

LEONARD W. HOWARD, CIVIL WAR VOLUNTEER

Arthur S. Pease



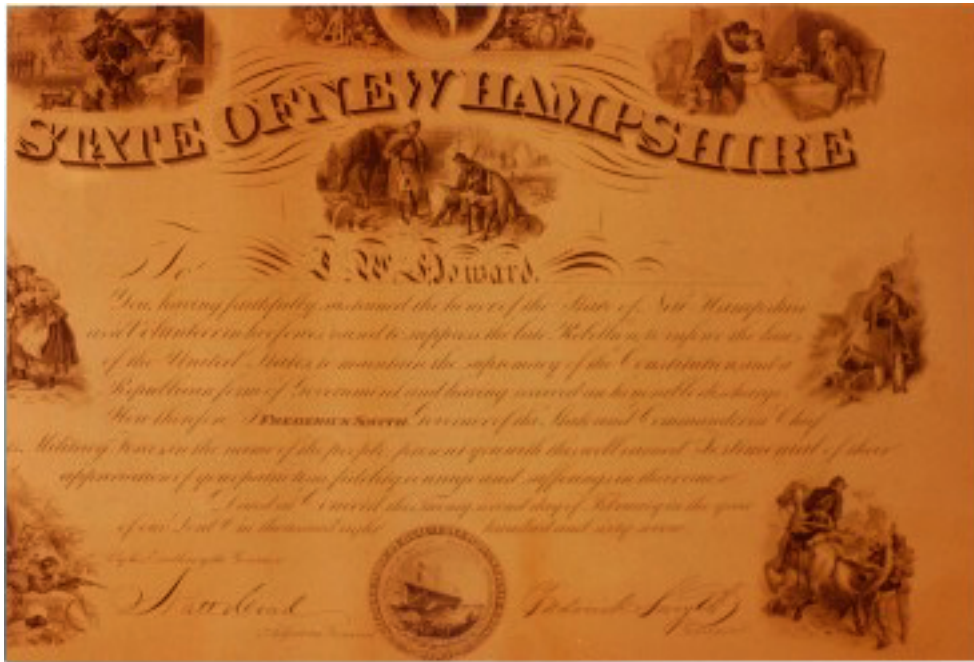
My Great-Uncle Leonard W. Howard [my mother's father's brother] was a member of Company B of the Fifth New Hampshire Volunteers, enlisting on October 9, 1861, at Concord and finally mustering out on June 29, 1865, near Washington, DC. I have the originals of his two discharges [he was discharged and reenlisted as a Veteran Volunteer in February, 1864] and a few pension papers, as well as the large "Testimonial" certificate, signed by Governor Frederick Smyth, apparently given to all New Hampshire veterans in 1867. Uncle Len was a short man and the story is that he was rejected when he first went to enlist, as he was too short. He then went home, put some higher heels on his boots and came back, now meeting the height requirement. This sounds like a many an apocryphal story of that and other wars but Uncle Len was only 5'4", so perhaps this really did happen.

I also own a musket which he apparently brought home when discharged [he was charged \$6.00 on the "Company Muster-out Roll", dated June 28, 1865, at Alexandria, Virginia]. There is no mention of the rifle in family records or lore but it was in his home when the farm on Atwell Hill, in Wentworth, N.H., was bought by my Aunt Gladys and her husband, David Kenison. I had never heard of it until the early 1970s, when Katherine Blaisdell was writing a series of books about the upper Connecticut River

valley. She contacted my mother [Theda Pease, Orford, N.H.] and explained that her husband, Dr. Ed Blaisdell, veterinarian and gun and antique tool collector, had obtained the rifle from my Aunt Gladys. As the story goes, Aunt Gladys had some cats to be spayed and she paid by trading Uncle Len's rifle to Dr. Blaisdell.

I have every confidence that the rifle I own was the one Uncle Len brought home, although I cannot prove it conclusively. Charlie Wright, who as a teenager talked a good deal with Uncle Len, writes that Uncle Len carried at least three separate rifles during the course of the war. In a letter to my mother on June 29, 1974, he wrote, "Your Uncle Len carried at least three different muskets during the war. The 5th Regiment trained with Belgian muskets, I believe; those guns were replaced by U.S. made ones; then, at Antietam his rifle was left in the ditch of a sunken road, which is now called "Bloody Lane", where he had been shot through the body and left for dead; till he was finally rescued by his chum, Bill Coarson. Then, months later, upon rejoining his regiment [in Maryland], your Uncle Len was issued another musket, . . ." The musket I have was not manufactured until late 1863, if mine and Dr. Blaisdell's deductions are correct and I assume it is at least the fourth he carried and the one he brought home.

In Civil War Guns, William Edwards writes as follows, as part of a discussion on James D. Mowry's part in scandals concerning weapons furnished to the Union army. "Mowry supplied guns marked with his name, U.S./JAS. D. MOWRY/NORWICH CONN on the lock with an eagle, forward of the hammer . . . We believe the Mowry-stamped lockplates are fitted to arms fabricated for Mowry . . . by the Eagle Manufacturing Company, at Mansfield, Connecticut." Mowry and Eagle were apparently not able to meet the demands of his contract with the War Department, as in November, 1863, Mowry asked for permission to extend the time for deliveries [Edwards, 45]. He was given permission to deliver " . . . 2000 more muskets. These were delivered during December and January of 1864. It is probable these arms are of a most unusual category; fabricated and marked by the Norwich Armories in Norwich, Connecticut, they bear, on the left side of the stock opposite the Norwich-stamped lockplate, a circled ink stamp about 1 inch across, oval in form, the brand of Jas. D. Mowry! . . . Though only one such arm with this mark is presently known . . ." Uncle Len's rifle fits this description and a local gunsmith has examined the rifle, finding all parts to be original. Dr. Blaisdell never talked with William Edwards, so Uncle Len's must be only the second rifle of this category which is known to exist.



There is also an interesting story regarding the wound Uncle Len suffered at Antietam. In "The Silent Neighbor", by Charlie Wright [N.H. Profiles, May, 1958], Charlie quotes Uncle Len as follows:

" . . . At the time I was hit, my right arm was raised. I was about to plunge the ramrod down when I felt a flash of pain stab through me like a red-hot poker. I fell, then I guess I must have fainted.

"When I came to, it was dark. I was in awful pain. The ball had passed through my right lung and on through my body, lodgin' just under the skin to the side of my backbone. I lay on the battlefield, right there in that ditch, for more than twenty-four hours. The stretcher-bearers passed me by. No doubt they thought I couldn't live, so they didn't bother to pick me up.

"My chum, Bill Coarson, hunted all over, tryin' to find me. At long last he did and gave me a drink from his canteen. He tried to get the stretcher-bearers to help lug me off the field but they refused. They said 'twas no use, I'd die anyway. So finally Bill told a couple of stretcher-men that he'd report them to Colonel Cross if they didn't take me off the field. They picked me up then and carried me to a set of farm buildin's.

"The yard was filled with the wounded, as close together as they could lay. The house and barn and sheds were all full of wounded officers and men. The stretcher-bearers couldn't find any other place to leave me, so they dumped me into a hog-pen. The hogs had been slaughtered by the soldiers, of course, but that pen was a mess - and swarmin' with flies.

"I had to wait a long time there. had to wait my turn. The surgeons were workin' like mad, hour after hour. But at last my turn came. And when the surgeon slit the skin on my back, over the Minie ball, it dropped right out into his hand. Then he took a long probe, thrust a silk handkerchief

into the wound, and rammed it clear through! Yes, he drew the handkerchief through my body. That was to clean out the wound.

"I was then taken to a shelter tent. Later on I was sent to a regular hospital. And less than ten months after Antietam, I rejoined the Fifth Regiment while on its march to Gettysburg. . . ."

When I first read this story, I was amazed at the treatment of the wound but didn't question the story. Then, when I received copies of Muster Rolls and Casualty Sheets from the National Archives, questions were raised. The Casualty Sheet dated 3-9-78 identifies the wound as "Wounded Slightly - Chest" and then on the Casualty Sheet dated 4-15-85, listed under the nature of the casualty is "W. Side". I also checked Bill Coarson's name in Child's history of the Fifth and noted that Coarson was listed as having deserted on September 1, 1862, at Centreville, Virginia, two weeks before the battle of Antietam! Was Uncle Len's story just a tall tale told to impress a youngster [Charlie Wright]? And what about drawing a handkerchief all the way through his body - I began to think that was not realistic.

Then, in an article in *Historical New Hampshire* on the Fifth Regiment, I read a letter written by Colonel Edward Cross, the Fifth's commanding officer, to his friend Henry Kent in Lancaster, describing the battle of Antietam. At the end, Cross mentions the fate of three soldiers, two of whom Child lists as residing in Lancaster. Cross also wrote "Howard is also badly wounded." No first name is given, but since Cross was writing to a friend in Lancaster and Uncle Len enlisted in Lancaster [Uncle Len then lived in Concord, Vt., just a few miles south on the Vermont side of the Connecticut,] it seems logical that Colonel Cross was referring to Uncle Len. The "badly wounded" sounded much more serious than "Wounded Slightly - Chest". This evidence, along with Muster Rolls which show Uncle Len "In hospital Frederick, Md" through February, 1863, certainly began to sound a little more like the story Charlie Wright remembered. Finally, I have two copies of enlistment papers for William Coarson of Concord, Vt., dated August 22, 1864. In these papers, Coarson declares that he has already served in the army for three years, was honorably discharged, and desired to enlist in a Vermont regiment for one year. Would he be allowed to enlist in a Vermont regiment if he had earlier deserted? Or was record-keeping far enough behind and Provost Marshals scarce enough in the "Northeast Kingdom" of Vermont that this could happen? Or, was the notation of Coarson's desertion an error? Perhaps he was just missing, later turned up before Antietam and the record was never corrected?

Eventually, I have come to what I believe is a logical explanation of Uncle Len's story of his wound, although I still can't verify Coarson's role in the story. Several years ago, I met Russell Yerkes, a medical technician and member of the Fifth Regiment New Hampshire Volunteers reenactment group, and told him the story. After talking with a doctor he met at a reenactment and with other medical personnel, Mr. Yerkes posits the following explanation. The bullet which hit Uncle Len was partly spent and without its full force when it hit him. It hit his chest, struck a rib, and followed that rib around to his back, where the Minie ball lodged just under the skin. The surgeon then slit the skin on his back and removed the bullet. Where the story about the probe and silk handkerchief came from is unclear. There was an entrance wound in his chest and an exit wound in his back and maybe Uncle Len believed that the bullet had gone straight through. Or, perhaps more likely, the passage of time and/or the desire to tell a good story brought about the explanation, which today seems fanciful and medically improbable at best.

Just when I thought I had this story all figured out, more information surfaced. Mark Travis, an editor at the Concord, N.H., *Monitor*, who is co-writing a new history of the Fifth, e-mailed that he had found that Colonel Cross recommended several men of the Fifth for the Congressional Medal of Honor after Antietam and Uncle Len was one of those. Information from the National Archives, *Record Group 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Regimental Letter Book, 5th New Hampshire Infantry* is as follows:

Hd. Qts. 5th N.H. Vols.

May 22d, 1863

Captain:

I have the honor to recommend in accordance with Gen'l Order No. 53 from Hdqrs. Army of the Potomac of May 12th, 1863 the following officers and men of the 5th NH Vols. . . Private Leonard W. Howard Co B wounded at Fair Oaks Antietam and Fredericksburg in all of which battles he conducted himself with marked distinction is recommended for a medal of honor. . .

Very Respectfully,

E.E. Cross

Col 5th NHV

None of those so recommended was granted the Medal and Mark says that this was probably also part of General Hooker's attempt to raise the Army's morale after these battles, implying that standards may have been lax. I had never heard of this nomination and it is possible that Uncle Len never knew about it. This did raise one more question, as other papers and muster rolls say that Uncle Len was still in hospital recovering from his Antietam wound in December of 1862, when the battle of Fredericksburg was fought.

However, the medal of honor nomination cites him as being wounded at Fredericksburg! Clerical error, mistaken identity, poor memory - perhaps the explanation lies in one of these or in some other reason.

There is one other connection which Uncle Len had to other Civil War events. After the war, he married Susan Hudson, widow of John May Hudson, who served in both the Third and Eleventh Vermont regiments, and who died in the infamous Andersonville Prison during the war. I have several pension papers of Uncle Len's and some affidavits and papers for Aunt Susan. When Uncle Len died, she applied for a widow's pension, and these papers are in support of that application.



I also own a blank copy of a lawyer's solicitation for veterans to claim land grant as a 'bounty' for their service. Uncle Len never acted upon this possible opportunity [as he got a bonus as a 'Veteran Volunteer' in 1864, he may not have been eligible for any land], as he moved from Concord, Vermont, to Wentworth, New Hampshire, in the 1880s. Grandpa George Howard soon followed him to Wentworth and there my mother, Theda Louise Howard Pease, was born on April 28, 1906. Ma remembers Uncle Len and Aunt Susan, who lived on the road down Atwell Hill to Wentworth village, just a short walk from Ma's girlhood home. She has given me the picture of Uncle Len and Aunt Susan on page 10, which was taken in front Ma's home on Atwell Hill, near the Baptist Church.



There is one final connection between Uncle Len and myself. I have taught social studies, mostly American history, at Lebanon High School since 1971 and as such, tell students each year about the Soldier's Memorial Building downtown near City Hall. I found that dozens of Lebanon men served in the Fifth and that one of the stained glass windows in the building, honoring a Captain Nathan Randlett, shows him to be a member of that regiment. So, almost one hundred fifty years later, one Civil War veteran's grand-nephew is teaching about a building raised to honor men of the very same regiment in which he served. To quote Arte Johnson of the Sixties television comedy classic, *Laugh-In*, "Verrrrry interesting"!

You will note that I use qualifying words such as "apparently" and "perhaps" quite often in this account. As a social studies teacher, I try to have my students become caring, informed skeptics and not make claims they can't support, yet at the same time I want them to make informed judgments.

I have attempted to follow those rules for myself.

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Attachments:

- "Casualty Sheet", L.W. Howard, 3-9-78
- "Casualty Sheet", L.W. Howard, 4-15-85
- "Company Muster Roll", 11/62-2/63, Leonard W. Howard, 5th NH [listed as "Absent" REmarks: "Wounded in battle Sept. 17/62 In hospital Frederick Md."]

- “Company Muster-out Roll”, 6-28-1865, Leonard W. Howard, 5th NH [includes reference to “arm, equipment retained”]
- “Rifle Muskets: Civil War Scandals” p45, in Civil War Guns, Edwards, William B., Castle, a division of Books Sales, Inc., Secaucus, New Jersey, 1982
- Coarson, Bill, Enlistment Form, 8-22-1864, State of Vt
- Fifth New Hampshire Regiment, 1861-65, William Child, “Part II, Complete Roster”
- “The Fifth New Hampshire Volunteers”, Donald H. Richards, *Historical New Hampshire*, Volume XXVIII, No. 4, Winter, 1973
- “Private Howard of the ‘Fighting Fifth’”, Katherine Blaisdell, Bradford, Vt. *Journal-Opinion*, 5-25-76
- “Silent Neighbor, The”, Wright, *New Hampshire Profiles*, 5/58
- “Dear Friend Theda”, Letter from Charlie Wright, 6-29-1974

THE little town of Wentworth, New Hampshire, furnished ninety-one men for the Union forces back in 1861-65. But ninety-one never came back to Wentworth and those that did, didn't want to talk about it. Leonard Walker Howard was one of those men.

Straight and dignified, with deeply lined features, he proudly retained a full head of dark-brown hair at sixty-nine, although his beard was a rich gray. I was intrigued by this pleasant, retiring neighbor who spent his words like gold-pieces—especially where his war experiences were concerned.

As a boy, I was curious to know more about this silent neighbor of mine. I knew that he had served nearly four years in the Union army as a private in the Fifth Regiment, which later became famous as the "Fighting Fifth"; that he had been severely wounded in action and that he received a small pension. But that was all.

One evening I was near the pasture gate when Mr. Howard came striding over the dusty road. I was fascinated by his erect posture and precise stride,

snow shoveling, as boys of fifteen or sixteen years of age drew half pay while working on the town roads, Leonard Howard was one of the men on this job. He seldom "worked out," but when he did he labored steadily and took pride in his work.

Presently I paused for a moment and turned to glance back along the straight sides of the cut. Mr. Howard was close by.

"This would make a good trench to use in a battle. Wouldn't it, Mr. Howard?" I remarked.

He merely chuckled and kept on with his work.

At the age of fifteen I sold weekly papers around the neighborhood and Mr. Howard bought a paper each week. Again and again I tried to persuade him to talk about the war, but the result was seldom more than an amused chuckle. It became somewhat of a game, yet a game I couldn't seem to win. I realized, after a while, that my eager questioning was a tactical error. *If I can get Mr. Howard talking about guns, I thought, maybe he'll go on to telling about the war.*

So the next time I called to deliver his paper, I mentioned the fact that I had traded a small rifle for an old shotgun and a loading kit. We fell to talking of guns, the penetration of bullets, and results obtained by using various loads of powder and shot.

Suddenly he remarked, "You know, I've a buckshot in my left arm."

"That so?" I replied. "How'd it happen?"

"Got it at Fair Oaks, down in Virginia."

"Oh, in the war!"

"Yes, 'twas our first real battle. You know, we fellers worked like sin buildin' a log bridge across the Chickahominy so we could get *into* the battle, but we got our bellies full of fightin' by the time that scrap was over with.

"I remember the first time we came under fire," he went on. "Our company, Company B, was formed in line, and there was a big stump just a few paces ahead. When the first bullets come whistlin' over our heads, a few of the boys broke ranks and dashed toward that stump. The first feller to reach the stump kneeled down behind it and aimed his gun over the top. But before he could fire, a Minie ball struck him right between the eyes.

(Continued on page 44)

The Silent Neighbor

(LEONARD HOWARD)

By Charles A. Wright

so different from the shambling gait of many farmers.

"Mr. Howard," I said, "do soldiers always walk like you do?"

He chuckled, but made no further answer.

Yet perhaps his thoughts swung back for a moment in recollection of that floundering march through the Chickahominy swamps, the charge through a cornfield at Antietam Creek, or the long and painful march to Gettysburg.

I did not see him again for several months. Then one day late in March when I was helping with the town

Silent Neighbor

(Continued from page 30)

He fell back, dead as a hammer. I tell ye the captain didn't need to yell any more orders for the other boys to get back into the ranks. No sirree. They hustled right back and took their places!

"Well, at Fair Oaks we were at close quarters with the enemy, right in the woods. They were shootin' buckshot as well as musket balls. I remember it was about this time o' day gettin' dusk, when I got hit (June 1, 1862). I went to a farmhouse in the rear, where the doctors were at work, and waited my turn. Then a doctor tried to probe out the buckshot, but somehow he couldn't get ahold of it. The wound healed all right, though, and I've carried that buckshot to this day."

"Doesn't it ever hurt you?" I inquired.

"Never bothers me. It wasn't much of a wound, anyhow, compared to the slug of lead I got at Antietam."

"A slug of lead?"

"Minie ball. You see, B Company

was stationed in a sunken road. I was standin' up, loadin' and firin' as fast as I could. My gun got so fouled up I could hardly push my ramrod through the barrel. At the time I was hit, my right arm was raised. I was about to plunge the ramrod down when I felt a flash of pain stab through me like a red-hot poker. I fell, then I guess I must have fainted.

"When I come to, it was dark. I was in awful pain. The ball had passed through my right lung and on through my body, lodgin' just under the skin to the side of my backbone. I lay on the battlefield, right there in that ditch, for more than twenty-four hours. The stretcher-bearers passed me by. No doubt they thought I couldn't live, so they didn't bother to pick me up.

"My chum, Bill Coarson", hunted all over, tryin' to find me. At long last he did and gave me a drink from his canteen. He tried to get the stretcher-bearers to help lug me off the field, but they refused. They said 'twas no use, I'd die anyway. So finally Bill told a couple of stretchermen that he'd report them to Colonel Cross"

if they didn't take me off the field. They picked me up then and carried me to a set of farm buildin's.

"The yard was filled with the wounded, as close together as they could lay. The house and barn and sheds were all full of wounded officers and men. The stretcher-bearers couldn't find any other place to leave me, so they dumped me into a hogpen. The hogs had been slaughtered by the soldiers, of course, but that pen was a mess—and swarmin' with flies.

"I had to wait a long time there. Had to wait my turn. The surgeons were workin' like mad, hour after hour. But at last my turn came. And when the surgeon slit the skin on my back, over the Minie ball, it dropped right out into his hand. Then he took a long probe, thrust a silk handkerchief into the wound, and rammed it clear through! Yes, he drew the handkerchief through my body. That was to clean out the wound.

"I was taken into a shelter tent. Later on I was sent to a regular hospital. And less than ten months after Antietam, I rejoined the Fifth Regi-

ment while on its march to Gettysburg. That's where Colonel Cross was mortally wounded."

The veteran's gaze lifted to a large framed print on the wall. Kerosene lamps cast a mellow glow on the picture. In the foreground, Federal soldiers were shown massed in confused ranks behind a low stone wall. Ragged lines of Confederate soldiers charged up a slope, charging up to the very muzzles of the Federal guns. A mounted Confederate officer, having jumped his horse over the wall, held his hat high on the point of his sword. Here and there along the front, men were engaged in mortal combat, thrusting with naked bayonets or clubbing their muskets. At the left stood a clump of splintered trees. In the right foreground a group of Confederate prisoners of war were being herded to the rear. And in the background was a broad meadow, strewn with the wreckage of war.

This old print, which portrays the "high-water mark" of General Pickett's valiant charge at Gettysburg, is now a scarce collector's item.

"How did it seem to get back in the ranks once more?" I inquired.

"Well," he replied thoughtfully, "'twas mighty good to be back with the boys again. But I felt kind of sad, too. So many were missin' . . . killed at Fredericksburg. Less than two years before we had left New Hampshire a thousand strong. Now we were down to about 175 men considered fit for duty. I soon found out that I wasn't very rugged. I'd got soft bein' laid up so long in the hospital. And that quick march to Gettysburg nigh finished me. But when we got there I was put on light duty.

"During the battle I helped guard a bunch of prisoners, back of the lines on Cemetery Hill. The cannonadin' was the worst I ever heard! Once in a while a solid shot or a shell from the rebel guns would sail clean over the top of the hill and come boundin' down the slope. A few of the prisoners were killed or wounded by shells from their own artillery, and I tell ye we had our hands full to keep the whole bunch from skedaddlin'. But we held 'em."

"Were you wounded again?"

"No, but at Cold Harbor I was hurt in a bayonet charge. We were chargin' as fast as we could run, when I stumbled over somethin' and fell, strikin' my abdomen on a jagged stump. That wasn't reported as a wound, of course, but it hurt me as much—or more. In fact, I still suffer from the effect of that injury, by spells."

Mr. Howard was silent for a long moment. He sat slumped in his chair as if his unusual talkativeness had wearied him. The ticking of the clock was clearly audible in the room. He turned to his wife, a short, buxom woman, who was seated beside the table.

"Susan," he said, "why don't ye give Charlie a handful of them cookies ye baked today. I thought they tasted mighty good." He chuckled. "A darn sight better'n that hardtack we fellers knawed on in the army!"

° William Coarson, Company B, born at West Lebanon, Maine; credited to Lancaster, N. H.

°° Colonel Edward E. Cross, of Lancaster, N. H., first commander of Fifth Regiment.