

INCIDENTS CONNECTED WITH THE HISTORY OF THE THIRTY-SECOND IOWA INFANTRY

The Thirty-second Iowa Infantry, of which the writer was the first Adjutant, was mustered into the United States service on the 6th day of October, 1862, at Camp Franklin, in the upper part of the city of Dubuque. Our Colonel was John Scott, of Story County, who was elected State Senator in 1859 but resigned to enter the U. S. military service. He was elected Lieutenant Governor in 1867. We stayed there about five weeks, receiving clothing for the men, and our almost worthless guns, which were an old-style of Prussian or Belgian musket. Those old guns were fearfully, if not wonderfully, made—about as dangerous at the breech as before the muzzle. They were continually getting out of order, and our gun-smith always had repair jobs ahead.

While we were in Camp Franklin we gave all possible attention to squad and company drills, under the tutelage of Major Brodbeck—a jolly, beer-loving Dubuquer who long ago passed on to his reward. The old Major understood his business, for he had served long, and no doubt well, in the German army. Like Gen. Fitz Henry Warren, however, he could use “the energetic idiom” upon occasion, though he was a kind-hearted man when you knew him well.

One afternoon the regiment was marched out from the camp near the Mississippi River to the high bluffs a half mile away, where we had our first sham battle. The men unaccustomed to such violent exercise, and to climbing hills,

returned to camp much heated by this unusual exertion. On the way back I passed one poor fellow—John J. Hartman—from my town, who was sitting on the damp ground with his gun resting across his lap. I told him of his great danger of contracting a cold and ordered him to rise and go on to camp. Within the next hour or two he was seized with a congestive chill, from which he died before morning. This was the first death in the regiment and it cast a cloud of gloom over the entire command. He was a neighbor of mine at Webster City, and I greatly admired the rosy-cheeked, stalwart youth, because of his heroic action some months before in saving a man from drowning in the Boone River. It was an emergency requiring instant action, strength, and courage. His death occurred November 12, 1862.

But orders came one day from Adjutant General N. B. Baker, directing Col. Scott to take river transportation to St. Louis and report with his regiment to Major General Samuel R. Curtis, who was in command of the department of the Missouri. Our camp became a very busy place. People came in from the counties—Hardin, Franklin, Hancock, Winnebago, Cerro Gordo, Marshall, Wright, Hamilton, Webster, Boone, and Story—in which the regiment had been raised, to bid heartfelt goodbyes to husbands, sons, and lovers, who had offered their precious lives to their country and were to depart on a journey from which less than one-half ever returned. A bright and beautiful girl from Wright County rode about the camp with my wife and myself. We passed the officers of Company G, who were resplendent in the blue and brass of their new uni-

forms. Lieut. Bannon was especially fine looking. Queried the beautiful Wright County girl: "Do you think he is engaged?" Of course I could not tell, though I hoped not. But that handsome officer has been dead many and many a year, and the Wright County maiden is now a gray-haired grandmother of Des Moines.

We were very busy getting ready to go, but the details of our movements have pretty much faded from my memory. Everybody was pleased when we found ourselves afloat on the great river. I remember that when we reached Davenport, where we landed for a short time, Edward Russell, who was then editing *The Davenport Gazette*, came on board bringing a large number of his papers, which he distributed among the men. Mr. Russell was one of the very bright and conscientious Iowa editors of his time. He was to all intents and purposes a radical, and when some years later the question arose of putting universal suffrage into the Constitution of this State, he stoutly contended for "striking out the word white." He made what we called at that time "a square, stand-up fight" in the Republican State Convention for this change in our fundamental law. There was a large element in that convention heartily opposed to giving suffrage to colored men, and the committee on resolutions reported the regular party platform, entirely ignoring the question. But Mr. Russell then introduced the proposition as an independent motion, and after a protracted contest it was adopted upon a call of the counties, and the Republican party of Iowa from that time was committed to impartial suffrage for white and colored men.

Leaving Davenport we steamed on down the river and

finally reached the city of St. Louis. We went into camp at Benton Barracks. That afternoon Col. Scott reported in person to Maj. Gen. Curtis, with myself and three or four of his other officers. The General received us with great kindness and was much interested in ours as an Iowa regiment. I had met him in a congressional district convention some time previously, and I could very plainly see a difference in his demeanor from being "a good mixer" as a candidate for Congress and Major General in command of one of the principal departments of the western army. On the following day the Colonel and several of our officers visited the headquarters at Benton Barracks, where General B. L. E. Bonneville was in command. Gen. Bonneville had been greatly distinguished as a traveler and explorer at the head of a detachment of the army, which went across the country to the Pacific coast. His adventures on that trip were rewritten from his *Journals* by no less an author than Washington Irving. The book—never out of print—has long been one of the classics in the history of western exploration. At that time General Bonneville was a very old man, though he was still alert and vigorous. I have always regretted that I did not form one of the party which called upon him. All who saw him were very much pleased with that ancient relic of our military life. He died in 1878.

A couple of days later Col. Scott received orders to divide his regiment, take six companies to New Madrid, and leave the other four at Cape Girardeau. This last contingent was under the command of Col. Gustavus A. Eberhart, who is now a resident of the city of Des Moines—a most genial, excellent gentleman, as he was a skilled engineer and a

brave and energetic soldier during the Civil War. W. L. Carpenter, now also of Des Moines, of which city he was once elected mayor, was a sergeant in Company G, which was a part of the Cape Girardeau contingent.

Lieut. Col. Edward H. Mix was sent to New Madrid with the six companies. I accompanied him, as that was to be the headquarters of the regiment. We had a very pleasant time for a month or six weeks after reaching this latter post, though towards the end of our stay a great many of the men were sick with measles. They had suffered much from this disease in Dubuque. I found Col. Mix to be a very pleasant associate, indeed. He was something of a scholar, could recite whole pages from Shakespeare, and sang many Spanish songs. He had spent some time on the Isthmus of Panama and in South America, and spoke the Spanish language like a native.

New Madrid had been some time in the possession of the Confederates before they were driven out, and we occupied their old camp. This was surrounded by a ditch, in front of which was an abatis consisting of small pine trees, which had been sharpened and driven into the ground with the tops projecting, and these had also been sharpened. From long neglect the ditch had in some places filled up and the abatis was considerably decayed. Just outside and above our camp was a little star fort, which covered perhaps an acre of ground. Upon this fort there were mounted six eighteen and twenty-four pounders. The fort, however, had not been drained and the water stood in it to the depth of nearly a foot. There was a magazine in the surrounding embankment which was so far elevated that it remained dry.

Col. Mix and I set to work to put the camp in the best possible posture of defense. We drained the fort, deepened and cleaned out the ditch surrounding the camp, and repaired the abatis. Only one road from the outside country led into the camp, and across this we placed a ponderous gate, which could be closed and fastened at night. The purpose of this was to check any sudden raid upon us from the outside. Just at this time Gen. Curtis sent down to us some eighty German artillerists who had refused to perform military duty, claiming that they were entitled to be mustered out. For the present they were to be treated as prisoners. We were directed to keep them in our camp and take care of them until further orders. They were willing to police their own camp, and if we were attacked by a rebel force they promised to stand by us and fight.

About this time there was a great scare along the Mississippi River, and especially in southeastern Missouri and adjacent portions of Tennessee and Kentucky. From the west it was stated that Jeff Thompson was advancing upon our post with a force of two thousand men. We had only six hundred of those poor Prussian muskets and the cannon in the fort, for which last there was little or no ammunition. The recusant Dutchman took hold at once and set to work to complete the drainage of the fort, and also looked up our resources of powder, shot, and shell for the big guns. They reported that the ammunition on hand was almost useless. The information of the advance of Jeff Thompson was so circumstantial that it seemed to behoove Col. Mix to do something at once in the way of preparing for him. He and I discussed the matter, calling in some of the captains

of the companies. The scare had been so general that no boats were running on the river, and we were without telegraphic communication with the outside world. In addition to the menace of Jeff Thompson, the country was reported to be full of roving bands of guerrillas who were liable to annoy us at any time.

A large board raft destined for Memphis had landed some days before, as a measure of safety, at our camp, where it was securely tied up. The raftsman had a large skiff capable of easily carrying eight men. I suggested to Col. Mix that if he would impress this boat and give me a detail of six men, I would row up to Island No. 10, which was about ten miles away, and see what could be done in obtaining ammunition for our big guns. At first he thought that this was wholly impracticable, but I told him there was almost everywhere an eddy on one side or the other of the river. I knew that opposite us there was an eddy some three or four miles in length, up which the boat could easily be rowed. He started at once for the raft and in a few minutes returned and told me that I could have the skiff. I made my detail of six men and started about noon on my trip. John Eckstein, who was afterwards treasurer of Hamilton County for some ten years, James B. Williams, son of Maj. William Williams, of Ft. Dodge, who commanded the Spirit Lake Expedition of 1857, and Elias D. Kellogg, of Algona, were of my party. The names of the others I am unable at this time to recall. They were all good men whom I had known before the war. We rowed straight across the river. The bank was some fifteen to twenty feet high, back of which the ground was level and partially cov-

ered with brush and timber. I sent out three men as skirmishers, directing them if they ran across any rebels to fire upon them, and then make a rush for the boat. I promised not to desert them whatever might ensue. We reached the upper end of the eddy in a short time when I brought in the men and we crossed to the other side, where I found a similar eddy and rowed up stream as before.

We reached Island No. 10 some time before dark. Upon reporting to the commandant, he informed me that he could supply us with a ton and a half of powder and shot and shell that would match our guns. This material was brought from the magazine and deposited on the bank. Information had been received in some way that a steamboat would probably come down that evening, the first in a week or ten days. I ordered the men to take the skiff and go back to camp, while I would wait and come with the ammunition. A steamer came about nine o'clock that evening and our material was very quickly put on board. On reaching New Madrid the ammunition was unloaded upon the raft before mentioned, and I retired for the night to my tent very much tired after my experiences during the day. I anticipated that before noon our ammunition would be placed in the magazine in charge of the Dutch artillerists, who would speedily get the guns ready for action. We were all quite in hopes that Jeff Thompson would come on and attack us, for we believed that with the fort and our entrenchments we could make a successful defense against his horde of "butternuts."

The next morning, however, Col. Scott had arrived from Cape Girardeau in a little ferry boat called the "Daven-

port." I believe it belonged to some party in the city for which it was named, and that it had been purchased or impressed for service along the river. It had been turned over to Col. Scott who was to use it in plying between the two camps into which the regiment had been divided. He came, however, with an order which was a surprise and a mortification to his command. This order had been issued by Gen. Thomas A. Davies, who was in command at Columbus, Kentucky. The command of Davies was in General Grant's department, while we were in the department of the Missouri, commanded by General Curtis. Our immediate commander was General E. A. Carr. Davies assumed, however, that he had a right to command Col. Scott, and ordered him to take his six companies and go with them to Ft. Pillow and report to Col. Wolfe of the Fifty-second Indiana Infantry, who was there in command. The following is a copy of this curious order:—

HEADQUARTERS DISTRICT OF COLUMBUS,
COLUMBUS, Ky., December 27, 1862.

COL. SCOTT,

New Madrid, Mo., Commanding 32 Iowa:

You will immediately proceed to New Madrid, burn the gun carriages and wooden platforms, spike the guns and destroy the ammunition totally; take the same boat and proceed to Fort Pillow, under convoy of Gun Boat, and report to Colonel Wolfe, Commanding that place.

(Signed) THOMAS A. DAVIES,
Brigadier General.

Col. Scott was of course most reluctant to receive and respect such an order from a General to whose command he did not belong, but Generals Tuttle and Fisk were at

Columbus, and in view of the great scare in which General Davies participated, they advised Col. Scott to obey the order; but our six companies, with Col. Mix and myself, were heartily opposed to taking this step. We felt that it was doubtful whether the scare had anything behind it; and then, Gen. Davies had no right to command Col. Scott. Our officers and men were unanimous in urging him to disobey the order. But he was inflexible on this point and gave orders that the command should be put in readiness to move whenever a couple of steamers came down to take us to Ft. Pillow. The steamers came that night, or next morning, accompanied by a "tin-clad" gunboat. These "tin-clads" were simply gunboats which were protected by plates of boiler iron, and were only of avail as against small arms. A six-pound shot would have torn their upper works to pieces, but as there were no six-pounders arrayed against us they answered our purpose. We took the steamers during the following day and accompanied by the "tin-clad" sailed away for Ft. Pillow. "My powder" had been carried into the magazine next the river, and our orders from Gen. Davies stipulated that we were to spike the guns, burn the carriages, and blow up the magazine. This last work was taken in charge by the officers of the gunboat, who prepared long fuses, reaching perhaps one hundred or more feet to the powder in the magazine. It was some minutes before the sputtering fire reached the three thousand pounds of powder. In the meantime we had proceeded perhaps a mile when the magazine blew up. A great column of dirt rose, apparently two hundred or three hundred feet in the air. For an instant it was shaped like a bundle

of wheat, and we could plainly see the shells exploding through the clouds of dust.

The trip down the river was uneventful, though the weather was growing much colder and the north wind was very fierce. We landed at Ft. Pillow about the middle of the afternoon and the men at once went on shore. The cold was constantly increasing and the men were without tents. I remember that I assisted an orderly in putting up my tent. It was a hard struggle with the wind to keep the tent erect until the pegs could be driven into the ground to hold it in its place. Our supper was cooked by our colored "Aunty" in the open air. A cup of coffee, some boiled cod fish, and bread composed the meal. The poor men suffered fearfully during the night. Many of them were just recovering from the measles when we left our comfortable camp at New Madrid, and were compelled to sleep in the open air on the ground. It is little wonder that many of these convalescents took severe colds and died during the next two or three weeks. In the morning the ground was covered with snow, but the wind had gone down and it was much easier getting about. As soon as practicable lumber was secured and a hospital shanty erected in which the sick men were provided for as comfortably as possible. Our medical attendance, headed by Dr. S. B. Olney, of Ft. Dodge, was everything that could be desired, and he gave unremitting attention to the sick men. Our Chaplain, L. S. Coffin, also of Ft. Dodge, who was later one of the Board of Iowa Railroad Commissioners, ministered faithfully to the sick and was constantly on duty with them. He is still living (nearly 85 years of age) on his farm three miles from Ft. Dodge.

Col. E. H. Wolfe was in command of the Fifty-second Indiana Infantry at Ft. Pillow, and as his commission was older than that of Col. Scott, he remained in chief command of the post. By his permission, Col. Scott was allowed to take the little "Davenport" ferry boat and return to Cape Girardeau, where he reported by telegraph to Gen. Carr, his immediate commander at St. Louis. Gen. Carr resented our leaving New Madrid very bitterly, and ordered Col. Scott to consider himself under close arrest until charges could be preferred against him for abandoning his post in an unjustifiable manner, and also for having failed to put it in a posture of defense. This last charge was an egregious blunder, for everything possible had been done to increase the defenses of the post up to the time that the order came for its evacuation. We saw no more of the staunch little steamer "Davenport." It had ceased to be an appendage of the Thirty-second Infantry.

Considerable correspondence ensued between Gen. Carr and Gen. Curtis, in which the former manifested a very vindictive spirit toward Col. Scott, taking no account of the statement of Gen. Davies as to the danger in which he considered the posts along the river from Confederate attacks. Col. Scott was confident that the order for his arrest would be countermanded as soon as Gen. Davies could explain matters to Gen. Carr. This did not follow, however, and a military commission was organized to investigate the subject and determine the responsibility of the officer or officers connected with the affair and whether or not he or they should be dismissed from the service of the United States. Brig. Gen. William K. Strong was president of the commission

and Col. Albert G. Brackett was the recorder. Col. Brackett was retired from service in 1891. He had risen from the ranks in the cavalry service until he was commissioned Colonel. He deserved to have been made a Brigadier General. He was a brave and efficient officer and became the author of two valuable volumes of war books. One was *Gen. Lane's Brigade in Central Mexico*; the other a *History of the United States Cavalry*. After his retirement he settled in Des Moines, Iowa, where he remained for a year or two when he removed to Washington, residing there until his death in 1896. About the time of his retirement from service, he also wrote a magazine article in which he fully justified the action of both Davies and Scott, although he told me that it was a most singular case and one that puzzled him exceedingly. In concurring in the verdict that neither Davies nor Scott should be dismissed from the service, or even censured, he seemed to base his action upon what he considered their honest estimate of the circumstances by which they were surrounded. I have searched for Col. Brackett's article recently, but have not been able to find it. I was anxious to read it again and obtain certain facts which I cannot recall at this writing. I have been unable to find mention of it even in *Poole's Index*, so I suppose it was printed in some periodical not indexed in that publication. Col. Scott was discharged from arrest at the close of the trial and at once returned to his command, where he was most cordially welcomed by officers and men. In the meantime, our regiment had built houses on a little eminence just above the landing and had made them quite comfortable. There were many abandoned log houses in the country adjoining. We

tore down some of these and drew the materials into camp where they were again erected. Some of the men split "shakes," in pioneer Iowa style, with which they covered the roofs in lieu of shingles. Capt. John R. Jones, of Butler County, even made his house more comfortable with green blinds—which he found somewhere.

A word about the scare. It had no foundation in fact. Jeff Thompson was not preparing for and had not even contemplated an advance upon New Madrid. The reports which reached us were simply false. We could get no well defined account of guerrillas who were said to be prowling about the country. If there were any of these unauthorized and irresponsible troops they stayed some distance inland where they could not be reached.

I have an interesting little memento of "M. Jeff Thompson, Brigadier General of the Missouri State Guard." Our scouts one day brought into camp a certain Louis Lebecker, who was found suspiciously prowling about the country. He had a pass¹ which sufficiently explained itself, and of which this is a copy:—

JACKSON, MISS., OCT. 28th, 1862.

Mr. Louis Lebecker, formerly of St. Louis, late of the Confederate States Army, is the bearer of a communication from me to the Missourians assembling in South East Missouri. All passes and facilities which may be extended to him by the patriotic people of Arkansas, will confer a favor on

M. JEFF THOMPSON,
Brig Genl M. S. G.

Mr. Lebecker is a gentleman and can readily identify himself.

Aside from the mortification which this needless evacua-

¹ The original is preserved in the Aldrich collection of autograph letters, manuscripts, and portraits in the State Historical Building, at Des Moines, Iowa.

tion caused our men, there was the destruction of government property. It was very annoying to us all to see the fires lighted under the guns which soon destroyed the carriages. Gen. Davies said in one of his letters that he ordered the guns to be spiked with "soft iron," but those words were not included in the order which he gave to Col. Scott. Our men had not been in service long enough to have acquired much discipline, and when they had carried their impedimenta to the boats a fire broke out in the barracks which were very soon all ablaze. They were completely destroyed. They were, however, for the most part mere shanties and the loss was trifling. Where they once stood there was left but a blackened waste; and when the post was again occupied the barracks had to be rebuilt. The fort was so much of a ruin that I do not believe it was ever repaired.

This separation of the regiment was most vexatious in many respects, especially in the matter of compiling returns and reports. There was another matter which caused considerable vexation. The Fifty-second Indiana Infantry was really a pro-slavery regiment, always ready to drive the Negroes, who came to the post, back into slavery. In fact, an ex-Confederate captain by the name of Jones, who lived with his father-in-law near Durhamville, some fifteen or twenty miles inland, was allowed to come into the post and drive out two colored men—William and Coleman—who were in the employ of our wagon-master, and take them to his home. He drew a big pistol and told them to "march"—and they marched. The Thirty-second Infantry protested so vigorously against this high-handed outrage that a small detachment of men was allowed to go out and bring in the Negroes.

Among the officers who went with that little party were Capt. Cadwallader, of Company K, and Lieut. T. C. McCall, who survived his military service many years, serving after he reached home a term in the Iowa State Senate. He died about a dozen years ago.

In one respect this may have been a good thing for the regiment, for in its divided state it was not sent into battle, but remained guarding bridges and doing very irksome garrison service. Both officers and men craved to be united as when we sailed out of Dubuque to go to the front. This privilege was denied them until about the time of the Red River expedition, when the two sections of the regiment came together and took part in that memorable march. It participated in the capture of Ft. De Russy and in the battle of Pleasant Hill, Louisiana. In this last disastrous affair about one-half of the officers and men were killed or wounded. The brigade of which it formed a part was commanded by brave old Col. William T. Shaw, of the Fourteenth Iowa Infantry, now residing at Anamosa, Iowa. Descending the river, it took part in the battle of Yellow Bayou,¹ where Col. Shaw, in disobedience of positive orders, fought a splendid battle and by his coolness and good judgment saved the brigade from capture.

CHARLES ALDRICH

DES MOINES, IOWA

¹ See Maj. W. G. Donnan's account of *The Last Battle of the Red River Expedition* in the *Annals of Iowa*, 3d Series, Vol. VI, pp. 241-247.