

By the Golden Gate

The journey of the Fifty-first Iowa Volunteers from Des Moines to Council Bluffs was a continuous ovation. People in every town through which the three special trains passed turned out en masse to greet the departing soldiers. Wherever the trains stopped the men were showered with cigars, candy, and fruit; while each battalion was entertained at a midday dinner somewhere along the way. The headquarters train, for example, stopped at Stuart, Iowa, where townspeople and countryfolk had united to provide tables heavily laden with chicken, ham, vegetables, fruit, cakes, and coffee for the soldiers.

The Rock Island "special" was the first of the three trains to arrive in Council Bluffs, and fifteen minutes later, at six forty-five, the North Western troop train steamed slowly into the station. Women's organizations of Council Bluffs, the home of Company L, had prepared baskets of sandwiches, fruit, and cake, and an abundance of hot coffee, all arranged for quick distribution. Despite the terrific jam at the station the women succeeded in feeding every one of the visiting soldiers. Meantime the battalion on the Burlington "special" was receiving a similar reception at Red Oak, the home of Company M. By nightfall the three trains were pounding along across the plains of Nebraska.

A wealth of memories cling to that two-thousand-mile trip from Des Moines to San Francisco. The men rather expected that the people of Iowa would be interested in them but the hospitality of people all along the line was a revelation. At Denver, for example, men and women of various patriotic societies had prepared forty-five gallons of coffee, three hundred and fifty sandwiches, and plenty of fruit for the men on the headquarters "special". When the long line of coaches crawled into the station, some two hours late, the women advanced with buckets of coffee and trays of sandwiches. Out of the cars the men tumbled pellmell and lined up alongside the train. When they were told to get tin cups for coffee they broke ranks unceremoniously and rushed back into the Pullmans, some in their haste climbing through the open windows.

While the horses belonging to officers of the regiment were led out of the palace car for exercise, men of the battalion were granted leave to explore the city and some went as far as the capitol. After an enjoyable two-hour stay at Denver the troops again boarded the train and it pulled slowly out of the station headed for Cheyenne through which the other two sections had already passed. The other battalions received as hospitable a reception at Ogden as the men on the headquarters train had experienced at Denver.

The fifth day of travel found the three trains "rolling down from the snowsheds of the Sierras to



COLONEL JOHN C. LOPER

the sunny vales of California''. By Thursday evening, June 9th, the troops had reached Oakland Mole. That night the soldiers slept for the last time in the Pullmans, and noncommissioned officers at first found it a herculean task to prevent groups of men from slipping off to visit the nearby cities.

Early the next morning the Fifty-first detrained in full equipment and marched to the ferry for the six-mile ride across the bay to San Francisco. Great crowds lined the docks to welcome the Hawkeyes to San Francisco, and women of the Red Cross had a hot breakfast ready for the hungry men. As soon as breakfast was finished the regiment was formed and started on its three and a half mile march to Camp Merritt. Crowds lined Market Street and Golden Gate Avenue down which the Iowans proceeded, and the boys from the prairie State were visibly affected by the warmth of their welcome.

Upon his arrival at Camp Merritt, Colonel Loper reported at once to Brigadier General E. S. Otis, then in command. The regiment was assigned quarters in the northwestern part of the camp, and the men fell to work with a will to clear off the ground. Before night the "white tents of the 51st stretched out in regular rows over the shifting sands."

Camp Merritt was located on a bleak waste of land over which raw winds from the Pacific swept unceasingly and clouds of fine sand covered everything — blankets, mess kits, clothing. At night, dismal fogs from the ocean hung low over the camp, and by

morning the canvas tents were dripping wet, while blankets and clothing inside were moist and sodden. Moreover, the site had once been a Chinese burying ground and it was not uncommon for human bones to be revealed. Gales of wind frequently blew up sand storms and threatened to demolish the tents. Californians said that it was the worst weather they had experienced in twenty years.

The men of the Fifty-first hoped to depart for the Philippines at once but in this they were doomed to disappointment. When the regiment left Des Moines a detail of fifteen officers and men remained to secure enlistments to bring the strength of each company up to one hundred and six. In a few days Iowa recruits began to arrive at Camp Merritt, and by the last of June the regiment was filled to the required strength of one thousand three hundred and thirty-eight men, but the necessity of equipping and training these raw troops delayed departure.

On the Fourth of July the Iowans paraded with five thousand other troops over a route about fifteen miles long. The companies were in line from seven o'clock in the morning until two o'clock in the afternoon, and loud were the complaints when the regiment returned to camp and learned that dinner would not be served until half past five. Nor did the memory of cheering thousands along the line of march offset the disappointment of the men when it was learned that no passes would be issued to leave camp that afternoon or evening.

The daily round of company, battalion, and regimental drill continued. The second, third, fourth, and fifth expeditions sailed and still the Iowans remained in camp. The conviction grew that their war experience would be confined "to killing fleas and chasing a jack rabbit of long acquaintance over the hills of the Presidio." Dissatisfaction with the discomforts of Camp Merritt grew, especially as sickness and disease increased among the men of the regiment. The ministrations of various organizations and individuals offset to some extent the hardships of camp life. Then, too, the skill of the Iowans as foragers resulted in the secret acquisition of rugs, carpets, and chairs which helped to make the tents more comfortable habitations.

Agitation for the removal of the troops from fever-infested Camp Merritt continued, however, and the San Francisco newspapers gave aid to the cause. Finally after seven weeks of discomfort, sickness, and deaths the troops were removed to Camp Merriam on the Presidio — the government military reservation overlooking the Golden Gate. The Fifty-first was assigned space on a sloping, grass-covered hillside. Half a mile in front, in plain view of the camp, lay San Francisco Bay, while the hills of Sausalito on one side of the gateway to the Pacific and the frowning fortifications of the coast artillery guarding the harbor entrance, were clearly visible. With the tents floored and mattresses provided for the beds, the health of the Fifty-first began to im-

prove in the new location, but the men still chafed on account of their detention in San Francisco.

On the evening of August 5th, Colonel Loper received a dispatch from Congressman J. A. T. Hull of Iowa, which read, "Your regiment will be sent to Manila without fail". This news caused a noisy demonstration: the band paraded followed by at least two-thirds of the regiment. But the celebration was premature.

On August 11th, the Tennessee, Kansas, and Iowa troops in full marching equipment were reviewed by Major General H. C. Merriam. The review and drill lasted for four hours, and at its conclusion General Merriam announced that the entire brigade would be sent to Manila. Tennessee responded with a rebel yell while both Kansas and Iowa added to the din. The men marched off the field yelling, singing, and carrying their hats aloft on gun barrels. But the enthusiasm was short-lived for the transports in port were filled with other outfits.

After the fall of Manila on August 13th, the Iowans felt that all hope of leaving the United States was gone and dissatisfaction was rife. Then word came from Washington that the Fifty-first would be retained in service and hopes again were raised. During September the burden of drill was rather light and health conditions were good. The men were given as many liberties as were consistent with the general welfare of the camp. Many citizens of San Francisco won an abiding place in the

affections of members of the regiment by entertaining them in their homes. Visits to San Francisco, to the Cliff House, and to the Sutro Baths were favorite excursions.

October was the golden period in the long sojourn of the Fifty-first at San Francisco. Early in the month it was ascertained that the regiment would be sent to the Philippines as soon as transports were available. On the rifle range the team from the Fifty-first defeated the Twenty-third regulars, the Seventh California, and the Kansas and Tennessee regiments of their own brigade. Another victory for the regiment was won by Company M of Red Oak in a competitive drill at Mechanics' Pavilion. The Hawkeyes scored 98 4-5 per cent, and won thereby a silver loving cup for the regiment.

But to every man of the Fifty-first the performance of its football team is a cherished memory. With only ten days of practice the team played a game with the powerful aggregation of Leland Stanford University. Colonel Loper granted the regiment a holiday for the occasion, excusing all but the guard. On October 20th, 1898, eight hundred men of the Fifty-first, accompanied by the band and Colonel Loper and his staff, boarded a special train for Palo Alto. As the train rumbled slowly along through south San Francisco a squad of men kidnapped a brown goat and took it along for a mascot. With the band playing "A Hot Time in the Old Town", "The Girl I Left Behind Me", and other

popular airs, the regiment invaded the Stanford athletic field. To the astonishment of the collegians the soldier boys outplayed them at every stage of the game and when the final whistle blew Iowa had won 6 to 0. That night the soldiers celebrated.

By this time it was definitely learned that the regiment would sail in the near future. Inspections were numerous and frequent examinations were held to eliminate the unfit. On October 29th definite word came assigning the Fifty-first to the transport *Pennsylvania* and designating November 3rd as the date of departure.

On the last day of October the football team of the Fifty-first played the University of California eleven at Berkeley. Again the Iowans demonstrated their superiority in a hard fought battle, and a few minutes before the game ended Captain Richard P. Gaines of the Iowa team scooped up the ball and ran nearly the entire length of the field for a touchdown. But the referee called the play offside and the game ended in a scoreless tie.

The thoughts of all were turned toward preparations for departure. It was a busy time: letters had to be written, baggage had to be packed, and farewells had to be spoken. Now that the time for sailing had arrived there were some regrets at leaving San Francisco, but the appeal of an overseas voyage to the prairie lads was irresistible.

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