

**GETTYSBURG THROUGH THE EYES OF PRIVATE ROYAL D. KING, 14<sup>th</sup> VERMONT**  
**Compliments of Virginia Gage and *The Camp Griffin Gazette*, Green Mountain Civil War Round Table**



14<sup>th</sup> Vermont Infantry Monument, Gettysburg  
National Military Park. Courtesy U.S.  
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Chamberlain CWRT Editor's note: Virginia Gage, editor of *The Camp Griffin Gazette* [News and Information from the Green Mountain Civil War Round Table], has graciously given the Chamberlain round table permission to reprint the "Letter of Pvt. Royal D. King, 14<sup>th</sup> VT, to his sister." This exceptionally poignant letter (which had been transcribed), appeared in the June 2021 edition of *The Camp Griffin Gazette*, Volume XXVIII, Number 6. Many thanks to Ginny Gage and our friends at the Green Mountain Civil War Round Table for agreeing to share Private King's account of the Battle of Gettysburg.

The Vermonters are well remembered for their service at Gettysburg. As the battle unfolded, the 14<sup>th</sup> Vermont was part of General George J. Stannard's Third Brigade (which was also known as the Second Vermont Brigade, as referenced in Private King's letter), Third Division, I Corps. They played a critical role in thwarting a determined Confederate advance against Cemetery Ridge and stabilizing the badly shaken Union line during the late afternoon of July 2. Then, on July 3, they moved forward and unleashed a devastating flanking fire on the right of the Confederate line advancing on Cemetery Ridge during "Pickett's Charge." [P.J.S.]

*Near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania*  
*July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1863, Thursday*

*Dear Sister –*

*I don't hear anything from you or any one else but I am a going to keep writing just the same – I have not received a letter from any source since about the middle of June. I tho't it strange that I did not hear anything from home, for some time before we left the shoals [Wolf Run Shoals on the Occoqua River in VA]. I have written twice since we left there. Perhaps you have rec'd the letters. I don't expect to receive any more mail matter till we rejoin our regiment. Our company is left here as guard for the Division Hospital. We left the Reg't the 5<sup>th</sup> & have heard nothing from it. I suppose it is at Frederick M.D. Frederick is about 30 miles from here. Our mail I presume is being sent there, but we shall not get it till we start for home. 11 days after tomorrow will bring the 21<sup>st</sup> of July. The 13<sup>th</sup>'s time is out tomorrow. There was a co of that Reg't sent here at the same time we were – They have started to rejoin their Reg't to day. I presume we shall be ordered back next week – I have not told you yet where we are. We are between 3 & 4 miles south east from the Battle Field – on the Baltimore Turnpike. The whole country for 10 miles is one vast hospital. Every barn & almost every house has been appropriated for hospital purposes. The wounded suffer greatly from want of proper care. Many die, who if they had been properly cared would have recovered. Ours is only a Division Hospital & there are 500 in it. Dr. Woodward is the principal surgeon. He does all he can & as well as he can, but that is but little compared with the care that most would get at home. They are sending the wounded off to Baltimore, Philadelphia, & Washington as fast as possible. We have to stand guard six hours of the 24. That is light duty compared with anything we have had before since we left the shoals. It is hard work tho for us to do that. No one except ourselves can form any idea of how tired we were when we got here. The truth is we were completely fagged out. After marching seven days, from 20 to 25 miles each day, & lying one whole day exposed to the heat of a broiling sun, & the most terrific cannonading ever known, it wonder that so many are alive & as well as we are. The Rebs supposed they had annihilated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vt brigade – for they didn't suppose that men could possibly live exposed to the fire that we were. They call us "fighting devils." Some of the old Reg'ts say they never saw men stand fire as we did, & old Reg'ts could never have been made to do it. We did something toward gaining the victory at Gettysburg. I glad that I was there, & would willingly go thro all I have again if it would be the means of ending this inhuman war. I am proud of the "Flying Brigade," & I never before was so proud of being a Vermonter. We have not disgraced the Green Mountain State, & the others may have done as well, I know of none who have done better. It is true that we are weary & exhausted, but what of that, if we have been the means of crushing rebellion & treason. Those of us who get home will come with different looks feelings from those we left. Our experience will have taught us many things that we never would have learned without. No money could buy mine – I would not part with them on any account.*

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On July 11 Private King sent another letter home, this time describing the aftermath of the battle. Ginny Gage kindly provided the text of King's second transcribed letter.

*You see it takes some time to write a letter here. I commenced this two or three days ago & have not had a chance to finish it yet. We are still at the Division Hospital but shall probably be sent away somewhere by the middll of next week. We have heard nothing from our Reg't since we left it & don't know where it is or what it has been doing. We have rec'd no mail since leaving the shoals, & probably shall not now 'till we back to the Reg't. I expect that when we leave here we shall go to Baltimore & from there home. We can't get so much as a newspaper here, & know no more about what the Army has done since it left here, than the man in the moon. They are sending off the wounded as fast as possible. The greater part of them are gone & as soon as the rest are sent, we shall leave here. They send them to Baltimore first & from scatter them about among the different hospitals. Sam left yesterday with the other cripples. He is doing well & will be able to go home when the rest of us go. He lost his knapsack & blankets – so I went on the battlefield yesterday & got a wollen & rubber knapsack for him & a woolen & a knapsack for myself. I threw away my knapsack the day before the big fight. My wool Blanket I left at union mills. I am fitted up again for another march. The battlefield still shows the traces of the fierce strife waged upon it. The dead were not all buried, yesterday, they said, & hundreds of dead horses lie about producing an intolerable stench. I went into the town or city of Gettysburg. It is quite a pleasant place, larger than Castleton & not so large as Rutland.*

*About every hous I saw had bullet marks on it. We heard here last night that Lee had surrendered his whole army – I don't credit the story. You at home know more about it than we do. If you have got a paper that has an account of the Battle of Gettysburg in it, I wish you wo'd keep it till I get home as I have not seen anything of the kind. Mr. Smart has gone with the Reg't. He was well when he left here Proctor & Steve are with the Reg't. neither of them went into the fight – I was weighted yesterday & bro't down 128 lbs. I am well as usual. I write any more now. It will probably not be of any use to write to me as I probably shall not get it if you do.*

*Yours truly, R D King*

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General Stannard's report appears in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. The report puts Private King's very personal letter into context with his fellow Vermont volunteers at Gettysburg. [P.J.S.]



George J. Stannard. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Civil War Photographs, reproduction number LC-DIG-ds-03985. (Cropped for presentation.)

*Report of Brig. Gen. George J. Stannard, U. S. Army, commanding Third Brigade.  
HDQRS. THIRD BRIG., THIRD DIV., FIRST ARMY CORPS,  
Gettysburg, Pa., July 4, 1863.*

SIR: I have the honor to report that the Second Vermont Brigade, under my command, marched from the line of the Defenses of Washington, upon the Occoquan, on the 25<sup>th</sup> ultimo, under orders to report to Major-General Reynolds, commanding the First Army Corps. The brigade joined that corps at this place on the evening of July 1, after an exhausting march of seven days' duration. The distance marched averaged about 18 miles per day. The men marched well, with no straggling. Rain fell on every day of the seven, and considering the condition of the roads, the distance traveled (from the mouth of Occoquan to Gettysburg) could not have been accomplished in less time.

We reached the battle-ground in front of Gettysburg too late in the day to take part in the hard-contested battle of July 1, and my tired troops upon their arrival were placed in position in column by regiments on the front line, in connection with the Third Army Corps. Before reaching the ground, the Twelfth Regiment, under command of Colonel Blunt, and Fifteenth Regiment, under command of Colonel Proctor, were detailed, by order of General Reynolds, as guard to the wagon train of the corps in the rear. I was detailed, per order of Major-General Slocum, as general field officer, and met Major-General Meade, in company with Major-General Howard, near my command about 3 a. m. of the 2d instant. The Fifteenth Regiment rejoined the brigade in the morning, but was again ordered back on the same duty about noon.

On the morning of the 2d instant, we were allowed to join the First Army Corps, and reported to Major-General Doubleday, agreeably to previous orders, and were placed in the rear of the left of Cemetery Hill. After the opening of the battle of July 2, the left wing of the Thirteenth Regiment, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Munson, was ordered

forward as support to a battery, and a company of the Sixteenth Regiment was sent as a support to the skirmishers in our front. While stationing them, Capt. A.G. Foster, assistant inspector-general of my staff, was seriously wounded by a ball through both legs, depriving me of his valuable services for the remainder of the battle.

Just before dark of the same day, the lines of our army on the left center having become broken under a desperate charge of the enemy, my brigade was ordered up. The right wing of the Thirteenth Regiment, under Colonel Randall, was in the advance, and, upon reaching the break in the line, was granted by Major-General Hancock, commanding upon the spot, the privilege of making the effort to retake the guns of Company C, regular battery, which had just been captured by the enemy. This they performed in a gallant charge, in which Colonel Randall's horse was shot under him. Four guns of the battery were retaken, and two rebel field pieces, with about 80 prisoners, were captured by five companies of the Thirteenth Regiment in this single charge. I placed the Sixteenth, under command of Colonel Veazey, on picket, agreeably to orders, extending to the left of our immediate front. The front thus established was held by my brigade for twenty-six hours.

At about 4 o'clock on the morning of the 3d, the enemy commenced a vigorous artillery attack, which continued for a short time upon my position. During its continuance, I moved the Fourteenth, under command of Colonel Nichols, to the front of the main line about 75 yards, which was done at double-quick in good order. I then, with permission from my immediate commander, selected a position to occupy, if attacked with infantry, some distance in front of the main line.

At about 2 p. m. the enemy again commenced a vigorous attack upon my position. After subjecting us for one and one-half hours to the severest cannonade of the whole battle, from one hundred guns or more, the enemy charged with a heavy column of infantry, at least one division, in close column by regiments. The charge was aimed directly upon my command, but owing apparently to the firm front shown them, the enemy diverged midway, and came upon the line on my right. But they did not thus escape the warm reception prepared for them by the Vermonters. During this charge the enemy suffered from the fire of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth, the range being short. At the commencement of the attack, I called the Sixteenth from the skirmish line, and placed them in close column by division in my immediate rear. As soon as the change of the point of attack became evident, I ordered a flank attack upon the enemy's column. Forming in the open meadow in front of our lines, the Thirteenth changed front forward on first company; the Sixteenth, after deploying, performed the same, and formed on the left of the Thirteenth, at right angles to the main line of our army, bringing them in line of battle upon the flank of the charging division of the enemy, and opened a destructive fire at short range, which the enemy sustained but a very few moments before the larger portion of them surrendered and marched in—not as conquerors but as captives. I then ordered the two regiments into their former position. The order was not filled when I saw another rebel column charging immediately upon our left. Colonel Veazey, of the Sixteenth, was at once ordered to attack it in its turn upon the flank. This was done as successfully as before. The rebel forces, already decimated by the fire of the Fourteenth Regiment, Colonel Nichols, were scooped almost *en masse* into our lines. The Sixteenth took in this charge the regimental colors of the Second Florida and Eighth Virginia Regiments, and the battle-flag of another regiment. The Sixteenth was supported in this new and advanced position by four companies of the Fourteenth, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Rose.

The movements I have briefly described were executed in the open field, under a very heavy fire of shell, grape, and musketry, and they were performed with the promptness and precision of battalion drill. They ended the contest in the center and substantially closed the battle. Officers and men behaved like veterans, although it was for most of them their first battle, and I am content to leave it to the witnesses of the fight whether or not they have sustained the credit of the service and the honor of our Green Mountain State.

The members of my staff—Capt. William H. Hill, assistant adjutant-general; Lieuts. George W. Hooker and G. G. Benedict, aides-de-camp; Lieutenant [Francis G.] Clark, provost-marshal, and Lieut. S. F. Prentiss, ordnance officer—executed all my orders with the utmost promptness, and by their coolness under fire and good example contributed essentially to the success of the day.

There were 350 killed, wounded, and missing from my three regiments engaged; of the missing, only 1 is known to have been taken prisoner.

I am, with much respect, your obedient servant,

GEO. J. STANNARD,

*Brig. Gen. of Vols., Comdg. 3d Brig., 3d Div., 1<sup>st</sup> A. C.*

Lieut. Col. C. KINGSBURY, Jr.,

*Assistant Adjutant-General.*