



These tents may be similar to those in which the Lightning Brothers were sleeping. "Petersburg, Va. Hospital stewards of 2d Division, 9th Corps, in front of tents." Timothy H. O'Sullivan, photographer. LC-DIG-cwpb-03960. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

The lightning brothers: A brief case study in union civil war research

In honor of the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, this is the first in a series of articles about records at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., that are useful in researching the war and its participants.

It was a dark and stormy night.¹ On Valentine's Day 1863, the 76th Ohio Infantry encamped at Young's Point, Louisiana, as part of General William Tecumseh Sherman's campaign to capture Vicksburg, Mississippi, and secure control of the Mississippi River. That night a thunderstorm rolled in, and at 1 a.m. on 15 February, lightning struck the center pole of the tent used by seven noncommissioned officers of Company B.

Rufus B. Buxton and Henry D. Rose were instantly killed. Henry C. Hare was struck senseless and did not recover his faculties for several hours. Benjamin Rice was "pretty badly hurt." Frank J. Brackett "had a severe shock" but got over it. In the days afterward, Virgil W. Graves continued to experience lameness and weariness in his limbs, while Lewis Follett had lameness

and weariness in his back. The effects of the strike were curious. The most seriously injured survivors, Rice and Hare, lay between the two men who were killed. Brackett and Graves lay beyond Buxton, and Follett lay beyond Rose but under the same blanket. Follett recounted these details in a letter to his father that was published in a local newspaper. Follett concluded, "It seems providential that we were not all killed."²

Buxton and Rose were initially buried near camp,³ but may have later been reinterred back home, as both have gravestones at Maple Grove Cemetery, Alexandria, Licking County, Ohio.⁴

Lightning strike is certainly not the normal way to die or be injured in war. Union forces of the Civil War lost roughly 200,000 to disease, 110,000 in action or from battle wounds, and 50,000 from many other causes.⁵ Estimates vary, but the risk of death from lightning is less than one in a million; the risk of injury, less than one in 100,000.⁶

Curiosity is the beginning of knowledge and most research projects. What happened to these men, the lightning brothers? The men's Compiled Military Service Records (CSMR) and pension

CASUALTY SHEET	
Name: <i>Henry D. Rose</i>	
Rank: <i>Capt.</i>	Company: <i>B</i> Regiment: <i>76</i>
Age: <i>20</i>	State: <i>Ohio</i>
Nature of Casualty: <i>Death</i>	
CAUSE OF CASUALTY—(Name of Disease, Acc.)	BY WHOM DISCHARGED
<i>Struck by lightning</i>	
DEGREE OF DISABILITY.	FROM WHAT SERVICE THIS OBTAINED
<i>Total</i>	<i>Death</i>
BY WHOM CERTIFIED.	REMARKS
<i>Capt. J. P. French</i>	<i>Struck by lightning</i>
DATE OF DISCHARGE, DEATH, &c.	
<i>Feb. 15, 1863</i>	
PLACE OF DISCHARGE, DEATH, &c.	

Casualty Sheet, from Henry D. Rose, 76th Ohio Infantry, Civil War Compiled Military Service Record, RG 94, NARA.



Tombstone of Henry D. Rose. The tombstone has the name of another Civil War soldier, Capt. Ira French, who also served in Company B, 75th regiment inscribed on the opposite side. Photo courtesy of Robert M. Sizelove Sr., Newark, Ohio.

files, both available from the National Archives (NARA) in Washington, D.C., provide answers, along with other records and publications.

Rufus B. Buxton (1841-1863)

In 1860, Rufus lived with his parents, David and Catherine Buxton, and brothers David, Bushrod, Charles, and Harry, at Saint Albans Township, Licking County, Ohio. His parents and brother David were born in Vermont, but Rufus and his younger brothers were born in Ohio.⁷ He was 20 when he mustered in on 1 November 1861 as a private; he was appointed fourth sergeant on 16 November 1861. A druggist born in Licking County, he was 5 feet 9 1/2 inches tall, with fair complexion, blue eyes, black hair. His CSMR contains two records noting that he was “killed by a stroke of lightning.”⁸ There is no pension file for Buxton since he had no widow or other dependents.

Henry D. Rose (1842-1863)

In 1860, Henry lived with his parents, L. W. and Charlotte Rose, and sister, Emily, at the village

of Alexandria, St. Albans Township.⁹ His father was a merchant; their household also included Ira French, a clerk in his store; Sarah Tyler; and the elderly Bertha Hill. French later served and died in the Civil War, and he shares a monument at the local cemetery with Henry. Ironically—for a young man with no descendants—Henry has his own published genealogy written by Walter Thrall, *Genealogy of Henry D. Rose, Son of Lyman W. Rose, of Alexandria, Ohio, from Jonathan, the First Ancestor in this Country, Through Six Generations, About One Hundred and Fifty Years, from 1690 to 1840* (Columbus, Ohio: Glenn & Thrall, Printers, Gazette Office, 1862). Henry was 20 years and 2 months old when he enlisted as a private in the 76th Ohio Infantry on 17 September 1862 at Columbus. He received a \$25 bounty upon enlistment. A student born at Alexandria, he was 5 feet 5 inches tall, with rosy complexion, blue eyes, and red hair. The recruiting officer, Lt. Fred H. Wilson, wrote “I certify that the above Henry D. Rose has consent of his parents” on his enlistment paper. He was promoted to corporal sometime in January or February 1863. His CSMR

contains two records noting that he was killed by a stroke of lightning.¹⁰ There is no pension file for Rose since he had no widow or other dependents.

Franklin Josiah Brackett (1838-1910)

In 1860, Frank lived in the household of Columbus and Betsy Cann, which included Alexander and Laura Gould and their one-year-old son, Frank. Both Columbus and Alexander were blacksmiths.¹¹ Brackett first served in the 17th Ohio Infantry, a three-month regiment. He was 23 when he mustered in on 9 October 1861 as a private, and was appointed second sergeant on 16 November 1861. A blacksmith born in Licking County, he was 5 feet 9 inches tall, with ruddy complexion, black eyes, and black hair. His CMSR makes no mention of his lightning shock. He was promoted to first sergeant on 30 September 1862, conditionally appointed to second lieutenant on 24 November 1863, and to first lieutenant on 11 March 1864. He was on detached service as a recruiter from approximately 20 November 1863 to 10 March 1864, and was mustered out of service on 15 July 1865.¹² Brackett's pension file contains several references to the incident. In his affidavit dated 18 June 1892, Brackett testified "That a tent containing Rufus Buxton, Benjamin F. Rice, Henry Hare, ___ Rose, Frank J. Brackett and others was struck by Lightning and ... [he] received severe shock in left side rendering him a cripple for several months from which he never fully recovered, as he has been troubled with rheumatism in left side and heart trouble ever since in a greater or less degree." Between 1892 and 1894, several men in his regiment—John Dull, William C. Montgomery, Joseph Spaith, and Jabez L. Rhodeback—described the incident in affidavits or in letters to the pension office. Spaith noted Brackett was "very much crippled" and "is not able to work at his trade but verry little of the time." Rhodeback, who was sleeping in a "shelter" nearby, said the lightning struck the pole at the back end of the "wall tent," broke the pole into three pieces and slivered it badly. He also remembered pulling the wall tent off of the men inside, and that he was acting first sergeant

while Brackett was unable to perform his duties. Frank married, had six children, and died 15 September 1910 at Newark, Licking County.¹³

Henry Clay Hare (ca. 1833-1913)

In 1860, Henry, a shoemaker, boarded at Saint Albans Township, with 70-year-old Martha Curtis, whose household included two female family members and two other single male boarders.¹⁴ "Henry C. Hair" was 27 when he mustered in on 9 October 1861 as a private. He was appointed fourth corporal on 16 November 1861. A shoemaker born in Licking County, he was 5 feet, 6 inches tall, with fair complexion, gray eyes, and black hair. Sometime in January or February 1863 he was promoted to second corporal. He was sent to the "Division Hospital Boat" on 7 March 1863, and by May or June of 1863—still "sick"—he had been transferred to the 4th Division's Dennison General Hospital, Camp Dennison, Ohio. On 17 August 1863 he was discharged from service because he had been unfit for duty for sixty days and was incapable of performing the duties of a soldier because "Head & spine injured by Lightning Feb 14th 1863, causing partial paralysis of all muscles of body & partial loss of vision. Unfit for invalid corps. Disability 1/2." His company muster roll for September and October 1863 noted his discharge on 17 August, but indicated he was to be charged \$3.35 for his knapsack, haversack, canteen, and related straps. His CMSR is filed under the name "Hair" and most of the records in it use that spelling.¹⁵ Several records in his pension file mention the lightning strike, including Hare's declaration for pension on 10 August 1888 that stated that he "lay in an unconscious condition for about 15 hours." He still suffered from its affects to his brain and spine and was partially paralyzed. On 8 December 1888, Jerome Van Buskirk recalled that Hare was "apparently lifeless for nearly two hours there being no pulse or other signs of life" and that "he was taken immediately to the quarters of Capt. Metzgar of Company C and there worked with by the Captain and others until life returned...."

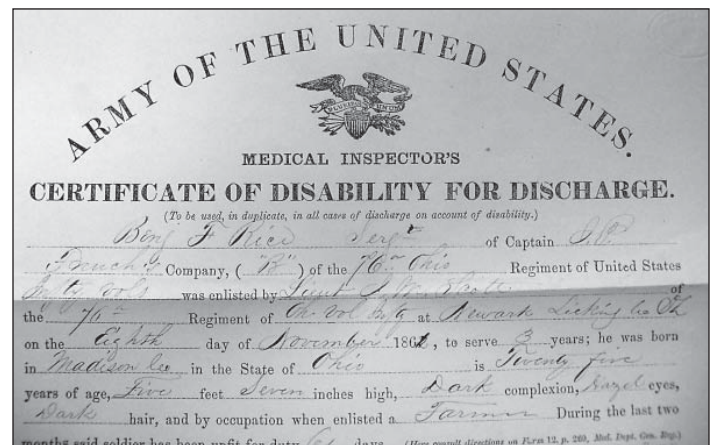
Hare was unable to resume work at his trade and was disabled from manual labor. By 1902 he was “rather slow in answering questions” and his memory was “inclined to be faulty at times.” Hare’s acquaintances included Ohio Governor George K. Nash, who wrote a letter to the pension office on his behalf on 26 December 1901. Henry married, had two children, and died at Columbus on 10 April 1913.¹⁶

Lewis Follett (1841-1915)

In 1860, Lewis lived with his parents, Eliphalet and Catherine Follett, and siblings Dwight, Howard, Janet, Frank, Fanny, and Willie, at Saint Albans Township. His father had been born in Vermont, and his mother in Pennsylvania, but Lewis and all his siblings had been born in Ohio.¹⁷ Lewis was 20 when he mustered in on 30 October 1861 as a private. A farmer born in Licking County, he was 5 feet 10 1/2 inches tall with dark complexion, black eyes, and black hair. His CMSR makes no mention of his lightning shock. He was appointed third sergeant on 16 November 1861, and sometime in January or February 1862 he was promoted to second sergeant. He reenlisted for another three years on 4 January 1864 to gain \$100 in bounty pay. He was promoted to first sergeant on 7 April 1864, then to sergeant major on 22 April 1864, then to first lieutenant and adjutant on 7 April 1865. He was mustered out of service at Louisville, Kentucky, on 15 July 1865.¹⁸ Lewis married the same woman twice (she divorced him because of his alcohol abuse but remarried him after he quit drinking). He suffered from rheumatism and heart disease from hardships suffered during military service, but the only mention of the lightning strike is in his widow’s declaration for pension on 14 June 1915. He had two children, and died 17 February 1914 at the U.S. Soldiers Home in Los Angeles.¹⁹

Benjamin F. Rice (1837-1917)

Benjamin was 24 when he mustered in on 8 November 1861 as a private. A tanner born in Madison County, Ohio, he was 5 feet 6 1/2 inches tall with fair complexion, hazel eyes, and



Top of Medical Inspector’s Certificate of Disability for Discharge, Benjamin F. Rice, 76h Ohio Infantry, Civil War Compiled Military Service Record, RG 94, NARA.

black hair. He was appointed first corporal on 16 November 1861, and was promoted to fourth sergeant on 9 January 1863. He was sent to the General Hospital at Memphis on 21 February 1863. On 6 April 1863, he was discharged from service because he had been unfit for duty for 61 days and was incapable of performing the duties of a soldier because of “Paraplegia from stroke of lightening Feby 14th 1863. The case is a very positive one. Disability total.” His company muster roll for March and April 1863 noted his discharge on 6 April, but indicated he was to be charged \$3.46 for his knapsack, haversack, canteen, and related straps.²⁰ Rice was the first survivor to file for a pension. In his declaration dated 6 June 1863, he noted the lightning strike to his right hip which caused his discharge, as well as back troubles caused by attempting to lift a wagon during the battle of Hanes Bluff on 29 December 1862. The pension office’s board of examining surgeons in Union County, Iowa, noted that he had been unable to walk for three to four months following his discharge but at the time of their examination, 17 March 1886, he could walk with a somewhat unsteady gait. The muscles of both legs were flabby, among other symptoms, and his disability from paraplegia remained “total.” After the war, Benjamin married, had a daughter, was divorced from

his wife, and died in Columbus on 6 December 1917.²¹

Virgil Warren Graves (1839-1924)

In 1860, Virgil lived with his parents, V. A. and Louisa Graves, and siblings Lucius, Anna, Julius, Ethelbert, Caroline, Catharine, and Nora, in Alexandria. His parents and older brother Lucius were born in Massachusetts, while Virgil and his younger siblings were born in Ohio. His father was justice of the peace.²² Virgil was 21 when he mustered in on 9 October 1861 as a private. A farmer born in Licking County, he was 5 feet 9 inches tall with dark complexion, gray eyes, and black hair. His CMSR makes no mention of his lightning shock. He was appointed fifth sergeant on 16 November 1861, and sometime in January or February 1863 he was promoted to third sergeant. He reenlisted for another three years on 4 January 1864 to gain \$60 in bounty pay. He was appointed commissary sergeant on 22 April 1864, promoted to first lieutenant on 28 March 1865, then appointed regimental quartermaster on 1 May 1865. He was mustered out of service at Louisville on 15 July 1865.²³ Several records in Virgil's pension file mention the lightning strike. After the war, he married, had five children, and moved westward to Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, and Idaho. He was the last surviving "lightning brother" at his death on 20 October 1924 at Filer, Twin Falls County, Idaho.²⁴

Conclusions

There is an unlimited number of interesting stories about our ancestors' experiences in the American Civil War, but the story cannot be told using a single source. CMSRs, pensions files, newspapers, the regiment's record of events, regimental and other published war histories, soldiers' letters and other archival sources in a variety of repositories all have a role in gaining a more complete understanding of soldiers' experiences during the war. In the case of the "lightning brothers," the momentous lightning strike is recorded in the CSMRs of the two dead and two most seriously injured men, and in

the pension files of all five survivors. However, linking all seven men *by name* to the event required finding the letter from Lewis Follett to his father, published in the local newspaper shortly afterwards.²⁵

For more information about Civil War records in the National Archives, visit "Civil War Records" <<http://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/civil-war-genealogy-resources/index.html>>. 

Notes

1. Victorian novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Baron Lytton, is credited for first use of this phrase, which began his 1830 novel *Paul Clifford*. Americans probably remember it best as the beginning of Snoopy's unfinished epic novel in the *Peanuts* cartoon strip. For more information, see "It was a dark and stormy night" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It_was_a_dark_and_stormy_night.
2. "The Lightning Accident of OVI County B, 76th Regiment, February 15, 1863..." *Newark [Ohio] North American* 6 March 1863, p. 2, reprinted in *Licking Lantern* 33 (Summer 2008): 28.
3. Stewart Bennett and Barbara Tillery, editors, *The Struggle for the Life of the Republic: A Civil War Narrative by Brevet Major Charles Dana Miller, 76th Ohio Volunteer Infantry* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2004), 86.
4. "Maple Grove Cemetery, Section 4," St. Albans Township, Licking County, Ohio, online <http://www.usgwarchives.org/oh/tombpics/licking/stalbans/maplegrovecem/mgc/mgc.htm>.
5. Precise counts are difficult. These figures come from William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War, 1861-1865* (Albany, N.Y.: Albany Publishing Company, 1889), 50. Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861-65* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1901) is considered to be more authoritative, if less detailed.
6. Leslie A. Geddes and Rebecca A. Roeder, *Handbook of Electrical Hazards and Accidents* (Tucson, Ariz.: Lawyers & Judges Publishing Company, 2005), 131-33. Globally, there are about 44,000 thunderstorms daily producing eight million flashes of lightning.
7. 1860 U.S. census, Licking County, Ohio, population schedule, Saint Albans Township, p. 455A, dwelling 60, family 60, Buxton; NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 999.
8. Compiled service record, Rufus B. Buxton, 76th Ohio Infantry; Civil War Compiled Military Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office (RG) 94, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C. (hereafter CMSR, RG 94, NARA).

9. 1860 U.S. census, Licking County, Ohio, population schedule, Alexandria, p. 468A, dwelling 262, family 254, Rose; NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 999.

10. Compiled service record, Henry D. Rose, 76th Ohio Infantry; CMSR, RG 94, NARA.

11. 1860 U.S. census, Licking County, Ohio, population schedule, Alexandria, p. 466B, dwelling 236, family 228, Cann; NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 999.

12. Compiled service record, Frank J. Brackett, 76th Ohio Infantry; CMSR, RG 94, NARA.

13. Frank J. Brackett, Civil War Pension File WC 715,322; Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, RG 15 (hereafter, RG 15, NARA).

14. 1860 U.S. census, Licking County, Ohio, population schedule, Alexandria, p. 465A, dwelling 213, family 205, Curtis; NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 999.

15. Compiled service record, Henry C. Hair, 76th Ohio Infantry; CMSR, RG 94, NARA.

16. Henry C. Hare, Civil War Pension File WC 761,001; RG 15, NARA.

17. 1860 U.S. census, Licking County, Ohio, population schedule, St. Albans Township, p. 455B, dwelling 68, family 68, Follett; NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 999.

18. Compiled service record, Lewis Follett, 76th Ohio Infantry; CMSR, RG 94, NARA.

19. Lewis Follett, Civil War Pension File WC 796,937; RG 15, NARA.

20. Compiled service record, Benjamin F. Rice, 76th Ohio Infantry; CMSR, RG 94, NARA.

21. Benjamin F. Rice, Civil War Pension File SC 22,469; RG 15, NARA.

22. 1860 U.S. census, Licking County, Ohio, population schedule, Alexandria, p. 466A, dwelling 226, family 218, Rose; NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 999.

23. Compiled service record, Virgil W. Graves, 76th Ohio Infantry; CMSR, RG 94, NARA.

24. Virgil W. Graves, Civil War Pension File 959,623; RG 15, NARA.

25. Some publications mention the event without a complete list of names. Charles A. Willison, *Reminiscences of a Boy's Service with the 76th Ohio...* (Menasha, Wis.: George Banta Publishing Company, 1908), 47 ("a sergeant killed and a corporal and several others severely injured."). Stewart Bennett and Barbara Tillery, editors, *The Struggle for the Life of the Republic: A Civil War Narrative by Brevet Major Charles Dana Miller, 76th Ohio Volunteer Infantry* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2004), 86, names six men, omitting Hare, and gives different details than those in Follett's letter. W. P. Gault, *Ohio at Vicksburg: Report of the Ohio Vicksburg Battlefield Commission*, Volume 1 (Columbus: c. 1906) 171, simply says two were killed and four disabled. There is no mention of this event in the multi-volume *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880–1900), online at Cornell University Library's Making of America website <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/m/moawar/>. For an extensive bibliography of publications and manuscript sources for researching the 76th Ohio Infantry, see Larry Stevens, "76th Ohio Infantry" <http://www.ohiocivilwar.com/cw76.html>.

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