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Foundation
*Telling the Army Story...
one Soldier at a time*

Voices of the Past

Part of the Army Heritage Center Foundation's Educational Series

CIVIL WAR

Highlights:

- Edwards served with the 10th and 29th Maine Regiments from 1861 to 1865
- He saw combat in the Battle of Manassas (2nd Bull Run), Antietam, and the Shenandoah Valley Campaign.
- His letters describe his experiences, including Antietam, the Red River Campaign, observations regarding African-American Soldiers, and encounters with smallpox.

Read more of Abial Edwards' letters at www.armyheritage.org

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Abial Edwards: Student of the Grand School

(Maine, 1861-65) Born in 1843 in Casco, Maine, Abial Hall Edwards volunteered to serve in the Union army during the American Civil War, motivated by a dual desire to help preserve the Union and to provide for his younger siblings. He documented his wartime experiences in a series of letters written to his future wife Anna L. Conant from 1861-1866. These letters provide a rich description of the observations and emotions of a young man serving through many of the Civil War's most prominent battles and campaigns.

Assigned to Company K of the 10th Maine Regiment of Volunteers, Edwards spent his first few months of service moving from Baltimore to Virginia with his regiment. The 10th Maine first saw action during the Battle of Cedar Mountain. After a brief rest the unit took part in the Second Battle of Bull Run some two weeks later.

In his letters, Abial described a Soldier's daily life, but also delved into his personal insights and feelings towards a variety of subjects. Between the battles and the long marches he reveals details and feelings about fellow soldiers, fears of disease, and suggestive displays of affection towards Anna Conant. By spring of 1863, having survived the Battle of Antietam unscathed, Edwards was mustered out of the 10th Maine. But as his letters reveal, Edwards was



Undated photograph of Corporal Abial Edwards. Photo Courtesy of USAHEC.

uneasy remaining at home, feeling as if he were shirking his patriotic duty. "Be it as it may" Edwards wrote to Anna in December 1863, "Do your duty is my motto even though it may clash with my own personal life." After spending a few months at home, Abial returned to service with the 29th Maine Infantry Regiment in September 1863. (pg 71)

With the 29th, Edwards participated in the Red River Campaign; then linked up with Major General Philip Sheridan

*The Army has been a grand school to foster ones best impulses...
- Corporal Abial Edwards*



Major General Philip H. Sheridan. Photo Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

“The Battle raged all day the bursting of the shells the groans of the wounded & Dying made a scene that was awful beyond description. I hope I never shall see such another as it is the Rebels are drove from Maryland we remained on the Battle field two days after the Battle and had to bury the Rebel dead as the Rebels buried none the them the sight was awful.”

Corporal Abial Edwards, writing about the Battle of Antietam

during his Shenandoah Valley Campaign (1864-1865) until the war's end.

With the war over, Edwards' role changed from that of combat Soldier to occupation Soldier as the Army took up the task of occupying the South during Reconstruction. Edwards writes of his sadness over Lincoln's assassination and his growing anger and dislike for Southerners.

Five years after originally volunteering, Abial Edwards was mustered out of service in June 1866. He would eventually marry Anna Conant in 1869, but sadly passed away in his hometown at thirty-four in 1877.

Over the years and through generations, Edwards' family saved the original letters, which were eventually gathered for the book *“Dear Friend Anna”: The Civil War Letters of a Common Soldier From Maine*”.

The book and the original letters are now in the collection of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center where they are available for public research.

Sources

Abial Hall Edwards Papers, 1861-1866. Box 1. USAMHI.

Kallgren, Beverly Hayes., and James L. Crouthamel, eds. *“Dear Friend Anna”: The Civil War Letters of a Common Soldier From Maine*. Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1992.

February 23rd 1864

My Dear Anna

I now take this my first opportunity to answer your kind letter which I received at Algiers. It was gladly received and I have read and reread it a great many times. We left Algiers the 20th and came as far as Bradhall City by cars then took a boat and came to this place (Franklin) got here on the morning of the 21st This is a very low country but If the climate agrees with me I think I shall like here. It is very warm here but we have cool nights. The trees are leaved out and the Robins and Mocking bird make music enough. As near as I can find out the is about 8,000 troops here in our Corps and the Rebel force against us is about 30,000 but they are at Red River which is quite a distance from here. The is strong talk of our going to Red River as soon as we get some more troops but I don't think we shall at present. The is quite a lot of Guerrillas about here which are some what troublesome Anna I have been sitting here and trying to make it seem to me that I am so far from home but I cant and only think for three years. Some times I have thought how much I might have enjoyed my self in Lewiston this summer as you was a going to stop there but it is no use to think any thing about it now all we must hope for is that this war will be settled before many months. And anyone that has served their Country now will never have cause to be ashamed of it The is quite a lot of Negro troops here but they are not very near us. As we was comeing here they cheered us loudly as we passed. But our boys kept very still and never returned it. The negros make a neat looking soldier and our Reg has come to the conclusion that they can and ought to fight as well as white folks but as for cheering them they cant do it. Dear Anna I want to write you often and I will do the best I can to write to you but we have very poor accommodations. We have got the small shelter tents again. My Regards to your Brother & Sister

I will write again soon

Aff Thine

*Abial Anna
Co K, 29th Maine
New Orleans L-A
Gen Bank\$ Deps*

Please visit www.armyheritage.org/education-and-programs/educational-resources/soldier-stories to find more of Abial Edwards' letters, articles relating to his service, and other Soldier Stories.

The letters presented here and online are transcriptions of the originals. These transcripts retain the original spelling, punctuation, syntax, and other stylistic elements of the original documents. As with all transcriptions of hand written documents, there are issues with legibility, which may lead to occasional errors.