

The story of John Hammel has more holes in it than wedge of Swiss Cheese. Little was discovered about his birth and youthful years other than he was born about 1833-34 in Ireland. ^[1] The identities of his parents were unknown as were the names of his siblings. Obviously, he was an immigrant to the United States, but the year of his entry into this country was also unknown. The first record of his existence in the U.S. came from the 1860 Federal Census.

In that year, John was married and lived in Orwell, Vermont. He was twenty-seven. His new bride was Ellen E. Fanning (1838-1892). She was from Orwell, having been born there in 1838. Her father, Edward Fanning, and her mother, Ellen Waldron, also lived in Orwell. Edward was a common laborer. Ellen had three siblings, all males: Edward, Michael and William. The actual date of the marriage was not discovered, but, calculating backwards from the birth of their first child, it was somewhere around late 1859 to early 1860. On the 1860 Census form, John and Ellen had indicated they had been married "with the year". The Census had been taken in July of 1860. ^[2] As for children, the couple seemed to have had only one child and that was a daughter named Elizabeth Hammel. She was born August 15, 1862 in Orwell, eleven days AFTER John completed filling out his enlistment papers in front of the army recruiter. ^[3] What was he thinking??!! What would motivate a man about to become a father for the first time and barely married for two years, to desert both a wife and newborn child and go off to war? There's only one person who knew the answer to that question and that was John.

On August 4, 1862 in Shoreham, Vermont, John signed his enlistment papers before the recruiter and became a member of Company B, First Vermont Heavy Artillery (also known as the 11th Vermont Infantry). He was twenty-eight and stood five feet seven and one half inches tall. He had hazel eyes, brown hair and a light complexion. He was from Ireland and made a living from farming. ^[4] It wasn't until after his daughter was born that Private Hammel's military service of three years began. He reported to Brattleboro, Vermont on September 1, 1862 to be formally mustered-in the Union Army. He then received his \$25 bounty installment and collected another \$2 premium which went to the recruiter. ^[5]

The regiment was originally mustered-in as the Eleventh Vermont Volunteer Infantry in September, 1862. In mid-December of that year, it was redesignated as the First Heavy Artillery. Unfortunately, official and personal records used both designations which has caused great confusion.

The Eleventh Regiment was the largest Vermont regiment sent to the war, both in original membership and in total enrollment. It was recruited as an infantry regiment at the same time as the Tenth, under the call of July 2, 1862 from President Lincoln for 300,000 volunteers. By the middle of August, ten companies had been organized. The Regiment rendezvoused at Camp Bradley in Brattleboro, Vermont where they were mustered into the U.S. service September 1, 1862 for three years. It left the State on September 7 for Washington, D.C. where it arrived on the ninth and was immediately assigned to duty in the chain of forts constituting the northern defenses of the capital. By order of the Secretary of War, dated December 10, 1862, it was made a heavy artillery unit becoming re-designated as the First Heavy Artillery.

The Eleventh remained in the defenses of Washington, D.C. for a period of eighteen months, during which time it was chiefly employed strengthening the works, constructing and garrisoning Forts Stevens, Slocum and Totten. During the latter part of its artillery service at Washington, the Regiment garrisoned four other forts and occupied a line of about seven miles. It experienced little of the real hardships of war during 1863 and the first months of 1864. It had comfortable quarters, the men enjoyed excellent health and rations - even luxuries were abundant for a price. It maintained an excellent state of discipline typical of Vermont troops, and was rated the best disciplined regiment in the defense of the capital. After the terrible Federal losses at the Battle of the Wilderness, the Eleventh was ordered to join the Army of the Potomac. It reported for duty as infantry near Spotsylvania Court House with nearly 1,500 men.

During the severe Overland Campaign that followed, the Regiment participated in every major engagement of the Sixth Corps from May 1864 to April 1865: Spotsylvania; Cold

Harbor; Petersburg; Welden railroad; Fort Stevens; Charlestown; Gilbert's ford; Opequan; Fisher's Hill; Cedar Creek; Petersburg siege. In the debacle at Welden railroad, June 23, 1864, the Regiment suffered the greatest loss sustained by any Vermont Regiment in a single action. It lost nine killed, thirty-one wounded and two hundred sixty-one captured. All the captives were sent to Andersonville prison where two hundred thirty-two of them died.

Original members, recruits for one year and recruits whose term of service expired before October 1, 1865, were mustered-out on June 24, 1865. The remainder of the Regiment was consolidated into one battalion of heavy artillery and stationed in the defenses of Washington until mustered-out on August 25, 1865. The original members of the Eleventh numbered 1,315. Recruits and transfers amounted to an additional 1,005. The total rank and file was 2,320. Of that number, 152 were killed in action; 210 died of disease; 457 were wounded; 339 were captured; 2 died by accident. ^[6]

For the next ten months (September, 1862 through June, 1863), Private Hammel was a model soldier even to the point of racking up a typical debt of \$3 to the ever present sutler. ^[7] Sometime in July or August of 1863, Private Hammel committed some sort of serious transgression of military protocol. As a result, he was given a Regimental Court Martial. The charges were not specified in his service records, but his punishment was: "...In confinement at Hd. Qrs. D.C. forfeit \$10.00 for mo. for the term of one mo.; to be at hard labor in charge of Guard for 20 days, R.O. No. 97." ^[8] Three months later, Private Hammel was confined to a Regimental Hospital at Fort Slocum, D.C. There he died on December 21, 1863 of "typhus fever." ^[9] As was the habit of the Army, a final accounting for Private Hammel was done. The Irish weren't always lucky. Poor John's surviving relatives had to return \$25 bounty money that had been advanced to him prior to his death. ^[10] John Hammel's Record Of Death And Internment clearly stated that his "...body to be taken home...." for burial. ^[11] All of John's earthly possessions were sent along with the body to Orwell for burial. Among those personal effects were:

1	Cap	1	Great Coat
1	Uniform Coat	2	Blouses

1	Pair trousers	2	Pair Cotton Drawers
2	Flannel Shirts	1	Cotton Shirt
1	Pair Boots	1	Pair Socks
2	Blankets	1	Haversack
1	Knapsack	Notes	\$4.00 ^[12]

Ellen applied for a widow's pension on June 2, 1864. Her application included payment for a minor child in addition to herself. ^[13] Although the service records for John wasn't clear on the amount she was awarded, but it probably was the usual \$8 per month for her and \$2 per month for Mary.

In 1870, Ellen was living in Orwell and her daughter, Mary, lived with her. Ellen was a thirty-three year old widow with an eight year old child to support. Her occupation was listed a keeping house, so she must have been living on the \$10 per month pension money she received under John's military service. ^[14] That would be equivalent to about \$176 per month today. In 1873, Ellen remarried. Her new husband was Daniel Rogers. He worked on the railroad as a laborer. He was about seven years Ellen's junior. ^[15] They were married on September 15, 1873. When Ellen remarried, she would have lost the widow's pension plus the extra \$2 per month child support payments by law. To prevent losing the \$2 per month, Ellen had a guardian appointed for her daughter in December of 1873. The person on record was her step-father, D. G. Rogers. ^[16] How they legally managed to get away with this arrangement was incomprehensible. But apparently it worked. With a new husband to support them, money was not such a critical issue anymore. Ellen and Daniel enjoyed nineteen years together. On April 25, 1892, Ellen passed away from consumption in Orwell. ^[17]

NOTES

1. Vermont in the Civil War/Cemeteries/Vermont/Orwell/St Pauls/Hammel, John/Vitals; Ancestry.com, 1860 U.S. Federal Census for John Hammel.
2. Ancestry.com., Vermont, Vital Records, Death for Rogers, Ellen (Fanning); Ibid., Family Tree for Ellen E. Fanning; Ibid., 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Ellen Fanning.
3. Ibid., Family Tree for Mary Elizabeth Hammel; www.fold3.com, Compiled Service

Records Of Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Vermont, p. 2, image 309677020. Hereinafter referred to as Compiled Service Records.

4. www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Records, p. 2, image 309677020.
5. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, p. 3, image 309677027.
6. Vermont in the Civil War/Units/1st Brigade/Eleventh Vermont Infantry; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/11th_Vermont_Infantry.
7. www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Records, p. 9, image 309677027.
8. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, p. 10, image 309677028.
9. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, p. 17, image 309677035.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, p. 19, image 309677037.
12. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, p. 21, image 309677039.
13. Ancestry.com, General Index: Pension Files for John Hammel.
14. Ibid., 1870 U.S. Federal Census for Ellen Hamaul.
15. Ibid., 1880 U.S. Federal Census for Ellen Rogers.
16. Ibid., General Index: Pension Files for John Hammel.
17. Ibid., Vermont, Vital Records, 1720-1908 for Ellen Fanning Rogers.