

NARRATIVE  
OF A  
PRIVATE SOLDIER

IN THE  
Volunteer Army of the United States,

DURING A PORTION OF THE PERIOD COVERED BY THE GREAT WAR

OF THE REBELLION OF 1861

BY

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## PREFACE.

In writing the following narrative of my experiences during the troublous period embracing the years 1861 to 1864 I disclaim any intention of setting myself up as a historian.

The sphere in which I moved was not at any time so elevated as to enable me to form views of men and things of so extended a character as that they could have any general bearing or interest. It is extremely seldom that a person in the ranks of an army or in the mass of a political machine becomes acquainted with the springs of a movement until its object has been accomplished or defeated. As for the army movements by Geographical Divisions, momentous crises in Congress, the probable effect of defeat in the field upon the finances of the country, and the like, we never discussed nor, for my part, thought of them. So that if any one chance in the future to pick up this

book in anticipation of receiving any valuable or important information from it having any bearing on either of these great questions he may in all probability be disappointed. That the regular historian will have to deal with those matters I have no doubt. In my narrative it will be found that I seldom travel very far beyond my actual and personal experience, it is my object to keep within the line strictly, and if now, after having made my disclaimer, I am asked for my object in writing the book at all, I will be compelled to admit that I can give none that is to my mind a useful or practical one. It may, indeed, turn out that my story will partially corroborate some one who may hereafter venture an extended opinion as to the general character of the experiences of the private soldiers in our Civil War; it may be of some interest to the children of those who took part in the struggle, in showing the facts as they were, stripped of the inevitable romance with which such narratives have been clothed by writers who have shown a lack of power to resist the temptation. Whether or no, one thing occurs to me, and that is this, if my ac-

count is preserved until he is grown, my son will not be confined to mere tradition for his information, as is the fact with the children of so many soldiers of former wars, and as will no doubt be the case with those of many of my comrades as well.

*CHARLES LEWIS FRANCIS.*

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#### CHAPTER I.

FROM THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR UNTIL ABOUT JUNE, 1862, AND WHILE, ALTHOUGH I WAS NOT YET A SOLDIER, I WAS MUCH WITH THE ARMY, AND IN THE FIELD.

1. WHEN the war broke out, say in the month of April, 1861, I was residing with my uncle in Baltimore and Washington; that is to say, business was done in the former city, while the residence was at the capital. On the 19th of that month occurred the bloody riot in Baltimore, during which six or seven men of the Sixth Regiment of Massachusetts Infantry were killed or wounded. The next two days (Saturday and Sunday) were days of terror. No one knew what was to come next. Regiments were hastily formed out of workmen from the various shops. "Ross Winan Guards" was the name of a battalion formed by the enlistment of men in the employ of the great inventor. That, and other regiments and companies paraded the streets in hastily manufactured uniforms of various colors and materials, and armed with a great variety of weapons.

On Friday night a company of the 6th Maryland State Guard proceeded to the President street depot, and after compelling the men of an unarmed regiment (the Twenty-sixth Pennsylvania, Colonel Stone) to retrace their steps to Philadelphia, the soldiers of the Sixth Maryland Guard, accompanied by a large but well organized mob, proceeded to the Gunpowder river, where they set fire to and destroyed a railroad bridge, and I believe they also at the same time scuttled and sunk the great railroad ferry-boat "Maryland," on the Susquehanna river at Havre-de-Grace. Besides this, all communication by telegraph between the city and the outside world was cut off, excepting a line to Harper's Ferry, but that wire was kept open solely in the interest of those whose sympathies were against the Federal Government and in favor of the Southern people. Saturday the city was altogether in the hands of the mob. Stores, especially such as contained arms and those holding provisions, were broken open and ruthlessly rifled of their contents. All kinds and descriptions were seized in the general levy. It was not unusual to meet a band of rag-buffins armed with single and double-barrelled shot-guns, rifles, long and short, and a variety of swords, sabres, and cutlasses all in one company. Few persons slept that night. Owners of houses, stocks of goods, jewellers, bankers, and all were alike in great fear for the safety of the valuables they were possessed of or had under their control. Sunday morning broke into a beautiful spring day. The sun shone warm and genial. Still there was no abatement of the excitement. The church bells rang incessantly, but

not for the purpose of calling worshippers. All stated Divine services were suspended, and the wild clanging of the bells were but signals for all persons capable of bearing arms to assemble at the various places of rendezvous, and there be sworn in and armed as citizen soldiery. One Kane—he was styled "Marshal Kane"—seemed to me to be in the chief control, and, when I went to the police station, or other public building on Holiday street, I think, he was actively engaged in superintending the mustering of men and the issuing of arms to them afterward. All the forenoon the city was rife with rumors. "Troops from the hated North were at Cockeyville," a town on the Central Railroad; "Regulars were advancing from Carlisle"; "The Yankees of the city were secretly congregating among the hills and valleys of Druid Hill Park," near the town, and all sorts of such exciting rumors were mouthed around by one crowd to another. About noon more soldiers came. These were from the adjacent counties and composed of the ancient militia, rejuvenated in flesh, but not at all in make-up or appearance. They were, each company, dressed in different costumes, but all held close on to the original continental style, and I would not demand much for venturing the assertion that many of the uniforms worn had been preserved from that period. It was said that the Governor had secreted his person, and therein he acted the part of prudence if he was in the city at all. One crowd were very desirous of hanging him for a "Union man"; another wanted him to issue a proclamation calling the militia into active service to "protect the soil of Maryland

from the Northern invader," while still another motley gang, composed of the "Anne Arundel Militia," went to the Fountain Hotel, where the State Executive was supposed to be in hiding, and there clamored with drunken vehemence for authority to go and demand the evacuation by the United States forces of the neighboring Fort McHenry. Not succeeding in getting any such authority, the gallant troopers proceeded to the Entaw House, and from thence, having first got more gloriously drunk, they went on their self-imposed mission without a mandate. The expedition ended in a disgraceful retreat or a ludicrous farce—I do not know how to properly designate it. I saw the best of it, and have attempted to describe it in another place.

2. On Monday the city was calm. The hot blood had run itself down. Orders had been sent to the North from Washington, the country at large had got over the first scare, and in a day or two after, an Ohio regiment of infantry and some regular troops entered the city, partially in secret, but with loaded cannons and muskets and fixed bayonets—indeed, in full fighting trim. They marched down from the Central Railroad depot to the Washington depot on Camden street. It was an impressive sight. Dread determination was on each and every man's face. There were closed ranks and generally true soldierly bearing and carriage. Every eye was fixed. Not a smiling countenance nor an answering cheer from the populace greeted them, and no handkerchiefs of fair ladies waved in welcome. The crowds on the sidewalks were dense, and kept a sullen silence. The silence was al-

most painful. I remember that I heard the ominous, heavy, regular tread of the soldiers as they marched to the defiant rolling of the drums. There was no music save that, and, if it may be so called, an occasional dramatic blast of the bugle as changes in the direction of the column were announced. Then indeed the people began to breathe freer. The city had been controlled, troops had safely passed through, and the "secessionists" and their allies, the mob, had alike been awed into submission. The first regiment of loyal troops that I saw venture on the bloody route of the Sixth Massachusetts was, I think, from Vermont or Maine. They were uniformly tall, full-bearded, healthy looking men, and a jauntily attired vivandiere was with them. They did not ride in the cars from the President street depot to the Camden depot, as the gallant Sixth attempted, but, having formed near the depot, with loaded muskets and fixed bayonets, they wisely marched along Pratt street through the great crowds to the cars. Soon after that New York city sent some regiments, composed in part of what were then called roughs. They were firemen and of that class. It was expected by the Southerners that these troops would fraternize with them, but they did not, and that was the last of Baltimore's prospects of ruin. She settled down to terrible hard times and the mortification of seeing United States engineers surveying old Federal Hill, as a preliminary to the erection of a strong fort right in the city itself.

3. Early in May I left Baltimore entirely, and remained in Washington and its neighborhood. Until July my time was divided between visiting camps and

forts, attending the sessions of Congress, and generally, in taking in the events occurring around and about me. The battle of Bull Run was fought, and I witnessed the wonderful extremes. A few days before, and I saw the fine looking troops from the North; they were well fed, well dressed, full of fight, and they moved from the various camps in the city, over the Long Bridge and on to Arlington Heights, in time with the music of many gorgeously uniformed and well appointed bands. With virgin banners flying, and speeches from the President and the eminent Senators and Representatives from their several States, the various regiments and brigades marched gayly on to finish the war in sixty days! I saw the retreat, and when the troops filed into the city I mingled my feelings with those who feared that the existence of the nation was in its greatest peril. To render it worse, that direful day was dark and gloomy, and it rained in torrents. The returning soldiers were dirty, and begrimed with the historic clay of Virginia; some were shoeless, many hatless—all minus something, and but very few with any but drooping and dejected spirits. All was hurry-scurry, and to all appearances without any definite aim other than that of arriving at comfortable camping grounds. Then we were afraid that the rebels would follow up their victory and enter Washington. It was said by many that the Government were wholly prepared to flee, that the President had gone, and it was fully a week before the people were reassured of their immediate safety. The best conditioned of our troops had been left on the southern side of the Potomac, but what

did we know of that? Besides, our Provost Marshal's office had not yet been completely organized, our spies were not so diligent or numerous as those on the other side, and the city contained within its limits a vast number of those who thought the enemy would very soon be at our doors, and with whom a wish was father to the thought. However, the feeling of despair in time gave way to that of hope and confidence, General McDowell was superseded, and by and by General McClellan, the "great soldier," the "young Napoleon," the "savior of his country," took command of our armies. Troops poured into the city by thousands; daily and hourly; fortifications rose as if by magic, and upon all the hills around the city were bristling cannon, while at the feet of those hills and all around them was a vast camp of armed men. From the Insane Asylum beyond the eastern branch of the Potomac river to Fognalytown on the Rockville Pike road, and around in a circle, were camps of infantry, cavalry, and batteries of artillery.

4. After General McClellan assumed command, and had reorganized the army, there was a grand review of the troops held at Ball's Cross Roads. In order to get there we first had to procure a formidable pass from the Headquarters of the Army, and this pass was made no less formidable by the oath attached to it than by the terrible looking signature placed at the bottom. It was that of "Drake De Kay," who was an aide-de-camp at headquarters. I am sorry I have lost that pass, because it would now be a real curiosity, and I would have liked very much to have been able to give a copy of it in this place. However, armed

with this formidable pass, I went with the rest of the sightseers, crossed the river at Georgetown, thence to Munson's Hill in Virginia, where our people had a signal station communicating with another situated on the top of the dome of the Capitol. From there we went to Ball's Cross Roads, but I saw no Ball's or other notable crossroads. I simply saw from a favorable position immense masses of troops of all arms: long lines of infantry, now in echelon, now in masses, and again formed into line of battle extending for miles, and at times two or three lines deep. Squadrons and regiments of cavalry galloped through openings in the woods, crossed the depressions, and quickly disappeared in other openings in the forests; then whole parks of artillery dashed into the fields, and in and out and through the woods, meanwhile performing the most intricate and mysterious of manœuvres. One time I thought that the hill we were standing upon was to be carried by storm, but a division of New York troopers flanked us and passed on. It was an awfully grand sight, and fascinated me; I could not help fixing my gaze upon the scene before and on both sides of me. There was everything of real battle except smoke, noise, and suffering. The generals and their staff officers were gayly dressed, and the horses they rode reared and pranced as if they were conscious of the fact that the eyes of the civilized world were upon them, and that the great majority of men trusted and expected that their riders would be carried upon their backs to victory and triumph. It was a beautiful day, clear and cold, and the sun shining upon the well burnished arms and accoutrements of

the men, withal, made a picture with which the finest I ever saw on canvas was not to be compared for beauty. I saw the youthful commander twice on that day. He was surrounded by a hundred staff officers, while scores more were flying hither and thither with orders to the different division commanders. His escort consisted of about five hundred picked troopers, and this body guard prevented us from getting too near their chief. He himself stood up with a glass almost continually at his eye, and, if he thought of making a striking picture of himself, I must say that he succeeded in impressing me by his attitude and reminding me of a famous picture of his alleged prototype.

5. It might have been a little before that that I went with some couriers who delivered at Poolesville certain despatches for General Stone. It was rather late one afternoon that we left Washington by the Rockville road, and it was almost dark when we galloped through Rockville, the county seat of Montgomery county, Maryland. The town bore an appearance of old age and decrepitude, and there were no attractions for us to stop, even if our orders had not been imperative not to do so. Later, we arrived at Muddy Branch, or Darnstown. Darnstown was no town at all at that time, but I remember that Muddy Branch was very muddy. There were only two or three houses in the town, but they were "on the Pike," and there was a cross-road leading to a ferry on the Potomac river a few miles to the south. There were ten or twelve regiments of infantry encamped thereabouts, and shortly after our arrival nearly all of them took up the line of

march for Poolesville, a few miles further on. It was late fall or early winter, and the night was very cold. About midnight we arrived at Poolesville, and the General received his despatches. We did not know, at least I did not know, the contents of our papers, but early that morning Colonel Baker, of the First California regiment, was across the Potomac river, and the battle of Ball's Bluff was fought and lost. I went over after the battle, and penetrated nearly to Leesburg. I was, at times, inside the enemy's lines, but did not know that until I had got out again. That was the first time that I had actually seen men killed and wounded on a battlefield, and, it may seem strange, but I do not remember that I experienced the peculiar feelings to be expected. It was not until Winchester that I did so. But of that as I get on with my story. Soon after the repulse and defeat the body of Colonel Baker was recovered, and I returned to Washington with its escort, having been absent about three days. There was deep feeling manifested upon the death of Colonel Baker. He was extremely well liked by the men under him, and their lamentations were loud. Although this regiment was called the "First California," it is not to be concluded therefrom that it was composed of Californians. It was not so to any great extent. Colonel Baker had been a Senator from Oregon, or California, I forget which, and I believe represented one or the other in the Senate of the United States at the outbreak of the war. I saw the regiment when it was being organized. It was encamped on the Bladensburg road, just outside of the corporate limits of Washington. Its organization

was different from that of most other regiments in this, that there were seventeen or eighteen companies, four of which at least had been recruited in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and more in various other cities in unequal proportions—this I know, because I witnessed scenes of emulation, to designate it lightly, between the men of different States. Besides this regiment, he had several others at Ball's Bluff. There were, I think, the Nineteenth and Twentieth Massachusetts, and I have an impression that I recognized the Fifteenth regiment from the same State. Colonel Baker was an Englishman by birth, but had been brought to this country at a very early age. In person and appearance he was large and heavy; he had a full face, florid complexion, and he wore a full beard and whiskers, with these he had a kind, benevolent, and fatherly expression of countenance. It was generally remarked that he was *too good* a man to be recklessly exposed to danger, and there was manifested a strong disposition toward having an investigation to ascertain whether the Colonel's next superior officer was not to be blamed for the disaster.

6. Again I went on an expedition to Virginia with a column of troops. We did not know where we were going to nor what we were going for, but at a miserable place called Drainsville, it was a question whether, in the skirmish that took place, we got beaten or were victorious. At any rate we came back without having accomplished any specific object that I know of. I believe this was undertaken by the troops of General McCall's Pennsylvania Reserve Corps. During the rest of the winter of 1861-2, I was engaged in

going from camp to camp, and in the habit of staying away from home for days and weeks together. Of course it was very wrong and all that, and I invariably got lectured upon my return, but after all, I had many interesting experiences during that time, and besides, amid such scenes it would be hard to attempt to control a youth of eighteen, especially as a wide and treacherous ocean existed between him and direct parental authority. So I had very much my own way. I encamped at Tennytown—a little beyond Georgetown—with the celebrated "Buck Tails" of Pennsylvania, and made many acquaintances among the men of the various regiments. I was in a position to return services for entertainment, because, military discipline being rigidly enforced, few of the officers or men were allowed to go beyond the grand lines of their respective brigades or divisions, whereas, I was not so amenable to arbitrary orders, and could go and return nearly as it suited me, and thus I was enabled to perform many little commissions for those with whom I associated. There were four or five regiments in the brigade of "Buck Tails," and these, with several others, and a battery, commanded, if I remember well, by a Captain McClure, formed what was known as the "Pennsylvania Reserve Corps." The whole was commanded by General McCall. I became very intimate with several men in the Forty-sixth Pennsylvania regiment. Indeed, I think it was that regiment that had whole companies of Welshmen in it. One of the men of this regiment was sadly homesick, and, as he had a sister who was a domestic in the family of Galusha A. Grow, the then Speaker of the House of

Representatives, I was duly commissioned to interview her and lay his case before her in such a way as that she should duly communicate the same to her august employer, for relief. Whether my mission or her labors were ever successful I never learned, but I do know that when I reached home and told where I had been, I received the severest correction short of a thrashing I had ever had, from my aristocratic great aunt for communing with a "servant." It was very shocking to her when she saw how quickly I had blossomed into so democratic a flower. Dear, high-minded old aunt! If she had but recalled history then, or was alive now to know as much as we do about the inside springs that move great men, she would have realized that "servants" had before controlled, did then, and no doubt would thereafter wield no small influence in shaping the policies of those whom they serve—all the way between presenting a good or bad dinner, guarding secrets well, and the other extreme, allowing themselves to be courted by newspaper correspondents or other—spies. But that is not a narrative, and ought, if printed at all, to be placed in parentheses, and it would have been, if I had not been advised by very respectable authority to entirely discard the use of them in the kind of writing described in my title-page. I visited the camps and fortifications on both sides of the river. I was very much interested in the organization of the Sixth (or Fifth) United States Cavalry. The regiment was encamped on the great plain east of the capitol and not far from the Congressional burying ground. General Hunter was the Colonel and General Emory