

A BRIEF HISTORY
OF THE
THIRTY-FOURTH REGIMENT
N. Y. S. V.

EMBRACING

A COMPLETE ROSTER OF
ALL OFFICERS AND MEN

AND A FULL ACCOUNT OF THE

DEDICATION OF THE MONUMENT ON THE
BATTLEFIELD OF ANTIETAM

SEPTEMBER 17, 1902

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

LIEUTENANT L. N. CHAPIN

"PATRIOTISM IS SUCH A LOVING SENSE OF THE UNITY AND THE VITALITY OF THE NATIONAL LIFE AS WILL LEAD ONE GLADLY TO OBEY THE LAW, TO GUARD ITS DIGNITY, TO AID IN ITS ENFORCEMENT, TO EXERCISE A NOBLE SELF-RESTRAINT, TO CULTIVATE CIVIC VIRTUES AND POLITICAL WISDOM, TO SACRIFICE, TO SUFFER, AND, IF NEED BE, TO DIE FOR THE COUNTRY."

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Here, as at all our other first camps, we were overrun with the blacks, for whom the Suwanee River, and all other rivers of the south, had no attractions at all comparable with those of the Potomac River, with Massa Linkum's sojers encamped on its northern bank. General Butler had not yet arrived, to give these refugees a name and a status; the government did not want to do anything to give the south reason for believing that we were fighting to wipe out slavery; and so these runaways, who were not yet contrabands, were left unhoused, unfed, unclothed, and almost unburied. Later on their condition was very much improved, and thousands of them were employed as teamsters, servants, etc. But all along, at first, the whole situation was most pathetic.

Quartermaster Easterbrook gives us a few interesting reminiscences on this subject:

"The only points of especial interest regarding the fugitive slaves in our camp, so far as I had any experience, center on Fenton Harris, who faithfully served me, went to Little Falls with me when we were mustered out, came to New Haven with me, and died here last October, (1901,) and lies in the Grove Street Cemetery in this city, in the lot, and close by the grave of Lieut.-Governor, Morris Tyler, in whose family he had been employed for thirty-four years. Fenton was much more than a servant to me. I have never lost interest in him. He was a noble specimen of an escaped slave. Col. Laflin had as a servant "Dick," who also was a superior man. I would like to tell you how I tried to get Dick out of Washington, in December, 1861, with the aid of Dr. Sherman, to take him home, (Pittsfield, Mass.,) for the Colonel, and how he failed. A black man could not get out of Washington. Dr. Sherman invoked the power of his position to get him out, but it wouldn't work. Dick had to stay. Then there was Addison Phillips, and his wife, Nellie, with an infant of tender age, (six weeks, I think). Nellie established a laundry at Camp Jackson, and did quite a thriving business. Addison, is living at the Falls, and did own several houses and lots there. Captain Riley also had a valuable man. He was as black as a raven, and as good as he was black. He enlisted late in 1863, or early in '64, and received a large bounty: \$1,500 as I remember it. Fenton Harris had been owned by a man named Turley, whose home was at Leesburg, Va. There must have been twenty or twenty-five negroes in our outfit, most of whom came to us at Camp Jackson. The poor fellows had a hard time of it until the adoption of Butler's theory. After that they got along all right."

Major Sponable also had a servant by the name of Robert Scott, who was like the others, faithful and true. He was an escaped slave, who joined us at Camp McClellan. He was brought home by the Major at the close of our service. He went to school in Little Falls during the summer of 1863, and the Major finally got him a position as waiter in a restaurant, in Syracuse.

Captain Clark reports that on one occasion, when he was on picket at Edward's Ferry, General Stone tried to send back to Virginia two boat loads of these blacks that had "sought sanctuary" in our camps. The Confederate picket refused to let them land. Stone still ordered the men to row on, but the rebel picket threatened to shoot, and so Stone gave it up. Stone was imprisoned after Ball's Bluff, and later was released, and restored to the confidence of the government. Still later he became a Pasha in Egypt.

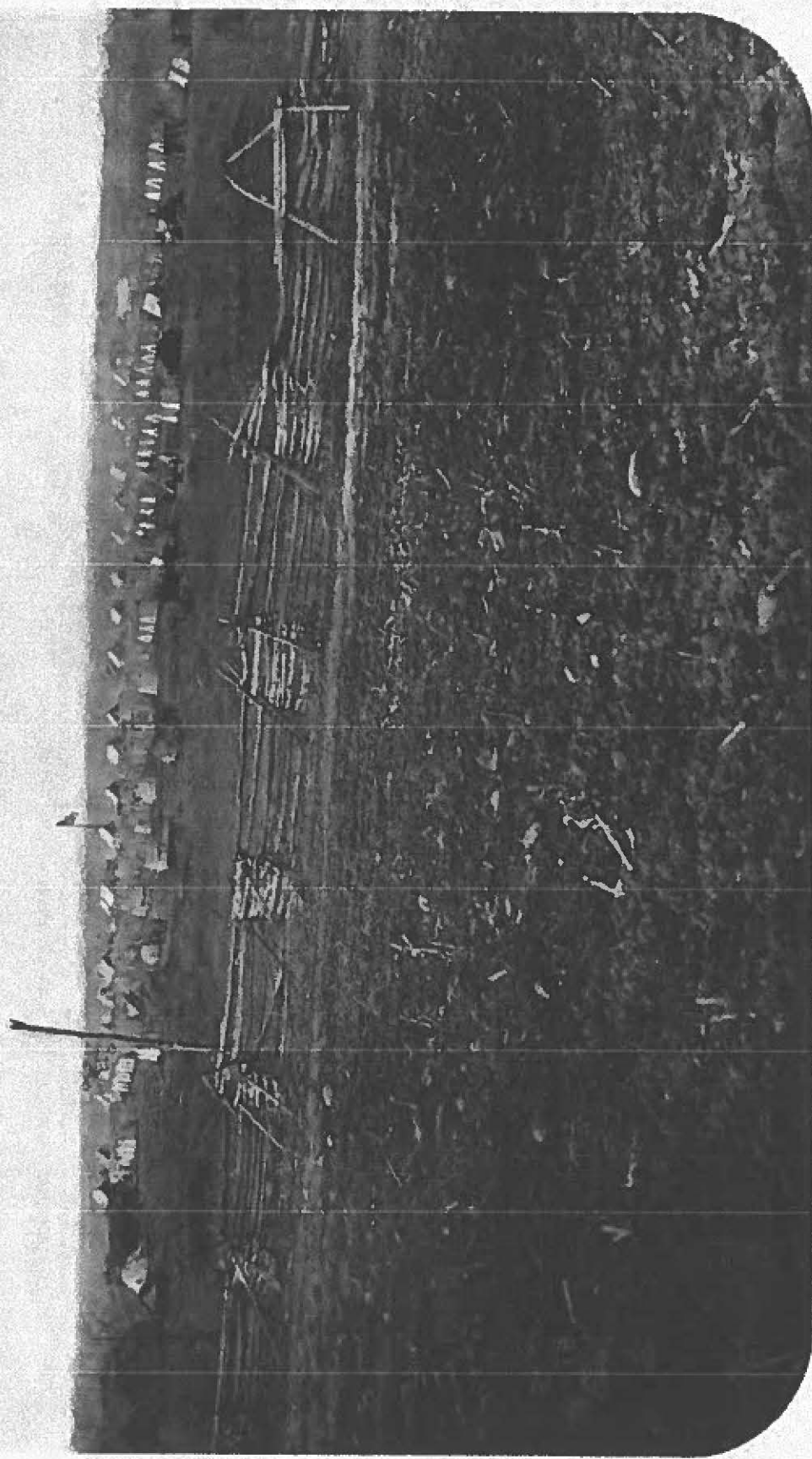
CHAPTER III

EDWARD'S FERRY. BALL'S BLUFF. WINTER AT CAMP McCLELLAN.

THESE scouting expeditions across the Potomac thickened, rather than thinned, as the season advanced. Finally, there was an effort on the part of General McClellan, now in command of the Army of the Potomac, to determine the strength and character of the rebel forces scattered along the upper Potomac, on the Virginia side.

It was the fortune of the Thirty-fourth to play a more or less important part in that little red drama, known in the annals of the great rebellion, as the Battle of Ball's Bluff. Leesburg, nearly opposite us, was a good sized Virginia town, and was supposed to be the headquarters for quite a large body of the enemy. General Charles P. Stone was in immediate command on our side; and, on October 20, received orders from McClellan to feel the ground around Leesburg. With this in view, he directed Colonel Devens, of the Fifteenth Massachusetts, to send out a scouting force, to determine just what there was at Leesburg. The scouting party reported a small force only in sight; whereupon five companies of the Fifteenth were thrown across at Harrison's Island; and afterward other troops, numbering, all told, 1,900 men. This force was attacked by a superior force of rebels, under General Evans, and driven into the river, with great slaughter.

Our fortunes, however, lay at Edward's Ferry, some four miles below, and were not so disastrous. Monday morning, October 21, we broke camp at Seneca Mills, and started for Poolesville, some eight miles away. We were soon halted, and our destination changed to Edward's Ferry. Arriving at that place about noon, we found the movement across the river already under way. Two regiments were across the river, and others waiting for the ferry. Heavy cannonading was kept up by our batteries on the Maryland side, on what appeared to be rebel redoubts some distance back from the river; but without drawing any fire from that direction. The means of transportation to the western bank of the river were nothing to brag of. Two old scows had been conscripted from the adjacent Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, and were poled back and forth in primitive fashion. During the afternoon our turn came, and for the first time the regiment squatted on the sacred soil of old Virginia. Pickets were thrown out, and the scant forces, thus quite isolated, awaited events. Toward midnight, most unsavory rumors began flying about. These were to the effect that Colonel Baker's forces, which had crossed at Harrison's Island, above, had been badly cut up; that Colonel Baker himself, had been killed; and that the victorious enemy were now on their way to give us a dose of the same medicine. Immediately began a hurried retreat back across the river. This continued until another batch of rumors started flying—to the effect that McClellan, with a large body of troops, was on his way to reinforce us, coming up the Virginia side of the river. This stopped



CAMP M'CLELLAN, AT POOLSVILLE, MD.—1861-2

the retreat, and such forces as had been taken to the Maryland side were brought back. All the talk now was about an immediate advance on Leesburg. During the afternoon following we were suddenly thrown into great excitement by hearing volley after volley of musketry discharged among the pickets, and soon after a long line of rebel troops was plainly discernible, just in rear of our retreating pickets. At this juncture, two pieces of artillery opened a brisk fire upon the advancing enemy, and the infantry lined up for action. The rebels, however, soon beat a hasty retreat, and our picket line was immediately restored. Company G was thrown forward to support the most advanced pickets, and the rest of the regiment held in reserve well toward the front. A company of the First Minnesota, another regiment of the brigade, was on the right of Company G, and during the brief engagement had one man killed, and another wounded, the man killed receiving four bayonet thrusts after he fell, mortally wounded by a shot through the hip. Wednesday afternoon there was again some commotion out on the front, but nothing came of it; and Wednesday night the troops were all transferred back to the Maryland side.

This whole event acquires importance by reason of what took place elsewhere, rather than by what we experienced. There is no reason why we should not have had a dose of the same medicine that was given to the Fifteenth Massachusetts, and the other regiments that crossed at Ball's Bluff. It is probable the enemy did not understand our isolated position. At the time they made their appearance, as above recorded, General Banks had a large force on the Maryland side, waiting to cross. This acted as a first-class bluff. So far as known, Captain Wells Sponable of Company B, and Private James Faville of Company K, were the last persons to leave the Virginia side. Coming to the river bank, they found large numbers of muskets, and a great quantity of provisions, abandoned on the bank. All this stuff they threw into the river before leaving.

Greeley in his "American Conflict," describing the events that took place at Ball's Bluff, adds this in regard to our movement at Edward's Ferry:

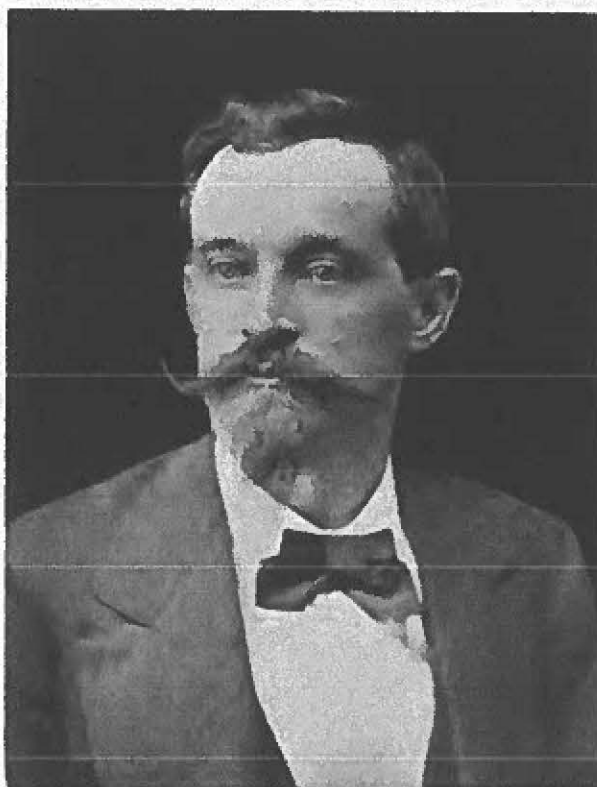
"Meanwhile General Stone had directed General Gorman to throw across the river at Edward's Ferry, a small force, which made a cautious reconnaissance for about three miles, on the road to Leesburg, when, coming suddenly upon a Mississippi regiment, it exchanged volleys and returned. General Gorman's entire brigade was thrown over at this point during the day; but, as it did not advance, its mere presence on the Virginia side of the Potomac, so far from the scene of the actual combat, subserved no purpose. After the disaster was complete, General Stone, about ten p. m., arrived on the ground, opposite Ball's Bluff, from which our ill-starred advance was made, as did General Banks at three next morning, and General McClellan on the evening of that day. But it was now too late. No relief was sent while relief could have availed. Even McCall retired from Dranesville southward (on the Virginia side) on the day of the fatal fight."

On recrossing the river the regiment did not return to its old camp at Seneca Mills, but proceeded to Poolville, where it went into camp, and remained until the following spring. This camp was known as "Camp McClellan." At this time we were brigaded with the Fifteenth

Massachusetts, First Minnesota, and Eighty-second New York (formerly Second New York Militia) under the command of General Willis A. Gorman.

Previous to this Edward's Ferry movement, Colonel Ladew had returned, and resumed command of the regiment; but, always in extremely poor health, and seemingly unable to endure the fatigue of campaigning, he was unable to accompany the regiment across the river; and was again compelled to be absent from his command until the 20th of February. The winter on the upper Potomac was one of much severity. In spite of stringent orders to the contrary, there was a good

deal of intercourse, of the friendliest character, between the pickets on the opposite sides of the river. There were a good many meetings in mid-stream, much commerce in the way of swapping of coffee for tobacco; swapping of newspapers and general exchange of news and views, not considered contraband. Not infrequently our pickets would cross to the other bank or the rebs to ours, for purposes of more friendly intercourse. This was wholly out of order, of course, and in fact, dead against orders; and more than one officer lost his head on account of it. But neither officers nor men could withstand the deadly fascination of the game. It was delicious. And the officers and men on the reb side couldn't abstain from it any more than we could. As the winter advanced, river and canal were fast locked in icy fetters. And then the northern boys wished they had brought their skates; for they could see the Johnnies, on the other side, having a good time on the ice. January 10, there was a heavy fall of snow, and the weather became bitterly cold. The rigors of picket, down on the river, could not be abated; but in camp the men made themselves as comfortable as possible. Congenial spirits among the men, drawn together by that selective affinity which sometimes makes strange bedfellows, would combine, and erect little log-walled huts, with some kind of rude roofing, and so make themselves quite cosey. Then, again, some strange josey, would go and live by himself, solitary like, chumming or fraternizing with nobody. It was his way, and he was let alone.



CAPTAIN THOMAS CORCORAN—1865

And all the time at the camps there was drill, drill: company drill, regimental drill; and three times a week there was brigade drill. These brigade drills were grand affairs, and quite worthy a long journey to see. Everything was spick and span, bright and shining; and three brass bands, and several drum corps in the brigade, made up a quite overpowering mass of glory. Occasionally, also, there would be grand reviews of all the troops in that vicinity, serenely contemplated by either the great General George B. McClellan himself, or by General Charles P. Stone, who, if it had not been for the red memory of Ball's Bluff, and Edward's Ferry, might have counted himself, also, to have been some great person. But at this time the Thirty-fourth itself had no band; that is, had not the real brass thing. And feeling the humiliating position in which this naturally placed the regiment, there was a general chipping in, the brass horns were ordered, and soon the Thirty-fourth had as good a band as any. This story teaches us, that, in time of war, if you can't have the real thing, in the way of glory, such as battles and killings, a brass band is the first, last, and best substitute.

To the everlasting credit of all the officers and men, be it said, that there was the most determined effort, through all the hard winter, to make the most and the best of the situation. Largely through the exertions of Chaplain Van Petten, there was erected a commodious chapel, in which there was preaching on Sunday, Bible class on Monday evening, prayer meeting on Tuesday and on Thursday evenings, and a Lyceum meeting on Wednesday evening. This Lyceum was a great thing. And the debates were masterful and eloquent. Some of the debates were on war topics, and the state of the country, and showed the true statesman-like breadth and grip of events. The following were the officers: President, Lieutenant-Colonel James A. Suiter; Vice-President, Captain D. J. Rich; Secretary, Lieutenant W. S. Walton; Treasurer, Adjutant George W. Thompson.

We observe the danger we encounter in this narrative of making the view a little too rosy. We note with regret our constant tendency to lean that way. And, lest some of our old comrades should be beguiled by this narrative into believing that they must have had a very delightful time that winter, after all, we will have to admonish them not to forget how it rained that winter; how it snowed; how it froze; how it thawed and let the bottom drop out of all the roads, and of many more equally interesting facts. Some men thought it rained all the time; but this view was not generally held; for quite as many thought it snowed all the time; but all agreed that the weather was doing something all the time, quite extraordinary. Hard labor was incessant; sickness was very common; and suffering was universal. Living on the raw like that, is the thing to bring out all the weak, and the strong, and the singular traits in human nature. You find out all that was born in a man, and all that he has since acquired. The sharp attrition of the closely herded camp life grinds a man hard, and sometimes uncovers things not suspected before.

We must not forget to speak of a nice little event that occurred on the 1st of February. That was the presentation of a sword to Dr. S. N. Sherman, the surgeon of the regiment. Sherman was a member of Congress yet, and away a good deal at Washington. But on the occasion of one of his visits to camp he was presented with a fine sword and belt. This was on account of his personal care and interest in the welfare of the men on the occasion of the crossing at Edward's Ferry, October 21. The sword bore an inscription appropriate to that event. The doctor was a very popular man from the beginning of his connection with the regiment, until his retirement March 6, 1863, to accept the position of Surgeon of United States Volunteers. The doctor, next to Lieutenant-Colonel Suiter, was the oldest officer in the regiment, the colonel being forty-four years old at the time of entering the service.

From early in August, 1861, to November 12, 1862, Quartermaster Nathan Easterbrook, Jr., was on detached duty on the staff of General Gorman, commanding the brigade. During the interval, this department was administered at first by First Lieutenant Elijah R. Brown, of Company A, for nearly a year; and afterward by First Lieutenant Alfred T. Atwood, of Company I. Both officers served the regiment with fidelity and ability. In one of the letters of Lieutenant W. S. Walton we find the following neat little allusion to Quartermaster Easterbrook:

"Conspicuous among General Gorman's staff, we noticed, on both occasions (brigade reviews), your friend and fellow townsman, N. Easterbrook, Jr., now honored with the duties and emoluments of Captain Brigade Quartermaster and aide-de-camp. Active, earnest, and kind to all, he deserves his good fortune, and nothing would please us more than to have some military dignity say, 'Come up higher.'"

A very cheery event during these winter months, and, in fact, always, was the arrival of the paymaster. In those days we were paid off in coin, and the formidable twenty-dollar gold pieces were very much in evidence in the regiment after these visits. A snug bit of money it took to go around; but Paymaster King always brought enough. This being paid in coin did not continue long; for soon the white and yellow metals disappeared, and did not reappear as currency for more than eleven years.