

HISTORY
OF
FAYETTE COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA,
WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

OF MANY OF ITS
PIONEERS AND PROMINENT MEN.

EDITED BY
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ILLUSTRATED.

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Gen. S. Duncan Oliphant,¹ the subject of this sketch, is the second son of a family of eleven children—six sons and five daughters—of F. H. and Jane C. Oliphant; was born at Franklin Forge, at the “Little Falls” of the Youghiogheny River, Franklin township, Fayette Co., Pa., Aug. 1, 1826.

¹ By Gen. Joshua T. Owen.

His experience of school commenced when quite a child, while his father lived in Pittsburgh,—the instruction of a private tutor in the family at Franklin Forge, and subsequently at different schools from time to time in Uniontown, mostly in the old Madison College building; and his preparation for college at Bethel Academy, near Pittsburgh, and the Grove Academy, at Steubenville, Ohio.

In the fall of 1840 he entered the freshman class of Jefferson College, Cannonsburg, Washington Co., Pa., where his older brother John, Gen. J. B. Sweitzer, Rev. Johnson Elliot, John Sturgeon, Daniel Downer, William Parshal, and Thomas Lyons, of Fayette County, were among his college-mates. He was one of the four orators representing the Philo Literary Society, along with Gen. Joshua T. Owen, of Philadelphia, Gen. James S. Jackson, of Kentucky, and Col. Rodney Mason, of Ohio, on the annual exhibition in the spring of 1844, graduating in September following. In October of the same year he entered Harvard Law School; graduated from it in June of 1846; entered the law-office of Gen. J. B. Howell and Hon. E. P. Oliphant, his uncle, and was admitted to practice in the several courts of Fayette County in September, 1847.

Having some passion and taste for the military life he joined the old Union Volunteers in the fall of 1847, and in January, 1848, he was elected and commissioned captain; appointed aide-de-camp on the staff of Maj.-Gen. Cyrus P. Markle. In 1849 he was elected and commissioned lieutenant-colonel, commanding the battalion of uniformed militia of Fayette County. Taking an active part in anything useful to the town and county, he commanded the Union Fire-Engine Company for many years, and was for three terms president of the Fayette County Agricultural Society, holding its annual fairs at Brownsville. He was fond of horses, the chase, the rifle, and the shot-gun, and was something of an expert in all manly exercises.

Acquiring some experience at the bar of Fayette County, he moved to Pittsburgh in the fall of 1850, and entered into partnership with Hon. Thomas Williams; but the atmosphere of the "Smoky City" proving uncongenial to his wife's taste and health, he returned to Uniontown in the fall of 1852, and resumed the practice of law there.

About this time the building of a branch railroad from Uniontown to Connellsville began to be seriously agitated. Col. Oliphant took an active interest in the enterprise, calling meetings and soliciting subscriptions for stock, working on when others had abandoned hope. The Fayette County Railroad was due chiefly to his—in conjunction with the Hon. Nathaniel Ewing's—constant and persevering energy. He was secretary and treasurer of the company from the commencement of the enterprise until after the road was finished.

On the 12th of April, 1861, Fort Sumter was fired

upon. Col. Oliphant at once commenced to raise a company of volunteers for the defense of the Union. In this he had the active co-operation of Capt. J. B. Ramsey, Maj. J. B. Gardner, Henry W. Patterson, Henry C. Danson, William H. McQuilkin, Martin Hazen, and others. On the 15th the company was full and off to the rendezvous in Pittsburgh, where the company was organized, electing S. D. Oliphant captain; J. B. Gardner, first; J. B. Ramsey, second; and Henry W. Patterson, third lieutenant. The company then went into Camp Wilkins with the name of "Fayette Guard," and was cast in the organization of the Eighth Regiment, Company G, Pennsylvania Reserve Corps, at Camp Wright, on the Allegheny Valley Railroad, of which Capt. Oliphant was elected lieutenant-colonel. On the 16th of June, 1861, he was presented with a beautiful sword by his friends in Pittsburgh, of which the *Daily Post* of the 17th says,—

"SWORD PRESENTATION—AN INTERESTING CEREMONIAL.

"Last evening one of the large parlors of the Monongahela House was filled by a party of ladies and gentlemen to witness a pleasing and touching ceremony, not an uncommon one amid the incidents of these times of war, but in this instance a peculiarly graceful and appropriate one. A beautiful sword was presented to Lieutenant-Colonel S. D. Oliphant by his friends as a token of their love for the man and their esteem for the virtues peculiar to the soldier which he so eminently possesses.

"In a speech conceived in most excellent taste, and delivered with true manly feeling, the sword was presented to Col. Oliphant by Algernon S. Bell, Esq., of this city. It was received by Col. Oliphant with deep feeling, and his reply was a model of calm eloquence, such as only comes when the heart speaks out.

"The gentlemen were college-mates together, are both members of the legal profession, and the friendship of their early days has been refreshed and strengthened by the growing esteem of more mature years. The occasion was one which called forth feeling allusions to bygone days and classic remembrances. The generous impulses of both hearts poured out in simple, touching words. There was no effort at display, no high-flown effort at big, round words, but the men spoke to each other as brother might speak to brother.

"We never recollect to have witnessed a similar ceremony more happily consummated. The audience sympathized heartily with the sentiments expressed by the speaker, and at the close of the ceremony gave their hearty congratulations to the officer whom they had assembled to honor."

On the 20th of July, 1861, the regiment received marching orders for Harrisburg; took cars at Pittsburgh on Sunday morning, the 21st, arriving at Harrisburg on Monday morning. "Bull Run" had been heard from, and the regiment was hurried on through Baltimore to the defense of Washington; went into camp at Meridian Hill, moved thence to Tenallytown, where the Pennsylvania Reserves were assembled and organized into brigades under Gen. George A. McCall. The Eighth Regiment was brigaded with the First, Second, and Fifth Regiments, under command of Brig.-Gen. John F. Reynolds.

Late in October, 1861, the Pennsylvania Reserves were ordered to the south side of the Potomac, to the extreme right of McClellan's line, Camp Pierpont, with division headquarters at Langley, on the Dranesville turnpike.

The monotony of the winter of 1861-62 was only broken by the little battle of Dranesville, eight or ten miles south of Camp Pierpont, the first success of the Union arms on the soil of Virginia, fought principally by the Third Brigade of the Reserves, under Gen. Ord; the First Brigade, in which was the Eighth Regiment, under Gen. Reynolds, being in reserve, and coming up near the close of the battle. About the 1st of April the Reserves took up the line of march for Fredericksburg, on the Rappahannock River, halting some days at Alexandria, Manassas Junction, and Catlett's Station, arriving at Falmouth, and shelling a detachment of rebels out of the town, but not in time to prevent them from firing and burning a span of the bridge on the Fredericksburg side of the river. The Reserves went into camp on the hill above the town, were incorporated with the army of Gen. McDowell, and remained on duty at Falmouth and Fredericksburg until the 8th of June, 1861, when the division was ordered to the Peninsula, and again assigned to the right of McClellan's line, on the Chickahominy, near Mechanicsville.

On the 26th of June, 1862, Col. Oliphant was on grand guard and picket duty with his regiment at the village of Mechanicsville, and during the afternoon of that day was driven in by the advance of Lee's army. Retiring slowly he fell back to Beaver Dam, where the regiment was formed in line of battle with the rest of the Reserves. "Col. Oliphant rode along the front of his line, addressing each company in turn with words of inspiring eloquence. When he came to his own old company, under the influence of deep feeling and strong emotion, he exclaimed, 'Fayette Guard, remember Pine Knob is looking down upon you, and Lafayette is watching you from the dome of the court-house! You will not go back on me to-day?'¹ The first of the Seven Days' battles was fought, and the 'Old Guard' did not go back upon him."

Next morning the Reserves fell back to Gaines' Mill, where the second of the Seven Days' battles was fought. Col. Hayes having lost his voice, not strong at best, and although he participated in the battle, he turned the command over to Lieut.-Col. Oliphant. The regiment was sent forward some distance in advance of the line to develop the position and force of the enemy; it suffered severely. Every commissioned officer in the left wing excepting Capt. Danson was killed or wounded; among the wounded were Capt. Baily and Lieut. McQuilkin, of Fayette County. Having spent all its ammunition, the regiment retired by the rear rank in good order, mangled and bloody, but

not broken. On the crest of the hill, where the line of battle was formed, Col. Simmons, of the Fifth Reserve, opened his ranks to let the Eighth pass through.

The whole line cheered the Eighth, and Col. Simmons, grasping Col. Oliphant's hand, said, "I never expected to see you alive again, or to bring a corporal's guard up out of that rebel hell."

At the White Oak Swamp Col. Oliphant received a severe contusion from a spent round-shot, which involved the right knee-joint. Stunned by the blow he fell unconscious to the ground, when Surgeon Alleman bandaged his knee whilst under fire, and having administered some restoratives, in a few minutes he remounted, and by leave of Gen. Seymour continued on duty on horseback. [Officers below the rank of brigadier-general are required to go into battle on foot.] He continued on duty throughout the day and night, and the next day at the battle of Malvern Hill.

On the 6th of July, at Harrison's Landing, he was stricken down with partial paralysis of the right side, and with entire loss of hearing, and was sent to Washington and thence home for treatment. He suffered great pain in his leg and ears, and on the 29th of December, 1862, on surgeon's recommendation, he was honorably discharged on account of physical disability incurred in service.

Col. Oliphant's hearing improving, along with improvement of his general health, when, in February of 1863, a shock from the discharge of an overloaded musket kicked him over, causing a severe contusion of the shoulder-blade and joint, which hastened the restoration of his hearing to a normal condition; but it is yet dull, and at times inconveniently so, and the injury to the knee-joint is without much relief.

Having thus in a measure recovered from his disability, in June of 1863, Col. Oliphant was appointed and commissioned in the United States Veteran Reserve Corps with the rank of major, ordered on duty at Pittsburgh, then at Harrisburg, and in July was assigned to the command of a detachment at Pottsville, in Schuylkill County. Promoted in August to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, and in October to the rank of colonel, and assigned to the command of the second sub-district of the Lehigh, with headquarters at Pottsville, his duty there was to enforce the draft, and give protection to the coal operators who had large contracts with the government.

This was to him the most delicate and anxious period of his military service, to obey and follow out his orders and instructions fully and firmly without coming in conflict with the civil authorities.

Says *The Miners Journal* of April 2, 1864, "Col. Oliphant, of the 14th Veteran Reserve Corps, recently detached from this post with his command, carries with him the good wishes and kind regards of all who had the pleasure of enjoying his acquaintance; as an officer he was firm and faithful in the discharge of

¹ American Standard, July, 1862.

his duty, and the good order that prevailed here may in a great measure be attributed to his excellent judgment. We part with him with sincere regret."

Arriving at Washington City, he was detached from the active command of his regiment and ordered on duty as the presiding officer of a board for the examination of officers recommended for promotion, and when this board was discontinued he was detailed as the senior officer of a general court-martial in Washington.

In July of 1864, Gen. Jubal Early invaded Maryland and threatened Washington. Col. Oliphant was sent to Philadelphia to bring down all the convalescents from the hospitals fit for service in the defenses of the city. While mustering and equipping the men land communication between Philadelphia and Washington was cut off by the rebels, but he took 1200 men by sea and the Potomac River into the defenses around Washington.

After Gen. Early's repulse he resumed court-martial duty, and so continued until early fall, when he was sent as senior officer of a board of inspection of men in hospitals. This duty brought him to Nashville in December, and he volunteered on the staff of Gen. Thomas for the battles of the 15th and 16th instant, in which the rebel army under Gen. Hood was destroyed.

Returning to Washington after these battles, he was again appointed presiding officer of a board of examination, and continued on this, court-martial and special inspection duty until June 23, 1865, when he was promoted to the rank of brigadier-general by brevet, and assigned to the command of the Second Brigade of the garrison of Washington, with headquarters at East Capital Barracks.

While exercising this command the State trials for the murder of President Lincoln were conducted at the arsenal in Washington; the guards were furnished from his brigade, and by special order from Gen. Augur to that effect, he largely increased the force and took command of the guard himself on the day of execution.

From this time he was actively though uncongenially employed on provost duty, while Grant's and Sherman's armies were being passed through Washington and disbanded, until late in November, 1865, when he was relieved and ordered home to await the further order of the War Department.

Gen. Oliphant spent the winter of 1865-66 in Harrisburg, in the service of the Pittsburgh and Connelville Railroad Company, and on the 1st of July, 1866, was honorably discharged and mustered out of the military service of the United States.

In the spring of 1867 he moved to Princeton, N. J., for its educational advantages, having a large family of small boys; was admitted to the bar of that State, and resumed the practice of law.

His imperfect hearing and some impediment of speech, resulting from the paralysis, embarrassing

him in trials at the bar, and his old friend, Hon. William McKennan, having been appointed judge of the United States Circuit Court for the Third Circuit, including the district of New Jersey, he saw in this the probability of an appointment to office in the line of his profession more congenial to his tastes and physical condition; applied for and was appointed clerk of the court for the district of New Jersey in September, 1870. He is so employed at this writing. In the spring of 1874 he moved from Princeton to Trenton, where he now resides.

In March, 1847, Gen. Oliphant married Mary C., only child of John Campbell, of Uniontown, and has by her ten sons, all living. His wife Mary dying in October, 1875, some time thereafter he married a New Jersey lady, Miss Beulah A. Oliphant. Although of the same name, there is no consanguinity of blood between them.

Gen. Oliphant is a genial man, polite and even courtly in manners, and fond of society. His intimates are few, but they are staunch and true friends. He is a Republican in politics, and though not at all bitter in his advocacy of political doctrines, he is an effective public speaker.