

CHAPTER VI.

COVERS THE TIME DURING WHICH I REMAINED AT THE POST OF BENTON BARRACKS, NEAR ST. LOUIS, MO., AND EMBRACES FROM APRIL 10, 1863, TO DECEMBER 29, 1863, THE LATEST DATE BEING THAT OF MY DISCHARGE FROM THE SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES AS PRIVATE OF COMPANY "B" EIGHTY-EIGHTH REGIMENT OF INFANTRY ILLINOIS VOLUNTEERS.

1. At the first thought I concluded that an account of my life at Benton Barracks would necessarily include a lengthy dissertation upon the "technique" of army life—the peculiar arrangements existing there, treating of the various officers and their separate duties, and methods of performing them; but I have since amended my plan so that I will only give in this place a general account of my experiences at the post, and when I am bound to mention anything beyond the legitimate limits of such a project I will endeavor to be as brief as possible. My nominal office, as I have already stated at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, was that of "Post Bugler," but upon

the day of my arrival I was set to work in the office of the Post Adjutant, and assisted in the preparation and making out of what was called a "Tri-Monthly Post Return." That document comprised an official statistical account and history of the post for the previous ten days; the number of officers and men, their several names, ranks, companies, and regiments, and the nature of the details of those who were on special duty; also the names, rank, and regiment of all who had died or been transferred during that period; and much other information prescribed by the rules of the Adjutant General's Office. I was not long in becoming familiar with the requirements of that branch of the business, but I was altogether relieved of it within a few days, and installed at a separate desk, having in my charge the issue of passes to go in or out of the camp lines. I soon began to recruit my health, and in about a month I had procured a small sharp-tongued bugle, and one morning I surprised the Post Band by sounding the "first call," with a number of variations possible on that instrument. The post of Benton Barracks was situated on what was called Grand Avenue, and included the Fair Grounds belonging to the Agricultural Society of St. Louis and a large tract of land adjoining on the west. The whole of the Fair Grounds, with the numerous buildings, large and small, belonging to it, were monopolized, and used as a sort of General Hospital. This General Hospital was almost entirely independent of the post, and was carried on under the direction of Surgeon Ira Russell, U. S. V. Colonel B. L. R. Bonneville was, as I have said, our post commander.

He was a short, fat old gentleman of French-Canadian extraction. He had been in the military service of the United States for forty or fifty years, and had already been retired, and was now restored to the active list, and doing duty as Chief Commissary of Musters for the Department of the Missouri besides being Commander of the post. The Colonel had seen service in all of the various wars the country had been engaged in during the many years of his career, but what he appeared to be most particularly proud of was the fact that when comparatively a youth, and only a Captain in the army, he had explored the Rocky mountains and gone through ever so many adventures and hair-breadth escapes, and had been given up as lost for a time; his account of which had been edited or written by no less a personage in literature than Washington Irving. I saw the book. It was about the size of this of mine; and although it would be presumptuous in me to criticise so august a writer, still I cannot forbear saying that I have seen many works of the Prince of American authors in which he displayed his genius to a degree immeasurably beyond that which he appears to have employed in editing or writing the Colonel's narrative. The Post Commander had for his Acting Assistant Adjutant General a handsome, dashing, and young Lieutenant, A. J. Newby, who belonged to some Iowa regiment. Lieutenant Newby not only had a handsome face and a fine carriage to recommend him, but he was besides a very good, kind, and gentlemanly officer. Above all he was a master of the "Spencerian" system of hand-writing, and his penmanship was as handsome

as his face. His signature was a model for all to copy. Our Post Adjutant, however, sadly interfered with Lieutenant Newby's designs, if he had any, on the affections of the Post Commandant's pretty niece. Lieutenant N. Brosseau was from Kankakee, Illinois, and was not only of the same extraction as the Colonel, but he was withal a handsome, modest young fellow, and, what capped his qualifications, he was a devout Roman Catholic in religion; so that, no matter how often the lady went out riding under the escort of the ponderous Acting Assistant Adjutant General, it was Lieutenant Brosseau who invariably got the honor of gallanting her to and from church. Iowa men, or men belonging to regiments from that State, were in the great majority around Headquarters. In the Post Adjutant's office besides myself was ——— McHenry, a little red-complexioned, abridged up old man from the north of Ireland. Mac was a patient, reliable, and steady man with his figures and pen, and lived entirely contented if he had the uninterrupted enjoyment of two privileges, as he was pleased to term them. The first was immunity from "botheration" when at work at his "reports," and the second was the exercise of unrestrained liberty in the queer notions he had of the laws of health. He would rather pay twenty-five cents at any time than indulge in a "square meal," being content with bread and water, provided the former contained a proper proportion of phosphorus or other alleged brain food; and he liked to sit under the flow of a water pipe and allow the cold fluid to run down his naked back for an hour at a time. The post headquarters

itself was a large, substantial mansion, situated in the centre of the parade ground, and the Post Adjutant's office was in a building of more modest pretensions near by. Next door to our office, but in the same building, was the U. S. Military Telegraph Office, and that was presided over by Mr. and Mrs. Marean. They were a childless couple, she fat, curly-headed, and jolly, he thin and straight-faced. The headquarters men used to make of the telegraph office a sort of rendezvous; that is, such of them as were specially musically inclined. There were in it guitars, flutes, and I believe a piano, and we always got the air of the latest patriotic song or hymn for the first time at Marean's. In the main building there were Captain Guerin, a citizen, Chief Clerk to the Commissary of Musters, and Jones, Windsor, and Wadsworth, clerks. The latter had also the duties of Postmaster added to his share. Amos M. Currier was on the other side of the hall, as Chief Clerk to the A. A. A. General. A. M. Currier was a nice little, intellectual looking man, and as honest and kind as his appearance betokened him. He wore long silky brown whiskers and full beard and moustache, and on the whole was such a person as goody-goody boys like to have for a school-master. There were some other clerks there—a Zach King and a King No. 2, but I have forgotten the names of the rest. They were all men of Iowa regiments, and Mount Pleasant, McGregor's Landing, Washington, or Des Moines, Iowa, invariably marked the letters they received. My duty was now confined to the issuing of passes not only to officers and men who desired to leave the camp for business or pleasure,

but also to such other persons (civilians) whose business or curiosity required that they should come into or go out of the lines of the post. Most of the latter were male and female peddlers of fruit, fancy goods, etc.

2. As the fine weather came on I found my situation quite comfortable and easy. The routine of my labor was light, and I found at my disposal considerable leisure time to go and come. I frequently visited the city and what places of interest there were there and in the surrounding country. Before the summer was much advanced I had purchased a fleet pony of the mustang breed, and on its back I often rode for miles around and through the adjacent country. I prescribed for my health's benefit frequent and furious coursings along the "King's Highway," a road that ran from the river above the city to the river a long way beyond it below, often going as far as Carondelet without turning. I visited the scene of an early triumph for the Union cause—Camp Jackson—just outside the city, where a military camp of Rebels was surprised in 1861, the men captured, and the State assured to remain in the Union. During the summer we used to go past the La Cede Iron Works, and thence on to an ancient ferry on the Mississippi river to bathe. The place was none of the best, owing to the treachery of the current, and tradition was plentiful that catfish thereabout were as large as porpoises, and when caught invariably had within each one of them from a quarter to a half of a human body. I remember that I used to look upon the whole ferry and the scene as the same as that memorable one described in "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

About this time the Government found itself with a large number of men on its hands who had been rendered unfit for field service by reason of wounds and amputations, and the order authorizing and directing the formation of the "Invalid Corps" was promulgated. On general principles the objects of the order were applauded by all, as it was considered no more than right and just that the General Government should retain in its service and pay as many of its disabled veterans as it needed and who were capable of performing clerical and other duties akin to them. Men with but a single leg or arm, instead of being thrown back upon the friends and communities which they had left behind them, in the receipt merely of a paltry pension, were suitably placed in positions where the Government could utilize their talents and at the same time well afford to pay the ordinary wages. Under these arrangements there was a good regiment organized in St. Louis by Colonel Alexander, an old veteran of the Regular Army. There never was a word uttered that I heard in any manner derogatory to the organization until the authorities in Washington decided that other than those who were wounded and maimed might be received into the corps; but now it was that many great and notorious cowards, men who were full of fear of the dangers incident to an active career in the field, officers as well as soldiers, made a grand rush for admission to membership in the "Invalid Corps." Certificates of Disability were almost dignified with a market value, and the prices soon ascended to a high figure, and because "Chronic Diarrhoea" was the prevailing complaint

alleged by such dishonorable men in their applications for transfer, the whole corps fell into disrepute; and although the designation of it was officially changed from "The Invalid Corps" to "The Veteran Reserve Corps," still it rarely got that name save on paper and in very polite society. In all other places it was stigmatized as "The Diarrhoea Corps." In my position and by my associations I was enabled to see a great deal of the inside workings of the organization, and I can truly say that it was really disgusting when not amusing to hear the stories of some applicants for transfer. Dr. Ira Russell used to tell us some of their stories: how one officer offered three hundred dollars for the necessary certificate; another tendered a mortgage on his farm; others begged and prayed to the medical authorities for their assistance. All this time there was no difficulty in a proper person being transferred. Poor George Rodney of my company wanted a certificate very badly, but he succeeded only in becoming an inmate as a convalescent of the General Hospital. There one day he proved himself entitled to some indulgence, for he succumbed to the effects of disease contracted in the service, and died and was buried. It was Rodney against whom the Colonel, on that memorable night before Thanksgiving, the previous year, had especially directed his denunciations because George had his musket with him, and from that it was to be inferred that he intended to use his weapon against defenceless people. The climax of interest in the "Diarrhoea Corps" was reached when, not long afterward, a law was proposed in the National Legislature having for its object the

consolidation of the corps into compact regiments, and the incorporation of the whole with the Regular Army. Under the pressure of the intense spirit of patriotism or super-patriotism then prevailing, and amid the confusion and turmoil incident to the state of war the country was then in, the act was passed, and the eminent promoters of the measure had performed services that entitle them to be vividly remembered, perhaps differently by different people. Under this law the grossest injustice and unfairness was enacted, for while thousands upon thousands of good men were wounded or otherwise disabled, they did not care for or seek to fasten themselves upon the Government for life, but were content to return to their homes as patriotic citizen soldiers, on the contrary, with the incorporation into the Regular Army of the Veteran Reserve Corps, the officers belonging to that organization became equal in the tenure of their commissions to those who had devoted their lives, from extreme youth to old age, to the service of their country. The result was that on the conclusion of the war the country found upon its hands a batch of officers whom it could not get rid of except on half pay. It may be interesting in the near future to see Colonel Bonneville, U. S. A., and others of his class and services, on a social and official equality with "Colonel Swashbuckler, U. S. A.," erstwhile a corner loungee in some country town in the far North. Many persons like the last-named gentleman (?) will secretly thank the luck that deprived them of a limb apiece when they complacently draw half pay, while the more unfortunate comrade, of equal rank and ser-

vices, turns the crank of his hand-organ on the corner of the street and receives the pitifully small pension awarded to him by his grateful country.

3. There was no complaint possible to be made in relation to our domestic economy. Here occurs a break in the almost constant talk of matters in relation to what was for our eating; there is not now much solicitude about rations, and we had no longer to think of the wherewithal for dinner before we had disposed of our breakfast. "Our mess" was composed of most of the clerks engaged in and about the Post Headquarters, and we had a cook all to ourselves. Sam Fry was office-orderly to the Colonel commanding and general purveyor for the mess. He was in every respect a first-class "gobbler." Sam was besides a jolly fellow, of great experience and always full of fun. In his career he had been an auctioneer, a clown in Dan Rice's circus; he had driven a stage-coach for years, and when he enlisted he had just dropped the handles of his plough, Cincinnatus like, on a farm up in Iowa. There were also three or four men from the General Hospital—apothecaries, hospital stewards, etc.—in the complement. We occupied a separate house, and altogether were very comfortable. Sam Fry drew regular rations for all of us except Jones. Jones got commutation money instead, and paid a stated sum for his board. The rest were taxed about one dollar a week, and with the fund thus collected Sam Fry provided such seasonable articles of diet as were not included in the legal ration. How the cook got her pay I have forgotten, but I have an indistinct recollection of there having been an un-

derstanding all around that she was expected to steal enough to compensate her for her services. The troops stationed at Benton Barracks at the time I am writing about were almost entirely composed of unexchanged paroled men, with a small force of others acting as a provost-guard; but other troops made of the post a sort of temporary stopping place on the journey going south. When any such did favor us with their company there was great excitement at headquarters. On ordinary occasions it was the merest matter of form to mount the guard. The work was often done by either McHenry or myself, each in our turn acting as Adjutant and Sergeant-Major all in one, and the Post Band often outnumbered by two to one the whole detail for guard duty. When it happened that a battalion or regiment of men came to be our guests, the first thing that usually occurred to McHenry was to make a detail for the ensuing day, taking care to draw a requisition for sufficient men and officers to make the ceremony imposing. One such occasion was on the 12th of October, 1863, when, about noon-tide, we were startled by the strong and measured sounds of many bugles, and by a great amount of drumming and fifeing. McHenry was in ecstasies, and none of us were very sorry for the promise of an enlivening of the routine of duty. We had not long to wait before we were cheered by the sight of a sturdy column of infantry en route. This proved to be the Tenth Minnesota Infantry Volunteers. It had just returned from General Sibley's expedition against the Dakota or Sioux Indians. The forces of the expedition had pursued the red-skins to and beyond the

Missouri River, and although the men had seen very hard service, still the whole brigade of which this regiment formed a part had lost only eight men. The officers and men of the regiment were as a rule tall, fine, able-bodied men, rough in exterior and bronzed by exposure, and to a dot they filled the requirements of a good picture of the ideal pioneers of our Western country. The regiment was well armed with the latest improved pattern of the Springfield rifled musket. Friend McHenry did not wait long, but sent a requisition for the attendance on the morrow of a most respectable sized detail, and during the afternoon, when the Ninth regiment from the same State arrived in camp, it only caused McHenry to make out another detail to augment the number to report. During the whole of that evening nothing was talked about in our set save the grand guard-mounting there was to be on the next morning. There were to be eighty privates, a quota of non-commissioned officers, and three shoulder-strapped gentlemen to boot. Early next morning we were astir. McHenry had conned his part as Sergeant Major well, and was waiting. But alas for his hopes of distinction! the Post Band had not yet concluded its morning salutation of reveille when the band of the Ninth Minnesota struck up the "General Assembly." Soon afterward the regiment was in line, column formed, and the command, "Forward" given. Then they left us as they came, without a word of explanation, not even submitting their reports to post headquarters. When the time came for Guard-mounting we were compelled to be content with the usual beggary detail of Provost Guardsmen for duty.

The performance of my duties as Pass Clerk brought me in contact with many queer and interesting characters. About the middle of August, 1863, a man who said he belonged to a certain regiment of Illinois Infantry became very familiar; and as he was a sort of engaging person, he rarely failed to secure a pass from me when the favor was in my discretion. I do not now remember what it was that particularly aroused my suspicions that all was not right with him, but they were aroused about the time mentioned. He always had plenty of money, and apparently wanted for nothing but complete liberty. Finally I hit upon a plan that was immediately successful, and I declined to issue a pass to him. I pleaded as my excuse the standing order in relation to the amount issuable and the risk I ran in overstepping the limit prescribed. This was an obstacle to his going to St. Louis, and forced his secret. He used his occupation of a soldier as a cloak or cover for the business he was really engaged in. That was the "shoving" or passing of counterfeit money. He then got the required pass. As soon as he was gone I consulted with my superior, and proper measures were concocted to meet the emergency. Under instructions from Mr. Currier, I went with the soldier into the city, among his companions there and through their haunts. By some means or ~~other~~ the head of the gang (for there was quite a number of them) succeeded in eluding the officers of the law set upon his track. It was said at the time that the detectives in the service of the Government, or at least some of them, were in collusion with the Yegues. However, the business was broken up for a

time. I mention this circumstance more particularly because during the time I played amateur detective I saw more devilment than I had during my whole previous life.

4. On the 1st of September I received a furlough or leave of absence for fifteen days, and upon that I proceeded to Loda, Illinois, and there passed the ensuing two weeks. It was a remarkably pleasant season of the year, and I remember to this time that day succeeded day in a round of interest. Up to that time the farmers of that section had been kept comparatively poor. Corn was dirt cheap, and in some instances actually used as fuel; but during that year the people had sown flax seed and had realized enormous profits, owing to the great demand and price paid for the product for hospital purposes. The farmers had also cultivated sorghum or Chinese sugar cane, and that had yielded immensely—so much so that the resources of the country were taxed to their utmost for casks to put the syrup in, and still it fetched a high price per gallon. In this way the country folk were paid for the two or three previous years of hard times, and they were all cheerful and happy in so far as material prosperity was concerned. All this contributed in a great degree to enable me to accomplish my object, which was to have a pleasant time and relaxation from the routine of my duties at Benton Barracks.

During the early autumn of 1863 the political affairs of the State of Missouri were, to put it mildly, in a very bad way. Governor Gamble presided at Jefferson City, the capital of the State, and he was thoroughly hated and despised by what was designated

the "loyal" element of the people of the State, while he was upheld or defended by those who were of contrary affiliations. There was an election approaching, and great excitement ensued. Politics engrossed the attention of the citizens to the exclusion of almost every other topic. Street corners, churches, public halls, markets, and even our military camps were the scenes of wordy warfare. The severe measures of General Curtis early in the year had taught the would-be outspoken sympathizers with the South a lesson that they had not forgotten. Alton Penitentiary was not far away, Gratiot street Prison was at hand, confiscation laws were in force, and above all it was easy for declared rebels to be transported into the Southern lines. So far as the opposition dared to go, they went. I remember listening to a speech of the celebrated patriot and Union man, General "Jim Lane," of "Kansas Jayhawker" fame. He was a Radical of the Radicals. He breathed death, confiscation, banishment for Rebels in every sentence, and he was not left without support—his words were received with tumultuous applause. He was replied to by General Frank P. Blair, Jr., who even at that time had so changed his views from what they had been during the earlier stages of the war, as to be called a "Copperhead." Jefferson City was at that time in part protected by a regiment of the Missouri State Militia (the First Regiment). There were two kinds of militia in the State—the Missouri State Militia and the Enrolled Missouri Militia—and the greatest confusion was caused by that circumstance. The prime distinction between the two sorts was found in the na-

ture of the sentiments they held toward the Federal Government and the ideas they entertained in regard to States rights, especially the rights of the State of Missouri. The first mentioned were intensely loyal to the Union of the States. What the others were may be inferred, but I cannot undertake to describe them any further than by saying that each sort was at the throats of the other on the slightest provocation. When "Jim Lane's" speech reached the capital the loyal M. S. M.'s became wildly enthusiastic, and the men of it there only ceased to cheer and roar over it when they had denounced the Governor at his own door. On this many of the militiamen were thrown into prison, but the rest of them rallied, carried the prison house by storm, and released their comrades. "This was altogether too radical," said Captain Barnes to me, "and the consequence is that the regiment has been scattered—two companies on the Iron Mountain Railroad, two on the Pacific Railroad, and two more here." Several of the officers of the regiment were even then under arrest for aiding and abetting the men in the commission of whatever the offence was that was laid to them.

About the last of October we received news that went to confirm previous rumors to the effect that a soldier named Roberts, of the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry, was to be executed at our post for desertion and felony. The anticipation of the event gave rise to a great deal of speculation, but it never came off, at least during my time, although the sentence had been regularly approved by the highest authority. When I first arrived at Benton Barracks the place con-

tained a large number of men, and these we organized into companies and battalions. Under the rules and regulations governing the army, each company was entitled to a certain quota of women as laundresses. In times of tranquillity these women are wives of soldiers, but in our camp it was otherwise, except in a very few instances. Whether or no, when men were exchanged and ordered to the field it was altogether out of the question to think of sending the women with them, so that when the camp was depleted of soldiers there remained a large number of these women, and their presence within the lines soon developed into a nuisance. Being attached to no regularly mustered company, they could draw no rations, and therefore it is easy to see that no matter how they obtained the means of living, it was certainly acquired in an irregular manner. They retained their old quarters, and from thence the unfortunate creatures sallied forth as foragers. Nothing was safe from depredation: the commissary depot was robbed, the wood piles were raided upon, and the stores of the "village" were burglarized. It required a strong effort, but finally they were all extirpated, almost literally at the point of the bayonet. Captain Fillebrown, the commander of our Provost Guard, did the work in a very "gal-lant" but at the same time effectual manner. Then the women swarmed into the buildings attached to the General Hospital. They were not allowed to rest long, however, before the Hospital folks chased them from one building to another until what were left of the unlucky women were all congregated in a shanty adjoining the dead-house. The enemy were finally

driven out of this last resort by a stratagem. Hospital Steward Ferris procured a couple of devil-may-care fellows, who allowed themselves to be publicly carried into the dead-house, and in such a manner as insured the fact that, at least some of the obnoxious women could not fail to see them go in. At midnight the women were startled by the sounds of the supposed dead men groaning and raving as they reached their ears through the thin walls of the house. The frightened creatures lost no time in arriving at the conclusion that the devil was there in person, and they hastily quitted their last refuge, and left the precincts of the hospital for a less haunted neighborhood. From that time the whole post was comparatively clear of the unwelcome "laundresses."

During the late summer and early autumn the scourge of small-pox raged fearfully in the General Hospital, and a great many died before they could be transported to "Bloody Island," in the Mississippi river, where a sort of exclusively small-pox hospital had been established. All the people around us were in great fear of the contagion. What was most sad was the carelessness exhibited in providing against danger. There were many young women who had volunteered to serve, and were serving as nurses in the hospital. Before entering upon the service it was required, as a precautionary measure, that they, in common with all others, should submit to the operation of being vaccinated. On the face of it this was a very good and proper regulation, but unfortunately sufficient care was not exercised in the selection of the vaccine matter used, and many persons fell as victims. Those

who did not contract the dread disease were but little better off than those who did. I remember the case of one young woman who had been beautiful; she belonged, too, to a highly respectable family in the city of Saint Louis, and it was nothing but genuine patriotism that had impelled her to assume the duties of hospital nurse. They vaccinated her as they did the rest, but alas! the agent was indeed poisonous. It was charged with the seeds of the most horrible disease. In a short time she got to be a most pitiful object. Her breasts dropped off, and then death relieved her from a miserable existence. Others got off with no less than withered arms, and ugly scrofulous marks.

About the first of August there were at our camp five companies of the Eleventh Missouri Cavalry Volunteers, and three companies of the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry Volunteers, and a portion of the Second Regiment Missouri Heavy Artillery, besides a Provost Guard of one company of the Ninth Regiment Wisconsin Infantry Volunteers. The three companies of the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry were on the way to the Rocky mountains to do duty in that region in protecting emigrant trains from the depredations of the Indians. One company was almost entirely recruited from deserters from the free-lance John Morgan's forces, and the other two companies were composed mostly of boys. The regiment had participated in the run through Ohio after General Morgan, and the deserters had been glad to better their condition by taking service on our side. I became acquainted with Sergeant Sherlock, of Company "E" of this regiment, and also with Sergeant-Major Lewis. The latter had already seen

service, having been an officer at the battle of Stone river, and captured, as I was, at that battle. He was thereafter honorably discharged, and had now re-entered the service as a veteran. If my memory serves me well, he told me that he was of the immediate party that captured the guerilla General Morgan. At home the Sergeant was a lawyer, and as he expected to be stationed for a long time in some comfortable quarters at a frontier fort, he had provided himself with a well selected library. The companies departed for the West on the 10th of August. The Second Missouri Heavy Artillery was a very poor specimen of a regiment. There was no discipline whatever in it—no regularity at all, except indeed in the drawing of rations and in being irregular in almost everything else. The whole regiment was soon afterward mustered out of the service. The Eleventh Missouri Cavalry was also a sorry conditioned organization. It was commanded by Colonel W. D. Wood, who, it was represented, was a near relative of Governor Gamble. Many of the officers and men had figured on the wrong side at the capture of Camp Jackson in 1861, and although the regiment had existed as an organization for three quarters of a year, it had as yet seen no field service. Altogether the regiment was not liked by any of us, and it was often subjected to treatment as if it was not to be trusted. There must have been something radically wrong from the beginning with Missouri. It seems so singular that she should have had such good, brave, and gallant soldiers away from home on either side of the conflict; and such miserable defenders within her borders. It was a common