

## Men In Green The Second U.S. Sharpshooters

By Robert Brown

On May 3rd, 1861 President Abraham Lincoln made his second call for volunteers, this time for enlistment's lasting for three years or until the wars end. Among the Regiments raised during this time were two regiments of United States Sharpshooters. Both regiments were enlisted under the supervision of Hiram Berdan, Colonel of the First Regiment United States Sharpshooters. The Second Regiment, under the command of Colonel Henry Post, was composed of eight companies representing six states.

The sharpshooters were uniformed in dark green frock coats and forage caps, the later adorned with a black ostrich plume. They were also issued light blue trousers, later changed to green to match the uniform coats, and brown leather leggins. A knapsack in the Prussian style, made of calf skin, with the hair on the outside, and a special mess kit finished off the outfit.

The Second Regiment began arriving at the Camp of Instruction in January 1862. When the soldiers got to the camp they realized that the government promises of higher pay, larger bounty and Sharps rifles weren't going to be fulfilled. The soldier jokingly said that U.S.S.S. stood for Uncle Sam's Sad Soldiers, or Unfortunate Soldiers Sadly Sold. The muddy and cold camps invited many diseases to the sharpshooters. Measles and Small Pox were the most common. On January 28, 1862 132 men out of 720 men in the Second Regiment were listed as sick. Despite this the sharpshooters camp was a popular stop for many of Washington, D.C.'s visitors and residents.

On March 18, 1862, the Sharpshooters Broke camp in Washington and headed to Virginia. At this time the regiment was equipped with the 5-shot Colt Revolving Rifle. The Second received it's baptism by fire at Falmouth, Virginia on April 18. In a train accident near White Plains on June 1, the sharpshooters lost 44 men injured and one killed. At Fredericksburg the sharpshooters traded in their Colts' for the coveted Sharps. On July 24 companies A and C accompanied General John Gibbon on a reconnaissance to Orange Court House. At Orange Court House the Sharpshooters engaged some confederate cavalry, easily pushing them off the field. On another reconnaissance, August 6, the sharpshooters engaged some troopers of J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry at Guiney's Station. The regiment received orders to begin a force march to Cedar Mountain, however; arriving too late to participate in any action they encamped there until the

19th, when they were moved to the Rappahannock River to act as Pope's rear-guard.

At Gainesville on August 28th the Second, as part of Hatch's Brigade were again engaged. Although under heavy artillery fire for most of the time, the regiment took very few casualties. The next day at Manassas, the sharpshooters were posted along the Centerville road. The sharpshooters were forced to hold their ground, against a large body of confederates, by themselves until dark. Over the three days fighting at Bull Run the Second Regiment lost 42 men. Colonel Homer Stoughton, then a captain, later said that, "They were under fire from August 23rd to the wind up at Chantilly, August 30. No men ever bore themselves more gallantly than the sharpshooters." When the regiment left Falmouth August 10th there was between 600 and 700 men on the roll. At morning roll call September 2nd only 127 men answered.

The Second Regiment distinguished themselves again at South Mountain, September 14th. The sharpshooters led the attack up the mountain. In doing this they were the first union regiment on top of the mountain.

At the battle of Antietam the Second Regiment was heavily engaged in the cornfield. The regiment was ordered to the left of Gibbons Brigade, the famed "Iron Brigade", to protect their flank from advancing confederates. During the fight the regiment captured two enemy battleflags. Losses this day were severe, 66 men killed or wounded. Among the killed were Adjutant Parmalee, killed while attempting to capture an stand of enemy colors. Colonel Post was wounded during the days fighting.

At the battle of Fredericksburg the Second Regiment, now under Major Stoughton, was put in the Left Grand Division of Burnside's new army. The regiment engaged in skirmishing with the enemy troops, taking few casualties and earning great praise. On January 20, 1863 the sharpshooters participated in Burnside's ill-fated "Mud March.

On May 2nd the two regiments of sharpshooters became engaged at Chancellorsville. Entering a clearing they were engaged by the enemy. During this the Second Regiment was nearly flanked, but was saved by the quick thinking captain of Company C. After a series of advances the two sharpshooter regiments pushed the confederates back to Catherine's Furnace, where they captured 365 men of the 23rd Georgia. On the 3rd of May the 2nd Regiment was posted as pickets, where they remained through out the remainder of the battle. It was at Chancellorsville that the Second's chaplain, Lorenzo Barber, earned his nickname, "The Fighting Parson." During the battle Chaplain

Barber was often seen on the firing line, with his telescopic sighted rifle.

The III corps arrived at Gettysburg well after dark on July 1st. On July 2nd the Second Regiment took up position between Devil's Den and the Snyder Farm. Here they were attacked by the Fourth Texas. The Second performed their duty with deadly accuracy, killing both the colonel and the lieutenant colonel. Lieutenant Smith, also of the Fourth Texas, dipped his handkerchief in Plum Run and wrapped it around his head. When his comrades reached his body and took the handkerchief from around his head there were eleven bullet holes in it. Eventually falling back to Big Round Top the Second engaged the 15th and 47th Alabama on their way to Little Round Top.

The colonel of the 15th, William Oates, ordered the two regiments to pursue the sharpshooters over Big Round Top, rather than leave them in their rear. This gave the union time to reinforce Little Round Top. Because of the deadly fire laid down by the sharpshooters, several confederate officers claimed that Big Round Top was "a perfect hornets' nest of sharpshooters." The 3rd day of Gettysburg the Second Regiment was moved to the center of the union line, to help repulse Pickett's Charge.

On November 8th the Second Regiment pushed the confederates out of Brandy Station, and occupied the town. At the Battle of Mine Run, November 30th, the Second Regiment was placed at the left of the union line. During this engagement Chaplain Barber was severely wounded in the leg. In December the enlistment's of the Second Regiment ran out, and almost every man reenlisted, the rest being replaced by recruits from each company's home state.

On the evening of May 5, 1864, after the first days fighting at The Wilderness, General Birney asked the Second Regiment for volunteers to retake a cannon that was abandoned during the days fighting. The men soon returned, not only with the cannon, but also the harnesses of the dead horses. On the 6th, taking position on the right of the Vermont Brigade, they moved forward and took up behind breastworks on the Brock Road. During the confederate charge on the works the Second's Color-Sergeant, J. Madison Tarbell posted the regimental colors on the works. He remained there, often with the confederate color bearer next to him, until he was shot through the arm and had to retire to the rear, taking the colors with him. Protecting the army as it left the 7th, the sharpshooters were the last union unit to leave The Wilderness. On the second days action at Spotsylvania, May 10, Colonel Stoughton was badly wounded. The

Sharpshooters also suffered heavily on the 12th during fighting near Bloody Angle.

On the First of December the First Regiment United States Sharpshooters were disbanded, the men being assigned to the Second Regiment. On February 5 through the 7th, 1865 the Second Regiment had its last action at Dabney's Mills and Hatcher's Run. The Second Regiment was disbanded on February 16th, 1865, by General Order number 12, of General DeTroibriand.

"The United States Sharpshooters, including the first and second consolidated battalions, being about to be broken up as a distinct organization in compliance with orders from the War Department, the brigadier-general commanding the division will not take leave of them without acknowledging their food and efficient service during about three years in the field. The United States Sharpshooters leave behind them a glorious record in the Army of the Potomac since the first operations against Yorktown in 1862 up to Hatcher's Run, and few are the battles or engagements where they did not make their mark. The brigadier-general commanding, who had them under his command during most of the campaigns of 1863 and 1864, would be the last to forget their brave deeds during that period, and feels assured that in these different organizations to which they belong severally, officers and men will show themselves worthy of their old reputation; with them the past will answer for the future."

Colonel Fox, in his book Regimental Losses in the Civil War says about the sharpshooters, "They were of a high grade in physical qualifications and intelligence. They were continually in Demand as skirmishers on account of their wonderful proficiency as such, and they undoubtedly killed more men than any other regiment in the army. In skirmishing they had no equal." The companies of sharpshooters were moved to units of their respective states until the end of the war. The last company to muster out of service did so on February 20, 1865. Throughout its service the Second Regiment United States Sharpshooters had 1178 serve in its ranks. They lost 125 men, 10.6%, killed and 462 men wounded.