

CHAPTER XIV.

Good-Bye Shenandoah Valley-----On The Cars To Wash-
ington-----Ride On The Water-----Arrival, At Deepbottom
-----Promotions-----Drilling And Inspections-----
High Standing Of The Regiment In The 24th Army
Corps-----Rebel, Rams And Gunboats Create An
Excitement-----More Promotions.

On the 19th of December, 1864, we took cars at Harper's Ferry. There was considerable anxiety among the men as to which course we would take, east or west, but this was soon settled by the train moving out toward Washington. Captain Mallory, having received a leave of absence, left us at the Ferry for his home in Meigs County. Owing to several hindrances, we did not get started until nearly dark. That night ride will be remembered as the most disagreeable ever experienced by the men. They were in box cars without any fire, and many in open cattle cars. It had rained all day and did not cease until dark, when it turned very cold and windy. The men suffered terribly with the cold. The entire 1st division of the Army of West Virginia followed us, our brigade being in the advance. We reached Washington about daylight and at once marched through the city to the Potomac River landing, where we took transports in waiting for us. The 116th boarded the "Lizzie Baker," the 123d and brigade headquarters the "Keyport," and the 34th Massachusetts the "Massachusetts," all sidewheel steamers. Without any delay all moved down the river, and at night anchored off Point Lookout. It was blowing a hurricane in the morning, and was very cold, and we did not start out until nearly noon. We were scarcely under way before the wind became furious again. Our vessel rolled terribly, and to us landsmen the experience was far from pleasant. The men were soon nearly all "seasick." The "Keyport" was an old vessel, and even the captain and crew were a little afraid of her, to say nothing of the rest of us, who saw nothing but destruction in the wild wind and waves. The wind continuing, toward night, we put into the mouth of a creek below Rappahannock. A gunboat on picket there, on seeing us approach, saluted us with a shot across our bow, which was another surprise to us. After we had hove to and anchored, the gunboat came out to us, and its officers invited brigade headquarters to take supper with them, which they gladly did. We started early next morning. We had proceeded but a short distance before we struck high wind and waves, rougher by far than the day before. The "Massachusetts," with the 34th Massachusetts regiment on board, had disappeared from our fleet. The "Keyport" was in real danger of foundering several times, and all felt great relief when we passed out of the breakers into smoother waters, and Fortress Monroe appeared in the distance. We anchored that night five miles below City Point, and the next day moved up to James Landing, where we disembarked, and crossing the James River on pontoons, marched out to "Camp Holly," at Deep Bottom, on the Libby estate, and we were in the Army of the James. The 34th Massachusetts had not yet come up nor been heard from, and considerable anxiety was felt about it. Captains Dillon, Mann and Hull, of our regiment, by some mistake were left to come up on their boat. The mortars and Howlett's batteries kept rearing all night. General Butler was absent, trying to take Fort Fisher when we arrived, and General Ord was in command of the army.

Our first night was a very cold one, and we were furthermore obliged to sleep on the ground without tents and but little wood for fires. Since leaving our comfortable quarters at Opequan Bridge, on the 19th, until now, the 24th, we had a rough, hard time of it. The next morning found us all in pretty bad humor, and quartermasters and commissaries were hurried around as lively as ever they were. The 34th was now heard from. Their vessel was driven into Cherry Stone Inlet, where it was obliged to lie for two days. The regiment arrived on the 25th, and with it several of our officers and men. The men busied themselves building quarters, and having theirs well under way on the arrival of the 34th, turned out in force to help them build theirs. The Massachusetts men were not so handy with the axe, shovel and trowel as our western troops, and made the erection of quarters irksome work. Our men were always ready to help them on such work, for they were good fighters, and for that our men liked them. We were quartered on Libby's plantation, he of Libby prison fame, and our quartermaster erected his quarters in the Libby door yard, but the "door" and the house and all other building were long since gone the way of war.

The rebels came round to greet our coming, and considerable picket firing took place the night of the 25th, and the brigade was in line of battle behind the works most of the night. The next morning we went out a

short distance on a reconnaissance, but the rebels had retired in the early morning. On the 26th, we received the news of General Sherman's capture of Savannah, and his presentation of it to President Lincoln as a Christmas gift. Salutes were ordered fired, and this brought on an angry cannonade which continued all day and nearly all night, and kept us under

(Pages 228 and 229 of Wildes's book were apparently missed when this copy was made. This transcription will continue at page 230).

.....some time. It terminated in a hundred-pound gun being dismounted in the fort and the rebel vessels getting out of range. At length the enemy succeeded in cutting the chain in front of the obstructions beyond the lower end of Dutch Gap Canal, and the Fredericksburg got through under full head of steam; but the Richmond, Virginia and Drewry grounded, and the Fredericksburg had to return to their assistance. The Drewry could not be got off and was abandoned. A shell from Battery Parsons subsequently falling into her magazine, she blew up. It was now approaching daylight, and as the rebel fleet was in range of the battery, and the gunboats on the river had recovered from their demoralization and were coming into action, the whole fleet retired up the river and escaped. It was a close call for the Army of the James, for had the rebel ironclads not grounded, the entire fleet of transports at City Point might have been sunk and the base of operations there destroyed, in which event the Army of the James and Fort Harrison would have been isolated from the forces on the south side and greatly endangered. Our army was all under arms from the moment the first gun was fired in the morning, and fearing a repetition of the experiment the next night, the whole army lay behind its works. A large force of rebel infantry lay waiting in our front to attack and "wipe us off the map," had the ironclad expedition been successful. It failing, all soon became quiet on the James.

On the 25th, General Harris inspected our brigade very minutely. We all thought him specially exacting and scrutinizing with the 116th. The next day he promulgated an order to the effect that the 116th was the best regiment in the division, "and would therefore be excused from fatigue and picket duty for two weeks." This created great excitement in camp, and as showing the good natured rivalry existing among the regiments of the brigade, the officers of the 34th and 123d, accompanied by the 34th band, went over and gave the 116th officers a serenade. Commissions arrived on the 28th for Sergeant Major Wm. J. Lee, to Second Lieutenant; Sergeant Joseph Purkey, to Second Lieutenant; Sergeant Jacob Wyckoff, to Second Lieutenant. On the same day we received notice of Lieutenant Sibley's resignation. He had but shortly before been exchanged in broken health. Captain Dillon resigned January 29th; Captain Chaney, February 1st; Adjutant Ballard, February 3d; and Captain Cochran, February 9th, which created several vacancies. On the 10th, Lieutenant Wm. B. Henry was promoted to First Lieutenant; Second Lieutenant Edward Muhleman, to First Lieutenant; Q. M. Sergeant Ezra L. Walker, to Second Lieutenant. On the 15th, First Lieutenant W. S. Martin was promoted to Captain; Second Lieutenant Rees Williams, to First Lieutenant; Sergeant Wm. H. Bush, to Second Lieutenant; Sergeant John S. Heald, to Second Lieutenant; Sergeant Charles A. Cline, to Second Lieutenant.

About the 3d of February, we received the news of the submission of the Thirteenth Amendment to the States for their ratification. There was universal rejoicing all through the army. None of the bad feeling seen everywhere when in January, 1863, the President issued the Emancipation Proclamation, existed anywhere now. Everyone was ready to adopt measures that would forever put an end to American slavery, and was glad steps to that end were being taken. Salutes were fired, and officers and men cheered, shook hands, pulled and jerked each other about and fairly danced for joy. As the news passed from one regiment to another, you could hear the cheers and shouts of men rolling along, and echoing and re-echoing, until it seemed as though the whole army was uniting in one grand effort to all cheer at once, and mingled with it all was the tremendous roar of artillery from the forts and artillery parks off to our left, and the gunboats and mortars on the river in our rear. Of course all this exasperated the enemy, and that night there was a great deal of picket firing, and we stood at arms most of the night.

At the Sunday inspection, January 29th, Corporal James M. Stout, who stood first in the regiment and second in the brigade at the previous inspection, was first in the brigade and first in the division and corps, and received a furlough for thirty days and written permission to take his gun and accoutrements home with him. The 1st brigade was announced, in an order from corps headquarters, as in the best order in the

division, and the 34th Massachusetts the best in order in the brigade. Lieutenant Colonel Wildes, as brigade commander, now became entitled to a leave of absence under the inspection orders, and on the 6th left for home. Q. M. Sergeant Walker, now acting as Sergeant Major, also obtained a furlough. Captain Dillon, who had resigned on the 29th ult., on account of disability, went home now, and also Major Teters on leave of absence. We thus had a pleasant party. John A. Dennis, of company I, was accidentally killed at Chapin's Farm by the falling of a tree, on the 10th of February. It was a sad affair. He was a good soldier, had always done his duty well, and it seemed hard to thus lose his life after passing through all the great battles of the Shenandoah Valley safely. About the 12th, it grew very cold and windy. Among other capers of the wind, was the blowing down of our chapel, which had been built about a month before at the request of the Chaplain, and a great many chimneys. On the 15th, a great many prisoners were exchanged at Aiken's Landing, among them several of our regiment. They met with a royal reception when they came out to our camp. For several nights along between the 15th and 23d there was a great deal of disturbance on the picket lines. On the 21st, we received news of Sherman's capture of Charleston, Columbia, etc., and more salutes were fired, again exasperating the rebels. The old flag was again floating over Fort Sumter.

On the 23d, a Commission as Assistant Surgeon was received for Hospital Steward James T. Moran, but the regiment had not men enough to allow him to be mustered. No more faithful, industrious and competent man for his position could be found in the service than Dr. Moran, and his failure to enjoy his well earned promotion was deeply regretted. No officer or man in the regiment performed his duty more faithfully, throughout the service, than Jas. T. Moran. Major Teters returned on the 27th. News to-day of the fall of Wilmington. More salutes, and the rebels are mad again. Orders to move at an hour's notice have been in existence for several days. On the 28th, Corporal John M. Mitchell, of company I, and Sergeant Uriah Hoyt, of company B, received orders from the War Department to report at Columbus for promotion in a new regiment, the 186th, of which Lieutenant Colonel Wildes was made Colonel. Desertions from the rebels were very numerous along about this time, and the deserters say that shooting at them as they cross the lines explains much of the picket firing heard every night. February 26th, Lieutenant Colonel Wildes was appointed Colonel of the 186th O. V. I., and Major Teters was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel of the 116th. Quartermaster Sergeant Ezra L. Walker, who had performed so long such valuable services in the Quartermaster's department of the 116th, was appointed Quartermaster of the 186th. Commissary Sergeant W. T. Patterson was appointed Quartermaster Sergeant, *vice* Walker, promoted, and Frank O. Pickering was appointed Commissary Sergeant. Captain John Hull was promoted to Major. Major Hull resigned and went home on the 16th of February. He was an old man, too old for active field service, but he had endured the hardships of the service remarkably well, always bravely did his duty as an officer, and he now left the regiment for his home with the kind wishes of both officers and men, and with the esteem and respect of all. On the 18th the following promotions took place:

First Lieutenant John C. Henthorn, to Captain.
First Lieutenant Wm. Mosely, to Captain.
First Lieutenant John S. Manning, to Captain.
Second Lieutenant Charles P. Allison, to First Lieutenant.
Second Lieutenant Wm. J. Lee, to First Lieutenant.
Second Lieutenant Joseph Purkey, to First Lieutenant.

General Grant and the Secretary of War reviewed the Army of the James on the 18th. It was a grand affair, and the whole army appeared in admirable condition. General Gibbon, in command of the 24th army corps, is one of the very best officers in the army, and General Ord, in command of the Army of the James, well deserves the confidence which General Grant seems to repose in him. On the 22d, Brevet Major General Turner assumed command of the division, which 'was now designated the 2d division of the 24th army corps, relieving General Harris, who returned to the command of his old brigade, the 3d. The troops are marching and counter-marching, and all are under orders to march to-morrow morning. Instead of marching on the 23d, we had another inspection.

Transcribed by:
Diana Hart
May 10, 2002
DiHart@juno.com

