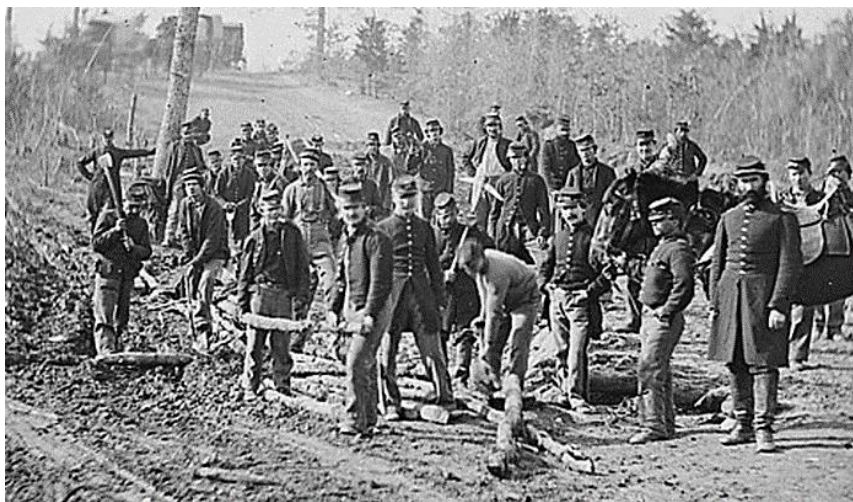


Ancestor Profile – Pvt. Aaron Ruple Porter

This is the story of Aaron Ruple Porter who, with his older brother Chauncey, served in *Co. E* of the *1st Michigan Engineers and Mechanics* from 1864 to 1865. The *Michigan Engineers* were a specialized regiment of volunteers trained to not only fight like regular infantrymen but also to provide logistical support to the regular army. They were skilled in building bridges, roads, railroads, and destroying the enemy's infrastructure. Many volunteers were drawn to join this branch of service by the \$4 premium over the regular infantryman's monthly pay of \$13.

Right: Union Engineers building a corduroy road in June 1862.



The Porter family arrived in Pine River, Gratiot County, Michigan, in 1854, enticed by the *Graduation Act of 1850*, which offered land for 50 cents per acre to those willing to relocate. Upon their arrival, young Aaron and Chauncey helped their father, Elijah, build a cabin in the woods, then continued to clear the land so they could farm it. Sister Ellen taught school and mother Julia and sisters Rebecca and Mahala tended to household duties.

In 1862, not long after Aaron's brother, Chauncey, had married and moved away to the small town of Ionia near Grand Rapids with his new bride, tragedy struck the Porter family in Pine River. Aaron's father, Elijah, succumbed to disease.

At age 19, Aaron became the head of the Pine River household, which now consisted of himself, his mother, Julia, and his two sisters.

As the war raged in the Eastern and Central States, brothers Aaron and Chauncey Porter both found themselves struggling to support their families in central Michigan.

In October 1863, President Lincoln issued a call for three hundred thousand more men to serve for three years. If quotas were not met, a draft loomed. The federal bounty for first-time recruits was raised to three hundred dollars to spur enlistments. Additional local bounties, averaging between one and two hundred dollars, raised the total available to new recruits even higher.

Since enlisting with a sizable bounty was much more appealing than being drafted, Aaron and Chauncey Porter marched to Grand Rapids together in August 1864, where they enlisted with the *1st Michigan Engineers*.

The recruiting bounty of \$500 (which would be about \$15,362 in 2024 dollars) likely assuaged their concerns about leaving their families behind. Neither man had military training, but the hard life on the frontier had likely prepared them well, both physically and mentally, for what lay ahead.

Rally, Boys, Rally for the Flag!
And Avoid the Draft.

VOLUNTEERS
FOR THE
29th REGIMENT
OF MICHIGAN INFANTRY

Will be called by the undersigned, who has been duly authorized
by *Assistant Blair*.

SUBSTITUTES
ARE ALSO ENLISTED IN THIS REGIMENT.

\$300 GOV. BOUNTY
And **LIBERAL LOCAL BOUNTIES**, in addition, offered!
TERM OF ENLISTMENT THREE YEARS OR DURING THE WAR.

Come boys, let us strike once more for the old Flag—Let it be ours
to do the glorious work of putting an end to the hated and wicked Rebellion, which has trampled on
the Constitution, violated the laws of the country and made mockery of our Union, as we had to preserve. Let us march
"WITH COMPLEAT" in all colors, which we do regardless of our lives and the name of LIBERTY.

N. J. FRINK,
Recruiting Officer.

MARSHALL, Aug. 3, 1864.

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Ancestor Profile – Pvt. Aaron Ruple Porter (continued)

The Porter brothers were assigned to *Company E*, commanded by Captain Silas Canfield of Ionia - someone Chauncey likely knew from civilian life. They were sent south to Camp Owen in Marshall, Michigan for brief basic training. Then they were transported to Atlanta, Georgia to reinforce their Engineers regiment which had arrived there ahead of them on September 28, 1864.

By the time the *1st Michigan Engineers* regiment arrived at Atlanta in late September, the Confederates had already abandoned the ruined city and fled southward.

Right: Shell-damaged Ponder House in Atlanta.

The hard work for Aaron and his Engineer regiment was soon to begin. On November 2, 1864, the regiment was attached to Jefferson C. Davis' *XIVth Corps*. Two weeks later, it left Atlanta and headed for Savannah, Georgia to participate in what is known as Sherman's "*March to the Sea*".



During this memorable march, the regiment was required to keep pace with the movements of the infantry. They traveled over ten miles a day, while tasked with tearing up railroad tracks, twisting rails, burning bridges, repairing and making roads through marshes, and building bridges.

The *1st Michigan* arrived before Savannah on December 11, 1864, after marching 250 miles in 25 days. The following extracts, taken from a diary kept during the march, gives an idea of the work done, and the hardships experienced by the soldiers:

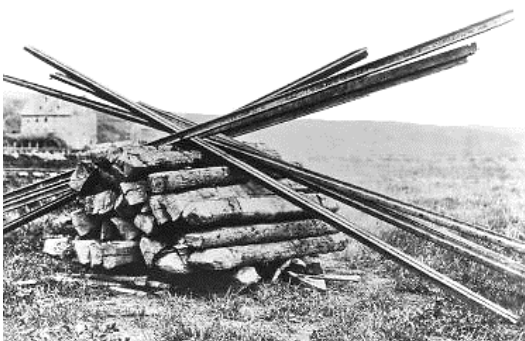
"Nov. 18th - After reaching a point beyond Covington, the six companies left the railroad about dusk and marched three to four miles until we reached the direct road to Eaton, not far from the Oleonfanbacher River. The day's march was very hard on the men, some of whom fainted by the way."

"Dec. 3^d - Moved down the river toward Millen and Augusta. Then marched to near Horse Creek, on the road to Sylvania; the last few miles were made after dark; men very tired; halted in the road near water; supper at 11 pm; sleep about midnight."

"Dec. 4th - Reveille at 4 am. Marched at 6 am; repaired several bad places in the road, one in particular near Little Horse Creek; cut down small pine trees and with fence rails made it passable for the trains. Part of the men on duty at this place all night, keeping road repair, and assisting trains to cross."

One of the reasons the army only advanced about 10 miles per day was that the roads were often muddy and impassable due to steady November rains. So, the engineers not only had to repair bridges that were destroyed by the

retreating Rebels, but they also had to repair the roads made impassable due to heavy rains - and by deliberate flooding by the retreating Confederates. In addition, the troops had to forage for food and shelter, and struggle to catch a few hours of sleep.



Above: Sherman's Neckties – Wooden crossies were turned into a bonfire to heat and soften the rails stacked on top. When softened, the rails were twisted to make them unusable to the Confederates.

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Ancestor Profile – Pvt. Aaron Ruple Porter *(continued)*

Death also came suddenly to a few unfortunate men. For example, on December 10, 1864, at Telfair Road, near Savannah, Georgia, Robert Brown of *Co. H* was mortally wounded by a cannon ball fired from a rail-mounted cannon.

After the fall of Savannah, the regiment embarked on transports for Beaufort, South Carolina. From there, they began the long march through the Carolinas to Goldsboro, North Carolina. During the march, vast amounts of public property were destroyed, railroad iron heated and twisted, and almost numberless bridges built and repaired. The men often worked all through the night, so the army could march the next morning.

While the troops showed some restraint during the *March to the Sea* through Georgia, Sherman's army showed none as they moved northward through South Carolina. The Palmetto State was the first State to secede to start the war, and Sherman's troops were in a mood to punish. Sherman wrote the following to Chief-of-Staff, Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck in late December from Savannah: *"The whole army is burning with an insatiable desire to wreak vengeance upon South Carolina. I almost tremble at their fate, but believe she deserves all that seems in store for her."*

The regiment advanced on Raleigh, North Carolina, and occupied it on April 14, 1864. They were present at Bennett's House on April 26, 1865, for the surrender of Gen. Johnston's Army. After the surrender, the regiment marched towards Washington, D.C., advancing through a defeated Richmond, Virginia on the way.

The *1st Michigan Engineers* arrived at Washington on May 20, 1865, and took part in the *Grand Review* four days later. The unit was mustered out on September 22, 1864 at Nashville, Tennessee, and then marched 500 miles back to Jackson, Michigan. They were then paid and released from duty. From there, Chauncey and Aaron Porter returned to their families in Ionia and Pine River, a mere 80 and 100 miles away.

All told, the Porter brothers traveled nearly 2,700 miles together during their year with the *1st Michigan Engineers*. Four years later, Aaron married a 21-year-old woman of Irish and German descent named Eliza Murphy, herself a descendent of Revolutionary War Patriots and early settlers of the Isle of Wight Colony in Virginia. They became the parents of five children, with the first being my great-grandfather, Reverend Harry Erastus Porter.

In his later years, Aaron Ruple Porter lived in Gratiot County, Michigan with his second son, Archie Porter. He passed

away in 1904 at age 61 and now rests next to Eliza in Breckenridge cemetery. A simple headstone at his grave reads: *A. R. Porter - First Michigan Engineers.*

In 2022, after the *SUVCW* National Encampment in Grand Rapids, members of the *Department of Texas and Louisiana* traveled to Breckenridge, Michigan to pay respects to Pvt. Aaron Ruple Porter. They were joined by several members of *Saginaw Camp 67, SUVCW* for a nice graveside ceremony.

Left: Gravesite of Aaron Ruple Porter at Breckenridge Cemetery. Descendant Daniel B. Pourreau is 3rd from the right.



... submitted by Daniel B. Pourreau, Camp SVC