

HISTORY OF THE ONE-HUNDRED AND FORTIETH PENNSYLVANIA VOLUNTEERS.

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[CONTINUED.]

1864.

July 23 While out in the front we stepped over to see Lt. Laughlin. He was not at home, but we went into his "gopher" and left our card. His house was all cellar, with a mud roof level with the ground. A hole was dug in the ground, and steps to descend into it. Two offsets were left for beds. Shelves were dug in the wall. The door faced away from the enemy; it was a gopher sure enough. The mode of living was called "ground-hogging," and was resorted to by the whole army, horses and all. The army looked like a town with all the houses on one side of the streets, and the back of the house in front—the front door was behind anyhow. In walking among them a person was apt to be on a roof before he was aware of it.

From Laughlin's house we went to the right stopping at Fort Hell (soldiers use very appropriate names) to examine it. Men were busy at the gabions, traverses and magazine. As we were passing long another part of the line a shell flew past, instantly there was a stir among the soldiers to see what was fired at. Several followed the first, one or two bursting over a group of soldiers making coffee. They fanned away the smoke with their caps and continued cooking.

Among the squad at work in our Division was a man who was crazy on religion. Some thought he was "playing off," in order to get discharged. He always went with an open Bible in his hand, and was preaching. Neither threats nor appeals had any effect on him. He professed to have a calling from God, and was bound to do his duty in spite of punishment.

"Yes, I am bound to do my duty," he exclaimed. "Well" said a comrade, "since you've enlisted your duty is to serve Uncle Sam. So come take a shovel." He always dodged the point of duty to the country. He ought to have been in the asylum.

July 24. Mr. Milligan preached.

July 26. At four P. M. we started—no one knew whither. We moved along the road until within two miles of City Point and stopped for supper. As we tramped our noses and throats got filled with dust. Water was in great demand but scarce. One reason diarrhea prevails in an army to such an extent, is because the men get choked in this way, and drink the first water they come to, be it good or bad. The first we came to was in a muck hole covered with slime, in which you could see all the colors of the rainbow. But it was a poor time to be dainty. We had to take that for coffee, and fill our canteens with it for the night march.

After supper we started again. It was dark; the road lay through the woods; fires were burning at every angle to show the course of the column. At every fire was a dismounted cavalier, gathering wood, and instructing the heads of columns. The cavalry were moving on our right. Before midnight we crossed the Appomattox on a pontoon, at Point of Rocks.

July 27. About two P. M. we crossed the James at Jones's Landing. A part of the Nineteenth Corps was on duty there. Our Corps laid down for sleep. Companies C and D were sent on picket. The line was established along the edge of a woods and we waited for daylight. At the first peep firing began, and our Brigade charged at the Reb works, capturing some prisoners and four Parrot guns. Troops moved in where we were and a battery unlimbered and prepared for action only twenty feet away; we knew there was no need of us there, but having no orders could not leave.

Hancock, Sheridan and Foster rode by. Sheridan had an old white straw hat on, the rim of which was turned down in front and up behind; his position was somewhat stooped, with one hand on his thigh, while the other held the reins. De Trobrian, who commanded the troops behind us asked what we were doing there. We told him awaiting orders.

Soon the order came, and just as the men collected the Rebs began shelling us. Words cannot describe how peaceful that scene was before the first shot. Officers' cooks, negro hostlers, hospital attaches, and such like, were in profusion, eating their breakfast and feeding their animals; laughing and joking were in order and hard tack was being washed down by amusing anecdote. But suddenly that first shell came screeching along, setting the hair on end, and such a jumping, crawling, rolling, running and wriggling to get behind trees you never saw. Coffee was upset, hospital boxes dropped, dishes spilt—anything—everything left, to get behind a tree. The soldiers stood out unprotected. The second shell rolled over the plain fifty yards in our front, bouncing up at every thing it struck, but did not burst. The third came crashing through the tree tops, and spluttering as though all pandemonium was let loose. It went over our heads. A negro was going over the plain double quick, leading two horses. The shell fell between them, and raised a cloud of dust. That was the last we saw of Mr. Nig.

Our batteries opened and soon silenced the enemy. We went up to join the Brigade. Halted in the captured woods. The fire of our artillery and gunboats was well shown. The trees in the rear of the works were cut almost into kindling wood and all the shots were about four feet high.

It was wonderful to see what a shell would go through—a gunboat shell especially. Some trees two feet in diameter were cut off. We saw a pine tree three feet over, and an oak two feet over, through both of which a shell had gone, and then knocking a hole in the ground, that a cart load would not fill, went on.

After lying around the Reb works until noon we went into the woods. Part of the the regiment went on picket. A few boys got behind a house on the skirmish line to protect themselves. Near the house was a plum tree full of fruit. Every boy who went near it was shot at. So one crawled out, and cut it down while lying on the ground, felling it towards the house. In this way they got the plums in spite of the Johnnies, and sat eating them without molestation.

To be Continued.