

CHAPTER IV
of
ARMY RECOLLECTIONS.

The winter of 1864, spent in Camp, between the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers, Va. is a winter of pleasant memories, and will be remembered while life lasts. It was a period of rest, for a few months, from long and weary marches, loaded down like pack mules to the limit of one's strength. To recapitulate, we had started out from Alexandria, Va. in April of 1863, down the beautiful Potomac and Chesapeake Bay to Norfolk, and on to Suffolk, Va. ^{then} there invested by Gen. Longstreet, after a few weeks of fighting, he left ^{there} them to join Gen. Lee, then we went to Yorktown and slowly made our way up the peninsula towards Richmond and were in sight of Richmond when the Battle of Gettysburg was fought. Then we went to New York City, by the way of Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia and were there during the New York riots, then to Camp over on Staten Island, looking far out on the Atlantic, then to Tarrytown on the Hudson, where we spent a few very pleasant weeks, then back to Staten Island, leaving there October 13, '63 for the front again, and after the Battle of Mine River, Va. in November going into Camp at Brandy Station, 75 miles south west of Washington, in December of 1863. Our wanderings during the summer had taken ^{us through} ~~in them~~ seven different states, and every where we went, objects of interest presented themselves and we enjoyed them to the full. We ascended to the top of Washington Monument at Baltimore, we ranged through the Capitol at Washington, saw the Liberty Bell at Philadelphia and the Central Park and other items of interest at New York City, and to those of us who were so fortunate as to return home, we had

something to think of and remember the rest of our lives. Our duties during the winter were just enough for good exercise and discipline so that we had plenty of time to write letters to friends at home, and for study, and the letters we received in return had a great influence for good over the Soldiers life. I make some quotations from my diary written at the time.

"Friday, January 1", 1864. The storm~~x~~ which marked the closing hours of the old year has ceased, and the splendor of the rising sun gives promise of a better day. Happy New Year, Happy New Year is resounding on all sides, and tho' away from home and friends, and exposed to hardships and peril, all seem contented and even happy. Our thoughts are with loved ones at home, and we ^{very} ~~fergently~~ hope that by another New Year we may be with them.

"Saturday, Jan. 2nd. The weather changed last night, and it was intensely cold. The wind blew hard penetrating every crevice of our log dwellings. The sargent came around before daylight with orders for me to be ready to go on picket duty, got up, ^{at} make a fire and prepared some coffee, and made ourselves as warm as possible, and ^{with} ^{me} three day's rations in our haversacks and went five miles to the banks of the Rappahanock River." That 1st day of January, 1864 has been known as the "Cold New Years" from that time to the present. In nearly all the Northern States it was intensely cold, in Mich some 40 below zero, and in many cases people were frozen to death. In one case, a young man and woman attended a Dance, as they started for home they were talking cheerfully of the incident^s of the party, but after a time conversation lagged, and as the young man failed to get any response from his companion, he observed her closely and to his horror he found that she was dead by his side, literally chilled to

death. We had a very cold time for the three days we were on picket. had to arrange a temporary shelter but as there was plenty of timber and we had axes and knew how to use them, we kept good fires and did not seriously suffer and enjoyed our comfortable houses all the ^{more} time when we got back to them.

My chum, Ben Batcheler, and myself sent to New York and procured a stock of diaries, writing paper etc. to sell thru' the army and did quite a business for a time. The health of the regiment was usually good during this winter, but among so many men there were some accidents and many deaths. January 12th we heard the band playing a funeral march and attended the services. The Chaplain made brief remarks from the text "In the midst of life we are in death" and compared the shortness of human life to a wave of the sea ^{arrow} an arrow flying from the bow.

January 13th we received a large box of good things from home. They remembered us with many necessities which were of great benefit to us all winter long. Another funeral today, the Chaplain preached from the text. "A man dieth and where is he"---One morning, I saw a man in the next Co. come out of his tent with his gun, ready for picket and commenced sparring with another man, his gun lock was caught on a projecting log from his tent and was discharged and the other was shot thru' the body. I saw them carrying him off to the Hospital but did not learn whether he lived or died.

January 14th. Our orderly Sergt. is sick and I am acting, detailing men for duty, drawing rations from the Q. M. and other like duties. Miss Wheelock, a hospital nurse, arrived in Camp today from Washington and spent the most of the winter in our Regiment and in the hospital, and did a great deal of good by her presence there,

Saturday, January 16th. Got the Co. out early for Roll Call, made out the morning report, then attended the sick Call, drew rations for the Co. in the afternoon. A man died in Co. "B" last night. Jan. 17th, Regular Company inspection and of the Quarters, airing of blankets, clothing and etc. took place. Janry 19. The Father of a young man who died a few days ago came this morning, and tenderly conveyed his body home to rest among his kindred and friends. January 22. Every man in the Company is detailed for duty today, for different purposes, some building Corduroy Road, others chopping wood for the officers, some splitting plank to make floors for their tents. January 24. Some of the members of the 6th Mich Cavly. came to see us and spent the most of the day with us. Janry 29th. Up early for Roll Call, the the sick call---5 reported sick in our Co. Pickets come in at 2. P.M. Report having seen rebel Cavalry on the other side of the Rappahannock River. 40 men are reported for duty. February 21---Rumors around that the Paymaster will soon be here and pay us 2 months wages. ^{He} We will be welcome, we need a little money for postage stamps, and some of the boys have such delicate appetites they have to supplement their regular rations with liberal supplies from the Sutler's Stores at exorbitant prices. There are plenty of good healthy rations supplied for all if they take the trouble to properly prepare them. February 22nd. The Officers of the 2nd Army Corps have a grand Ball in honor of Washington's birthday. Their hall is beautifully decorated with the colors of the different regiments of the 2nd Corps.

In the latter part of February , 1864 a grand review of the Army of the Potomac was held; days were spent in preparing all arms of the service for the occasion. It was a sight seen only once in a life time. On a great plain near Stevensburg, Va. were assembled

the infantry, artillery and cavalry of the army. For a time all was seeming disorder and confusion, marching and counter-marching, but soon the lines were formed and the review began. Great numbers of illustrious men, Senators and Representatives of the Nation, whose names were as household words in the land, and among them one, ---greater and mightier than them all---Lincoln, of immortal memory---were there to witness the Review. On a slight eminence on the right of the line, on horseback, was the Commander in Chief, General Grant, seeming more the statue than the man. On his right was General Meade on his left Gen. Hancock, and as the great army---in magnificent array passed before him, his keen eye noted all its capabilities and the occasion was marked by him as the beginning of the end. About the same time our Co. was called out, and with other Co's of the Regiment marched to a large field 2 miles from Camp, as we passed along, we noticed other regiments going in the same direction, arriving there the whole force was formed into 3 sides of a Square. On the open side, we noticed a mound of fresh earth, wondering what it all meant, we soon heard in the distance the strains of a funeral march, an ambulance came in sight, a coffin was taken from the ambulance and placed by the side of the open grave, a young man was brought out and seated on the coffin, his eyes were bandaged, a firing party of 12 men stepped out, and he was shot to death with musketry, then the regiments were all marched in file past the sad sight, as a warning of the fate, that overtakes deserters and Bounty Jumpers. Some 2 weeks after we were brought out again to the same ground and the Regiment were formed in 2 long parallel lines about one rod apart, and a young man, with one-half his head shaved down to the scalp with a big board on his back, on which, in large letters, were in-

scribed "thief", was marched thru' the lines followed by two soldiers, with fixed bayonets, and a band playing the Rogue's March. He was such a confirmed thief, that they could do nothing with him, and so they drummed him out of Camp. Discipline in an army must be maintained at any cost.

Lieut. ^{Burch} Brich of Co. "B" of 26th Mich. Infantry was quite a literary character, and he instituted a course of Lectures in the large Division Hall ^{which} had been fitted up. One of these lectures was Grace Greenwood, well known to a former generation. Her subject was "the present war". It was well received and listened to with great interest. It was my good fortune to attend to the Lecture. Miss Wheelock, our army nurse, and as "Grace Greenwood" had desired to see for herself how the soldiers lived in camp, the two Ladies did us the honor of a call, and thought we were very good housekeepers.

March 25th, 12 men, 1 corporal and one Commissioned officer ~~man~~ were called for from our Co. to day for picket duty and as Lieut. Smith had to go with them, I was left in command of the Company, Our other Commissioned Officers, being home on recruiting service. When we first came here in December it was a heavily wooded section, but so much wood has been used for the purposes of the army, that now we have to go half a mile out side of camp and cut down stumps to procure wood to cook our meals.

As the time drew near for the ^{Spring} Ching Campaign to open greater activity prevailed in the army, not so much in drilling the men, for the officers knew they were ready at any time, two years of experience had fitted them to act well their part, when the supreme moment should arrive, but in seeing that arms were in order; that men were well supplied with munitions ^w of war and with clothing, and

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the eager intense interest, not only of our own people, but those of other lands were centered on the two great armies which confronted each other for miles, on either side of the Rapidan.

We had learned in January that the Government was desirous of obtaining a supply of Officers for Colored troops in process of formation, and two Boards of Examiners were in session at Washington to Examine all applicants. My chum, Benjamin F. ^{Balcheler} Balcher and myself, obtained a copy of Casey's Tactics in use in our army and began a careful study of them. During the winter, when our Co. Officers were home on furlough, we had good opportunities for putting in practice what we had learned by drilling the men, and on April 25th, we applied for and obtained permission to go to Washington for examination, our turn did not come for two or three days after we arrived there, which time we improved to good advantage in hard study, and on April 27th, 1864, I appeared before the Board of which Maj. Gen. Casey, author of the Tactics in use in our army, was the President, and sustained an examination in General History, in Mathematics, and a more thorough one in the tactics of our army. We were then thoroughly examined as to our physical condition by an expert surgeon, as to our ability to stand the hardships and exposures of a Campaign, and at its close I was informed by the Secretary of the Board that I was passed as Captain. Somewhat to my astonishment, ^{my} comrade passed as a Lieutenant. By this attention to study and practice my pay was increased from \$17.00 a month as Seargent to \$165.00 per month as Captain. As we had a little leisure to look around after our examination, we noted the anxious intense interest of the people of Washington in the work of the Army, they acted as if they were

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treading on the ruin of a volcano, which, at any moment might open beneath their feet. They looked off toward the south as if they could hear the roar of cannon, and the conflict of contending armies ---and they had not long to wait. We returned to our Command at Brandy Station, on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, and were congratulated by the Officers of the Regiment on our success.

The announcement that the army was soon to move was received with cheers, they were ready and anything was better than inaction, and they had faith in the justice of their cause; in their Commander and in themselves. A new Commander had been appointed to the armies of the East, U. S. Grant, by name better known since that time to the people of the civilized world, than he was then to the people of the United States, but we had heard of his hard stubborn fighting in the West, at Ft. Donaldson, Pittsburg Landing, and Vicksburgh, and we believed he would not fail us.

On May 2nd, 1864, the order came to break up camp and the work of destruction commenced. The log tents or houses which had made us such comfortable homes during the winter and which had been prepared with so much care, were torn down and consigned to the flames. The thousand and one things gathered around us during the winter for our comfort and convenience were kicked from one end of the camp to the other--they had no further use for them. Barrels of beef and pork and sugar were opened in the Company streets and every man ordered to pack six day's rations in his haversack, and what was more suggestive of the work before us, Boxes of ammunition were opened and every man supplied with 60 rounds of cartridges, and then when all was ready, at eleven o'clock of the night of May 3rd, 1864, we bade goodbye to our Camp of the winter. Companies were formed into

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Regiments, Regiments into Brigades and Divisions, and we started,--- where do you inquire? Thousands of them to die at the Wilderness and Spottsylvania, and Cold Harbor and Petersburg;-thousands more to linger for long weary months in hospitals with wounds which would make their lives miserable to life's latest day; other thousands to linger in the prison pens of the South, and at Belle Isle--Libby Prison, Saalsbury and Andersonville; while many others should fill nameless graves, known only to him who should summon them forth at the last great day--and yet my friends, I firmly believe that could they have seen the end ^{from} of the beginning, the great majority of them would have gone forward to their duty, Just the same. We marched all night, and at daylight, came to the Rapidan, at Ely's Ford, the dividing line between the Union and Confederate forces. We had thought Gen. Lee would dispute our passage of the River, but he did not, preferring to meet us further on, in the Wilderness. The Pontoon bridges were all laid, and the Heights on the opposite side of the river occupied by our troops and soon the Rubicon or the Rapidan was passed. Many had thought that before starting out on the Spring Campaign we would camp out in tents for a time and go thru' a discipline of thorough ^{drill} Order, and with this thought in view knapsacks were packed to overflowing, but when we came to the Rapidan and saw the Pontoon Bridges laid ready for a passage, knapsacks were hastily unpacked, and their contents of letters and other household treasures scattered on the ground, It was simply impossible to carry all the accumulations of the winter. Our rest here was short, Gen. Grant was no dress parade General, he knew that when his men were ^{in the soul} ready, delays were unknown, and we pushed rapidly along. It was a very hot day, this 4th day of May, and we suffered from the heat and the marching, but we were the skirmish regiment of our division and

marched on the flanks of the Army, which was easier than marching in the ranks. That night we camped on the field, where the Battle of Chancellorsville had been fought the year before. It was a beautiful May evening, and as far as the eye could reach, could be seen the camp fires of the army, and from around those fires could be heard the sounds of laughter, and shout and song. Some of the older men who had families at home were gazing thoughtfully in the fires, thinking of the morrow and what it might bring forth, perhaps they saw there visions of contending armies, and garments rolled in blood, but soon the fires burned low, the laughter and the song died away and as the tired soldiers wrapped their blankets around them and laid down to rest; to many of them it was the last quiet rest of earth.

After our morning meal we pushed on towards the Wilderness, Those who had started with full knapsacks began to lighten them and enough blankets were thrown away in 2 or 3 days to carpet a road for 10 miles. Men realized that stern work was before them, and they became more thoughtful as they marched along. About 2 o'clock, as I remember, of the afternoon of May 5th, 1864, we heard in the distance the roar of a musket, quickly followed by others, and the Battle then and there commenced, ceased not, day or night, until at Appamattox the army of Gen. Lee surrendered to the victorious army of Gen. Grant, and the greatest war of modern times was ended. Our Regiment was quickly ordered to the side of the road, and artillery and cavalry, and what was ^{more} very suggestive--ambulances hurried by. The musketry firing increased in volume and intensity, and after an hour or two our Regiment was ordered down into the Wilderness, and tho' we did not go far enough to take an active part in the firing

or fighting, yet the trees above our heads were agitated by the bullets of the enemy's guns, as by a strong breeze, about 10.P.M. we came out of the thick woods onto higher ground again. It was very dark, and men with lanterns guided our way. We saw many men on the ground, white and cold in death, the most of them wearing the green uniforms of our Sharp Shooters. In the morning of the 6th, the 4th Mich. Infantry, with many of whose members we were acquainted, marched by us, and we inquired as to the casualties in their Regiment and learned, with sorrow, that many had fallen. One case I especially remember, Julius Root was one of our neighborhood boys, they told us he had been shot thru' the arm, and had been sent to the rear, tho' his wound was severe, they thought it not serious, but that was the last that was ever known of Julius Root, whether he died from loss of blood, or was caught in the forest fires that were raging about that time, and burned to death, or was taken prisoner by the enemy, and perished in some southern prison, will perhaps never be known. His only sister, an orphan, could not give him up, and would not believe that he was dead, and for many long years cherished the hope that he would return to her. As the Sea does not give up its dead, so war does not yield its victims, and he sleeps, perhaps, in some quiet nameless grave, in the southland, known only to ^{him} who notes even the sparrow's fall, and who will summon him forth in that last great day.

Our Regiment, the 26th Michigan Infantry, was the skirmish Regiment of our Division, the First Division, of the Second Army Corps, and commencing with this 6th of May, we were on the left flank of the army, watching the enemy and engaged in skirmishing with them from time to time. For days we could hear in the distance, heavy volleys

of musketry and the heavier roar of the cannon. Our losses in killed and wounded, were frightful, and that of the enemy correspondingly heavy. Many gallant officers, who were towers of strength to the Union cause went down to death, among them General Sedgewick and Wardsworth. The latter was a grand old patriot of Western New York. He was immensely wealthy, but casting aside all considerations of wealth, esteeming the cause of his country, as of first importance, he not only gave of his means freely to the Union cause, but gave himself to die, that the cause of Right might triumph.

Althrough the war I kept a pocket diary to which I occasionally refer in writing this, and which now lies before me, some of it was written in the camp and on the march; or when we halted an hour or two to prepare coffee, but during these days, from May 5th to May 12th inclusive, it was written on the picket line, behind breast works, while all around us was heard the heaviest musketry firing and cannonading, that ever shook this continent. At this stage of the contest, 21 months after our enlistment, we had become veterans, and accustomed to sights and dangers, which had formerly made us shudder. While on picket duty one day, along a piece of woods, we had a suspicion that a large force of the enemy were concentrating beyond the woods, and we determined to find out, we went through on the double quick, meeting no resistance, and taking them somewhat by surprise, we saw a large open field with rebel Infantry and Cavalry, and one or two pieces of artillery. We made a few rapid observations in regard to their number, fired a few shots at them to stir them up a little, turned in retreat, and came back thru' the woods with a celerity that surprised ourselves. I find no mention made of this charge in any of the numerous histories of the war, and I have

recorded it that it might not be entirely lost to posterity.

In the afternoon of the same day we deployed as skirmishers, and advanced thru' the woods for some distance to discover the enemies line, suddenly a shot is heard on our left, and a terrible cry from one of our men tells that the shot had taken effect, instead of the limb being entirely shot away, a spent ball had struck him on the foot, causing for the moment intense pain, but not even breaking the skin. A brisk cavalry fight is in progress on our left, we can hear distinctly the cracking of the revolvers, and carbines, and the cheering of our men. We always noted a great difference in the cheers of our own men, and the wild yells of the rebels, the one ^{rang} long out hearty and free, as if inspired by the justice of their cause, and spoke of a determination to uphold it; the other was constrained, as if no willing service was rendered, and they were somewhat doubtful whether or not they were in the right.

On one of these days, I think May 7th, in changing our position from the left to the right, we passed near the Head Quarters of the Army. A brisk artillery duel was in progress at the time, and the air was filled with the iron lead, ^{hail} as the shells burst all around us. Mounted Orderlies were hurrying back and forth with dispatches, and with the exception of one man all were active and alert. This man sat at the foot of a large tree with a cigar in his mouth. It looked as if he might have come down as David did in the olden time to see the Battle, but no, this man so cool and seemingly unconcerned was himself the Center and Director of all the movements of the army for it was General Grant.

Sunday morning, May 8th-Dawn on us again but how unlike the Holy Sabbath day. We are at a place called Clark's Tavern. The day is

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very hot and the roads dusty, a large force of cavalry and infantry are massed here ready for service at a moments notice. We improve the time in felling trees, and constructing defenses for ^{we} ~~all~~ know not the moment when the enemy will be upon us.

Later in the afternoon we hear that a large quantity of provisions we had been expecting had arrived. We were relieved from the picket line and retired to the rear. In some way, I think, the enemy had learned of the arrival of our stores, and gathering a large force made a rush for them. As we were only a strong picket line they were too much for us, and drove us back, but when they came to our large quantity of army stores---hundreds of boxes of hardtack, barrels of beef and pork and sugar, the like of which they had not seen for a long time, many of them halted and began to help themselves to our stores, their's now by right of conquest and possession. A large force, however, followed us, and in addition to heavy musketry firing they gave us a terrible shelling, the air seemed full of the iron hail from the bursting shells, and oh, what ghastly wounds they caused when they struck men and horses. Many were killed and wounded, and what had been such a quiet, peaceful Sabbath, in its beginning, ended in fierce fighting, and in death to many a brave soldier.

There was hardly an hour, day or night, during these days from May 5th to the 12th, when I was wounded, when the sound of firing, musketry or cannonading could not be heard in some portions of the fields. Of course you will understand, that ^{these} there large armies, union and confederate, extended over miles of space. Much of the firing came from the pickets, confronting each other behind breast works, many times only a few rods apart, but sometimes large bodies of men, Brigades and Divisions, came together, and when to this tremendous

their

masketry firing, the big heavy cannon joined in the chorus, with its deep bass voice. ~~They~~ ^{their} made music which could be heard for miles around.

On Tuesday May 10th, Lieut. Grisson of our Company, was ordered to take a squad of men and make a reconnoissance, John T. Olds of our Company was with him, after going a considerable distance, John stopped to get some tobacco from a barn, where a quantity was stored, while he was doing this the Company had passed on and were out of sight. In following after he came to a fork in the road, and taking the wrong one, soon found himself in the midst of a Company of rebel soldiers and was taken prisoner, and was soon afterwards sent to Andersonville, Ga., but what was his loss, was my gain, for I found him when I arrived there two months later, and I believe it is entirely due to his care for me during that terrible experience in a rebel prison that I am here to write these pages, and to render a tribute of Praise to my friend, John T. Olds. I shall speak of him again.

On Wednesday afternoon May 11th our Brigade started out on a skirmish, after going some two miles, we found the enemy and a brisk firing commenced and continued ^d for upwards of half an hour. It was a sharp fight while it lasted, bullets whizzed around us like bees in swarming time, and with heavy loss to our Company. Eli Rambois left on the field for dead, refusing the offers of his Comrades to remove him to our lines. Albert Bates is badly wounded in the thigh, Butler and Hathaway and Bennett severely wounded, Hinckley is struck with a buck shot, Aaron Slater shot thru' the body and mortally wounded and died in the ambulance, while being conveyed to the Hospital at Fredricksburg.

This war the most serious loss our Company had ever known, and it was with feelings of deep sorrow that we saw the ambulances bear

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away our comrades to the Hospital, realizing, too, that added labors and responsibilities rested on the survivors.

We prepare our suppers and gather around our camp fires talking over the events, and narrow escapes of the day. It was a gloomy time, the forepart of the day had been pleasant, but now the clouds were gathering and there was every prospect of a storm near at hand, and from what we could see around us, the movements of large bodies of troops of Infantry and Cavalry, convinced us that preparations were being made for a great battle in the near future and we should soon be engaged in a more deadly storm than that of the elements, and we had not long to wait, for the great Battle of Spottsylvania ~~will~~ open early on the morrow.

Thus ends the 4th Chapter.

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