Recitals and Reminiscences

Stories Eminently Worth Telling of Experiences and Adventures in the Great National Struggle.

ON THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI.

Running the Fleet Past the Batteries at Vicksburg and the Exciting Times Before the Event.

Editor National Tribune: Directly after the evacuation of Corinth Gen. Sherman, assisted by Gen. M. L. Smith, was put in command of Memphis, and prepared for a campaign against Vicksburg. In the latter part of November, 1862, the movement began. As Grant started from Lagrange, Sherman started from Memphis, coming in touch with each other a few miles west of Holly Springs, and as we reached the Tallahatchie River we were detained two days and nights constructing a bridge. We crossed over, went half a day's march and rested easy three or four days. At this time Gen. Grant devised a new plan of operation, for he received word from Gen. Banks that in all probability he would be able to assist in the attack on Vicksburg from below in a short time. Grant ordered Sherman back to Memphis to descend the river by boats preparatory to a simultaneous attack by the three armies on Christmas Day.

We boarded the boats and started. We landed at Milliken's Bend on Christmas Day, tore up some railroad, and at night crossed over and camped on the Yazoo. Not hearing anything from the other two armies, Gen. Sherman decided to make the attack alone. After a day or two of manuvering we found the Johnnies well intrenched and secreted a few miles below Haynes's Bluff, where Chickasaw Bayou strikes the foot of the hills. The assault was made directly in front by means of a pontoon bridge across the bayou and the slaughter of men was terrible, and in all the several battles fought around Vicksburg there were none to compare with this, considering the number of men engaged.

The 16th Ohio, which led, suffered the greatest of all, lost its Colonel, half its Captains and more than half its men. At the same time an assault was made of lesser proportions about half a mile to the right, in which my regiment, the 6th Mo., took the lead. Here the bayou leaves the bluff for a considerable distance, and from the nature of the ground no artillery could be used against us, and our casualties were not so great. But, still, it was a hot place.

At Chickasaw Bayou.

The bayou was about 100 yards wide, but no water, and we were compelled to cross. The rebels were behind the levee on the opposite bank, and there we lay hard up against the works from noon till night. We made our escape under darkness. Gen. M. L. Smith, our division commander, was wounded in the skirmish before the assault, and got back to us the next October. Meanwhile Gen. Blair commanded our division. As we were drawn up in line Gen. Sherman rode up and said: "Men, you are going into a tight place, and some of you will be killed. We are sent here to capture Vicksburg, and it would be cowardice upon our part if we should fail to make the attempt."

It has always been my belief that if Gen. Sherman ever made a blunder it was right there. He was severely censured for his rash act by all the leading newspapers of the land. Gen. Grant had better judgment than to throw his entire army into such a death trap as that.

The assault was made Dec. 29, and two days afterwards we buried our dead under a flag of truce, and on New Year's Day we boarded our boats and slipped out under the cover of the gunboats. But we didn't go back to Memphis, as some have stated. We went up the Arkansas River, and gave the Johnnies a little surprise party at Arkansas Post. On Jan. 11 we landed and surrounded the fort, and the next day 5,000 of them surrendered.

We loaded them on the transports as thick as they could stand, and gave them free transportation North. As we began to move down to the Mississippi there came snow and bitter cold weather, and our sufferings were immense, and must have been far worse on the prisoners. About this time we learned of Grant's defeat at Holly Springs, and that he was coming down with all his forces. We dropped leisurely down the river, going into camp at Milliken's Bend and clear on down to Young's Point, in front of Vicksburg. My regiment went into camp Jan. 25 on the banks of the river at what was known as Butler's Canal. Gen. Butler in the Summer before had come up from New Orleans to cut a channel across this narrow tongue of land to open up the Mississippi for traffic with transports, but after cutting a mere ditch abandoned the enterprise.

Digging the Canal.

Here the narrow strip below the proposed canal is three miles long, running eastward towards the city, which can be seen well up in the hills, and the cut-off one and one-eighth miles in length, running due south, so it can be seen that practically this would save the travel of at least six miles. Now it was proposed to construct a channel large enough to accommodate the entire fleet. The water in the river was within its banks, and the work was begun by a dredging machine working its way from the river thru the levee into the open ground, and then the gap was filled in, and the men set to work in regular railroad style, with picks, shovels and wheelbarrows, cutting a channel about four rods wide, forming a levee on the lower side.

Our work progressed well for some weeks, until we had a levee five or six feet high, but all the time the water in the river was gradually rising until it got about eight feet higher than the inland, when all of a sudden our dam broke and let a great current of water in upon us, flooding the whole face of the earth, forcing us to the levees for protection, where we remained waterbound for several weeks, and from thence all work was suspended, excepting the dredging machine, which leisurely went on its way, which served as a target for the rebels' long-range gun, situated in the hills across the river, just beyond the lower end of the canal. Probably this was "Whistling Dick," which was such a menace to our camp for so long.

But, after all, the failure of the canal proved no material obstacle in moving the fleet below the city, for when Grant got ready for action he ran the batteries all the same, and it had already been demonstrated that the running of the batteries could be made without material damage. As early as the end of February the ram Queen of the West passed the batteries with only a mere scratch. Then, on the night of the 14th, the ironclad Indianola ran down in safety. On the 25th of the same month the Lancaster and Robert Nelson, two light-draft gunboats, ran down at daybreak. The Lancaster received a shot in the hold and sank just below the lower end of the canal, but all the crew was saved.

Sherman Tricks the Rebels.

Gen. Sherman, in order to locate the position of newly placed guns, played a little dog trick on the Johnnies by fitting up a great old barge in the semblance of a monster ironclad, and set it adrift with the current. As the miserable old craft leisurely proceeded on its mission of discovery, the young rebels had ample time to test all their long- and short-range artillery, and, becoming disabled, the terrible monster came to shore on our side, where the rebels kept up their merciless firing all the next day, and then along about April 1 a barge loaded with commissaries, towed by a tug and accompanied by 35 volunteers, ventured to run the batteries in the night, but were unfortunate, and the tug was sunk and the barge set on fire and every man perished. My company marched along the levee as a land escort, heard the pitiful cries of our unfortunate comrades, but could render no assistance, and by the middle of April, as the waters had abated so as to construct a road from Milliken's Bend to Grand Gulf, the armies began to move, and consequently it became necessary to descend the river with the fleet. From Vicksburg to Milliken's Bend is 25 miles, and 50 miles to Grand Gulf.

On the night of the 21st the most important run was made, consisting of four gunboats and three transports. One transport was set on fire and burned; all the others made the run in safety. The rebels lit up great bonfires, and the burning of the boat made the river almost as light as day, and then about a week later a fleet of six transports were sent down, and one of them was set on fire and sunk. All the others were successful, but not without considerable damage. This may be regarded as the most hazardous, being unprotected by the gunboats and so heavily loaded. As Grant began manuvering at Grand Gulf, Sherman slipped up the Yazoo and made a feint on Haynes's Bluff, landed some troops under cover of gunboats, the Choctaw in the lead, and made pretensions as if he would storm the very gates of hell.

After two days of outwitting the Johnnies he pulled away, and followed up the main army, leaving my brigade, commanded by Gen. Giles A. Smith, to bring up the rear. We boarded the boats and moved up to Milliken's Bend, and on May 7 we took up the line of march to Grand Gulf. We crossed the river on the 13th. Next day we loaded up with five days' rations and continued our march, and in two days caught up with the army just in time to take a part in the battle of Champion Hills. We gradually pressed the enemy back all day, and at night they slipped away. The following day we made haste to rejoin our rightful command at Bridgeport, and crossed Black River on a river pontoon, and the next day, May 18, we came to the Confederate works in the rear of the city, and replenished our haversacks from the Yazoo.—J. W. Sapp, 6th Mo., First Brigade, Second Division, Fifteenth Corps, Pawnee, Okla.

The Break at Franklin.

A. T. Seaman, 16th Ky., Guthrie, Okla., thinks he knows something about the break at Franklin, as he helped to close it, and was in that hand-to-hand fight. His brigade, which was in Cox's Division, consisted of the 12th and 16th Ky., 100th and 104th Ohio and 8th Tenn. The two Ohio regiments were in the works, with the 8th Tenn. and the two Kentucky regiments in reserve a few yards in the rear. The Ohio troops were carried away by the rush of Waggoner's men, and Gen. Cox rode up to the head of the reserve and said, "For God's sake, Kentuckians, go up there," and before he had stopped speaking the regiments were on the move, and met the rebels before they reached the works with clubbed guns. Capt. Palmer was killed. Orderly-Serg't Joe Heiser was killed, and the same bullet passed thru the flag pole. The old flag is to-day in the State House at Frankfort, with a piece of tin tacked around the staff to hold it together. Comrade Jim Hiver, of Co. H, was one of the first to reach the works, and loaded and fired one of the guns himself in spite of the rebels poking a rail into the gun to stop him. Comrade Seaman admits that 46 years is a long time to remember accurately the things which happened, but the events of that day were so burned on his memory that he never can forget them. He would like to hear from any of the old boys.

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THE GOLDEN LOCKET.

A Kind-hearted Soldier Boy, Rewarded For a Favor, Came Near Being Killed on Account of It.

Editor The National Tribune: Sometime before we went on the great Wilson raid, we were on an expedition towards Mobile, Ala. It had rained very hard, and the roads were knee deep with yellow mud. It was almost dusk when we passed a carriage in which sat an old white-haired gentleman and a beautiful girl of about 14 or 15. My Captain was riding just in front, and gave me permission to help them out. Someone ahead had taken his horse and harness. I rode out to them and hitched. I hitched up my horse and pulled the carriage into the road. Then the boys took hold and pushed and pulled. We had to go three-quarters of a mile and then turn off into a lane that led to a fine mansion. When I arrived in front of the house the old doctor had fainted. He was 94 years old, and had been compelled to attend a sick woman. I carried him into the house and lay him on a couch, while the girl brought water and bathed his face and he soon revived.

They both thanked me, and said that they feared they would have had to stay there all night and that it might have killed the girl's grandfather. The girl went into another room and brought a gold medallion locket and gold chain. On one side of the locket was a picture of a lady in white enamel and it could be opened to contain pictures. The girl said "Take this for your kindness and to remember us by." I told her I was afraid to take it, for if I were captured they would be apt to kill me, thinking that I had stolen it. They both begged me to take it and come to see them when the war was over, and she put the chain over my head and told me to hide it in my breast until I could get home. She said that it cost $50 in gold. I told my Captain and showed him the locket so that he would know that I did not steal it.

On the raid of Gen. Wilson we had a fight at what was called Ebenezer Church, near Selma, and captured some 400 prisoners. We put them in a clearing that night and formed a guard around them. I was one of the guards. We had plenty of coffee, at least I did, and I made coffee in my oyster can bucket until 11 or 12 o'clock at night, and gave them some, as many others did. I sat at the fire with my horse tied to a tree about 20 yards behind me. There was heavy timber all around. I concluded to look at the locket as I did not dare to look at it in day time, as someone would have stolen it from me.

I noticed a boy prisoner walk in front of me, and each time he looked intently down at me. I thought nothing of it, and asked him if he wanted some coffee and he replied that he did not. When I was relieved by the next guard I went to my horse and saddle and lay down. The ground was wet from a recent rain. I was soon dozing, as I was very tired. I was awakened by a noise and raised on my elbow and found a little half-grown cat, starved, wet and draggled, mewing at me and rubbing against me. All that I had in my haversack was two crackers and about four ounces of dirty bacon. I cut some of it into little blocks and the kitten ate it ravenously.

I lay down again and it snuggled up to me. I had just commenced to doze again when I heard a stick snap near me. I instantly grabbed my carbine and turned to see that boy standing behind me, and in his hand, glistening in the few rays of moonlight, was a long butcher knife. I told him to halt and throw down that knife. Then I asked him what he was doing out there. He said "I intended to kill you by running this knife in your back, take that locket from you, get on your horse and escape, but your kindness to a little starved kitten made me hesitate." I asked him what he wanted to kill me for? He said that the locket belonged to his sister, her grandmother having given it to her. He said he knew that we had been near his home and that I could not have gotten it except by robbing her of it.

I then told him how I got it, and told him to march in front of me to the Captain. Then the boy cried and asked me to forgive him. I gave him the locket and told him to give it to his sister and tell her how he got it. I marched him back and turned him loose among the prisoners. Towards morning he came to me and asked me to give him something to remember me by. I gave him a little silk flag which my mother made and sent to me. He kissed it and said "I will not fight that Flag again. They say we are about whipped, so I will go home on parole and then stay there." When we turned back from Macon, Ga., the war was over.—A. Hottinger, Edna, Kans.

The Officers' Retirement Bill.

William A. Patterson, First Lieutenant, 38th Iowa, Cresco, Iowa, says that it should be remembered that the volunteer officers were selected in their regiments as the most capable men to assume the responsibility of leading the men. If they failed in these duties there was little mercy for them. A square deal would give each officer honest pay and proper recognition.

The Salloway Bill.

Editor National Tribune: God bless the House of Representatives and all our friends for the Sulloway bill. It will bring unnumbered blessings to comrades all over the country. I am very poor and 71 years old, but this bill will enable me to support myself for the rest of my days.—James Anthony, 36th Pa., Plattsmouth, Neb.

Steinwehr's Division at Gettysburg.

A. F. Sweetland, 55th Ohio, State Soldiers' Home, O., criticises severely the statements in an expensive set of books consisting of six volumes of about 300 pages each, entitled "Historical and Biographical Cyclopedia of the State of Ohio." This book is in the Home Library. Comrade Sweetland, whose regiment belonged to Steinwehr's Division, points out the errors in regard to his command at Gettysburg. At no time did the division fight its way south by the Taneytown road, at no time did it face or fight a division of Hill's Corps and at no time was it on Cemetery Ridge. It was really on the brow of Cemetery Hill, which is the northerly end of Cemetery Ridge and north of the Baltimore pike and cemetery. Cemetery Ridge is between the Taneytown and Emmitsburg roads and southwesterly from Cemetery Hill. No division of Hill's Corps advanced east of Seminary Ridge, which is a mile or more west of Gettysburg, until after the retreat of the First Corps from it, about 4 p. m., July 1. Had a division of Hill's Corps been in the position given by this writer it would have been in the rear of the First Corps and the First and Third Divisions of the Eleventh Corps and in front of Steinwehr's Reserve Division, and a part of the Second Corps being not far away it would have been simply mopped up and wiped out in a very few minutes. Ewell's Corps did not reach the northerly front of Cemetery Hill until after the retreat of the First and Eleventh Corps to Cemetery Hill. The First Corps reached the town first. Their further retreat was leisurely, and, halting a few minutes on the Baltimore pike street and the Taneytown road street of the town, they blocked the free retreat of the Eleventh Corps, thereby causing the capture of nearly 1,500 of them in the north part of Gettysburg. Doubleday's and Robinson's Divisions of the First Corps passed across the immediate front of Steinwehr's Division to its position on their left. Wadsworth's Division of the First Corps passed the right of Steinwehr's up the Baltimore pike and turned off to their position on Culp's Hill, a half mile to Steinwehr's right and rear. Some of the First Corps came back southwest and south of the town. Some of the Eleventh Corps and others came to Cemetery Hill by keeping close to the east side of the town, their retreat being screened by the same brush, locust and other trees that later hid the "Tigers" from view on their charge on the evening of the 2d until they were close up to a part of Barlow's line of battle. The incident that this writer ascribes to Steinwehr's Division did not occur to any division of the army, either Union or Confederate, during the battle of Gettysburg. He did not have his "hat" of truth on straight. Steinwehr's Division arrived by the Baltimore pike from the south at about 1 p. m. on the first day, and took position in the cemetery on Cemetery Hill, and later took position on its west front along the Taneytown road, facing west, without firing a shot, no division of Hill's or other corps being within a mile of it. The 33d Mass. was detached on arrival and fought on another part of the field. Coster's First Brigade was ordered to reinforce Barlow's Division about the time the retreat began, and suffered severe loss. It was in reserve at Cemetery Hill most of the time and later a part of it, especially the 27th Pa., assisted other troops in repelling the charge of the "Tigers" from the batteries of Weidrich and Ricketts a few minutes before Carroll's Brigade arrived.

Who Can Identify Him?

Frank E. Wise, Greenville, Pa., wants to hear from anyone who knew of Godfried Straub, who left Greenville Pa., in the Summer of 1864 for Hermann, Mo., where he enlised as a volunteer and served until the close of the war. He returned to Greenville, bringing his musket and uniform with him, and died about 12 years ago. His discharge and other records were lost or destroyed. The Adjutant-General of Missouri refused to give the record because the company and regiment were not given. His widow is anxious to get a pension, but this cannot be granted until more evidence is furnished.

Money Used to Good Purpose.

J. S. Bean, 8th Vt., wants to say a word against the kickers against the Sulloway bill. They simply will not understand. The money is not thrown away or squandered or sent out of the country. It is put into circulation to help build up trade and business and quicken the wheels of commerce. It goes all over the country, where it will do the most good not only to the veterans who receive it, but to all their neighbors.

Captured But Escaped.

Editor The National Tribune: I belonged to Co. A, 6th Ill. Cav. Rebels were reported up in Western Tennessee about 40 or 50 miles from Memphis. Gen. Grierson heard of them. He was ordered there with the 6th and 7th Ill. Cav. They met us about a half mile from camp in an old field. We gave them a volley or two and charged. They broke and ran thru a creek bottom.

I had a Johnny in front of me. I was sure I could get him. A big tree had blown down and he ran around it. I couldn't rein my horse quick enough, so he jumped the log, and in doing so caught his hind foot and fell and broke his neck. My Johnny got away. I was alone. Curt Perry's mare ran away with him, and as he came back asked him to take me on his horse. Grierson sent a part of the 7th Ill. Cav. down to capture their camps, and while we were taking my saddle off and putting it on Perry's mare, they ran about 15 or 20 rebels out of camp. They came upon us. The next thing I knew the Johnnies yelled: "Surrender, Yanks." They made me get on an old plug of a horse and took us prisoners. I kept watching for our men. I saw our men going up the road. My guard wheeled his horse to the right, and when he did that I jumped off, got behind a tree, and then broke and ran. One of the 7th Ill. boys was going up the road and I hollered for him and he stopped and I got up behind him and went on up where our regiment was.—J. H. Holderfield, Dexter, Mo.

Stabbed in the Back.

Joseph H. White, 167 School St., Roxbury, Mass., writes to the Boston Post in reprobation of such false friends as Gillett and Weeks. He says that he would much rather have been shot on the firing line by a bullet from a Confederate than to have been stabbed in the back by a knife in the hands of these Northern Copperheads. He wants to know of Gillett and Weeks if they are those millionaire veterans of whom they speak? There are certainly none in his vicinity.

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Historic Soil.

Solomon Close, Stamford, Conn., a well-known Grand Army man and railroad engineer, has made a collection of soil from a great number of historic places, beginning with Lexington and extending thru Waterloo and Gettysburg. He still keeps collecting, and his recent samples are from John Brown's grave, Maj. Andre's execution place, earthworks at Vicksburg and from near the house where John Paul Jones was born. He says that some of the Grand Army Posts in New England are planting trees, naming them after brave comrades of the war and placing a stone marker near to tell this. The Posts in Hartford will plant a tree and dedicate it with some of this soil. They think it will be looked upon in the future like the Charter Oak or the Washington Elm. He would like to have the comrades of the District of Columbia to do the same.

The 126th N. Y.

J. B. Scott, Chetek, Wis., is intensely interested in the Wilderness Campaign, and could hardly wait from one week to another for the paper. He served in the 106th N. Y., First Brigade, Third Division, Sixth Corps, and was near the beloved Sedgwick when he fell. He was in all the battles and skirmishes of his regiment until June 1, 1864, at Cold Harbor, where he received a minie ball in his left thigh as they were charging the enemy at sunset. Lieut.-Col. Townsend, in command, fell mortally wounded before the works were reached. If the officer is alive who helped Comrade Scott off the field he would like to hear from him. He thinks he belonged to the 122d N. Y. or Ohio. He would also like to hear from any of his old comrades.

Cedarville, Ill., in the War.

Luther Angle, Cedarville, Ill., prepared for last Memorial Day a statement of what the town did in the war for the Union. It had representatives in 12 regiments, the 3d and 7th Ill. Cav., the 11th, 12th, 15th, 26th, 32d, 46th, 92d, 93d, 142d, 146th and 147th Ill. and one battery. The Heck family furnished three sons and one son-in-law to the army and the Kryder family three sons, two sons-in-law and one brother-in-law. In Co. G, 93d Ill., were 50 men from Cedarville. There were 60 in the 46th Ill. and six commissioned officers. The County sent 72 per cent of its male population into the army.

The Fight at Fort Stevens.

T. W. Cumberland, Peru, Ind., was interested in the account of the fight at Fort Stevens. He would like to know which New York regiment it was that was in camp just north of Fort Ethan Allen, and was ordered to take position in line of battle about 12 o'clock. When they were in line their Colonel walked along the line and said: "If there is a man in line that will turn his back on the enemy, let him step out." Not one stepped out. They had the American sand in its purity. He would like to hear from any of the boys of that regiment. He was on guard near by, and heard all of it.

Seton Story Concluded.

Ernest Thompson Seton concludes the account of his adventures in "The Arctic Prairies," in the February Scribner, with a description of "The Land of the Musk Ox," including a vivid picture of the narrow escape which he and his party had in the rapids of a great river owing to the upsetting of his canoe.

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ADDRESS .....

The 26th Pa. Emergency.

Thomas J. Mays, Philadelphia, Pa., writes an interesting letter to the Philadelphia Press as to the part the 26th Pa. Emergency Regiment took in opening the battle of Gettysburg. He says that the battle was brought about by force of circumstance, and not by any action of either Meade or Lee. June 28 Lee ordered Ewell to move in the direction of Gettysburg via Heidlersburg. At the latter place he could use his discretion whether he moved on Gettysburg or Cashtown. Rodes's Division of Ewell's Corps came from Carlisle, and reached Heidlersburg about 12 miles from Gettysburg on the night of June 30. Early's Division of the same corps left York on the morning of June 30, and both of these divisions coming from different directions, appeared on the battlefield about 1 p. m., July 1, while Hill's Corps was fiercely engaged with the First Corps on the Chambersburg pike. Comrade Mays denies that Hill's meeting the First Corps on the Chambersburg pike was accidental. It was a part of the movement for concentration. When the cogs of a wheel work so harmoniously and accurately as the coming together from nearly opposite quarters of these divisions, it must be assumed that they are moved intelligently and for a purpose. The clash of June 26 between these moving troops and the 26th Pa. Emergency was an inevitable result. It was the beginning of a series of events which clouded and determined all the issues of the campaign. The boys composing that regiment had no idea of the consequences of their action. Early heard their guns at Mummasburg, 10 miles away, and Lee heard them at Chambersburg, 25 miles away.

Recruiting the G. A. R.

J. K. P. Ferrell, Uhrichsville, O., wants the comrades everywhere to try to get all the comrades inside of the Posts. His Post has taken by muster or reinstatement 23 in the last nine months. He took in 20 of them himself.

Thee 3d Iowa.

L. F. Benson, Snyder, Colo., served in the 3d Iowa and then veteranized. He has never seen the name of any of his regiment in the paper, and wonders why they do not write. He is now past 70.

Bright Prospect.

Smith J. Noe, 159th N. Y., Sayville, L. I., commends the Sulloway pension bill strongly, and believes that Congress will pass it and do full justice at last to the veterans. The future looks bright.

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