

# BYERS SAMUEL MARSHALL

WITH FIRE AND SWORD

Samuel Byers  
**With Fire and Sword**

«Public Domain»

**Byers S.**

With Fire and Sword / S. Byers — «Public Domain»,

# Содержание

PREFACE	5
CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	13
CHAPTER IV	17
CHAPTER V	20
CHAPTER VI	22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

# With Fire and Sword

## PREFACE

In war some persons seek adventures; others have them in spite of themselves. It happened that the writer of this book belonged to a regiment that seemed to be always in the midst of great experiences. It was, in fact, one of the few regiments that absolutely fought themselves out of existence. It was mustered in a thousand strong; it lost seven hundred and seventy-seven men by death, wounds, and disease. The fragment that was left over was transferred to a cavalry command. When the writer finally escaped from prison, after many months of confinement and many thrilling adventures both in prison and in the army of the enemy, he was mustered out as a "supernumerary officer." His command had ceased to exist. He was literally the *last man of the regiment*. Of the eighty of his regiment who had been taken to prison with him all but sixteen were dead. Of the nine captured from his own company all were dead but one.

While with his command he had served as a private soldier, as sergeant, and as adjutant. On escaping from prison he was for a time on General Sherman's staff and was selected to run down the Cape Fear River and carry the great news of Sherman's successes to the people of the North.

He kept a diary every day in the four years of war and adventure. The substance of the facts related here is from its pages; occasionally they are copied just as they are there set down. The book is not a history of great army movements, it is simply a true tale of the thrilling experiences of a subordinate soldier in the midst of great events.

## CHAPTER I

### **My enlistment in the Union Army – The "Bushwhackers" of Missouri – The Quantrells and the James Brothers – Cutting a man's head off – My first adventure in the war – Capturing a guerrilla**

I am writing down these sketches of adventures of mine from a daily journal or diary kept by me throughout the four years of the Civil War. Its pages are crumpled and old and yellow, but I can read them still.

Fate so arranged it that I was the very first one to enlist in my regiment, and it all came about through a confusion of names. A patriotic mass-meeting was held in the court-house of the village where I lived. Everybody was there, and everybody was excited, for the war tocsin was sounding all over the country. A new regiment had been ordered by the governor, and no town was so quick in responding to the call as the village of Newton. We would be the very first. Drums were beating at the mass-meeting, fifes screaming, people shouting. There was a little pause in the patriotic noise, and then someone called out, "Myers to the platform!" "Myers! Myers! Myers!" echoed a hundred other voices. Mr. Myers never stirred, as he was no public speaker. I sat beside him near the aisle. Again the voices shouted "Myers! Myers!" Myers turned to me, laughed, and said, "They are calling you, Byers," and fairly pushed me out into the aisle. A handful of the audience seeing Myers would not respond, did then call my own name, and both names were cried together. Some of the audience becoming confused called loudly for me. "Go on," said Myers, half-rising and pushing me toward the platform.

I was young, – just twenty-two, – ambitious, had just been admitted to the bar, and now was all on fire with the newly awakened patriotism. I went up to the platform and stood by the big drum. The American flag, the flag that had been fired on by the South, was hanging above my head. In a few minutes I was full of the mental champagne that comes from a cheering multitude. I was burning with excitement, with patriotism, enthusiasm, pride, and my enthusiasm lent power to the words I uttered. I don't know why nor how, but I was moving my audience. The war was not begun to put down slavery, but what in the beginning had been an incident I felt in the end would become a cause.

The year before I had been for many months on a plantation in Mississippi, and there with my own eyes had seen the horrors of slavery. I had seen human beings flogged; men and women bleeding from an overseer's lash. Now in my excitement I pictured it all. I recalled everything. "And the war, they tell us," I cried, "is to perpetuate this curse!" In ten minutes after my stormy words one hundred youths and men, myself the first, had stepped up to the paper lying on the big drum and had put down our names for the war.

We all mustered on the village green. Alas, not half of them were ever to see that village green again! No foreboding came to me, the enthusiastic youth about to be a soldier, of the "dangers by flood and field," the adventures, the thrilling scenes, the battles, the prisons, the escapes, that were awaiting me.

Now we were all enthusiasm to be taken quickly to the front, to the "seat of war." We could bide no delay. Once our men were on the very point of mobbing and "egging" our great, good Governor Kirkwood, because for a moment he thought he would be compelled to place us in a later regiment. However, we were immediately started in wagons for the nearest railroad, fifty miles away.

At the town of Burlington, on the 15th of July, 1861, we were mustered into the service as Company B of the Fifth Iowa Infantry. Our colonel, W. H. Worthington, was a military martinet from

some soldier school in Kentucky. His sympathies were with his native South. Why he was leading a Northern regiment was a constant mystery to his men.

The regiment spent scant time in Burlington, for in a little while we were whisked down the Mississippi River in a steamer to St. Louis, and soon joined the army of Frémont, organizing at Jefferson City to march against General Price, who was flying toward Springfield with the booty he had gained in his capture of Mulligan and his men at Boonville. Now all began to look like war. Missouri was neither North nor South; she was simply hell, for her people were cutting one another's throats, and neighboring farmers killed each other and burned each other's homes. The loyal feared to shut their eyes in sleep; the disloyal did not know if a roof would be above their heads in the morning. Brothers of the same family were in opposing armies, and the State was overrun by Southern guerrillas and murderers. The Quantrells, the James Brothers, and other irregular and roaming bands of villains rode everywhere, waylaying, bushwhacking, and murdering.

We followed General Price's army to the Ozark Mountains, marching day and night – the nights made hideous by the burning of homes on the track of both the armies, while unburied corpses lay at the roadside. We marched half the nights and all the days and just as we got close enough to fight, the Washington politicians caused Frémont to be removed from his command. Frémont had been ahead of his time. He had freed some slaves, and the dough-faced politicians were not yet ready for action of that character.

The campaign had been to no purpose. Some of our regiment, indignant at the removal of their general, had to be guarded to prevent mutiny and disorder. Now we turned about and made the long march back to the Missouri River. Half that cold winter was spent near Syracuse, in guarding the Pacific Railway. We lived in wedge tents, and spite of the cold and snow and storm, our squads by turn tramped for miles up and down the railroad in the darkness every night. What terrible tales, too, we had in our little tents that winter, of the deeds of Quantrell's men. It did not seem possible that the South could set loose a lot of murderers to hang on the skirts of our army, to "bushwhack" an honorable foe, burn villages, destroy farms, and drive whole counties into conditions as frightful as war was in the Middle Ages. Only savage Indians fought that way. Yet Quantrell's band of murderers was said to be on the payroll of the Confederate States. Here and there, however, his guerrilla outlaws met with awful punishment, and horrible incidents became the order of the day and night.

I recall now how a prize was once offered by one of our commanders for the head of a certain man among those desperate murderers, a desperado with a band of men that knew no mercy. His troop of riders had ambuscaded almost scores of our soldiers, and innocent farmers who did not happen to like his ways were strung up to trees as unceremoniously as one would drown a kitten. The offered prize of a thousand dollars stimulated certain of our men in taking chances with this beast of the Confederacy, and a corporal of our cavalry learned of the desperado's occasional visits at night to his home, only a dozen miles away from where we were camped. Several nights he secretly watched from a thicket near the cabin for the bandit's return. Once in the darkness he heard a horse's hoofs, and then a man dismounted and entered at the door. The evening was chilly, and a bright fire in the open fireplace of the cabin shone out as the man entered.

The corporal, who had disguised himself in an old gray overcoat, knocked for entrance, and pretended to be a sick Confederate going on a furlough to his home not far away. He was cautiously admitted and given a seat by the open fire. He had no arms, and to the bandit and his wife his story of sickness and a furlough seemed probable enough. The two men and the one woman sat in front of the fireplace talking for an hour. The corporal, with the guerrilla sitting within a few feet of him, thought of the prize, and of his comrades murdered by this man. But what could he do? Suddenly the thought came, "I must kill or be killed." Outside there was only darkness and silence; inside the cabin, the low voices of these three people and the flickering fire.

The corporal glanced about him. There was no gun to be seen that he could seize. The guerrilla's big revolver hung at his belt. While sitting thus, a bit of burning wood rolled out onto the hearth. The

guerrilla stooped over to put it in its place. Instantly the corporal saw his chance and, springing for the iron poker at the fireside, dealt the guerrilla a blow on the head that stretched him dead on the cabin floor. In an instant his big jackknife was out of his pocket and in the presence of the screaming wife the brute severed the man's head from his body. Then he left the cabin, mounted his horse in the thicket, and in the darkness carried his ghostly trophy into camp. It is a horrible ride to think of, that dozen miles, with the bleeding head of a murdered man on the saddle bow.

So the awful things went on all that winter in Missouri. As for myself, I was tramping about as a corporal, helping in a small way to keep the great railroad free from marauders and in possession of the Union army.

I don't know how it happened, but one morning our colonel, who had always treated me with extreme gruffness, though he well knew I did my duties with patriotic zeal, sent for me to come to his tent. I was a little alarmed, not knowing what was about to happen to me. The colonel called me by name as I entered, saluting him cap in hand, and for once he actually smiled.

"Corporal," he said dryly, as if suddenly regretting his smile, "I have noticed that you always did the duty assigned you with promptness. I need a quartermaster sergeant. You are the man."

I was almost paralyzed with astonishment and pleasure. I stood stock still, without a word of gratitude. At last, recovering myself, I explained that I had enlisted expecting to fight, and not to fill some easy position with the trains.

"If I could only be allowed to find a substitute," I ventured to say, "in case of a fight, so I might share the danger with my comrades, I would like the promotion."

Again the colonel tried to smile. "You probably will change your mind; you will find excitement enough," he remarked, dismissing me.

I was hardly installed in my new post when to my surprise I was ordered by the colonel to take a good horse and ride twelve miles across the lone prairies and carry a message to a command at the village of Tipton. Instantly my mind was excited with the hopes of an adventure. I don't know, even now, just why I was selected for the venturesome undertaking. I knew there was scarcely a road and not a house in the whole distance. I knew, too, the whole country was full of murderous guerrillas. But nevertheless I was full of elation. This was the kind of a thing I had hoped for when I enlisted.

Light flakes of snow were falling when, with exultant spirits, I started from the camp. The trip outward proved uneventful, for nothing happened to me on my way. As I was returning, however, at a point halfway across the prairie I was surprised to see a man in gray, probably a guerrilla, ride out of a long slough or hollow to my left and gallop into the road directly ahead of me. He was in complete gray uniform, wore a saber, and had revolvers at his saddle bow. The man glanced back at me, and I saw him reaching for his pistols. "Here comes my first fight in the war," I thought instantly, "out here alone on the prairie." Save my one half-loaded revolver, strapped to my waist, I was unarmed. The stranger, without firing, galloped faster. I, too, galloped faster, the distance between us remaining about the same. Each of us now had a pistol in his hand, but it looked as if each were afraid to commence the duel. If the stranger checked his horse to give him breath, I checked mine. If he galloped again, I, too, put spurs to my animal. Imagining that other guerrillas must be lurking quite near, I was not over-anxious to bring on the engagement, and I suppose the armed man felt much the same way, for he could not have thought that I was in such a place absolutely alone. So neither fired. We just looked at each other and galloped. Finally we approached a little wood, and in a twinkling he turned into a path and was out of sight. I did not care to follow him to his hiding-place just then, and quickly galloped to our camp a few miles off.

Before midnight that night I, with a dozen of my regiment, surrounded the little wood and a cabin secreted in its center. Approaching, we looked into the windows, and, sure enough, there, roasting his feet in front of an open fire, sat my rider of the day. When three of us suddenly entered the house and demanded his surrender he sprang for a rifle that stood like a poker by the fireside, aimed it at me, and shouted "Never! Surrender yourself." A bayonet that instant against his breast

brought him to terms, however. There followed a little farewell scene between him and his wife, who poured bottles of wrath on the heads of the "bluecoats," and our captive – my captive – was hurried to the guardhouse at the camp. It had been a perfectly bloodless encounter, but next morning it turned out that I had by chance captured one of the most dangerous guerrillas in Missouri.

## CHAPTER II

### **We leave Missouri and go South – The prisoners of Donelson – The taking of New Madrid – "Kindly bury this unfortunate officer" – Quaker guns at Shiloh – The killing of the colonel**

It was a trifling incident, this capture, compared with the dreadful things I have referred to as going on in Missouri that memorable first year of the Civil War. A great volume would not contain the record of them all. The first dead men I saw while in the army were eight Missouri farmers murdered by guerrillas and left lying in the hot sun and dust at the roadside. The sight moved me as no great battle ever did afterward.

One half of the male population of Missouri was trying to kill the other half. They were not opponents from different far-off sections fighting, but near neighbors, and nothing seemed too awful or too cruel for them to do. How I pitied the women and children who lived in the State in those awful days!

General Sherman's designation of war as "hell" found more confirmation in the dreadful raids, outrages, and murders by Quantrell's guerrillas in Missouri than in the bloodiest battles of the four years' conflict.

Now for months my regiment, with others, had chased up and down, and all over that unhappy old State of Missouri, trying to capture and punish these bands of murderers. On the old steamboat *War Eagle*, too, we paddled for weeks along the "Muddy Missouri" River, landing every here and there to have a little brush with guerrillas who had fired on our boat from the banks or from secret recesses in the woods. It was rare that we could catch them or have a real fight. Their kind of war meant ambushes and murder.

At last an end came to this dreadful guerrilla-chasing business in Missouri so far as we were concerned, anyway. We were to stop running after Price's ubiquitous army too. We were no longer to be the victims of ambushes and night riding murderers.

The glad news came to my regiment that we were to be transferred to the South, where the real war was.

One morning we left the cold and snow, where we had lived and shivered in thin tents all the winter, left the thankless duty of patrolling railroads in the storm at midnight, and marched in the direction of St. Louis. A long, cold, miserable march it was too, hurrying in the daytime and freezing in our bivouacs in the snow and woods at night. Many a man we left to sicken and die at some farmhouse by the roadside. Our destination was New Madrid, where we were to be a part of Pope's army in the siege and capture of that town.

As we were about to embark on boats at St. Louis we beheld in the snow and storm many steamers anchored out in the pitiless waters of the Mississippi River. These vessels were loaded with shivering thousands in gray and brown uniforms, the prisoners whom General Grant had captured at the battle of Fort Donelson. There were twelve or fifteen thousand of them. Seeing this host of prisoners made us feel that at last the Union army had a general, although we had scarcely heard of U. S. Grant before. This army of prisoners taken in battle was his introduction to the world.

Shortly we were before New Madrid, and the siege conducted by General Pope commenced. The town was defended by strong forts and many cannon, but its speedy capture by us helped to open up the Mississippi River. It was a new experience to us, to have cannonballs come rolling right into our camp occasionally. Yet few men were injured by them. We were in more danger when a fool

officer one day took our brigade of infantry down through a cornfield to assault a gunboat that lay in a creek close by.

The Rebel commander had expected us, and had his grape shot and his hot water hose, and such things all ready for us. We went out of that cornfield faster than we went in. This was real war, the thing my regiment had been so longing for, in place of chasing murderers and guerrillas in Missouri.

We entered New Madrid one morning before daylight. The enemy had left in awful haste. I recall finding a dead Rebel officer, lying on a table in his tent, in full uniform. He had been killed by one of our shells. A candle burned beside him, and his cold hands closed on a pencil note that said, "Kindly bury this unfortunate officer." His breakfast waited on a table in the tent, showing how unexpected was his taking off.

Our victory was a great one for the nation, and it put two stars on the shoulder straps of General Pope. It made him, too, commander of the Eastern army.

A comrade in Company A of my regiment had been wounded a few days before and had died in the enemy's hands. I now found his grave. At its head stood a board with this curious inscription: "This man says he was a private in the Fifth Iowa Regiment. He was killed while trying to attend to other people's business."

Our command was now hurried to the Shiloh battlefield, of course too late to be of any use. But we took part in the long, wonderful, and ridiculous siege of Corinth, under Halleck, when our great army was held back by red tape, martinets, and the fear of a lot of wooden guns that sat on top of the enemy's breastworks, while that enemy, with all his men, and with all his guns, and bag and baggage, was escaping to the south. Our deeds were no credit to anybody, though here and there we had a little fight.

One incident of great importance, however, happened to my regiment here. It was the death of our colonel. One night when he was going the rounds of the picket lines out in the woods he was shot dead by one of our own men. The sentinel who did the killing declared that Rebels had been slipping up to his post all night, and when he would hail with "Who goes there?" they would fire at him and run into the darkness. He resolved to stand behind a tree the next time and fire without hailing. By some accident Colonel Worthington and his adjutant were approaching this sentinel from the direction of the enemy. Suddenly the sentinel held his gun around the tree and fired. The bullet struck the colonel in the forehead, killing him instantly. As he fell from his horse the adjutant sprang to the ground and cried, "Who shot the officer of the day?" "I fired," exclaimed the sentinel, and he then told of his experiences of the night. He was arrested, tried, and acquitted. Yet there were many among us who believed that the colonel had been intentionally murdered. He was one of the most competent colonels in the army, but among his soldiers he was fearfully unpopular. He was, however, a splendid disciplinarian, but this was something the volunteers did not want. In their minds the colonel had been only a petty tyrant, and not even wholly loyal. With a different disposition he certainly would have been a distinguished soldier. He was one of the most military-looking men in the whole army, but friends he had none. More than once his life had been threatened by soldiers who regarded themselves as having been treated badly by him.

His body was brought into camp the next morning and lay in his tent in state. He was given a military funeral, and the horse that was bearing him when he was killed was led behind his coffin.

After his death numbers of the men of the regiment were indignant, when they found among his papers warrants and commissions intended by the governor for them, commissions that had never been delivered. Their promotions had never come about. Now they knew why.

Worthington was succeeded by Colonel C. L. Matthies, one of the bravest, best, and most loved commanders of our army. Later Matthies was made a general, and at the close of the war died of wounds received in battle.

Although I was quartermaster sergeant of the regiment, I was always careful that this should not keep me away from the command when enduring hard marches or when engagements were coming

on. When in camp I kept my rifle in one of the ammunition wagons (of several of which I had charge), but if the alarm sounded my rifle was on my shoulder and I was the private soldier in the ranks of the company. I deserved no special credit for this. I was only doing my duty. We had muzzle-loading Whitney rifles and bayonets. The equipment and rations we carried in weight would have been a respectable load for a mule.

## CHAPTER III

### **Iuka, the fiercest battle of the war, 217 men out of 482 of my regiment are shot – The awful Rebel charge at Corinth – Moonlight on the battlefield – Bushels of arms and legs – Tombstones for fireplaces – One of Grant's mistakes**

All that summer, after taking Corinth, we chased up and down the State of Mississippi, trying to get fair battle with the Rebel army. At last the chance came, and for my regiment it was an awful one – the battle of Iuka.

The battle of Iuka took place on the 19th of September, 1862. It was fought by a handful of the troops of General Rosecrans against half the army of General Price. Grant was only a few miles away, but although commander-in-chief, he knew nothing of the hardest-fought battle of the Civil War until it was over.

One morning before daylight while camped in the woods near Jacinto half expecting to be attacked, we heard that Price's army was in Iuka, some eighteen miles away, and that if we would hurry there and attack from one side, General Grant, with Ord's troops, would attack from another side. How eagerly the regiment made the forward march on that beautiful autumn day! The woods were in their fairest foliage, and it seemed too lovely a day for war and bloodshed. The bugles played occasionally as the men hurried along, but not a shot was fired. No noise like war fell on the soldiers' ears as they tramped over the beautiful country road toward the Tennessee River. They had time for reflection as they marched, and they knew now they were going to battle. There had been no time for letters or farewells, and each thought the other one, not himself, most likely to fall in the coming engagement.

There were only 482 of my little regiment now marching there, hoping, almost praying, the enemy might only wait. How little anyone dreamed that before the sun set 217 of that little command would be stretched dead or dying among the autumn leaves!

It was just two o'clock when the regiment ran on to the army of the enemy, lying in line right across the road close to Iuka. My own regiment was in the advance. Instantly it, too, was in line of battle across that road, and in a few minutes absolutely the fiercest little conflict of the war began. Our brigade was fearfully outnumbered. Rosecrans, had ten thousand soldiers within five miles of the battlefield, yet let three or four small regiments and a battery do all the fighting. Ten miles away, in another direction, lay General Grant and General Ord, with many other thousands, as silent as if paralyzed. An unlucky wind blew, they said, and the sound of our cannon, that was to have been the signal for them to attack also, was unheard by them.

Charge after charge was made upon our little line, and the Eleventh Ohio Battery, which the regiment was protecting, was taken and retaken three times. There were no breastworks, yet that one little brigade of Hamilton's division stood there in the open and repulsed assault after assault. It was the Iowa, the Missouri, and the Ohio boys against the boys of Alabama and Mississippi, and the grass and leaves were covered with the bodies in blue and gray. Not Balaklava, nor the Alma, saw such fighting. It was a duel to the death. For hours the blue and the gray stood within forty yards of each other and poured in sheets of musketry. Every horse of the battery at the left of my regiment was killed, and every gunner but one or two was shot and lying among the debris. No battery in the whole four years' war lost so many men in so short a time. Antietam, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, could show nothing like it. Only the setting sun put an end to what was part of the time a hand to hand conflict. One daring Rebel was shot down and bayoneted clear behind the line of Company B, where he had broken through to seize the flag of my regiment.

That night the enemy slipped away, leaving hundreds and hundreds of his dead and wounded on the field. With a few lanterns our men then went about and tried to gather up the wounded; the dead were left till morning. There were 782 Union men lying there in their blood that long night, 608 of them out of a single small brigade. While mothers and sisters at home were praying for the safety of these dear ones at the front, their spirits that night were leaving their torn bodies in the dark and ascending heavenward. Five of my eight messmates of the day before were shot. It was not a question who was dead, or wounded, but who was *not*. Fifteen officers of our little half regiment were dead or wounded. The enemy lost more than one thousand men in trying to destroy that single brigade and its Ohio battery.

The burying party the next morning found nineteen dead Rebels lying together at one place. At another spot 182 Rebel corpses lay in a row covered by tarpaulins. The enemy had not had time to bury them.

It was a principle among our generals that if a command fought well in a battle or got cut all to pieces, that was the particular command to be put at the very front in the next hard scrap. And so it was that within two weeks my regiment was placed outside the breastworks at Corinth, to wait and receive another awful assault.

The night before the battle of Corinth the Fifth Iowa Regiment lay across the Purdy road, in the bright moonlight. I remained awake all night, talking with a comrade who shared my blanket with me. Poor Jimmy King! he survived the war only to be murdered later on a plantation in Mississippi. As we lay there in the wagon road, the awful losses of my regiment at Iuka kept us thinking there in the moonlight what would happen on the morrow. When morning came the firing opened, and for all that day the battle raged fiercely at the left and center left, we getting the worst of it, too. The Rebels were charging works that they themselves had built when they held the town during Halleck's siege. General Haccelman and many other of our officers had fallen. Our own division, though fighting some, had lost but few men. That evening an order came for us – Hamilton's Division – to assault the enemy's left flank at midnight. Before the hour came, however, the move was decided to be too dangerous, and we changed our position to one nearer the forts. All the night we lay there under the brightest moonlight I ever saw. Under the same quiet moonlight, and only six hundred yards away from us, also lay the victorious Rebel army. They believed Corinth as good as taken, but they had only captured our outer lines of forts. Yet it looked very bad for us. Every house in town was full of our wounded and our dead lay everywhere.

Once in the night I slipped away from the bivouac and hurried to the old Tishimingo Hotel, to see a lieutenant of my company, who had been shot through the breast. Never will I forget the horrible scenes of that night. The town seemed full of the groans of dying men. In one large room of the Tishimingo House surgeons worked all the night, cutting off arms and legs. I could not help my friend. It was too late, for he was dying. "Go back to the regiment," he said, smiling, "all will be needed."

It was a relief to me to get back into the moonlight and out of the horror, yet out there lay thousands of others in line, only waiting the daylight to be also mangled and torn like these. The moon shone so brightly the men in the lines, tired though they were, could scarcely sleep. There the thousands lay, the blue and the gray, under the same peaceful moon, worshipping the same God, and each praying for dear ones North and South they would never again see. God could not answer the prayers of the men in both armies that night. Had He done so, all would have been killed on the morrow. At early daybreak I again went to see my lieutenant. As I entered the building a cannonball from the enemy crashed through the house and killed four soldiers by the stairway. My friend, with many others, was being carried out to die elsewhere.

It was soon full day. In one of the rooms I saw the floors, tables, and chairs covered with amputated limbs, some white and some broken and bleeding. There were simply bushels of them, and the floor was running blood. It was a strange, horrible sight, – but it was war. Yes, it was "hell." I hastened back to the lines. Nine o'clock came, and now we knew that the great assault was to be made.

We looked for it against our own division, as we lay in the grass waiting. Suddenly we heard something, almost like a distant whirlwind. My regiment rose to its feet, fired a few moments at scattering Rebels in our front, and were amazed to see a great black column, ten thousand strong, moving like a mighty storm-cloud out of the woods and attacking the forts and troops at our left. Instantly we changed direction a little and, without further firing, witnessed one of the greatest assaults of any war. It was the storming of Fort Robinett. The cloud of Rebels we had seen divided itself into three columns. These recklessly advanced on the forts, climbing over the fallen trees and bending their heads against the awful storm of grape and canister from all our cannon. A perfect blaze of close range musketry, too, mowed them down like grass. Even a foe could feel pity to see brave men so cruelly slaughtered.

When the assault had failed and the noise of battle was stilled, I hurried down in front of Robinett. My canteen was full of water and I pressed it to the lips of many a dying enemy – enemy no longer. Our grape shot had torn whole companies of men to pieces. They lay in heaps of dozens, even close up to the works. General Rogers, who had led a brigade into the hopeless pit, lay on his back, dead, with his flag in his hand. *He was the fifth one to die carrying that flag.* When I reached him some cruel one had stripped him of his boots. Another had taken his fine gold watch.

In this attack on Corinth the brave Southerners lost 5000 wounded, and we buried 1423 of their dead on the battlefield. Our own loss had been 2200 dead and wounded. That night I stood guard under an oak tree on the battlefield among the unburied dead. Many of the wounded, even, had not yet been gathered up. The moon shone as brightly as the night before, while thousands who had lain there under its peaceful rays before the battle were now again sleeping, but never to waken.

Our regiment now pursued the flying Rebels with great vigor. The quantities of broken batteries, wagons, tents, knapsacks, guns, etc., strewn along the roads behind them were immense. At the Hatchie River the Rebels were momentarily headed off by a division under Hurlbut that had hurried across from Bolivar. A seven hours' battle was fought at the bridge, but the Rebels got away in another direction. Possibly the best friend I had in the world, save my kin, was killed at that bridge. It was Lieutenant William Dodd, a classmate in school. His head was shot off by a cannonball just as his regiment was charging at the bridge.

The pursuit of the enemy was being pushed with vigor when the army was ordered to desist and return to camp. It was an astounding order, as it was in our power to destroy the defeated and flying columns. That order was one of the mistakes of Grant's earlier days as a commander. Indeed, we of the rank and file had little confidence in Grant in those days. We reflected that at Shiloh he was miles away from the battlefield at the critical moment. Sherman had saved the Union army from destruction there. At Iuka, Grant, though commander, did not even know a battle was going on. At Corinth he was forty miles away, and now, when we had the enemy almost within our grasp, he suddenly called us back. Rosecrans protested. It was in vain. The order, more imperative than before, was repeated. It required months, and great events, to make Grant the hero of the army which he afterward became.

This entry I find in my diary in one of those days: "Our commander of the district is General U. S. Grant, who took Donelson; but aside from that one hour's fighting, and a little fighting at Shiloh, the troops know little about him. Rosecrans is at present the hero of this army, and, with him leading it, the boys would storm Hades."

With the mercury at one hundred, the dust in the roads ankle deep, and the whole atmosphere yellow and full of it, the regiments exhausted by the pursuit, and yet disgusted at our recall, slowly tramped their way back to Corinth. Now I visited my wounded companions in the hospital. On inquiry for certain ones I learned that they were dead and lying out in the improvised graveyard near by.

For some reason the dead at Hatchie Bridge were not buried. A week after the battle my brother rode by there on a cavalry expedition and made the horrible discovery that hogs were eating up the bodies of our dead heroes. *That too was war.*

We now camped on the edge of the town and went on building still other and greater forts. Many of the soldiers made huts for themselves. It was getting cooler now, and little fireplaces were

built in the huts and tents. Brick was scarce, and in a few instances the men used the stone slabs from a graveyard close at hand. It seemed vandalism, but the dead did not need them and the living did.

## CHAPTER IV

### **An unlucky campaign led by General Grant – Holly Springs burned up – The first foragers – Some modern Falstaffs – Counting dead men**

In a month's time, or by November 2, 1862, the army, reorganized, our division led by Quimby, and Grant in command of the whole force, started on that very first disastrous campaign for the rear of Vicksburg. Grant had some thirty thousand soldiers to march with him by way of Grand Junction and Holly Springs, and another thirty thousand men, under Sherman, he sent down the Mississippi River to attack Vicksburg from another direction. We marched in mud and wind and rain till nearly Christmas, the enemy constantly retreating before us. We made a tremendous supply station at Holly Springs and left it in charge of a garrison. There were supplies there for a hundred thousand men, besides a million dollars' worth of captured cotton.

Just as we were confident of overtaking and destroying the enemy, we were stunned by the tidings that a great column of Rebel cavalry had dashed in behind our army. With torches and firebrands they had burned Holly Springs to the ground, and had destroyed all the army stores. There was not a potato or cracker or a pound of bacon left. How I remember that dark night when Van Dorn's cavalry got behind us in the country lanes of Mississippi! I had been started back to a hospital in Holly Springs, for my eyes had been inflamed for days. Just as my little freight train reached the suburb of what had been the town, the rear guard of the enemy rode out at the other side. The morning that I arrived there was nothing there but smoke, and ashes, and ruins, and a smell of coal oil over all. A million dollars' worth of our army supplies had been burned up in a night. The pretty town, too, was in ashes, and Van Dorn's bold cavalry swung their sabers in the air and rode away laughing. General Grant's father and mother, in the town at the time on their way to visit their illustrious son with the advance of the army, were captured, but politely paroled and left among the ruins.

The loss of the town was a disgrace to the North. There was a fort there, solidly built of cotton bales and occupied by a colonel and a thousand troops. The colonel forgot what our ancestors did with cotton bales at New Orleans, and promptly threw up the sponge. But then Colonel Murphy was not General Jackson. With the loss of Holly Springs and the destruction of our base of supplies there was nothing for that whole army of Grant's to do but to trudge its weary way back to Corinth and Memphis, through the mud and the wind and the rain.

The tragical part of that campaign was taking place at the same moment down by the Yazoo River, right under the guns of Vicksburg. Grant, when he marched out of Memphis, had sent Sherman and thirty thousand men down the river in steamboats to attack Vicksburg from one side while he should hurry along with another thirty thousand men and pound it from the other side. Sherman and his heroes made the awful assaults at Chickasaw bayou we read of, never dreaming of the fiasco that had befallen the main army at Holly Springs. Not one word of the news ever reached him – and then in swamps and bayous his soldiers waded in water halfway to their necks and assaulted impregnable hills and breastworks. Two thousand men were killed or mangled to no purpose. Some of the heroic fighting of the war was done in that Yazoo slaughter pen, and then Sherman and his crippled army withdrew in utter failure.

Vicksburg was safe for awhile.

My own duty in that unlucky campaign with Grant had been to search the country in the neighborhood of our camps and bivouacs for additional supplies. Many a time, with a dozen or twenty men for guards, and a couple of six-mule teams, we would venture miles from camp to confiscate bacon, flour, poultry, or whatever else a soldier could eat. On my return to the regiment with a wagon

full of good things, the companies would set up a cheer for the quartermaster sergeant. The colonel always allowed me to choose the guards who should accompany me. Many a time our little squad got back to camp by the skin of their teeth, chased by guerrillas or some wandering band of Rebel cavalry. Our habit was, when we found a plantation with something to spare on it, to post sentinels in the lanes in every direction, while a few of us with the aid of the negroes loaded the wagons. If all went well, the procession, followed by the slaves we freed and took with us, went back to camp in state. Sometimes there was indecorous haste in getting home, owing to our sentinel firing his gun in warning of near danger. More than one of the boys of those venturous excursions, to this day, have not yet come back to camp.

On one of these excursions one day we were surprised by a little party of rangers, but we took their leader captive, and with him a fine Kentucky charger and a splendid rifle. The brigade colonel presented to me the rifle I myself had captured, for my "bravery," he said, but the splendid thoroughbred he took for himself. Alas! this rifle, the testimonial of my adventure, was burned up when the Rebel cavalry took Holly Springs. I had left it there to send North some day.

These excursions after food that I have described must have been the forerunners of Sherman's great forage parties later, on his "march to the sea." It was easy enough to feed an army that way, if men could be found to take the risk. Sherman's later forage parties were so strong that the risk was reduced to fun.

I copy from my diary here (1862):

"Now the enemy is in front of us. He is on our flank and all around us. It is dangerous to venture a mile from camp alone. In fact, orders are strict for every man and every officer to stay close to his regiment day or night.

"On all the plantations along our way in this campaign there are signs of war. The cotton gins, the fences, the barns, are all gone, – burned by raiders of both armies, who have scouted through this same country time and again. The weather is often gloomy; the fenceless fields are brown and naked; the big houses left standing on the plantations look lone and desolate. There is no song of birds. The army wagons, in long trains, and the soldiers in great strung-out columns of blue, go over the soft ground across the fields, along what once was lanes and country roads, almost in silence. Here and there a skirmish of musketry at some creek crossing or at some wood is the only noise heard. This state of Mississippi, like the whole South, sees the desolation of war. But the big, white, lone houses on the deserted lawns, with their low verandas about them, are not wholly unoccupied. Though the arms-bearing men of the country are every one in the army fighting us, the women and the children and the slaves are still at home. These slaves desert their mistresses and come into the Union camps at night by hundreds, bearing their bundles on their heads and their pickaninnies under their arms.

"As Rebel cavalry bands are rioting all around us, the strictest orders are given about leaving camp. But those who slipped away without leave the oftenest were themselves officers. Numbers of these went off almost nightly, to pay their devoirs to ladies whom they happened to admire at neighboring plantations. These women, glad enough of the compliments of the Federal officers, let it be very clearly understood that they were nevertheless true-blue Rebels. Things as to the war were simply glossed over in conversation, and both the lady and the officer sometimes had a delightful evening, even if the delight on the officer's part was in violation of duty. Sometimes these visits led to ridiculous terminations. War is not all tragedy."

Again I copy from the journal of that December:

"The other night three of the officers of our brigade, Captain H – and Lieutenants D – and O – got themselves into a pretty mess by leaving camp to visit at a plantation. The laughable facts are these: We had stopped two or three days, to mend bridges over the Yocona River. General Grant had asked our brigade commander to report the names of three officers for promotion. Captain H – and two lieutenants were selected. Among the private soldiers these men were not regarded as deserving honor. On the contrary, they were looked upon as common braggarts. Some politician at

home, probably, had moved the wires for their promotion. As it happened, these three officers were the worst offenders of all, as to leaving camp without orders for the purpose of visiting Rebel ladies at neighboring plantations. Some of the staff heard of this and determined to unmask them. Some Rebel uniforms were secured from prisoners in our hands, and one dark night when the captain and his friends were away from camp at the home of a Mrs. S – , visiting, a dozen of us in disguise were sent to surround the house. Instantly there was a cry among the women of "guerrillas!" "Confederates!" "Confederates!" "Friends!" and a bonny blue Rebel flag was waved in the doorway. We were indeed a desperate-looking lot, but the women met the supposed Rebel guerrillas almost with embraces. The captain and his two lieutenants we pulled from under the bed by their heels, and threatened them with instant death. The women begged us only not to kill them in the house. The officers, on their knees, pleaded for their lives. It was agreed that they should simply give up their swords, be paroled, and allowed to return to camp. At headquarters the next morning, in explanation of the loss of their swords, they told a wonderful and Falstaffian tale of being overwhelmed by Van Dorn's guerrillas the night before, and of their miraculous escape to camp. That moment they were confronted with their surrendered swords and their signatures to their paroles. There was a fine collapse at headquarters that morning. The names of the three gentlemen were sent to General Grant the same day, I understand. But not for promotion."

I had a little taste of life in the hospital that December. My eyes got worse. For a little time I was in a fine private home in Holly Springs, for the town, after its burning by Van Dorn, had been retaken by us. Every room in the house had its floors filled with the sick and the dying of both armies. Long years after that, while on shipboard returning from Europe, I made by chance the acquaintance of Mrs. Kate Sherwood Bonner, the authoress, who as a girl had lived in Holly Springs. We talked of the war times, and it transpired that the mansion where I had witnessed such distressful scenes among the dead and dying was her father's home.

I saw General Grant's father and mother there in Holly Springs daily. At the capture of the town they had been taken as stated, and released, the father on parole.

I was now sent to Memphis, as I was still in hospital. The hospital here was in the old Overton Hotel, which was crowded with hundreds of wounded. The room used as a dead house was filled every night. It was across the court and below my own room. I could see the corpses distinctly, as the window was left open. It was my habit, a strange one, when I awoke in the morning, to look over and count the corpses of men who had been carried in there while I had been sleeping. It seems now a ghastly business enough.

## CHAPTER V

### **The laughable campaign of the war – An army floating among the tree tops of the Yazoo Pass**

In a little time, February, 1863, Grant's army was again off to try for Vicksburg. This time it was to go on that campaign, so laughable now, but romantic always, called the "Yazoo Pass expedition." We were to go down the Mississippi River in big steamers to Helena, and there transfer ourselves on to a fleet of little steamers, cut the levee into the overflowed country, and try floating a whole army a hundred miles across the plantations and swamps of Mississippi.

My eyes were well again, and I was happy to join our regiment and be one of the aquatic throng. Just as we were getting on to the boat at Memphis two of my company managed to get shot by the provost guard. They had been full of liquor, and refused to go to the steamer. They had been heroes at Iuka. How unlucky now to get crippled for life in a drunken brawl!

On the 22d of March, near Helena, my regiment went aboard the pretty little schooner called the *Armada*. Shortly, dozens of these small boats, crowded with regiments, accompanied by gunboats, were floating about, awaiting the order to sail through a big cut that our engineers had made in the river levee and get down the pass into Moon Lake. The Mississippi was high and raging. All the low-lying country for half a hundred miles was flooded till it looked like a vast sea, with forests of trees standing in its midst. Here and there, too, a plantation, higher than the surrounding country, was noticeable. The first pass into Moon Lake was but a mile long. But through that pass swirled and roared the waters of the Mississippi, so suddenly let loose by the break in the levee.

At just four in the evening our little steamer got the order to turn out of the river and into the rushing waters of the pass. We would not have been more excited at being told to start over Niagara Falls. Our engines are working backward and we enter the crevasse slowly, but in five minutes the fearful, eddying current seized us, and our boat was whirled round and round like a toy skiff in a washtub. We all held our breath as the steamer was hurled among floating logs and against overhanging trees. In ten minutes the rushing torrent had carried us, backward, down into the little lake. Not a soul of the five hundred on board the boat in this crazy ride was lost. Once in the lake we stopped, and with amazement watched other boats, crowded with soldiers, also drift into the whirl and be swept down the pass. It was luck, not management, that half the little army was not drowned.

Now for days and days our little fleet coursed its way toward Vicksburg among the plantations, swamps, woods, bayous, cane-brakes, creeks, and rivers of that inland sea. Wherever the water seemed deepest that was our course, but almost every hour projecting stumps and trees had to be sawn off under the water to allow our craft to get through. Sometimes we advanced only four or five miles a day. At night the boat would be tied to some tall sycamore. Here and there we landed at some plantation that seemed like an island in the flood. The negroes on the plantation, amazed at our coming, wondered if it was the day of Jubilee or if it was another Noah's flood and that these iron gunboats arks of safety.

We soldiers, if not on duty pushing the boat away from trees, had nothing to do but sleep and eat and read. Most of the soldiers slept on the decks, on the guards, and on the cabin floors. Four of us had a little stateroom. I had with me a copy of Shakespeare, cribbed by one of the boys somewhere, and the Bard of Avon was never studied under stranger circumstances.

The Yazoo Pass, though not so crazy as the crevasse we had come through, was nevertheless bad and dangerous. Two of our craft sank to the bottom, but the soldiers were saved by getting into trees. All the boats were torn half to pieces. One day as we pushed our way along the crooked streams

amid the vine-covered forests we ran onto a Rebel fort built on a bit of dry land. In front of it were great rafts that completely obstructed our way. An ocean steamer was also sunk in the channel in front of us. To our amazement we learned that it was the *Star of the West*, the ship that received the first shot fired in the war of the Rebellion. That was when it was trying to take supplies to Fort Sumter. Our gunboats shelled this "Fort Greenwood" in vain, and now Rebels were gathering around and behind us and guerrillas were beginning to fire on the boats. The waters, too, might soon subside, and our fleet and army be unable to get back into the Mississippi. We could not go ahead. Suddenly the orders came to turn about and steam as fast as possible to a place of safety.

By April 8 we had made the journey through the woods and cane-brake back to the pass. The picturesque farce was ended. We could now hunt some other road to Vicksburg. We know nothing of what the generals thought of this fiasco, but we private soldiers had great fun, and the long stay on the boats had been a rest from hard campaigning. We had not lost a man. A whole campaign and not a soldier lost!

## CHAPTER VI

### **Grant's new plan at Vicksburg – Running the Vicksburg batteries – An hour and a half of horror – The batteries are passed – The most important event in the war**

The attempt on Vicksburg was not to be given up. In the spring of 1863 the whole army moved down the Mississippi to begin one of the most noted campaigns of history.

A real sane notion had gotten hold of Grant, and of scarcely anyone else. That notion was, if possible, to get across the Mississippi *below* the town (Sherman had failed trying it above) and throw the whole army on to the fortifications at the rear. If the town's defenders should be bold and come out and fight us, so much the better. We wanted that.

Soon General Grant built long stretches of wagon roads and corduroy bridges that ran snakelike for forty miles among the black swamps, cane-brakes, and lagoons on the west bank of the Mississippi River. He then marched half his army down these roads to a point below Vicksburg, below Grand Gulf, and bivouacked them on the shore of the river. The other half, of which my regiment was a part, remained near the river above the city. Possibly we were twenty-five thousand men there.

One night these twenty-five thousand bivouacked along the levees of the great river were all in great excitement. "Coming events were casting their shadows before."

It must have been some great event was about to happen that April night of 1863, for the Assistant Secretary of War was there, and General Grant and General Sherman were there, waiting and watching in the greatest suspense. What was going to happen? Some one hundred and fifty private soldiers were going to perform a deed that should help make American history. The success of a whole army and the capture of the best fortified city on the American continent depended on the heroism of this handful of private soldiers on this April night. No wonder the government at Washington sat by the telegraph and anxiously awaited every scrap of news sent from Grant's army before Vicksburg. He was to open the Mississippi River. That very day, almost, the government at Washington sent a letter urging General Grant to hurry. "In my opinion," telegraphed General Halleck for the President, *"this is the most important operation of the war. To open the Mississippi River would be better than the capture of forty Richmonds."*

General Grant realized the mighty things he had at stake.

But what availed it to collect his soldiers there? In front of him, in high flood, swept the mightiest river on the continent; he had not a boat to cross with, and the enemy laughed and dared him from the other side. His fleet of steamboats was forty miles and more up the river, and between him and that fleet were four miles of hostile batteries strong enough to blow a fleet to pieces. In fact, every hill, hollow, and secret place above and below the city hid a dozen cannon. All the way from Vicksburg down to Warrentown was a fort.

What could be done? Without some steamers on which to cross, the game was blocked, and Vicksburg, strong as Sebastopol itself, might stand there forever and the Mississippi River be blockaded to the end of the war. Two or three of Grant's ironclad gunboats had run past these awful batteries one night, their sides banged to pieces and their iron mail scooped up as if it had been made of putty. One of them was sunk. But these iron tubs could not serve as ferryboats for forty thousand men. Then, the scheme was proposed to cover some of the wooden steamboats with cotton bales and on a dark night try and rush them past the batteries. The boat captains, however, would not risk it with their own crews, even had they as a rule been willing, and so the commands of the army asked for *volunteers* from the private soldiers. Desperate as the undertaking seemed, one hundred and fifty Union soldiers stepped forward and offered to run these steamboats past the guns. The writer was

one of these volunteers. But too many had offered to take the risk. The required number was selected by lot, and the most I could do that historic night was to stand on the river levee in the dark and watch my comrades perform one of the most heroic acts of any war. It was hardly a secret. The whole army was excited over the desperate proposal. The enemy must have heard of it, and been doubly prepared to destroy us. "If Grant's attempt prove successful he can destroy the whole Confederate army, take Vicksburg, and open the Mississippi River." No wonder the Washington officials sat by the telegraph day and night just then awaiting great news.

The moon was down by ten o'clock of the night of April 16. Under the starlight one hardly saw the dark river or the cane-brakes, swamps, and lagoons along its border. The whole Northern fleet lay anchored in silence. Grant's army too, down below, was silent and waiting. A few miles below us lay Vicksburg, dark, sullen, and sleeping. Not a gun was being fired. A few lonesome Confederate river guards floated above the town in rowboats watching to give the alarm at the approach of any foe on the water.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.