

Camp Life in Other Days

In these stirring and rigorous days of war and preparation for war, at a time when millions of men are experiencing some form of military discipline, when thousands of Iowa boys are surrendering the comforts of home to endure the comparative privations of camp life, in order that democracy may continue to flourish, it may be well to turn back the pages of history and review the experiences incident to army life in previous wars. If the days are dreary and the nights are long in camp to-day, has it always been so? Modern war probably more nearly approximates Sherman's description of it. But, perhaps, camp life has improved.

During the Civil War thousands of Iowa boys were called into military camps. But in those days there were no large, central, well-equipped, and well-organized military camps. Instead, there were numerous small, ill-equipped, local camps where the volunteers were mustered into service and trained for a short time. Such camps were located at Burlington, Clinton, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Iowa City, Keokuk, Mount Pleasant, Muscatine, and Oska-

loosa. At these centers the companies of the various Iowa regiments gathered, learned the rudiments of military discipline, and were presently sent to reinforce the Union armies on the battlefields of the South.

Being conveniently situated, Davenport at various times during the Civil War was the site of five military camps. Of these Camp McClellan was the first and the most important. Established on August 8, 1861, it was the rendezvous of the Eighth, Eleventh, Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Sixteenth Iowa Infantry regiments, and the recruiting station for other miscellaneous troops.

Some of the more interesting features of life in Camp McClellan may be gleaned from the diary of Alexander G. Downing, a Cedar County farm youth who enlisted at the little town of Inland on Tuesday, August 19, 1861, and was transported with forty-four others by wagon to Davenport. His first meal in the army consisted of "boiled potatoes, fried bacon and baked beans." At night he had plenty of "straw to sleep on". During the first week in September the government issued to each man "a good, double, woolen blanket" to use at night in the "bunks of wheat straw". Rations consisting of "bread, beans, potatoes, bacon, rice, sugar, coffee, salt and pepper, also soap and candles" were drawn every morning.

In this diary for October 3, 1861, there is a comment regarding the weather and the condition of the camp. "It rained all day, and although our camp is on high ground, on the bluff just east of town, yet it is a jelly of mud. It couldn't be otherwise with three or four thousand men tramping over it."

Two weeks later Downing wrote: "Our daily routine in camp is as follows: Reveille at 4 a. m., breakfast call at 5, drill at 9 and dinner call at noon; drill call at 2 p. m., dress parade at 5, supper at 5:30, tattoo at 8 and taps at 9, when every man not on duty must be in his bunk and all lights out."

The men of the Eleventh Infantry had been in camp more than two months before arms were issued. "Our guns are the old-fashioned muskets made by working over the old flintlock gun, so as to use a cap in place of the flint", recorded Downing. "The musket is loaded with a cartridge containing powder, ball, and three buckshot in front of the ball. Each man is to carry forty rounds or more of ammunition all the time."

Uniforms were issued on November 2nd. Each man received "one dress coat, \$6.71; one overcoat, \$7.20; one pair of pants, \$3.03; one pair of shoes, \$1.96; two shirts, \$1.76; one double woolen blanket, \$2.96; one hat, \$1.55; two pair of drawers, \$1.00; two pair of socks, 52c; one cap, 60c; one

leather collar, 14c. The total cost for each man was \$27.43." The part of the uniform which caused the most comment was the collar. It was "a piece of stiff leather about two inches wide in the middle, tapering to one inch at the ends" which were fastened with a buckle. The soldiers were required to wear these about the neck "with the wide part under the chin" to hold the head erect. Brass epaulets on the shoulders made much extra work, as they had to be kept polished. Mr. Downing, in a note, commented that when the troops went into active service, "these epaulets were discarded and the 'dog collars' went with them".

Camp Roberts, located in July, 1863, on Duck Creek near Oakdale Cemetery at Davenport, was named for General B. S. Roberts who was stationed there. This was the headquarters for the Eighth and Ninth Cavalry. It was later called Camp Kinsman, and eventually the buildings were used for a soldiers' orphans' home. A stone at the present location of the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home in Davenport shows the site of old Camp Roberts.

Camp Joe Holt, Camp Herron, and Camp Hendershott, also located at Davenport in 1861 and 1862, were used temporarily. The Second Cavalry rendezvoused at Camp Holt, and the Sixth

and Seventh Cavalry at Camp Hendershott. Camp Herron accommodated the Thirty-first and Thirty-second Infantry.

The first Civil War camp in Iowa was Camp Ellsworth established near Keokuk in May, 1861. This camp, located a little north of the city and not far from the Mississippi River, contained more than two hundred acres of land "free from timber and broken by several ravines". It was described as "a beautiful spot — high, airy, and affording a magnificent parade ground, large enough for the maneuvering of a dozen regiments." Members of the First Iowa Infantry were mustered into service there on May 14, 1861. A few days later the citizens of Keokuk arranged "a grand picnic" for the soldiers. The "tables" were lavishly supplied with food, and speeches and music "enlivened the occasion".

Franc B. Wilkie, writing from camp on June 2, 1861, said: "The details, both regular and irregular of camp life are varied, and to most of us, amusing and full of interest, all of which will probably wear off after a week's familiarity with its duties. Incessant drilling, guard mounting, either beneath a boiling sun or in a drenching rain storm, sleeping seven in a tent, washing greasy dishes, scouring rusty knives and forks, the almost State's-prison-like confinement of the soldiers;

all these, and a hundred other circumstances incident to camp life, will very speedily take the romance out of the whole matter".

Wilkie wrote of the white tents arranged so as to form streets at the camp. The Governor's Greys were stationed along "Dubuque Street", the Jackson Guards on "Jackson Street", and Captain Mason's company on "Bates Street". The daily routine, from the sound of reveille to tattoo and taps, was one of the rigid regulations. As something of an innovation, the men in one of the tents adopted the rule that "whoever swears shall read aloud a chapter in the Bible", the book being constantly open for that purpose. One could scarcely pass by the tent, day or night, it was said, without hearing some one reading the Scriptures. One youth had already read all of Genesis and Exodus and was getting "well into Leviticus". At this rate it was estimated that he would finish the entire Old Testament within three months.

On June 13th preparations were made for the First Iowa to leave Camp Ellsworth. "Five minutes ago the prairie was flecked with snowy tents", wrote Wilkie at three o'clock, "now there is not a tent to be seen — our late beautiful encampment is simply several acres of wood-piles, straw-heaps, old fireplaces, and wooden kitchens." The next day the troops were at Hannibal, Missouri.

There were three other military camps at Keokuk. In the fall of 1861 members of the Third Iowa Cavalry rendezvoused on a bluff near the city, which they called Camp Rankin in honor of Colonel J. W. Rankin of Keokuk. For this regiment 1100 horses were purchased at an average price of \$100 per head. On the 11th of November the Third Cavalry left Camp Rankin, and a few days later troops of the Fifteenth Iowa Infantry occupied it. These men remained for only a short time, however, for on November 25th it was reported that Camp Rankin had been abandoned, that the "sheds" would be sold by the United States, and that a new camp would be established at Fifth and Johnson streets.

The barracks at the new camp, named Camp Halleck, were supposed to be "comfortable and economical". The "cooking sheds" in the rear were provided with "improvised furnace ranges". On the upper floor of the main building "sleeping bunks" were set up. The commissariat was located "just across the street in a room of the Estes House". Guards were placed all around the vicinity of the barracks, but citizens were not hindered in passing. Stringent rules were enforced against drunkenness and card playing. The ladies of Keokuk gave the soldiers a "fine Christmas dinner" and on New Year's Day the ladies of Dan-

ville and vicinity, in Des Moines County, sent a "sumptuous" meal. Dress parade preparatory to leaving camp was held on March 16th and on the following day the regiment embarked on the *Jeannie Deans* for new quarters at Benton Barracks.

Adjutant General Baker announced the establishment of several new camps on August 11, 1862. Among these was Camp Lincoln at Keokuk. The Nineteenth Iowa Infantry, first stationed there, was soon moved south and the camp was occupied by the Thirtieth and Thirty-sixth Iowa Infantry in turn. In the fall of 1862 a smallpox epidemic at Camp Lincoln took the lives of about one hundred members of the Thirty-sixth Iowa.

In August, 1861, Colonel Addison H. Sanders selected a site for a camp at Dubuque "at the upper end of the bottom land adjoining Lake Peosta" — the area just south of Eagle Point. This camp was first called Camp Union, but was later known as Camp Franklin. The buildings constructed were twenty by sixty feet in dimensions and were arranged to accommodate one hundred men each. By August 25th, seven of the ten barracks were completed, and three companies were at the camp. Colonel William B. Allison, who was then in command at the camp, asked citizens of Dubuque to lend blankets for use of the

soldiers until a supply could be purchased. The report of the hospital at Camp Franklin from September 18th to November 30, 1862, showed that the whole number of persons admitted was 193; returned to duty, 163; furloughed convalescent, 7; discharged, 1; died, 8; remained in the hospital, 24. Early in 1863, the camp was vacated and the buildings were sold at public auction for \$1564.

On July 15, 1861, the *Des Moines Valley Whig* reported that, for some reason unknown to the writer, troops of the First Iowa Cavalry were to be transferred from Keokuk to Burlington. Upon their arrival at Camp Warren the men were formed in line in front of an extended board pile from which troughs and tables were to be made. At 11:30 o'clock the commissary sent out "rations of bread, raw meat, beans, unbrowned coffee, and sugar, together with camp kettles and deep pans". Out of these, the soldiers were required to "improvise a dinner, without knife, fork, spoon, pan, cup or tin". A little later the troops were engaged in building barracks for themselves, making shoes for the horses, and otherwise preparing for the life of a soldier. But with all the hardships, the boys found camp life to be "not wholly devoid of sunshine and merriment". In September, 1861, the editor of the *Des Moines Valley Whig* visited Camp Warren and reported that the troops were

comfortably quartered, in good health, and had plenty to eat.

In the fall of 1862 troops from Warren, Lucas, Decatur, and Wayne counties were organized into the Thirty-fourth Iowa Infantry, and placed in camp near Burlington at a place called Camp Lauman, where they remained until October 15th. During a period of two months' encampment at least 600 men had measles. This kept many of them unfit for duty during their entire stay at Burlington, and made camp life unusually monotonous.

Iowa City was the site of two military camps. In August, 1861, Governor Kirkwood ordered the Tenth Iowa Infantry to be quartered in the fair grounds, a twenty-five-acre area just south of town on the west bank of the Iowa River. For a while it was feared that their occupancy of the fair grounds would prevent the holding of the State Fair, but on September 24th the troops were suddenly moved to more active scenes of warfare, and Camp Fremont was again transformed into the State Fair Grounds. The site of Camp Fremont lies just north of the present Iowa City Municipal Airport.

In the summer of 1862 Camp Pope was established southeast of Iowa City and members of the famous Twenty-second Iowa Infantry under the

command of Colonel William M. Stone rendezvoused there. The Twenty-eighth and Fortieth regiments were also stationed there in the fall of 1862. The site of Camp Pope is now within the limits of Iowa City. A boulder and bronze tablet in the yard at the Longfellow School mark the location.

Soon after the receipt of President Lincoln's proclamation of July 2, 1862, calling for additional troops, Governor Kirkwood commissioned Eber C. Byam, of Linn County, to raise the "Iowa Temperance Regiment". Circulars were distributed and soon there were twice as many volunteers as were needed — "men who touch not, taste not, handle not spirituous or malt liquor, wine or cider." They were mustered as the Twenty-fourth Iowa Infantry and sent to Camp Strong on Muscatine Island, where the Thirty-fifth Iowa was also in rendezvous.

Camp Strong was described as "very nice" for drilling, dress parade, and guard mounting. But there was "too much swampy land near it," which made it unhealthy, and besides, "there were too many loads of melons brought into camp." Members of the temperance regiment remained at Camp Strong for a little more than a month. Meanwhile, they had "a great deal of fun, drill, parade, and bad weather, and a good deal of measles in camp."

The Thirty-fifth Iowa remained at Camp Strong until late in November.

On October 12, 1861, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton authorized the organization of the Fourth Iowa Cavalry to be rendezvoused at Mount Pleasant. Within a week the troops began to arrive at Camp Harlan, so named in honor of Senator James Harlan. The camp was at that time "only an open meadow, lying west of the town, where there were piles of lumber provided for building barracks." Construction work began at once. Indeed, there was nothing else for the men to do. They had no military supplies, no equipment, no clothing but their own — not even a sufficient supply of blankets. But the people of Mount Pleasant permitted no one to be uncomfortable.

The barracks, which were constructed of rough pine boards, were eighty by twenty feet in dimensions, "and high enough for three tiers of double berths, or 'bunks,' between the floor and eaves." There was a door in each end, a window in the middle of each side, and a floor of rough boards. Twelve of these buildings facing south, one for each company, stood side by side with intervals of about twenty feet. In front of the barracks and beyond the parade ground were small barracks for the officers. At the rear of the barracks were long, low sheds to be used for stables. Excellent water

was supplied from Swan's Spring. The Fourth Cavalry remained at Camp Harlan until February 22, 1862, when the regiment was moved to St. Louis.

In the fall of 1862 the Twenty-fifth Iowa Infantry used the buildings at Mount Pleasant but the place was known as Camp McKean. Subsequently the barracks were burned. A boulder and bronze tablet now mark the site of the camp.

During the Civil War there were two military camps near Council Bluffs. In the summer of 1861 Colonel Grenville M. Dodge, commanding the Fourth Iowa Infantry, established Camp Kirkwood near the southern limits of the city, on the high ground north of Mosquito Creek. The Second Iowa Battery of Light Artillery also went into quarters at Camp Kirkwood on July 4, 1861, and was mustered into the service of the United States later in the same month.

During the summer of 1862, Colonel Thomas H. Benton, Jr., recruited the Twenty-ninth Iowa Infantry, which rendezvoused a little south of Camp Kirkwood, "on the same beautiful table land". This regiment remained at Camp Dodge, named in honor of Grenville M. Dodge, until December, 1862, when it proceeded down the river to Helena, Arkansas.

Clinton, like Council Bluffs, had a recruiting

center which was known as Camp Kirkwood. In September, 1862, members of the Twenty-sixth Iowa Infantry drilled there under the command of Colonel William M. Stone. The troops remained at Clinton only a short time before they were removed to St. Louis and thence to Helena.

The Thirty-third Iowa Infantry, containing a large enlistment of men from Mahaska County, was mustered into service at Oskaloosa on October 1, 1862, at Camp Tuttle, named in honor of Colonel J. M. Tuttle of the Second Iowa Infantry. The troops remained at Camp Tuttle until November 20th, when they were marched to Eddyville, and thence transported to Keokuk, St. Louis, and Helena.

Members of the Twenty-third Iowa Infantry, recruited chiefly from Polk, Story, and Dallas counties with scattering volunteers from Harrison, Wayne, Page, and Montgomery counties, were stationed at Camp Burnside near Des Moines in the fall of 1862. Their stay at that location was very brief, however, as they were soon transferred to southern camps and to active scenes of warfare.

Military camps in Civil War days were makeshift, and the equipment and rations were not the best. Sickness was prevalent, making the normal hardships yet more difficult to bear. Sometimes camp life had pleasant aspects, but then, as now,

the daily routine was inflexible, periodic guard duty was unavoidable, and drill became monotonous. Boys who volunteered in a spirit of adventure must have been disillusioned. In those days, however, the period of training was short and many an Iowa company went into battle with slight knowledge of military tactics and unprepared for the rigors of long marches. Yet the Iowa camps were much more comfortable than the bivouacs on southern battlefields.

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