

## With the First Iowa Infantry

When the Civil War broke out, Henry O'Connor was a man of forty, already well known in the State of Iowa as a successful lawyer and a popular political orator. He enlisted as a private in Company A of the First Regiment of Iowa Volunteers and served through the three months of active campaigning with that organization in Missouri in the summer of 1861. The letter printed below was written by O'Connor and first appeared in the *Muscatine Weekly Journal* for August 2, 1861. Later it was reprinted in a brief history of the regiment written by O'Connor and published in 1862.

On August 10, 1861, the First Iowa distinguished itself in the battle of Wilson's Creek. Soon thereafter, the three months enlistment period having expired, the regiment was mustered out. Most of the men re-enlisted in other organizations, O'Connor later attaining the grade of major in the Thirty-fifth Iowa Infantry. He resumed his law practice after the war and from 1867 to 1872 he served as Attorney General of the State.—THE EDITOR.

Camp Seigel[Sigel], Green County, Mo.

Ten miles N. W. of Springfield, July 16, 1861.

Friend Mahin: — I am so much of a stranger to the



*Journal* of late, that I scarcely know how to approach it. I am, as you see, very particular in dating my letter, not that there will be anything new to you in what I have to say, but that such of your readers as feel interested in the doings and misdoings of the First Iowa Regiment, may take map in hand and follow us through our long and somewhat tedious march; and perhaps some of them may wish to preserve it. I can vouch for its accuracy — elegance of style of course you cannot expect, when you consider that I am sitting *tailor fashion*, with the tail-board of a wagon across my knees for a writing desk, in a noisy camp of six thousand men, and over two thousand horses and mules — drums beating, fifes squealing, mules braying, horses neighing, men swearing, singing, and doing everything but praying.

We are now encamped near the summit of the Ozark mountains in a beautiful region, and what is still better, surrounded by a warm-hearted, Union-loving people, who are ready and willing to make any sacrifice for our beloved country. The soil is rich but full of lime-stones, which show themselves on the surface of the ground about as thick as onions in Scott county, to the great annoyance of plowmen, and the especial annoyance of us poor devils who have to sleep on them every night. However, I must not get in advance of my story.

We left Keokuk, June 13th, thence to Hannibal by boat, next moving by rail to Macon City, thence to Renick by rail, 30 miles, where we remained one



night, and commenced our march to Boonville. This is the point at which some unfriendly correspondent of the *Gate City* says we took to the woods and got cut off, a statement no less injudicious than erroneous, as I have no doubt it caused many a tear to be shed about our hearth-stones at home. We made the march to Boonville, 58 miles, in two days and three hours, on three meals, and that it was a good one we need no better evidence than Gen. Lyon's expression to Col. Bates, that he knew of no better march even by old regular soldiers. We staid in Camp Cameron at Boonville till the morning of the 3d of July, when, as a part of General Lyon's command, we started on our march for south-western Missouri, to any point where we could lay our hands on the traitor Jackson. We made what is usually denominated forced marches, twenty-four miles a day, except one day, when it poured down a drenching rain on us, we marched 18 miles — the Iowa boys at the head of the column, with mud and water running off them in the shape of a mixture of rain and sweat — company A in the van singing national airs, under the lead of that little nightingale from your office, Emerson Upham, who, by the way, has shown himself to be one of the toughest and best soldiers in the regiment. When we had marched eighteen miles and left the two Missouri regiments forty-five minutes behind, and their men dropping by the road-side by the score, the surgeon of Col. Boernstein's regiment rode in a gallop to the head of the column, and



told the General that unless he halted the column he would kill all the Missouri men. We halted right in the rain. The rain held up in an hour or two; we built a fire, dried our clothes on us, (the best way always to save taking cold,) got our supper of some healthy crackers and good coffee, run round like antelopes, and in the evening to the surprise of every one, and to the terror of the St. Louis boys, we had a skirmish drill. I believe it was at this point that Gen. Lyon, who first called us Gipsies because of our ragged and dirty appearance, christened us the "Iowa Grey Hounds."

At Grand River, in Henry county, we came up with Col. Sturgis' command, consisting of two volunteer regiments from Kansas, five hundred regulars, and four pieces of artillery, which, joined to our force of twenty-five hundred troops, put Gen. Lyon at the head of a column of six thousand, with ten pieces of artillery. Crossing Grand river with such a force of men, wagons and horses on a rickety old ferry boat, was, as you can perceive, a tedious process. It was prosecuted night and day, and the whole column taken over without a single accident to man or beast. We marched from there to the Osage river, at a point ten miles southwest of Osceola. Here, again, we had to go through the disagreeable process of crossing the troops on about the meanest thing in the shape of a ferry boat that I ever saw. But Gen. Lyon was there, and the thing had to go ahead.



Just before starting over the river in the evening, some Union men came into camp and gave information to the General of about eight hundred secessionists being encamped at a point about twelve miles off. Colonel Bates was ordered to detail from his regiment a sufficient force to take them or break them up. Five companies — A, C, D, F and K — were accordingly detailed for that purpose, and got all ready to start, under command of Major Porter, silently, as soon as it was dark; when suddenly, and to the great disappointment of the boys, the order was countermanded. It appeared that a messenger had just arrived from Springfield with the intelligence that Col. Seigel's [Sigel's] command, of about fifteen hundred, were in Springfield surrounded by about eight thousand secessionists, under the lead of Claib Jackson nominally, but Ben. McCulloch really, for Jackson is not fit to lead a blind horse to water. He is a coward as well as a traitor. This news, of course, stirred up the old General, who seemed to feel sure of his game this time, having missed Jackson at Boonville.

We went on with the crossing, and got our regiment over by four o'clock in the morning; no sleep, with orders to march at five; made fires, hurried up our breakfast, swallowed it and started at quarter past five. This was our great march, kept up through a hot sun until three o'clock. We camped, got supper, and at half-past 5, when we were thinking of fixing our beds, the General's bugle sounded a



forward march. Off we started, and after measuring off forty-five miles in twenty-two hours — recollect with the loss of two nights' sleep, and only three hours' rest — we fetched up in a cornfield, on the bank of a pretty stream; corn reeking with heavy dew, ground muddy from recent rains, men shivering, sleepy and hungry. We were ordered to get our breakfasts, what sleep we could, and be ready to march in two hours. Springfield, still thirty-five miles off, must be reached to-night. Of course, in this long march a great many fell back exhausted, but most of our regiment came up within an hour. Many dropped down in the wet and mud and went to sleep; some went to making a fire and stirring round to prevent chilling — myself among the latter. In a little over three hours we had got breakfast, sleep, rest, &c., &c., and were again on our weary, swinging march, but with many sore feet. We thought of nothing, however, but coming up with Jackson, when lo! after we had gone about five miles, the General received the news of Jackson's defeat by Seigel [Sigel], and his subsequent hasty flight. Of course this rendered any more forced marching unnecessary; so after marching a few miles further to a good creek, we encamped for the day, cooked, slept, washed ourselves, our shirts, &c. Next day, Saturday, we marched to this place, where we have rested ever since.

We spend our time very pleasantly. The intervals between drill and parade are spent in looking up



some delicacy in the way of bread, butter, chickens, &c. A good many wagons come into camp with those things, and those of the boys who have not gambled off their money have a little left.

I have given you a rough but faithful sketch of our soldiering for the last four or five weeks. How do you like it? It is better to read of, than to be a part of. Like others, perhaps, you will be astonished to hear that your correspondent stood the march all through without giving out or resorting to the wagons. Pretty fair for a soldier weighing only one hundred pounds. Our officers had not a much better time than the men. Capt. Cummins is a perfect horse to march. It is rumored that he is going to Washington with a view of a commission in the regular army; or, failing in that, to get a company accepted, and then come home and raise it.

George Satterlee is acting Quartermaster, and on that account is very little with the company. He is unusually popular with the regiment, and his business knowledge and habits fit him admirably for the place.

Ben. Beach is, and always has been, a favorite with the company. Always at his place, wherever that is, impartial, modest and kind-hearted, he is seen and felt, but not often heard. He desires to raise a company and stay in the army, if he has a chance. I predict that he will make his mark as a soldier.

Col. Bates has gained very much in favor with his men during this march. He evinced an anxiety for



the comfort of his men which endeared him to them, and he assumes a respectful independence in the presence of his superiors which the citizen-soldier likes to see.

Col. Merritt and Major Porter have always been personally popular with the regiment. We have had none of those disgusting scenes of *whipping, bucking, gagging, &c.*, in our regiment, but we have seen too much of it in the others while at Boonville and here, amongst regulars and volunteers. A great deal of it in the St. Louis regiment. In the first Kansas regiment a young man named Cole was shot on dress parade, for killing a fellow soldier. Four balls entered his body, and one his neck. He died instantly.

In a wayside grocery and gambling shop near the Osage river, two soldiers belonging to the regulars were murdered. The grocery and house were burned by order of the General, and the grocery keeper, who proved to be the murderer of at least one of the men, was taken, tried before the general, convicted, sentenced to be hanged, and is now under guard awaiting execution as soon as the General shall order. He deserves his fate richly. He is an old offender. These are incidents of news.

I had almost forgotten to say a word about Gen. Lyon. A man rather below the middle stature, with no surplus flesh, red hair and whiskers, fast ripening to grey, small blue eye, vigor, energy, fearlessness, and a dogged determination to accomplish his purpose at all hazards, are the prominent traits of his



character. Finish the picture yourself — I must close to get this to Springfield.

We expect to be home about the 20th or 25th of August, and will be glad to see the people whether they will to see us or not.

H.