

The 6Th Pennsylvania Never Runs: Armed With Lances, This Cavalry Unit Charged Across The Eastern Theater

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Review

THE 6TH PENNSYLVANIA NEVER RUNS

Armed with lances, this cavalry unit charged across the Eastern Theater

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Wittenberg, Eric J. *We Have It Damn Hard Out Here: The Civil War Letters of Sergeant Thomas W. Smith, 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry.* Kent State University Press, ISBN 087338623X

During a cavalry action near Culpeper, Virginia, on August 1, 1863, Sergeant Thomas Smith of the 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry heard Brig. Gen. John Buford angrily reprimand Maj. Henry Hazeltine, the 6th's commander, for failing to properly lead his troopers in a charge on a Confederate battery. According to Smith, Buford screamed: "Men I know it tis not your Fault, but [turning to Hazeltine] Its your fault you cowardly Son of a Bitch you consider yourself under arrest." It is this sort of personal glimpse into the Army of Potomac's cavalry corps that makes **We Have It Damn Hard Out Here** so interesting.

Thomas W. Smith was 23 years old when he joined the Union army in October 1861 for three years' service. A Philadelphia upholsterer, he still resided with his parents and siblings at the time of his enlistment, and his wartime letters to them served as the basis of the book. Tom Smith's unit was unique in the Federal service in that it was the only cavalry regiment armed with lances.

Organized by 1846 West Point graduate Col. Richard H. Rush, the regiment carried the official designation of the 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment but unofficially became known as "Rush's Lancers." It served in all of the major campaigns of the Army of the Potomac from the Peninsula through the summer of 1864, when it was transferred to the Army of the Shenandoah. Company I, to which Smith was assigned, served as a line unit and also saw detached service as one of the Army of the Potomac's headquarters guards.

As a result of his company's different missions and assignments, Smith's experiences ranged from mounted charges to scouting duty to providing security

for the Army of the Potomac's commanding general.

Smith's letters are filled with descriptions of the monotony of camp life, the misery of the hospital, and the difficulties of hard campaigning. His spelling, grammar, punctuation, and use of the upper/lower case is irregular, but these problems do not detract from our understanding of Smith's intent.

Editor Eric J. Wittenberg wisely chose not to overhaul the letters so they would maintain their "essence and integrity." The editor did add periods and removed commas to give the letters greater clarity, but unfortunately he did not indicate just when and where he made these editorial changes. Wittenberg also provides narrative to introduce and connect the letters, which is useful in providing the necessary historical context. At times his commentary is redundant and his own prose is occasionally awkward, but not to the point where it is distracting. Overall, he did a fine job of researching the various people mentioned by Smith and gives us a fuller picture of Smith and his family through the use of census data, military service records, and pension files.

Sergeant Smith did not re-enlist at the end of his three-year term and was discharged in October 1864. He returned to Philadelphia and his antebellum occupation, but military service had worn him down, and rheumatism curtailed his ability to work with his hands. He married when he was 40 years old, and by the time he applied for a pension in 1891 he had become so incapacitated that his wife was the sole source of the family income. Smith also was an alcoholic, which eventually caused his death in 1896 at the age of 58.

Thanks to Wittenberg, Smith's wartime experiences live on in his letters, giving us yet another remarkable example of the life of the common soldier of the Union.

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