



Thomas Sparks (1817-1874) wearing the uniform of the Gray Reserves in 1861 when a corporal.

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Until the Regt. returned home we had drill every afternoon (except Saturday & Sunday) & Wednesday & Friday nights.

My family being out of town, I did not attend on the night drills, but was very constant & attentive to those in the afternoon, as my election as 2^d Lieut. was by acclamation, & as my 2^d Superior officers were old soldiers (the Capt. an old Washington Gray of Phila. & the 1st Lieut. for a long time an active member of the Tompkins Blues of New York) I felt rather embarrassed at first. But as it went, drilling & studying alternately, until I began to feel more confidence in myself. — As the civil business of the Co. had all been left in my charge by the officers who had gone with the Company, I was kept very hard at work, & my own business putting back at the same time left me not a leisure moment. I was heartily glad when I recd the news that the Regt. was at Hanisburg last Wednesday night on its way home. On Thursday morning last the Regt. arrived at West Hill Station at 8 1/2 A.M. They looked like veterans who had seen service I assure you. Our old Captain (about 64 years old) looked like a very old "moustache" all tanned dark & with unshaven face.

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Darby
Hills, Sept 28/62

Dear Sister Caddy.

I do not remember whether I am in debt to you for the last letter or you to me, however, I just feel like dropping you a few lines. — Since I wrote you last, our dear old State has been in danger of invasion by the rebels, now, however, ^{danger is no more} the present. When Gen. Curtis called upon the men to arm themselves to proceed to the Southern border, the "Gay Reserves" at once went to work to prepare for their duty. The day after the Proclamation was received in this City, the band of Officers offered the services of the Regt. to the Governor. The Captains of Companies were directed to fill up their ranks & to prepare for leaving the City at an hour's notice.

All the Company Armies were kept open all day & night until 10 P.M. Drilling was constant. New members were proposed & elected. The Roll was ^{soon} filled in our Company (A) that numbers of our members had to be put off with promise for vacancies, should they occur. My peculiar business (bullet making) being the only one in Pennsylvania, prevented my shouldering my musket, but I nevertheless spent nearly all the time at the Armory, (being Secty. of the Co.) assisting in the work of preparation.

On Monday (the 15th) the boys started for West Philadelphia Depot of the Pennsylvania R.R. Co. They left at 7th & Market St. about 1/2 p. 6 P.M. down to Chestnut, up Chestnut to 12th - up 12th to Arch - up Arch to 21st - down 21st to Market, - up Market to cross the bridge to a gate opposite the Darby Road. It was a day warm afternoon, & some of the men suffered severely from the fatigue in carrying their knapsacks, as they had not yet become accustomed to the work. I carried the musket for one of our men part

of the time. The Cars left West Phila. about 8 P.M. for Harrisburg. The balance of the trip to the battle fields of Maryland I will allow two of my friends to relate to you in their own words. Genl. Pellekin, & private Jacob Donaldson wrote me a sketch of their adventures & I now enclose them for your perusal. Please return them to me when next you write.

In obedience to an order from Capt. Smith, I called (the day after the departure of the Regiment) a meeting of the remaining Active, Associate & Contributing members of Co. A. to be held at the Armory for the purpose of organizing a Company A. No. 2. The object of which was to be for constant daily drills, to fill up vacancies in the ranks of the Company in the State Service, & for service at home, in case their services might be needed.

Altho' the notice was so short that numbers did not receive their notification till too late, about 50 members met & signed the Roll under the Call. - An election was held & (3^d Lieut) Bethell was chosen Captain. (Sergeant) Seay " " 1st Lieut. (Corporal) Sparks " " 2^d do.

The Captain at once appointed new-Commissioned officers, Sectys. & Treasurers, & thus the Co. A. No. 2 was organized. -

lost what little sense he had before possessed.
The consequence was, he had to be sent home
"crazy."

The Derby Rangers are to-night to be
presented with a play by the ladies,
to have a supper by the men
that "staid at home."

Mr. Ellis, Mrs. Keat, "Plickin" & your
humble servant will be "on hand."

It is said that during the 10 days' campaign,
the Friends' meeting house had very
few male attendants, - so many had
gone to the war.

We have a large Army hospital in our
neighbourhood; viz, the "Summit House"
near the Episcopal Church, Kingsessing.

The good people of the neighbourhood
are very attentive to the poor sick &
wounded soldiers there. - The ladies &
the children have fairs to raise the
means to assist in obtaining extra
comforts &c.

As breakfast is ready, I must now close
Yours truly

Thos. Spence

The members of the Regt. (those like myself
who had stayed at home) formed an
escort, which, with Kingfield's brass
band, preceded the Regt. on its way
to 7th & Arch St. by the same route
it had taken when they left home.

The officers of Co. A. No. 2. were the officers
of the escort, all however, in Citizen's clothes.
When our Company returned to the armory
they found a cold collation (with plenty
of hot coffee) prepared for them.

I waited on the table for about 1 1/2 hours.

The poor fellows seemed almost famished.
They had so little to eat during the
10 days they had been in service that
with the exception of what they took
with them in their haversacks, & some of
them asserted they eat more at this
collation than they had during the whole
time I have mentioned.

The service rendered by 2 regts. of the Phila. Reserve
Rifles have been very valuable. - Altho'
our Regt. (the 1st Gray's) have not come in
contact with the enemy they were in his immediate
proximity, at Bunker's they were on the left wing
of McClellan's Army, & when on the point
between Hagerstown & Williamsport, they were
part of the right wing of the same army.
They scoured on one occasion part of the
left of battle of the previous day.
When passing thro' the deserted Camp grounds

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of the rebel army they had to use great care that they did not carry off with them some of those insects usually denominated "soldier bugs" from all accts. I am satisfied that the rebel soldiers are a very filthy and licentious set of rascals.

The women of Boonsboro had to close their doors & windows as the rebel army passed through their town. The scent was so very disagreeable, that any one in search of them can smell them at a great distance.

The effect ^{of this siege} on the members of the Regt. will no doubt be good. The different individuals now know what they can endure in the way of hardships.

Some, who had been in service for 3 mos. last year, say that they have undergone more in the ten days of service just past, than they did in the 3 mos. under Genl. Patterson. — Another benefit is, that the newspaper press & the community will cease their sneers at the Reserves, Home Guard & other such organizations of citizens, who are willing to devote their leisure & means for the military protection of Phil. &c.

Again, — the members of the Regt. & of the different companies have had an opportunity of testing the merits of their officers. Should they again be called on by the authorities for such a tour of duty, several changes will have to be made.

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They find that even ^{some} West Pointers are not all the right sort of staff for commanding a Regt. in the "field."

I fear Caddy that I will tire you out with my military hobby. —

Wifey is first rate. The baby is progressing finely & all the rest are very well & desire their love to be sent to their dear Aunty & to Uncle Peter, to whom I desire my salutations be given. —

Yours affectionately
Mrs Sparks

Monday, Sep. 29/62

P.S. I ought to state that old Darby has redeemed itself about 4/5 of the votes of this Borough formed a company & went off to Harrisburgh. They were with some other companies from Delaware County formed into a Regiment viz. the 6th Penna. Militia. The Darby Captain, Charles Sitzgenburg (the village Blacksmith) was made Major of the Regiment. The Regt. was sent down the Cumberland Valley to Hagerstown (Md.) On one occasion there was a sudden alarm. — they were ordered to form "line of battle" but lo & behold they had no arms! However the enemy did not come, but one of our Darby Rangers, named "Shah" the bar-keeper of the "Buttonwood"

Darby [Pennsylvania]

September 28, 1862

Dear sister Caddy,

I do not remember whether I am indebted to you for the last letter or you to me, however, I just feel like dropping you a few lines.

Since I wrote you last, our dear old State has been in danger of invasion by the rebels. Now, however, the danger is no more present. When Gov. Curtin called upon the men to arm themselves to proceed to the southern border, the "Gray Reserves" at once went to work to prepare for their duty. The day after the Proclamation was received in this city, the board of officers offered the services of the regiment to the Governor. The captains of companies were directed to fill up their ranks to prepare for leaving the city at an hour's notice.

All the company armories were kept open all day and night until 10 P. M. Drilling was constant. New members were proposed and elected. The "Roll" was so soon filled in our company (A) that numbers of our members had to be put off with promises for vacancies should they occur. My peculiar business Bullet making) being the only one in Pennsylvania prevented my shouldering my musket but i nevertheless spent nearly all the time at the armory (being secretary of the Co.) assisting in the work of preparation.

On Monday (the 15th) the boys started for West Philadelphia Depot of the Pennsylvania Railroad Co. They left 7th & Market Street about half past 6 P. M. down to Chestnut, up Chestnut to 12th, up 12th to Arch, up Arch to 21st, down 21st to Market, up Market Street [] the bridge to a gate opposite the Darby Road. It was a very war, afternoon & some of the men suffered severely from the fatigue in carrying their knapsacks &c. They had not yet become accustomed to the work. I carried the musket for one of our men part of the time.

The cars left West Philadelphia about 8 P. M. for Harrisburg. The balance of the trip to the battlefield of Maryland I will allow two of my friends to relate to you in their own words. Lieut. [George F.] Delleker & private Jacob [H.] Donaldson wrote me a sketch of their adventures & I now enclose them for your perusal. Please return them to me when next you write.

In obedience to an order from Capt. Smith, I called (the day after the departure of the regiment) a meeting of the remaining active associate & contributing members of Co. A to be held at the armory for the purpose of organizing a Company A, No. 2. The object which was to be for constant daily drills, to fill up vacancies in the ranks of the company in the state service, & for service at home in case their services might be needed.

Although the notice was so short that members did not receive their notification till too late, about 50 members met and signed the roll under the call. An election was held & 3rd Lieutenant Bethell was chosen Captain, Sergeant Sears was chosen 1st Lieutenant, and Corporal Sparks was chosen 2nd Lieutenant.

The Captain at once appointed non-commissioned officers, secretaries and treasurers, and then the Co. A, No. 2 was organized. Until the regiment returned home, we have had drills every afternoon (except Saturday and Sundays) and Wednesday & Friday nights.

My family being out of town, I did not attend on the night drills but was very constant and attentive to those in the afternoon. As my election as 2nd Lieutenant was by acclamation & as my 2 superior officers were old soldiers (the Captain an old Washington Grays of Philadelphia and the 1st Lieutenant for a long time an active member of the Tompkins Blues of New York), I felt rather embarrassed at first. But at it I went drilling and studying alternatively until I began to feel more confidence in myself. As the civil business of the company had all been left in my charge by the officers who ha gone with the company, I was kept very hard at work & my own business pretty brisk at the same time left me not a leisure moment.

I was heartily glad when I read the news that the regiment was at Harrisburg last Wednesday night on its way home. On Thursday morning last, the boys arrived at West Philadelphia Station at 8:30 A. M. They looked like veterans who had seen service, I assure you. Our Old Captain (about 64 years old) looked like a very old "mustache." All [were] tanned dark and with unshaven faces. The members of the regiment (those like myself who had stayed at home) formed an escort which with Birgfeld's Brass Band, preceded the regiment on its way to 7th & Arch Street by the same route it had taken when they left home. The officers of Co. A, No. 2, were the officers of the escort, all however in citizen's clothes. When our company returned to the Armory, they found a cold collation (with plenty of hot coffee) prepared for them.

I waited on the table for about 1 and a half hours. The poor fellows seemed almost famished. They had so little to eat during the 10 days they ha been in service that (with the exception of what they took with them in their haversacks), some of them asserted they eat more at this collation than they had during the whole time I have mentioned.

The service rendered by 2 regiments of the Philadelphia Reserve Brigade have been very valuable, although our regiment (the 1st Grays) have not come in contact with the enemy, they were in his immediate vicinity. At Boonsboro they were on the left wing of McClellan's Army and when on the road between Hagerstown and Williamsport, they were part of the right wing of the same army. They occupied on one occasion part of the field of battle of the previous day. When passing through the deserted camp grounds of the rebel army, they had to use great care that they did not carry off with them some of those insects usually denominated "soldier bugs." From all accounts, I am satisfied that the rebel soldiers are a very filthy and licentious set of rascals. The women of Boonsboro had to close their doors and windows as the rebel army passed through their town. The scent was so very disagreeable that anyone in search of them can smell them at a great distance.

The effect of this service on the members of the regiment will no doubt be good. The different individuals now know what they can endure in the way of hardships.

Some who had been in the service for 3 months last year say that they have undergone more in the ten days of service just past than they did in the 3 months under Gen. Patterson. Another benefit is that the newspaper press & the community will cease their sneers at the Reserves, Home Guard, and other such organizations of citizens who are willing to devote their leisure & means for the military protection of Philadelphia again. The members of the regiment and of the different companies have had an opportunity of testing the merits of their officers. Should they again be called on by the authorities for such a tour of duty, several changes will have to be made. They find that even some West Pointers are not all the right sort of stuff for commanding a regiment in the field.

I fear, Caddy, that I will tire you out with my military hobby Wifey is first rate. The baby is progressing finely & all the rest are very well & desire their love to be sent to theit dear Aunty & to Uncle Peter, to whom I desire my salutations be given.

Yours affectionately, — Thos. Sparks

P. S. I ought to state that Old Darby has redeemed itself. About 4/5 of the voters of the Borough formed a company & went up to Harrisburg. They were with some of the other companies from Delaware County formed into a regiment, viz. the 16th Penna. Militia. The Darby Captain, Charley Litzenberg (the village blacksmith) was made Major of the regiment. The regiment was sent down the Cumberland Valley to Hagerstown (Md.). On one occasion there was a sudden alarm. They were ordered to form a “line of battle” but lo and behold, they had no ammunition. However, the enemy did not come but one of our Darby Rangers named “Liah”—the barkeeper of the “Buttonwood”—lost what little sense he had before possessed. The consequence was he had to be sent home “crazy.”

The Darby Rangers are tonight to be presented with a flag by the ladies & to have a supper by the men that “staid at home.” Mr. Ellis, Mr. Neal, Plick____, and your humble servant will be “on hand.”

It is said that during the 10 days’ campaign, the Friends Meeting House had very few male attendants—so many had gone to the war.

We have a large army hospital in our neighborhood, viz: the “Summit House” near the [St. James] Episcopal Church, Kingsessing. The good people of the neighborhood are very attentive to the poor, sick, and wounded soldiers there. The ladies and children have fairs to raise the means to assist in obtaining extra comforts, &c.

As breakfast is ready, I must now close. Yours truly, — Thomas Sparks

Bio of Thomas Sparks

Born in 1817 he was 45 years old when he served in Co. A. of the First Regiment Infantry, National Guard of Pennsylvania (a. k. a. "The Gray Reserves," or the "7th Regiment of the Militia of 1862"). Thomas and his wife, Annie Eliza Brown, were Pre-Hicksite Quakers and members of the meeting house at Darby. He was born in the old district of Southwark, Philadelphia county, Pennsylvania. Thomas passed away in 1874.

In 1838, when he was 21, his uncle took him into the business of manufacturing shot, his uncle then being the proprietor of Sparks' Shot Tower near the Delaware river in the southern part of the city. In 1855, when his uncle died, Thomas succeeded him in managing the enterprise which did a healthy business during the war not only in manufacturing round shot but conical bullets. This shot tower still stands today and can be toured.