

Records concerning Alexander St. George

Conrad W. Terrill, 20 Nov. 2008

The main records presented herein are the Civil War Court Martial records of Alexander St. George, and the letter written by the captain of his company to his wife, after he was killed in battle.

Alexander St. George was born Alexis Laporte dit St. George on 19 Sept. 1830 in Sorel, Quebec (in the Catholic parish of St-Pierre-de-Sorel), a son of Joseph St. George and Marguerite Arpin dite Poitvin.¹ He was born just about one year after his sister Marie Odile Laporte dite St. George, who married Cyprien Nadeau in the mid-1840's. Cyprien and Odile Nadeau, after they started living in the U.S., took the names Benjamin and Josephine Nadow.

We know that in 1851 Alexis St. George, 20 years old, lived with his parents (Joseph St. George, day-worker, and Marguerite Harpin) and his 16-year-old brother Onézime in the parish of St-Jude, Richelieu County, Quebec.² Sometime between 1851 and 1859 he moved down the Richelieu Valley and across the U.S. border to Swanton, VT, as many others from his area of Quebec had been doing for over twenty years, some of whom were his siblings. Alexander Laporte dit St. George married Maria (Martha) Potwin, daughter of Moses and Margaret Potwin (their American names), in Swanton on 1 Dec. 1859.¹³ His age was given as 27 (he would have been 29, actually) and hers as 15, and they were married by a Justice of the Peace. His sister Odile's family left Swanton at just about this time, and moved to Holden, MA. His parents, Joseph and Margaret St. George, were living in Swanton in 1860, as were Martha's parents. In fact, Martha was living with her parents, but Alexander was not there. Alexander's sister Julia and her husband Edward Potwin were living next-door to Martha and her parents.^{4,11}

Alexander and Martha's first child, son Narcisse, was born 6 Mar. 1860 in Swanton. Their second child, daughter Maria Louisa, was born 8 June 1862, at home in Fairfax, VT, with no attending physician.^{3,5} Alexander was not with Martha when their second child was born. He was off to war—the "War of the Rebellion." He enlisted in Milton, VT, on 2 Oct. 1861, and enrolled for three years in Company I of the Sixth Regiment, Vermont Volunteers. In the Company Descriptive Book, Alexander St. George is described as: 28 years of age (he was actually 30), 5 ft. 5 in. in height, dark complexion, black eyes and black hair. By 19 Oct. Alexander was en route to the front. For a detailed description of the activities of the 6th Vermont Volunteers see reference 7.

Alexander St. George was a headstrong soldier, one who did not like being given orders that did not make sense to him. He spoke English well enough, but he was French-Canadian in spirit, and things were different in French Canada (Quebec). He probably would have done well fighting in the Lower Canada Rebellion of 1837-1838, had he had been old enough at the time. But he was not well-suited for the U.S. Union Army in the Civil War. He was twice court-martialed during his term of service—the only soldier in his company, during his time there, who had to face court martial charges.¹² Had he not been killed in battle halfway through his term of service he probably would have been court-martialed yet again a time or two. Most of the court martial cases at that time concerned desertion, or quitting the company ranks; but Alexander's cases concerned breaches of military discipline.

Alexander's first court martial, on 14 Aug. 1862, resulted from a pair of incidences which oc-

Lt. Edward A. Holton¹⁵

curred early in July of that year. On 5 July, at camp near Harrisons Landing, VA (20 miles southeast of Richmond, on the James River), he was repeatedly ordered by Lieutenant Edward A. Holton to go and put on his coat. Alexander refused to obey, saying “I have no need of any” (or words to that effect). On 8 July, at the same camp, Lt. Holton repeatedly ordered Alexander to leave the ranks and go to his quarters. Again, Alexander refused to obey, saying, “I am very well where I am” (or words to that effect). Perhaps Alexander would not have had to face court martial if it had not gone any further than that; but when Lt. Holton attempted to remove him from the ranks, Alexander charged bayonet, saying, “I will run you through” (or words to that effect). This is all the detail contained in the records of the court martial. I myself wonder if this is precisely the way it happened, since Alexander pleaded “Not Guilty” to the charge of “mutinous conduct,” even though he conceded guilt on the charge (two specifications) of “disobedience of orders.” The

Court, however, found him guilty of both charges, and sentenced him to confinement and hard labor for the remainder of his term of enlistment, with a ball and chain attached to his left ankle for three months of each year. We can only imagine Alexander’s incredulity and dismay upon hearing this sentence. Sometime later, perhaps days later, while Alexander was still held at headquarters, Brigadier General Hancock, Commander of the Division, reviewed the cases, and disapproved the sentence in Alexander’s case. He commented that the Court had failed to attach any forfeiture of pay to the sentence, or to provide any but an honorable discharge. He ordered that Alexander be released from confinement and returned to duty. His decision is puzzling unless we assume that he was simply not in accord with the Court Martial in this particular case, and so he produced technicalities to render a more just sentence. We have to wonder if the whole procedure was arranged to scare some sense into Alexander. Alexander was most likely baffled, but elated, by the new turn of events, and we can assume that the order to return to duty was one of the few that he obeyed without hesitation. Most likely he now resolved to be a model obedient soldier. He was able to keep on track for six months.¹³

Alexander’s second court martial, on 19 Feb. 1863, resulted from an incident which occurred at 9 A.M. on 14 Feb. 1863. First Sergeant John G. McCombes, having been ordered to form a detail, ordered Alexander to go on fatigue duty. Alexander refused to obey, saying “I will not go a step until I have finished my breakfast” (or words to that effect). Alexander pleaded guilty at the court martial, and was sentenced to forfeiture of \$10 from his monthly pay. This must have been a one-time deduction, since the monthly pay of a private was \$13—\$2 of which was retained until the end of his term of service.⁸

The 6th Regiment Vermont Volunteers fought in many skirmishes and battles during the time Alexander St. George was with them. Two of the bloodiest battles were Antietam and the Wilderness. The regiment fought at Gettysburg, too, but by that time (1 to 3 July 1863) Alexander was no longer with them. He died on 4 May 1863, at Bank’s Ford, near Fredericksburg, Virginia, during the Chancellorsville campaign. The Vermont 6th Regiment did itself proud at Bank’s Ford—in a gallant charge it drove back the enemy and captured 250 prisoners.⁷ But Alexander died in the effort, from a gunshot wound. He was presumably buried at the battlefield.⁶

William B. Reynolds was the Captain of Co. I when Alexander was killed. The following is a transcript of the letter that he wrote to Alexander's wife, to inform her of her husband's death:

*Camp 6th V. Vol.
Near Falmouth, Va.
May 9, 1863*

*Mrs. St. George
Milton Falls, V.*

Madam: ———

It becomes my painful duty to inform you that your husband, Alexander St. George, of my Company, was killed in battle on the Heights of Fredericksburgh, Va., May 4th inst. at about 5½ o'clock P.M. — He lived but a short time after being shot — his wound being in the abdomen. He fought bravely — died like a true soldier, as he was, in his country's defense.

It gives me pleasure to assure you that I had no braver soldier in my company. During all our previous battles he had remained safe, but went hopefully forward. During our recent battles he had been unusually high-spirited and confident of victory.

We are deeply sympathetic with you in your irreparable loss. We commend you to the care of our friends, and trust you will inform any of the members of his old company if ever you are in want. You need not hesitate under such circumstances.

I inclose a letter which I took the liberty to open, as it came to-day. I see, by it, that you will be in Fairfax, so I direct to that town.

I think your husband sent you a note against Wm V. Reynolds of West Milton, some months ago. If you have not collected it, you can do so at any time, when you wish to.

Address me at any time, if I can assist you in any manner.

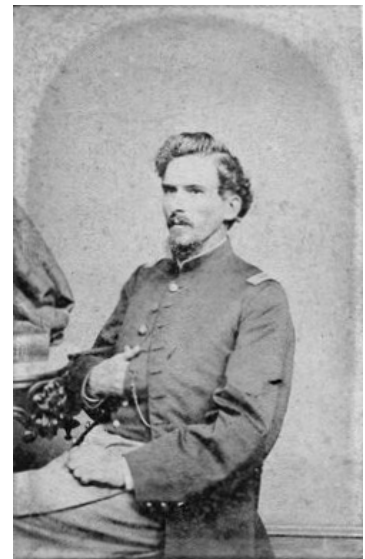
Very Respectfully,

W^m B. Reynolds

Capt. Co. I

6th V. Vol.

The original of this letter can be found in Alexander St. George's Civil War pension files (a photocopy is included here, in Appendix B). Martha St. George was hoping that this letter, and the fact that she herself had received it, would provide sufficient proof that she was indeed Alexander's widow, and was thus eligible for an \$8 per month widow's pension. It was not sufficient. Many affidavits were required to support her two claims, that for herself and that for her daughter Louise later, after she remarried and was no longer eligible for the widow's pension. Martha remarried on 6 March 1866, to Peter Bush, at Westford, VT. Martha and Peter both were residents of Fairfax, VT. Martha's son Narcisse died 1 June 1864, at age four, under the name Malcom St. George.⁶ Her daughter Louise was almost four years old when Martha remarried, and eligible for a \$10 per month (\$8 basic, plus \$2 per minor child) Civil War minor's pension until she was 16 years old. Martha and Peter Bush moved to Brookfield, Tioga County, PA, soon after they married.



Capt. William B. Reynolds ¹⁴

The Vermont Historical Society

Postscript: Lt. Edward A. Holton, who perhaps had a personality conflict with Pvt. Alexander St. George, received a medal of honor for distinguished conduct in action on 16 April 1862 at Lee's Mill, VA. He commanded Co. I for three months during the winter of 1863/1864 when Captain Reynolds was detailed on recruiting service. He was wounded in action near his right knee in May of 1864, and promoted to Captain of Co. F two weeks later. He was discharged in August of 1864 for disability due to the knee wound. Captain Wm. B. Reynolds was promoted to Major and put in command of the 17th Regt. Vt. Vols. in April of 1864, and was killed while leading an assault on 30 July 1864 at the Battle of the Crater, at Petersburg Mine, VA.^{9,10}

References

1. Baptism record, St-Pierre-de-Sorel catholic parish, Alexis St. George, bapt. 27 Nov. 1830; Drouin Collection (Quebec). (via Ancestry.com).
2. 1851 Canada Census, Quebec, Richelieu Co., St. Jude, district 23, sub-district 314, roll C_1134, schedule A, image 114/115 of 158, lines 13-16, Joseph St. George household (via Ancestry.com).
3. Civil War pension records, Alexander St. George, Co. I, 6th Regt., VT Vols.; National Archives & Records Administration (NARA), Wash., D.C.
4. 1860 U.S. Census, Swanton, Franklin Co., VT, roll M653_1321, p. 698; Joseph St. George household. (via Ancestry.com).
5. **Swanton Vermont Church Records, 1865-1908**, by Donella Ashline. *Narciscus St. George, bapt. 3/14/1860, child of Alex Lapoite dictus St. George and Marence Poitvin; and Maria Lousya St. George bapt. 7/6/1862, child of Alexi St. George and Maria Potvin.* (via Ancestry.com).
6. Civil War service records, Alexander St. George, Co. I, 6th Regt., Vt. Vols; NARA, Wash., D.C.
7. "Vermont in the Civil War," (<http://vermontcivilwar.org>, by Tom Ledoux) from **Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers and lists of Vermonters Who Served in the Army and Navy of the United States during the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1866**, compiled by Theodore S. Peck, Press of the Watchman Publishing Co., Montpelier Vt., 1892, pp. 177-180.
8. "Table of Pay, Subsistence, Forage, etc. Allowed by Law to Officers of the Army," and "Monthly Pay of Non-Commissioned Officers, Privates, etc.," Batter B, 4th U.S. Light Artillery – Army Pay Scale, (<http://www.batteryb.com/armypay.html>).
9. Civil War service records, Edward A. Holton, Co. I, 6th Regt., Vt. Vols.; NARA, Wash., D.C.
10. Civil War service records, William B. Reynolds, Co. I, 6th Regt., Vt. Vols. & Co. 17, Vt. Inf. (field & staff); NARA, Wash., D.C.
11. 1860 U.S. Census, Swanton, Franklin Co., VT, roll M653_1321, p. 682; Moses Potwin and Edward Potwin households. (via Ancestry.com).
12. A court martial index, by-unit, compiled by the research staff at NARA.
13. Vital records of Swanton, Vermont, 1857-2000, from the Town Clerk's Office; from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Center, microfilm roll 2210841, item 2.
13. Civil War Court Martial records, Alexander St. George, Pvt., Case # KK-675; NARA, Wash., D.C.
14. Photograph of Major William B. Reynolds, 17th Regt., Vt. Vols.; from the portrait gallery collection of the Vermont Historical Society (http://vermonthistory.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=280&Itemid=175).
15. Photograph of Capt. Edward A. Holton, Co. F, 6th Regt., Vermont Vol. Infantry, from the collection of the U.S. Army Military Historical Institute; (Wartime photo. Folder: RG98S-CWP86.85, Civil War (1860-1865), Civil War—Photos).

Appendix A. Transcripts of Court Martial records

Head Quarters Smith's Division
August 14th 1862

General Orders
N^o 195

~~ Before a General Court-Martial of which Major T.O. Seaver 3rd Regt Vermont Vols is President, which convened at the Head Quarters of the 2^d Brigade, Smith's Division by virtue of special Order N^o 374 from these Head Quarters of July 23rd 1862, were arraigned and tried.

1~~ Private Alexander St George Co I. 6th Vermont Vols, on the following charges and specifications.

Charge 1?~~ ~ Disobedience of orders

Specification 1?~~ In this, that the said Private Alexander St George Co I, 6th Vt Vols upon being repeatedly ordered by his commanding officer 2nd Lieut E.A. Holton to go and put his coat on, did refuse to obey and said "I have no need of any" or words to that effect. This at Camp near Harrison's Landing Va. on or about the 5th day of July 1862.

Specification 2d~~ In this, that the said Private Alexander St George of Co I, 6th Reg^t Vermont Vols, having been repeatedly ordered by the said 2nd Lieut E.A. Holton to leave the ranks and go to his quarters, did refuse to obey and said, "I am very well where I am," or words to that effect; This at Camp near Harrison's Landing, Va, on or about the 8th day of July 1862.

Charge 2? ~~ Mutinous Conduct.

Specification ~ In this, that when the said 2nd Lieut E.A. Holton attempted to remove him, the said Private Alexander St George, from the ranks, he the said Private did charge bayonet on him the said 2^d Lieut and say "I will run you through", or words to that effect. This at Camp near Harrison's Landing Virginia, on or about the 8th day of July 1862.

To which charges and specifications the prisoner pleaded as follows

To the 1 st specification, 1 st Charge	Guilty
To the 2 nd specification, 1 st Charge	Guilty
To the 1 st Charge	Guilty
To the Specification 2 nd charge	Not Guilty
To the 2 nd charge	Not Guilty

After mature deliberation on the testimony adduced the Court finds the prisoner as follows

Of the 1 st specification, 1 st Charge	Guilty
Of the 2 nd specification, 1 st Charge	Guilty
Of the 1 st Charge	Guilty
Of the Specification 2 nd charge	Guilty
Of the 2 nd charge	Guilty

And do therefore sentence him the said Private Alexander St George of Company I, 6th Reg^t Vermont Vols "to be confined at hard labor in the forts and fortifications of the United States for the remainder of his term of enlistment and to wear a ball and chain attached to his left leg for three months in each year."

2~~~Private Joseph Benjamin { . . . and the rest of the cases }

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The proceedings in the foregoing cases having been laid before the General Commanding the Division the following are his decisions thereon.

1.~ The proceedings in the case of Private Alexander St George, Co I, 6th Reg^t Vermont Volunteers are disapproved. The Court failed to attach any forfeiture of pay to the sentence, or provide any but an honorable discharge.

Private Alexander St George, Co I, 6th Regiment Vermont Volunteers, will be released from confinement and returned to duty.

2.~ { . . . and the rest of the cases }

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.
.

By order of B. Gen^l Hancock
(signed) Chas. Munde.
asst adjt-Gen^l

A true copy
Cha^s Munde
Major + A A Genl

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(N<sup>o</sup> 22?)

Proceedings of a General Court Martial convened by virtue of the following Special Order. Viz:  
Head Quarters 2<sup>d</sup> Div<sup>n</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> Corps  
Feb<sup>y</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> 1863.

Special Order  
No 25

A General Court Martial is hereby approved to meet at such place within the Division as the Presiding Officer may designate at 10 A.M. to-morrow Feb<sup>y</sup> 5 1863 for the trial of such prisoners as may be brought before it.

Detail for the Court

|    |                       |               |
|----|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1? | Lt. col. W. B. French | 77? N.Y. Vols |
| 2? | Major W Ellis         | 49? “ “ “     |
| 3? | Capt. E. E. Johnson   | 2? Vt. “      |
| 4? | “ C. J. Omsbee        | 5? “ “        |
| 5? | Lt. Charles Noble     | 119? Penna. “ |
| 6? | “ C. D. Rositer       | 33? N.Y. “    |
| 7? | “ Hiram Bailey        | 2? Vt. “      |

Lt. W. A. Pierce 3<sup>d</sup> Vt. Vols is appointed Judge Advocate.

No other Officers than those named can be assembled without manifest injury to the service.

The Court to sit without regard to {hours}?

By order of Brig. Gen. Howe  
E. Mattocks  
Lt& A.A.A.G.

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Head Quarters 77th Reg. N.Y. Vols
Feb^y 19th 1863

10 oClock A.M. The court met pursuant to the following order. Present.

1?	Lt. Col. W. B. French	77 th N.Y. Vols
2?	Major W. Ellis	49 th “ “ “
3?	Capt. E. E. Johnson	2 nd Vt. “
4?	“ C. J. Omsbee	5 th “ “
5?	Lt. Charles Noble	119 th Penna. “
6?	“ C. D. Rositer	33 rd N.Y. “
7?	“ Hiram Bailey	2 nd Vt. “

&

Lt. W. A. Pierce 3rd Vt. Vols. Judge Advocate. The Court proceeded to the trial of Private Alexander S^t George of Co. I 6th Regt. Vt. Vols who was called before the court and having heard the order convening the court read was asked if he had any objections to any member named in the order to which he applied, he had none.

The Court was then duly sworn by the Judge Advocate, and the Judge Advocate was duly sworn by the President in the presence of the prisoner.

The prisoner Private Alexander S^t George of Co. I. 6th Regt. Vt. Vols was arraigned on the following charge and Specification

Charge —: Disobedience of Orders

Specification —: In this that he the said Private Alexander S^t George of Co. I. 6th Regt. Vt. Vols. when ordered by his 1st Sergt. John G. M^cCombes to go on Fatigue Duty in answer to a detail properly made at about 9th o’Clock A.M. on the 14th day of February 1863 did wilfully refuse to obey said orders of the said 1st Sergt. and did reply “I will not go a step until I have finished my Breakfast” or words to that effect.

The Charge and Specification was read aloud by the Judge Advocate and the prisoner pleaded as follows.

To the Specification —: Guilty

To the Charge —: Guilty

There being no testimony to be introduced the court was cleared for deliberation and having carefully considered the case of the prisoner, find him the said Private Alexander S^t George of C^o I. 6th Regt. Vt. Vols as follows.

Of the Specification —: Guilty

Of the Charge —: Guilty

And the court do therefore sentence him the said Private Alexander S^t George of C^o I. 6th Regt. Vt. Vols.

That he forfeit Ten Dollars of his monthly pay.

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Head Quarters 2<sup>d</sup> Division 6<sup>th</sup> Corps.  
Camp near White Oak Church Va.  
February 21<sup>st</sup> 1863

General Orders

N<sup>o</sup> 11.

II. Before a General Court Martial convened at the Head Quarters 77<sup>th</sup> Regt. N. Y. Vols. by virtue of Special Orders No. 25, of February 4<sup>th</sup> 1863, from the Head Quarters of the 2<sup>d</sup> Division of 6<sup>th</sup> Corps of which Lieut. Col. W. B. French 77<sup>th</sup> Regt N.Y.V. is President, were arraigned and tried:

1. *{through 21, the cases prior to that of Alexander St. George}*

22. Private Alexander St George of C<sup>o</sup> I<sup>st</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> Regt. Vt. Vols on the following charge and Specification”

Charge — Disobedience of orders.

Specification — In this, that he the said Private Alexander S<sup>t</sup> George of C<sup>o</sup> I<sup>st</sup>. 6<sup>th</sup> Regt. Vt. Vols. when ordered by his 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant (John G. McCombs) to go on Fatigue duty in answer to a detail properly made at about 9 o’C A.M. on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Feby 1863, did wilfully refuse to obey said orders of the said 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant, and did reply “I will not go a step until I have finished my Breakfast, or words to that effect.

To which charge and Specification the prisoner pleaded as follows:

To the Specification — Guilty

To the Charge — Guilty

After carefully considering the case, the Court confirmed the plea of the prisoner and found him as follows:

Of the Specification — Guilty

Of the Charge — Guilty

And the Court does therefore Sentence him, the said Private, Alexander S<sup>t</sup> George of C<sup>o</sup> I<sup>st</sup>. 6<sup>th</sup> Regt. Vt. Vs “That he forfeit ten dollars of his monthly pay.”

II. The proceedings of the Court in the cases of  
*{nine Privates}*  
are severally approved: and the sentences are confirmed.

III. The proceedings of the Court in the cases of  
*{a Sergt., a Corpl, and four Privates}*  
are severally approved: the sentences are confirmed and will be executed under the direction of the Brigade Commanders.

IV. The proceedings of the Court in the cases of  
*{four Privates}*  
are also severally approved: the sentences are confirmed and they will be confined at Fort Monroe Va. or such other public works as will best suit the interest of the service.

V. The proceedings of the Court in the cases of  
Private Thomas ONeill Batt. “G” 5<sup>th</sup> Regt. U.S. Arty  
“ Martin Lyman “ “ “ “ “ “ “

“ Alexander St George C° I?. 6? “ Vt. Vols  
are approved: the sentences will be executed.

VI. The General Court Martial of which Lt. Col. W. B. French 77? Regt N.Y.V. is President is  
hereby dissolved.

By order of Brig Gen Howe

E. Mattocks

Lt. & A.A.A.G. {*acting asst. adjutant-*

*General*}

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Appendix B. The letter which informed Martha of the death of Alexander.

Camp 6th St. Vol.
Near Falmouth, Va.
May 9. 1863.
Mrs. St. George
Wilton Falls, Vt.
Madam: —
It became my
painful duty to in-
form you that your
husband, Alexander St.
George, of my Company,
was killed in battle on
the Heights of Fredericks-
burgh, Va. May 4th inst.,
at about 5 1/2 o'clock
P. M. — He lived but a
short time after being
shot. His wound being
in the abdomen; He fought
bravely — died like a true
soldier, as he was, in his

Country's defense,

It gives me pleasure to assure you that I had no braver soldier in my Company, During all our previous battles he had remained safe, but went bravely forward, During our recent battles he had been unusually high-spirited and confident of victory.

We are deeply sympathetic with you in your irreparable loss. We commend you to the care of our friends, and trust you will inform any of the members of the Old Company if ever you are in want. You need not hesitate under such

circumstances,

I inclose a letter which I took the liberty to open, as it came to-day. I see, by it, that you will be in Fairfax, so I direct to that town.

I think your tin band sent you a note against ^{W. V.} Reynolds of West Milton, some months ago. If you have not collected it, you can do so at any time, when you wish to.

Address me at any time, if I can assist you in any manner,

Very Respectfully,

W. B. Reynolds
Capt. C. I.

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