

THE OREGON SCOUT.

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THE OREGON SCOUT.

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GRANT IN THE WILDERNESS.

The Army of the Potomac—From the Crossing of the Rapidan—To the Siege of Petersburg in 1862.

There are few more graphic pictures of horror of war than the following sketch of the campaign in the wilderness, written by Lt. Elias Brookings, of the 31st Maine for the Springfield Republican.

It is the purpose in this account to review briefly some of the scenes and incidents of which the writer was a witness. Little attempt will be made to give the positions of the different corps which composed the army. For the most part the observations are confined to a single regiment.

While our fighting in this campaign begins at the Rapidan, less than fifty miles from Richmond in a direct line, so many rivers are to be crossed that the army must move up and down these streams to find suitable fords or for favorable positions for pontoon bridges. It must cross and recross in accordance with the movements of the enemy. The soldier, now looking back 22 years, would estimate his route from May 4, when the army was put in motion toward the Wilderness, to June 15, the date of reaching the James, at several hundred miles. For 50 consecutive days this army of the Potomac was in motion and on the alert, marching one day and meeting the enemy the next; again marching three days, and again repelling the attacks or changing the works of the foe for as many more.

Consider also the load which is carried by each soldier—five days' rations, 40 rounds of ammunition, canteen filled with coffee, and knapsack prepared for a three-months' campaign. The weight of this burden, including musket, is not less than 80 pounds. It is proper that every soldier's monument in the land should be surmounted with the representation of a soldier fully equipped. The son of every veteran, to understand in any degree the burden which his father bore, should annually buckle on the old armor and put himself on the march. Wonder and admiration would fill the breast of that son whose father had for months and years staggered under such a load. So much in general.

On May 1, the army encamped all the way from Culpeper court-house northerly for 25 miles toward Alexandria, numbered from 125,000 to 150,000 men. Reorganizations and consolidation of regiments, brigades and divisions have been rapidly progressing and are now nearly complete. Great activity everywhere prevails. The drilling of troops, the distribution of supplies, the moving of artillery and above all the presence of Hancock, Burnside, Meade and Grant, indicate an immediate advance. The appearance of this vast army reaching on both sides of the highway toward the distant hills presents a magnificent picture. Look at it. Burnished arms on all sides, regiments on dress parade, inspection of companies, drill by squads, regiments and brigades, badges, flags, tents dotting the entire surface, knots of men here and there discussing the situation and speculating of the future, officers in gaudy dress, with aids and orderlies galloping over the field—these are some of the prominent features in this grand spectacle on these gala days. Good health and buoyant spirits are the rule. At the appearance of some well-known and popular general the men voluntarily rush to the roadside and send forth cheer upon cheer. And yet under all this there is a fearful foreboding for Grant is here and therefore the army is never to retreat. Generals are issuing orders to be observed on the march. Burnside, commander of the 9th corps, with which our regiment is attached, caused to be read to each brigade very definite instructions. Among others was this: "On the march no soldier should quit the ranks on any pretense whatever without the permission of his commanding officer. The army is about to move into the country of an active enemy, with no friendly force behind or near it, and every straggler runs the risk of Liberty prison or bullet."

Almost every hour of the day or night we are expecting to receive the order, "Forward to Richmond." May 3 the adjutant of each regiment reads Gen. Meade's address. Even now comes a patriotic throb as we recall these words:

Soldiers! The eyes of the whole country are looking with anxious hope to the blow you are about to strike in the most sacred cause that ever called men to arms. Remember your homes, your wives and children. Bear with patience the hardships and sacrifices you will be called upon to endure.

On the same day camp is broken, six days' rations are issued and we are in motion. A few only of the soldiers of our regiment had seen service, having enlisted in the winter and spring. The officers, however, were for the most part veterans who had served in the 2d Maine regiment.

Of for a pen which adequately could set forth the suffering of even that one day's march of 18 miles toward the Rapidan. At 12 o'clock the burden seems more than double, 80 pounds become 200! Like a ship at sea partially wrecked, from which some of the cargo less valuable than the rest must be thrown overboard, the soldier now examines his load and begins to throw away articles, which in the morning seemed indispensable. Before sunset he has summoned all his energies, marched and marched, minutes seeming hours. The earth

ceases her revolution. But there is hope. A halt may be ordered. It does not come and the man finally staggers and falls. Overtaken and urged on by a guard whose duty it is to allow no one to fall out, he is helped to his feet, pushed on a few rods and again falls. Burnside's order has little weight with one so exhausted. He welcomes either Liberty or a bullet.

Some veteran at his side has told him of the painful search for his regiment, when once falling out. His comrades move on, regiments, brigades, divisions and corps passing in rapid succession. The weary soldier is unable to move, might finally overtaking him. Rising at daylight new and strange badges are worn by the troops now passing. From all sides the "stragglers" appear. At last upon some comrade straggler, like himself, the old badge of the 9th corps, the cannon and anchor, is seen. It is a welcome sight. These two men, being bent upon one and the same object, the finding of their regiments, form a partnership. Others wearing the same badge join them until nearly a brigade is formed. The search is continued through the day. Toward night the headquarters of the corps are discovered. But the corps extends for three miles along the road. One hour more and the division is found. Short work after this to find the brigade, regiment and company.

On that first day at 7 a. m. our regiment numbered 800. At 9 p. m. only 600 responded to "roll-call." Of the 200 who have fallen out 50 fail to overtake their commands and in a few days are reported sick in hospitals. But the 600, what is their condition after the first day's campaign? Our good general, in addition to instructions on falling out, had also mentioned the necessity of "washing the feet at night, soaping the stockings and greasing the shoes." But suggestions, instructions, and even orders are of little avail with men so utterly prostrated by the day's march. Experience here, as elsewhere, must mainly be relied upon to correct the habits. The feet are sore, the shoes are taken off to relieve pain, but as a rule the stockings, although saturated with blood, are not soaped nor the shoes greased at the end of the first day. The Veterans are the exception. They seek brooks and streams in which they bathe before sleep. This, too, is our first night without tents. Stretched upon the ground for miles, the army of the Potomac rests.

It requires more than a blast from the bugle to rouse the soldier the next morning. The company officers must awaken each man. Removing his blankets he attempts to stand. After several futile efforts, he finally succeeds in taking a few steps without shoes. Gathering wood, the soldiers in groups of six or eight light a fire to boil the coffee, which with pork and hardtack, makes their breakfast. Hardly is the breakfast eaten when the order comes, "Fall in." Tottering and limping the men obey, the acute sensation of pain gradually diminishing under the exertions of the march. So heavy is the load and so tedious is the march that many a soldier prefers to meet the enemy—anything but this terrible fatigue!

On the 5th the 9th corps reaches the Rapidan by a forced march. The sharp rattle of musketry is heard. The 2nd, 5th, and 6th corps have had hard fighting all day. Ambulances, stretchers almost block the way. Wounded and bleeding men are carried to the rear. Having crossed the Rapidan we are in the Wilderness. All night the groans and cries of wounded men are heard.

Early the next morning our lines are formed and we are advanced toward the enemy. As we near the foe there come from the officers these words so well understood just before a battle, words given in a low half-whispered and yet firm tone: "Forward"—"forward"—"steady"—"guide right." On and on we advance, with difficulty keeping in line owing to the underbrush. A fierce battle is already raging on both sides. As yet we have received no fire from the enemy. We are near his entrenchments. Suddenly the order comes, "Charge." A deadly fire is hurled in our very faces. Our lines become irregular. We return the fire, probably with little effect, our antagonist being protected by his fortifications. The storm of lead continues as we attempt to reform our lines and again charge. By this time our troops are strangely mingled.

Now comes a lull, men begin to look about them. In the excitement of the charge officers urged on any men whom they could. All bear the stamp of brave men, but many are strangers. Only a few of those who started at the first order are here now. Some, more daring than others, scaled the works of the enemy and are now prisoners; too many have fallen; some in the confusion fought nobly elsewhere, while possibly a few considered "discretion the better part of valor." But where is the regiment? The old flag is the regiment, no matter how few are with it. Out of such a charge and in so much confusion 50 men may be found with the colors immediately after. Eagerly the absent ones search for a sight of the flag, which all are bound to recognize as home.

All day long the tide of battle ebbs and flows, now on the right, now on left, now at the center, and again at all points, fierce and sharp. Attacks and repulses, victories and defeats follow each other in rapid succession. On the march to the Rapidan soldiers longed to meet the enemy. They have met and fought him and lost more than 20,000 in killed and wounded

—7,000 prisoners, besides many from sickness and other causes.

Again we are moving toward Spottsylvania. On our way we halt upon the ground, being upon a battle-field where one year before 15,000 Union men fell. It is Chambersville, where Hooker was so badly beaten. The skeletons of veterans still upon the surface are reverently buried. Many marks of that terrible slaughter still remain, but the old order, "Fall in," left us little time to wander over this sacred soil.

Spottsylvania seems much like the wilderness. The forest trees are larger and the clearings more frequent. In the five days of marching and fighting one scene is remembered with distinctness. Our forces at this point are entrenched behind hastily-constructed works on the brow of a hill. The hostile forces are posted on the opposite hill. The ravine between is covered with a small growth of trees sufficient to screen troops. Suddenly 2,000 or 3,000 men rush from the enemy's line toward the ravine. Had the movement been discovered in time the troops could not have reached the ravine, for before reaching it, they were within easy range. Evidently they are to make a dash toward our lines. Officers are urging the men to be calm and take good aim. Our men obey. At the first fire the foe retreats to the ravine. While he is crossing we load to be ready as he ascends the hill. The colonel rushing along the line cries out, "Now be ready, boys." As they emerge the order is "fire." The colonel seeing the execution calls out: "Good good, boys. Give 'em another." At Spottsylvania the Union loss is placed at 10,000.

And now for eight days and nights with scarcely an intermission this army has been making attacks upon a desperate foe everywhere strongly entrenched. If sleep were allowed to any, it must be under arms. The soldier must grasp his musket and be ready to spring to his feet at any moment. Our loss has been fearful. The sick, the wounded, the killed and the prisoners during these memorable days must have amounted to more than one-third of the entire army. After this battle reinforcements are pouring in. Troops are encouraged by the news from the North. Men generally in the army considered themselves beaten. Our loss had been greater than that of the rebels. Imagine our surprise on learning that President Lincoln had on May 9, after receiving intelligence from "the Wilderness," issued a proclamation recommending that all patriots "unite in common thanksgiving and prayer to Almighty God" on account of "the army operations within the last five days." On the same day the army mourned the loss of Gen. Sedgewick who was killed by a ball from a sharp-shooter. The objective point is not reached. The army must move. There is more or less of skirmishing and annoyance from sharpshooters all the way to Cold Harbor which is reached June 1.

Incidents are constantly occurring to break the monotony of these hot and dusty roads. A man in the ranks is whirled violently round and falls to the ground. His companions remove his equipments and search for the expected wound. It cannot be found. The man soon resumes his place and goes on almost ashamed lest he be suspected of slinking. The same night when ready to encamp and the blankets, which had been twisted together and thrown over the shoulders, are spread out a bullet falls upon the ground. The soldier, suspected of shamming calls his comrades for an inspection, who find that the rebel bullet has passed through 12 thicknesses of his blanket. The verdict was "justified in falling." Every soldier will recall many similar instances. Sometimes the bullet passes through the clothing. The soldier imagines himself killed and often sends dying messages to his friends.

At Cold Harbor it is the old story of attacks and repulses, slaughter and blood. In this fight our brigade at one time is placed in front of artillery for its support. For several hours we lie flat upon our faces in the edge of a forest, our artillery playing over our heads and the confederates returning the fire. Beyond a doubt this is the most trying position in which to place men. Shot and shell came screaming through the air. Now a shell bursts in our midst, killing several and wounding others; now it comes tearing along cutting the branches from trees; now it plows the earth in our front and half buries those near; and again it strikes in our rear. But in each case there is a painful suspense. The noise is deafening. The hands placed over the ears are but a slight protection. The boom of guns is still heard. If we could only do something! Fire, load, charge or retreat! We must wait for orders. When the order, "ret