

Who were they?
The 1st Regiment U.S. Sharpshooter Armorers
By
Bill Skillman, John Carey and Brian White

Most of us are fascinated by the U.S. Sharpshooters; their uniforms, Sharps rifles, their innovative, battlefield tactics and their steadfast resolve in the face of enemies-both Confederate and Union, alike. One day I was searching through Caspar Trepp's papers and kept seeing the name: "*Foster---Armorer*" show up on receipts for rifles or equipment. I became curious, who was "*R. Foster-Armorer*"? What did he do? Who were the other men who quietly served the Sharpshooters in Ordnance, Quartermaster, Commissary, teamster, pioneer and other support roles? Unlike today's military where upwards of 1000 personnel might support a single rifleman, the number of men assigned to similar duties in the Civil War U.S. Army was very small indeed. To help me find out the identities of these men I was helped by two old friends and fellow Sharpshooters, John Carey and Brian White; without whose assistance this article would not have been possible.

The Sharpshooters sought men who had the knowledge, skills, tools and replacement parts to maintain their Sharps rifles or get them back in working order--the Regimental Armorer. But let's start at the beginning: Ordnance is one of three categories of supply in the Civil War-era U.S. Army (Quarter Master and Commissary the other two). For U.S. Sharpshooters 'Ordnance' consisted of: Sharps Improved rifles, bayonets, ammunition/percussion caps/pellet primers, leather accoutrements (cartridge box, cap pouch, scabbard); belts; (cross belt-to support the cartridge box and waist belt); and lastly three brass plates (the oval 'US' plates-attached to cartridge box/waist belt, and the round 'Eagle' plate, attached to the cross belt strap directly over a soldier's breastbone). In addition, combination screwdriver/wrenches, bore brushes (both carried in the cartridge box's implement pocket) and wooden cleaning rods (1 for every 10 men) were issued.

But how did USSS officers procure Ordnance so it could be shipped from the Sharps factory in Hartford, Connecticut or the Washington Arsenal and get issued to the men in the field? Regulations required them to submit paperwork (requisitions) stating the type and number of items they needed. To help them navigate 'red tape' officers reached for **The Company Clerk** (subtitled: *Showing How and When to Make out all the Returns, Reports, Rolls, and other Papers, and What to do with Them*). One of the bits of 'helpful advice' in The Clerk was to ensure the men took care of their weapons and equipment (otherwise the officer was responsible):

444. *A strict account of the arms, therefore, is necessary, and tends to keep them in good order; for if the soldiers find that they are to pay for every loss or deficiency, they will take as much care of them as if they were their own personal property.*

Today, we (or Visa/Master Card) own our Sharps rifle and accoutrements. During the Civil War 'Ordnance' was public property belonging to the U.S. Government. While Captain Bertram's December 1862 inspection report (featured in Wiley Sword's book) condemned the Sharpshooters for being "*perfect slouches and slovens... no two uniformed alike..no bayonets*", the following orders issued by Major George Hastings (interestingly, issued in October and December, 1862), clearly spells out his expectations for the men:

General Order # 5

Arms and accoutrements Must be inspected daily and immediately before parade by Co officers and all cases when Arms or accoutrements are not in good order the delinquent Must be promptly punished and for habitually Neglecting his Arms Must be reported to regimental Head Quarters

By Order

WH Horton
Actg Adjt

Geo. G. Hastings
Major Comdg 1st USSS

Regt Order # 8

Attention is called to the late order directing daily Company inspection of Arms and accoutrements Company officers are expected to take pride and interest in the condition of their Arms and to punish promptly all neglect of them by their Men The Rifle are frequently rusty and dirty at Guard Mounting

*By Order
Geo. G. Hastings
Maj. Comdg. Regt.*

Notice Major Hastings ordered daily inspections of arms and equipment to make sure men kept their weapons and equipment (a) clean and (b) in good working order.

Failure to comply with orders required the company officers to punish any offender; chronic offenders were to be sent to regimental Headquarters for further punishment (likely a court martial).

443. *The design is that a company shall draw its full allowance of ordnance; and it is expected to appertain to the company as long as it is serviceable. The regimental armorer keeps it in repair; and such repairs as cannot be made by him may be made by sending to the nearest arsenal. The Ordnance Dept. requires that the old arms shall be inspected, condemned, and ordered to be turned in before new arms can be drawn.*

Many modern reenactors refer to Wiley Sword's book to say the Sharpshooters 'pitched' their bayonets to "prevent them from being used as infantry". In reality, they'd be in violation of Army Regulations and subject to punishment for failing to carry their 'full allowance of ordnance'. Punishments ranged from their pay being docked (to replace lost item) or assigned 'extra duty' (digging/filling in sinks, etc.). Officers who tolerated insubordination suffered stiffer penalties, ranging from court-martial, stoppage of pay, dismissal from service, and criminal charges and imprisonment.

I suspect the poor inspection reports cited in Wiley Sword's book was because the Sharpshooter's commanders (and clerks) were absent from the company at the time the Division inspections. In December 1862 (after the Army of Potomac's demoralizing defeat at Fredericksburg) all of the USSS senior staff officers (Berdan-wounded, Ripley-wounded, and Trepp-sick) were absent. The Regiment's captains were either casualties or detached to brigade, division or Corps administrative assignments. Suddenly junior officers (or senior NCO's awaiting promotion) found themselves responsible to keep their men fed, clothed and armed; and it takes time to learn the myriad of duties of a Captain.

444 (continued) *The arms should bear the letter of the company and be numbered, and each soldier should have his corresponding number issued to him. If the arms cannot be so lettered and numbered from the arsenal, it can be done by the regimental armorer*

Think fast: What is the serial number of your Sharps rifle? It was the duty of the Regimental Armorer to record the serial number and the soldier it was issued to (or the Company officer). Listed below (from an undated paper in Lt. Col. Trepp's regimental file) is the serial numbers of Sharps rifles issued to members of the Wisconsin 'G' company:

Sharpshooter	Rifle Serial #	Company	Listed in Wiley Sword register?
Geor. W. Griffin	54471	G-1 st USSS	yes
H. W. Woodbury	57131	"	no
D. A. Beard	57266	"	no
C. Atwood	57386	"	no

W.H. Withney	57428	“	no
O.D. Hawley	57574	“	no

Unfortunately, Wiley Sword, Roy Marcot and other researchers have failed to find a single source that lists all of the Sharps rifles and the men they were issued to. Some regiments required this information to be recorded in the company book, others by the armorers.

445. *The surplus arms not issued to the soldiers are kept in repair, and are boxed up and placed in store usually at the post to which the company belongs. The storing is done by the quartermaster sergeant, if there is one to the company. If there is not a company store room to which he alone has access, the boxes are turned over to the quartermaster for storage. The boxes should be marked with the letter of the company, the name of the officer accountable for the property and a list of the contents.*

The above situation describes ‘posts’ that for the Sharpshooters were the winter camps at Falmouth (1862) and Brandy Station (1863); but what happened when they were on campaign? The armorer had to keep enough extra rifles, spare parts, accoutrements and ammunition to issue to new recruits, men returning from hospitals or POW camps. Unlike the Springfield rifled muskets, when a Sharps rifle was too badly damaged for field repairs it would be returned to the Sharps Rifle Mfg. Co. for reconditioning.

So what types of tools did the Regimental armorer carry with them to make repairs in the field?

3- wire awls (<i>to punch out the band clips</i>)	1- Die stock
1- Band Set	1- Die set
1- Drill Brace	7- Files
1- Hand Brace	12- File handles
6- Center Bits	1- Glue pot
2- Hand brushes	3- Spring hook
1- pr. Calipers	1- Drawing knife
1- Centre punch	3- pr Nippers
6- Cold chisels	3- Pliers
6- Stock chisels	12- reamers
6- Stock gouges	1- Spring compass
1- Compass	1- Bench
2- Spring clamps (<i>compress mainsprings</i>)	1- hack saw frame
2- Wood clamps	6- “ “ blades
1- Drill stock	4- Armorers punch
6- Drills-assorted	6- Screwdrivers-brace
1- Bayonet mandrel	1- soldering iron
1- screw wrench	1- set-screw taps
3- hand vise	1- breeching vise
1- straight edge	2- oil can (small)
1- tinnerns shears	1- Brass scale

A complete set of armorer tools weighed 100.92 pounds and were stored in a large wooden crate positioned directly behind the driver’s seat in the wagon. This allowed him (or his assistant) to access individual tools or quickly unloaded the crate from the wagon if more extensive repairs were necessary. Other critical equipment (rifles and accoutrements) were also stored in wooden crates; each strategically positioned (according to Regulations) in the wagon bed.

The list below shows the Ordnance ‘on hand’ and carried by the armorer at the end of the 3rd Quarter, 1863 (June thru August):

List of Ordnance on hand

*1st USSS
Sept 30, 1863*

9	<i>guns Sharps improved rifles</i>	20	<i>sear</i>
8	<i>body belts</i>	17	<i>bridle</i>
11	<i>body belt plates</i>	34	<i>“ screws</i>
7	<i>cartridge boxes</i>	31	<i>primer springs</i>
13	<i>“ “ plates</i>	10	<i>“ “ screws</i>
4	<i>bayonets</i>	5	<i>“ “ followers</i>
83	<i>“ scabbards</i>	6	<i>“ “ driver</i>
16	<i>cap pouches</i>	15	<i>“ “ slides</i>
1	<i>cross belt plate</i>	20	<i>“ “ covers</i>
43	<i>gun brushes</i>	24	<i>‘ ‘ ‘ screws</i>
41	<i>screw drivers</i>	4	<i>“ “ cut off</i>
7	<i>gun ???</i>	22	<i>“ “ “ screws</i>
4	<i>receivers</i>	56	<i>butt plate screws</i>
22	<i>“ slides</i>	50	<i>patch box springs</i>
50	<i>“ slide screws</i>	4	<i>“ “ screws</i>
22	<i>gas plates</i>	8	<i>Stock Rifle</i>
11	<i>slide vent tubes</i>	10	<i>“ “ screws</i>
126	<i>screws</i>	22	<i>Swivel bands</i>
17	<i>toggle</i>	20	<i>Swivel band</i>
20	<i>L???</i>	40	<i>Swivel screws</i>
50	<i>“ screws</i>	48	<i>Band springs</i>
25	<i>“ springs</i>	19	<i>Swivel</i>
100	<i>“ spring screws</i>	36	<i>“ “ rear screws</i>
55	<i>“ spring keys</i>	28	<i>“ “ ???</i>
22	<i>“ key stops</i>	318	<i>gun cones</i>
??	<i>“ “ springs</i>	1	<i>front sight stud</i>

Among the many useful ‘tidbits’ in the Company Clerk is the individual parts for the Sharps Rifle and Carbine (and their unit price). The armorer would be familiar with all of the parts listed below (I have provided an excerpt):

Name of Parts	Rifle Price	Carbine Price
Receiver	\$3.00	\$3.00
Slide	1.75	1.75
“ screw	05	05
Gas plate	75	75
Two cones, ten cents each	20	20
Slide vent tube	10	10
Slid “ “ screw	05	05
Toggle	25	25

In addition to the Sharps rifles the men were issued with a cone (nipple) wrench/screwdriver and a brush (both stored in the implement pocket of the cartridge box) that could be fitted to the wooden cleaning rod to remove

fouling from the barrel. 1 rod was issued for every squad of 10 men; but I have found in a number of company records showing only 1-2 rods present.

Cone wrench and screw driver	37	
Brush thong and rod	43
Brush	25
Thong	15
Rod	15
Cartridge stick	05

The last two entries reflect the ‘Berdan contract’ Sharps rifles:

Guard plate with double trigger, complete	2.75
Angular bayonet	2.50

When Hiram Berdan contacted the Sharps Rifle Mfg. Co. to make rifles for the Sharpshooters, he included two ‘add on’ features. The first was the ‘double triggers’ (by pulling the rear trigger it adjusted the tension of the front one). The second change had the rifles issued with triangular bayonets (instead of the cumbersome sword bayonet used with the Infantry Model rifles). As a side note, I have found a number of NM1859 Berdan rifles stamped on the bottom barrel with the outline of the saber bayonet stud; the outline served as a simple, yet precise, guide to enable workmen to solder the lug in the correct position every time.

281. *Regiments armed with muskets, rifles or carbines other than the Springfield rifle model of 1855-61-63, are entitled to an armorer, for the purpose of keeping the regimental arms in repair. He can be supplied with a set of tools and extra parts by a proper reacquisition on the Ordnance Dept.*

282. *Under the direction of the commanding officer, it is the duty of the armory to keep the arms of the regiment in repair and to take care of the tools and extra parts.*

Since the Sharpshooters were armed with customized Sharps rifles Regulations entitled them to have an armorer assigned to maintain the weapons. In addition to the Armory Sergeant, a second man was detailed to assist him.

The **Customs of the Service** describes The Ordnance Soldier starting at section 190: “*Enlisted men are not so much soldiers as mechanics and laborers...they are enlisted like other men, but differently employed and receive different allowances of pay, clothing and rations.*” “*The appointments of sergeants must be submitted to the Chief of Ordnance for his approval; but corporals and privates of the lowest class, and are advanced subsequently according to their competency...*” The Armorer Sergeant’s duty would be taking inventory, processing paperwork and overseeing the work done by the soldiers assigned to him.

We would expect men assigned to this duty to be gunsmiths or recognized experts with firearms upon enlistment. Examining the muster rolls for the 1st Regiment only four men list their pre-War occupation as ‘*Gunsmith*’; they are:

<u>Last name</u>	<u>First</u>	<u>Company</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Muster date</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Shortan,	Charles	A	NY		Pvt
Foster,	Richard	B	NY	Sept 5, 1861	Pvt
Kinsman,	Henry	F	VT		3 rd Sgt
Frink,	Luther	K	MI	March 4, 1862	Pvt.

Private Shortan was discharged at Camp of Instruction in Washington, DC on account of illness on November 2, 1861; well before the Regiment was issued the Colt-Root Revolving Rifles in the Spring of 1862. This left three men with the aptitude and experience to serve as armorers.

The 1st US Sharpshooter armorers

Among the Ordnance records in Lt. Col. Caspar Trepp's papers I discovered the identities two men who served as armorers for the USSS. The receipt below introduces us to our first man:

~~~~~  
*This is to certify that the 10<sup>th</sup> day of May 1863 I took final control of all Ordnance and Ordnance stores in the hands of private John Mickesell, Co 'K' 1<sup>st</sup> USSS, the acting Armorer of the Regiment and that I found the following Articles viz:*

- 2     *cartridge box belts*
- 13    "     "     "     *plates*
- 3     *screw drivers and cone wrenches*
- 17    *wipers with thong and rods*
- 4160  *linen cartridges Cal 52/100*
- 16, 700 *percussion caps*
- 16    *bayonets, Triangular*

*And that the above stores have been taken up and accounted for on the Quarterly Return of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores for the Second Quarter ending June 30, 1863,*

*Caspar Trepp, Lieut. Col.  
 Comdg 1<sup>st</sup> US Sharpshooters*

*Triplicate*

~~~~~  
 Brian White found a biological sketch of John Mikesell in the History of Gratiot County (Michigan): *John Mikesell was born in Ohio and living in Gratiot County when War broke out. How he wound up in Michigan is not clear. Anyway, Mikesell arrived in Detroit; where he enlisted in Co. 'K' 1st USSS on January 18, 1862. It is also not clear when and where he attended the shooting trials that enabled him to qualify for the Sharpshooters. At 28 years of age, John stood 5 foot 10 inches tall, had a dark hair, blue eyes, and light complexion. On March 4th, he was mustered for 3 years of service. There is nothing in his service record until being wounded in action at Deep Bottom, Va, on August 16, 1864. He was transferred to Co. 'F', 5th Veteran Volunteer Infantry on December 23, 1864 (this regiment absorbed all Michigan USSS veterans and recruits with time left to serve). He was discharged upon the expiration of his term of service at Petersburg, Va. on March 15, 1865. There is nothing in the 'Brown Books' to indicate Mikesell's 'extra-duty' as armorer. After the War, Mikesell moved to the little community of Newark (in Gratiot county) to work as a stonemason. He married (wife, Mary) and had one son (Arthur Adelbert). Mikesell died in 1921 and was buried at Mt. Hope cemetery, in the county seat town of Ithaca.*

I contacted John Carey, who reviewed his collection of Descriptive and Muster rolls for Company 'K' and confirmed that Mikesell was the armorer for the 1st Regt. USSS. However, he also discovered discrepancies between the Gratiot County biography and the Co. K Descriptive list for 1862:

<u>No.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Where born</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>Officer</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
40	<i>Mikesell, John</i>	<i>Pvt</i>	<i>Sommerset Pa</i>	<i>Detroit</i>	<i>Mather</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Blacksmith</i>

<u>Date Enlisted</u>	<u>Where at</u>	<u>Hair</u>	<u>Eyes</u>	<u>Complexion</u>	<u>Feet</u>	<u>Inches</u>	<u>Date Mustered</u>
<i>Jan 18/62</i>	<i>Detroit</i>	<i>dark</i>	<i>blue</i>	<i>light</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Mar 4/62</i>

The December 15, 1864 muster out roll shows: *"Transfer to 5th Michigan Infantry. Detailed as Armorer at Division Quartermaster Train."* The list also showed: *"Due (owed) Regimental Suttler \$4.00"*

It is not entirely clear why Mikesell (whose pre-war vocation was “blacksmith”) was appointed armorer. One possibility is that his blacksmith skills were needed to care for the horses, tack and the armory wagon. As many reenactors discover, one can quickly learn the component parts of a Sharps and how they work. Also, blacksmiths were regularly tasked with repairing or making household and farm goods in frontier communities, so Mikesell would have had the technical ability to repair Sharps rifles as well.

The December 1864 muster roll shows Mikesell assigned to the 1st Division (2nd Army Corps) Quartermaster (wagon train). His name was carried on the Company ‘K’ rolls (and his pay and other paperwork was processed there). Unfortunately, we have no information on the circumstances of how Pvt. Mikesell sustained a wound at Deep Bottom? Because of his duties required him to be with the wagon train it is highly unlikely he would have been on the skirmish line with the rest of the Sharpshooters. He may have wanted to ‘go to the front’ because he was bored, looking to see what combat was like, or other reasons.

Mikesell must have been good at his job, because when he was transferred to the 5th Michigan Veteran Volunteer Infantry, he was retained as that regiment’s armorer. The 5th Mich VVI was designated as the ‘skirmish regiment’ for the 3rd Division, 2nd Army Corps; with most of the men carrying Sharps rifles until the end of the War.

The mysterious case of Richard Foster, Armorer 1st Regt USSS

Among Lt. Col. Trepp’s Ordnance papers I discovered a number of receipts and invoices addressed to/by ‘R. Foster, armorer’. Below are some of those entries:

~~~~~  
*To Commandg Officer  
Company A  
1<sup>st</sup>  
Berdan’s SS*

*Received from Foster (armorer) 2 bayonets*

*R. Aschman 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut  
Com’d Co. A.*

~~~~~  
*Head Quarters. 1st Regt. USSS
Camp near Warrenton, Va.
Nov 12th 1862*

Received of R. Foster Regt. Armorer 1gun & accoutrements, numbered 55822 (last digit hard to confirm-wes)

*H. Marble
Capt. Commdg Co. “G”*

~~~~~  
*Camp of the U.S.S.S. Dec 10/62  
Received of J. Foster (Armorer)*

*22 cases of cartridges  
60 primers  
10 springs  
6 nipples*

*R. Aschman Lieut  
Com’d Co. A  
1<sup>st</sup> Regt U.S.S.S.*

Hd. Qrts. 1<sup>st</sup> Regt. USSS  
Camp near Falmouth, Va.  
Dec 24, 1862

Received of R. Foster Regt. Armorer 5 Sharps rifles with accoutrements

F E. Marble  
Capt. Co. "G"

~~~~~  
I believe that "R. Foster" may have been the earliest armorer for the 1st USSS. Considering the entire regiment wasn't armed (with the controversial Colt-Root revolving rifles) until March 1862, there would have been no need for one before then.

But back to "R. Foster." What follows is a fascinating and puzzling story. Brian discovered Foster's name and service in the same Gratiot County (Michigan) history as Mikesell:

"RICHARD FOSTER, farmer, Section 8, Washington Township, is a son of Richard and Fanny (Hines) Foster, natives of Staffordshire, England. Richard Foster was a lock and gun smith, and died in London in 1852. Richard Jr. was born in Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, England, Oct. 10 1822. When 21 he was apprenticed to his father's trade, and in 1852 he came to America. He lived three years in New York City, and then went to New Jersey, where he enlisted in Company D 1st U.S. Sharpshooters. He went to the Army of the Potomac and fought in the seven days' battle before Richmond, at Fredericksburg, Bull Run, Antietam, Frederick City and other places. He escaped unhurt, and held at the time of his discharge the position of Armory Sergeant of his regiment. He was discharged in front of Petersburg, VA, Sept. 14 1864. He keeps as a trophy a saber which he captured from a rebel Colonel. On leaving the service, Mr. Foster went first to New York, and then came to Gratiot County, locating on 80 acres on section 8, Washington Township. He has improved 35 acres, but has also worked at his trade in the mean time.

In August, 1847, he was married to Elizabeth, daughter of William and Martha (Dunch) Fletcher, natives of Kent and Middlesex, England. They both died in the old country, Mr. Fletcher having been a hotel-keeper until his death. Mr. and Mrs. Foster have had seven children, four of whom are living: Joseph, Richard, William, and George. Mr. Foster has been Roadmaster in his township. (A Road master could be two occupations: a railroad maintenance official charged with the maintenance of a division from 50 to 150 miles of railway; or a public overseer of repairs of roads-WES). Politically he is a Republican. He and his wife of members of the M. E. Church."

I was very excited with Brian's discovery because it seemed to nicely sum up Sgt. Foster's war service. However, the next day John emailed me information that showed a very different picture of "Armory Sergeant" Foster. This is John's discovery:

My Regimental information (1st Regt. USSS; Muster sheets, Descriptive, Abstracts, Casualty & Desertion lists, Etc.) differs somewhat to Brian's post war information. I've read the (Gratiot County) bio. before and have always questioned some of the war time facts.

According the Regimental Descriptive List for Richard Foster, he was Born in London, England (most likely a generalization); standing 5'6" w/ Light hair, Blue eyes & a Light complexion. Richard was 36 years old when mustered into service by Capt. Martin (Co. 'B') on Sept 5, 1861 at NYC, he was a Gunsmith by trade.

During his service with Company B he was listed as being 'Killed in Action' before Yorktown; (which is false because he, in fact, survived the War) makes one to believe he was wounded or missing at this time. This conflicts with the Bio .account that stated he was unhurt during the war. In the 1890 Census (of which I also

question items) he states that he was wounded in his right ear by a shell. Such a wound would give the appearance of a bad (potentially fatal) head wound, which perhaps caused some to believe that he had killed after he didn't return to the Regiment. I have no reference of him being an Armorer, he may have served in the position for a time when assigned to Co. B in late '61 - early '62.

John did more digging and found a copy of the July 16, 1862 list of Co. B men wounded and sick. The last entry shows R. Foster—Armorer as one of the “At Headquarters-Sick”

At Headquarters Sick
Corp Wilson
R. N. Bannet
W. Cramer
J. W. Chidley
Wm Green
S. A. Samore
S. J. Griswold
S. Haines

J. Mc Caffrey
J. Mc Graw
S. Mc Graw
M. Roark
S. Robison
R. Rannick
Wm Stapleton
J. H. Warner
J. G. Warner
R. Foster Armorer,

Foster served with Company B until Sept. 7th 1862, at which time he was transferred to Company H, which he was assigned until February 1, 1863. On that date the records show him listed as a deserter, after he failed to return from a furlough, he is said to have gone to Canada. These facts are listed in several different documents including the Company Muster-out sheet dated September 16, 1864. (this information conflicts with the post-War Biography stating that he mustered out w/ the company before Petersburg). His desertion could be the reason why he was never granted a pension after he applied for one in 1904.

No more info until I find him living (like Brian said) in Washington, Gratiot Twp, MI. He is listed with his wife, Elisabeth, and two sons (1870 census). The two eldest sons moved; his second eldest (Richard listed on the same page) was listed as living w/ N.B Fraker working as a farm hand. In 1880, Foster still lives with his wife & two sons (William & George) still at home. His eldest son (Joseph) and his family are listed on the same page of the census.

Now the 1890 Veterans Census (the questionable one). Richard is listed as both 'Richard Foster' & 'Richard

Foster Jr.’ On this census he states he was a Sergeant in Company H and served full term (till 9/3/1864) being wounded. He also listed himself as Richard Foster Jr. serving as an orderly for Capt. Andrews Co. ‘H’ of the 3rd Mich. Inf. from Aug. 1864 (a date that conflicts with his stated USSS discharge) till June 1865. I haven’t found much info. on Capt. Andrew or Richard’s service with the 3rd Mich to verify.

What???! Will the real Richard Foster (Jr.) please stand up? Trepp’s Ordnance records clearly show that he served as one of the regiment’s armorers until December, 1862. Sometime between then and February 1863 Foster was granted a furlough but never returned to the regiment. While AWOL, he was transferred to Co. ‘H’, but kept on the rolls “on detached duty”.

I asked John if Foster might have been one of the Sharpshooters sent north for recruiting duty during the Winter of 1862-3; but John reported that he was not. So somehow Foster obtained a furlough, and for reasons unknown, deserted to Canada. The USSS records continue to list him as a ‘deserter’ right up to September 16, 1864 (when the Company was discharged). So Foster never did return to the USSS. But why?

Foster next says he served with in the 3rd Michigan Infantry as an orderly for Captain Andrews of Company ‘H’ from August 1864 until June 1866. John wasn’t unable to locate any information about Captain Andrews or Foster in the 3rd. But I discovered that this was because there were two 3rd Michigan infantry regiments. The ‘original’ 3rd Michigan served in the Eastern theater from 1861 to June 20, 1864. Five months later the 3rd Michigan was ‘reorganized’ under the command of Col. M.B. Houghton and saw duty out west.

While the Brown Books list the history and contain the muster out rolls of the 3rd Michigan Infantry, I wasn’t able to locate the muster rolls for the “Reorganized” 3rd. I asked Michigan’s ‘History Detective’, Chris Czopek, to lend a hand. After carefully examining Michigan’s Adjutant General’s records Chris notified me that he found no evidence that Foster had served with the Reorganized 3rd Michigan Infantry, let alone was promoted as a sergeant and served as an aide to Captain Andrews. Chris held out the small possibility that Foster may have enlisted under a substitute’s name (a common practice for men who wanted to get a sizeable bounty by serving in another man’s place—in Foster’s case, to avoid detection as a deserter from the USSS). However, Chris thought this unlikely.

So what can we say about Armorer Foster? He appears to have been a man who continually revised his service record. If his intent was to magnify his service so as to make himself eligible for a pension, he was unsuccessful. It is ironic that he lived out the remaining years of his life within 20 miles of the man who truly was the Armory Sergeant for the 1st U.S. Sharpshooters; Luther H. Frink.

Armory Sgt. Luther H. Frink

The third man identified as an armorer for the 1st USSS was Luther H. Frink, of Michigan’s Co. K. According to the Muster Rolls; Frink was born in Shanago (the mustering officer misspelled “Chenango” as well as writing “Powell” instead of ‘Howell’ as his hometown) County, New York. He was 21 years old, stood 6 feet 1 inch tall; had blue eyes, light hair and light complexion. His pre-war occupation was ‘gunsmith’. He enlisted on February 18, 1862 at Howell, Michigan for 3 years service. He was mustered in Detroit with the rank of Corporal on March 4, 1862 by Col. Smit. Frink continued to rise steadily in the ranks to Sergeant. On December 23, 1864 he was transferred to Co. A, 5th Michigan Veteran Vol. Infantry with the rest of the Co. K men. At this time, Frink was commissioned as Second Lieutenant, but the War ended so he was never formally mustered to this rank. He was discharged at expiration of service at Petersburg, Va. on March 2, 1865. Like Private Mikesell, there is nothing in the Michigan Adjutant General’s “Brown Books” that recognize Sgt. Frink as serving as armorer for either regiment.

After the War, Frink returned to Livingston county and in 1868 and was listed as one of the 246 men ‘over 21’. According to the 1868 History of Howell Village and Howell township Frink’s occupation is listed as ‘moulder’

(A **moulder** made moulds (or molds) from which castings were made. The moulder used a special wooden pattern or wax model to shape the mould. The model was then removed (or lost) leaving the shape required and creating the mould). Like Foster, there are confusing entries in Frink's post-War record. The History of Livingston County records Frink as being commissioned a "First Lieutenant"; whereas the History of Howell records him as "Sergeants returned".

Young Frink's interest in shooting and firearms was influenced by his father, Nicholas, who was one of Howell's early settlers and an avid hunter. The History mentions Nicholas and 4 other founders of the town of Howell who enjoyed hunting in the wild lands surrounding the pioneer community. Like his father, Luther enjoyed the shooting sports. In August, 1877 his name appears as 'prosecutor' for the newly established Brighton Gun Club (a conservation, shooting, hunting and fishing club). Luther's position suggests he was the Club's conservation officer, who enforced community game and fishing limits. Frink was also one of the first 13 volunteer fire fighters to serve on Brighton's Hook and Ladder Company No. 1. Frink died on August 28, 1905 and is buried in Lakeview Cemetery in Howell; in the family plot.

Henry Kinsman-a possible USSS Armory Sergeant?

Kinsmen enlisted in Company 'F' at Vermont as 3rd Sergeant, his pre-War occupation was gunsmith. On May 15, 1863 Kinsmen was promoted 2nd Lieutenant; occurring two weeks before Luther Frink was detailed as Regimental Armorer. John speculated that Kinsman might have served as armory sergeant until his promotion. The two weeks would have allowed for a transition period for personnel (and transfer of records, duties, etc.).

In addition to being a gunsmith, Kinsman: "*originally hailed from Connecticut (the state of the "Winthrop" connection) just the other side of the sound from New York City. Before joining the Sharpshooters, Kinsman served in Co. 'A' (Rifle company) of the 1st Connecticut State Militia, a 3 months regiment. Company 'A' was issued Sharps Rifles (as was the rifle companies of the 7th NYSM, that produced future USSS officers, William W. Windroph and Lewis Parmalee).* John suspects that Kinsman gained experience in the use, care & handling of the military Sharps rifle before enlisting with the Sharpshooters, making him especially qualified to supervise their care until returned to field duty. At this time we don't have access to Kinsman's military records to establish this for a fact.



1862 CDV of 1st Sgt. Henry Kinsman, Co. "F" 1st USSS posing with a Model 1852 'slant breech target rifle'. Note the tang sight at the wrist of the stock and globe sight at the muzzle, it is likely his personal weapon (Brian White collection).

So who were the 1st USSS Armorers?

Who were they? The 1st U.S. Sharpshooter Armorers

Based upon the research we have done, the USSS armorers identified so far, have been Sgt. Frink, John Foster, and John Mikesell. Frink was the armory sergeant (despite Foster's claim). The only evidence of Foster holding a sergeant's rank is from his own Post-War accounts. After Foster deserted in February 1863, Private Mikesell replaced him. Both men's names appear in Caspar Trepp's Ordnance records from November 1862 to November 1863 (the month of Trepp's death). Both Sgt. Frink and Private Mikesell records show them detailed to 1st Division/3rd Army Corps wagon train; but still carried on the regimental rolls. They were transferred, with the remaining Michigan sharpshooters, to the 5th Michigan Veteran Volunteers and served with them until War's end.

Conclusion (for now)

Among the unsung heroes of the 1st USSS were three men who quietly served in a 'support capacity'; ensuring the custom Sharps rifles and equipment were kept in good working order from Yorktown to Deep Bottom. Two men served honorably until discharged at the end of their term of service. One man deserted, and his military service remains shrouded in mystery and controversy. I find it interesting that all three armorers (assistants) settled in Michigan after the war; two of them residing within a few miles of each other.

Sources:

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5. Kautz, August V. Customs of the Service. J.B. Lippencott & Co. Philadelphia, PA. 1864
6. Kautz, August V. The Company Clerk. J.B. Lippencott & Co. Philadelphia, PA. 1863
7. Ordnance Manual for the use of Officers in the United States Army. J.B. Lippencott & Co. Philadelphia, PA. 1863
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10. Trepp, Lt. Col. Caspar; 1st Regiment, Berdan's; U.S. Sharpshooters. Correspondence & Papers 1861-1863. New York Historical Society. Albany, NY.
11. Portrait & Biographical Album, Gratiot County, Michigan 1884
12. Smith, Elisha. History of Howell Michigan. 1868

NOTES

Co. G Sharpshooters associated with the Sharps serial numbers:

Sharps Serial # Sharpshooter & service

54471 *George W. Griffin, Res. Trenton, WI. Enlisted 8/20/62 as Private. Mustered 8/20/62 into Co. G 1st USSS. Transferred out 12/31/64 into Co. A 2nd USSS. Transferred 2/18/65 into Co. B 36th Wisconsin Infantry. Mustered out 7/12/65 at Jeffersonville, IN (Absent wounded at muster out). Wounded 10/27/64 Hatcher's Run, VA. Intra-regimental transfer on 9/22/64 from Co. G to Co. D.*

57574 *Orris D. Hawley, Res. Leon, WI. Enlisted 8/30/62 as Private. Mustered 8/30/62 into Co. G 1st USSS. Transferred out 2/15/64 into Veteran Reserve Corps. Date & method of discharge not given. Wounded 7/2/63 at Gettysburg, PA.*

57266 *Obediah A. Beard, Res. Clinton, WI. Enlisted 8/29/62 as Private. Mustered 8/30/62 into Co. G 1st USSS. Transferred out 12/31/64 into Co. A 2nd USSS. Transferred 2/18/65 into Co. B 36th Wisconsin Infantry. Mustered out 7/12/65 at Jeffersonville, IN (Absent wounded at muster out). Wounded (date & place not stated). Intra-regimental transfer on 9/22/64 from Co. G to Co. D.*

57428 *Wiltse,(spelled Wiltsey on form) Martin H. Oak Grove, WI. Enlisted Aug. 20, 1862 as private. Discharged Dec. 29, 1863 on account of wounds sustained at Chancellorsville;*

57386 *Alvord, Cyrenius , Mackford, WI. Enlisted Sept. 2, 1862. Transferred Sept. 22, 1864 to Co. D; then to Co. A, 2nd USSS, Dec. 31, 1864; then to Co. B, 36th WI Inf., Feb. 18, 1865*

57131 *Woodbury, Henry W. res. Blue Mounds, WI. Enlisted Sept. 7, 1861 as Private. Reenlisted Sept. 22, 1864. Transferred Vet., Corp., Sergt.; transferred to Co. D, Sept. 22, 1864; wounded; mustered out Oct. 1864*

I welcome your thoughts and comments

~ WES ~

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