

RIPON AND THE CIVIL WAR

IN APRIL OF 1861, RIPON GREETED THE CIVIL WAR WITH GREAT ENTHUSIASM, ORGANIZING VOLUNTEER COMPANIES SHORTLY AFTER LINCOLN’S CALL FOR TROOPS.

- The first volunteer company formed in 1861. The Ripon Rifles was led by Captain Oscar La Grange. Its 2nd Lieutenant was George W. Carter.
- Ripon Rifles became Company B of the 4th Wisconsin Regiment. By June, it numbered 122 men.
- Enlistments quickly followed with the Ripon Guards and the Rough and Readies.
- Community pressure and patriotic fervor motivated men of all ages, from 15 to over 60, to enlist.

RIPON’S VOLUNTEERS FORMED THE CORE OF THE 4TH WISCONSIN INFANTRY/CAVALRY, WHICH PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN EARLY CIVIL WAR CAMPAIGNS.

- Company B and Ripon Rifles, became part of the 4th Wisconsin, arriving in Baltimore on July 22, 1861.
- George Carter became Captain of Company B after La Grange transferred.
- In 1862 they participated in the campaign to capture New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Vicksburg.
- At the Battle of Camp Bislaw they helped secure a decisive Union victory.
- At the capture of Opelousas they secured about 1,000 horses.
- At the Port Hudson Siege, May 1863, there was heavy fighting, with the regiment suffering casualties. The regiment’s efforts contributed to the eventual surrender of Port Hudson, marking a turning point in controlling the Mississippi.

THE 1ST WISCONSIN CAVALRY REGIMENT SAW EXTENSIVE SERVICE IN THE WESTERN THEATER, FOUGHT AT CHICKAMAUGA AND IN THE ATLANTA CAMPAIGN, AND WAS HEAVILY INVOLVED IN THE PURSUIT AND CAPTURE OF CONFEDERATE PRESIDENT JEFFERSON DAVIS IN MAY 1865.

- Ripon College professor Edward Daniels helped form the First Wisconsin. Cavalry, with many recruits from Ripon.
- Oscar La Grange left the 4th regiment and became second in command of the First Wisconsin Cavalry.

COMPANY D OF THE 1ST WISCONSIN CAVALRY WAS A PROMINENT UNIT FORMED DURING THE CIVIL WAR, WITH INITIAL RECRUITMENT AND ORGANIZATION TAKING PLACE IN RIPON (CAMP FREMONT) AND LATER KENOSHA BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 1861 AND FEBRUARY 1862.

NOTABLE INDIVIDUALS

RIGHT: WALTER O. HARGRAVE enlisted in Co. M, 1st Regiment Wisconsin Volunteer Cavalry in 1861 and was sent to the South to fight. In 1865, Hargrave’s regiment took part in capturing Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America. After the war, Hargrave returned to Ripon where he bought the family farm from his father. He married Antonia Meyer in 1874 and had seven children.



RIGHT: GEORGE W. CARTER (1839-1920) One of the first in Ripon to enlist in the war, “I cannot repress my enthusiasm and my whole heart beats at the thought of meeting the enemy.” Carter returned home at the close of war with a crushed thigh. His leg was shattered by a cannonball at Port Hudson, Louisiana.



RIGHT: OSCAR LA GRANGE (1837-1915) He gained a reputation as a hard-fighting officer. On May 9, 1864 while his command was participating in Major General William T. Sherman's march to Atlanta, Georgia, he was captured at Rocky Face Ridge, spending three months as a prisoner of war until exchanged. He led his brigade in one of the last pitched battles of the war when they fought and captured Fort Tyler at West Point, Georgia on April 16, 1865. He was given the rank of Brevetted Brig. General in 1865 for his faithful and meritorious services. In his later years, he was Governor of the U.S. Soldiers Home in California.



The above photograph is believed to have been taken at a Wisconsin, First Calvary, Company D, reunion c1880. The person in front row, center is Stephen Wamsley Nichols (1840-1901), a Civil War hero who was a member of the First Wisconsin Cavalry. He was one of General Sherman’s favorite scouts and historian Samuel Pedrick tells us that he captured more than 20 Confederate prisoners single handedly. Nichols was multiracial, an African-Narragansett.