

A Few Martial Memories

I

OFF TO THE WARS

O, Johnnie has gone for to live in a tent —
They have grafted him into the Army.

In the spring of 1862, Camp Benton, just west of St. Louis, was a rallying point for the volunteers of the Northwest. Fifteen or twenty thousand new troops occupied it, in tents and barracks; brass bands paraded; raw cavalymen, with unstained sabres, stood in long lines learning to cut, thrust and "let the enemy parry"; infantry with glittering weapons were drilling in companies and in regiments; the silver ringing of bright ramrods in still brighter gun-barrels was heard on every hand; staff officers, who had been clerks or unfledged lawyers a few weeks previously, galloped about with an air of immense responsibility, as though a battle were in progress. All was glitter, bustle and excitement. "Now, this is war", I said to myself, leaning against a cannon that had never been fired, and folding my arms in the fashion of Napoleon.

In a couple of days a great number of boxes somewhat resembling coffins, were hauled to the front of our quarters, and we turned out with loud cheers to "draw guns". They were beautiful Springfield

rifles, as bright as silver, and of the best pattern used in either army during the war. It was an exciting moment. When the orderly sergeant handed me one, together with a belt, a bayonet and sheath, a cap-box and cartridge box, and a brass "U. S." to put on the cartridge box, I felt that a great trust was being reposed in me by the United States government. Many a man has gone to Congress or received a Major-General's commission with less actual modesty and solemn emotion than I experienced on that occasion. And that burnished rifle, so beautiful that it seemed fit only to stand in the corner of a parlor, or repose in a case of rosewood and velvet, subsequently had an obscure but worthy history. In the course of the war, from its well-grooved barrel, I hurled more than eight hundred Minie balls in protest against a Southern Confederacy, and on my last battlefield I smashed it against the side of an oak tree, that it might never fire a shot for the dissolution of the Union.¹

Still other things were rapidly given to us. We received those horrible-looking regulation felt hats which somebody decreed we must wear; also black plumes to adorn them; a brass eagle that resembled a peacock in full feather, for the side of a hat; a brass bugle for the front; brass letters and figures to denote each man's company and regiment; leather "dog collars" to span our necks, and much other

¹ Practically the entire Sixteenth Iowa Infantry was captured before Atlanta on July 22, 1864.— The Editor.

trumpery — all of which we threw away eventually, except the hat. The latter, in time, we lowered a story or two, by an ingenious method, and it served us well in storms of rain, and in the fierce heats of Southern summer. Buttoned and belted and strapped, and profusely ornamented, we felt we were soldiers indeed, and we pined for gory combat. Now and then a straggler would arrive, and after gazing on our splendid paraphernalia, he would be in a fever of anxiety until he, too, had secured the last gewgaw to which he was entitled at the hands of a generous Government. "Have you drawn your bugle yet?" became the slang salutation of the camp, the original inquiry having been propounded by an alarmed rural volunteer to one of his belated companions. After strutting about with our new weapons, like so many boys in their first new boots, we were ordered to the drill-ground to learn how to handle them without impaling one another.

Early the next morning the drums rattled furiously, and orders came to pack up instanter and get ready to leave for the seat of war. The wildest commotion ensued. Every other matter was forgotten, and with eager haste we got into line on the parade ground. There we learned the most annoying duty of a soldier — to stand in his place like a hitching post, perhaps for hours, simply awaiting orders.

We finally stacked arms and had breakfast, but at eleven o'clock we marched out of Camp Benton with

drums beating and colors flying, going we knew not where. Three batteries and three regiments of infantry followed us. The people of St. Louis cheered us vociferously all along the route. At 2 o'clock we reached the steamboat levee, and our regiment (16th Iowa) was packed and crowded on board a miserable old craft called the *Crescent City*. The other regiments embarked on other boats, and more troops and batteries were swiftly ferried across from East St. Louis and embarked on still other steamers. At dusk our somewhat imposing flotilla swung off, and amid the roar and clatter of martial music, and the cheering of soldiers and people, we steamed down the Mississippi. It was the 1st of April, and our commanders told us we would smell gunpowder soon.

At ten o'clock the next morning we reached Cairo, and saluted the beautiful Ohio with a round of cheers. Our fleet turned up the Ohio, and on still the next day we came to Paducah, Kentucky, at the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee rivers. Taking on plenty of coal, we moved up the Tennessee river to join Grant's army, flushed with its recent victory at Fort Donelson. The voyage was enchanting. I shall remember those lofty bluffs, robed in green foliage, bright with blossoms and flowers, to the last days of my life. Wild and picturesque scenes lay on either side, and strains of music floated on every breeze. The weather was balmy and delightful. The air was fragrant with the breath of Southern spring. We seemed only on a pleasure excursion. We passed

Fort Henry without stopping, but close to its battle-rent works, constructed on land little above the river level, "Old Glory" floated peacefully above the riddled ramparts, sentries paced back and forth, and troops were encamped near by.

On the evening of April 5th we arrived at Pittsburg Landing. No wharves, warehouses or dwellings lined the shore. Not even a clearing was visible. We saw only a wooded wilderness. On the east shore were richly timbered low lands, subject to overflow. On the west side abrupt bluffs rose from the water's edge to a height of 150 feet. They were broken by deep ravines that came down to the river. These towering green highlands were covered with magnificent oaks and elms in full foliage, decorated here and there by dark mistletoe. In Egyptian darkness we disembarked on the west shore, and climbing nearly to the summit of the bluff, we formed in line and stacked arms. The other regiments and the artillery companies also disembarked and climbed the hill. A very large army seemed scattered about. We could see innumerable campfires far to the front, and martial music floated for miles through the woods. Worn out with a voyage of hundreds of miles, we spread our blankets and went to sleep. It was the night before the battle of Shiloh — one of the bloodiest engagements of the whole war.

II

THE OPENING GUNS OF SHILOH

So long as there's truth to unfetter,
So long as there's wrong to set right,
So long as our march is upward,
So long will the cry be — "Fight".
So I drink — to defeat or to conquest;
To the laurel — or cypress and scar;
To danger, to courage, to daring —
To the glory and grandeur of War.

Irene F. Brown.

Early in the morning — very early — I became aware that something unusual was occurring. Rousing with an effort, I staggered to my feet and found that other men had also been awakened, and far away through the woods we faintly heard bugles sounding and heard the distant dull roll of drums, mingled with the discharge of fire arms. Interrogating members of a regiment near by, we got the answer:

"Why, it's the long roll beating."

"And what's the long roll?" we inquired.

They explained that it was a peculiar roll of the drum that is only beaten at a time of great danger to an army. Like a fire bell at night, it was a note of alarm. It signified the enemy's presence, and called the soldiers to arms, in haste. This was news indeed, and a presentiment of impending momentous

events seemed for a moment to possess me. Every drummer who heard the roll, snatched his drum and repeated it. The weird note sounded in every direction. We listened intently and were soon startled by the roar of artillery, somewhat distant, but frequent and heavy. Presently the cannonading became "nearer, clearer, deadlier than before." The crash of musketry, in volleys, was heard, far away to the front. Staff and field officers began to appear, many of them mounted and "riding in hot haste"; and the drums of many of the regiments around the landing beat the assembly.

The idea that some kind of a battle was commencing, had been ridiculed at first, but it was now certain that heavy fighting was being done on the outer lines. Our drums beat and our regiment hastily formed, after which baggage was brought up from the landing, ammunition was issued, and we were shown how to bite and use cartridges. We got orders to cook breakfast, eat it, and get back into line. As the roar over in the woods waxed nearer, louder, deeper and more terrible, wounded men began to appear in great numbers along the road leading to the river. The first of them who reached us gave a partially correct but exaggerated statement of affairs. The army had been surprised by an immense force of Confederates, they said; soldiers had been shot or bayoneted in their tents; whole regiments had been captured or massacred; our lines had been broken and driven back; many of our bat-

teries had been captured, and affairs were growing worse every moment. Presently a new class of men began to arrive from the field, in limited numbers. They were totally uninjured, and some of them had no muskets. In reply to any questioning, they said their regiments "were all cut to pieces," and that there was no use for them to stay there any longer. As time dragged by this class of men became more numerous, and the number of regiments that were all cut to pieces struck me as being quite appalling.

The great battle meantime waxed fiercer and fiercer, and appeared to be extending over miles and miles of ground; more artillery was getting into line; the concussion of guns grew heavier and more frightful; and volleys of musketry broke in tremendous explosions, one overlapping and drowning the other in rapid succession; the leaves on the trees and the very air seemed to vibrate with repeated shocks; and listening volunteers, fresh from the North, some of them slightly pale, abandoned their long cherished fear that the war might end before they would ever do any fighting.

The preceding night we had slept for the first time on a soldier's couch — the ground — little dreaming that before we should sleep again the surge-like tide of an awful battle would sweep to within twenty paces of that spot. It was a Sabbath morning, warm, sunny, and with a cloudless sky. I thought of the ringing of the church bells in my native State, and then I listened with awe to the ter-

rible roar of the mighty conflict raging a few miles away. It swelled into smooth thunder, varied by volleys of artillery, and then broke into redoubled violence, lashing and clashing with spasmodic rage. It seemed that some vast, devouring force of Nature was approaching; that some furious ocean had been poured upon the land, and was leaping and crashing its way through crags and abysses to the scene where we stood. On the opposite side of the river the lowlands were basking in the sunshine that streamed through the fresh foliage of the trees, and blossoms and flowers were plainly discernible. It was a picture of perfect tranquillity. The river was like a sheet of glass. Two heavily armed gunboats moved slowly back and forth like restless monsters fretted with unavailing ire; and the many transports lying along shore were rapidly getting up steam as though to fly from a region of disaster.

Fugitives and wounded men poured past our bivouac by hundreds. We had ceased to interrogate them, for the reply was invariably the same. A fearful struggle was in progress. The Union army was literally fighting for existence. It was being steadily driven back, and had met with enormous losses. The attack had been made with consummate skill, at the earliest break of dawn. At many portions of the field, not even picket lines had been stationed in front of the Union encampments, and these troops were taken by complete surprise.² Men were

² The question of whether or not Grant's army was taken by sur-

actually killed on their cots. Rebel soldiers afterwards told me that they "fired into the tents and the Yankees came buzzing out like bees." At other portions of the field, pickets were properly stationed. Where the blame lies is immaterial. Generals, colonels and soldiers knew little about actual war — especially on a large scale. The enemy rushed on in three heavy lines of battle, and won everything at the outset, but that the battle raged for forty-eight hours afterwards, and ended in a rebel defeat, is one of the wonders of history.

Albert Sidney Johnston fell that day, just after leading a victorious charge, and at the very moment he was waving his thanks to his wildly applauding soldiers.³ Just before the battle he had issued to them a stirring address, in which he said:

I have put you in motion to offer battle to the invaders of your country. With the resolution and disciplined valor becoming men fighting, as you are, for all worth living or dying for, you can but march to a decisive victory over agrarian mercenaries, sent to subjugate and despoil you of
prise has been for many years a subject of controversy. For a refutation of the surprise theory see Rich's *The Battle of Shiloh*.— The Editor.

³ There has been much difference of opinion as to the manner of the death of General Johnston. The story recounted by Parkhurst is to be found in many of the earlier books dealing with the battle. Later writers have in several cases maintained that General Johnston was engaged in forming the reserves behind the lines when he was hit by a stray ball. See Rich's *The Death of General Albert Sidney Johnston on the Battlefield of Shiloh in The Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. XVI, pp. 275-281.— The Editor.

your liberties, property, and honor. Remember the precious stake involved. Remember the dependence of your mothers, your wives, your sisters, and our children on the result. Remember the fair, broad, abounding lands, the happy homes, and ties that will be desolated by your defeat. The eyes and hopes of 8,000,000 of people rest upon you. You are expected to show yourselves worthy of your valor and lineage: worthy of the women of the South, whose noble devotion in this war has never been exceeded in any time. With such incentives to brave deeds and with the trust that God is with us your generals will lead you confidently to the combat, assured of success.⁴

After breaking a Union line, and driving it back in rout, Gen. Johnston was receiving the clamorous applause of his soldiers. Three fugitives turned around to see what new calamity impended, and they guessed him to be a general. Loading their muskets as quick as they could, they fired simultaneously.⁵ He fell in his saddle, and died a few moments afterwards in the arms of a surgeon. His death caused a temporary cessation of the enemy's activity. After some delay, that proved valuable to the Union forces, Beauregard assumed command. He swore he would "water his horse in the Tennessee river before sunset," and he nearly kept his word.⁶ The enemy's

⁴ This address by General Johnston to his soldiers is printed in the *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. X, Pt. II, pp. 396-397.— The Editor.

⁵ See footnote on p. 120.— The Editor.

⁶ This famous declaration was made at the beginning of the battle by General Johnston, not by General Beauregard.— The Editor.

frantic efforts continued. By this time every Union regiment was in action.

Gen. Lew Wallace left Crump's Landing, somewhere down the river, that morning, with about ten thousand men, with rush instructions to reach the field promptly, but he got lost in the woods. Had he made the march in proper time, he might have won imperishable glory. He could have hit the left flank and rear of the rebel army, and changed a disastrous field into a victorious one. As matters went, he arrived when the crisis was over — the next morning.⁷ All day long, hour after hour, the battle raged, and the victory seemed to be Beauregard's.

III

SUNDAY EVENING AT SHILOH

Their toast to the smoke of the peace pipe,
 As it curls over vintage and sheaves;
 Over war vessels resting at anchor,
 And the plenty that Peace achieves.
 I drink to the sword and the musket;
 To Battle's thunder and crash and jar;
 To the screech and the scream of the bullet —
 To onset, to strife and to War.

Irene F. Brown.

It was close to evening. From the hilltop where I stood, stretching down the long abrupt slope to the river's edge, and off to the left for half a mile, and

⁷ General Wallace arrived after dark Sunday evening and during the night disposed his troops for battle.— *War of the Rebellion: Of-*

perhaps a mile, was the wreck of a terribly beaten army. Thousands and thousands of men, in the apathy of despair, awaited an apparently inevitable calamity. Buell's army was known to be close at hand, hurrying toward us, on the other side of the river, and officers of every rank from general down, were passing through this vast mob and appealing to them by everything that civilized men hold sacred to get into line and keep the enemy back, if only for ten minutes, till Buell could save them from massacre. I even saw a girl of eighteen stand on a stump like another Joan of Arc, and deliver a passionate harangue. She was in Zouave uniform—some "daughter of a regiment"—and her burning words produced astonishing effect.

We had but a little ways to go, and barely a moment to take in the situation. A long line of artillery stretched off to the right, some of the pieces being heavy enough to shatter the walls of a fortress at one discharge. The enemy was throwing a few shells.

At once there rose so wild a yell,
It seemed that all the fiends that fell
Had pealed the banner cry of Hell.

Thousands and thousands of infuriated men poured in to sight with fixed bayonets, yelling like demons.

ficial Records, Series I, Vol. X, Pt. II, pp. 170, 176, 188, 193, 196, 197. For a discussion of General Wallace's march to the battlefield, see Rich's *General Lew. Wallace at Shiloh* in *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 301-308.—The Editor.

It seemed that the earth had vomited forth a new rebel army. "Bull's Run! Bull's Run! Bull's Run!" they shrieked at the tops of their voices. They hoped to stampede us in sheer terror. We fired by instinct. Almost at the same time our massed park of artillery hurled barrels of grape and canister into their naked ranks. Their yells were drowned in the roar, but on they came, the living trampling over the dead. No commands were given us. No man's voice could have been heard. Every man loaded and fired with frantic haste. Smoke rose before us, in clouds. Suddenly a tempest of musket balls flew hissing around us. We knew we had checked the charge, for troops on a charge seldom fire. The combat deepened. A terrific and supernatural noise alarmed me. It seemed like some enormous projectile ripping the air open. I instinctively crouched to the earth. It passed in the direction of the enemy, diagonally, and fell among them. I imagined I heard it bursting, and that I saw the flames of its explosion. It was a huge shell from one of the gunboats. Others followed in swift succession, scattering death and havoc wherever they fell. They were thrown with astonishing precision.

An unusual crash of musketry to the left caught my attention. Glancing across the road I saw that a long double line of infantry had just poured a volley into the foe. Where I fought, our line was ragged and disordered. Some were standing erect, some were lying down, some were fighting on one knee,

and some were behind logs, stumps and trees. But every man of that line stood erect, in splendid order. They were fresh troops from Buell's command. The rest was like a horrible dream. We loaded and fired and smoke enveloped us. The ground trembled beneath our feet. We were in a whirlwind of smoke, fire and missiles. It was so near night that our muskets flashed fire. Our cannons belched forth streams of fire. At times I saw gunners standing erect, ramrods in hand, like silhouettes against a background of fire. At length bullets ceased to fall among us. I dreaded a new charge. Then the fire began to slacken all along our line, we began to hear cheers, we ceased firing, and knew that the conflict had ended. Then, amid the lifting clouds of smoke, and amid the dead and dying, powder-grimed and streaming with perspiration, we snatched off our hats and cheered and yelled like maniacs. We had repulsed the foe, and the first day's carnage at least was over.

As I was getting into place at the line of battle, just before the enemy's onset, I hastily viewed a most melancholy circumstance. On the left hand side of the road, on the summit of the hill stood an old log cabin, and around it were innumerable tents — I cannot say how many, for they stretched to the left — and every one of those tents was filled with wounded soldiers. Musket balls were already piercing the canvas, and I saw men running with stretchers to remove the wounded. All that stood

between those tents and the storming columns of the foe was a hurriedly forming and ragged line of battle. The line must have been within a yard of the tents, or may have been formed down through them, the outer tents being torn down. Imagine the agony of a man with a shattered leg or with a Minie ball through his lungs being jolted off in a stretcher by two excited, rough and incompetent men. Imagine this being done under a fire of musketry, with shells bursting plentifully around, and tremendous excitement prevailing. Or worse yet, suppose he had been left behind, shorn of the strength he possessed an hour before, and must lie helpless on his blood-drenched couch with screaming missiles rending his tent to tatters, and inflicting additional wounds. I did not see the result, but great numbers of those men must have been killed on the cots where they were lying.

We had no sooner reached the line of battle than a shell came shrieking through the air, and fell not twenty feet in front of us. It whirled there a moment and exploded. A soldier fell forward on his breast, and a comrade ran to his side, and taking him by the shoulders, lifted him up. Then we saw that his face and throat were blown or cut off, and the blood spurted in great jets or streams from the veins and arteries of his neck, and his friend dropped the quivering trunk to the ground with a look of horror. It was the ghastliest sight I saw in the war. We hear orators rant about men spilling

their blood on the altar of their country. That man literally poured out all the blood in his veins on the barren soil of a Tennessee hill, that the flag that floats in triumph today might continue an emblem of nationality and power.

Immediately after the repulse of the foe, and when triumphal cheers were ceasing, we began to hear different and more piteous sounds. They were the moans of the wounded and dying. I even heard horses sending forth sounds that seemed like appeals for human sympathy and assistance. Indistinctly seen, but all around us, was blood — on the ground, on the trees, on the guns that had swept the foe so terribly, on the prostrate forms of the slain, and even on men who were walking about, glowing with the enthusiasm of victory.

Troops were pouring up the road from the landing. They were soldiers of Buell's army. The steamers were ferrying them across the river as fast as possible, and bands of music were playing on the steamers. These men had been in the service some little time, and betrayed evidence of training and discipline. They passed us, and deployed in line of battle some distance beyond us, for the enemy's forces had retired about half a mile. The Buell troops that got into action that evening numbered only a few thousand, but they rendered invaluable aid at a critical moment.⁸ They were led by the im-

⁸ Only a part of Colonel Ammen's brigade of General Nelson's division actually got into the fight on Sunday evening. These troops

petuous General Nelson, who was afterwards killed in a Louisville hotel by one of our own generals. Nelson was a proud, arrogant, overbearing man, but he was a most heroic military leader — utterly without fear. I saw him on horseback at the road, under the full fire of the enemy, but did not know until the next morning who he was.

A rapid re-organization of Grant's forces ensued; the rolls were called, arms were stacked in line; those of us who had any rations, ate them, after which, exhausted with the day's toils and intense excitement, we spread our blankets on the ground and were soon sleeping soundly.

Our bugles sang truce — for the night cloud had lowered,
And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky;
And thousands had sunk to the ground over-powered,
The weary to sleep and the wounded to die.

CLINTON PARKHURST,
Co. C, 16th Iowa Infantry.

could doubtless be numbered in hundreds rather than thousands.—
War of the Rebellion: Official Records, Series I, Vol. X, Pt. II, pp.
328, 333-334, 337.— The Editor.