

Collecting the Soldier Vote

In the fall of 1862, I was appointed by Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood one of the Commissioners of the State of Iowa to take the vote of her soldiers in the field. I was assigned to take the vote of the Twenty-second Regiment of the Iowa Infantry wherever I found them. The vote of the soldiers in the field was to be taken on the same date as the home election in October. I found my regiment near Rolla, in central Missouri. The election was a quiet one, the vote strongly Republican. In due time I delivered the result of the election to the Secretary of State at Des Moines.

In the fall of 1863, I was reappointed to take the vote of the same regiment. The Twenty-second Regiment was comprised largely of men from our own county of Johnson. In October, 1863, I found our regiment some two hundred miles west of New Orleans, in southern Louisiana, a long and tiresome trip by rail and water — rail to Cairo, government transports from Cairo to New Orleans, rail from New Orleans to Brashear City, now Morgan City, thence by steamer to New Iberia.

Our regiment formed a part of the Thirteenth

Army Corps, then stationed in southern Louisiana. General Nathaniel P. Banks, who was then in command of the Union forces in that district, went with us to the Teche country and we overtook the Thirteenth Corps near New Iberia late in the afternoon of the second day out from New Orleans. The next day after reaching New Iberia, we marched all day up the Teche towards Martinsville and camped at nightfall near a field of sweet potatoes. There were only a few cabins or small houses in the neighborhood. Our soldier boys digging the potatoes with their bayonets, using the rail fences for their fires, appropriating all the pigs and chickens in sight to their own use, seemed to enjoy their feast hugely. Early the next morning we took road again, had a skirmish with the rebels at a crossing of the Teche, captured one bushwhacker, and came into camp early in the afternoon. Our Twenty-second took possession of rebel ex-Governor Mouton's plantation, in sight of the church steeples of Vermilionville. Mouton is a French name which means *sheep*. The Twenty-second took charge of Governor Mouton's sugar and corn mill and ground corn for our regiment and for the Thirteenth Corps as well.

After two or three days spent in reviews and inspection, General Banks returned to New Or-

leans. I was in camp here for nearly two weeks. When the proper day came, I took the vote, and soon after was notified by General E. O. C. Ord that a lot of prisoners under guard were to be sent to New Orleans and that it would be a good opportunity for the Iowa Commissioners to take the back track, as the army was soon to move north following the retreating rebel army. We took his advice and left. Secretary Stanton had issued orders directing quartermasters to furnish us transportation and a suitable guard. All government officials were directed to aid us and facilitate our mission in every possible way. The Commissioners each had a copy of this order, and when presented to an army officer, it commanded respect and prompt action.

We left camp early in the morning and marched all day, or at least the prisoners and a portion of the guard marched. The Commissioners and rebel officers were provided with ambulances. The officer in command of the guard and his aides were on horseback. Late in the evening we reached an old camp near New Iberia. Our prisoners numbered about eighty. One, General John G. Pratt, an old man, was a native of Saybrook, Connecticut. He had gone south many years before, married a woman who had a large plantation and a good supply of woolly heads, commonly called

slaves. General Pratt belonged to the same family as Captain Pratt, with whom my father sailed a hundred years ago. Another noted prisoner was Albert Voorhees, a cousin of Dan Voorhees, a statesman of Indiana. He had been the rebel Attorney-General of Louisiana.

The same night, near midnight, I took a steamer on Bayou Teche reaching Brashear City the next night at midnight. We showed Stanton's order, and the official hustled out three or four freight cars and a sickly engine to haul us. Our palace cars had no seats except one long bench, no back. As I had not slept for thirty-six hours, I was sick and very weak. I had about five thousand dollars in my old satchel belonging to our soldiers to be brought home and delivered to their families. I had on my overcoat, wrapped my shawl about me, laid the satchel on the car floor, laid myself down on the floor, using the satchel for a pillow, and slept soundly all night. Being surrounded by a crowd all the time, and of all sorts of people, I ran a great risk and I would not like to repeat it. I was careful not to reveal my fix, not even to any of the Iowa Commissioners.

We crossed over the big river to New Orleans, went to the City Hotel where I have often stopped since, took breakfast and went to bed. But I had slept only an hour or two when word came that a

government transport was just ready to start up the river — all aboard — so we started for Cairo on a Sunday morning. The deck of the transport was packed almost like sardines with sick and wounded soldiers, many deaths. It was a common thing to hear a soldier say, "Well, poor Tom played out last night". If not Tom it was Jake or Mose or Jim; a sad sight and an unpleasant trip. From what I saw and heard during this trip, I came to the conclusion that there is little sunshine in war.

I reached home after a fatiguing trip of six weeks via river and rail. Resting a few days, I went to Des Moines and delivered the ballots to the Secretary of State. The soldiers this time gave an almost unanimous vote for the Republican ticket.

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