

CHAPTER III.

The March to Romney-----The Winter at Romney-----A
Forage Train Under Captain Brown Captured-----
Paroles-----A Bad State of Feeling-----Patriotic Action
Of the Regiment-----The March to Winchester.

On the 20th of January we left Moorefield for Romney. Sergeant Charles P. Allison and Carmi Allison, of company K, and Sergeant Robert G. Wells and D. J. Haning, of company G, remained behind for some purpose, as we moved out of Moorefield, and were captured by the enemy, who occupied it as soon as our rear guard left, and while it was yet in sight of the town. These men were all paroled. On our march we were accompanied by a great many colored people fleeing from slavery. The threatened proclamation, liberating the slaves, had been issued, on the first of January, by President Lincoln, and though West Virginia had been excepted from its provisions, the colored people did not know it. They only knew that an emancipation proclamation had been issued by the President, and hence they flocked into Moorefield in large numbers during the night before we moved, colored people inside our lines having sent the news of our intended movement next morning to a great distance outside. It snowed hard the first day, it was very cold, and the roads were about as bad as they could well be. Toward the middle of the afternoon, two colored women were given a ride by the hospital steward. Somehow the incident, which was thought nothing of, got home in the shape that "Colonel Washburn and Lieutenant Wildes had turned sick men out of their ambulances and put niggers in to ride." The story lost nothing by repetition and traveling, and soon assumed very ugly proportions. Finally the officers of the regiment united, in a card to the press, explaining the silly story, which squelched it. We here reproduce the card of the officers:

Editor Messenger, Athens:

Our object in addressing you, is to publish an extract from a letter from one of our friends in Athens, and set the matter it contains in its true light before your readers. The extract is as follows:

"Letters written home, either by the line officers or privates, all have their effect on public opinion. We have had some experimental facts in the case, and some of them I must take the liberty of asking you to give me the truth of, as the stories sent home by one or two writers, and circulated by their friends, demand immediate attention if not true; if true, I would like to know it, as your humble servant and your friends here have pronounced them lies. I have been told by Reed Golden that his brother John had written to his father, that while your Regiment was on a march, some three or four contraband negroes were found coming into your lines and asked protection; whereupon Colonel Washburn ordered some sick boys that were riding in an ambulance to get out, and put the contrabands in to ride, and that a private had written home to his father that the contraband negroes were wenches, and that Lieut. Col. Wildes ordered the sick boys out and let the negroes ride."

The undersigned, officers of the 116th Reg't O. V. I., are acquainted with the circumstances that gave rise to the story above mentioned, and we do hereby pronounce it an unmitigated lie, and we brand any man as an unprincipled liar who would be so lost to every sense of manliness as to construe what did occur, to make it appear as represented by "Reed Golden" and said "private."

The facts in the case are simply these: When our Regiment left Moorefield two female contrabands, desiring, it seems, to leave their good masters, came within our lines and started on foot, in company with a few other contrabands, in the wake of our Regiment. The hospital steward, who was driving an ambulance full of sick soldiers, overtook them and kindly asked them to ride on the driver's seat, where sick soldiers cannot very well ride, and could not, especially that day, as it was storming. Neither Col. Washburn ore Lieut. Col. Wildes knew that said contrabands were riding, and we say, under the circumstances, "what if they did?" The two

females brought through on that march are now doing good service in the hospital of the Regiment---one being an excellent cook, the other a laundress.

JOHN HULL, Capt. Co. K.	H. L. KARR, 1 st Lieut. Com'g Co. G.
LEVI LUPTON, 2d. Lieut. Co. C.	MATHEW BROWN, Capt. Co. F.
W. S. MARTIN, Lieut. Co. F.	W. R. GILKEY, Surgeon 116 th
JAS. P. MANN, 1 st Lieut. Co. C.	T. MALLORY, 1 st Lieut. Co. B.
E. W. BRADY, Chaplain 116 th	EDWIN KEYES, Capt. Co. B.
C. W. RIDGEWAY, Capt. Co. A.	A. B. FRAME, Lieut. Com'g Co. I.
H. L. SIBLEY, 2d Lieut. Co. B.	R. F. CHANEY, 2d Lieut. Co. D.
WM. MYERS, Capt. Co. D.	F. H. ARCKENOE, Capt. Co. C.
JOHN VARLEY, Capt. Co. E.	

Of this matter Jesse VanLaw, the editor of the "Athens Messenger," said:

"We need not say that we never believed this report, as the enemies of Col. Wildes, as well as his friends, will agree that no man in Athens County has excelled him in kindness and care for the sick and hungry soldiers that came to this place, while he resided in it. The idea that he would turn out the sick of his own command to allow any body to ride is absurd to any one not gone stark mad with 'nigger phobia'."

In justice to Captain Golden, we should state here, that he positively denied writing anything of the kind to any body, and even if he has not denied it, we would never have believed that he did. Looking back to this from the midst of our changed condition, what was then thought of sufficient importance for all the officers of a regiment to stop to explain, looks now very ridiculous and absurd. Yet such was then the bitter prejudice against the colored people, that their action seemed not only advisable, but really necessary, in order to relieve the public mind from the impression gained that the 116th had officers who would throw their sick men out of ambulances to make room for "niggers." Such were the absurdities some people were ready to believe, whenever the "nigger" was involved in the story.

When we camped at the end of the first day's march, there was a foot of snow on the ground, and the "top rails" in our vicinity were rapidly consumed. We reached Romney the next day, the 11th of January. We lay here two months and were constantly engaged in drilling, foraging and picketing. On the 18th day of January, a four days' mail was captured by a party of twenty-five guerrillas, between Romney and the railroad. It was the result of a most disgraceful piece of carelessness on the part of a cavalry escort. A few days after this, a soldier of company I came to headquarters, and wanted to be authorized to act as a scout, and thus be able to convey news of the proximity of rebel bands in time to avoid such attacks and surprises as the one just mentioned. After some conversation, he was asked if he thought he could deceive the rebels as to his identity in case of his capture. After a moment's reflection he replied: "I guess I can, I have deceived everyone I have ever had anything to do with so far in life." He was given the authority to scout, and some days afterward was found at a house close by the picket line, where he had been all this time "sparking" a girl. His authority to scout was revoked, but his ability to "deceive" remained unquestioned ever afterwards.

A most disgraceful affair took place here on the 16th of February. Captain Brown, of company F, with his company and some cavalry, all under his command, when about seven miles from Romney on their return from a foraging expedition, with a loaded train, allowed his men to straggle and wander about the country, thus leaving the train unprotected. He and his Lieutenant, Martin, were riding quite a distance in front of the train, giving it no attention whatever. In this situation the rebel McNeil, with about forty mounted men, dashed in between Captain Brown and his train, and captured it and his men in detail, without any resistance. The men were all paroled, the horses and mules cut loose from the wagons and their loads burned. Captain Brown ran off at full speed to camp, never making even the slightest attempt to join his men, or avert this disaster. McNeil took about sixty prisoners, fifty horses and eight mules, and beat a hasty retreat, and though followed, as soon as the news reached the camp, by a large body of cavalry, he made good his escape with all his capture, except the prisoners, whom he paroled. He sent word to Captain

Brown by the paroled prisoners to send him out his shoulder straps. The affair aroused the greatest indignation, and Captain Brown and Lieutenant Martin were placed in arrest. Charges were preferred against them, and they were tried by a court martial and acquitted with a public reprimand! It is proper, in justice to Lieutenant Martin and the members of company F, to say, that they thoroughly redeemed themselves in their subsequent conduct, and that the responsibility of the whole affair wholly rested upon Captain Brown. No braver officer belonged to the 116th than Lieutenant Martin afterwards proved himself; and no company of men did any more gallant service than company F performed throughout its term of service. Of Captain Brown, more will appear hereafter. Lieutenant Sibley was Judge Advocate of the court martial here. At Romney Captains Ridgeway, Fuller and Golden, Lieutenants McElfresh and Sears, and Assistant Surgeon James Johnson resigned, all on account of failing health.

Quite a despondent and unpatriotic feeling extensively prevailed among the men at this post during this winter, and large numbers procured themselves to be captured by guerrillas and paroled. On being paroled they would, on their own responsibility, go home, or on returning to camp, refuse to do duty. Suspicion led to an investigation, which developed the fact, that rebel citizens in the vicinity kept on hand paroles, signed by guerrilla chiefs, and that the men, aware of this were in the habit of going out and getting them, sometimes paying for them in coffee, sugar, etc. There seemed to be an understanding established between our soldiers and the rebels. Paroles became as common, at one time, as sutler's checks, and the uncomfortable feeling that this state of affairs created among officers can hardly be imagined. It was determined to put a stop to it at all hazards, for it was simply another way of deserting. Accordingly, orders were sent home to cause the arrest and return of all soldiers, in whose possession were found paroles and *no furloughs*, and all in camp were armed and returned to duty. Paroles soon became a badge of cowardice, and when once thus branded by the better class of soldiers, the business suddenly came to an end. This was a shrewd scheme on the part of the rebels to deplete our army. Had they sent their prisoners to Libby and Belle Isle, the terrors of prison life would have been in their minds, but so far from this being the case, the paroled prisoners had the picture of a pleasant, indefinite visit to their home and friends held before their eyes, and in the home-sick condition of many, this was a temptation too strong to resist. When Captain Brown's train guard was attacked, McNeil cried out to the men, before either side fired a gun, "I don't want to hurt you, throw down your arms and I'll parole every devil of you and you can go home." This was the policy pursued by the rebels all through that part of West Virginia during the winter of 1862 and '63, and it did us far more harm than to have sent their prisoners off to the rebel prisons of the South would have done. We have said that probably while we lay at Gallipolis in the fall of 1862 was the darkest and gloomiest period of the war. Perhaps the time we lay at Romney ought to be excepted. During this period the disloyal element of the North exercised its most baneful influence, and its greatest sway over the minds of the soldiers, and no one had any doubt that the policy of paroling our soldiers originated with and was suggested to the rebels by Northern rebel sympathizers. Letters advising soldiers to desert often came to camp. In these letters, rebel victories were magnified, and Union victories disparaged, and we were hearing on all sides that we could never quell the rebellion. Seeing the poisonous effect of such letters and newspapers upon the minds of the men, General Milroy suppressed a few papers, notably the "Wheeling Register," and it was threatened to suppress the mails altogether, if such letters and papers continued coming to our camps. A general meeting of officers and men was finally held in February, at which a stirring address appealing to the patriotism of the Northern people was adopted, together with a series of resolutions deprecating, in strong terms the course pursued by disloyal men in the North, urging the loyal people everywhere to take new heart, to stand up fearlessly for the cause of the Union, and to do all in their power to encourage the army in the field. This address and these resolutions were published throughout the counties in Ohio in which the regiment was raised, and the effect was soon made visible in the advanced morale and temper of the men. We here copy the resolutions.

At a meeting of the officers of the 116th Regiment O. V. I., held on the evening of the 10th inst, at Romney, West Virginia, the following officers were appointed a committee to draft resolutions expressive of the sentiments of the officers and men of said Regiment, vis: Lieut. Col. Thos. F. Wildes, Captain John Varley, Captain Wm. Myers and Lieutenant Hamilton L. Karr.

The committee reported on the evening of the 12th inst, the following preamble and resolutions, which were adopted by every officer on duty with the Regiment. On the following day they were read to the Regiment while on battalion drill, when

not one man dissented, but all adopted them with a deafening AYE!

Whereas, WE, the officers and men of the 116th Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry, firmly believing in the justice and holiness of the cause in which we are engaged, and solemnly avowing our purpose anew of fighting its battles till the last rebel in arms is laid low at the foot of our glorious banner of Light and Liberty, do, therefore---

Resolve, That nothing but "unconditional surrender: will answer the demands of the true soldier and patriot.

Resolved, That we are still actuated by the same motives that induced us to first lift our arms against rebellion; that we are mindful, and believe, that service rendered to our country is service rendered to our God, whose boon our country is to a people determined to be FREE, and with these convictions to inspire us, we will war against treason till its last vestige is swept to its native hell, with a devotion unfelt and unknown by any but the true soldier.

Resolved, That we will hail with feelings of delight the dawning of PEACE; but we can think of no peace worth having short of crushing out the rebellion, and the complete restoration of the authority of the Government over every foot of her soil, East, West North and South.

Resolved, That we, as a loyal soldiery, acknowledge the Administration the medium through which the destruction of the rebellion is to be made effectual; and that we owe it to all we hold sacred in our blood bought, free institutions, to give it such support as will enable us to hand down to generations to come, intact, this glorious Union of ours.

Resolved, That any party, or set of men who, by factions opposition to the Administration, the Government, or the prosecution of the war, injure our noble cause, will meet with overwhelming and popular indignation from the soldiery both now and HEREAFTER.

Resolved, That we hear with regret, though with hearts full of condemnation and repudiation, the murmurings, and insane, disloyal conduct of the "copperheads"---so called by the soldiers---in our loyal and gallant State.

Resolved, That we regard the efforts of these "copperheads" in Ohio to demoralize the army by writing treasonable letters to the soldiers in the field, urging them to desert their flag, misrepresenting the Administration and the object of the war, much of which is done to cover up their own cowardice and justify their treason, as unworthy American citizens, and as more heinous and execrable than the efforts of armed rebels who meet us in deadly conflict on the battle-field.

Resolved, That we regard any attempt to injure or depreciate the value of the currency of the Government in which the soldier is paid, as a direct blow at the soldier and his family, and a stab at the very vitals of the Government itself, conduct of which no one friendly to the perpetuation of our free institutions and the restoration of the Union of States would be guilty.

Resolved, That we regard the prospects of a speedy termination of the war resulting in the utter discomfiture and the consequent overthrow of the rebellion, as bright and encouraging---all the boasts of rebels and tho sneers and jeers of "copperheads" to the contrary notwithstanding.

WM. MYERS, President

H. L. KARR, Secretary

ROMNEY, WEST VIRGINIA, Feb. 12, 1863

The January proclamation of emancipation had added much to this bad state of feeling in the army and among the people. For a time, party spirit was so excited, that it was feared the North itself might become the scene of civil strife. But now the army everywhere began to express itself upon the state of affairs. In the same month the Army of the Cumberland had a monster meeting at Murfreesboro, at which an address was adopted, containing a powerful appeal to the patriotic people of the land "to stay, support, and uphold the bands of the soldiers," and denouncing in unmeasured terms those who were clamoring for "peace on any terms." While the storm of passion was at its height, threatening the safety of the country, there came

a sudden lull, calming popular agitation and allaying factional discord. The Government, just before tottering under the tumult of contending parties, now suddenly resumed its firmness, sustained by the steady support of the people. This surprising change, as surprising to one side as the other, and as mysterious as the varying phenomena of nature, was accompanied by circumstances which astounded the whole country. Popular leaders who but a few days before had denounced the “radical” policy of the Government as fatal to the cause of the Union, and counseled opposition, now praised the one and depreciated the other. Many attempts were made to solve the mystery of this sudden and remarkable change. Some attributed it to the stand taken by the army against opposition to the Government; some to the scorn with which the enemy had treated rebel sympathizers in the North; some to a discreet fear of an Executive, endowed with almost absolute power, and now thoroughly determined to exercise every mite of his power, to the work of crushing out the rebellion; while the real explanation of this sudden political conversion was doubtless attributable to the patriotic notion of checking the rising anarchy by a sacrifice of personal opinion to the general welfare. But whatever caused the mysterious change, the fact of the change itself remained, to be seen and felt on every hand. Patriotic letters and counsels took the place of the late seditious and treasonable ones, and soon not a vestige of the unpatriotic feeling we have mentioned was any where to be found. It was as dead as the same men helped to make the rebellion within the next two years. And from that time forward the people and the army were one harmonious whole, and both labored in perfect accord and unison to accomplish the overthrow of the rebellion and the restoration of the Union. With the disappearance of this state of feeling, the slumbering fires of patriotism were kindled anew, and every one went about the discharge of his duty in the good work before him with a renewed zeal and a firmer determination than ever.

February 17th Private Amos S. Byers, of company C, was instantly killed by the accidental discharge of a musket. It created a great sensation in the regiment, and caused greater care of arms ever afterwards. Byers was a good man and an excellent soldier, and his sad death was greatly mourned. The headquarters of the regiment were in a large brick house while we lay at Romney, and having plenty of fuel and rations and good sleeping apartments, we passed the time very comfortably. No happier military family could be found anywhere than ours. Major Morris, Adjutant Sibley, Quartermaster Cochran, Sergeant Major Ellis, Commissary Sergeant Walker and Acting Quartermaster Sergeant Campbell, Clerk Waterman and Orderly Webster formed a happy party. Several of them were good singers. One or two good fiddlers were generally about. Sibley, for drollery and comic speaking and story telling, excelled, and when all other duties were performed, the *ennui* of camp life was kept very far away from those quarters by genuine fun and amusement. From one of the numerous letters written from Romney, we make the following extract as showing the enjoyments of headquarters: “In the Adjutant’s office just now is heard the sweet sounds of the violin, and the Major’s strong bass voice with the Sergeant Major’s fine tenor, while, overhead, in the Quartermaster’s room, is heard the fun and frolic of Lee, Walker and Campbell, and the useless protests of the matter-of-fact old Quartermaster. I would like to take this whole headquarters crew home with me and show them to you. You would think us wild barbarians no doubt, and it is more than likely we have all forgotten the ways of civilized life, but we are all apt scholars, and with good teacher would soon learn them again.” But the foundation of the future good record of the regiment was also laid at Romney in study, drill, officers’ and non-commissioned schools, and in the preservation of excellent discipline. On the 15th of March we moved from Romney for Winchester, reaching there on the 17th.

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