

Service with the Old 4th Mich. Infantry

Robert Campbell

MOLLUSK Records

Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Michigan Commandery records, 1885-1951 (bulk 1885-1931).

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(?) means the transcriber is not certain of the previous word.

???? means that the word is indecipherable.

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Almost every man who participated in the War of The Rebellion saw some feature of interest and importance in the conflict not noted by any other person. Hence it is obvious that many valuable incidents of the War will never be chronicled. But personal observation may yet be written that would be of value for the future historian to glean (?) from.

The Old 4th Michigan Infantry was one of the three regiments called for to be raised in Michigan under the Special Order of the Secretary of War May 11th 1861 to serve for three years. There was somewhat of a scramble as to who should be admitted to these regiments. As the Secretary cautioned the Governor that he was not to exceed this number, But was to muster out any surplus. So the old 4th was somewhat select at the beginning. Pure patriotism was a leading native (?) power.

2-3

From it sprang over a dozen colonels and from them seven or eight generals. And from among the noncommissioned officers and privates after the war, there were those who became congressmen, professors and other officers of high position in civil life. As a member of this regiment my opportunity for observation in camp upon the march and upon the battlefield were quite favorable. This regiment was at the 1st Bull Run Battle, and a remnant that reenlisted continued until the final surrender at Appomattox. It was in almost every battle of the Army of the Potomac. And is known as the regiment that had three colonels killed in battle. It had also three flags in succession each with a marked history. And the fortunes of war were such that during a part of the time in Grants Overland Campaign, it was in command of lieutenants. It lost over 14 percent of its total enrollment in killed and mortally wounded in battle.

3-4

Another remarkable feature was that it lost about twice as many killed and mortally wounded in battle as there were of those who died of disease, a feature which pertains to but few if any other regiments.

As army Commanders we had Generals McDowell, McClellan, Pope, Burnside, Hooker, Meade and Grant. While the Confederate Army, that of Northern Va. which confronted us, had for the most part except for a short time Beauregard and Johnson, but the one commander General Robert E. Lee. News from these armies were always looked for with special interest and anxiety as they covered respectively their capitals Washington and Richmond.

Our army under each commander had its peculiar episodes and more or less desperate fighting. The history or chief incidents of the career of each commander, would require a lengthy paper for even a casual outline of things worthy of mention.

On the eve of departure for the seat of war, the ladies of Adrian presented the regiment with a beautiful flag.

4-5

In receiving it Col. D. A. Woodbury said that it would ever be a reminder of duty. And sooner than see it trailed in the dirt it should become the pall (?) of the regiment. This was our first colonel and our first flag. After the exchange of Salutations and good byes at Adrian, the regiment splendidly uniformed and equipped and highly praised by those in the states through which it passed, it reached Washington, and soon afterwards marched with the Union Army under the command of Gen. McDowell to Centerville

It was sent to watch the enemy near Blackburns Ford, while the unfortunate Battle of Bull Run was raging within a short distance of them. Being detached from Willcox Brigade for that purpose, much to the chagrin and dissatisfaction of the regiment.

Gen. O. B. Willcox declared to me a few years since that if he could have retained the 4th Michigan in his brigade that day that the Battle of Bull Run would have had an entirely different history.

5-6

There are many facts which would certainly justify the operation. After covering the retreat to Washington, the regiment with the rest of the army had a long period of camp life, drill and varied experience under Gen McClellans command.

It seemed a long time to wait, but we are comforted with the assurance that there were to be no more Bull Run's, but it seems that Robert E. Lee was not committed (?) in regard to the latter statement. After about eight months in camp with but little that was eventful, the regiment boards the transports and is landed at Fortress Monroe. There they view the exploits of the Merrimac and its defeat by the Monitor. The siege of Yorktown, Battle of Williamsburg and advance with the Army to the Chickahominy River in front of Richmond. Here the regiment was first brought prominently before the public while McClellan was preparing to advance upon Richmond. On May 24 1862 the regiment was chosen to make the first advance across the Chickahominy River.

6-7

It crossed in two sections one some distance above a rebel camp the other nearly opposite under the commands respectively of Col. Woodbury and Lieut. C. ?. Childs.

The camp though much superior in numbers were driven from their position losing about a hundred in killed wounded and prisoners. For which the regiment received the plaudits of the army and special commendation of the commanding General. In the prelude at New Bridge there was the full flush of valor, vigor and victory. At Malvern Hill the finality, the last of the seven days battles, A brief brilliant career and Col. D. A. Woodbury was numbered with the slain And within those few days were more than eighty of his brave, beloved men returned to the host with him. After a few weeks for repairs and recuperation upon the James River below Richmond. The emboldened enemy are the first to take the initiative Then follows 2d Bull Run South Mountain and Antietam.

7-8

The two latter battles form the climax in McClellans remarkable career. After the battle of Antietam when the enemy had recrossed the Potomac at Blatchfords Ford near Shepherdstown, They placed batteries upon the opposite heights with their supports and sharpshooters in front to guard the ford and prevent our army from following theirs. The Fifth Corps which for the most part had been in reserve during the battle, was ordered to pursue them. On reaching the river, the menacing batteries of the enemy were discovered. Gen. Porter the Corps Commander applied to Gen. Morrell Commander of the 1st Division, and he with Gen. Porter went to the brigade Commander to ascertain if it would be possible to secure a volunteer assaulting force who were willing to ford the river in the face of those batteries and undertake to capture them and ascertain, if possible, the position and strength of the enemy.

8-9

When Gen Griffin commander of the 2d brigade was interviewed Colonel Childs of the 4th Michigan happened to be there when he heard what was wanted he said to the Generals if you will give me the support of your batteries, some sharpshooters or other reliable supports I will volunteer to take my regiment and make the assault. The proposition was accepted at once. Sharpshooters were given and two volunteer detachments from 1st brigade. All under the command of Col. Childs. When the regiment was formed and brought into position under the batteries, where they could see what was before them the Col. addressed his men and told them that he had volunteered to take the regiment to ford the river and undertake the capture of those batteries. But said he if any of the men do not desire to go they are at liberty to step from the ranks. Only two men stepped out.

9-10

Then said he, pointing to the guns that had already opened fire upon them do you see those batteries we are to capture them, a shell at that moment bursted over them. The speech was cut short and the regiment started for the enemy. They waded the river and rushed up the banks. They captured several cannon (?) and a number of prisoners And pursued the enemy for some distance, but were recalled, and at night returned in triumph. Recrossing the river with but five casualties. Although the fire was severe yet as is usual from elevations it passed for the most part, over their heads.

Confederate reports tell us that they were astonished at the audacity of the federals, so fine in number. Thinking that there must be a large flanking force

somewhere, they fell back in confusion. Other troops were sent over the next morning, but the enemy turned upon them in force.

10-11

And some of them were hurled back across the river in disaster. This calamity became somewhat commingled with the grand triumph of the Old 4th Michigan the night before. At a reunion of Griffins old brigade held at the time of the Grand Army Encampment at Pittsburg Pa, The Old 4th was specially remembered and commended in high terms. It was unanimously voted that a medal of honor was due to Col. J. W. Childs from the War Department for that brilliant achievement. A letter endorsing the recommendation was afterwards received from Gen. Porter.

For several weeks we lay in camp near the Antietam battle field during which time the President Abraham Lincoln visited the army. His prepossessing personality and sympathetic fatherly bearing had an inspiring effect upon us.

Soon we crossed the Potomac River into Va. And the pursuit of the enemy was again begun.

11-12

Proceeding about parallel with the mountain range we reached Warrenton Rumors of changes were rife, An initiative was sent from Army Head Quarters to certain officers of the 5th Corps desiring their presence that they might bid good bye to the commanding General. We shook hands with him and exchanged words of regret about parting.(?) Burnside was to command, and the army moved on.

Some of the despondent ones thought that it was taking a leap in the dark. We soon had Fredericksburg with its slaughter, and the battle of "Stick in the Mud" some of the boys called it. And more disobedience of officers for our late corps commander Fitz John Porter was about to be tried for disobedience of orders under Gen Pope at the 2d Bull Run battle. Poor Burnside he was in hot water with some of his officers there was alleged disobedience of orders on the part of some of them.

12-13

He appealed to the Administration, certain officers must be courtmartialled or removed, or his own resignation be accepted. It was an embarrassing situation. And it showed the remarkable sagacity and powers of management on the part of Abraham Lincoln.

Burnside's resignation was accepted. And one whom he had recommended for dismissal was put in his place. The troubled waters were so smoothed (?) that each of those commanders afterwards issued orders highly commendatory of each other. And Hooker takes command of the army.

Our regimental flag had become badly dilapidated riddled with bullets and the flagstaff broken. It was decided that it should be sent home to Michigan and a new one procured. In March 1863 I went from camp near Fredericksburg to Washington on official business.

Amongst my documents was a requisition for a new flag.

13-14

Proceeding to department headquarters I was courteously received and shown some of the finest flags and was assisted in selecting one of the best. In carrying it through the streets of Washington on my return I was more impressed than ever with the charm that attended and was attached to "Old Glory". Some of the passersby would salute, raise their hats and ladies would use such expressions as "God bless the soldier and the flag."

This was about the time that Gen Hooker was aching for the opportunity to advance upon the enemy. Hope had again begun to revive after the great setback at Fredericksburg.

The new banner was joyfully received by the regiment. A few days afterwards Captain Jeffords was commissioned as Colonel of the regiment. He was much pleased with the new flag and pledged himself in strong decisive terms to be its special guardian and defender.

14-15

It was first unfurled in battle at Chancellorsville where the regiment with its division were on duty upon the left of the field of battle. But after the rout(?) of the eleventh corps by Stonewall Jackson's victorious "Foot cavalry" as they were called, the division was withdrawn and hastily hurried to the right flank of the army where a prominent and important position was assigned to the 4th and 16th Michigan for defense. It was here that corps Commander Gen Mead rode anxiously up to Division Commander Gen. Griffin and said, have you placed suitable regiments upon that important position? I have said Griffin. Are they reliable (?) They are Michigan men. But will they hold it? I have placed the 4th and 16th Michigan in that position and they will hold it against hell, and they did hold it.

Among the killed in this battle was a young man whos father was also a member of the regiment.

15-16

And he was on duty with me at that time near United States Ford (?), some distance from the regiment. A wounded soldier came up to where we were and said to the old soldier, your son Henry is killed. He was facing the music (?) with the rest of the boys. The old father looked startled for a moment but recovering himself said, "I would rather hear that he had been killed than to hear that he had turned his back to the enemy." A short time afterwards another comrade brought his blood stained watch and pocket-book. The old father took them in silence, glanced at the fresh blood stains and as he turned away I could see that the tears were streaming over his war worn cheeks. Such are the fruits of war. So sure was Gen. Hooker of victory at one time at Chancellorsville that he declared "I have Lee's Army in one hand and Richmond in the other"

16-17

But he was seemingly not at all disconcerted when a few days afterwards he retreated across that river and his army returned to its old campground. At the beginning of the Gettysburg Campaign May 28th 1863 we again left our old camp near Fredericksburg and proceeded up the Rappahannock to Kellys Ford about 15 miles and there picketed the river for about two weeks. From the

heights near the ford we had a good view of the artillery and cavalry fight near Brandy Station.

About the time that we left our old camp the paymaster had furnished us with two months pay. Starting as we were upon an uncertain campaign, many of the men wished to send home some of their surplus money by express, but the nearest express office was at Aquia Creek about thirty miles distant on the Potomac River. The question was raised how the packages could be sent to the office. My good old tent mate the Chaplain John Seage volunteered the undertaking.

17-18

Knowing well that there was quite a risk to run from guerillas and bushwhackers. He and I worked together marking and arranging packages and letters. So we placed over twelve thousand dollars in a large haversack, which was to be concealed under his overcoat. About three o'clock in the morning he started on horseback for Aquia Creek. Much of the way the roads were winding and weaving (?) and in places ran through woodland and thickets of undergrowth. About two hours after sunrise a soldier came dashing into camp upon the Chaplains horse and calling out, "The Chaplain is shot: the Chaplain is shot: But he has saved the money. The guerillas attacked him. He wants to see one of his sons and some of the officers as soon as possible." He wanted to explain some of the private works that were upon some of the packages." As he was thought to be dying. His oldest son a Lieutenant of the Regt was ready at once. I volunteered to go with him.

18-19

Armed with sabers and revolvers, we mounted and started our horses upon the canter. We regarded the case as an urgent one, and agreed that if we were attacked and one of us was shot down the other if possible should dash ahead. After riding about ten (?) miles we came to where a supply train with its escort had encamped for the night.

There in a tent we found the wounded Chaplain. Although considerable weakened from loss of blood and excitement, he wanted to talk. He told us first about the many packages, his chief anxiety was that the money might (?) all be safely returned to the men to whom it belonged. As sending it by express was for the time being out of the question. Then said he I had passed this camping train about a mile daylight had just dawned, the road was through a thicket of woodland with quite a ravine upon one side. Suddenly a group of men appeared, partly in rebel uniforms.

19-20

Two or three in front two behind and two on the side opposite the ravine. Halt! Surrender: said the leader in front of me." Those swift winged prophetic messengers that will flit through the mind in certain emergencies came over him in a moment of time. But for the money that was intrusted to him it seemed like folly to do otherwise than surrender. "I thought" said he," of the men who had intrusted their money with me. Save for dear and needy ones at home. They all might forgive me under the circumstances if I had surrendered, but I never could have forgiven myself.

He was a man of nerve and decisive character. When the guerilla said "Surrender", the Chaplain said "surrender to whom?" in the name of "Moseby's Cavalry." "I don't recognize that authority and shall not surrender. Without further parley they raised their pieces and fired a volley at him.

20-21

His horse which had formerly been wounded in battle was wild with fright. He wheeled and plunged down into the ravine and rushed furiously back toward the wagon train, the Chaplain bending over and clinging to his neck. As he reached the train, he fell bleeding and fainting from his horse. A surgeon arrived the wounds probed and pronounced severe but not dangerous. He was struck several times through both arms. One shot aimed at his heart passed through his thick overcoat which concealed the haversack with the money, and lodged in his breast near the heart. That same morning within a few miles a mail carrier with valuable matter was captured and never heard from afterwards. A colored teamster was captured and hanged by a trace (?) chain to a tree

These were dark! dark, days between the battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg.

21-22

We remained picketing the river above and below Kelly's Ford for nearly two weeks. It was quite a variable experience. The pickets of the opposing armies at times would jolly each other, go in swimming together, swap tobacco sugar coffee and other things. One day I was riding past one of our picket posts when a confederate called out to our men that he wanted to swap horses with that officer. Our men appealed to me for my word of honor that he would not be molested if he came over to our side of the river. It was a very irregular proceeding for a commissioned officer to be engaged in. But trusting to the honor of the parties I consented. Leaving his carbine with one of his comrades, he rode through the river, came to me gallantly saluted and asked me how I liked to come face to face with a wild rebel. We did not swap horses, as I preferred my own steed to his war worn animal.

22-23

But in our few minutes to talk and repartee I received some significant pointers. Said he you can cross the river here and go to Richmond and we will give you the best we have in the shop. (?)

But we are going to Washington and expect before the summer is over to visit New York and Boston.

Our aspirations for ends to be accomplished were very different. But we parted as friends, hoping to meet and compare notes upon some future time.

Confederate General Gordon who confronted our Corps at times during the war and who has recently delivered lectures throughout the North, tells us of a similar experience where he visited his pickets upon the same river among the same men. The time between Chancellorsville and Gettysburg was a high water mark for the Confederacy. Leading southerners talked about yet calling the roll of their slaves at the foot of Bunker Hill Monument.

23-24

The New York draft riots encouraged them to push forward toward the north.

At this time the Administration was perplexed and in doubt as to the proper move to make. The Confederate Army seemed to stretch from the lower Rappahannock to the upper Potomac about one hundred and fifty miles in length.

Hooker thought that he might throw a part of his army across the river between Lee's army and Richmond and attack the rear. Lincoln thought that he might attack the long stretched out ???? somewhere in the middle and thus cut him in two.

But in the main we had to be guided by what the Confederates were doing, in the mean time our cavalry were playing a very important part with there skirmishes and fights were numerous. We knew not then of Gettysburg, but we did feel and know that a desperate something was in the near future.

24-25

For many days in sultry June the weary soldiers tramped beneath the burning sun. At times shrouded in dust, through desolate Virginia and fruitful Maryland. At times the distant clouds of dust rising to our left and front above the mountain range told us that the defiant foe were hastening on between us and our northern homes.

We hurried forward until the citizens with pallid faces tell us that we are now in Pennsylvania with the daring foe beyond us. The last night of June we camped at ??? Mills about 15 miles from Gettysburg. Early the next morning we canvassed the regiment to ascertain the immediate wants of the men. Col. Jeffords came to me and said I see that a large number of our men have taken to wearing hats, of course they are much more comfortable to wear in the hot sun than caps but it isn't Soldier like.

And I want you to have caps for those men, so that all may look alike.

25-26

Jeffords and I had been classmates together at the high school several years before and had not met since then until here in the army. He thought that it was a little curious that the quartermaster in being notified through his department about obtaining supplies, ammunition, etc. should thus know about a premeditated movement before the regimental commander should know. In fact it seemed to leave the quartermaster as quite an independent personage. When he spoke about drawing the caps I said to him it is for the Company Commanders to call for caps for their men in their requisitions to me. Then I will make requisition for them through the proper channels. Then, said he I order you to get a cap for every man in the regiment who hasn't one without company requisitions. I smiled in his face and said all right Colonel, but you must give me a written order to that effect.

26-27

Robert H. Campbell – no. 134

He went back to his quarters and in about ten minutes returned. Quartermaster said he you needn't send for the caps. But I want to make you a present, said he. I was at the 1st Bull Run, on the Peninsula seven days fighting, 2d Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville. Then putting his hand in

his pocket he drew out a large heavy (?) six barreled self cocking revolver. In all these campaigns, said he, I have never needed to use it and it has been a heavy load to carry. You as quartermaster are liable to be mixed up with the guerillas and have much more need of it than I have. Besides you have better means of transportation for heavy artillery than I have. As the occasion was a half serious half comic one I took the weapon made a corresponding sophomoric speech in reply. This was my last interview with Col. Jeffords. Within a few minutes the bugle sounded. We soon heard distant guns in the direction of Gettysburg.

27-28

The troops started toward the sound. Our train followed for several miles then ??? to the right on the road to Hanover which is a few miles east of Gettysburg. There were the marks of a fresh battlefield. The cavalry had met some of the frightened and bewildered looking citizens, told us about the marvellous (?) cavalry charge and great credit was given to Michigan troops, the enemy being driven.

Who was not somewhat bewildered at this time, the crisscross movements of Army detachments. In the midst of our anxiety, it was rumored that Hooker had resigned as Commander of the Army. The head of the army gone. What next? How commendable the complaisance of our Union soldiers.

With some armies it would have meant defeat. Not so with ours, where almost every intelligent veteran was in a measure fitted for a commander. It made much rumor but little stir.

28-29

Some enthusiasts, "catching at straws" said McClellan is in command again. But some of us soon knew that our good 5th Corps Commander Gen. Mead had been appointed to succeed Hooker. That settled it, and things moved on. Before the day was over the roar of cannon and distant din of battle plainly told us where the great historic field was to be. The 1st and 11th Corps driven back through Gettysburg. Gen Reynolds the commander killed. This was our bit of news for the first day.

Then comes the hurried night marches the grand concentration of forces. Where on the morrow more than one hundred and fifty thousand valiant men confront each other with over five hundred cannon.

Our 4th Michigan reached the field about the middle of the fervour (?) – July 2d. It maneuvered at various points of the battlefield for several hours, skirmished near the Peach Orchard, and at last lined up with its brigade in a skirt of woods in front of and pretty (?) across the historic Wheatfield.

29-30

Where severe fighting had already taken place, and where perhaps the greatest charging and countercharging during the battle was enacted.

The confederates broke through the lines upon the right of our brigade there was a commingling of forces a hand to hand conflict. Our flag was seized by a confederate who was bearing it off. Col. Jeffords rushed after him and slew him with his sword and seized the flag. A confederate behind the Colonel thrust

his bayonet through him. Major Hall, it is said, shot the latter confederate with his revolver.

The 4th Michigan Monument stands in the lower bloody angle of the Wheatfield near the spot where Col. Jeffords fell.

He lived in a semi delirious condition for a short time and the surgeon who attended him told me that the last words that he uttered were mother! Mother! Mother! It is stated that he was the only man killed with a bayonet thrust at the battle of Gettysburg.

30-31

Some have stated that he shot the rebel with his revolver, but he gave me his revolver the day before. I still have it as a relict. In this battle the regiment lost about thirty percent of those engaged in killed wounded and prisoners.

The next day July 3rd Gen. Picket of Longstreets Corps with about eighteen thousand men made his desperate attempt to break the union center upon Cemetery Hill and divide our army. The artillery duel before the charge was something terrific and awfully sublime. But it seemed like madness for men to press forward as they pressed forward while our artillery from different directions was mowing them down.

But they did reach and break our center. Led by Confederate General Armistead, who fell dead within our lines. And the tide was turned. Had Stuarts Cavalry met them in the rear of our army as was expected, it is hard to tell what the result would have been.

31-32

The great cavalry battle upon upon our right prevent the converging columns from coming together.

At Chancellorsville if any one of a number of seemingly chance mishaps that were against us had been otherwise, the victory would most likely have been ours, and vice versa. At Gettysburg, seemingly, if any one of a number of mishaps to the Confederates had they been otherwise the victory might have been theirs. After the Battle I rode for miles over the ghostly field, was at Culps Hill, Cemetery Ridge, Wheatfield, Little Round Top from which a fine view was obtained of a large part of the great battlefield. And I also visited the improvised hospitals where thousands of the wounded and dying lay. All were waiting anxiously for the next move. Then the signals (?) proclaimed. The rebels are retreating.

Even the wounded and the dying seemed to catch the joyful sound. They felt that the high water mark of the Rebellion had been reached. But the end was not yet.

32-33

Our third flag was the American Eagle upon a blue field. Our regiment followed it after Gettysburg and in the Mine Run Expedition for hundreds of miles and latterly in Grants overland Campaign. On May 5th 1864 at the first days battle of the Wilderness, one of the color guards was shot through the head his blood and brains were scattered over the flag and upon the face of the color bearer who was also wounded. Here about the same time Col. Lumbard was mortally wounded. Our third Colonel killed in battle. When I saw him upon that field

writhing in the agonies of death a peculiar feeling came over me on account of a remarkable coincidence. One of our best and most pathetic war songs Entitled "The Soliloquy of the Volunteer Wife" it was dedicated to his wife. He and I have sung it together a number of times. It was quite prophetic in some places. One couplet was

He never again may hear the tones,
Or kiss the lips of his little ones.
Now the vail is lifted the end is near.

33-34

"He never again will hear the tones
Or kiss the lips of his little ones"

As he groaned and turned he muttered must I die and be buried in this hated Virginia soil. For six weeks more it was almost one continued battle. Men found and died.

With the Confederates besides fighting for what was embodied in the so called "Lost Cause". They assumed that their lives, liberty and property were at stake or at least jeopardized. This coupled with the declaration that they would fight to the "last ditch" This in a measure explains the heroic madness that they at time exhibited in battle. After the Emancipation Proclamation there seemed to be also a renewed desperation in their fighting. With the Federals there was at the beginning but the one thing National Unity or "Save the Union" Which in time developed in a measure into a struggle between freedom and bondage.

34-35

Human slavery had existed in the world for thousands of years. And now the Union soldiers were the chosen instruments to settle this momentous question for all time. What can explain the heroic valor of the Union Army, that was so manifest in some of those terrific charges? It could not be selfishness. Was it not directed by the hand of our ruling Providence.

There was No special favor or commutation of time for the Old 4th Michigan Infantry, it was fight, fight, fight! Even upon the day that our three year term of service expired, we were fighting at Petersburg some of our men were killed and wounded that very morning. But we were there to fight. The "Last Ditch" had a meaning. And Gen. Grant was in the saddle.

36 end

This manuscript written by
Robert Campbell – 1st. Lt. L. 116.

