

The PALIMPSEST

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BESSIE L. LYON

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSEST

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

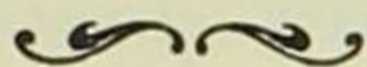
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Arctic Exploration

Waves from the turbulent waters of Lake Winnipeg broke over the sides of the weather-beaten, flat-bottomed *Colville* as a Canadian "nor'easter" shook the hull of the small freighter bound for Grand Rapids, Manitoba. The voyage across the broad upper part of the lake was unusually rough. And in the dingy, cramped quarters of the *Colville* the crew swapped stories and exclaimed in unison that their steamer was "the worst roller on the lake".

But through the night of August 26, 1892, as Frank Russell lay in his bunk, he was only partially mindful of the storm, the smell of fish, and the sickening sway of the boat, for his thoughts were floating back to the fall of 1891 when he was a Junior in the University of Iowa. It was in that year that he decided he would be a zoologist. He remembered how he had debated whether to continue as a portrait artist or to turn to the study of animal life — a subject which had in-

trigued him since he was a youth in Fort Dodge. He probably recalled also the day in the spring of 1891, when his restless nature prompted him to plan a zoological expedition to Canada in company with his close friend, Arthur G. Smith. This expedition was finally sponsored by the University and the two students were accompanied by Charles C. Nutting, professor of zoology. During the summer of 1891 the three men roamed the wilds of Manitoba collecting specimens for the University museum of natural history. It was then that Russell began to dream of exploring northern Canada.

It all began after Russell and his two companions had met Roderick Ross MacFarlane, an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company and a noted ornithologist. During conversations with the three University explorers, MacFarlane had expressed concern over the vanishing musk-ox. He said that the musk-ox was on the verge of extinction due to the "increasing activities of the Indian on the southern and the Eskimo on the northern borders" who were killing them for their hides. He urged the men to secure a "series of musk-ox" before the large animals were all gone. "His enthusiastic description of the field," wrote Russell afterward, "roused in me a strong desire to visit the Far North."

Professor Nutting wanted to develop the University museum and Frank Russell was eager to collect specimens. Having spent a summer in the field with his pupil, Nutting knew that he had the "stuff from which explorers are made" and persuaded President Charles Schaeffer and the University Regents to sponsor an expedition to the arctic region. Meager funds were raised and Russell volunteered his services. His instructions were concise: To obtain specimens of the larger arctic mammals, especially musk-ox and to "pick up everything else he could get his hands on."

Frank Russell's senior year at the University was devoted largely to a rigorous training program which he hoped would harden him for the life of a northern explorer. He stuck to his training plan as rigidly as the members of the Hawkeye football team. In addition he found time to serve as captain in the University military unit, take an active part in the Zetagathian Literary Society, and write a thesis on the "Variation of Animals in a State of Nature."

Upon his graduation in June of 1892, Russell and Smith set out for Puget Sound and British Columbia. Both men desired to collect rare specimens for their own cabinets until it was necessary for Russell to begin his northward journey. They secured marine invertebrate life from the

waters of Puget Sound and later got specimens of the mountain goat from the Rocky Mountains of central British Columbia. Their ways parted on August 15th when they reached Winnipeg. Smith bade goodbye to his friend and returned to Iowa City. Russell made arrangements to winter at the Hudson's Bay Company post near Grand Rapids at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River on Lake Winnipeg.

Boxes of clothing, guns, ammunition, food, and mounting material were dispatched to Selkirk, the head of navigation on the Red River for lake steamers. His expedition to the far north, destined to last for more than two years, began on August 24, 1892, when he boarded the *Colville*.

He arrived at the Hudson's Bay Company's station a mile and a half above Grand Rapids on August 29th. There he took possession of a small, unoccupied log cabin which was to be his home for the coming winter. The prospect was not reassuring, for the logs of the cabin were chinked with small amounts of moss, clay, and frozen mud and the cracks were all too numerous.

The day after he arrived, Russell went into the "bush" and shot twelve birds which he mounted in the afternoon. He intended to make as complete an ornithological collection as possible. He was also anxious to study the ethnology of the

Indians. Fortunately he soon discovered two or three burial places and uncovered bones of a people he presumed to be those who had occupied the region before the Crees had arrived.

Late in September he and Napasis, the best hunter around Grand Rapids, started out in a "leaky birch canoe" to hunt moose. Russell wanted experience in hunting big game in the far north. On the second day the men sighted two moose and emptied their guns. One escaped and the other, wounded in the leg, began to run. Immediately the two hunters gave chase and followed it for almost two miles over the muskeg. Russell finally overtook the animal and fired a fatal shot. His first moose!

Throughout his first winter in Canada, Russell went on many hunting expeditions with the thermometer sometimes hovering at 60° below zero. He busied himself in collecting birds, trapping animals, and preparing them to send back to the University. According to the plan this work was preparatory for the main expedition in the following summer. While at Grand Rapids he was to perfect himself in the art of managing dog teams, canoes, and snowshoes, the three means of conveyance in the north; and "to harden himself to the colder climate, that he might better endure the year of isolation in the arctic regions."

Back at the University, the students eagerly awaited letters from Frank Russell which were often printed in the *Vidette-Reporter*. His adventures were followed as closely as the athletic teams of that year. A. G. Smith, in the February 28, 1893, issue of the paper, made this comment in asking for a testimonial fund for the explorer: "When I often hear someone say 'I would enjoy such a trip', I feel like asking him whether the flaming Aurora would appear so beautiful when seen, while the mercury stands at 40° below; whether skimming over the snow upon snowshoes would seem so pleasant if after hours of this work, a supper of tea, bacon and bread, such as only an Indian squaw can make, was all that could be expected, whether three hundred and fifty miles from the post office would not detract from the beauties of nature; would the society of Indians make up for the culture of the University?"

Students and faculty alike responded to this appeal by giving \$221.96 to the testimonial fund. With this money a committee purchased a repeating rifle, a shotgun, shells, a camera and film, four suits of chamois-skin and fleece-lined underwear, books, and medicine. All this, with a check for fifty dollars, and a mending kit prepared by a group of girl students, was sent to Russell.

When he received the gifts in March, he wrote:

"I've faced the north wind every day this winter. I've been out when it was fifty-seven below zero. I've wakened in the morning with two inches of snow on my blankets; all without flinching, but boys, when you pointed that rifle at me I came down. . . . The rifle shall be kept among my 'good things'. I hope that I make such use of it along the Arctic coast as to prove myself worthy of at least some extent of the esteem of its donors."

Scarcely a day passed that he did not go out to hunt. By midwinter he was thoroughly acclimated and too busy to be lonely, being personally responsible for all eleven departments of his expedition. The hunter was "becoming more of an Indian every day," the ornithologist was "devoted to his science", the ethnologist was studying Indian customs, the entomologist had had painful experiences with sand flies, the geologist was worried about the cost of exporting specimens, the botanist wanted to spend about "fifteen hours a day" at his work, the meteorologist was keeping a record of the severe weather, the paleontologist planned frequent excursions, the secretary begrudged the time required to write notes, the cook had plenty to do, and the man that skinned the birds had "the most irksome duties of all."

On the morning of February 20, 1893, Russell left his winter quarters with a dog train which

was headed for Selkirk. He was making the three-hundred-mile trip in the dead of winter so that he might descend the Mackenzie River "by the first open water". The party reached Selkirk on the tenth day in the midst of a blinding snow-storm. Russell and the natives had suffered undue hardship from lack of food, because the dogs had eaten all the bacon, and most of them had suffered "snowshoe sickness" from the fatiguing pace they had set over the snow-covered terrain. From Selkirk, Russell went on to Winnipeg by train where he received a letter of instructions from Professor Nutting. Before departing for the far north he was directed to "proceed to Macleod, Alberta, and collect zoological and ethnological specimens until about May 1st."

The prospects in the vicinity of Fort Macleod being unpromising, he went thirty miles farther west to Pincher Creek. There, having devoted a week to hunting sheep in the rolling hills of Alberta without success, he turned to collecting birds. The result of his six weeks at Pincher Creek netted him forty bird skins, a Piegan Indian mummy, the skulls of nine mountain sheep, and mountable heads of mountain goats and mule deer.

Reaching Edmonton on April 20th, Russell purchased his equipment for the trip to the far north.

His supplies included: two hundred pounds of flour, fifty pounds of side bacon, twenty-one pounds of black tea, thirty pounds of brown sugar, and three pounds of baking powder. His entire outfit, including the provisions, ammunition, two Winchester rifles, and two shotguns weighed 750 pounds. A large portion of his food was to be given to the Indians as gratuities for services.

From Edmonton, the University explorer set out for Athabasca Landing in a horse-drawn wagon owned by the Hudson's Bay Company, and arrived in time to catch the Company's first York boat for Lake Athabasca. The river voyage was marked by narrow escapes for Russell and the ship's crew, for the stream was full of ice floes and the current was so strong that the boat nearly capsized when it struck a huge rock in the river.

Fort Chippewyan in the Athabasca District was reached on the twentieth day of the trip which covered 530 miles. In this "Land of Desolation" which Russell said had but two seasons — a snow season and a mosquito season — the explorer spent his time collecting many birds on the islands dotting Lake Athabasca. "When I attempted to collect birds", he wrote in his report, "the mosquitoes sometimes actually covered the gun barrels and concealed the sights. The mosquito helmet I was compelled to wear seriously

obstructed my vision, and they always found their way through its meshes. They have not the timid and hesitating manner that characterizes the southern mosquito, but realizing that their summer is short and naturalists are few, they waste no time but light squarely upon their bills and go to work. I have smeared coal oil, bacon grease, and other precious ointments upon my face and hands, with only temporary effect. My face and wrists were often swollen from their poisonous attacks. Sleep is impossible without a net to completely cover one."

After an uncomfortable but successful month of collecting birds around Lake Athabasca, the University explorer continued by boat down the Great Slave River to Fort Resolution and thence across the lake and up the northern arm to Fort Rae. At this settlement Russell spent ten days living at the Company post where he ate "black, tough, hair-covered caribou meat" three times a day. But the call of the far north beckoned and he decided to make a summer trip to the Barren Ground to secure more ornithological specimens, shoot caribou, and, as he said, "to get something to eat, as the unvaried diet of tasteless, leathery dried meat was growing intolerable." The Indians, however, refused to allow him to accompany them on a caribou hunt because they thought

the skins he sent home to be mounted would live forever and the herds would migrate southward to share that happy fate.

Finally, in company with Andrew, an Indian, Russell undertook a private reconnaissance up the Yellow Knife River in search of birds and caribou. During the trip the University explorer and his guide subsisted almost entirely on suckers and whitefish caught in their nets. They learned from the Dog Rib Indians, whom they met on their journey, that the caribou were out of reach. The region contained very few birds or small animals and, because the caribou hunt was futile, Russell decided to return to Fort Rae. He marked a tree on the shore of the last lake in a chain near the Yellow Knife River to commemorate "the visit of an Iowan to that desolate lake, never before visited, I believe, by a white man."

Summer passed quickly for Russell at Fort Rae. He made many trips into the forests and near-by islands to collect birds. He spent day after day shooting and trapping birds and at night, after feasting on his prey, would turn from hunter to taxidermist and preserve the skins. With the coming of fall he journeyed to Fort Resolution with the natives and inquired about expeditions of the Indians to the Barren Ground to hunt the musk-ox. After more than a year in the lonely

surroundings of northern Canada he was anxious to achieve the principal purpose of his mission.

With the first flurries of snow, the hardened explorer made arrangements to accompany the Indians of Fort Rae on their fall caribou hunt. During the three expeditions made with the Dog Ribs during the winter, Russell secured eight caribou which he prepared for the museum and also acquired a rare albino caribou skin. He traveled more than five hundred miles behind a dog sled on snowshoes for his rich reward. In December he skirted Great Slave Lake by dog team to accompany an Indian party setting out from Fort Resolution for a buffalo hunt. On the trip to Resolution the temperature ranged from 50° to 60° below zero.

"If exposed to the wind while on the march, as we were on the broad river and on the lake," reported Russell, "it was difficult to keep our faces from being frozen. At night the intense cold seemed unendurable. We never had any shelter but our blankets; it would have been impossible to have kept a fire burning all night, as the coals thrown off would have burned our blankets, and the quick-burning spruce would have required frequent renewal. Toward morning I was nearly always awakened by the bitter cold, which sometimes gave me the impression that my feet were

certainly frozen. I sometimes started the morning fire myself. Although there was little comfort in a bed, where I was literally writhing from cold, it was not pleasant to open my blanket covered with frost and snow, and search in the darkness for a strip of birch bark with which to ignite the charred sticks at our feet."

The trip to Fort Resolution to join the Chipewyan Indians on the buffalo hunt proved unsuccessful and so he returned to Fort Rae. He had spent two months, traveled 650 miles, pushed the dog sled most of the way, and "had not even seen a buffalo track" for his pains. He spent the month of February, 1894, in his lonely cabin at Rae, where his "spirits were at the lowest ebb", waiting impatiently for the Indians to begin the trek to the Barren Ground. To improve the time, he ran a trapping line during the day and wrote and sketched during the evening until the cold froze his ink and numbed his fingers.

At last, on March 5th, Russell set out with four Dog Ribs for the Indian camps which were busy preparing for the long journey to the desolate abode of the musk-ox. The tribe, led by Johnnie Cohoyla, was reluctant to take a white man to their own hunting grounds. They accepted Russell merely because they could beg from him precious bits of salt, tea, and tobacco. The weeks

dragged by and the hunters moved their camp ever northward toward the land of the musk-ox. Finally after the Easter festivities, the Indians decided the opportune time had arrived to invade the bleak desert of snow.

By dog sled the hunters and Russell traversed the plains. They depended on the numerous caribou of the country to supply them with food. After passing the Musk Ox Mountains, the party was held up for sixty hours by a fierce blizzard which made traveling impossible. On the thirteenth day of the hunting expedition, the day after the snowstorm had subsided, they caught sight of forty musk-ox. Russell's goal was now in sight! A six-mile chase ensued but only one hunter was able to reach the animals. This Indian killed four of the prized musk-ox.

Three days after the first musk-ox were seen, Russell, with the aid of field glasses, sighted a herd of fourteen on the summit of a hill. After two hours of cautious traveling the hunters neared the musk-ox and released the dogs to chase them. Russell, prepared to give chase to the animals, had taken off most of his cumbersome clothing. "We soon came upon eleven of the musk-ox standing at bay in two little clusters, hardly lowering their heads at the dogs, whose ardor had been cooled by the statue-like immobility of the noble

animals", he wrote, describing the kill. "Their robes were in prime condition, the long hair and heavy erect mane gave them an imposing appearance. To kill them was simple butchery, yet I had no choice but to fire as rapidly as possible and get my share of them, as they were all doomed anyway." He skinned the two animals the next day in the bitter cold of an arctic blizzard and prepared the skins and skulls for travel on the sled, formerly laden with firewood.

On the twenty-ninth day the hunting party returned to the camp from which they had started but found the place was deserted. It had been a very successful hunt but the hardships of *mal de racquette* (snowshoe sickness), carrying a load upon his back, and urging a weakened dog team, hauling five hundred pounds of skins and supplies over the frozen snow, were almost beyond the endurance of stouthearted Frank Russell.

In his book, *Explorations in the Far North*, Russell pictured the scene as he neared Fort Rae after the 800-mile trip: "As my weary dogs crept over the hill into Rae and dragged the load of five complete skins and heads of musk-ox in front of the door which they had left two months before, they sank down utterly worn out. I lifted them out of the harness and prepared my evening meal with slow and exhausted movements, but

sustained by a devout feeling of thankfulness that the journey had been successful."

On May 10, 1894, Russell left Fort Rae, which had been his "home" for almost a year, and traveled on snowshoes with his dog team to Fort Providence on the Mackenzie River. His farewell tribute to his faithful dogs is, by implication, a vivid portrayal of his own hardships. "With aching limbs and bleeding feet they had toiled on, their only reward being the half putrid fish of which I was often unable to give them full rations. Many a time they had been beaten into the snow when exhausted and hungry. Many a time they had been harnessed in the morning, too weak and stiff to start the heavy load, only answering the cutting whip with their piteous whine. Nadjuk, Treff, Major and Corbeau, we have hunted, eaten and slept together for the last time."

From Fort Providence, Russell traveled 600 miles down the Mackenzie River by steamer. From Fort Good Hope he proceeded 280 miles in a canoe and entered the arctic circle. The last 160 miles northward to the mouth of the Mackenzie was negotiated by canoe in company with Count de Sainville. By following the glow of the midnight sun for one hundred miles, Russell reached Herschel Island. On August 30th he boarded the arctic steam whaler *Jeanette*. After a

cruise of approximately a month around Wrangel Island the boat turned southward through Behring Sea and approached San Francisco harbor on October 27th. As the ship neared port, Russell exclaimed: "How different the green hillsides, dotted with trees, viewed through the balmy air of a perfect day, from the barren, fog-enveloped, and snow-covered mountains of the Aleutian Islands which we had passed twelve days before!" His arrival in Iowa City on November 2nd was celebrated by students and faculty.

Not only had Frank Russell acquired invaluable specimens for the University, including the almost-extinct musk-ox, but he was also the first man ever to descend the Mackenzie River to its mouth and reach civilization around Alaska.

"In my opinion", wrote Professor Nutting, "he has shown such dogged determination, cool bravery and good judgment in the pursuit of his object, as should win for him a high place among the great explorers of the far north. It must be remembered that he was alone and unaccompanied by a retinue of attendants and helpers, and that the rigid economy which he practiced necessitated his going without many things considered necessary by the Hudson's Bay men while traveling in that country."

REEVES HALL

Christian Soldier

When men are drafted for military service in a wholesale manner, as at present, we seem to forget the volunteer system of recruiting the Union Army in the Civil War. Ambitious citizens raised companies, patriotic rallies were held, and men, proud of their physical fitness and loyalty, enlisted. Eventually, when more troops were needed, they were drafted, but men were allowed to hire substitutes. Iowa quotas were usually filled by volunteers.

One day in midsummer of 1862, when Amasa O. Allen was in Maquoketa on business, he ran into a whirlwind campaign for recruits. Lee was frightfully aggressive, and Lincoln's forces seemed demoralized in the face of this critical campaign. Could men who loved their country resist the call for volunteers? Allen was a busy farmer. With his wife and two small children he was doing his utmost to earn a living and live in peace. He had come to town with no thought of enlisting, but as he listened to the appeals for recruits, he decided to volunteer at once in what later became Company I, of the Twenty-fourth Regiment of Iowa Volunteer Infantry.

Consternation reigned at home when he broke the news. The young wife, Agnes, put up a brave front, but her heart quailed at the thought of being left to run the farm and care for little Charles and baby Mattie. What it meant to the young father, to leave his dear family and go off to face the uncertainties of war, can be gathered from the loving letters he sent from the various camps and at the battle front.

"Leaving Maquoketa," he wrote from Muscatine on August 31st, "we proceeded to DeWitt, where we arrived at half past one. After dinner, we started for Davenport, where we arrived after dark — a tired, hungry set of boys. But after partaking of Mr. Davises supper and all camping on the floor, we felt somewhat refreshed. Saturday morning we loaded our baggage into wagons, then formed into line and marched down to the levee and aboard the steamer *Denmark* but did not start until just as we sat down to dinner, when we steered down the river for Muscatine, arriving about four o'clock. We marched up to the hotel where we left our baggage and had an introduction to our Colonel Byam.

"Then we started for Camp Strong on foot, distance about two and one half miles. Arriving there we were cheered by the regiment, and then marched to our barracks, which are very good

buildings, forty by twenty feet, with four tiers of bunks, one above the other."

Camp Strong — probably typical of the army camps in 1862 was situated, according to Allen, on an island of 2700 acres below Muscatine. "There are twenty-six barracks," he wrote, "and about 1500 soldiers, 900 of which belong to our regiment — and a better looking lot of men, I never saw! But the 'Excelsior Guards' get the praise every time we pass through. Adjutant General Baker made us a speech on the Denmark, and told us that we were the best company that ever passed through Davenport. . . . We are getting settled, and camp life is not harder than I expected. But, if it was not for my Country, give me home, where my wife and little ones can be with me!"

Spiritual needs were not neglected as is evidenced by his statement: "Today we were all escorted into a hollow square, and listened to some of the best addresses that I ever heard, by Reverend Truesdale, and I never saw a congregation keep as good order in a church, as did that 1500 men, seated on the ground — and many were the wet faces, as we listened to the advice that was given. Since writing the above we had a prayer meeting in our tent, and we had a good one before we closed."

No mail had come from home by September 10th, though he had written three times. "I want to hear that my beloved wife and little ones are well", he wrote. "I am well and enjoy camp life better than I expected, but there are some rough boys here, from all parts of the state. There are some twenty-two hundred men here — but most of the men of the 24th Regiment are steady, and have prayer meetings in their barracks every night and preaching twice on Sunday."

Of the first thirteen dollars he was paid he sent ten dollars home. He hoped "to get a furlough for a week," in order "to come home and see how you get along, and kiss my dear family once more". But neither the furlough nor the paymaster came. By September 17th he had part of his military clothing — "dress boots, pants, and caps and blankets". The other garments were issued after the regiment was mustered in on September 18th. "Don't think I am homesick," he insisted, "for I am not, but would like to see the friends at Sharon." On the roster he was listed as second corporal.

Basic training was brief and perfunctory. By the end of six weeks the regiment was preparing to leave Camp Strong. All the equipment had arrived, including "Enfield rifles that were taken from the rebels. They were never unboxed and

came here with 'C. S. A.' marked on the boxes. They are a nice gun and weight just ten pounds, and the boys feel very proud of them."

Corporal Allen wished his wife could visit him before he was transferred to front-line duty, but the wish appears to have been unfulfilled. "About fifty men, women and children are here visiting our company today", he wrote on October 12th, and "they all bring baskets of provisions. Since I came to camp, I have hardly had a meal without pies, cakes, molasses, baked chicken, etc. But these days will soon be over, and then I expect to see no more of my friends until I come home, and I don't want to come to stay, until the last Rebel is driven so near the Gulf of Mexico that they will have just room enough to kneel down to be shot."

A little touch of wifely anxiety must have crept into Mrs. Allen's letters, for he goes on to explain: "Ag, you wanted to know if we kept up our prayer meetings; we do, twice a week, and sometimes every night, besides preaching twice each Sabbath. You wanted to know if I used any profane language. No, I do not — Ag, I have made up my mind to return no worse than when we parted, and just as much better as I can."

Company I of the Twenty-fourth Regiment left Camp Strong on October 20th, on the steamer

Hawkeye State, arriving at St. Louis on October 22nd, but the troops were ordered to remain on board and proceed to Helena, Arkansas, as soon as knapsacks arrived.

The first active experience of the Twenty-fourth Iowa was in foraging for food. One of the men was shot while on such an expedition. "The ball struck him in the back, and followed a rib around, and came out below the pit of the stomach and he caught the ball in his hand."

On November 15th, the regiment received orders to be ready to march in three hours with three days' rations. Under General A. P. Hovey, a large force moved down the river to attack Arkansas Post. The maneuver failed, however, and the expeditionary force returned to Helena.

"Perhaps you would like to know how we live", wrote Allen to his wife. "While we were down the river last week, we had Iron Clad crackers, and Sow Belly, and coffee, when we could get a chance to make it. You may think that it is rather hard feed, but it is nothing when we get used to it — we shut our eyes and 'chaw' whatever they give us and call it good". His letters never complained or revealed any deterioration of character. Certainly Corporal Allen sustained the reputation of the Twenty-fourth as the "Temperance Regiment", noted for the abstinence and

piety of the men. His attitude was always that of a brave Christian soldier, whose greatest hope was righteous victory for his country.

On picket duty "it was so warm that I did not take my blankets out of my knapsack — much more like May than the 19th of December." Back in Iowa, he assumed, they were sleigh riding. "Perhaps I will step in some day and take you out riding! Wouldn't we enjoy it — but we will wait a bit, till we *whip Old Jeff*, then I will come home to stay with you."

A long letter on New Year's Day carried a message of optimistic faith. He wanted to appear cheerful despite the hardships of war. The regimental camp was on low ground and sickness was prevalent. "My health still keeps good," he wrote, "but some of our boys look rather hard." About thirty-five were "not fit for duty".

He deplored the absence of the paymaster. Not that he needed the money, for he had "not used fifty cents" since he left Iowa, but he knew his wife was having a hard time. "Ag," he advised, "if you think best, you can have Uncle Cha try and see if he can sell my right to that land with the house on it. If I don't get back by spring he can sell what little I have for money or anything else that he thinks best, for I don't think it will amount to much unless I should come home soon.

You can talk with him and see what he thinks about it. The cow and heifers, you had better try and keep, for they will get better; they are good property at any time."

He was pleased to answer a note from his small son, Charley. "I hope you will be a good boy and remember all the prayers that your Mama learns you", he admonished. "Mama says your feet are so sore that you cannot go to school; you must read at home and learn to write so you can write me a good long letter. Charley, you did not tell me who gave you and sister Mattie all those nice things at Christmas. When you write again you must tell me all about it. Take good care of little Mattie and help Mama all you can, and Papa will come home soon."

Meanwhile, the campaign against Confederate strongholds on the Mississippi was developing. News of heavy casualties became more frequent. By January 10th the regiment had received orders to pack up and be ready to board a boat for some unknown destination. "Now Ag, don't worry about me, because I say we don't know where we are going". Two weeks later heavy rains had flooded the camp. "You don't know anything about mud in Iowa; there, there is some bottom to it, but here there is none." Though the regiment moved to higher ground, sickness still

plagued the men. Exposure to inclement weather on scouting duty disabled many. Four were discharged from Company I "and quite a number more soon will be", reported Corporal Allen on February 8th. Fortunately he had not been sick a day since he enlisted.

And so the winter passed. Spring came early in Arkansas, but the Twenty-fourth Iowa continued to mark time at Helena. "Some of the regiments are getting nearly discouraged", Allen wrote. But in March the Iowans drilled hard every afternoon until the Eleventh Indiana, tired of that drudgery, cut the levee above the town and flooded the drill ground. "The river being high, it soon overflowed the whole town, and now half the houses in Helena have to be reached by boat. The river is still rising — 16 inches more of water, and there will not be a foot of dry land in the town."

Friends at home sent loads of potatoes, turnips, beets, and some sauerkraut, dried peaches, molasses, and ginger snaps, concerning which he remarked, "So you see we are living very well, and are not suffering for food and clothing, as I hear it is reported in Iowa. But I think it is from some *Copperhead*." One can read between the lines his contempt for such propaganda.

Soon after a big "war meeting" of ten thousand

troops, addressed by prominent generals to develop morale, the long period of waiting came to an end. The Twenty-fourth Iowa was assigned to the Second Brigade of the Twelfth Division, Thirteenth Army Corps, and ordered to join General Grant's army in the operations against Vicksburg. By April 24, 1863, the regiment was located at Fisk Plantation, Louisiana, five miles from the Mississippi, and twenty miles from Vicksburg.

Amasa Allen liked Louisiana. "We are in one of the finest countries that ever lay out of doors", he wrote. "The Rebels intended to farm rather extensively in corn. Within the last week I have passed through millions of acres that was about eight inches high, and did look fine — until the army passed through and let the cattle in to feed it down." Evidently the Union men did not scorch the earth, but they devastated pretty thoroughly for, "Mr. Rebel will not raise anything in this part of Rebeldom, this season, nor will they have many houses to live in when they return."

The campaign was progressing in earnest. Gunboats were nightly running the blockade and the army was maneuvering into position around the doomed city. "We left ten of our boys at Milliken's Landing, who were unable to march, and

we have since heard that two of them died", wrote Corporal Allen. As for himself, his health was good, but two arduous weeks had left him fatigued.

"My dear", he wrote to his wife on May 5th, "I will try to give you an idea of where we have been since the 28th of April. At two P. M. we left our camp at Perkins Plantation two miles from the Mississippi and thirty miles below Vicksburg. We marched to the river, boarded transports and lay there until twelve o'clock at night, when we started down the river; at sunrise we were in sight of the fortifications of Grand Gulf. We also found seven of our best gunboats. Soon after we arrived, the flagship signaled for the fort to surrender, which it would not do, and at fifteen minutes before eight the boats turned their prows toward the Fort. When within about a mile, the batteries opened fire on our boats, to which they responded, and the firing began in earnest — the engagement lasted about six hours. It was the intention of our General to land the Infantry at the Fort, but the bluffs were too high, and there were too many rifle pits to climb. Our boat lay about three miles from the batteries, and in plain sight. I must say it was the grandest sight that ever I saw."

The attack having failed, the gunboats and

transports retired, the troops disembarked and marched down the levee opposite the town, and the boats ran past the Confederate batteries in the dark. In the morning the soldiers boarded the transports and went down stream to Bruinsburg where they landed and drew rations for four days. About sundown, they started for Port Gibson, and marched all night, in order to get in the rear of Grand Gulf.

"In the morning of May 1st we heard the cannon begin to boom. They fired about 400 shots, and all was still. The Rebels had evacuated Grand Gulf, and were making their way to Vicksburg, and our advance had overtaken them in the night. The Rebels chose their battle ground at Magnolia Church. Our division arrived at sunrise, and we had about 30 minutes for breakfast, and our Brigade was ordered into the field. We unslung knapsacks and advanced about half a mile, and were ordered to lie down until we were wanted. We lay there half an hour, the shells and balls whistling over us, when orders came for Second Brigade forward — We advanced about 80 rods and were ordered into a canebrake — the worst place that white men ever saw! Again we were ordered to lie down. Here we were in range of the enemy, and had it not been for the canebrake, our Regiment would have been badly cut up. As

it was, our Regiment got separated, on account of our Colonel not standing up to the rest. He is not the man to hitch to, in a tight place. He gave no more commands through the day. Lieutenant Colonel John Q. Wilds and Major Ed Wright are men that won't flinch in a tight place. They led us through the fight. Our Brigade was then ordered out of the woods to take a Battery. The 24th Regiment was kept in the rear all forenoon, so that when we got out of the woods, the Battery was taken and the Rebs had all left.

"We rested a half hour, and were ordered to follow them, and advanced about a mile, when the Secesh shells began to burst all around us. The Rebels did not come out into the open field — they kept in the woods all day. The 24th was then ordered to support the Peoria Battery; we lay down close to the Battery, but the Rebels got range of us, and the balls were flying thick when General Hovey came and ordered us to change position, or we would get all cut to pieces; so we removed a few rods, and were out of range.

"We lay there a short time and were then ordered to double quick through the fire of the enemy for about 80 rods, and lie down in front of one of our batteries. We got to fire only two rounds, the whole day, as they kept us as support.

"The battle lasted till dark, and our Regiment

lost one killed and ten wounded. The Rebs considered themselves badly whipped and made tracks for their hole in Vicksburg. We had double the force of the enemy — not more than one third of them were on the field".

The Confederates retreated eastward to Port Gibson, where they crossed Bayou Pierre and burned a bridge. This detained the Union forces about eighteen hours, but, said Corporal Allen, "we are again after them with a sharp stick, and shall follow them, until the last Secesh has given himself up, as a prisoner." Port Gibson fell on May 2nd.

"I often thought of home on the first day of May", confessed the soldier, "when the bullets were whistling and the shells bursting and was glad that you did not know where I was, for I know you would have been crazy — But the day is past, and I am safe — I never even thought of being shot, and I can't say I was at all scared. I didn't fire but twice, and then was as cool as if I had been shooting at a mark. It is dark and I must close by wishing you good night, and may God protect and care for you until I return" —

There the record ends. Whether Corporal Allen fought at Champion's Hill on May 16th, where the Twenty-fourth Iowa lost 45 per cent of its men, is not known. Perhaps he won his

promotion to the rank of first sergeant in that terrible battle. Sometime in May or June, during the hard fighting around Vicksburg, he was taken sick and removed to Memphis, Tennessee. From a hospital there, on July 3, 1863, the chaplain wrote to Agnes Allen that her husband was dying. It was his last wish that she should take care of their children and meet him at last in heaven, the home of the good.

The young wife was distracted with grief, but she had her two children to rear, and she could not sit and mourn. Amasa Allen's Uncle "Cha" Lamson assisted her in the sale of property, and build a small brick house, near his own, in Anamosa. There she bravely faced life, doing sewing for others, and making a living as best she could.

The Christianity and patriotism of Amasa O. Allen have served as guiding beacons for the later generations of his family. The daughter Mattie married, but left no children: Charlie married Lillian Wheeler and had two daughters — Mrs. G. Leming of Hampton and Mrs. Ray Baird of Webster City. Two great grandsons, Allen Baird and Alfred Baird, are now in the service of the United States Army — Christian soldiers like their great grandfather.

BESSIE L. LYON

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