not received the Fostoria News since I have been with the Hospital. I received those papers that you Sent me, The Meth[odist] Prot[estant] and the N. Y. Tribune. I will close for this time. Hoping to hear from you Soon.

Your affectionate Son J W Rumpel  
Direct: J W Rumpel To His father John Rumpel  
U S General Field Hospital & Malinda J Rumpel

## THE CHATTANOOGA CAMPAIGN

The opening of the Chattanooga campaign may be dated from the time Grant reached that place on October 23, 1863. The first important troop movement occurred the following day, when the Eleventh Corps left Stevenson, Alabama, for Bridgeport on its way toward Chattanooga. For Rumpel, it marked his nineteenth birthday, as his diary records:

Sat. 24th. We got marching orders and marched to Bridgeport, arrived there at 4 P. M. to day I am 19 years old

Sun. 25th. We are putting up our Shanties at Bridgeport, the day is cold We started in the evening and marched to Shell Mound Station, arrived there at 11 o'clock PM. Our Co. went on picket

Mon. 26th. We are still on picket We expect an attack We were relieved in the evening.

Tues. 27th. The day is cloudy. Our Corps came up at noon We started at 10 o'clock P.M. and marched along the railroad and camped in the evening at Falling Waters.

Wed. 28th. We started and marched to the fortifications near Lookout Mts. they shelled us on the way We encamped in the valley in the evening our Regt went out on picket

Thurs. 29th. The 12th. Corps had a fight with the rebs Our Brig drove the rebs off raccoon mountains and took possession We were relieved [from picket duty] and went to the Mts. and throwed up breastworks and remained there

Frid. 30th. We are still in the breastworks We received our mail drew a letter from J N Rumpel and a picture  
Camp Lookout Valley, Tenn.

Nov. 16th, 1863

Dear Sister

I Sit down this afternoon [to answer your] welcome letter which came to hand a few days ago and was glad to hear that you were all well. I am not very well at the present time I am not doing any duty now

We are now encamped on the Side of the Raccoon Mountains under the firing of the rebel guns on Lookout Mountain they have been Shelling us for nearly 3 weeks and only killed one man of our Regt Our men can do more damage in 20 minutes than they can do to us in a week Old Gen Grant Says that in ten days he can get them off that Mountain without firing a gun. If he can do that it will be a good thing

Meanwhile, we see that Grant is quietly laying the groundwork for future victory. The "cracker-line" was established, by which the army of Rosecrans was relieved from the threat of starvation. We shall later see, when the day of victory arrives, how the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps under Hooker will drive the Confederates off of Lookout Mountain in the brilliant "Battle above the Clouds." For the present we read in Rumpel's diary, that the men of the Fifty-fifth Ohio are preparing breastworks on Raccoon Mountain for any emergency that may come:

Mon. [Nov] 2nd. We moved further to the right and commenced building more breastworks

Tues. 3rd We finished our breastworks there is nothing important

Wed. 4th. Still in the breastworks I am not very well

Thurs. 5th The rebels are shelling us once in a while

Sun. 8th All is quiet on the line we expected an attack this evening.

Tues. 10th We moved back and went into camp

Wed. 11th P Marguat was struck with a shell and mortally wounded

Frid. 13th We are still in camp I am not well, off duty

Sun. 15th I was at the Corps Hospital

Wed. 18th there is cannonading off to the right to day

Frid. 20th The day is clear I am not very well

Sat. 21st. The day is rainy M. Grove and J. Fell returned from the Hospital

At last the day of battle and of victory arrives: November 24 and 25, 1863. Rumpel and some other soldiers, probably because of some disability, are left to occupy and guard the camp. He tells of it in a letter home, dated November 29, and in his diary, which we shall intermingle:

Lookout Valley, Tenn

November 29th 1863

Dear Father—

I Sit down this Sabbath morning to write you a few line which will inform you that I am not very well although I am better than I was a week ago. There has been a battle here We drove the rebels off Lookout Mt. and entirely out of Tenn[essee] and away from Chattanooga I and some more of the boys was left here in camp The Regt, is away out in front Still following up old Bragg, they have got him to going and they keep close to his

heels They are now ahead 30 miles from here clear on the other Side of the old Chickamauga battle field I think that old Bragg is about give up If he gets whipped out at Atlanta he never can make a Stand again The last we heard from the Regt they had 2 killed and 5 wounded none of our Company was hurt yet

It was quite a Sight to See the rebels get off of Lookout, and we did not lose many men in taking it either Old Joe is the man to take them on their flank and scare them out I think this will about play them out. Our boys captured about 1500 prisoners and 49 pieces of Artillery, this they got on Missionary Ridge the prisoners are coming in all the time I will have to close

Write Soon

Yours truly

J W Rumpel

To his parents and friends I will herein send you moss which I got on Lookout Mt after the rebels left.

We turn to J. W. Rumpel's account of these same stirring events, as briefly recorded in his diary:

Sun. [Nov.] 22nd. The day is cool . . . Our Corps marched at 10 P. M. to Chattanooga. The doctor left me in the old camp

Mon. 23rd Our Regt was in a skirmish to day they had 2 killed and 5 wounded Lieut Bromley is killed

Tues. 24th Gen Hooker took Lookout Mt. from this side I witnessed the scene

Wed. 25th The day is clear Our men took Mission ridge with several thousand prisoners and several pieces of Artillery

Thurs. 26th There is some fighting on the left to day. The day is clear and nice Thanksgiving

In the late fall of 1863, after the 55th Ohio had reached Tennessee, steps were taken toward reorganizing some of the older regiments, which meant that soldiers might enlist in newer regiments, or they might go home when their enlistment time had run out. Efforts were made by the leaders to get as many veterans as possible to re-enlist and certain inducements were offered. The reorganization of the 55th Ohio took place in November of 1863, and is mentioned in a letter from Rumpel to his sister, dated November 16, 1863, and sent from Lookout Valley, Tennessee:

We have only got about 6 months to Stay any more. There was an order read to the 73rd. Regt yesterday that all the old Regts is to be discharged the 1st. of June. I



expect we will get the order in a day or two. They allow us 40 days furlough a year and we have not had any furloughs yet. So they will discharge us that much Sooner, if they do that it will be a good thing. They may not give us a chance to re-enlist There are a great many that will re-enlist again. Our Colonel's name is Charles B. Gambee; Lieut. Col. James H. Stevens, he had his arm taken off at Chancellorsville; Major, Rudolphus Robbins; Adjt, Robt. W. Pool. Our first Lieut. is Butler Case, he is at home recruiting; 2nd Lieut, John R. Lowe.

Please get Some good writing paper and envelops and Send to me in a package, it is hard to get here. We drew 2 months pay the other day. I will not send any home at this time, I lent it all out. Then the next time I will Send it all at once. It is not a very Safe place to Send from here. I will close for this time Write Soon

Your Brother  
J W Rumpel

In connection with his re-enlistment, we have a letter to John Wesley Rumpel from his father, dated January 10, 1864. The son had evidently written to his parents for advice about re-enlisting, and the advice is given, along with a statement that shows that disloyalty in any form or degree was not tolerated at the Rumpel home in Fostoria:

[Fostoria, Ohio]

Jan. 10th. A. D. 1864

Dear Son,

We again Sit down this evening to inform you that we are well at present hoping and trusting that these few lines many find you the Same. We received your letter yesterday and was glad to hear from you again. We also was glad to get the photograph of J. N. W. Rumpel.

In regard to re-enlisting I can hardly tell what would be the best. Your Mother would rather you would not re-enlist. If we knew that the war would be over Some time next Summer it would be well to re-enlist. But that is uncertain. If we had not so many Northern rebels to Support the South I think the thing would Soon be done with.

It is certain that if you don't re-enlist that your time will be out Sometime next Summer and if your furlough is allowed you will be out by June or July. I would be glad to have you go to School Several years if you would be so lucky as to get home. But as you have already put down your name providing  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the regiment goes I hope you will do all for the best and do as you think would be bet-

ter for yourself. I will add no more at this time, but remain

Your affectionate J. Rumpel  
to J. W. Rumpel

We have records to show that Rumpel did re-enlist at this time, and continued with the Fifty-fifth Ohio in the March through Georgia and till the end of the war.

The following is an excerpt from a letter written to his sister from Lookout Valley, Tennessee, and dated March 10, 1864. It seems to have been sent soon after the regiment had returned from its furlough, and gives us an interesting sidelight on camp life in winter time:

We got here about a week ago. But when we got here we found our old quarters missing. So we had to build new ones. We have got them built and [are] living in them. The boys are so lazy that they are all asleep except Lieut. Case. He is laying on the bed a reading a novel. I I am so lazy that I can hardly write We expect to Stay here Some time, we are guarding the rail-road. I received the Fostoria News to day. When you get through with my Grammar book I wish you would wrap it up and send it to me by mail. We are getting up a grammar class in the company and I would like to have it to Study in. I will have to Send this letter without a postage Stamp. Please tell father to Send me Some. I will have to go and draw rations and will close for this time.

Your affectionate Brother  
J W Rumpel

Rumpel's diary tells of the closing days of 1863, which led up to the mustering out and re-enlistment of the regiment:

- Tues. 1st The day is clear and cold
- Wed. 2nd The day is clear David Baird and Lt Case returned from home
- Sat. 5th We dont hear anything from the Regt.
- Wed. 16th We hear that the Regt is coming back to-morrow
- Thurs. 17th I am on extra duty at Brown's ferry The Regt came back in the evening
- Frid. 18th I am on duty on the Rail road
- Mon. 21st We went to get out timber for the new Camp
- Tues. 22nd We are putting up our Shanties
- Frid. 25th This is Christmas and we have short rations
- We moved in our new Camp
- Mon. 28th We are enlisted as Veteran Volunteers
- Tues. 29th They are still enlisting

Wed. 30th They are filling out the muster-out rolls  
there is not much of importance

Thurs. 31st We are mustered out of the volunteer  
service We have been in service 2 years

#### THE CAMPAIGN FOR ATLANTA

The first week of May 1864, the armies of the West—the Ohio, the Tennessee, and the Cumberland, combined under the command of General Sherman—left Lookout Valley in Tennessee, and began the journey toward Atlanta, while the same week the Army of the Potomac under U. S. Grant began the drive through the wilderness toward Richmond.

From the beginning of the campaign in May until the March to the Sea began in November of the same year, a period of six months, there are preserved for us six letters which J. W. Rumpel wrote to his family in Ohio. All of these letters indicate that he was not in active service with his regiment but had been detailed to serve in a Federal Field Hospital. We have noted in previous letters that he was not always able to perform the duties of a regular soldier and was at times hospitalized. The records of his Company (B) show that a number of his comrades had, for physical reasons, left the regiment and joined the Veterans' Reserve Corps, where they could render a needed service without entering active combat. Others, of course, had returned home at the end of their term of enlistment. Instead of either of these alternatives, John Wesley Rumpel had elected to remain with the army and serve his comrades in the hospital corps, a service that was badly needed and that he was physically able to render. When we know that during the war more than twice as many Union soldiers died of disease as perished from actual combat, we must see the importance of good hospital service for the success of a campaign, especially in one that was to reach hundreds of miles into Confederate territory and for much of the time be cut off from their Northern supply centers. These letters also show that young Rumpel was vitally interested in the spiritual as well as the physical welfare of his comrades, that he follows closely the campaign strategy, and is quick to inform the folks at home of the successes gained by the army. The first letter was written shortly after the army had crossed the Chattahoochee River and the siege of Atlanta had begun:

U. S. General Field Hospital  
 Marietta, Ga.  
 July 19, 1864

Dear Father—

I Sit down this morning to answer your letter of June 30th I was glad to hear from you that you were all well when you wrote I am middling well at present and hope that this will find you all in good health. We are still at this place yet There is wounded and sick going out and coming in every day.

Our men are across the Chattahoochee river and driving the rebels before them like Sheep. The other day when the 14th Corps went across the river Gen Wood with his Div[ision] of the 4th Corps went to guard them until they got across Gen. Wood give the Pioneers one hour to lay the pontoons down They did it in one hour and 8 minutes They were then ready to cross and the rebels on the other side massed their forces for a charge on our men The order was given for them to Charge Bayonets But they would not go Their officers tried their hardest to make them charge But they would not Some of their deserters told us the other day that you can lead a horse to water but you cant make him drink. That is the way they feel about it.

You wanted to know whether I paid Mr Mickey or not For my part I cannot Say. But I think I paid it to the post Master, at least you told me to You can ask James, I expect he knows. If he Says I did not pay him Just pay him and I will make it all right. I expect the next time we move this Hospital it will be to Atlanta. Please write Soon

Your Son J W Rumpel

In the next letter, dated August 11, 1864, we learn that the hospital has been moved, but not to Atlanta, for the city is still in Confederate hands. Vining Station was located on the west bank of the Chattahoochee ten miles from Atlanta. We also learn that the sale of the Rumpel farm at Fostoria, Ohio, is contemplated, possibly with a view to the move to Iowa which occurred the summer of 1865:

U. S. Genl. Field Hospital  
 Vining Sta., Ga.  
 Aug. 11, 1864

Dear Father

I received your kind and welcome letter of the 22nd. of last month to day and was glad to hear from you and that you were all well. It was the first letter I had got in Some time. I have had a Spell of the Intermittent fever

for about a week So that I could do no duty I am getting pretty Smart again So that I can do Some light work again The work is still going on in front of Atlanta The rebels Still hold the town But Atlanta is no object to Gen Sherman His idea is to destroy Hoods army as much as possible It is the opinion of a good many of the boys that Sherman is going to make a Vicksburg affair of Atlanta. If he does it will end the fighting in the West The boys are all in good Spirits hoping the war to end Soon The most of them think that this Summer will end the fighting . . .

In your next letter Please let me know how much you ask for the farm and how much you can get for it.

U. S. Gen. Field Hospital  
Vining Sta. Ga.  
Aug 25th 1864

Dear Father

I Sit down this morning to answer your welcome letter which I received a few minutes ago dated Aug. 13th and was glad to hear that you were all well. I am middling well all except my eyes are pretty Sore now especially when the weather is So hot as it is now. I am getting now So I cannot See much after dark. The Doctor calls it the moon eye. I am afraid I am going to have trouble with my eyes if I dont take good care of them. I am under the Surgeons care now. He wont allow me to go out in the Sun any more than I can help He has got my eyes fixed up with green Shades to keep the Sun out He wont allow me to wear glasses on account of them drawing the heat to the eyes. I think likely that I will get better when the weather gets cool. I dont think it is the regular moon eye because it is caused altogether by the heat of the Sun I have not had any pay for 7 months. Not since I drew pay at Louisville on our way home last winter. And I would like if you could send me about 8 dollars to get paper, envelopes and Stamps. I think that will do me until I draw pay and you will oblige me very much by Sending it to me.

We have preaching here every evening by our Hospital Chaplain. I have enjoyed myself very well. Better I think than in the Regt. Because we have no Regimental Chaplain. When our boys want to hear preaching they have to go to the 73" Ohio or the 33" Mass. to hear or if they want to hear dutch [German] preaching they go to the 26" Wisconsin all in the same Brigade. I dont See why our Regt. cant afford a Chaplain. There are a good many of our boys that would like to hear preaching. We have got our ward full of Sick men. But we are going to

send them all to Chattanooga to day. I received the copy of the Fostoria News the other day.

Mr Wm Carlile of the 9th OVC[avalry] is lying Just across the railroad from here. He is pretty Sick and if he dont take good care of himself He wont get over it. I will try and get him admitted in this Hospital and take care of him myself or else He will die as there is no one to do anything for him. You can tell Mrs Carlile that I will do all in my power for him. I will write a little note for you to give to Mrs Carlile, you can Send Jimmy up with it. I will close for this time. Please write Soon. Direct as usual.

Your affectionate Son  
J W Rumpel  
Vining Sta., Ga.  
Sept. 1st 1864

Dear Sister

I received your welcome letter of the 31st of July this morning. Cousin John Rumpel<sup>7</sup> [illegible] He was not very well when he wrote. But he is getting better. His Regt. was out on a raid. He went part of the way with them and was taken Sick and was Sent back. His Regt. was in three different engagements while they were out. His Regt. has got back and are now lying in camp near Colliersville, Tenn. Our Regt. is lying about 5 miles from here down the Chattahoochee river. I was down to the Div Hospital the other day and saw Some of the boys. Our Regt. was in a little Scrape the day I was down there. [This action is listed on Military Register of Company B of 55th Ohio, as occurring at Turners Ferry on August 27, 1864.] They had one killed one wounded and one taken prisoner. the one that was taken prisoner was David Beard of our Company. He was from Wood County. He was taken when on Picket.

I Sent to father for Some money the other day. I told him to send about 8 dollars to me until Pay-day for getting paper and envelopes and Stamps. I thought I would Speak of it again I Stand in need of money more than I have at any time Since I have been in Service. I ought to write a letter to Cousin Rebecca But I have no paper and envelopes So I must wait till I get Some. If you See her you can tell her the reason I dont write. I saw Mr Funk the other day. He is well. So is little Henry Funk. You wrote me some time ago that Henry was mortally wounded. But that was a mistake. He was not touched.

<sup>7</sup> In the 2nd Iowa Cavalry.

I have no news to write at present. So I will close for this time. Hoping to [hear] from you soon.

Your Afecionate Brother  
J. W. Rumpel

The "no news to write at present" at the close of the previous letter no doubt meant that, while there had been recent important movements of the army, there was no definite result to report, or that there was good news but the officials were not ready to have it put in the mails. The new developments were these, as reported by Sherman: "On August 26, the 15th. and 17th. Corps drew out of their trenches and made a wide circuit . . . There was great rejoicing in Atlanta, that the Yankees were gone, and the fact was telegraphed all over the South." But instead of retreating northward as was hoped, Sherman's army circled the city to the west and south and cut the railroad leading to Macon, the main line of supply for the city. "With the Macon road in Union hands, there was nothing left for Hood but to evacuate Atlanta, which was immediately occupied by Sherman."<sup>8</sup>

And these exciting events account for the enthusiasm of Rumpel's next letter dated the next day.

Vining Station, Georgia.  
Sept. 3, 1864

Dear Father

I hastily Sit down this morning to write you a few lines informing you that I am as well as usual. I write more this morning to tell you the news than anything else. ATLANTA IS OURS! IT FELL INTO OUR HANDS YESTERDAY MORNING SEPTEMBER the 2nd 1864. Our Division marched to the City yesterday. They had been lying here along the river guarding the ferry I expect the Old 55th is in Atlanta this morning.

Well our forces have carried the City, they fought hard enough for it. Gen. Sherman had a fight with the rebel Army on their retreat 30 miles in the rear of Atlanta and cut them all to pieces and completely demoralized them. It is going to cost them a good many lives to retreat. And Sherman is not going to let them go until he gets them completely demoralized So that they can never reorganize again. The 14" 15" & 16" Corps marched out about 25 miles in the rear of Atlanta on the Augusta road, the way that a part of the rebel Army was to retreat on and laid in ambush until the rebel Army came marching along.

<sup>8</sup> Otto Eisenschimal and Ralph Newman, *American Iliad*, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., 1956) pp. 630-632.

And then fired into them, and cut them all to pieces when they were not prepared and thought they were retreating all Safe and Sound. I expect we will move this Hospital up to the City in a few days.

I must Send letters without Stamps until I can get Some. I will close for this time Please write Soon.

Your Son

J W Rumpel

“FROM ATLANTA TO THE SEA”

Two months were spent in and around Atlanta, before the decision was finally reached to make the March to the Sea, a distance of 300 miles through hostile territory. Hood's army, though much smaller than Sherman's, was far from disorganized by the fighting around Atlanta and could still make Sherman a good deal of trouble. Hood tried to draw Sherman away from Georgia into Tennessee by destroying the railroad to Chattanooga, by which supplies for the army were brought from the North to Atlanta. For a time Sherman followed Hood northward, but the latter refused to fight, and it became evident that he only wanted to distract Sherman from further devastation of the South. In desperation Sherman finally gave up the pursuit. It was during these weeks of uncertainty, that Rumpel writes a letter home, dated October 21. The General Field Hospital has been moved into Atlanta. From the letter we note the weariness engendered in soldiers by long inactivity and uncertainty about the future, also note that the chief excitement is found in foraging expeditions into the surrounding country for rations:

Gen. Field Hospital D. C.

Atlanta, Ga.

Oct. 21st 1864

Dear Father

I Sit down this morning to write you a few lines. Informing you that I have not been very well for the past few days. But I am feeling better now. I hope this will find you all enjoying good health. The road has been cut again But it is all right again and I expect the mail will come through in a day or two all right. It is quite lonesome here without getting anything to read or any news. Our Regt. has gone out on a 5 day expedition to forage in the country a large wagon train went out and they went with the train as an escort. I will have to postpone my letter for dinner as it is now half past eleven



O'clock. Half past 2 and I believe I will not finish the letter until I See whether I get Some mail. There has 3 or 4 trains Just come in and there must be Some mail. There must be a pile of letters for me.

I have been out to the Regt. and returned. Our Company has all gone out on a 5 day forage expedition except 3. The non-veterans have got their discharges and are going to Start home tomorrow morning. David Stackhouse will be at home in a few days if nothing happens. I have Just took a notion to Send this letter with John Smith. He is going home his time is out. He lives at Bloomville and he said he would go down to our house. He is a Brother-in-law to Edward Preble. I will close for the present. Hoping to hear from you Soon.

Your Affect. Son

J. W. Rumpel

P. S. I will herein Send you the receipt for that money that I Sent by the State Agent \$140.00. You can go to the County treasury and draw it.

J W Rumpel

The night before the army left Atlanta was a time of great destruction. Sherman was determined that the city should never again serve as a military stronghold of the South. His orders were to destroy everything that could serve a military purpose, but the fires got out of hand, and hundreds of residences and business houses were consumed.

"Such a raid as this has never been known," wrote John Wesley Rumpel of the march through Georgia, in his first letter home after reaching Savannah. In anticipation of the march, General Sherman wrote, "I want to prepare for my big raid." With his army of 62,000 men, he would make "the interior of Georgia feel the weight of war," and would "smash things to the sea."<sup>9</sup> His command to officers and soldiers was to "Forage liberally on the country." Since "no army could have carried along sufficient food and forage for a march of three hundred miles, . . . a system of foraging was simply indispensable to our success."<sup>10</sup>

"After a month of silence, the North learned that Sherman was at Savannah, his army intact. Hardee soon evacuated the city, and Sherman marched in on December 22."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Earl Schenck Miers, *The General Who Marched to Hell* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1951) p. 209.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>11</sup> *Picture History of Civil War*, p. 561.

On that same day of December, 1865, General Sherman sent a telegram to President Lincoln to announce his famous Christmas present to the nation:

I beg to present you as a Christmas-gift, the city of Savannah, with one hundred and fifty heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, also about twenty-five thousand bales of cotton.

Three days later, on that very Christmas Day of 1864, Rumpel "takes his pen in hand" to inform his father of the grand feast he and his comrades were having in Savannah on the national holiday:

Savannah, Georgia  
Christmas Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>/64

Dear Father

I again take my pen in hand to inform you that I am well at the present time hoping and trusting that these few lines will find you all in reasonable health. Solomon Sheller is not very well today he has got something like the ague. I suppose you folks at home are having a good time and I expect a turkey roast. Well we have not got quite as good as you have. But we have got a feast to what we had a week ago lying in the breast-works in front of this place with nothing but a little bit of rice to eat for 11 days. But as soon as we got possession of this place and marched in we went for everything that was good to eat and wear. To day we had pancakes rice Beef & pork for dinner and we thought it was a feast for Christmas But if you folks had no more than that you would begin to think about Starving. But we Just begin to think about living Since we have got into camp near the coast where every thing will be plenty During the campaign we were pretty hard up for clothing part of the time But my clothes lasted pretty well Some of the boys would have been naked if they had not got citizens clothing through the country.

Such a raid as this has never been known. We had orders to take anything that would add to our comfort and the country was completely Scoured on each flank of our line of march Our Army moved in 3 or 4 different columns And you may bet your life there was not much left in the shape of vegetables against the Armies all got through. Thus you See Hood could not have followed us Because he would not have any thing to Subsist himself with. There was not a great deal of fighting done during our whole march until We reached the fortifications of this City And here the fighting was not near

as hard as we expected it to be The rebels were between 15 & 16 thousand Strong here under command of Gen Hardee. The Northern and central part of Georgia was rich and fertile As far South as Milledgeville the country was very rich But this Side of there is mostly Swampy and a Sandy Soil. We had Some bother in getting our Artillery and trains along Sometimes. But the weather happened to be good. The weather here has been pleasant But it is raining Some this evening I Suppose you have freezing weather up North now while we are having warm weather here I expect we will have Some wet weather now.

I Saw Wm Beam once on the march It was at Milledgeville He was well His Regt. lays about a mile from here I must go over and See him tomorrow if I aint on picket He belongs to Co K 13" Mich Engineers 2nd Brig 1st Div 14" Corps

I will get a certificate from my Capt and Send to you So that you can get my local Bounty I received those Photographs of yours and mothers Also the 2 dollars in money which you Sent me. I will close for this time. Please write Soon.

Your Son  
J W Rumpel

Direct Co B 55" Regt O.V.V.I.  
20" Corps  
Savannah Ga

#### THE MARCH TO WASHINGTON

We may briefly outline the order of events leading up to the Grand Review in Washington late in May:

1. On April 2, Lee was forced to evacuate Richmond, and attempted to flee southward with the hope of joining Johnston's army in N. Carolina.
2. His flight was prevented by Grant's forces, and he surrendered his army at Appomattox Courthouse, April 9.
3. On the fourteenth of April, Lincoln was assassinated in Ford's theater.
4. Johnston and Sherman fought their last battle at Bentonville, N. C., on March 19, with a substantial victory for Sherman.
5. About a month later, Johnston and Sherman met near Raleigh, N. C., and agreed on preliminary terms for the surrender of Johnston's army.

6. These terms had to be approved by Federal authorities, and while the two armies faced each other at Raleigh, the following set of orders for the arrangement of the Federal camp was issued by General Sherman. This copy of the orders, carefully written in ink, was found among Rumpel's papers, and was evidently made by him while waiting for the final surrender, which took place during the last days of April.

Head Quarters Military Div. of the Miss.

In the Field . . . . . Raleigh, N. C.  
April 19th 1865

The General Commanding announces to the Army a Suspension of Hostilities and an agreement with Gen Johnston and other high officials, which when formally ratified will make peace from the Potomac to the Rio-Grande. Until the absolute peace is arranged a line passing through Terrell's Mount, Chapel Hill university—Durham Station and West Point on the Neuse river will Separate the two armies. Each Army commander will group his camps entirely with a view to comfort health and good police.

All details of military discipline must Still be maintained and the General hopes and believes that in a few days it will be his good fortune to conduct you all to your homes.

The fame of this Army for courage and industry and discipline is admitted all over the world. Then let each officer and man See that it is not Stained by any act of vulgarity, rowdyism or petty crime. The Cavalry will patrol the front line Gen Howard will take charge of the district up to the Cavalry. Gen Slocum to the Left of Raleigh. Gen. Schofield in Raleigh its Right and Rear. Quartermasters and commissaries will keep their Supplies up to a light load for their wagons, and the Rail Road Supt will arrange a depot for the convenience of each Separate Army.

By order of  
Major Gen'l W. T. Sherman  
L H Dayton A. A. G.

Two days after the arrival of Sherman's army at Alexandria, Virginia, near Washington, Rumpel writes a letter to his father, telling of the army's march northward, and the Grand Review to be held in a few days;

Camp Near Alexandria, Va.  
May 21, 1865.

"Dear Father"

I Sit down this afternoon to write you a letter after a long vacation of writing Well I expect you are tired waiting to hear from me But the reason I have not written is because we have been on the march and have had no chance to write. We left Raleigh, N. C. on the 30th of April and arrived at Richmond on the 9th of this month We laid there [illegible] and arrived here on the 19th Inst. making 17 days marching 330 miles We started from Raleigh directly after Johnston Surrendered. We are now waiting for the Grand Spectacle after which they will commence transporting troops to their own States The Grandest review is to take place in Washington on next Tuesday and Wednesday that was ever known. On Tuesday will be reviewed the 2nd & 5th Corps and Sherri-dans Command And on Wednesday will be reviewed Gen Shermans Army comprising the 14th 15th 17th & 20th Corps. I expect it will be a grand time We have to be fixed up in Stile.

I will close for the present hoping to hear from you Soon

Your Son J W Rumpel

I will herein Send you the Shape of the Corps badges of Sherman's army. J W R

- Corps Badges: 1. Army of Georgia, 20th Corps—A Star  
[Drawn in pencil] 14th Corps—An Acorn  
2. Army of Tennessee,  
15th Corps—A Diamond  
17th Corps—An Arrow

In Rumpel's last letter, dated May 27 in Washington, D.C., we have the account of his last march with Sherman's Army of the West. The last time he was in Washington was in the fall of 1862 when, after the defeat of Second Bull Run, the Army of the Potomac had retreated behind the defenses of that city. How different now are the prospects of the Union, as he marches with his regiment up Pennsylvania Avenue past the White House, a victorious army led by a gallant commander!

[Insignia of the U. S.  
Sanitary Commission]

Washington "D. C."  
May 27th, 1865

Dear "Father"

I received your welcome letter of the 6th Inst this morning and was glad to hear from you from your new home. Ever Since I rec'd your last letter written at Fos-

toria, I have been anxious to hear how you liked your new home and how you made the trip. I suppose you had a Successful Campaign as much So as we had. We marched 330 miles in 17 days Starting from Raleigh, N. C. on the 30th. day of April and reached Richmond on the 5th And Started from there on the 12th and Reached the vicinity of Alexandria Va. on the 19th Inst and laid in Camp there until the day for our Grand review which took place on the 24th Inst. We were ordered to pack up our knapsacks and put them in the wagons which we did, and took our line of march for the Capitol Where the Grand display took place. Indeed it was the grand display as Sherman's whole Army was Reviewed by Gen'l Grant, Sherman, Slocum, Thomas, and besides numerous other Gens Prest. Johnson & Cabinet and all the congressmen and a good many of the Governors. The day was pretty warm but the citizens kept us in good cold water So that we did not Suffer for any thing to eat or drink.

After the Review was over we marched out about 2 miles from the Capitol Northeast near the Baltimore R. R. and went into Camp where we now are and The Colonel Says we'll remain here until we are mustered out of Service. How long that will be is hard to tell. Those that came out in 1862 will probably be discharged first, then the 1 year men and the Veterans the last thing. It dont Seem hardly fair for the Veterans to be kept the longest but I expect we will have to do Just as they tell us. So we might as well be contented and we will all get home Some time if we live.

I believe you may keep those papers concerning my local bounty until I get to Fostoria, then if I need them I will Send for them. Solomon Sheller is well and hearty Also Wm. Sabins and in fact all the Fostoria boys in Co "B". I will close for the present Hoping to hear from you Soon and often

Your Son

Direct Co. B [55th]

J. W. Rumpel

O. V. V. I. Washington D. C.

So John Wesley Rumpel comes to the end of his service, a "Veteran" at twenty years of age, and faces the prospect of beginning life anew in the new state beyond the Mississippi. He joined his family during the year 1865 on the farm to which they had moved in Iowa County near the town of Ladora. There in 1868 he was married to Hannah Rosenberger and continued to farm until 1893. He then retired and moved to Mitchellville, Iowa, where he passed away December 24, 1910.

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