

**BATTERY D, FIRST RHODE
ISLAND LIGHT
ARTILLERY, IN THE
CIVIL WAR, 1861-1865**

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Battery D, First Rhode Island Light Artillery, in the Civil War, 1861-1865 by George C. Sumner

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GEORGE C. SUMNER

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PREFACE.

At a meeting of Battery D Association, held at Roger Williams Park, June 6th, 1891, the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

RESOLVED, That George C. Sumner is hereby appointed Historian of the Association, and earnestly requested to write and publish a History of Battery D, First Rhode Island Light Artillery:

Comrade Sumner accepted the position, and at once commenced to look up material for the work. He soon found that he had quite a task to perform. At the battle of Cedar Creek, late in the war, all the books and papers of the battery were captured by the enemy, it thus became rather a tedious undertaking to hunt up facts and dates. Artificer Clark Walker and Corporal Knight had diaries of some parts of their service, which was about all the material on hand to start with.

The Adjutant General's Office furnished considerable information. The Roster of the Battery was taken entirely from that office. The "War Records" was another source from which facts and dates were collected.

Comrade Sumner took a great deal of interest in this history and had a large part of it written when he was "called away to join his comrades who had gone before." The death of our comrade made it necessary for some one to take up the work. It was impossible to fill his place, and when the writer agreed to take up the history and complete it, it was with a great deal of hesitation, knowing his inability to carry on the work, and not having time to devote to the proper carrying out of Comrade Sumner's ideas.

Comrade Sumner had a great many marginal notes attached to his manuscript which he was familiar with, but to another person they were not very plain. Without doubt he intended to add considerable to his manuscript, but on taking up the work I found it almost impossible to follow out what he had evidently intended to do, and came to the conclusion that it was best to publish it as he left it. I hope the comrades of the Battery and whoever else that reads this work, will remember that the author was called away before he had time to even revise his original manuscript.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

A COMRADE OF THE BATTERY.

CHAPTER I.

ORGANIZATION—CAMP SPRAGUE, WASHINGTON, D. C.—WINTER
QUARTERS AT MUNSON'S HILL, VA.

AT the commencement of the Civil War, in April, 1861, there was in the city of Providence, among other excellent military organizations, one of light artillery, known as the Providence Marine Corps of Artillery, which for years had been interesting and instructing the young men of the city and vicinity in the manoeuvres of this branch of military service. A natural sequence of the presence of this company was to draw attention to this arm, and led Gov. Sprague to offer the government a fully equipped light battery, in addition to the First Regiment of Infantry. The offer being accepted, a battery was speedily organized for three months service, and on the 18th of April, six days after the firing upon Fort Sumter, it left Providence, fully equipped, for Washington. When it became evident that more troops and a longer term of service would be needed, Gov. Sprague at once began the organization of a regiment of light artillery. The second battery (or A, in regimental orders) was mustered into service June 6th, 1861, for three years or the war, and left home for Washington June 10th. After which, at intervals of less than a month,

a battery left Providence for the seat of war, until eight had been sent, which completed the First Regiment Rhode Island Light Artillery.

Battery D was the fifth in number, but fourth in the regimental formation, that was recruited, its organization commencing immediately upon the mustering of Battery C (Aug. 25th). Its quota was filled perhaps the most rapidly of any of the batteries, for by the 2d of Sept. it had its complement of men, and was sent to Camp Ames, on the Warwick road, just beyond Pawtuxet, where, on the 4th of Sept., it was mustered into the service of the United States.

On Sept. 10th, the battery moved to Camp Greene, near the Stonington Railroad. While in this camp the men were unformed, divided into gun detachments, and drilled in the manual of the piece, marching, etc.

On the 13th the battery left Camp Greene on the steamboat train for Stonington, under command of First Lieut. Geo. C. Harkness, the other officers being First Lieut. Henry R. Gladding, Second Lieuts. Stephen W. Fisk, and Ezra K. Parker. From Stonington it proceeded by boat to Elizabeth City, N. J., from which place it continued on by cars to Washington via Harrisburg, reaching its destination shortly after noon on the 15th, and marched immediately to Camp Sprague, where Capt. J. Albert Monroe, who had just been promoted from First Lieutenant to Captain, and transferred from Battery A to Battery D, took command.

The personnel of the company was particularly well adapted for the especially active work appertaining to the successful manœuvring of light artillery. Its members were young; scarcely one in ten had reached his majority; most of them had left good homes, where they had received the advantages of a fair education, and except in rare instances their physiques were such that camp life and the exercise of the drill speedily

developed endurance and suppleness. To no one was the possibilities of this command more apparent than to Captain Monroe. His experience in the home company, and three months of practical service with Battery A, convinced him that here was material from which, by persistent hard work, and by a proper and judicially administered discipline, there could be evolved a battery of light artillery which would honor itself and the State from which it came; and he immediately proceeded to work for the accomplishment of that idea. Requisitions were speedily obtained for horses and guns, and the battery was soon fully equipped, the battery consisting of four ten pound Parrotts and two twelve pound howitzers. Drilling was commenced immediately, both field and the manual of the piece, and continued without cessation from the 18th of Sept. to Oct. 11th, and such was the progress made by the company that at a review held on the 9th of Oct., on the grounds back of the Capitol, of all the artillery in the vicinity, at which Gen. Scott was reviewing officer, the battery was complimented for the excellence of its movements.

Oct. 12th Capt. Monroe received orders to report with his battery to Gen. Fitz John Porter, near Hall's Hill, Va., and as soon as possible the company commenced its first march, passing through Washington via Pennsylvania avenue, thence through Georgetown to the Potomac River, crossing at Aqueduct Bridge. Hall's Hill was reached about 7 p. m., and the battery went into camp. Having no tents, the men were obliged to spread their blankets on the ground, and had their first taste of a field camp in Virginia.

Oct. 14th orders were received to report to Gen. McDowell, and the battery moved about three miles, to Upton's Hill. While here they were given their first impressions of war. It was intimated that the enemy was in the immediate vicinity, and were liable to make an attack at any time. Each night

one section of the battery was sent out on picket. At no time in their service did they feel the responsibility of their situation more keenly than on these occasions, and not a rebel soldier within twenty miles. The two sections which were to remain in camp were obliged to work upon the earthworks with picks and shovels, an occupation they did not relish.

Oct. 29th camp was moved just over Munson's Hill, on the north slope, and a camp laid out, under the direction of Capt. John Gibbon, who had assumed command of the artillery in our division. His own, Battery B, Fourth U. S., was placed upon the left (instead of the right, as it should have been according to strict military etiquette, presumably because the ground was higher and drier). Our battery came next, then the First New Hampshire, Capt. Gerrish, and the Pennsylvania battery, Capt. Durrell, on the right. Tents of the Sibley pattern were now issued in place of the small A tents. These were circular in form, and large enough to accommodate ten or twelve men comfortably. When the weather became cold enough to require them, stoves were issued, and when the tents were properly ditched, the bunks built and filled a foot deep with straw, they became very comfortable homes, even in the coldest of weather. We soon had orders to prepare this camp for a winter's sojourn. Details were made each morning to work upon the stables for the horses, and in the course of a few days the finest camp in the history of Battery D was completed, and named Camp Dupont.

The battery was parked in regular style, pieces in front, caissons in the rear; on the right and left of them the stables were built. The tents for the men were pitched in the rear of the stables. The officers' tents were in the rear of the battery, the Captain's being in a line with the centre of the guns, and two others, one on each side of the Captain's, a little in advance, for the four Lieutenants. The cook-house

was at the upper end of the right tents, and the guard-house was placed quite a distance in front of the battery.

In this camp the battery remained from Oct. 20th, 1861, to March 10th, 1862, occupying its time in drill, inspections, sham fights, target practice, etc. Everything calculated to increase its efficiency was indulged in. Days were spent in perfecting the men in horsemanship. Heroic measures were used: no saddles or bridles were allowed; men were expected to learn to manage their horses successfully bareback, and with only the halter, and they did it, but there were many laughable and some serious incidents occurred before they thoroughly mastered the art.

The sham-fights were particularly exhilarating and entertaining to us, the whole corps, numbering fifteen or twenty thousand, participating in them, and blank cartridges were used without stint. A change of front would sometimes necessitate a long run for the battery, and if over open ground, was participated in with a relish; but if, as it sometimes happened, the route lay through what had been woods, but had been freshly cut off by the soldiers, leaving stumps of irregular height, it sometimes became very annoying to the cannoniers, as the carriages struck first one stump and then another, throwing them about, making it very difficult to retain their places on the boxes.