

THE COLOR BEARER OF THE TWELFTH IOWA VOLUNTEER INFANTRY

Sergeant Henry J. Grannis, of the Twelfth Iowa Volunteer Infantry, who died at Fayette, Iowa, October 13, 1907, at the age of sixty-six years, had an unmatched career as a color bearer in the Civil War. He was born in Indiana, July 18, 1841, the youngest but one in a family of seven children. He came to Fayette County, Iowa, with his parents in 1860, and entered Upper Iowa University at Fayette in the fall of the same year, or in the spring following. In the spring of 1861 the young men of the school, fired by the prospects of war, organized a company for drilling, pledging themselves to respond in case the President should make another call for volunteers. William W. Warner, a senior student, was chosen Captain; and David B. Henderson, late Speaker of the House of Representatives, was chosen First Lieutenant. Henry J. Grannis was a member of this company, which was known as the "University Recruits".

During the summer vacation several of the boys belonging to this company enlisted, but most of them returned at the opening of the fall term, when drilling was resumed, but for a short time only. A meeting of students was called in the little chapel, on the afternoon of September 15, 1861, as a result of which twenty-three students enrolled for service. One of the number withdrew his name later; two enlisted in other organizations; and one was rejected at muster-in. The nineteen pledged men dispersed to their several homes, promising to report in person one week later, with "recruits". Thirteen days after the enrollment in the little chapel, the company, 101 strong, was accepted

by the Governor of the State; and it became Company C of the Twelfth Iowa.¹

In the meantime the "girls" of the University, led by the preceptress, Miss E. A. Sorin, determined to show their patriotism and their interest in the volunteers by the presentation of a flag made with their own hands. Material was purchased and the flag was made according to "regulations",² and there was embroidered upon its folds the legend: "University Recruits 101". In return for this expression of interest and patriotism, the "girls" were invited to fill, by election, the one vacancy still left in the list of sergeants, and the person so chosen was to be the color bearer of the company. Accordingly, the preceptress called a meeting of the "girls" in the reception room of the Ladies' Hall. All that occurred in that room was never divulged; but it is known that two names at least were up for the suffrages, and that the choice fell to Henry J. Grannis.³

The flag was duly presented by the preceptress in a patriotic and inspiring speech, closing with these words: "Take our flag, and as it floats over you, sometimes give a thought to those by whom it has been presented. Proudly, confidently, we commit it to your keeping. . . . As you have been proud to live under it, if death be your lot, may you die under its folds, and may God protect and prosper you as you defend your colors."⁴

As already stated, the "University Recruits" became Company C of the Twelfth Iowa Infantry, and Grannis became the regimental color bearer—and there is little to hazard in claiming for him an unmatched career in that

¹ Reed's "University Recruits" Company C, 12th Iowa Infantry, pp. 1, 2.

² Reed's "University Recruits" Company C, 12th Iowa Infantry, p. 2.

³ Reed's "University Recruits" Company C, 12th Iowa Infantry, pp. 8, 9.

⁴ Reed's "University Recruits" Company C, 12th Iowa Infantry, p. 4.

responsible and most dangerous position, in either army, during the Civil War. Told in few words and without embellishment it may be thus stated:—From muster-in to muster-out, November 25, 1861, to January 20, 1865,⁵ Grannis was not only Color Sergeant *in rank*, but he was color bearer *in fact* in every battle and skirmish in which the regiment was, as such, engaged. In “*University Recruits*” *Company C*, by Captain D. W. Reed, page 27, we read that he “carried the flag on every march, in every campaign, and during every battle in which the regiment was engaged, from enlistment to muster-out. . . . In several engagements, the colors were riddled in his hands. On one occasion, every guard was killed or wounded; yet strange to say, Grannis never received a scratch, nor suffered the flag to go from his hands. That it was always at the front and carried with the greatest gallantry, every official report from the regiment testifies.”

The same writer, who was in close touch with the colors throughout the War, in a private letter of recent date, further says that “in all marches, skirmishes, and bivouacs, Grannis was ever and always at his post with the flag. On the march he kept his place and the flag was in his hands. In bivouac, he never allowed himself to go foraging or on pleasure excursions—his pleasure and duty was to be ready to carry or care for the flag on every occasion. He was often heard to say: ‘I did not know whether we were marching North, East, South, or West. I only cared to obey orders and keep my place.’ ”

The Twelfth Iowa was in its first line of battle at Fort Henry on February 6, 1862, but there was no land engagement. A few days later it was at Fort Donelson where Grannis’s flag was the first *inside* the enemies’ works,

⁵ Reed’s *Campaigns and Battles of the Twelfth Regiment Iowa Veteran Volunteer Infantry*, p. 258.

though the Second Iowa had the honor of being first *on* the works.⁶ At Shiloh, on April 6, 1862, Sergeant Grannis kept the colors flying from about nine o'clock in the morning until six o'clock in the evening, in the midst of that inferno, aptly named by the enemy "The Hornet's Nest"—and there was no hotter "nest" on any field at any time during the War than was "The Hornet's Nest" from about four o'clock until nearly six o'clock, when two-thirds of the artillery of the enemy was trained upon that spot, and two-thirds of the Confederate army was slowly coiling itself about that devoted band of scarcely two thousand men.

At the battle of Nashville, on December 15 and 16, 1864, the Twelfth Iowa took a leading and conspicuous part. The third brigade of McArthur's division led the movement on the 15th; and when the line was within charging distance of one of the forts, the order was for the colors of the Twelfth Iowa to lead straight to the center of the fort and for other regiments to "guide" on the colors of the Twelfth. Lieutenant Colonel Stibbs, commanding the Twelfth, instructed his adjutant to conduct the colors, and to see that they were carried *into* the fort.⁷ On reaching the redoubt a deep ditch was encountered, across which most of the men were able to leap. The adjutant sprang across, but the color bearer was not able to make the distance; and so he jumped into the ditch, and was climbing up the other side when the adjutant turned to assist him by taking the flag. The color bearer showed signs of objection to parting with the flag, and so the adjutant reached down and grasped Grannis's free hand and helped him out of the ditch. Grannis sprang to the top of the redoubt and lifted the flag as high above his head as possible—just in

⁶ Reed's *Campaigns and Battles of the Twelfth Regiment Iowa Veteran Volunteer Infantry*, p. 20.

⁷ Reed's *Campaigns and Battles of the Twelfth Regiment Iowa Veteran Volunteer Infantry*, p. 197.

time to catch in its folds a charge of grape shot from a second redoubt. The commander of the brigade, Colonel Hill, was killed by this charge of grape. The second redoubt was taken within a few minutes, the colors of the Twelfth Iowa still leading the movement.

An incident of the second day's fight is best related by the acting adjutant of the regiment, D. W. Reed, who, in a recent private letter (Nov. 7, 1907) says: "On the second day, at Nashville, the regiment charged across an open field, upon the enemy intrenched behind a stone wall. When about half way across the field, a rebel shell exploded exactly in the folds of the flag, tearing it to shreds. The colors, color bearer, and color guard were so enveloped in smoke, that it appeared that all were down; but without a moment's halt, the battered flag came out of the smoke, and Grannis, still unhurt, carried it forward with a rush, over the wall and up the high hill, in pursuit of the fleeing enemy, until he, and the little squad of Twelfth Iowa men were far in advance of the rest of the line, and until the halt and recall was sounded."

It is worth relating in this connection that, at the battle of Nashville, the Twelfth Iowa had but five commissioned officers, including the Quartermaster. There was not a commissioned company officer in command; every company was commanded by a non-commissioned officer.⁸

Sergeant Grannis surely possessed a charmed life, if there be any such. For more than one hundred days he was under fire, the one particularly "shining mark" for the missiles of the enemy, yet passing through all, unscathed!

The following is a list of battles in which Sergeant Grannis carried the colors, as given in *Campaigns and Battles*

⁸ Reed's *Campaigns and Battles of the Twelfth Regiment Iowa Veteran Volunteer Infantry*, p. 195.

of the Twelfth Regiment Iowa Veteran Volunteer Infantry by Major David W. Reed:—

Fort Henry, February 6, 1862.

Fort Donelson, February 13, 14, 15, 1862.

Shiloh, April 6, 1862.

Raymond, Mississippi, May 12, 1863.

Jackson, Mississippi, May 14, 1863.

Vicksburg, Mississippi, Assaults and Siege, May 18–July 4, 1863.

Jackson, Mississippi, July 10 to 16, 1863.

Brandon, Mississippi, July 19, 1863.

Brownsville, Mississippi, October 16–17, 1863.

White River, Arkansas, June 24, 1864.

Coonewar, Mississippi, July 13, 1864.

Tupelo, Mississippi, July 14–15, 1864.

Nashville, Tennessee, December 15, 1864.

Brentwood Hills, Tennessee, December 16, 1864.

Spanish Fort, Alabama, March 27 to April 9, 1864.

Twelve skirmishes at different dates.⁹

The flag presented by the “girls” of Upper Iowa University was captured with the regiment at Shiloh, on April 6, 1862, and the men were prisoners of war until exchanged on November 19, 1862. The regiment was reunited and reorganized in the spring of 1863. Another flag, a duplicate of the one carried at Donelson and Shiloh, was prepared and presented by the same hands that made and presented the first one; and this was carried to the close of the War.

Sergeant Henry J. Grannis was modest, unobtrusive, never pushing himself into notice, except when duty called him to lead with the colors of his regiment, and then he was the personification of cool, deliberate courage that knew no fear, flinched in the presence of no danger, having ear

⁹ Reed's *Campaigns and Battles of the Twelfth Regiment Iowa Veteran Volunteer Infantry*, p [2].

for no sound but that of the command of his superior officer. Even promotion to the rank of Lieutenant could not tempt him from the colors. He declined the honor by failing to "muster" under the commission tendered him. Sergeant Grannis was a model soldier, "beloved by all the regiment—he honored his comrades and himself by his gallant service and faithful discharge of duty."

J. W. RICH

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA CITY