

IN CAMP AND FIELD.

A Medical Man's Memory of War-Time

BY O. B. JOHNSON.

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SECTION XI.—ASSAULT AND SIEGE OF THE CONFEDERATE STRONGHOLD.

At two p. m., May 19, an assault was made on the Confederate works at Vicksburg. This assault was unsuccessful as far as capturing the stronghold was concerned, but resulted in getting the Federals in an advanced position, which position was made secure by the use of the spade the succeeding night.

Believing that the Confederates would not hold out against another determined assault, a second one was ordered at ten a. m., May 22.

This was opened by a terrific cannonade from all the Federal batteries; following this was an incessant rattle of musketry.

It was known at the hospital that the charge was to be made, and the constant boom of cannon and continual rattle of musketry firing after ten in the forenoon, all knew would soon bring in a frightful harvest of mangled and wounded.

The slain would, of course, for the time at least, be left on the field.

About two p. m., through the trees was seen a long train of ambulances approaching, all heavily loaded with mangled humanity. Upon reaching the hospital grounds, two or three ambulances were backed up at once, and the wounded lifted or carried out.

One of the first that the writer assisted in taking from the ambulances was a tall, slender man, who had received a terrible wound in the top of his head, a minute ball had, so to speak, plowed its way through the skull, making a ragged, gaping wound, exposing the brain for three or four inches.

He lived but a moment after removal from the ambulance.

The Captain of the company in which the writer enlisted was in another ambulance, mortally wounded, with a bullet in his brain. He lived a day or two in an unconscious stupor—a *comatose* state as the doctors say. But the majority of the wounded were boys, young, brave, daring fellows, too of a rash, self-sacrificing nature, not to, oftentimes from needless exposure.

One nice young fellow of eighteen the writer can never forget. He had been wounded in the bowels, and was sitting at the root of a large tree, resting his head against its trunk. His name was Banks, and knowing the writer well, he recognized him, and calling him by name, said: "Ah, I'm badly wounded."

Already his lips were ashy pale, a clammy sweat was upon his face, and from the wound in his abdomen a long knuckle of intestine was protruding. A few hours more, and young Banks was resting in the sleep of death. No danger from enemy's bullets now; the poisonous clay a little time before the dwelling place of joyous young life, nothing could harm more. By the quiet form sat the father, sad and heart-broken, himself a soldier, but the balance of his term of service would now seem lonely and tedious. Arms and legs of many in the ambulances were hanging useless and lying powerless by the sides of their owners, and soon the several tables were kept busy, removing mangled and useless limbs.

As on all such occasions when there was a great many wounded on hand at one time, but little was done for the mortally injured, save to lay them in a comparatively comfortable position; those having mangled limbs and broken bones were first attended, while those with unextensive, simple flesh wounds, were passed by till more serious cases were attended to. Judgment, however, in this direction was not always unerring. The writer remembers one man with what seemed a slight wound of the foot. He was rather persistent in having immediate attention, but the number of dangling limbs and gaping wounds calling for immediate care

seemed to justify the surgeons in putting him off for a time. His wound did not do well, and later he was sent to a general hospital in Memphis, when gangrene attacked the foot and death was the result. All the afternoon and till late at night on May 22 did the surgeons work with the wounded; amputating limbs, removing balls, cleaning and washing wounds, rodding them of broken pieces of bone, bandaging them up and putting in the best shoes possible. A few were brushed from stacks of spent balls or pieces of shell and recovered in a few days. Long lines of wounded now occupied the shaded places of the yard, and to attend to the wants of these kept all busy. Carbolic acid and other disinfectants were at that time not in use and all wounds were at first treated with simple water dressings. Old muslin cloth or lint was saturated with cold water and applied to all fresh wounds. As soon as these began to matter, simple cerate, a mild soothing ointment consisting of two parts of fresh lard and one of white wax, was applied. In most bullet wounds, the ball entering the body carried before it little pieces of the clothing, leather of the belt or cartridge box, tin of the canteen or any such substance first struck by the missile. In nearly all in tances these foreign substances were discharged in the form of little dark colored bits of debris.

Every day the wounds were washed and freshly dressed. But as the weather was warm many wounds became infested with maggots. This looked horrible but was not specially detestable.

Two or three days' extra work was made by the large number of wounded resulting from the assault of May 22.

After this there was a constant accession of wounded men at the hospital, but only a few at a time.

One man received a wound from some sort of a large missile that made an extensive opening at the place of entrance, the fleshy part of the thigh, in which it buried itself deeply and could not be reached. In a day or two the limb all about the wound began to assume a greenish-yellow hue and later the man died.

Cutting into the wound after death, revealed the presence of a copper-tap, more than an inch across, from a shell.

About a week after the set began a young man from an Ohio regiment died

from a wound resulting from his own impudence. The first day of the investment, while his regiment was drawn up in line three or four miles from the enemy's works, there being some delay in the advance, the young man got some loose powder, ran it along in a little trail, covered this with dust and tried to fire it. As it did not ignite he was stooping over with his face close to the ground when the charge took fire. His face was badly burned, and later was attacked with erysipelas, from which death resulted. This seemed an inglorious way of yielding up one's life when the opportunities for dying for one's country were so plentiful.

As soon as communication by the Yazoo was opened up with the North, supplies in great abundance came in for the sick. In the way of eatables were delicacies of various kinds, fruits, milk, home-made wines, etc. Clothing for the sick and wounded was furnished in full quantities. This, for the most part, consisted of cotton garments for underwear—shirts, night-shirts, drawers, gowns, etc. Most all of bleached muslin.

Cotton goods were at the time expensive in the market, from the fact that the sup-



ENTRANCE TO A MINE AT VICKSBURG.—From Harper's.

ply of the raw material by the South was stopped for the period during which the war continued.

Nearly all these things were donated by individuals and communities. Very many of the garments had the name of the donor stamped upon them with stencil plate. Quite a number of the articles seen by the writer had the name, now forgotten, of a lady with post-office address at Jamesville, Wis.

The assault of May 22 convinced all officers and men, that Vicksburg was much more securely entrenched than had been supposed, and that the only way to capture it would be by siege.

Accordingly all made up their minds to await the result patiently, but of the final fall of the stronghold no one entertained a doubt. Indeed, of ultimate triumph even man seemed from the start to have full confidence.

As before stated, after setting down to siege there were comparatively few wounded.

Back of Swett's garden under some small trees the dead from the Division hospital were buried.

It was not possible to provide coffins and so the dead were wrapped in blankets and covered over with earth—till their shallow graves were filled. As the siege progressed all the wounded and sick who were able to be moved were put in ambulances and conveyed to boats on the Yazoo river from whence they went North.

Came grew in abundance all about and by cutting a number of these stalks, tying them together with strings, and putting the two ends on cross-pieces and resting upon stakes driven in the ground, quite comfortable and springy cots were improvised for the hospital.

Swett's house had all the time been used as a place for storage of drugs and hospital supplies.

Swett himself was a short, thick-set man with a retentive stomach.

He used to stand around and lean on his cane with much seeming complacency. In his yard were several bunches of fragrant Jacaranda in full bloom. This is the most beautiful and deliciously fragrant flower, scenting the air with its delightful odor.

In the timber all about were magnificent specimens of Magnolia having upon their branches, in May and June, long beautiful blossoms.

Figs ripened in Swett's garden during the siege. These, while not laced by some when gathered fresh from the trees, by others were relished exceedingly.

Thus, tree flower and fruit lent something of their charms to assuage the horrors of war.

As soon as General Joseph E. Johnston discovered that Grant had securely invested Vicksburg, he began organizing a force to relieve the garrison. This force sought to attack Grant's rear on the line of the Big Black. Grant, who by this time was fully on the alert, and confronted Johnston with ample force to keep the latter at a safe distance from the operations against Vicksburg.

Meanwhile all sorts of stories were in circulation—nearly all favorable to the Confederates. At one time it was rumored that Port Hudson, some three hundred miles down the river, had capitulated to General Banks; at another, that the Confederates could not hold out longer; again that Richmond was taken and then that Washington had been captured by Lee.

Of nights the mortar boats from the river shelled Vicksburg, and sometimes the writer with one or more comrades would go out upon a high hill in front of the hospital from whence the bombardment could be seen.

The mortar boats were perhaps eight miles distant, and first a flash would be seen, then discharge of the mortar, then a streak of fire, then burning fuse; this would rise away up in the air and then descend as though every inch of space had been penetrated by a bullet. This was the mortar boat, where the Confederates had an enfilading fire, and they used it with most deadly effect on the 19th and 22d of May.

Immediately after the fall of Vicksburg an expedition against Johnston was organized under Sherman. The troops marched to Jackson, Miss., under a boiling sun over dusty roads, and besieged that place for the second time, and after two or three days' conflict Johnston once more evacuated it.

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The various places of interest about the city were visited. The several roads passing from the city, upon reaching the bluff, had roadways cut through this. In many places these cuts were twenty and thirty feet deep, and the walls of red clay perpendicular or nearly so. But this clay, these walls of red clay, these walls of such tenacity that washings never occurred, and the sides of the cuts remained as durable as if built of stone.

From the sides of these walls of clay, caves were seen in which some of the graves passed for seventy miles of their time. The writer visited several of these caves and found two or three of them carpeted and neatly furnished. Many places were seen where the immense shells from the mortar fleet struck the earth. When these failed to explode a great round hole was made in the ground, and in case of explosion after striking the ground, excavation was the result.

The great guns along the river front—the Columbiads of 9, 11 and 13-inch caliber—were visited. It was these that blacked the river and made the passing of even heavily armored vessels hazardous.

Some of the Confederate soldiers belonging to the infantry were about one of these huge guns, and one of them said within earshot of the writer: "I'll bet this creel of cannon's killed many a blue-belly."

Passing out toward the outworks a Confederate regiment, containing not many more men than a full company, was seen drawn up in line for inspection and roll-call, preparatory to completion of parole papers.

In conversation with the Confederates some said they had had enough of the war and hoped the South would make an end of it; others avowed their faith in ultimate success, the great majority however were non-committal regarding their notions of final success or failure.

The rifle-pits and works of the Confederates that crossed the railway and dirt road nearby, were visited. The neighborhood of the dirt road seemed especially to have been the scene of most obstinate conflict; it ran along on a ridge and the approach was particularly well guarded. The scene outside the Confederate works, between these and the Federal rifle-pits was dotted all over with Union graves, if some dirt thrown over a soldier when he fell could be called a grave.

A day or two after the assault the Union dead were buried under a flag of truce. The weather being very warm, before this was attended to, decomposition had already begun and the consequent stench would soon grow intolerable. Under these circumstances both armies readily agreed to a short armistice for disposition of the

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