

Journal of Camp Life

CAMP STONEMAN, near Washington, 1st NY Vet. Cav., Co. G

Wednesday, Oct. 28.—Hard frost last night, but we have a clear, pleasant morning, and have just been down on the flat in front of our camp, drilling. As neither [?] nor [?] are yet furnished, we have little to do but in the marching evolutions of the field. We have reveille at 5 A.M., roll call at 5:30, breakfast at 6:30, drill at 10, dinner at 12, drill at 3 P.M., supper at 5:30, roll call at 7:30, at tattoo at 8:30.

Thursday, Oct. 29.—It is startling to study the genius of war. As a *rule*, soldiers are governed by their animal nature, to the exclusion of all moral sentiments. Religion is discordant with *carnal* warfare. Say what you will of war, and generalize as much as you please to make it sublime, it is the unsanctified self in man; it is the devil incarnate, and must die out under the cross of Christ.

Friday, Oct. 30.—A long train of wagons has just come into camp with saddles, sabres, &c., for *some one* of our several dismounted regiments in this immediate vicinity, but we know not for which. The prospect brightens a little: the paymaster has just been here, and a part of our regiment have got their money. We hear heavy cannonading to-day in the direction of Leesburgh or Manassas, and we have flying reports that Meade is driving the enemy.

Saturday, Oct. 31.—It is a dark, dreary morning; but as the weather is warmer than usual, I have, in my frail domicile, passed the night very comfortably. We have just had a heavy dash of rain and wind, threatening out tents, but leaving them uninjured, though our camp ground is flooded with water. A large sutler's establishment has just been erected near us, which is a great nuisance, as it drains the men of their money and makes them sick with its luxuries.

Sunday, Nov. 1.—A little frost last night and now a lovely Sabbath morning. But all days are alike to soldiers, especially cavalry soldiers, who are seldom stationed long at a place, and as a consequence give loose reins to their passions and appetites. I am sorry to say it, but if the Union army was made up of such stuff as *our* regiments, it would be the most worthless part of the northern States. I have never known tobacco used so excessively. Liquor being entirely forbidden to privates, tobacco comes in quantities sufficient to balance the account. The rebellion could be *drowned* out in a few months by this terrible flood of tobacco slaver, if they were not as much addicted to it as ourselves.

Monday, Nov. 2.—To-day the paymaster came from Washington and finished paying our regiment. A regiment of cavalry in sight of our camp are leaving today, having just received their horses and arms. And what a scrambling there was of our men for the boxes, boards, poles, &c., of the deserted camp, for the purpose of improving our own. Our fare is good on the score of provisions. We have bread, beef and coffee in the morning, pork, beans and bread for dinner, and bread and coffee, well sweetened, for supper.

Tuesday, Nov. 3.—It is warm and pleasant to-day. Three travelling [sic] musicians are playing and singing near our tent, and have been profitably performing in various parts of the camp. A soldier's money is easily obtained for singing or anything else. Greenbacks and postal currency is the only kind of money current among soldiers. To-day our men, having first secured their pay, are scattering their money broadcast for watches, cakes, pies, oysters, tobacco, pocket books, military medals, stationery, &c., &c.

Wednesday, Nov. 4.—A new regiment of cavalry from Pennsylvania has just come in and encamped on the flat in front of us. They have already obtained their horses, and seem to be in fine condition. The weather is beautiful, but getting quite cold, for this region. Another regiment is leaving to-day; and so it is, that some are coming and others leaving at this great cavalry encampment of sixty or seventy thousand men! As this last was leaving, I saw in it a fine looking young woman, in full attire, of the

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staff officer style. Her hair was done up in net work and her voice was of such pure feminine tone, that her sex could not be easily mistaken.

Thursday, Nov. 5.—To-day, by my request, I have been assigned a position in our regiment hospital, where I have warmer quarters, but richer fare; so that while I am gaining on one score, I am losing on another. An officer of our regiment, intemperate and heartless, has just called to announce that one of the men had his brains kicked out by his own horse, and exclaiming, "I am glad of it!" It is humiliating to see in what a summary way, and even brutal way, accidents, sickness and death are regarded by military men in time of war. Last night, when one of our men died in a fit, it was treated with attention barely sufficient to cause the remark, "he is dead."

Friday, Nov. 6.—It is astonishing to calculate the amount of provision daily used un a single regiment. In ours, we have four barrels of pork, as many of beef, one thousand loaves of bread, two barrels of sugar, one barrel of coffee, two barrels of beans and one of rice! Soldiers eat too much; the idleness and monotony of camp life tend to make it a sort of recreation. Self is to be found purely unsanctified in the genius of war. If war is not the devil incarnate, there is no use in having one.

Saturday, Nov. 7.—Nothing of importance, except that our sabres have come, which will make our drilling a little more interesting. The hospital is full of patients, one of consumption, several of camp dysentery, caused by excessive eating; several are prostrated by their own vices, and several more are seeking to come in, but we have no room for them. Our hospital is a temporary affair, but if we remain here long enough, we shall probably get something better.

Sunday, Nov. 8.—A lovely day, but there is still no appearance of Sabbath with us. I should [i.e. would] have spoken on the campground to-day, but our sanitary duties are such as to absorb our time and attention to the exclusion of religious consideration. There is little or no morality in war, especially in this arm of the service, and but little ceremony is expected in regard to the sick and dying. The customs and habits of our cavalry soldiers, I think, are peculiarly barbarous, from the fact that, being mostly "on the wing," they have less chance for culture and religious improvement.

Last night I found it difficult to keep warm, our hospital arrangements are so very imperfect—we have not even a rough floor to keep our sick from the cold damp ground! I walked about the camp a portion of the night, when not engaged, to keep warm, and it gave me a fine chance for the contemplation of war. If I were going to write a book on this barbarous topic, I would entitle it "The Unwilling Instruments of Divine Praise, from a stand point behind the curtain." The excitements of the field and of camp life, take such a firm hold upon the animal in man, that our enormous Federal Army can be easily doubled—replenished and retained in the field, till the Southern resources are completely exhausted and the slaves themselves enabled to mingle with the free in this deadly conflict. The North, though vile as the South, pertaining to the sin of slavery, is to be, in process of time, the natural instrumentality for giving God's people their freedom and inalienable rights of citizenship.

If we discriminate between the immediate and efficient, we may discover a little sublimity in military movements, but in judging after the manner of men, war is but the "concentration of barbarism." A pass given by our commanding officer was criticised [sic] to-day by several of our old soldiers, because it was worded "Police and Patrol Guards please pass, &c." It was very properly argued that war, being arbitrary and coercive, knows nothing of any parlance but the commanding! In the light of this just criticism, our white-feathered Peace croakers may see the indefensibility of their grumbling against arbitrary arrests and suspension of Habeas Corpus; for as war is necessarily Barbarism, it can neither be civil nor polite. It is a dictate of common sense that, in time of war, the military power—as John Quincy Adams said in his great speech of 1842—is the paramount law of the land.

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During the few hours we remained in Washington, on our way hither, we could see, as we put up near the Capitol, the men at work in completing its magnificent domes. The unfinished monument of Washington was also in full view, especially as we commenced our foot-march of six miles, to this encampment. And to me it looked doubly sublime from the reflection, that it cannot of course be finished till “this cruel war is over”—thus standing as an appropriate monument to our imperilled [sic] country! For as this vast column has been left unfinished, so the American Republic by its primitive founders, was left with an organic defect, which can only be eradicated by a still more imposing baptism of blood than the American Revolution.—Both will be finished in due time.

In conclusion, it is humiliating to see how a large part of our soldiers look upon this national conflict. In some way or other, they discover that slavery is at the bottom of our sufferings, but were it not for this, they seem to think it would be well enough to hold the negro as chattel property. All such men—if they could only see it—are in some sort of sympathy with the Southern cause, for they are virtually joined to the despotic idea that might makes right. In time of peace and prosperity—like that which we enjoyed before the rebellion—the damnation of a people may slumber, but when the time of reckoning—the day of judgment comes, there is no possible way of escape from utter ruin but dealing justly, loving mercy and walking humbly before God.

No pardon for our national sin can ever be granted till it is asked. The prodigal must return before the Father will go to meet him, or stand waiting at the door to receive him. We may think it can make no difference in the termination of our present struggle, whether our individual minds are exercised with godly sorrow for sin or not, but in this we are surely mistaken, for the whole nation is made up of separate individuals, and the expression of ever man, in some way, shape or manner, is necessary to insure a permanent and abiding success.

J. [Rev. Jacob] WHITNEY

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Sat. 28 Nov 1863

Transcribed on 26 Feb 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY