Photograph from Crandall, W. D., et al, *History of the Ram Fleet and Mississippi Marine Brigade,* (1907)

Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie

WARFARE ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI

The letters of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie

Edited by

Norman E. Clarke, Sr.

Clarke Historical Collection
Central Michigan University *Mount Pleasant*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The letter press book[1] of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie and the original logbook of the U. S. Steamer Diana that contains many of Currie's commands are in the Clarke Historical Collection, Central Michigan University, which has kindly granted me permission to quote them. The editor is particularly grateful for the generous cooperation received from Clyde E. Walton and staff of the Illinois State Historical Society and to Dorothy A. Brackhoff of the Missouri Historical Society. George E. Heckroth,[2] Director of the Clarke Historical Collection, and his staff at Central Michigan University have shared generously with me their knowledge and time. Also, to Harold W. Moll, the editor is most grateful for his diligence and assistance in research and in the preparation of the final manuscript.

George E. Currie's letters, herein published, of which but fragments have been previously used, give fresh information on the military operations of Company C, 59th Illinois Volunteers, the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade, and portray the mind of a sensitive, intelligent observer serving his country during its greatest ordeal.

His letters are quoted verbatim from the letter press book. The story is further amplified by the addition of Chapters I and VI containing quotations from the books *Episodes of the Civil War, Nine Campaigns in Nine States . . . etc.*, by Corporal George W. Herr[3] and that excellent

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1. For a discussion of the letter press book, see appendix B, p. 149.

2. Mr. George E. Heckroth retired as Director of the Clarke Historical Collection in December, 1960.

3. Herr, George W., *Episodes of the Civil War, Nine Campaigns in Nine States . . . etc.*, San Francisco, Bancroft, (1890).

gathering of documentary and personal narrative, *The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade . . . etc.*, by Warren Daniel Crandall.[4]

Norman E. Clarke, Sr.

Birmingham, Michigan
May 18, 1960

4. Crandall, Warren D., and Newell, Isaac, D., *History of The Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade.* St. Louis, Press of Buschart Brothers, (1907).

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INTRODUCTION

Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie's letters cover a period from just prior to his enlistment on July 10, 1861, through August of 1864. His word depictions of a soldier's observation in service graphically present training, marching, and fighting in Missouri and Arkansas during the early days of the War. This first period was climaxed by the Battle of Pea Ridge,[1] that practically cleared Missouri of Confederate troops for the remainder of the War. George E. Currie was the first officer selected by Captain Alfred W. Ellet to join a new and hazardous river operation.

The Mississippi Ram Fleet, often called Ellet's Ram Fleet, was organized and built in early 1862. It has received little notice in books on the history of the Civil War, although it won the important naval Battle of Memphis[2] and contributed much to General Grant's western campaign. The ram, a wooden vessel with reinforced bow and often fitted with a steel beak for cutting into the enemy's ship, was of ancient origin in naval warfare, but it required the unexpected, devastating onslaught of the Southern Ram Merrimac (Virginia) to arouse Washington to the dangerous situation existing on the Mississippi River. The Federal Navy Department was ineffective, so the

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1. Williams, Henry Smith, *The Historians History of the World*, New York, The Encyclopedia Britannica Co., (1904) Vol. 23, p. 427.

2. Crandall, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-84; Ellet, Alfred W., "Ellet and His Steam-Rams at Memphis," in Johnson, Robert U., and Buel, Clarence., (Editors); *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, New York, The Century Company (1884-1887) Vol. 1, pp. 453-459; Stewart, Charles W., (Editor) *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Series 1*, Washington, Government Printing Office (1910) Vol. 23, pp. 125-135. This publication is hereafter referred to by *USONR-I.*

War Department seized the occasion to set up a naval operation manned by volunteer soldiers under army officers.

The rank of Colonel was given the Ram Fleet Commander, Charles Ellet, Jr., who was empowered to have his brother, Alfred W. Ellet, appointed Lieutenant Colonel and his second in command.[3] The latter was authorized to bring with him a limited number of reliable men from the regiment in which he was serving.

Alfred W. Ellet, then a Captain in Company "1," 59th Regiment Illinois Volunteers, received a telegram from Major General Samuel R. Curtis, Headquarters, Army of the Southwest, West Plains, Missouri, April 29th, 1862 as follows: "Persuant to orders from the Secretary of War you will proceed with the officers and privates herein described to St. Louis, Missouri, and New Albany, Indiana, and report in person or by letter to Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr., use all possible speed in reporting as ordered."[4] The following officers from the 59th Regiment, Illinois Volunteers, accompanied Captain Ellet; First Lieutenant John H. Johnson, First Lieutenant George E. Currie, and First Lieutenant Warren D. Crandall, all of Company "C".

George E. Currie served as an infantry officer in the 59th Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry, the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade. During these services he was intimately associated with the Ellets.

There were six Ellets[5] engaged in the Civil War. Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr., a civil engineer, conceived and built the Federal Mississippi Ram Fleet and died from a

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3. Curtis, H. Z., Assistant Adjutant General, Special Order No. 159. Quoted in Crandall, *op. cit.*, p. 37 and *USONR-I* Vol. 23, pp. 74 and 78. As Crandall's book was published in 1907, he did not have access to Charles W. Stewart's editing of the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion.* Volumes 22 and 23 were published in 1908 and 1910. Crandall states, on page 68, that he had access to the Ellet papers "preserved with scrupulous care by his (Ellet) family." He quotes at length from many of the orders and letters.

4. Crandall, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-13 and 245-247.

gun-shot wound received in the naval Battle of Memphis. His son, Charles Rivers, was made Colonel in charge of the Ram Fleet, following his father's death, although he was a Medical Cadet, only twenty years old. After a brilliant career of less than a year in command of the Ram Fleet, Colonel Charles Rivers Ellet died in October, 1863, from typhoid fever. Alfred W. Ellet, brother of Colonel Charles Rivers Ellet, Jr., was serving with the Ram Fleet when he was assigned by the War Department to form the Mississippi Marine Brigade and was given the rank of Brigadier General. Lieutenant Colonel John A. Ellet, nephew of General Ellet, succeeded to the command of the Ram Fleet, and his brother was a Lieutenant in the cavalry of the Mississippi Marine Brigade. The General's son, Lieutenant Edward E. Ellet, was on the military staff of his father.

The use of ram boats had been advocated by Charles Ellet, Jr., since his visit to Russia during the Crimean War, when he had urged Russia to employ such boats in relief of Sevastopol. He had repeatedly urged Washington[6] to adopt the ram boat for use in naval combat on narrow waterways such as the Mississippi River. The Federal Government consistently disregarded his offers to serve until the Merrimac on March 8, 1862, demonstrated the usefulness of the ram in battle, an incident that ended the days of wooden ships and introduced radical changes into naval warfare.

On March 27, 1862, Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War, was frantically urging Charles Ellet, Jr., as follows: "You will proceed immediately to Pittsburg, Cincinnati and New Albany, and take measures to provide steam-rams for defense against iron-clad vessels on the Western waters."[7]

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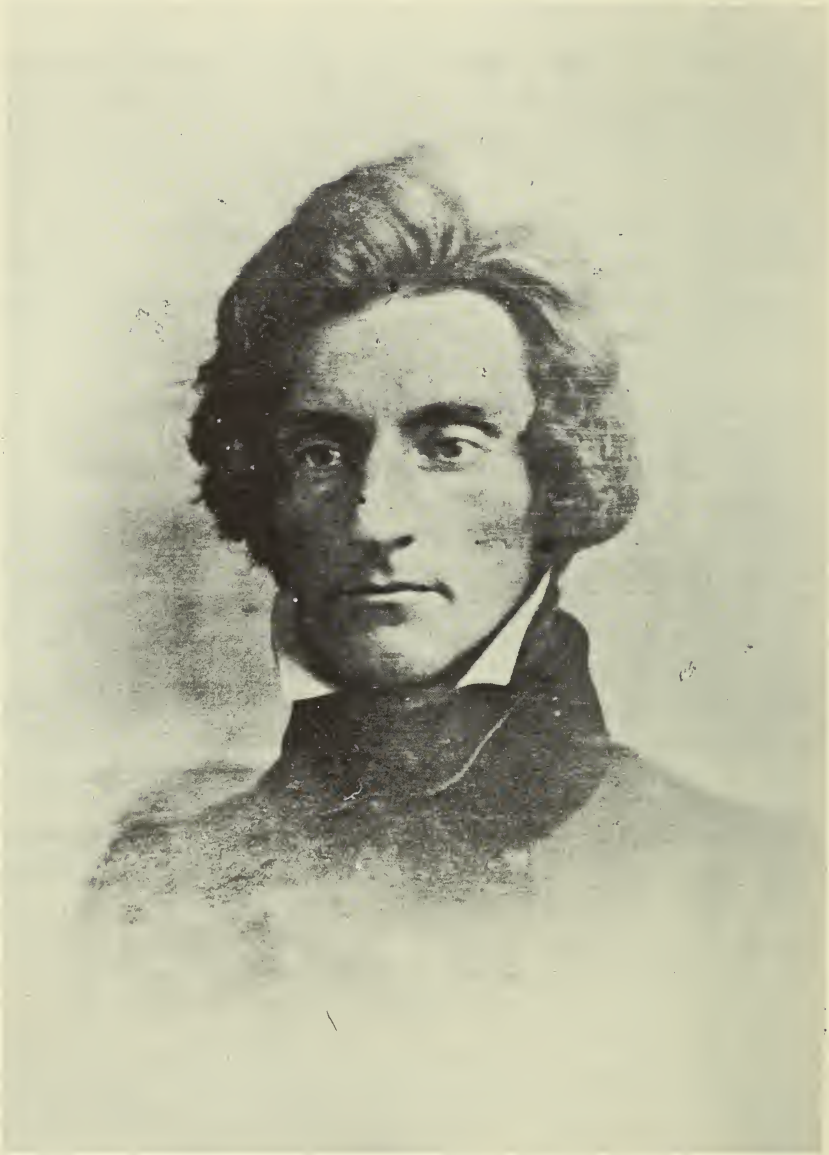
6. Abbott, John, S. C., *The History of the Civil War in America,* (Springfield, Ill. 1864) Vol. 1, p. 344. Charles Ellet, Jr., issued a pamphlet on the subject of Rams December 1855. In April, 1862, a month before the terrible onslaught of the Merrimac he published a similar pamphlet "Military Incapacity" and had it placed in the hands of every government official at Washington, D.C.

7. Stanton, Edwin M., Letter to Charles Ellet, Jr., March 27, 1862. Quoted in Crandall, *op. cit.*, p. 17 and *USORN-I,* Vol. 22, p. 680.



From the Collections of the Library of Congress

Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr.

To this urgent appeal, Charles Ellet, Jr., patiently replied, "I wish to again give you my views as briefly as possible. It is said that the enemy have eleven gun boats below Island No. 10[8] and I understand they are supposed to have others, fitted up as rams, ascending the Mississippi, one of which has reached Memphis. I propose to strengthen the hulls of some of the swift, strong coal towboats which I am told can be obtained here and fit them up as speedily as possible to be used as extemporary rams, to go down to Island No. 10, or any other stronghold of the rebels and at a proper time during the contest, when the rebel gun boats seem to be in a favorable position, run down before the batteries and drive our rams at full headway into the rebel boats doing what I can by preliminary preparation to save the men if the boats should sink. These boats the river men say will make eighteen or twenty miles an hour down the Mississippi. It will be very difficult to hit them at that speed[9] and I will try to protect engines and boilers against any ordinary shot. It is possible that I can so strengthen our own hulls as to sink any Mississippi boat we can hit fairly and save our own. I seek good boats and do not intend to make alterations which will injure them materially for future use, if they are not lost in the service... We ought to have at least as many boats as there are boats to run down. Indeed we ought to have more. No boat can stop to strike twice, and some may not hit their adversary fairly or may get the worse of it. The men must take service with the full knowledge of the dangerous nature of the duty, the enemies fire being the least of the dangers. I would like to be authorized to assure them that their names will be reported to the Secretary of War who will recommend them

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8. Between New Madrid and Island No. 10 the Mississippi makes a loop. New Madrid was cut off from its source of supply and it capitulated on March 17. A twelve-mile-long canal was cut across the loop and troops landed south of Island No. 10. It capitulated on April 7 after a combined land and water attack. See Williams, H.S., *The Historians History of the World,* New York, (1904, 1907) Vol. 23, p. 421.

9. Ellet is here referring to shot from gunboats or shore batteries.

to the President and Congress. I think this will be more valued than specific rewards."[10]

The nine vessels[11] to constitute the Mississippi Ram Fleet were the *Lioness, Sampson,* and the *Mingo,* three powerful Ohio River stern-wheel towboats; the *Queen of the West, Monarch,* and the *Switzerland,* three large side-wheel steamers; the *Lancaster,* a smaller side-wheel boat and the *Fulton* and the *Horner,* two small stern-wheel towboats used as tender and dispatch boats of the fleet. The first three named vessels were purchased and fitted out at Pittsburgh; the *Lancaster* and *Queen of the West* at Cincinnati; the Switzerland at Madison; the Monarch at New Albany, and the smaller boats at Cincinnati. All of the boats were not finished at the place named but were rushed down the Mississippi River and final work was done at New Albany and Mound City, on their way to the conflict.

The Mississippi Ram Fleet was one of many innovations in the Civil War that arose out of necessity and developed without the guidance of precedent. In a telegram to Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr., the Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, speaking of the Ram Fleet said, "...the peculiarity of the enterprise which you have undertaken induces

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10. Ellet, Charles, Jr., Letter to E. M. Stanton, March 29, 1862. Quoted in Crandall, *op. cit.,* p. 19 and *USORN-I,* Vol. 22, p. 683.

11. Crandall, *op. cit.,* p. 27; Pratt, Fletcher, *Civil War on Western Waters,* Henry Holt and Company, N. Y. (1956) pp. 96-100; Pratt and Crandall agree on the names listed; however, a study of the United States Navy Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion,* First Series, Vol. 23 pp. 64-66, 73, 532, and other letters give a somewhat different list of boats. In agreement with the official list is: Parker, Theodore H., *The Federal Gunboat Flotilla on the Western Rivers During its Administration by the War Department to October 1, 1862,* unpublished doctoral thesis (1938) University of Pittsburgh, Pa., page 113, "..had made arrangements to convert them into rams. Those were the *Sampson, Lioness* and *Dick Fulton,* purchased and converted at Pittsburgh, and the *Lancaster No. 3,* and the *Queen of the West* at Cincinnati, the *Monarch* at New Albany, and the *Switzerland* at Madison, Indiana. Shortly after the middle of April he also purchased at Pittsburgh, two small, fast vessels, the *Mingo* and the *T. D. Horner,* to act as tenders to the larger boats of his ram fleet."

the expression 'concurrence' instead of placing you distinctly under the command of the naval commander. There ought not to be two commanders on the same element in war operations—but as the service you are engaged in is peculiar, the naval commander will be so advised and will be desired not to exercise direct control over your movements."[12]

After the Mississippi River had been freed of the grasp of the Southerners from New Orleans to Fort Pillow, its use as a military waterway continued to be seriously interrupted by small to large bands of Confederate guerrillas who persisted in harassing river traffic and embarrassing important military operations. The guerrillas planted their cannon on favorable river banks and poured damaging fire into unarmed military transport and supply boats. If their fire was returned, they hastily dragged the cannon to a more sheltered position and resumed firing or pulled them back into the countryside.

To destroy the Southern guerrillas required a mobile, amphibious force of infantry, artillery and cavalry that could hastily land from ships, pursue the guerrillas on land and destroy them. Such a striking force was developed in the fall and winter of 1862-1863 and called the "Mississippi Marine Brigade," sometimes the "Ellet Scouts"[13] or "Ellet's Horse Marines."[14] This was a naval and land operation but under control of the War Department.[15] The organization of this amphibious force was one of the vagaries that plagued the Civil War. The men who made up this important service had to be obtained from volunteers among military hospital convalescents.[16]

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12. Stanton, R. M., Telegram to Charles Ellet, Jr., April 26, 1862. Quoted in Crandall, op. cit., p. 33; *USONR-I,* Vol. 23, p. 74.

13. Wright, Captain W. H., Recruiting Handbill. Quoted in Crandall, *op. cit.,* p. 257.

14. Crandall, *op. cit.* p. 258.

15. Porter, Admiral David, *Naval History,* pp. 331-333. Quoted in Crandall, *op. cit.,* p. 249.

16. Foster, C. W., War Department Letter, December 21, 1862. Quoted in Crandall, *op. cit.,* p. 255; *USORN-I,* Vol. 23, p. 630.

A detailed description of marine action follows. As the Colonel was on his way home after his honorable discharge, the boat was attacked by a guerrilla force. This vivid, action-filled word picture closes his story.

CHAPTER I

GEORGE E. CURRIE AND THE 59th REGIMENT, ILLINOIS VOLUNTEER INFANTRY

At the beginning of the Civil War the raising of troops was a jealously guarded right of each state, with the National Government assigning quotas, the size of which were influenced by the military ambitions of important state politicians. Accordingly, those states that loomed large in the political maneuvers of the Federal Government were placated by larger numbers of troops. But even in a favored state like Illinois, the patriotic enthusiasm rapidly filled the authorized regiments, and it is safe to say that more than ten thousand from Illinois left their state and enlisted in regiments of other states. It was in this manner that the 59th Regiment, Illinois Volunteers, first saw service as the 9th Missouri Regiment.

[1]"After having tried various pursuits, I established myself in the notion business in 1861, just previous to the outbreak of the war. I located in Tennessee, McDonough County, Illinois, a thriving little village on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. It had a population of one hundred or more good, staunch American farmers, liberal in their social and religious views, as the number of "sects" clearly evidence, but politically intensely partisan,

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1. From here to the end of this chapter is a direct quotation from Herr, *op. cit.*, pp. 443-447. The chapter in Herr's book, "Organization of Company "C", 59th Illinois" was written by Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie. As the letter press book in the Clarke Historical Collection does not contain all of the material that covers this portion of Currie's activity, it was deemed proper to include the chapter in this publication so that the story will be complete.

with about equal party strength of Democrats and Republicans.

They depend mainly on Chicago for news of the great world that stretched away beyond the horizon. The news train arrived daily at 4 p.m. One paper, generally the *Tribune,* was bought from the train boy. At about train time you would see the men gathering in groups, some whittling away at sticks or cutting out chunks in boxes or whatever was near, now and then emphasizing a vigorous remark by a deeper slash, while those who had driven in had hitched their teams and stood around waiting for the train. As it slowed at the station there was a close scrutiny of the passengers who alighted, a few greetings and good-byes waved to acquaintances as it pulled away, and then a closing-up of the rank as it were, around the post-office clerk, who usually read the news aloud. At the close came the after-clap of heated arguments; scampering off home to tell the folks; and, as a result, a new lease was given to opinions, strengthened or weakened by the report of the exciting times. Day after day brought rumors of rebel successes, union surrenders, a probable northern invasion, a threatened dissolution, and tramping down of the old flag, emblem of our freedom, and in its place to raise the stars and bars of rebellion. All questions gave place to the one that was agitating all loyal hearts, whether we should stand quietly by and let a few desecrate patriotism and freedom, our common heirlooms; or should we obey the voice of duty and go forth to battle for home, right, and country?

The loyalty of that little community was shown in the hearty approval that greeted our efforts to recruit a company. Enthusiasm lent wings to our actions, and in a few days we had raised the minimum number required. On the first of June we had an election, selecting R. M. Veach[2]

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2. Captain Brazillia M. Veach was born in Harrison County, Indiana, April 12, 1823. His father was a soldier of 1812, and his grandfather was in the Revolutionary War. When the war broke out, he was in the merchandising business in Tennessee, Illinois. He at once recruited a company of volunteers—Company C—and joined what was afterward known as the Fifty-ninth Illinois Volunteer Infantry. He led his company through all the campaigns in which it

as captain, and to me was given the first lieutenancy. We did not select a second lieutenant. Captain Veach left for Springfield immediately, to place our services at the Government's command. His return was eagerly awaited and two days later we were just as keenly disappointed at his inability to do anything but place our number at the disposal of the Government, at the end of a list of over a hundred other companies entered ahead of ours and awaiting acceptance. Ignorant of the demands of war and the darkness of the night then coming on the nation, we disbanded and went to our homes, disappointed and discouraged.

A few days after two recruiting officers came looking for companies already formed to fill out the Ninth Missouri Regiment, then recruiting at the St. Louis arsenal. We were accepted by them,[3] although our number had dwindled down, the interval having cooled the ardor of some, and others enlisting in other companies.

And now in the hurried preparations for departure, stand by my side and let us view this scene together. Look at the mother giving her last parting words to her boy, as with woman's faith she puts in his hand a little Old Testament that to her has been a safeguard and a comforter. See the father holding in his arms the baby, while his wife clings to his arms, and the children, awed by the presence of so many people, but unconscious of the sorrow, crowd around his feet. Sisters talk earnestly to brothers, and lovers draw a little aloof, and, seeing and hearing but themselves, vow constancy and faith between

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participated, taking part in several important battles, until June, 1863, when his health became so impaired he was compelled to resign. Recovering, he again recruited another company, which became Company C, One Hundred and Thirty-seventh Illinois Volunteer Infantry. He commanded this company until October 1864, when, his terms of service having expired, he was mustered out with his regiment. From Herr, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

3. The Ninth Missouri regiment, commanded by Colonel John E. Kelton, of West Point, entered the United States Service on September 6, 1861 at St. Louis. George E. Currie was First Lieutenant of Company "C."

the caresses. The girls' faces, beaded with perspiration and tears, look like they have caught the drops of an April shower, and their lips, red as roses in June, they lift up for kisses, so loud and long, we hear them here. And the baggage they are putting on the train—boxes and bundles, tied up with ropes and leather, and every other article that an "Aunt Jerusha" can twist into a knot when she wishes to make a bundle "tight and hold."

Is the scene tiresome? Well for you, my friend, that you can stand here with me and grow restive over the old mother, laying so many injunctions upon her son; and looking with pitying contempt at the father, burdened with the weight of his entire family; and sneer at the sister, so overcome at the brother's departure; and laugh at the country maiden, who, with streaming eyes and red, red nose, rushes up again to say good-bye to her sweetheart, and her grief overcoming maiden reserve, hangs on his neck and bids farewell once more. This day is the most trying one they have known in their simple lives. July, the 10th—the day, the last hour has come, and time nearly up, when all those near and dear to them are going to war. Heretofore their ways have all been peace. The waiting train will bear them away to unknown perils, dangers and death. The beloved father, the eldest son, the favorite brother, the trusted friend, the anxious lover—all are going. No wonder tears are as plentiful as drops in copious showers, and good-byes are said, but to be said again; and hands are clasped once more through the windows, and handkerchiefs are waved and waved; and the train moves slowly away—away from our sight, and then faster and faster bears them on to the new life of a soldier. Over all is the gloom which even the bravest hearts feel at parting; and then we try to throw if off, count our numbers, and although we have but forty-two (the required minimum being sixty) decide to go on and recruit by the way. We looked after our personal baggage. There was one line we could fight it out on some time. The good women at home had sent us forth laden with all the eatables a country housewife could make palatable; but, excepting myself, not one had a blanket or pillow. My landlady had given me a bed quilt and a pillow, and as I could find no available storeroom for the balance of my notion stock, I took it

with me, packed in trunks. Like Robinson Crusoe, I tried to save all the material from the wreck.

Quincy, Illinois, beautifully situated on a hill, was reached at sunset. We ate our supper of cold pie, chicken, cakes and other dainties on the levee. I will just say, for fear you may envy our lot, that this was the last epicurean supper we had for some time. We all sauntered up to the public square. Soon after there is a report from Palmyra, Missouri, about twenty miles away, stating that a portion of the Sixteenth Illinois Infantry, a part of which had been raised near our own town, and many of the men known to us, had encamped at the courthouse, and there had been attacked by rebels. They were driven inside the building, and had gallantly defended themselves against superior numbers.

The report caused the greatest excitement and commotion everywhere, with drums beating and bonfires blazing. The mayor of the town, after a stirring address to the citizens, soon found several hundred volunteers ready to start as a rescuing party. Among the number was our forty-two. At the critical moment it was found that there was not a musket to be found in the town. Empty hands and willing hearts could do naught against the rebel bullets; and so, amid the greatest excitement, the men broke rank, and confusion even more reigned.

At midnight our men returned to the hotel on the levee, the front street of the town. The only quarters we could obtain were the parlors, and we slept on the carpet. After a late breakfast in which we finished the last of our provisions, we sallied forth to find ourselves in the midst of active preparations for the relief of Palmyra. The scene had changed from up-town to the levee. During the morning two steamboats had arrived from Hannibal, a few miles below, with a smattering of soldiers and ammunition. An excited throng lined the river front. At ten o'clock Colonel U. S. Grant arrived from his camp, twenty miles away. His regiment, the Twenty-first Illinois Infantry, not yet uniformed and unarmed, looked more like farmers than soldiers. They had broken camp the day before and marched through the night to Quincy.

At the same time a train came from Springfield, bringing arms for Colonel Grant's regiment. This train was in

charge of the Quartermaster-General of the State. His half-military unit and the silver-mounted Spencer rifle that he carried quickly silenced all my doubts of him being "one grand general." So wishing to show my patriotism and bravery, assuming as much as a military bearing as I could, I tendered him the services of my little command (our captain having taken an early train home, I was acting as commander). On reaching the armory, a great deal of time was spent in convincing the officers that it was proper to let us have the muskets; and finally, when we secured permission, there were only twenty-one old muskets, with flint locks, with the dust of a century upon them. Half were without flints, and as these guns had gone out of use, no one could supply them.

Again reporting to the quarter-master, I received orders to take my men, and, with what guns we had and a little powder and a few bullets in our pockets, to cross to the Missouri shore, keep my command out of the demoralized crowd, and await the arrival of Colonel Grant, who would soon follow, and from whom I would receive further instructions.

Up to this time in my life I had been a civilian. I had never attempted to form a company or give a military command. Orders had to be obeyed, however, and my feelings in the presence of that multitude can better be imagined than set down. Under the circumstances I did the best I could. Taking one man by the arm, I placed him in position, and then, by a wave of my hand, motioned each one to step in line. The next concern was the manner of holding the muskets. Like their judgments, no two agreed in this respect, but each believed his own the correct way.

But my "woes did trod upon another's heels, so fast they followed." In the flurry of the moment, I had formed the line facing from the river. That river was our objective point. We were to cross it on a small ferry, and now how to reach it was the question. The men could not march backward down the hill. I could not change the course of the river. I must confess to a strong reverence for the majestic Mississippi. I honor the "Father of Waters." But just at that particular moment I considered the old gentleman had outlived his usefulness, and was decidedly in the way.

I thought for a time, and then drew once more upon my military ingenuity. I placed the first man in position, facing the ferry, and then, by a wave of the hand that had proved all-sufficient before, again assigned them to their places. My face glows with the conscious pride of a military tactician as I march the men down to the ferry. In a few minutes we have crossed the river and are within twenty miles of Palmyra, where the rebels, for aught we know, may now be the victors.

We did not march directly on Palmyra. The Phillistines were in too great numbers, and we had no David to confront them.[4] That little band looked like men with a great care on their minds. You could see at a glance that many of us were wavering between staying and running back home; and not a few but would have gone, but for the shame of such an act; and then too the river, you know, was between us and the other side.

The ferry, on its next trip, brought over Colonel Grant and his regiment, and soon a better feeling prevailed, the men chattering pleasantly. Colonel Grant established his camp near the river bank that afternoon, issuing clothing and arms, preparatory to an advance on Palmyra.

From the camp a railroad ran to Palmyra, crossing, at a distance of four and eight miles, respectively, the Little and Big Fabius, two small streams running parallel with the Mississippi. It was necessary to guard these bridges during the night, to prevent the rebels destroying them and thus cut off relief from Palmyra. Colonel Grant designed to send one of his own companies to guard these bridges, but was prevented by the delay in getting them uniformed and armed. So my company of forty-two men, with twenty-one muskets, was detailed for the duty.

We had no preparations to make, and it then being late in the afternoon, we were soon on our way, and by rapid marching reached the Little Fabius bridge at sunset. Most opportunely, too, for the rebels had already set fire to it, and the flames were making rapid headway. It was a difficult matter to extinguish it. We had no buckets, and the banks of the stream were steep and high, and the

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4. I Samuel 17:45-51.

flames stubbornly burnt on, despite our efforts. There was not a house in sight where we might have obtained some vessels to carry the water. We scattered the burning rubbish and used our hats for buckets—a boyish trick that did not desert us now. Finally we conquered it. When the excitement incident to our first experience in soldiering had like the fire, died out, we all sat down to rest and meditate.

We were in the enemy's country, and, helpless as we were, could not tell what moment would bring us an attack. There was gloom on our countenances, that dark shadow of coming events in our hearts, and over it all was a dismal attempt to keep up appearances.

Suddenly we were startled by a report so loud and long that, sounding down through these years, the echoes are painfully distinct. It seemed to be a challenge thundered over the whole Confederacy, and an isolent invitation to the rebels to come on and fight. When the shock had passed away, upon inquiry it was found to be a premature explosion of one of the old muskets. Lost in thought, the men sat knocking the pebbles between their feet with the butts of the guns; one had struck a stone too hard and the gun discharged. "Load up, Harry McElroy, and don't do so any more" was the stern command I made in rather a plaintive voice. He promised not to, but every once in a while some poor fellow, giving emphasis to his thoughts, would hit too hard and discharge the guns. Finally we arose as if intuitively prepared to set out for the next bridge. Detailing twenty men with ten muskets to Big Fabius bridge, four miles nearer Palmyra. Ought I not have felt perfectly secure with such a force? What a formidable line of battle we would present if attacked!

We walked on the railroad ties, as there was no road. Most of the time our way was through dense forest, dark and dreary, as the moon had not yet risen. It was a tedious, dangerous tramp for two hours. Somehow our feet would lag, as every step separated us from our companions, and we seemed dragging after us a load that became heavier as the distance increased.

This was our first outpost duty. When we at last reached the bridge the moon was shining brightly, and gave us a clear view of the surroundings. We posted two

sentinels—one at the far end of the bridge, the other to our left—and with the remainder, kept watch at the near end of the bridge. Not a man slept that night. We were all clothed in summer clothing, and had but one bed-quilt as a protection against the heavy penetrating dew. The sun never shown on a more hungry and chilled set of men, nor was daylight ever more eagerly watched for nor more gladly welcome.

Calling in the pickets, most of us slept till nine o'clock, when the sentinel on duty announced the approach of soldiers. A hasty consultation followed. Every man was upon the general's staff that time. It was decided to send one man forward to parley with the advancing foe, while the guns were put in the hands of the most trusty marksmen, to be ready for use.

Our emissary went forward, holding up his hands to show he was unarmed. The foe as steadily advanced. There was that calm which the uncertainty of the last desperate resort brings, and just as we resolved we must die, up went such a shout that made the welkin ring. We saw him shaking hands all around, like an exhorter at a camp-meeting. Then came our turn, for it proved to be a company that Colonel Grant had sent to relieve us. At twelve o'clock we were back at camp, surrounding a sutler's tent, buying something to eat.

I made a report to Colonel Grant. He heartily commended our actions, and expressed an earnest desire to have us in his regiment, but our previous arrangements prevented us accepting his offer. Returning to Quincy that afternoon, we went into camp in a little grove just outside of the town, and without tents, camp-equipage or provisions (we had to buy our rations yet) we practiced military duties as best we could.

A small steam ferryboat was sent up from Keokuk to take us down to St. Louis to join our regiment. On the fifteenth of July we steamed down the river. There was scarcely cabin-room for one-half the number, and so the rest were compelled to sleep on the open deck. We expected to reach St. Louis the next morning, and so took no provisions with us. The boat refused to land to let us buy any, and we reached the city at sunset the following day, hungry, I can assure you.

And now we are in a military camp. It is our first experience, and in such a camp we did not find ignorance conducive to that bliss with which it is generally accredited. Knowing not where, to whom nor how to apply for rations at so late an hour, we had about concluded that we would be compelled to wait until next morning. Fortune favored us. The post quarter-master heard of our arrival and destitution, and treated us, as he said, to the best of his ability, by issuing one box of hardtack and two uncooked hams.

It is a feast for a king, is it not, my brave boys? I hear the merry shout, the mirthful jest, the easy wit and humor, as the years roll away, and we are famished boys again, around the highly relished feast. It makes me hungry for the old times again, to think of it. Back again as comrads, sharing in common, the old storage shed where we slept that night on the bare ground, our slumbers as peaceful and refreshing, and our dreams as pleasant as though we slept on beds of down and mother watched over us.

Morning found us still determined to stand together, to serve and help save our country. Our hardships had been severe, indeed, and enough to daunt the courage of many a veteran. But we were young, and hope and sunshine and action add a zest to the purpose and a zeal to the enthusiasm of youth. It was still optional with us to remain in that camp or walk out as citizens; for as yet we had not been mustered into regular service. Hardships had been endured; the cares, trials and privations of a soldier's life were dawning upon us, gradually changing the idea that to be a soldier meant gay trappings, a time of ease, honor and pleasure. But we had come, we had seen, and we would stay.

Our first day in camp was made more pleasant by the assignment to better quarters and regular issuing of rations. On the following day we organized the camp for drill. As neither of its officers knew the first principles, and as an election for second lieutenant was then on the tapis, we were most fortunate in securing the very man for the position. He

was an old Mexican war veteran—D. W. Henderson.[5]

Leaving the company in his charge, I returned to Tennessee[6] to recruit it to sixty men, the required number. Returning, I found that Captain Veach had come back in my absence—having left it, as before stated, soon after our arrival at Quincy—and had been ordered down the river to Cape Girardeau, wither I followed with my new recruits on a Government transport. And there and entirely new scene opens. On our arrival there I was busy for some time looking after my baggage. As I have before mentioned, I had the remainder of my Yankee notion stock with me, and it would have puzzled anyone to know what I was going to do with it. It consisted of two large canvas-covered trunks filled with tack-hammers, hatchets, buttons, suspenders, pocket-knives, thread, needles, pins, and all the hundred odds and ends of a country notion trade.

Robinson Crusoe, you know, had his island; and I always respected him for being so industrious in saving everything from the wreck, when he might have gone fishing or hunting. I was like him in one respect; I was without friends at that time, to whom I might have sent these articles; and it began to dawn upon me that it was not exactly the right kind of baggage for a soldier called on to defend his country. The matter began to be a serious one when I thought the Government might not allow me transportation for my stock, and from indications we were not likely to be a standing army, as we had reports that other troops had even been compelled to run.

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5. Captain Daniel W. Henderson was born in Tennessee, March 7, 1823. In 1832 his parents settled in Illinois. In 1846 he assisted in raising a company for the Mexican War, but the quota for Illinois being filled, it was not accepted. At the second call, in 1847, he assisted in recruiting what became Company I of the First Regiment, Illinois Volunteers. He remained in Mexico till peace was declared, when his regiment was ordered home to Alton, Illinois, where they were paid off and discharged.

6. Tennessee, Illinois. See page 1.

How short-sighted we poor mortals are! How ready we are to brood over a trouble, and right here at our own door is a way out of the difficulty. And see how my opportunity came. Our company had only been mustered in after the last payday, and of course the boys had no money, and the next payday was a long time ahead. The sutlers had so many tempting delicacies, such as tobacco, cigars and other indispensable luxuries to a soldier, and every one of them was busy devising ways and means to secure them.

Hearing of my stock, they induced me to let them have the articles and they took them out into the town and sold them to the people, and so had ready money to purchase from the sutler.

I fitted up my tent, displayed the stock, and for an hour or so customers flocked in and trade boomed. Each one would take what he thought he could sell, and give me an order for the amount on the paymaster. Even the trunks were disposed of, and I soon found myself out of business rid of all encumbrances, and men all happy, and the profits not inconsiderable.

And so, as the story always ends, everyone is made happy. As I write, the smell of the sutler's cigar is wafted to me, and I find the temptation too strong to resist. I indulge in a soldier's solace. Won't you join me?"

CHAPTER II

FIGHTING IN MISSOURI AND ARKANSAS - 1861[1]

In Camp at Lamina Bridge, Mo.,
December, 20, 1861

Dear Sir:-,

[2]The trip from Quincy to St. Louis was made in a small boat with cabin rooms for only half our number, the others having to sleep on the open deck. Expecting to arrive in St. Louis in the morning, no provisions were taken on board and as the boat refused to land anywhere, we were compelled to wait for something to eat until we arrived at the Arsenal about sunset and entered for the first time a military camp. Ignorant of where, how and to whom to apply for rations, at this late hour, we had just concluded we would be compelled to wait until next morning when fortunately the Q.M., hearing of our arrival and destitution did as he said "The best he could for us" by issuing one box hard tack and two uncooked hams. It was a feast for a King, was it not my comrades? I still hear the

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1. The chapter numbers and the titles have been supplied by the editor. Each of the twelve letters in the letter-press book have a regular letter heading and a salutation. Chapter II is letter twelve, pages [143-156]. Pages [153] and [155] are missing and apparently were never in the letter-press book. The story is connected from pages [152] to [154] and from [154 to 156]. See appendix A, page 147 and B, page 149. Words in brackets have been supplied. In some instances the space is present but the word is missing, in others the word appears to have been skipped by the typist. Page numbers in brackets refer to the original letter-press book. In every instance, the letters are quoted verbatim from the original letter-press book.

2. A small portion of the first letter, Chapter II, gives similar incidents and phrasing as the last portion of Currie's account in Herr's work. Chapter I, p. 10.

merry laugh, the mirthful jest, the easy wit and humor, and the years roll away, and we are boys again together around that highly relished feast; comrades again as we share in common. That night the shed used for storage purposes, (better accommodations being promised for the morning) was where we slept on the bare ground, our slumbers as peaceful and refreshing, our dreams as pleasant as though we slumbered in royal couches. The morning found us still determined to stand together to serve and save our country. Our hardships so far had [not] been heavy enough to daunt many; we had seen and we would stay. Our first day in camp was made pleasant by the assignment of better accommodations and issuing of rations. The next day we organized the company for drill, but as neither of its officers knew anything of the art and as the election of a second lieutenant was then on the tapis, we were fortunate in finding just the man wanted—a Mexican War veteran, whom we elected, leaving the Company in his charge, I returned to Tennessee[3] to recruit the Company to sixty-five men, the legal number required. In ten days I returned with a sufficient number to the St. Louis Arsenal. During my absence our Captain Veach, (whom as before stated had left us) returned and had been ordered down the river to Cape Girardeau where I followed him with the recruits on a government boat.

The camp at Girardeau was large. Our Company had never been mustered into the service and in the intervals when not employed in throwing up earthworks on a summit of a hill just back of the city making preparations to guard against an attack of a large rebel force there menacing it, they had been drilled and had become quite proficient. The day after my arrival I was officer of the guard for the first time. First attempts always bring out all the awkwardness, embarrassment and incompetancy that can be embodied in a human creature, but the first attempt accomplished, the first lesson learned, then comes gradually an ease, a self consciousness of knowledge, ability and fitness that lightens the labor a half and makes the accomplishment only a question of time. I had guard of

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3. Tennessee, Illinois.

one hundred and fifty men and made the best use of my time and tried to improve every opportunity. We remained during two weeks completing the fortifications and drilling when off duty, so that when ordered to St. Louis arsenal at about the middle of August we returned such full-fledged soldiers that we felt a certain superiority over the many raw recruits there. A short time after our arrival at the arsenal all the companies, which like our own had enlisted to fill up the Ninth Mo. regiment, were called in from detached duty and the prefecting of the regimental organization completed. After a slight drill drill [sic] of the regiment we were ordered by boat to Lexington Mo., situated on the Missouri river, there to reinforce Col. Mulligan's command, which was surrounded in its entrenchments by a vastly superior force of rebels commanded by General Sterling Price, major Gen'l of this State of Mo. Telegrams came pouring in for hasty reinforcements to save Mulligan, yet we were placed on a stern-wheel boat, *R. G. Taylor,* which took three days to reach Booneville, Mo., but little more than half way to Lexington. At this point we learned of the surrender of the gallant Mulligan's entire command after a most brilliant defense and the retreat of Price's army with these prisoners south toward Springfield. Disembarking at Booneville [we] went into camp and remained nearly a week pressing wagons and horses from surrounding country into service for transportation of our supplies and equipage.

We next struck camp and started in pursuit of Price's retreating army already a week in advance [of us]. We reached Sedalia Mo., situated on the Kansas Pacific R. R., after a twelve [-hour] march where Gen'l Freemount [sic] with an army of 10,000 men joined us with Government transportation, [which] now relieved the horses and wagons impressed in our service. A day or two of preparation and organization of the army into brigades and divisions, and we were again on the march south toward Springfield expecting to overtake the retreating rebels at same point.

In a march of six days we reached Springfield one hundred miles distant unmolested to find that Price was still retreating toward Neosho in S. W. Mo., leaving only his

rear guard in the outskirts of the town. With this our advance, or rather Freemonts' [sic] body guard, had a spirited but disastrous encounter and was driven back to our advancing columns, losing fully one half of their number in killed and wounded.

A brave skirmish but an evidence of a lack of judgment as deplorable as costly. We camped near the city and on the following day, (Nov. 3rd), General Freemont [sic] was superseded by General Hunter, who immediately marched the army back over the same road they had traversed to Lamina Brigade [bridge?] near Otterville, Mo., where the army went into winter quarters. This virtually put an end to all extensive military operations in S. W. Missouri for the winter. Like the brave little soldiers of our early school book "we had been marched right up down again."

Now and then we made an occasional movement to intercept recruits going to Price's Army south of us and then the most important being the capture, at Milford, near Warrensburg, of a rebel camp making [the] entire force prisoners, securing camp equipage etc., and in which our company took a prominent part. On November 12th General Halleck displaced Hunter in the command of the Mo. department and a re-organization took place. General Samuel R. Curtis of Iowa being made the commander of our army.

We remained in camp drilling, adding to our military value as we became more and more [accustomed] to camp and field life. [4]As the army had now settled down

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4. Chapter II, Currie's letter No. [12], contains anomalies that are not consistent with the date, December 20, in the heading of the letter. In that portion of the letter before this reference number, he mentions November 12 and all of the events appear to have occurred before December 20. In the paragraph following this reference number, he mentions a thirty-day leave of absence, that, according to the context, must have ended late in January or early in February; hence, a date of December 20 is impossible for the second portion of the letter.

Currie further states that St. Louis and Rolla were connected by a railroad started at the beginning of the war and since extended to California. It appears, then, that the second portion of the letter was edited after the date when the railroad was completed across the country to California.

in their winter quarters with no expectations of again taking the field until spring, I obtained leave of absence for thirty days to visit friends in the North. After the expiration of my leave of absence on my return to St. Louis, I found that early in January the entire army had been ordered to Springfield, Mo., to drive out the rebels from that State. General Price advancing from the Arkansas border unresisted was over running S. W. Mo. There had been no provision to keep the line open from our camp near Otterville at Lamina Bridge to Springfield, the objective point seemingly of both armies, and it was useless to now attempt to reach my command by that route. [I] awaited the opening of a supply route to the army.

I ascertained that a supply train would leave Rolla in a few days to meet the army at Springfield. St. Louis and Rolla were connected by a railroad begun at the breaking out of the war and since finished to California. Taking the train I reached Rolla and from there had to secure private conveyance to Springfield, lying south about equal distance between Rolla and our winter camp, Otterville. Securing a Mexican pony [and] with the captain of our regiment for companion, I set out to find the command somewhere. It was now in February and bad weather [and] bad roads retained our progress, so materially that we reached Springfield only to find our army had passed through the day [before] hotly pursuing the rebels, southward.

Hurrying along without stopping to rest we overtook the command the second day and joined them while they were engaged in a running fight. [From] now on during the day our advance was constantly skirmishing with the

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In the letter-press book, page [143] is the first page of letter No. [12]. This page has no typed-in number, but the next page, [144] is numbered [#2]. Page [145] is not numbered, but page [146] is numbered [#3]. However, page [147] is numbered [#5]. Page [148] is numbered ["1st"]. These items indicate quite clearly that someone has attempted to join two letters or papers together to form one continuous story, and that there is a break in the manuscript at page [148]. There are no indications that the first portion of the letter could not have been written on December 20, 1861, but there are several indications that the second portion was written about March 1, 1861, and edited after that year.

rear of the retreating rebels; at night two armies camped within sight of each other, to arise the next morning to renew the running skirmishes of the day previous, the rebels retreating south, we followed close upon their heels. So each day repeated itself until our advance reached the Arkansas border. It appears that there was some dissatisfaction among the rebel soldiers now, as there had been rivalry among their officers.

The rebels with whom we had been skirmishing were Missourians who had enlisted under General Price for the defence of Mo. only, and did not want to go out of their own state. Gen'l Price had been appointed Maj. Gen'l of the State Militia, [sic] by the rebel Gov. Jackson and [was] not recognized as such by the regular Confederate service; both Generals McIntosh and McCulloch, regular Confederate Major Generals, claimed to out rank him and refused to fight under him in Mo. So the retreat was pushed on over into the state of Arkansas where McCulloch and McIntosh joined Price as did Maj. General Earl Van Dorn and a brigade of Indians numbering about five thousand under Gen'l Albert Pike of Arkansas, thus swelling the rebel force to about 20,000.

In order to check our advance the rebels felled [a] great number of immense trees, which lined the roadside right across our path to retard us and make mark [marching?] slow and difficult. But a regiment of soldiers with sufficient guard was put to work and so rapidly did it remove those obstructions, those huge forest trees, that they seemed as light as air in the many hands and were thrown aside so quickly that the rear of our army never knew until they came up and saw the trees, that there had been an impediment in our way. Only a half a day was lost by these instructions [obstructions]. Nothing further was done by the rebels to impede our quick advance. They were rushing rapidly on, intent on drawing us as far into the State as possible before offering battle.

Our first camp in Arkansas was at Cross Timber Hollows. Our mail, the first from Springfield, was received here. It contained an order from the Department Head Quarters, changing the name of our regiment from Ninth Mo. to Fifty Nine Illinois, a change effected by a petition from the regiment. All its members were from Illinois at

the time of its organization.

Illinois had furnished her quota of men and our only way to help was fill up the Mo. quota, in order to get into service at that time. From Cross Timber Hollows we ascended a hill to Elkhorn Tavern, around which afterwards the battle of Pea Ridge was fought, a change station on the old stage line leading from Springfield to Little Rock, and is located in the back bone, as it were, of a swell of ground called Pea Ridge. The roads from this point run along the summit of the ridge for three or four miles, then descends by easy grades into the valley of Sugar Creek turning to the right through a small village and to the left ascends another hill. Since entering the State we had not fired a gun, the enemy keeping too far in the advance, but here we learned that at the summit of the hill beyond Sugar Creek, the enemy had posted men behind the trees on both sides of the road to bush whack us as we advanced. To clear the way General Curtis ordered four [a full?] squadron of the second Mo. Cavilry to charge them from the foot of the hill. Instead of allowing the horses to walk to the crest of the hill and then make the attack, he insisted on a charge being made from the foot of the hill and the result was when they reached the enemy the horses were so tired they could not charge, and men and horses [were] slaughtered at a fearful rate, and before the infantry could get to their rescue, the rebels had fled leaving us to care for the wounded and bury our dead—this took us several hours. Afternoon was now upon us and so we went to camp on the battle field. The dead strewn thick around us must be buried. It was the first battle, in which I had ever been. I feel again the sickening hour of that sight. I see again the bodies of our commander [comrades] who so short a time before were as full of life, of hope, of eager expectations, as we who stood around saddened into a seriousness that still comes with the memory of that scene. There was not time for funeral preparations; the glory of a soldiers death must take the place of the tender loving mothers, the heart broken wives and sorrowing children [in?] those last acts of love which each and all do for things dead; and that glory then seemed what a poor recompense; as we stood around so uncertain as to which of us would be the next to part with life for it.

Turning I watched an ambulance come dashing along and as it passed I saw the dead bodies of two soldiers. The heads covered with blood were hanging out at the back end of the ambulance, the tail gate not being closed, jarring and knocking with every jerk of the wagon. A ghastly sight. I followed it and when it stopped went up and saw a soldier's burial on the battle field. Two men were digging a trench about three by seven feet, and into this side by side with an army blanket under and one over them, the soldiers were placed and the dirt, which was being removed for graves for the next dead comrades, covered them from sight forever. It seemed cruel then, but now I know that, though buried there without a mark to show their graves, they were not forgotten. The wild flowers take on a deeper hue on their graves, the winds sing softly to them of victory; the birds twitter all day of freedom and peace. They are a part of their nation's pride and glory. They are cherished by their Country, and in the hearts of their loved ones there is a memory that renews its life with every season and grows more sacred as passing time brings promise of a near reunion before the General Commander. All night long that scene haunted me and at dawn next morning when the reveille sounded I was glad for action to shake off the impression. First came the bustle and hurry of preparation for breakfast. But all through the time I could see those dead men, and though since, I [have] passed through more harrowing scenes, none ever affected me as did that first burial, and today the memory is as fresh as though it was an occurrence of yesterday.

After breakfast we struck camp and at sunrise the whole command was moving. It was now the latter part of February, 1862, and our whole march from Springfield had been made with most delightful weather. Our march this day covered over fifteen miles and that night we went into camp near the foot of the Boston Mountains, where Price had gone to recognize [reorganize?] and recruit as we afterwards, ascertained, being joined by troops and commanders as before explained. General Van Dorn commanding [the] Trains, [Trans-?] Mississippi Department [of the] Confederate Army, taking command. So rapidly had we advanced that our zeal had overstripped

our judgment and our supply train was now many miles in the rear, compelling us to go into camp until it came up with supplies, as our rations had been entirely consumed.

For the four days following our entire command lived on field corn, such as was fed to the mules and this had to be brought a distance of twenty miles, requiring an entire brigade to guard the foraging party. Its scarcity and the difficulty in getting it, put each man on an allowance of four ears daily. But even then our men were cheerful and many a hearty laugh did we have over the various contrivances and the ingenuity displayed in the preparation of our meals. Here would be one fellow driving holes through an old tin pan with a nail and then using the rough side for a grater. Another would pound it between rocks. It was parched and popped, stewed and boiled and roasted, but still it was only "corn," and not very palatable, especially for so long a time. We ate it promising ourselves feasts when the supply train came up, and it arrived opportunely, too, for distress and sickness already had become dangerously prevalent in the ranks from lack of food and nourishment.

We had been in camp four or five days when the rebels began to advance upon us and we were ordered to retreat, the idea being

Continued in our next.[5]

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5. The letter ends abruptly without finishing the thought. The next letter in the letter press book, No. [13], does not complete the story; however, the next letter in chronological order, No. [6] starts by a reference to the problem of "corn."

It will be noted that in the second portion of this letter the typist was having considerable trouble reading the manuscript as is evidenced by the large number of errors in transcription.

CHAPTER III

BATTLE OF PEA RIDGE ARK

Near Elkhorn Tavern March, 10th, 1862.

"And so Joseph's brethern came to buy corn."[2] Now do you think because we lived on corn for so long we had some to sell? Not so. The brethern began to advance upon us to slay us, coming up so fast, we were obliged to retreat hastily in order to secure a more effective position for the battle now evident. The game was now reversed. Instead of being pursued the rebels turned and were now pursuers driving us rapidly back to Sugar Creek, a position selected as offering many advantages for a battle ground, especially in defense against an attack from the south, from which direction the rebels were approaching. General Franz Sigel with his command was left in the rear to keep the enemy in check until our main army could get into position. Our retreat to Sugar Creek occurred on the 5th of March, 1862. It was late in the afternoon when we reached the creek and went into camp a safe distance back from the brow of the hill north of the stream. The first order was to built earth works on this hillside and get the artillery into position as this slope faced the south and thus commanded the direct approach of the rebels coming from that direction. It was a most tedious and difficult work. Up through a heavy underbrush over the rough uneven surface the men pulled the heavy guns by means of long ropes. I was detailed with my

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1. Letter No. [6], pages [61 to 77] contains no salutation and is titled "Battle of Pea Ridge, Ark." Currie refers to this paper as a letter, in the last paragraph of the chapter. This chapter is a verbatim quotation of Currie's letter No. [6].

2. The words in the quotation marks do not appear in the Bible. Currie is evidently referring to the records in Genesis, Chapters 42 to 45.

Company, our captain having returned home on a leave of absence, to place and protect a four gun battery belonging to our Brigade.

From the evening of the 5th, all night we worked and finished just at sunrise next morning, when we went to camp for rations and rest. All the afternoon of the 5th General Sigel, who had been left in our rear, was constantly engaged in heavy skirmishes with the advancing rebels. By his coolness and skill he baffled all their attempts to isolate, overwhelm or crush him. Finally wearing out the day and the distance fighting and falling back, repelling his foes until reenforcements were sent him, the rebels arrested their pursuit and General Sigel went into camp in close proximity to ours.

Preparations were now complete, and awaited the enemy's arrival but on the morning of the 6th they had failed to appear. About nine o'clock [as] we were sitting around our mess chests eating breakfast, the camp was aroused by the heavy firing of artillery in our rear. Startled, we seek information but on every face is the same anxious look of inquiry. Suddenly a courier dashes up from the direction of the firing with news that is most startling. A foraging party sent out back of us for food for the animals was attacked a short distance from Elkhorn and almost the entire party, wagons, and horses were captured. Picture to yourselves the confusion such news wrought. How had the enemy reached our rear, had we not worked all night to receive them with our artillery, as they approached our front? They certainly did not relish the warm reception and had frustrated all our plans. Simply, too. From the little village of Leetown west of our position a road led to our rear, meeting the road we were on, [to] the back of us near Elkhorn Tavern. This passage, by an oversight or negligence, which proved most costly, had been left unguarded and the rebels during the night had flanked us by making a detour by way of Leetown over this road and came up in the rear, compelling us now to meet them on their own ground with [out] an advantage for us. [We were] ignorant of every foot of it while to the rebel guides it was an open book. The long roll sounds and a rapid change is made from front to rear. The artillery which has caused so much time and labor to place in our

front, must now be dragged to another position and all the work must be done by the least possible number, as every man is needed at the front to meet the oncoming foe, who flushed with the decided advantage, meant to profit still further by our confusion. Hurry skurry, away go the wagons, Quarter Masters, Stores, the Commissary, the hospital with its sick and all the other traps of an army in the field, which must be located at a safe distance in the rear during an engagement. Loud and clear above all the din, came the commands of the many officers forming lines of battle. There was the rattling of the wagons dashing to the rear; the rumbling of the artillery, galloping off to the front; the clatter of the cavalry; the quick tramp of the infantry; the flashing of arms while the distant steady mutterings of the approaching enemy's firing told too plainly that the storm so long delayed was about to burst upon us with a fury that had gathered strength from the calm that preceded it.

Our division, the third, under Brigadier General Jeff. C. Davis, moved rapidly to battle. After two miles march [we] took position on the left of the Pea Ridge Road, which brought us into the vicinity of the little small [sic] village of Leetown. Marching through the woods we came to a small clearing around a little log hut, (which was afterwards converted into a hospital) and by command left our napsacks and other cumbrous luggage. We were marching through a woody country with a dense underbrush, cut and crossed by deep ravines and washouts, so we must be inipeded [sic] by as little weight as possible. And now marching by the right flank through the woods, we find a battalion of the second [First?] Mo. Cavalry belonging to our brigade in a most demoralized condition, having been disastrously repulsed in a charge. We pushed on until the head of our column came to a cornfield of about fifty acres, fenced in from the surrounding woods by a zigzag rail fence. As we reached the South East corner of the field the head of the column files to the right and continues marching in that order until our left reaches the corner, when we flank to the left in line of battle and move forward but a short distance when we met the rebels in line, and now the battle begins. Meeting, both armies fire simultaneously and both fall back. We retreat about two

hundred feet, about face, and reload our guns. Here one of my corporals in his excitement in ramming the ball in his gun struck his hand so forcibly as to drive the ramrod through it. On learning of the accident I relieved him from duty and sent him back to the hospital. I took his gun and cartridge box, filled with forty rounds of ammunition, strapped it around me and taking position at the right of my company, remained there during the fight, firing my musket as the men did. On our second advance we covered and went beyond the ground occupied by the rebels. At the first volley [we] passed down and up the sides of a ravine, met the rebels, exchanged fire and again both fell back.

I did not hear any command to retreat, if in fact any was given, and so ordered my company to reload, supposing the brigade was still in line. The underbrush was so heavy we could not see twenty feet from us, all of our firing having been done in a kneeling position. However, soon discovering our advanced position a most perilous one, we fired our volly and retreated across the ravine like gophers back to the command.

A third time we advanced to the enemy, this time but half way up the ravine as the rebels were awaiting us at the top, fired and we fell back hotly pursued by the rebels who drove us from the field. You would not have wagered much on my winning in that hurry! skurry! pell-mell! every man looking out for himself [in the] race. I was no light weight by any means with my heavy sabre, a filled cartridge box, and a musket on my shoulder. I was doing fairly well, however, until somehow the sabre twisted itself between my legs and threw me flat on my face. I knew the adjutant of our regiment, who was riding a white horse, was right behind me and turning over on my side I saw the big eyed animal looking down on me as sober as a judge, as if about to pass sentence upon me for such awkwardness. I rolled over out of the way, sprung to my feet, and scampered off making up for lost time.

The enemy was so close upon us we could almost see the color of his eye. A portion of our left came to a zig-zag fence enclosing a corn field and had to jump it, the right keeping on through the woods. My company, jumping the fence, ran across the soft plowed ground without much

military order, the rebels being within 150 feet of us, but so certain of capturing the entire command they did not stop to fire a shot. We jumped the opposite fence and met more rebels. Now don't anticipate, please, we jumped the opposite fence to be most agreeably surprised to find lying down and just behind, and so concealed from view, a full regiment of Indiana infantry, who had been held in reserve and now were in position to check the advancing foe. Did they do it? Well let's see. We leaped over the prostrate reserve and formed line just in their rear. Unaware the rebels came up within a few feet of the fence. When the reserves open fire upon them so unexpectedly and so effective as to completely check them. Baffled and chagrined at the turn affairs had taken, when our capture seemed so certain, they about faced, made a left half wheel and charged a four gun battery, which had been left in the corner of the first corn field mentioned, where you remember we formed in line of battle. The battery had been constantly shelling the woods in front of us during the attacks and retreats.

Seeing the object of the rebels, the reserve leaped the fence, also wheeled to the left and charged the enemy now already in posession of the battery and just ready to turn the guns upon us. The rebels abandoned the prize and fled fired upon [by us] with lightening rapidity and telling effect. This virtually closed the fight in our front for the day. The conflict had lasted from ten in the morning until four in the afternoon. Our division sustained a loss of fifty killed and one hundred and fifty wounded, some fatally.

You [will] remember [that] our division, the third, was stationed on the left of Pea Ridge Road. Our right, fighting on the East side of Pea Ridge road near Elkhorn Tavern, had been heavily engaged during the entire day. There was a ceaseless deafening roar of heavy artillery and the sharp crack of small arms from nine A. M. until night. The enemy's object was to throw its main force against our advance on the Pea Ridge road and sending a flanking party under Generals McIntosh and McCulloch via Leetown [to] get into our rear and thus completely shut us in.

Balked however in this effort the party joined the main

army, then near Elkhorn, and drove back our right two miles from their position occupied at the commencement of the fight. It was in this part of the battle [that] both rebel Generals, McIntosh and McCulloch, valiant and valuable officers of the Confederate army, were fatally wounded during the night.[3] The Confederates lost too many line officers and the field was strewn with their dead and wounded. Of the brigade of Indians under General Pike, great aid was expected by the rebels, as the enemy thought they would prove most efficient at ambuscades in the woods where they could practice their nefarious warfare, scalping and robbing prisoners. But they proved to be the most arrant cowards becoming perfectly unmanageable when our cannons, which they called "shoot wagons," were discharged, fleeing to the rear, [not] listening to, nor heeding commands of their officers.

While we were on the Leetown side of the fight, we lost rather than gained ground, and in a sense experienced the worst of the battle. Yet we had inflicted a severe [loss] on the enemy, killing and wounding many of their line.[4] Officers hewing down their ranks demoralizing the Indian Brigade and mortally wounding two of their best Generals. The death [s] of the Generals McIntosh and McCulloch had a most depressing effect upon the rebel rank, which never deports itself as gallantly under new officers as under the old commanders endeared by mutual successes and hardships. So that in summing up the day's result it was decidedly in our favor, though at the time we were ignorant of it, and the afternoon settled down on as despairing a division as ever came from battle. Every soldier seemed to know we had been defeated and the gloom of a final attack, which could only bring us capture or death,

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3. The word night appears to be an error of the copyist. Later in the letter are expressions that indicate that officers McIntosh and McCulloch were killed during the day time. The original word is believed to be "fight."

4. The context indicates that the punctuation is in error at this point. It should read, "Yet we had inflicted a severe loss on the enemy, killing and wounding many of their line officers, hewing down their ranks, demoralizing the Indian Brigade, and mortally wounding two of their best generals."

pressed heavily upon us and shut out hope. With despair depicted on every countenance we drew up in line of battle (in pursuance to a command) on the open field, where our battery was parked during the fight and standing thus listened to a speech made by our brigade commander, Col. Julius White, who among other things stated that we had driven the enemy from the field; that reenforcements would soon join us, overlooking the fact that the rebels, as every soldier knew, occupied a position cutting us off from our base of supplies and closed with an order, advance through the open field into the woods beyond.

My Company, which were [sic] the skirmishers of our regiment, together with a company of the twenty second Indiana regiment were ordered to deploy covering the front of our brigade and advance. On a comparison of dates of commissions with the Lieutenant of the twenty second Indiana, I by priority became commander of the skirmish line. We deployed and advanced the brigade following in supporting distance. Undisputed we made our way over the morning's battle ground, over the fence and advanced about one hundred yards into the woods, picking up on our way black flags decorated with the death's head, blankets, etc. Here and there through the woods we could discern a few rebels fleeing rapidly from us.

At one place we came upon two wounded men lying side by side on a blanket, covered by another, who had been struck in the legs by shells in the early fight, and had been all day uncared for; my attention being called to them they made known their wants, "a little water, a fire at their poor wounded feet" and interposed with piteous appeals not to bayonet them. I took their name and company, called back a couple of men who left them a canteen of water, built a fire to warm their stiffened limbs and made them as comfortable as we could. I promised to send an ambulance after them and have them removed to our hospital. I left them sending after us their words of thankfulness and blessing. They had looked for nothing but death, to expect no mercy from a Yankee had been ingrafted in their code. But here wounded [and] deserted on the battle field by those who had so taught them, they could not realize how we who had faced them in mortal combat all day would not [now] stop to assist them. They

did not understand that it was not hatred and enmity against our brother but love for our common parent and the protection of the ties that boundus in our family which had pushed us to war. Poor misguarded [misguided?] men! I sent a message to our surgeon to have them cared for, [then] other duties more important took my attention. It was now near sundown and the skirmishers were ordered to hault [sic] but remain deployed. All day we had fought with nothing to eat and with but scanty supply of water. Even now no streams were in sight and hungry, thirsty and exhausted and weary soldiers sank down on the damp leaves and were soon fast asleep.

And now for fear we disturb them, let us cease talking and take up the narrative when they awake. It did not try your patience in keeping still while the brigade lay asleep that night. [?] It was not a long nor a refreshing slumber, soon we awoke chilled through. We had no blankets having left them you remember, with our luggage at the little log house that morning. We dared have no fire as it would at once discover us to the enemy and bring on us an artillery fire. Shivering we remained until midnight when at a command of "follow" passed along the line in a low whisper, we gladly moved by file right, and joined our regiment who were advancing out into a wagon road that ran along the east side of the corn field, where we had advanced during the afternoon and over the battle ground occupied by the rebels during the day. No wonder you shudder. The road is so bestrewn with rebel dead that a detail of soldiers is necessary to turn them out of our path. Overhead a full moon in a clear sky sheds its beams directly on the upturn[ed] faces of the dead, rendering them still more ghastly and making their gray clothes almost white in the moonlight. "The dead are here" and to those soldiers, weary, chilled and despondent, moonbeams never made a scene more cold or cruel, the air never seemed [more] like drafts from a charnel house nor our doom more apparent.

After a circuitous route we reached General's Cutes [Curtis?] headquarters, halted for an hour or so and then took up our march again in the direction of Elkhorn Tavern. Our four gun battery was parked in the North East corner of a field and to support it the infantry layed [sic]

down along the rail fence running west. At sunrise, to signal our readiness for the fight, our battery was ordered and threw a shell every two or three minutes toward Elkhorn Tavern. This was done for a half an hour or so when to our surprise the rebels opened fire from a battery of masked guns on our flank within a few rods of us and nearly in line with the rail fence under which our infantry was lying so exhausted from action and hunger, having had nothing to eat since the previous morning, that they sank into a heavy sleep which even the din of the firing failed to disturb. Between the rebel battery and ours was a slight elevation in the ground and this prevented them [from] depressing their guns sufficiently to reach our battery, so they amused themselves knocking off the rails of the fence, throwing them on the sleeping soldiers and somewhat disturbing their slumbers. Aroused we lay there watching the brigade commander who was sitting on his horse at the right and in the rear of our battery. At a wave of his sword, up we jumped and scampered pell-mell southward over the field, the soft dirt flying in every direction from the sharpnell [shrapnel] and shells exploding at our heels. In the meantime our battery had limbered [lumbered?] to the rear and started obliquely over the field. That was [a] more profitable target and so the rebels ceased playing with us and turned their attention to the battery, firing at it [with] solid shot to wreck our caissons and succeeded in demolishing one wheel. As quick as [a] flash it was replaced and away it goes out of their reach without further harm. Unharmed also, the infantry took a position behind the lower fence of the field parell [parallel] with our first position with a dense woods just back of us and here in the angles of the zigzag fence we again lay down while upwards of fifty pieces of artilery we[re] put in position.

There's a lull in the battle [while] both armies placing [placed?] the artillery for the third[5] day's fight. Soon

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5. There is enough literature to reconstruct most of the Battle of Pea Ridge. However, commentators differ in the number of days fighting, some giving two and others three days. Currie indicates that portions of three days were covered by the conflict.

our batteries open fire on the rebels guns placed on the hillside just back of Elkhorn Tavern and for the next two hours there was a constant play of the artillery, not less than a hundred cannons belching out fire and smoke and shot as fast as guns could be loaded. The dense smoke formed a black canopy over us through which the shells darted like fury [fiery?] meteors and bursting, fell around us in deadly showers. Like the hungry waves of a storm tossed sea lashing against a rocky shore eager for destruction came the deafening reports of the cannons, the balls seething through the air making frightful bloodshed and carnage, yet there was a sublimity and grandeur about it, that made it majestic and worthy a battle of the Gods. It was such a cannonading that would have inspired a Milton's pen or made a Napoleon's heart leap with a warrior's enthusiasm of mighty conflicts. During all that firing our exhausted infantry slept. You wonder at it do you? It is part of a soldier's discipline to take advantage of every opportunity. The artillery cease operations and our foes concentrate on the East side of Pea Ridge road and with fixed bayonets [we] charge through the woods for about a mile until we reach the Huntsville road leading east from Elkhorn and by which the enemy had made a rapid retreat, taking with them all their artillery, arms, etc., leaving us only the battle field dearly bought by the lives of one thousand three hundred and fifty one of our comrades.

As we reached the Huntsville road the first person we saw was General Curtis riding along swinging his hat and shouting Victory, Victory! It was a joyous news. We had been fighting for two days and a half [on half] rations at best, but actually none for twenty four hours. We had been contending with an enemy that outnumbered us three to one, who by strategy had gained our rear, had shut us off from supplies. We had no hope of reenforcement. We had been driven two miles from our position the day before and now victory seemed more a dream than a reality. It was sometime before I could convince myself we had indeed won, so hard had been the fighting, so hopeless the issue for two days. All drank in the good news slowly and when final assurance came the men, hungry, exhausted, overcome, sank down just where they stood in line of battle with no thought but rest. All firing had ceased.

There's [sic] remained to tell of what [that?] two days conflict [on] the battle field, filled with its dead and wounded of both armies, horses and men arising [lying?], the dismounted cannons, shattered caissons and great boughs torn from the trees. Not long however did the scene remain quiet. Soon comrades were looking and making anxious inquiries for friends; ambulances passed hurriedly to and from the hospital bearing the wounded and dead, companies, regiments, brigades, divisions were soon enrouted for camp.

The fires were relighted and a hasty meal prepared and devoured as only half starved soldiers know how. Then came the guards for outpost, picket and camp duties, while those so fortunate as to escape this labor went over the battle field. All our dead and wounded had now been removed, leaving only the rebel dead which lay there in great numbers. Many of them had been there from the first day of battle and were now beyond recognition. Those who fought with them had left them there. Night graciously laid her mantle pitifully over them and shut them out from our view. At twilight long before the warning bugle had sounded to retire the camp was still, officers and men [were] fast asleep.

We breakfasted early next morning. At ten o'clock a rebel detail under a flag of truce came to bury their dead. Permission being granted [they] staked [stacked?] their guns with our outposts and proceeded under guard to the unpleasant duty assigned them. Quick work they made of it too. Coming to a body they would dig a trench two feet or less deep, and roll the dead soldier into it, letting the body remain just as it happened to lodge, face down or up, and threw in the dirt loosely on it. When they were through all over the field was arms, hands, and feet exposed, mute appeals for better protection against the swarms of wild animals that would soon scent them out. The rebel's detail, dressed in their butternut dyed suits with pale thin faces, presented a marked contrast to the well uniformed union guards who attended them. We had captured a few prisoners, amongst them about one hundred Cherokee Indians, half starved, half clothed, reeking with filth and vermin and presenting [an] object [lesson], a specimen of "lo! the poor Indians!" as to completely shatter all

one's ideas [about] aborigines. For the three days we remained in camp, these prisoners had to be watched and although the guards paced at fifty feet distant, that Ribicon [sic] did not save them, as the poor guards were attacked by the vermin without pity and without number. We could not feed the prisoners so they were paroled and sent out of camp. In a day or so we removed our quarters to Cross Timber Hollows, there to await supplies.

As this was the first general engagement in which I had been in, though now nine months in the service, you can imagine how the scenes impressed themselves on my mind, and possessing as I do a fairly good memory, every detail is so fresh it all comes back with striking distinctness. Probably clearest of all stands out the little log cabin we converted into a hospital, which was filled to overflowing with the wounded and dying, while piled like wood in cords, the dead lay all about it. I remember seeing there among the wounded Second Lieutenant Beach, Co. fifty nine Infantry, who had been shot in the ankle in our third retreat across the field on the first morning. Failing to get out of the enemy's reach he fell down and played dead. The rebels rolled him over stripped him of every article of clothing, except his underware and even taking off his shoes, the poor fellow enduring untold agony as they pulled his shoes from the wound, yet never giving a sign [of life]. You see we had just received our pay before the battle and many had not had the opportunity to send their money home, many of the soldiers carrying their money with them in the fight. Finding nothing on him they left Lieutenant Beach and went on. Curiously he had concealed $300 in his undershirt and held it too. As soon as he was able, he wrote home to his sweetheart and she, brave girl accompanied by her Father made the perilous journey and came to nurse him. As soon as he could travel he went home with her on a furlough and of course they were married. But it was not for this noble woman to keep him from his duty. She parted with him like a soldier's wife and once more he returned to his duty. When the war was over, going back, however, to the noble woman he called "wife," and where better could I find an ending to my letter than here, where love and devotion and loyalty threw a soft glamour over the hatred, vindictiveness, and broken faith that led to such sad scenes.

CHAPTER IV

THE MARCH TO SHILOH. TRANSFERRED TO THE RAM FLEET-1862[1]

U.S. Steamer Ram Mingo
June 1st, 1862

Dear Sir:-

We laid in camp a few days at Cross Timber Hollows, awaiting supplies after which we marched out of the State of Arkansas to Cassville, Mo. From here filing to the right our march tended easterly along the boundary line of the State, destination Shiloh or Pittsburg Landing, where troops were rapidly concentrating for a battle about to occur. Not long did we traverse the main road but leaving it, we ascended the Ozark Mountains and through a thick growth of pine trees, cut out our own road along their coasts [ascents?]. The Ozarks seemed in their formation to have arranged themselves like a large open fan, standing upright, the valley beyond formed a part of the fan having sunk out of sight, its plicated edge being marked by a stream that wended its way in and out following the folds. Along the edge of the huge mountain fan we cut our way, our large army three miles in length marching sometimes in a great "U" form, the rear and advance being within speaking distance and again in a great "W" when the center could [see] both front and rear while the tops of the trees that grew in its folds were way beneath us and the valleys were so deep it made our road seem like a great serpent that upheld by an unseen power glided on its winding way. For three days we marched without

1. The title has been supplied by the editor as have the titles of Chapters V, and VII to XIV. The rest of these chapters are quoted exactly from Currie's letter press book.

seeing a dozen residents. Slow and tedious was our journey and such a little progress did we make that like the children of Israel we seemed to have reached the desert which would keep us for fourty [sic] years outside of our promised land - civilization.

At length we descended into the valley aforesaid and now instead of marching around the folds we would cut across through the stream, and how often that meandering stream crossed our path, or we crossed it can be imagined, when it is noted that in one day our army waded through the same stream twenty three times. We soldiers could remember of leaving serpenture [sic] streams and sinuous rills, but there was not one of us but had a better idea of what they meant after that day. At a place called Bull's Mills we camped. Here my company was detailed at daybreak to proceed their command by a two hours start to make bridges over the streams to facilitate the passage of the infantry, the cavalry, artillery, baggage etc fording. [sic] We felled immense trees from both sides, letting them fall toward the center of the stream, their top branches overlapping each other. Our start was early but the task proved to be so much greater than anticipated that the advance reached us at ten o'clock just as we were finishing the third bridge. The men did not wait for its completion, but plunging in, waded across waist deep and so continued doing during the rest of the day, making twenty three crossings in twelve miles. This was the only enlivening occurrence on our whole tiresome tramp, every time we came to the stream the men broke ranks and waded in laughing, singing, shouting, glad as school boys wading through the first deep snow. The opposite [bank] reached, they would again fall into line and hasten on eager for the next plunge. We lightened our spirits and officers and men shared the gladsome feeling that made us boys again. So far we had passed through a miserable poor country, and a people whose only heritage was wretched poverty. Many days at a time we saw no dwellings. At last we went into camp at a point ninety miles south of Rolla, Mo. early in the afternoon.

While eating supper with my fellow officers Capt. Alfred W. Ellet, "Co.I.," called me aside and read to me an order just received from the Secretary of War, through

General Curtis to select ten[2] line officers and fifty picked men for special duty and to report to St. Louis without delay. The order ran thus: "In selecting of officers and men see to it that they are only those whose bravery has been tested and further say to them the duties they will be called upon to perform are of an extra hazardous nature. Do not select any who are not willing to volunteer after being informed of their special danger." Said Captain Ellet, "You are the first one to whom I have read this order. We alone know of its existence. Give me an immediate answer as to your intentions and say nothing of it until I have made my list of selections of men and officers."

I concluded to go with him and share whatever danger the expedition held. Captain Ellet and I had been warm friends during our time of service. Our friendship had been united by mutual dangers shared on picket and guard duty together and I felt now much gratified at this new mark of esteem and confidence. I went back to supper but the words "extra Hazardous" and the uncertainty and mystery took away all appetite. Of course I was subjected to all manner of quizzing and chaff at the hands of my mess mates as to the cause of my preoccupation, sudden loss of appetite and etc.; but I answered them equivocally and as we were to start for St. Louis that night I began packing up my effects getting ready to leave. This proceeding of course added fuel to the officer's curiosity, which as I was enjoined to silence, could not be satisfied. All this time details were being made from the different companies of our regiment and within two hours from the receipt of the order five officers were in readiness to start leaving, the other five to follow with the fifty men and our baggage next day as transportation could not be obtained for them that night.

At sunset, mounted on heavy artillery horses, we rode away. I wish it were possible to put the thoughts or to give place to the various solutions of the mysterious order

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2. *USORN-I* Vol. 23, p. 78. The letter of Brigadier-General Schofield says six officers. No letter from the Secretary of War or General Curtis has been located.

under which we now rode on that beautiful moonlight night. Like every puzzle it held a hundred deep holes through which a solution might slip just when you expected to solve it. Our officer gave us his opinion that we were destined for spies and detectives. Another solution groped through dark tunnels under cities: another timidly approached a treacherous mine, while still another boldly advanced upon storming breast works. The guessing went through every hazardous duty required from a soldier and still we were at sea. Two o'clock in the morning found both men and horses worn out. We concluded to stop at a barn by the roadside where we found forage for our horses and then climbing up into the loft, slept until sunrise.

After a breakfast, obtained at a near [by] house, we again proceeded, not refreshed however by our short rest. For quite a while previous to our trip we had been unaccoustomed to the saddles and the military horses we rode were not good saddle animals. Our bones ached, our flesh was sore and we felt very much like bad boys the day after a sound thrashing from a strong, irate school master.

We wanted to make Rolla, yet distant fifty miles, that day. While riding along in the forenoon we came across some of the largest black snakes I have ever seen. They were basking in the sun, one immense fellow fully ten feet long stretched right across our path. Our horses shied at [the] sight of it and held back. One of the officers dismounted and creeping carefully up, caught hold of its tail and with a motion similar to that of snapping a whip, broke its neck. Dinner was eaten at a little town; and while waiting, a Q.M. in charge of a supply train came up from Rolla and with it three or four ambulances which was going to our front. Our eloquence combined with our pitiful condition induced him to exchange two ambulances for our horses. We promised to return the ambulances from Rolla with the next train, which he had informed us would start two days thereafter. The rest of our way was made in comparative luxury. We made Rolla at dark, hav[ing] ridden the ninety miles in twenty four hours inclusive of all stoppings. Pursuant to our promise and direction we turned over the ambulances to the Post Q.M., leaving Rolla by rail at nine next morning [which] brought us to St.

Louis the same afternoon. From here by directions embodied in the order detailing us, we telegraphed notice of our arrival to [the] Secretary of War for further instructions. No amount of questioning could give us any information here as to our mission, no one even knowing of the order.

Next morning a dispatch in answer to ours ordered us to report to New Albany, Indiana, and again notify [the] Secretary of our arrival there. So, to near New Albany we went by first train and dispatched as directed. His answer settled all doubt, dispersed our anxiety and cleared the bewilderment. We were ordered to report to Col. Chas. Ellet, brother of Captain Ellet our commander and [a] civil engineer of great ability. Col. Ellet was busily converting tow-and steam boats into rams for the purpose of destroying the rebel fleet of gun boats and rams on the Mississippi river.

The fleet would consist of three side and four stern wheel boats then at the wharf at New Albany and [that?] were being converted into war vessels as rapidly as possible, requiring still about two weeks time for completion. The preparation consisted in making a protection for the boilers and machinery by enclosing them with a wall of heavy timber twelve inches square built around the boilers reaching from the main deck to within a few inches of the cabin floor, securely bolted and otherwise fastened to the boat's hull; in cutting down the upper works and painting the entire boat black, to give it as fierce an appearance as possible, and lastly to fill the prows solid, with scantlings that extended back about midship, or less.[3]

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3. Parker, Theodore H., *The Federal Gunboat Flotilla on the Western Rivers During its Administration by the War Department to October 1, 1862.* University of Pittsburgh (1939). Parker's description is herewith quoted from pages 113-114. "The changes necessary to convert steam boats into rams were limited by Ellet, for the most part, to braces and timber guards. Three timber bulkheads varying from 12 inches to 16 inches thick, and from 4 feet to 7 feet high and reaching from stem to stern were built into the hold. These were secured by cross braces so the weight of the entire vessel would be thrown into the impact when it rammed an adversary. In order to strengthen the hull against damage from such impact, stay

Despite all this preparation, the boats [were but] mere shells [so] as to earn the name of black death traps among the men.

Such [a] boat was to be [staffed] with 15 sharp shooters of which our fifty men were to form a part; a marine captain and a crew necessary to run the boat, supplied with a hose attached to the boilers with which to throw hot water in case of being boarded by the enemy, a liberal quantity of hand grenades and breech loading carbines. I was assigned military commander of the Ram Mingo, the other officers being similarly assigned upon the other boats. Our duties were to take exclusive command of the boats when in action but at all other times the marine Captain had command.

When all was ready we started down the Ohio river into the Miss-[sic] but found no obstructions until we reached Fort Pillow. Here in a bend of the Miss [sic] on the left bank the enemy had erected strong fortifications. With the heavy guns mounted on the summit of a hill that commanded the river for two or three miles. From this point down to New Orleans, a distance of one thousand miles, the rebels held undisputed possession of the river. The object of the Ram Fleet was to run the battery of Fort Pillow and attack the rebel fleet lying about (two miles) [below] Fort Pillow. We found our mortar fleet actively engaged shelling the rebel fortifications while two or three iron clad gun boats laid at anchor in the middle of the river. A few days prior to our arrival there had been a naval engagement in which we lost one boat, "The Cincinnati." The vessel was destroyed by a rebel ram lying under the guns of their fort suddenly attacking our fleet while [it was] unprepared to meet it.

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bolts were placed every few feet from stem to stern, transversing the entire width of the vessel. An oak bulwark two feet thick was built around the boilers and machinery of the vessels and braced in a similar fashion. Moreover, all the vital parts and machinery of the vessels were secured with timbers and iron braces, so there would be little or no chance of their derangement as a result of running into an enemy boat. These devices were ingenious and represented the best known method of achieving results without the expenditure of more time and money or other changes."

After our arrival we remained inactive for a number of days, not feeling safe to attempt the running of the enemy's batteries with our frail vessels, they not being intended for resistance to heavy ordnance. In order to protect the rams Col. Ellet decided to use empty coal barges. The modus operandi was this: "Each man was to tow a barge on the side next to the enemy's guns. Over the barge was built a sharp angled roof made of twelve inch square timber formed by securely bolting one end of the plank to the gunwales along both sides of the barge and drawing them together at the top, making the apex of the angle higher than the ram, the sides of the roof presenting a resistance of twenty four inches of solid timber to the rebel guns. To guard against line shots Col. Ellet had the angles formed between the sidewalls of the barge above the gunwales and the slanting timbers filled with drift, wood blocks, etc., making a perfect resistance against all such shots. While the preparations were in progress the mortar fleet which consisted of a half a dozen boats, each mounted with a heavy mortar armed [amid] ships [and] lying to the bank, about two miles above Fort Pillow, kept up an incessant shelling of the rebel fortification with immense bombs, each requiring a twenty [pound] powder charge. Each mortar was shot about every twenty minutes during the entire day and night until the incessant boom! boom! became distressingly monotonous.

The enemy, evidently husbanding their ammunition, vouchsafed no reply. To facilitate our work the barges were drawn along the bank to better enable the men to handle the heavy timber from shore. The rams were anchored about twenty feet out from shore to prevent the rebels boarding them at night and to relieve the men from guard duty, etc. We attached a breast line to a tree on the bank and in the morning could, by drawing in this line pull the boat up to the shore and at night slacken the rope and the Ram would ride at anchor. All hands had been hard at work all day and turned in early. Midnight found the silence broken only by the ceaseless lapping of the water on the shore. Suddenly Col. Ellet aroused every boat by his announcement of the "rebels" approach. Now everywhere the scene became one of quick command and humed [sic] obedience. Men dazed with sudden awakening, yet with a

soldier's instinct, darted hither and thither to prepare for the fight. Carbines were collected, hand grenades conveniently placed to be thrown on the enemy when within hitting distance; the hoses for throwing scalding water on those who attempted to board, were attached to the boilers, the sharp shooters were placed in [the] most effective positions and commanders moved among all, encouraging each man to stand to his post. The preparations were now complete; in readiness we waited. On and on we waited. On and on stole the enemy, evidence of their steady approach being the snapping of a dead twig or bough, the crunching of a pebble beneath their tread. The shadows of the dense woods lining the shore seemed to be teeming with rebel hordes.

With beating hearts, eyes and ears strained to catch every sight and sound, we waited. The river which would soon be the grave of many a brave man, flowed ceaselessly, pitilessly on. Every wave seemed to leap higher and higher and dash more boldly against the boat side, as if hungry to enfold its victims. Nearer and nearer they draw. Silence again. Will they never come from out those deep shadows. We felt we could stand the suppressed excitement no longer, and just as it became unbearable the enemy, dauntless, unfearing, appeared right in our post in full view—a great mild-faced moon-eyed cow, looking to our distended imagination ten times larger, ten times more mooneyed than ever cow appeared before. Probably attracked [sic] to the boats by the lights, it came to see what was going on, standing now calmly surveying the scene, as refreshingly unconscious of the [situation] it had [created] as a great statue or painting is of the furor it creates. Lazily looking around, its curiosity satisfied, it turned and disappeared in the woods. Oh! the hearty, joyous laughter that now went up from boat after boat, the echoes answered back with heartier peals until the whole place rang like the poor belated little boy frightened out of his senses by the tall white ghastly guidepost. We laughed again with might and main when we found out what it was. That night's adventure outlined [outlived?] the Ram fleet and though we boys have forgotten many things I venture to say that not amongst them will be found [one who has forgotten] the story of that cow.

Fort Pillow was situated on Chick-a-saw bluffs, high and steep. The opposite bank of the river was low and swampy and now covered with water. While we were getting ready to run the batteries I made several reconnoitres [sic] on the bank opposite the rebel fortifications. By wading through the water and keeping sheltered behind the willow trees I could get right up to the bank and with a field glass obtain a good view of the fort with the location and number of water batteries, two points which we wished to learn before attempting to run by them with our rams. The rebels had one of their gunboats and rams combined lying under protection of their water batteries and Col. Ellet desired to test the fighting capacity of his ram fleet by drawing out the enemy to battle. Sunday afternoon was the time selected. The arrangement being that I should take the *Dick Fulton,* the fleetest ram, and let her drop down stream, stern first, so near the rebel boat, as to induce her to come out of her moorings and attack me, while the ram *Switzerland,* a side wheel boat, was to hug the shore, bow downstream so that when the *Fulton* was attacked, she would join in the fight and the two vessels would capture the rebel. The race [ruse?] however, did not succeed. I dropped down, within range of the guns apparently unmolested and then returned to our landing.

During the time the weather was extremely hot, our boats were required to keep up one hundred and fifty pounds [of steam] night and day and the intense heat from the casemated boilers under the floor and the hot rays of a southern sun on the roof made the cabin so hot that our feet were blistered walking across the floor and it only became endurable at meal time by running the boat up and down the river and catch the breeze. There was much prostration and sickness caused by the intense heat among all our men.

Our work on the barges was about complete and in two or three days at the furthermost we had planned the descent of the river under cover of night, past Ft. Pillow and its formidable obstructions. But all our labor availed nothing. Before the dawn of day, one morning, we were aroused by a terrific explosion of the enemy's magazines which told too plainly that the fort was evacuated. A party from the fleet started off in yawls and by daylight had

taken possession of the ramparts and hoisted the stars and stripes upon the same staff which had borne, a few hours before, the flag of secession. The rebels retreated south taking with them everything of use and value but the water guns which they had spiked making them useless. The ram fleet had in the meantime dropped down to this point, while the gun boats and mortar fleets which were slow runners, moved on down the river to Memphis, the next stand selected by the enemy and where they had concentrated all their [sic][4]

4. The letter in the letter press book ends abruptly without a finished sentence or thought.

CHAPTER V

ELLET RAMS CONQUER REBEL FLEET IN BATTLE OF MEMPHIS - JUNE 1862

U.S. Steamer Ram Mingo
Mississippi River Ram Fleet of[1]

Memphis, Tenn., June 20th, 1862

Dear Sir:-

Fort Pillow had been evacuated. The flag staff that so short a time before held the emblem of the Confederacy, now bore the victorious stars and stripes, and so far the Mississippi was open to the Union forces. Our boats and mortar fleets left for Memphis, the Ram Fleet, remaining to destroy whatever the rebels, in their hasty flight, had left intact, following, overtook them, about ten miles above Memphis, where all cast anchor, for the night.

To better understand the after events, a description of the Ram Fleet is here pertinent. Under the skillful management of Col. Chas. Ellet, a civil engineer of marked ability, river steamers were converted into Rams by the

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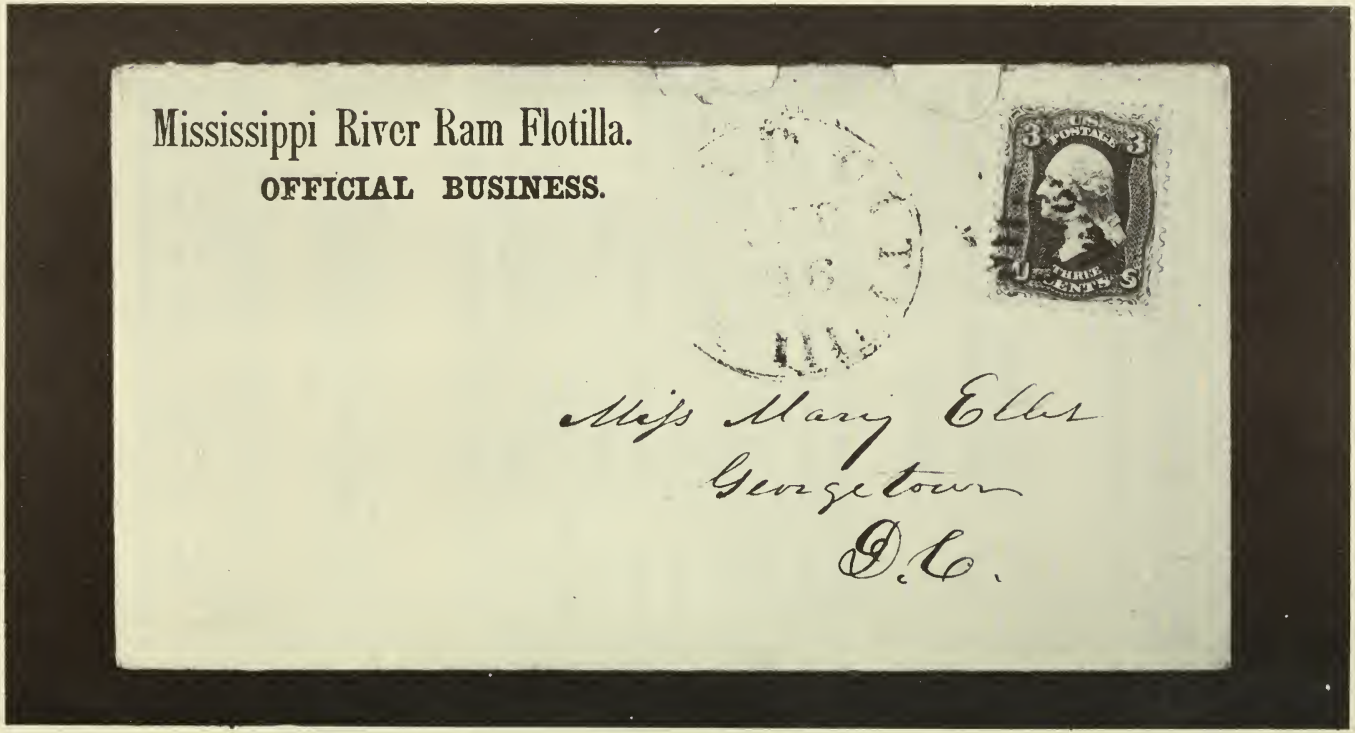
1. Special stationery had been prepared for the Ram Fleet's use. A photograph of a cover addressed to Mrs. Mary Ellet, nee Mary Israel, Wife of Charles Ellet Jr., addressed to Georgetown, D.C., is shown on page 46.

As the preparation of the Ram Fleet was kept as secret as possible, (see Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 115) it is improbable that special stationery was used before the display at Fort Pillow, June 5, 1862. Charles Ellet, Jr., died near Cairo on board his ram *Switzerland*, June 21, 1862, of infection as a result of a pistol ball wound received in the Battle of Memphis, June 6.

The cover bears the postmark and date, Mound City, Sept 26. The postage stamp used was first placed on sale August 17, 1861. The cover then must date after June, 1862, and probably is September 26, 1862.



Photograph courtesy of owner, Milton L. Greenebaum, Saginaw, Michigan

Ram Fleet Postal Cover

following process: For the protection of the boilers and machinery a heavy wall of 12 in. square timbers, securely fastened and bolted to the hull, extended from the main deck, to within a short distance of the cabin floor; the upper works were cut down; the prows filled solid with heavy timbers reaching back about midway, while a coat of black paint, added to their formidable appearance, if not to the strength of the boats. Each Ram was liberally supplied with hand grenades and breech loading carbines; a hose to attach to the boilers, for the purpose of throwing hot water on those who would attempt to board it, and with every appliance that would add to its efficiency. Fifteen sharp shooters were stationed on each boat. The duties of the fleet were to open the Mississippi to navigation and patrol it, so as to check the guerrilas, who now made the passage, if at all possible, extremely hazardous.

June 5th, 1862, opened clear and bright. The combined fleets had so many vessels that their number would be their worst impediment, when going into action, each obstructing the other. Slow runners, the gun boats, started down the river in order to make the distance to Memphis and secure a good fighting position, a little earlier than the other fleets. Soon after the Ram Fleet followed, at half speed.

Memphis, lying directly in our path, in a bend of the river, soon came into sight. Standing on the bluffs on the City's front, her population, to the number of thousands, gathered there, by invitation of the rebel commander, to witness the "speedy annihilation of the Yankee fleet," most eager for the battle to begin, that the sooner the victory might be celebrated. Opposite in line of battle, the rebel fleet, like enraged watch dogs, snarled and showed their glittering guns, seemingly as impatient and more defiant than the people. Two of our gun boats had dropped their stern anchors, at the low-head at Wolf's Island and were firing their bow guns. Their loud reports were the heralds of the fierce storm bursting upon misguided Memphis.

As soon as the Flag-ship of the Ram Fleet came in sight, she signalled all boats to land. This boat was the Queen-of-the West, and was the headquarters of Col. Ellet. In compliance with her signal the Rams began to

round to, but before a landing could be effected, the *"Queen"* again signalled all boats into action, and backing around, followed by the *Monarch* and *Lancaster,* (both side wheelers), in order named, darted off into action. The fourth Ram, the *Mingo,* of which I was its Military Commander, having the supply barge of fuel in tow, was compelled to land it before going into action.

Disregarding the firing of our gun boats the Rams[2] dart forward to meet the rebel fleet now advancing in formidable array. The Ironclads cease firing and the battle is entirely given over to the Rams, of which the rebels had the most powerful, while the Unionists had the advantage of down stream.

Stand here with me on the deck of the Mingo, unloading its barge and view the battle. Watch while the *Queen-of-the-West* with a Harpy-like fury darts at her formidable adversary, and meeting it in mid-stream inflicts such a disastrous blow, in less than three minutes, it sinks out of sight. There, see, the *Monarch* attacks and hissing as it speeds through the water strikes and so disables the Confederate Ram, that it will soon follow its sunken companion. A bursting steam pipe, or boiler, throwing out its scalding water, adds, to the terror of the crew, who if rescued 'twill only be to the prolongation of horrors, that death can alone relieve.

Make way again for the *Queen* as she boldly rushes forward to attack the *"Gen'l Price."* She strikes, but so powerful is the Rebel Ram, it resists the butt, and is pushed clear to the opposite shore, where it grounds. Back again, panting comes the Union Ram, seeking new prey. The Confederate flag-ship "Little Rebel," as it rebels against capture and making for the opposite shore, allows its commander and crew to escape in the woods. The *Monarch* next attacks the *Lovell,* and disables it. Down stream it turns and is escaping. See it going: It will escape. Hark: that awful report. Too late. The

2. Parker, T. H., *op. cit.,* states in note 42, that cannon were not mounted on the rams until after the Battle of Memphis, June 6, 1862. See also Charles Ellet, Jr., report of June 10, 1862, *USORN-I,* Vol. 23, p. 134.

Photograph from Crandall, W.D., History of the Ram Fleet . . . etc., (1907)

Naval Battle Before Memphis, June 6, 1862

boilers have exploded and it sinks in full view of the city, it tried so well to guard. In advance of the *Lovell,* and making the fastest time of its record the *Van Dorn* runs down the river and escapes, the only rebel vessel unharmed. The conflict is over. Brief but complete. The rebel fleet by destruction, capture or flight is destroyed. Of the Union fleet but two Rams, the *Queen-of-the-West* and the Monarch, were engaged in the conflict. The *Lancaster* backing into the bank broke its rudder and was compelled to withdraw from the fight.

The smoke of battle clears away, the spoils are secured, and, at anchor, in mid-stream ride the victorious Rams, while the gunboats with their heavy guns, broadside, ready for action, keep a manacing watch over the city. Already a dispatch for an infantry regiment to come and take command of the city has been sent. The mayor came on board, and surrendered the city, asking that no firing be done, as the streets were filled with women and children, and the people called to celebrate the victory? Over their hearts has fallen a despair, as dark as the Memphian night of old. An enslaved people have again found a liberator, and the revengeful spirit of a Pharaoh still lives.

With that strange influence of mind upon mind that leads to concentrated action in times of intense excitement, they surge through the streets, not lacking leaders and needing but the shadow of a cause to resort to deeds of violence. Restrained by fear, incited by intense hatred, humiliated with the certainty of the morrow, they wander on, while cries and groans, fierce threats, and wild lamentations mark the fierce conflict of their passions.

Through the confusion two lieutenants and one enlisted man[3] wend their way to raise the Union flag on the P. O. building. With jeers and threats, the howling mob pursue them to the building and follow close at their heels up to

3. Crandall, et. al., *op. cit.*, pp. 57 and 464, names four persons who went into the city to plant the flag, Lieut. (W. D.) Crandall, Medical Cadet Charles Rivers Ellet, the commander's son, and two soldiers of the boat's guard of sharp shooters, Cyrus Lathrop and William H. McDonald.

the flight of stairs. At the top is a trap door through which they stepped out, on the roof. Up goes the Union flag, for the first time unfurled in Tennessee, since two years before she passed the Ordinance of Secession. Dear old Flag: They watch it unfurl its stars and stripes over fallen Memphis with that keen affection, which none but a soldier, who has fought for it, could feel. With a just feeling of pride, they turn to descend, to find the trap door closed and fastened on the underside. They are prisoners on the roof, with no possible means of escape. Above them floats the Flag, the emblem of liberty. Below them is a mob, that shows its exultation on discovery of the trick, in loud hurrahs. They are completely in the trap. Before help could reach them from the boats, what might not happen, exposed as they were, helpless at the mercy of madmen!

On board the fleet the intelligence is received with the greatest concern. Immediately, Col. Ellet sends for the mayor. Nothing but a speedy and safe passage back to the boats for the men and to keep the flag where it is will save the town from being shelled. The mayor promises to do all he can and in a short time, to the great relief of everyone, the little party returned unharmed.

Fully as hazardous, was the exploit of the *Mingo's* commander,[4] who with his sharp shooters went on shore to cut down an old steamboat flag-staff to secure the rebel flag on it. On arriving he found another captain, who had come from another of the rams, for the same purpose. He was surrounded by an excited crowd of people, so menacing that he was at the least, uncertain what course to pursue. After a hasty conference the two officers decided to form a hollow square around the flag, alternating the men armed with breech leaders and muskets. At the point of the bayonet only would the crowd fall back sufficiently to allow the staff to fall, when it was cut down. Slowly the mob fell back cursing and making the most terrible threats of vengeance on those who molest the flag. In a few minutes the two men with the axes soon felled the

4. George E. Currie in Chapter IV, page 40, states that he was the commander of the *U.S. Mingo*.

pole on which the rebel flag was nailed, when it was speedily torn from its fastings and carried on board the fleet.

With the arrival of the Infantry the next day, the city was put under military command. After the storm, the calm. Stores were closed, business suspended, the streets deserted, the city's daily life paralyzed. All day the soldiers walked about, the excitement of the past night having wonderfully abated. As Confederate money was now treasonable, to aid the citizens the military commander allowed its circulation for three days in order to get the U.S. greenbacks, current. The effect was magical. People thronged the streets, filled the stores, rode, walked, traders came in, in numbers to buy supplies from every direction, everywhere people laden with bundles, it looked like another Vanity Fair day. Business was into its proper channel, again regulated itself and in a short time, life went on as before the surrender.

In summing up the casualties we found, remarkably, that although the people stood, directly in the paths of the shots from our gun-boats, there was not a single accident reported amongst them.

On the fleet but one was wounded and that one, our Commander Col. Ellet. When the *Queen-of-the-West* went into action he seated himself between the chimneys in full view of the pilot and of the prow of his own boat. Sitting there intent upon the proceedings, calm, collected with a forgetfulness of self and a disregard of danger, very characteristic of the man, he directed all the movements which proved so efficient. It was an exposed position, he being constantly a target for Rebel sharp shooters. Struck by a ball, in the knee, true soldier that he was, he never deserted his post until victory was secured. Daily he grew worse. Every effort that medical skill could devise was made. Amputation, the only hope of recovery, was to him abhorrent, and he resisted all appeals saying, "Like his country, he preferred death to dismemberment." His boat started up the river for cooler quarters, but when it landed at Cairo, Col. Ellet was journeying to that Country, in the Great Beyond. His military career was brief but brilliant. He had hoped and accomplished. Victory made his life complete and success enabled him to rest peacefully forever on the summit of Fame's Hill.

As a naval battle, the Memphis fight was one of the greatest ever fought on inland waters; as a victory it was most advantageous, as it opened the Mississippi to Vicksburg, a passage essential to the movement of our army and struck the severest blow the Confederacy had yet received, by thus dividing it down to that point; as a success it gave an immediate recognition and sterling worth to the effectiveness of Rams, [which] until then, new in naval warfare, and added prestige and honor to the genius of their projector, Col. Chas Ellet.

CHAPTER VI

MISSISSIPPI MARINE BRIGADE FORMED TO FIGHT THE SOUTHERN GUERRILLAS

George E. Currie had been promoted to Captain of Company "F" 59th Illinois Volunteers for meritorious service in the battle of Pea Ridge to take rank April 14, 1862.[1] Upon being offered the place, he volunteered for service in the Ram Fleet on April 28.[2] After his special assignment with the Ram Fleet, he left the steamer *U.S. Mingo* and joined his company where it was encamped. Early in November they were encamped across the river from Nashville, Tennessee.[3] On November 15, he received orders to report at once to Brigadier General Ellet at Cairo, . . . where he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel.[4]

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1. Herr, George W., *op. cit.*, p. 452.

2. Crandall, W. D., et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 38. See also pp. 34 and 37.

3. No record has been found that indicates exactly when or why George E. Currie left the service of the Ram Fleet to rejoin his company. The orders from Chas. Ellet, Jr., to Brigadier General Schofield, *op. cit.*, p. 34, *USORN-I*, Vol. 23, p. 78, state that no officer with rank greater than first lieutenant was to be selected. In the literature involving the Ram Fleet, he is always mentioned as a lieutenant and not as captain. Problems of rank may have necessitated his return. Also see Chapter VII page 64, for the attitude of his officer.

4. Chapter VI consists primarily of excerpts, abstracted by the editor, taken from the Introduction and Chapter I, pages 248–265 of Crandall, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2 (Two Volumes in one book). Crandall has presented copies of letters, orders and handbills, etc., that he obtained from the collection preserved by the Ellet family. Many of these orders were later published, *USONR-I*, Vol. 22, pp. 288, 680-683, 685; Vol. 23, see Index, David D. Porter's action, *USONR-I*, Vol. 23, p. 395.

During the year of 1862 the western divisions of the Union army and navy achieved those important victories that in a large measure contributed toward a successful outcome of the Civil War. Early in that year General U. S. Grant had taken Forts Henry and Donelson, compelling the evacuation of Bowling Green and Columbus; Nashville was occupied by Union troops; the battle of Pittsburgh Landing was fought and won and the strongly fortified city of Cornith captured. On the Mississippi River a series of victories were recorded in quick succession. Island No. 10 was captured; New Orleans surrendered; Forts Pillow and Randolph were evacuated; the Confederate flotilla was destroyed at Memphis and that city made the important base of further army and navy operations.

The Mississippi River was thus practically opened to Vicksburg, and its safe navigation became essential to the successful operation of northern armies. Down its deep, turbid channel must be transported the reenforcement divisions and munitions of war needed for the strengthening support and equipment of forces in the field. From St. Louis to Vicksburg stretched eight hundred miles of waterway. The mighty river wandered its way over many treacherous sholes [sic], between tortuous bends, through the very heart of disloyal territory still in possession of scattered forces of the enemy. Such was the conformation of the stream that the banks afforded ample and inviting opportunity for the masking of Confederate batteries, and the concealment of guerrilla bands located for the purpose of firing upon and capturing or sinking passing vessels richly freighted with government supplies. The gunboats of the river navy afforded no adequate relief from this harassing peril for when compelled by the fire of the gunboats to retire from their chosen position, the enemy had only to withdraw a mile or two into the interior, and either wait until the gunboats were gone or select another position a few miles above or below and there renew their operations. Had all the upper Mississippi navy been scattered along the river from Cairo to Vicksburg and each given a reasonable beat to patrol, there would not have been enough vessels to insure the transports safe navigation of the river. That which was manifestly and imperatively demanded by the situation was the organization and

equipping of a military force which could not only successfully fight the harassing guerrillas upon the water, but which could also disembark troops to fight them on land and if necessary, pursue them far into the interior, making it hazardous for these bands to prosecute their partisan warfare and insuring transport's safe navigation.

When Admiral David Porter assumed command of the Mississippi squadron, October 9, 1862, he applied for a force of Marines to be carried in suitable vessels accompanying the gunboats, and to be landed at points where parties of guerrillas were wont to assemble. The gunboats alone could not break these parties up and it was therefore necessary to have trained soldiers at hand to chase and annihilate them. The Navy Department could not furnish the Marines asked for, but the War Department undertook to furnish the necessary vessels to carry these soldiers about. The command was given to Brigadier General Alfred W. Ellet, and as the members of this family had before proved themselves brave and enterprising men, several of them were given appointments in the Marine Brigade.

The importance to the Union cause of the special service for which the Marine Brigade was organized is further shown by a letter written by Mr. Seddon, the Confederate Secretary of War, to General Kirby Smith, which was captured near Natchez by the Brigade itself. In that letter Mr. Seddon advised that "small bands of men be raised, to be armed with rifles and field pieces, for the express purpose of interrupting navigation on the Mississippi. The work must be accomplished at all hazards and whatever cost, as the possession of the river by the enemies of the Confederacy is having a bad effect upon the Confederate prospects abroad."

Secretary Stanton was quick to comprehend this critical situation on the Mississippi, and when there came to him, from Lieutenant Col. A. W. Ellet, a strong communication relating to this matter, he was prompt to act. Summoning Ellet, who was made a brigadier general, to Washington for conference respecting the organization and the need for transportation for the proposed command, the details were arranged, and within an incredibly brief time there was formed and equipped for active warfare an entirely

From the Collections of the Library of Congress

Brigadier General Alfred W. Ellet

novel arm of the service. The command belonged to the Army, yet, necessarily, as the Ram Fleet had been, was to cooperate with the Navy.

The Mississippi Marine Brigade fleet consisted of the following boats, *Autocrat, B. J. Adams, Baltic, Diana, Fairchild, John Raine,* and the *Woodford.* These were fine large boats, formerly New Orleans packets. The *Fairchild* was fitted out as a quartermaster and commissary boat, and the *Woodford* as a hospital boat, the rest designed for the accommodation and transportation of the officers and men, and their horses.

Refitted, their boilers were protected by heavy timbers and huge bunkers. From the lower deck to the hurricane roof was built all around, a barricade of solid, two-inch oak plank, of double thickness, and with two-inch dimension strips between. Through these barricades were cut loop-holes for muskets, and large port holes with swinging doors, for ventilation. For the protection of pilots, the pilot houses were provided, on each side, with semi-circular sheets of boiler iron. The afterpart of the cabin decks were officer's quarters, while the forward part served for the men's mess room. The men's sleeping quarters were upon an intermediary deck, built in aft of the boilers. Both officers and men were provided with suitable wash rooms, bathrooms, and facilities for washing clothes. Above the forecastle, hung upon pulleys, always ready to be attached to a huge crane on either side, and so quickly lowered and swung ashore, was a large railed gangway, over which two horses could pass abreast. As protection against any attempt at boarding, each vessel was provided with a hot water hose, connected with the boiler, and hung where it was in readiness for instant use. Only such furniture, bedding, etc., were retained out of the original equipment of the boats as was actually needed for the comfort of the officers and men. The rest was sold and the proceeds therefrom turned into the government treasury.

The Mississippi Marine Brigade was to be made up from invalids or convalescents from hospitals. Special order No. 89 issued by Headquarters, Department of Missouri, stated "persuant to order from the Secretary of War, Brigadier General Ellet is authorized to enlist

convalescents from any hospital and similar orders were issued from Headquarters, Department of Ohio. Recruiting literature was sent out in the form of handbills. The following are examples.

"MISSISSIPPI MARINE BRIGADE

Soldiering Made Easy! No more Marching
No Carrying Knapsacks!

$100.00 BOUNTY

A Marine Brigade, to act in concert with the invincible Ram Fleet, is to be raised immediately. All under the command of Brigadier General A. W. Ellet. Large steam boats are engaged to carry the troops down into the rear of Rebellion and open the Mississippi and her tributaries to the navigation of the northwest. They will be provided on the boats with good cooks and bedding.

General Ellet has received special permission from the Secretary of War to receive volunteers for the Brigade from the drafted men of every State. Those who are desirous of serving their country, exempt from the hardships of soldiers, will do well to join this organization. Transportation will be furnished to headquarters, St. Louis, for all volunteers.

The undersigned is a recruiting officer for this Brigade either for cavalry, artillery or infantry.

His office will be found at A. S. Foots Intelligence office, Bank Street, opposite Weddell House.

Captain J. R. Crandall"

. . . and from a hand bill-

"The proposed service is especially attractive to old soldiers. It has the following advantages:

1. There are no trenches to dig.
2. There are no rebel houses to guard.
3. There is no picket duty to perform.

4. There is no danger of camps in the mud, but always a chance to sleep under cover.
5. There is no chance of short rations.
6. Command will always be kept together.

Another reads:

THE "MISSISSIPPI MARINE BRIGADE"

Convalescent Soldiers--Harrah Boys!

Brigadier General Ellet having obtained permission from the War Department to recruit convalescent soldiers from any hospital, is organizing a Mississippi Marine Brigade. A regiment is just organizing in St. Louis, and promises to become the most renowned in the service.

It is raised for and becomes a part of the above Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General A. W. Ellet, well known commander of the Mississippi Ram Fleet. The "Ellet Scouts" will be furnished good quarters and transports fitted out expressly for them, where they will keep all their valuables, clothing, stores, etc., and with other parts of the Brigade, (consisting of infantry, cavalry, and artillery), on similar vessels, will keep company and act in concert with the Mississippi Ram Fleet. No long, hard marches, camping without tents or food, or carrying heavy knapsacks, but good, comfortable quarters, and good facilities for cooking at all times.

The "Ellet Scouts" are expected to see plenty of active service on the Mississippi River and its tributaries in keeping it clear of rebel guerrillas, and securing to the public the free and safe navigation of the great highway. They are expected to act promptly and at short notice, in concert with some of the Rams and gunboats at distant points, with secrecy and dispatch, and landing, to operate on shore in an attack, in the rear, or a sudden assault.

This Brigade will become famous in the annals of the Mississippi River Warfare, as the Ram Fleet

has already done. Now is the time if ever you can serve your country and consult your own comfort at the same time. Every soldier re-enlisting in this Brigade is entitled to a final settlement and all pay in arrears will be paid up promptly, besides two dollars premium, one month's pay in advance, and twenty-five dollars bounty for re-enlisting.

Published by order of Brigadier General A. W. Ellet.

Captain W. H. Wright

Recruiting Officer"

During this period of organization, the new command was quartered at Benton Barracks, which comprised the Fair Grounds, in the northwestern outskirts of the city [St. Louis]. There the men were collected, uniformed, and equipped, and, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie, a master of discipline and tactics, were daily exercised during the winter of 1862-1863 in company, regimental, and brigade drill.

With this brief introduction to the Mississippi Marine Brigade, herewith follow eight letters of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie describing his observations while in the Marine Brigade, including his discharge and trip home, November, 1862, to August 17, 1864.

CHAPTER VII

CAPTAIN CURRIE TRANSFERRED TO MARINE BRIGADE

Olive Street Hotel,
St. Louis, Mo.
Nov. 28th, 1862

Dear Sir:-

The following day after writing you at Nashville, Tenn., giving account of the army movements through Ky. and the battle of Perryville and which our regiment was yet encamped at Edgfield [sic] across the river at Nashville, I received the following order:[1]

Headquarters 14th Army Corps,
Department of the Cumberland,
Nashville, Tenn. Nov. 14th 1862

Special order, #16

Captain Geo. E. Currie 59th Ill. Vols. will proceed to Cairo, Ills. and report to Brigadier General Ellet without delay.

By command of Major General Resecreons, [sic] [Resecrans?]

W. H. Sidell,
Major 15th U.S. Infantry
A. A. Gen'l

To Captain George E. Currie
Co. "F" 59th Ill. Vol.

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1. The first paragraph of the letter is ambiguous and the exact meaning is not readily apparent. Internal evidence suggests the following interpretation:

"The following day after writing to you while I was at Nashville, Tennessee, giving accounts of the army movements through Ken-

This order came to me during the forenoon of Nov. 15th and without even expecting it my surprise can better be surmised than expressed. The Lieutenant Col. of our regiment of the 59th Ills., who was then in command, sent for me to come to his tent. He was very bitter in denouncing the order that took we [me?] permanently away from the Regiment. However the order was imperative and I hastened to make preparations to leave without delay. From this point runs the L. & N. Railroad to Louisville distant about one hundred and eighty miles to which place I had to go enroute to Cairo. As we followed the rebels out of Tennessee into Ky., before the battle of Perryville, they destroyed this Railroad by tracing [tearing?] up the track, derailing locomotives and cars and otherwise injuring it to our disadvantage. Near Mitchell, fourty [sic] miles from Nashville, is located one of the largest tunnels on the road. Into this the Rebels ran a full train of cars, then blew up the tunnel with an immense quantity of powder that completely filled the place with debris, requiring work to open the road to travel. The road from Mitchell south of the tunnel above referred to was in running order and being used for the Federals to bring up supplies from Louisville, which had to be transferred from Mitchell to Nashville by wagons, likewise all passengers to and from Louisville had to be taken by similar conveyances. For this purpose a line of omnibuses was attached at Nashville to carry people to the turminus [sic] of the railroad at Mitchell, and when I applied at their office in Nashville on the afternoon of the 15th I was told a large stage coach would leave early that afternoon in time to make connections with the railroad to Louisville the same night. [2][But delay in starting made the time near

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tucky and the Battle of Perryville, and when our regiment was yet encamped at Edgeville, a little town across the river from Nashville, I received the following order:....."

2. The typist of George E. Currie's letter Number 9 seems to have had trouble copying and interpreting the original. Page [118] and [119] of the letter press book contain the same material, page [119] having fewer typist errors and slightly better English construction. Page [118] has not been included in this book. Page [119] is indicated by being enclosed in brackets.

eight o'clock before we got under way, and instead of the mere comfortable stage coach promised about twenty passengers, all soldier and officers were required to take passage in an old dilapitated omnibus drawn by two horses of about the same value. It required fully two hours drive to get through our lines, at each outpost we were required to halt and show our authority for passing through the lines and finally we passed the outer and our way beyond was not interrupted by soldiers. Soon after, however, the rain began to fall from the dark overhanging clouds, that made it impossible to see any great distance, but the almost continuous flashes of lightening enabled the driver to see the turn-pike road distinctly, and with a liberal supply of the whip, we were being hurried along the smooth pike in good time. But the rain continued to pour down on the now thoroughly drenched driver, who sat on top of the bus, dressed in their [his?] summer clothing and had become so thoroughly soaked and chilled that he announced that he was unable to drive any further.

A friendly flash of lightning revealed the close proximity of a house a short distance ahead of where we then were and it was decided to stop there long enough to warm and dry the clothes of the driver and then proceed.

The house stood some distance back from the road with no sign of a friendly light shining from its windows for it was now midnight and the people had retired.] In response to our knocking on the door a man opened it to whom we made known our wants, who admitted us and soon had a bright fire in the grate of his parlor. The driver sat near the fire and soon his drying clothes steamed like a locomotive boiler.

Some of the passengers had provided themselves with the usual flash used by the experienced teamsters, whose contents made the inner man steam with greater force until he announced that he was good for the balance of the trip to Mitchell, rain or shine. "All aboard" was heard and soon we were flying down the road at a rapid rate. After an hour's run the wheels on the right side of the bus dropped into a rut at the edge of the road and over it went on the side, throwing those of the passengers seated on top of the bus down an embankment twenty feet below. I happened to be seated on the opposite side, so that when

the bus lay on its side I stood upright. Quickly opening one of the windows, now over my head I crawled out on the side of the bus, and helping others out, all the occupants being uninjured. My mind then turned toward the safety of those seated on top of the bus, among whom was my servant, Bill, as black as specimen of the African race as ever lived, and as true and faithful a servant as he was black. I called him at the top of my voice and he seemed to answer from the lower regions, "Here I is Captain. I's all right." Just then a flash of lightning revealed Bill climbing over a rail fence at the foot of the embankment over which he had been thrown into a cornfield.

Others of the passengers that had tumbled down the bank came up and in a few minutes all were assured of their personal safety, which was a musical tune. The bus was badly damaged, too much so to be of any further use on that trip. [In] a hasty council of war in which the driver was its principle [sic] it was decided that the driver should return to Nashville with the horses, procure another omnibus of which he said there were plenty and return early next morning and take us on [to] our destination which he said would not require more than four hours. Feeling thankful that we had escaped injury and elated at the promise of another conveyance early in the morning to complete our perilous journey through a section of country unprotected by Federal troops, and swarming with bands of Confederate soldiers, we set about making ourselves as comfortable as possible.

Some made a blazing fire from the rails of an adjoining fence, while the party of twenty or more gathered around. The rain by this time had ceased, the moon shone out clear and bright and altogether our condition was greatly improved, while compelled to await the morning and promised conveyance.

One of our party, Captain Veach, sighted a farm house not very far ahead of where our accident befell us and making up a party of four, myself [included] we set out to find accommodations for the night. We soon aroused the inmates and with a promise of a liberal reward in greenbacks for their trouble we were assigned a room in the garret (the house being but one story) in which were four beds and soon we were lost in deepest sleep after taking

the precaution of piling all the chairs in the room against the door so that no one could enter without making a terrible racket that [would] awaken the dead, and each with a revolver under his pillow, we felt sure of holding the fort against intruders.

It was long after sunrise that we were startled by a terrible knocking on our door, each of us was made awake in a moment, sitting up in bed with our revolvers in hand cocked and rising to defend ourselves against the band of guerrillas that we felt sure was now sure to break down all barriers and either capture or slay us in cold blood. The knocking continued but each time with greater force than before, because there was no response from within. Each rap on the door became painfully harassing to our now thoroughly aroused sense of danger, "each moment seemed an age," feeling that our time had come, still we were as silent as death not even speaking to each other least [lest] it might intensify, the feelings of the hated rebels to more desperate acts. Thus time sped on, each [of us] with his revolver pointed at the door ready to give the first intruder the warmest welcome and offer up our lives as dearly as possible.

After enduring untold agonies in silence, and as no one had yet broken down the door, one brave fellow in our party ventured to ask who is there, and what do you want? Such a burst of laughter as followed, this assurance of safety to the party fairly shook the house, each acting as though he was not afraid, that he knew there was no guerrilla at the door, etc. But I guess you never saw a happier set of fellows than we, when we heard the familiar voice of the Negro, instead as we feared, the demands of our enemies. To say the breakfast was greatly enjoyed is stating it lightly. After which we sat down to wait the arrival of the promised vehicle that was to carry us on to Mitchell.

About three o'clock a loaded omnibus hurriedly passed us enroute from Nashville, too full to make room for any of us, and to add still more to our discomforts, they knew nothing of an omnibus coming to our relief and as government wagons were constantly passing on their way to Mitchell for loads of supplies, all excepting myself took advantage of riding in one of these cumbisom [cumbersome?]

wagons, while I [was] so certain that an omnibus would soon reach us that I remained. Four o'clock in the afternoon came, still no means of relief, even the army wagons that had left Nashville in the morning, to make Mitchell fourty [sic] miles drive during the day, had all passed and I [was] left alone in the enemies [sic] country. To stay there overnight was almost certain capture or death.

I now began seriously thinking of some way out of that unpleasant dilemia [dilemma]. While thus wondering in my mind what to do a man riding in a buggy came along en-rout [sic] to Tyese Springs about four miles distant on my road. By paying him four dollars he consented to allow me to ride with him that far, but as our route took us off the pike we had to travel on a country road that was made almost impossible by rain the night previous. The buggy was a heavy running affair - the horses small [and] thin in flesh, consequently our progress was slow. However we managed to reach the Springs at dark, which was twenty miles from Mitchell. At the hotel there was a motley group of people standing around whose looks indicated there was no Yankee soldier needed there and taking the gentle hint, I set out to walk to Mitchell that night.

The mud road I had to travel was perfectly horrid, and for the most part led through the roads [woods?] with here and there a small clearing and the accompanying log cabin [by] the roadside. At each of them a dozen or more dogs set up a terrible barking as I neared the place, keeping it up until beyond their hearing, only to be startled by the next pack of hounds, as if to notify the Guerrillas [sic] of the approaching Yankee; thus I spent the entire night wending the middle of the road for fear I would tumble into the ditch. During all that night I never saw a living soul and the only signs of life during that long and lonely tramp were those rebel dogs who added additional terror to the situation by their continuous warning of my approach.

However at sunrise next morning I reached the camps of soldiers around Mitchell worn out and hungry for I hadn't eaten a mouthful since the early morning breakfast the day before. I soon was provided with a soldier's banquet that was now more relished. About eight o'clock my train pulled out for Louisville, which place I reached

without incident or accident about ten the same evening and stopping at the Louisville Hotel where I remained sick in my room for a week or more with a violent fever caused by the long tramp by night through mud and water and exposure. But I came out of it all right and soon was able to travel. [I] took passage on the O. & M. Railroad to Cairo, Ill. On my arrival [I] found that General Ellet had removed his headquarters to St. Louis to which point I went by rail arriving here on the 25th and reporting for duty and now awaiting my assignment when [to be?] made of which I am now ignorant, will write again.

CHAPTER VIII

ORGANIZING THE MISSISSIPPI MARINE BRIGADE

Benton Barracks,
St. Louis, Mo.
March 1st 1863.

Dear Sir:-

My last letter closed with the promise that as soon as I was assigned to duty (of which I was then ignorant) that I would write you again, as I knew that you would be anxious to hear why I was ordered to report here. Well the day after my arrival in St. Louis, I learned that Gen'l. Ellet, to whom I was to report, had his headquarters on Third Street near Washington Ave., and on arriving at the designated place, found his Adjutant General in charge of the office, Gen'l. Ellet having gone to his home in Illinois for a few days. My tardiness in not reporting sooner as ordered, was explained by my delay in Louisville while sick. The Gen'l. becoming tired at the long delay had concluded to go home and there wait my arrival. However explanations were all satisfactory and I was handed my commission from Washington and signed by the Secretary of War, Edward M. Stanton, promoting me to the rank of Lt. Colonel in an entirely new organization, styled the "Mississippi Marine Brigade", and Gen'l. Ellet, its Commander being authorized to recruit the command from convalescent soldiers, from the hospitals, or wherever men could be found, who were able to do duty in this Command, where little or no marching is to be required, and thus hold in service those who will perhaps never be able to do duty again in the field, and who can perform as good service in this brigade as by those who are enlisted from civil life. The command is to consist of one full

regiment of Infantry, four squadrons of Cavalry, one battery of six rod-men, steel guns, ten pounders for field service, and all to be quartered on board Government transports.

The object of this new organization is to keep the Mississippi river free of the roving bands of guerrillas that swarm upon its banks, firing upon passing steamers with artillery and small arms, thus preventing the Government sending supplies to the troops in that part of the southern country tributary to the Mississippi river.

The field and staff officers of the Brigade are to consist of one brig. gen'l. and staff, one colonel and lieutenant col. and two majors, beside the usual accompaniment of captains and lieutenants, all to rank as Infantry excepting the Cavalry and Artillery officers, and to be known as Army and not naval officers although we are to take orders, and be under the immediate command of the Navy on the Mississippi river. This you see makes us in the military parlance neither Army or Navy, the one or the other; and yet both. But there is one thing to be seen closely [clearly?], that is we will surely be amphibious in our movements and preparations for fighting, the boats all being purchased and casemated for our use and protection. But as to the kind of boats and how they will be made safe for the protection of the men I am at this time ignorant; but as soon as I have the particulars will make it a subject for my next letter. The above facts I learned from the Adjutant General which are in fact all he knows about the organization; but enough is gleaned to satisfy me that hereafter my long and tedious marches by day and by night, through rain and shine, mud and dust, sleeping in the open air without tents, and subsisting upon half-rations, are over. Henceforth I will have a horse to ride, this being one of the accompaniaments [sic] of my rank, and right well pleased I am with the change. The General was informed of my arrival by mail the same day and on the following noon we met at his headquarters at the above named Street and number. We needed no introduction as we both served as true officers in the 59th Illinois Infantry, he as Captain of Company "I" and I as 1st. Lieutenant in Company "C" and had frequently served as officers of guard and pickett [sic] together during the first year of

our soldier lives. There was the closest friendship existing between us as comrades, and men, and to this, and the confidence in my ability, so he said, that caused him to ask the War Department to advance me to the rank of lt. colonel and place me in his command. We read over the orders from the War Department, authorizing the recruiting of the brigade and at once formulated plans for its organization which are in effect that men be sent to the large cities in the West, where convalescent camps are established and there recruit, or have transferred to our brigade such men as are able to do duty on board our vessels, from any of the companies and regiments to which they then belonged. Brigade head-quarters are to remain where now located and I am assigned to duty at Benton Barracks in the western part of the City for the purpose of receiving the recruits as they arrive, organize them into companies, select their officers and establish a system of discipline and exercise the men in drilling, etc.

On the following day I established my head-quarters at the barracks, made a requisition on the Department Quarter-master for office furniture, and was soon comfortably located in my new position. In a few days thereafter recruits began to arrive in large numbers so that I was kept busily engaged in providing quarters, drawing supplies, and getting the camp into shape. As soon as enough men came in to form a Company, officers were appointed who took that care off my hands and following the same rule, as each company filled to its minimum, came in, we soon became quite a formidable command. Meantime I had appointed my Adjutant and acting Quartermaster. The Cavalry and Artillery companies were rapidly filling up and drilling of the men and schooling of the officers kept the camp in a continuous stir from early morning until night. My greatest ambition being to make this command proficient in drill and unexcelled in military discipline. To this end I used my best endeavors. How well I will succeed, the future must reveal. The barracks is commanded by Col. Bonnerville, an old army officer who is educated in his profession. Next in command comes myself, as I am the only field officer except Col. Bonnerville, stationed here.

But I must not forget to tell you the extent of these

grounds and the extensive proportions for mustering recruits, etc. The grounds within the [compound] must be something like 100 acres. Four long rows of houses or barracks as they are called in military parlance, extend fully 1000 feet each in length, from East to West, capable of sheltering at least ten thousand soldiers. Officers' quarters, probably half the length of the men's quarters, are located at the east end of the four barracks above described, running north & south, so that we have a full view down along the men's quarters and between which the space is used for the forming of companies and regiments preparatory for drill and parade. The grounds and quarters of the men are kept scrupulously clean, the buildings whitewashed inside and out, large dining rooms all provided for the accommodation of the officers where I am comfortably situated using a room adjoining my head-quarters, for a dormitory. With this pen picture, though but partially describing our arrangements, you will doubtless come to the conclusion that as soldiers we are quite comfortable, which we really are. The camp is kept in constant stir with the incoming recruits, the formation of new companies, and the drilling of those already mustered and organized, that when night comes on I am tired out and glad to seek retirement at an early hour. Still I am charmed with the life of a soldier with all its hardships, thrills and dangers, it has a peculiar fascination that language fails to describe and I am now more than anxious to test my abilities to organize the command I am entrusted with, by the selection of the best material offered, securing the ablest officers to command them and last but not least, establishing strict military discipline and by almost constant drilling of the men, make it one of the most effective commands in the Federal army. [On] Washington's birthday, 22nd. of February, the command was ordered out with other troops stationed in and around the city for a grand street parade and review by Maj. Gen'l. Curtis, the department commander. I had up to this time organized six companies of Infantry, the four squadrons of Cavalry men were nearly filled to the maximum number, the battery also about complete, and with new uniforms and accutrements [sic] for the men, made doubly attractive by a new design of cap of a semi-naval

design, we had the honor of attracting greater attention and were given more praise by the press for our military bearing than any of the many organizations that took part in that celebration.

We all felt justly proud of our little brigade I can assure you, and the praises bestowed upon us that day seemed to inspire the officers and men with renewed determination to put forth their greatest efforts to maintain the enviable reputation established on that occasion. From this time until we embarked on board the boats, I had no difficulty in mustering a full quota of men for company and battallion [sic] drills which was kept up in some manner from early morn until night every day. March 1st we received orders to prepare to break camp preparatory to our embarkation on board our vessels that would arrive at the wharf on the 3rd. The packing up of our effects began at once, the men being anxious to try the new life before them where comfortable quarters are provided and where for once they could serve their country surrounded by luxurious quarters free from the long and weary marches of the past and when we are quartered on board our vessels, I will write you again giving a full description of them and our new soldier life.

CHAPTER IX

GUERRILLA WARFARE AND BURNING OF AUSTIN, ARKANSAS - MAY, 1863[1]

On Board U. S. Steamer, *Diana*
Helena, Ark. May, 26th, 1863.

Dear Sir:-

Do you never grow tired of the repeated story of bloodshed and destruction? Brilliant manoeuvers [sic], daring charges, thrilling attacks, all mean but the same, defeat for one, victory for another and for both a sacrifice of life and property. Lash the ocean into stormy fury and look at the result, shipwrecks and destruction. And when grim visaged war with an insatiable appetite bellows through the land, destruction is his delight and death his attendant. The storm is passed, shipwrecks strew the shore and there a city lies in ruins.

On the East [West?] bank of the Mississippi about midway between Memphis and Helena, Ark. lay the little town of Austin. Its population was scarcely one hundred, when the men were at home, but now that it had linked its fate with that of the Confederacy it had valiantly sent every man and boy to the services, leaving their homes in the [hands] of women and children, who numbered about fifty. A clean neat snugly built little town, whose people

1. *Journal of the United States Steamer Diana* (JUSSD), p. 67. The fleet had been anchored at Helena, Arkansas, and shore skirmishes made on May 24 and 25. They left Helena at 5 P.M., May 25, and moved to the mouth of the White River. Wherever possible, the dates in the letter press book have been checked against the log book of the steamer *Diana*, and are indicated in the text.

and surroundings bore evidence of a refinement and culture. Their homes were comfortable, if not elegant, streets clean, lawns and gardens well kept and brightened with groups of women and children in holiday attire, presented to us on that Sunday, May 24th in 1863[2] a peace and calm and quiet happiness, that might well have softened the turbulent spirit and lead to holier higher thoughts than that of destruction and revenge.

Does coming events cast their shadows before? A dark and gloomy day is sometimes redeemed by a burst of glorious sunshine before the sun sinks out of sight, and to those wives and mothers it may be their homes never looked fairer, their children happier, than on that day, that was to close in darkness and despair for them. I can never recall the scene without feeling a flush of indignation, that I was compelled to witness such vandalism and seemingly to abet by my presence what was utterly beyond my control, and abhorrent to me. As though it happened but yesterday, the scenes stand out before me black and bold, a plot upon a discipline that allowed passion to dominate and revenge itself on helpless, innocent victims.

On Saturday afternoon, May 23rd[3] our fleet left Memphis for Helena, a run of ninety miles. The fleet consisted of nine steamboats, on board a regiment of Infantry, four squadron of Cavalry, a battery of six rifled guns and two pieces mountain hawitizers [sic] used for field service. The boats were casemated from lower deck to the hurricane roof, pierced at suitable distance, with loop holes for musketry and artillery, and each provided with one or more twenty pounder Parrott guns. Amphibious in its character, fitted out for operation both marine and on land, it was at once formidable and fully efficient in its many trying adventures. We put out for Helena leaving the *Fairchild*, our quarter master, and commissary boat at Memphis, taking on supplies to follow. Later on, my Boat, the *B. J. Adams* was second in order of sailing. Nothing occurring we reached our destination about sunset. But the *Fairchild* had no such good fortune. Her

2. *JUSSD.* "Austin burned May 24, toward evening." p. 67
3. *JUSSD.* "Arrived at Memphis, May 22, at 11 A.M." p. 66

officers reported being fired into by a Confederate battery of two guns on a point, in the river, where a fine academic school was located about a half a mile above Austin. On receipt of this information, the Commanding General of the Fleet at once issued orders for the return of the entire fleet to Austin, starting at two o'clock next morning. The order was specific in its details, the Cavalry were to hold themselves in readiness to disembark as soon as the boats touched the shore, and making a dashing charge, surprise the rebels, attack them, prevent their escape and hold them at bay until the arrival of the Infantry, which would follow quickly after them. Everything seemed to favor the plan, Austin was reached at daylight and the Cavalry ready, as per instructions, galloped away soon out of sight, while the bugle sounds brought the Infantry into line, the officers horses prancing around, full of action, glad to be free from the restraints of the stables on board the vessels. A beautiful May morning, the birds welcoming in the day with their sweet matutinal praises, the air soft and balmy, and heavy with the perfume of flowers and over all, the restful peace of a Sabbath.

"Sweet day, so calm, so cool, so bright,
The bridal of the Earth and Sky."

We took an easterly course along the principal thoroughfare of the town that beyond it stretched away into a country road about a mile and a half away. A primeval forest, venerable with its immense trees and dark and penulous [pendulous] with a heavy growth of underbrush lay in our path, while intermediate between it and the Town a road branched off to the left leading to the academy from which place the rebels had fired upon the *Fairchild* the day before. When the Cavalry reached this branch in the road, they halted and intended to remain there until the Infantry came up before moving on to the academy, where they supposed the rebels still were stationed in their position of the day before. In this supposition they were correct, but the rebels had formed their own plans as was subsequently shown. Having witnessed the debarkation of the Cavalry they reckoned upon this being all our force so they laid a plot to decoy the Cavalry to the wood, where capture would be an easy matter.

So placing a few mounted men in the edge of the woods, they opened a scattering fire on the Cavalry, [supposed them to be] the whole rebel force consisting of one regiment and two six pounder guns, [which] stole in on their rear, thus shutting the Cavalry off from returning on the Austin road back to us. A half hour's time was consumed in forming the Infantry into line and marching down to the academy road. Here ignorant of the situation we halted to listen if we could locate our Cavalry by any noise of firing. The neglected plantation was so overrun with the tall rank weeds as to effectly [effectively] screen the movements of any beyond and while this insured an almost certain success to the strategic movements of the rebels, it at the same time shut off from them the near approach of our Infantry coming up behind them. The rebels were now sandwiched in between our Cavalry in their advance, and the Infantry in their rear, and all alike unconscious of the other's position. It was a ludicrous position after all, there were the four squadrons of Cavalry dashing on, trying to overtake the enemy in advance as they supposed while the real enemy, a regiment strong, was almost treading upon their heels, so fast were they following them, and back of all our Infantry regiment close upon the rebels hordes.

When our Infantry advanced, reached the edge of the forest, it was fired upon by some roving rebels lurking on our flanks. The Commanding General had a close call for a sho[r]t while, and [an] orderly had a horse killed under him. We could hear no sounds of any conflict, nor were we again molested passing through the woods probably a half a mile in extent, and then into a clearing, with a plantation on our left--here again another branch from the main road lead [led] to the right—down quite a declivity into a dense undergrowth while the low overhanging boughs of the trees, stretching over the road had met and locked their branches into such a network as to allow hardly room for a wagon to pass under. Both the main road and this wood path were so thickly dented with fresh imprints of horses feet that it was impossible to say what direction our Cavalry had taken.

On this delemma [sic] our General decided to remain at the junction of the roads until he could be convinced of

which one the Cavalry had taken. Nine o'clock and the sun became uncomfortable [sic] warm. The cool shades of the trees, was very inviting and the men soon found shelter making themselves as comfortable as possible, until it seemed that there was no Cavalry awaiting for our support, and the only object of that march was to let the men lie in the cool shades of the forest. The General was frequently importuned to move on to look after the Cavalry, but he was obdurate and was [the] autocrat of the situation. One whole hour passed, and still no tidings of our little band of horsemen. At last around a sharp turn in the wood path comes an ox team, drawing a rude plantation wagon with a Negro driver, and a middle aged white woman sitting in the bed. She was [an] anomaly. She was a woman and yet could hold her tongue. To all our repeated questions she would give us no information, but the driver when taken away from her was more communicate [communicative]. The Negroes were always ready to give any information they could, telling us that fighting had been going on for more than an hour not a mile from us. Strange as that may appear we never heard a shot, the dense forest probably shutting off the sounds.

Now a quick start, a rapid march and in a short time we were in hearing of the skirmishers. A line of battle is formed by filling to the right and we marched forward to support the Cavalry, when imagine our surprise to find ourselves facing the rear of the rebel line. Quicker than a flash the wary Confederates realize their position, having fallen in their own trap and in a twinkling by a rapid movement by the left flank, spirited themselves out of our reach. Were the Cavalry glad to see us? Well when men think all hope lost and only death before them, suddenly a succoring hand lifts them up again to life and light, it takes some minutes for them to express their appreciation of the change. Men and officers rush to us with many a blessing for the timely assistance, not a few embracing, just as long parted lovers would have done. There's [sic] had been an alarming situation the rebels in their rear had never revealed their presence until they were in the treacherous road in the dense woods. Then they pounced upon them like furies. By falling back the Cavalry sought to gain time and position for a best possible defense.

Reaching a deep ravine they sheltered their horses under it[s] overhanging bank, and lying on their faces on the brink were doing their best to protect themselves against a force three times their number until assistance arrived. So admirably had they conducted the fight that they escaped without loss of life or wounds, and only two were taken prisoners. The enemies [sic] loss was a half a dozen or more. We did not stop long to search for their dead and wounded as the underbrush made locomotion difficult and it was thought best to get out of the woods as soon as possible. One case, however fell in my way. An officer whose rank I cannot recall was shot in the head and still living though our surgeon inserted his index finger its full length in the wound, he could not find the ball. We made a pillow of a blanket which we found near him and left him to die alone, a feast for some of the wild carnivorous animals infesting the swamps. A cruel fate? Yes, even in the throes of death he was a handsome fellow, and I never think of that morning without my mind reverting to his sad untimely death. Some heart awaited his coming that would never know the joy of seeing the absent one return. Leaving the rebel dead and wounded where they fell we returned to Austin to the boats. The women and children evidently glad that we had escaped the easy capture predicted by the rebels that morning were gathered on the sidewalks as we marched through. Officers and men returned to their quarters, the horses were unsaddled and taken care of, and we were congratulating ourselves upon the termination of the day, not anticipating any further duties unless the rebels came back to renew the attack. To our surprise we noticed the General's orderlies going from house to house reading to the inmates an order issued from the brigade head quarters that at the hour of four p.m. every house in the Town would be burned. The people were priveleged [sic] to remove their household effects should they see fit, if not, all would be consumed. In vain the women besought the Commander to spare their little homes, telling him of the great suffering he would impose upon their helpless children, the old, the feeble, the indigent, pleading their irresponsibility of the war and above all of the congregation of the rebel force at the academy the day before. Pleading,

beseeching as only woman can when she is put to the test to save her loved ones from danger. To all appeals he was unyielding and his answer fell like a knout on their heads already torn and bleeding with sorrow and anguish. There was no one to protect and none dared to protest against the cruel measure. Some of the women went to work carr[y]ing out their furniture and piling it up in the streets, but the majority of them, feeling that he who would render them homeless would not offer them protection against marauders and it was just as well to see all perish as to save some only to sustain another loss by having it stolen. So they sat in their homes soon to be the funeral pile [pyre] of their hopes and awaited the application of the torch. We read of the bravery and storism [stoicism] of the Spartan mothers but looking back and recalling again those defenceless women with their little children huddled around them waiting for the hour of their doom, I think even these women of old could not have suffered the loss braver nor shown more herosim under the trying ordeals. As previously arranged the tap of the bell on the boat is the signal to begin the conflagration. From house to house rush those detailed to do the fiendish work and those who in boasted chivalry, had gone in the service for protection of home and country, are now engaged in the valiant struggle of still further subduing a handful of women and children by that most barbarous crime of arson.

As the flames spread the inmates calmly walked out to places of safety. The flames made rapid headway and soon the town was one red sheet of fire. As again the tap of the bell signalled all aboard, and the boats pushed out down the river. The people of the town had been treated with utmost respect by every soldier, not one of whom but resented the part he was compelled to play in that disgraceful affair. I had visited the academy before mentioned and was in hopes that its distance would save it from the General's edict and it would be at least a temporary shelter for the stricken people. Upon the blackboard was the still unsolved problem, the students had been hastily called away to help solve one more difficult than any they had yet attempted. Books still open, marked where the day's lesson had been left unfinished, and now

without a moment's warning they left the peaceful haunts of the Alma Mater and fled to answer the stern demand of their government's call for more troops. Learning to read the lesson of life before the first page had been deciphered they were put to tasks that made brave men shudder and grow sick at heart, and when they returned, if return they did, they had gained a knowledge that put boyhood's days forever behind them. Lost youth! What can compensate us for it, when we have grown weary battling with the world, and would fain cast our eyes back to the wild free careless days of our boyhood. I had hopes, as I said, that the school would escape the sweeping ukase. We had not proceded [sic] down the river very far, before from every door and window belched forth smoke and flames and the last stroke was added. Like a Nemises [sic] pointing at us a long black avenging figure rose a huge column of smoke following us for miles down the stream. What became of the poor women and children? I do not know. Frequent inquiry elicted [elicited] nothing and our command never visited that locality again. It was an unmilitary act to say the least. A stain upon that record which we worked hard to make brilliant. It was one of those unnecessary acts, and for that reason most potent in its embittering effects that served but to widen the breach between the factions without gaining any advantage. Helplessness should never appeal to us in vain and he who cannot command himself to judge dispassionately and without motives of revenge should never be a commander of men to bring upon them the odium of actions their manhood resents, but whose duty as soldiers leaves no avenue for escape. You would never forget that sad scene of women and children left alone with their burning houses slowly eating away all hope of shelter from them. Nor do I think one could. We may think to cease of a Nero but one never forgets to pity Rome.[4]

4. We may cease to think of a Nero, but one never forgets to pity Rome. The typist apparently transposed the words *think* and *cease*.

CHAPTER X

BEFORE VICKSBURG - BUILDING OF FORT ADAMS - JUNE 1863

United States Steamer *B. J. Adams*
Mississippi Marine Brigade
Youngs Point,[1] La., June 30th, 1863.

Dear Sir:-

In war, as in politics, strategy holds an enviable position. The bolder the move, the more brilliant the success, the more humiliating the defeat. From early June, 1863, Vicksburg was besieged day and night. Our army was thoroughly and effectively investing the city, the right resting on the river above, thence in a crescent encircling it, reaching the Mississippi again, below the city. Our Navy patrolled[2] the river above, the peninsula opposite was in our possession, completely cutting off every avenue of supply and communication to the rebel garrison so hemmed in. The air was in a constant tremor, with the roar of artillery and the continual resounding of the sharp report, of small arms. Night, but added weirdness to this imposing spectacle. Immense shells,[3] fully 12 inches in diameter, filled with a ten pound charge of powder, and requiring a nineteen pound charge to eject them, shot into

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1. *JUSSD.* pp. 81-82, The *Diana* lay at Youngs Point, June 27 to June 29, leaving at 8:00 p.m. and arriving at Davis' Landing at 11:00 p.m.

2. *JUSSD.* pp. 75-84, June 11 to July 4 entries indicate patrolling of the river at Vicksburg.

3. Everhart, W. D., *Vicksburg National Military Park, Mississippi.* U. S. Govt. Printing Office, Washington, D. C. (1954) on page 44 is reproduced a National Archives picture of one of the huge mortars referred to by Currie.

the air, every few minutes from our mortars. Like huge fireflies, round and round, they ascend to a giddy height, then poising for a second, descend, explode, scattering their fragments, and deadly Night-shade of War as they are, impregnate the whole surroundings with death. The concussion was heard for miles away, like mutterings of distant thunder, and the burning fuse, full half a mile high, were as lightnings of as fierce, and long continued storm, as war has ever known.

During the siege, the Marine Brigade was lying inactive at Youngs Point, opposite the mouth of the Yazoo River. I had made various trips, through the surrounding country, up the Yazoo River; daring even to make my way to the "rifle pits," back of Vicksburg, and in every direction that an interest would incite, or the chance of an adventure, break the monotony of inactivity.

On one of these trips I made a discovery that led to the accomplishment of a strategic move that was as bold as it appeared impossible. Accompanied by Capt. Groshon, a former experienced artilleryman, [I] went down on a tug along the upper side of the peninsula opposite Vicksburg, across which futile attempts had been made in trying to cut out a new channel for the Mississippi and induce it to change its course. The river was very low, and the tug, by hugging close to the high bank, was screened from the alert rebels. Leaving the tug by cautiously feeling our way across the peninsula, dodging behind trees to escape shot and shell we succeeded crossing unharmed, and reached the levee, thrown up around the peninsula, for protection against high water, probably fifteen feet or more. Finding a washout down the slope, we crawled up its side to the ridge and lying on our faces, with field glasses, could look directly over into Vicksburg, just across the river. In the survey I happened to get the range of a foundry working full blast. It was very evident that the foundry was turning out cannon ball and shot, from the fragments of our fire pouring in upon them, killing us with the return of our own bread, cast upon the waters. Returning to the tug, making our way back in the same guarded manner as in crossing, and thence to the fleet I dispatched a request to Admiral Porter to allow me permission to locate [a] twenty pound Parrot gun to stop that

foundry. The Admiral gave his consent, but did not forbear from expressing his doubts as to the feasibility of such a plan, his views being strengthened by the fact that Gen'l Sherman had been driven out of a "sand bag fort," a mile to the right and rear of the position chosen for this new battery. Nothing daunted by this intelligence, I took one hundred enlisted men and fifty Negro boat hands from the fleet, and putting the gun on board a tug, started from Young's Point about sunset, so timing the arrival, that night would cover their transit across the peninsula.

Landing on the upper bank of the peninsula, the Negroes were sent ahead, the gun dismounted, lashed to a plank and pulled by a long rope across the distance, more than a mile, through the deep sand. The Negroes hurrying forward, were set to work making an angular excavation in the levee, the apex pointing toward Vicksburg. About two o'clock, the soldiers arrive with the gun. The force is now divided into relief of fifty, allowing two hours rest at a time for each division. So fast does the work proceed that, on the right, we begin tunneling a passage about twenty feet long, then widening out into a cave-room, in which to store our ammunition, as in a magazine, so secreted, we need fear no explosion of our shot by ignition from an unlucky ball of shell from over the way.

When morning came we were like miners working away, hidden from view, in the depths of the levee and so sheltered, at liberty to continue the excavation with the advantage of daylight to expedite the work. At sunset we have cut half way through the levee and our magazine was about complete. During the second night the gun carriage, and one hundred rounds of ammunition were smuggled across the peninsula, a hazardous but so far successful undertaking.

Directly in front of us, between the levee and the river, a railroad ran along, leading to Monroe, La. Wanting the iron for a casemating, a party of soldiers went up the track to find some kind of a wagon to haul it in. As the track in front of us was directly under the gaze of the rebel garrison, we felt diffident about robbing the railroad under the eyes of so many witnesses, especially since they would show their disapprobation of such an outrage by a perfect hail storm of shot and shell; so to guard

against discovery, about twenty soldiers went up the road in the darkness and securing a hand car, filled it with iron rails.

Meantime, the outer slant of the levee was graded off to about 35 degrees, as near as we could tell in the darkness; then this slant was cut in long vertical grooves in which were laid the cross ties to furnish a structure upon which to fasten the iron rails. These were laid on the cross ties, as fast as they could be brought in. At the bottom, two lengths were used, one on each side of an opening, left for a sally port for the gun. Above it but one length was used, it being about sixteen feet in length. The rails were laid with every other row reversed, so that one fitted into the other, making, when completed, a casemating of solid iron for the front of our fort four and a half inches thick.

So far all went well. In the day our position was most perilous as it seemed even a falling leaf brought over shot and shell, to investigate it; while during the night, by the river making this bend around the peninsula, our mortars' fleets lay back of us above the peninsula, throwing over our heads, into Vicksburg, their immense shells, every five of which took a hundred pounds of powder to send them on their errand of destruction and death. Whenever we heard the discharge, we watched for the shell. If it passed over us, we were safe, but [if] it did explode prematurely, we had to scamper off behind trees and stumps to save ourselves. During the night, many times we were compelled to thus protect ourselves. At one explosion, having no tree or shrub to get behind, I stood waiting for the result, conscious that the shell was making directly for me. It struck the earth not twenty feet away, plowing up the ground and burying itself out of sight, scattering the mud in all directions.

When we had cut through the levee, we met our first serious drawback. The excavation had been made on a level with the peninsula; the road bed of the railroad had been built four feet above the level so that there was an embankment in front of us, making our fort four feet too low. Should we reconstruct the fort or ditch through the bed. I finally decided upon the latter plan, but as it was a night's work, and as we could no longer then conceal our

position from the lynx eyed rebels, across the river, it had to be delayed until the third night. The second night we had finished about half the casemating. The levee was covered with a dense growth of weeds. In sloping down the front, for the fort we had cut a wide swath and thrown up the dirt, which in the daylight would show the tampering to the rebels, who would immediately make that spot a target. To cover up the gap, we transplanted as carefully as possible, loads of weeds, making it appear as natural as we could. When morning came, everything looked as serene and undisturbed as one could wish. Internal preparations were about complete, and we were jubilant over the success, so far. About noon I took a sly peep around to see how things looked. Imagine my feelings. The hot sun had withered all the transplanted bushes, and every moment the gap hedged in by the vivid green of the growing plants on every side, grew more startling, as the bushes lost their coloring, drooping and dying in the sun. They were rebel weeds, and seemed holding out their branches, beseechingly to the Confederates across, "to avenge the death of the flowers." Would the day never pass? Surely old Joshua[4] himself must have a hand, in keeping that sun so long in one particular spot in the heaven. The long hours, waiting hours, when every second seems an hour itself dragged slowly on. A report: A shell. Have they noticed the weeds? Inside the fort we sit and wait, our hearts beating with suppressed excitement, waiting. But the shell didn't strike the gap. Another and another comes over us, around us, but never near enough to mean "you are found out."

The next night, the 3rd, the gun is mounted, the casemating finished, and now nothing remains but the ditch. A cloudy afternoon brings on an early darkness, and we set to work in earnest. The ground is extremely hard and only yields to repeated thrusts of the picks. A drenching rain adds to the difficulty. Progress is slow, as but four men can work in the ditch at a time, the object being to make it as narrow as possible to prevent the entrance of any shots. Pitch darkness prevented seeing a foot ahead

4. Joshua 10:12-14.

of you. How fast the time flew? Everything depended upon us getting done by daylight, as we could no longer hide from the rebels. About two o'clock we stopped for examination of the progress. Taking a poncho I wrapped up a lantern in it and going to the end of the ditch, sat down in the mud and putting the light in front of me had Capt. Groshon sight over the gun and see if it was visible. But the gunner saw no ray sending the light back. I felt along the sides of the ditch and thought I felt a bulge on the right side. This was soon shaved away, and once again the experiment with the light, is repeated. Comes the glad tidings w[h]ispered along, light ahead?

We clear out the bowwom [bottom], a shovel full here and there, and our ditch is completed, being twenty feet long and two wide, with a little flange at the mouth. The railroad makes a bridge over the ditch as we did not cut it away, leaving it to stop any ball that might chance to strike low enough to enter the sally port. Captain Groshon and his relief, had slept part of the night, and it was now their time to go on duty. As the work had progressed, the men had, in turns, of their relief gone back to the fleet, for rest and change of clothing, but I never left until everything was completed. So now, leaving the fort[5] in charge of the Captain, I with those who had worked all night go back to the fleet for much needed rest.

With the first streak of dawn, Capt. Groshon discharged the gun. The ball left the ditch, but did not cross the river. Neither did the second, but the third sped defiantly across the river to the Confederates. An early caller, and it seemed a very welcome one, as by actual count, it received nineteen shots in return—could any shot ask better appreciation than that?

As soon as the gun was discharged, the men, fearing to trust to the fort, ran into the magazine and there awaited results, expecting the complete demolition of our little structure. But as shot after shot fails to make any

5. *JUSSD.* p. 79, June 22, "At daylight the two Co's came in having been engaged in preparing a gun on the point opposite the town of Vicksburg." A note at the side in another hand reads, "Ft. Adams."

impression, their confidence begins to strengthen and after the second or third firing of our gun, they stay by it, keenly enjoying the efforts of the rebels to destroy the gun. Deliberately and well the gun is discharged, and each ball is answered by a shower of immense cannon balls, from the rebel batteries, and for five shots during the day we receive one hundred in return, and still at night the little fort is as solid as when the fusil[l]ade began. When a report was made to Admiral Porter that night, he highly complimented the effort, saying "if we succeeded in doing no other harm, 20 shots for one was such a good return, that the rebels would soon exhaust their ammunition."

Next morning we sent over another challenge evidently to the surprise of the rebels, who evidently thought they had silenced us and driven us out as they had Gen'l Sherman. About four in the afternoon we struck the foundry, the escaping steam leading us to believe, we had hit the boiler. The foundry stopped its work, a serious blow to the rebels, as it was the only one running, leaving them no means to replenish their fast decreasing store of ammunition.

Having accomplished our purpose, our work was done. We named the fort Adams in honor of my head-quarter's boat, the *B. J. Adams*. It was a most successful piece of work, as without an engineer or aid I had constructed a battery in the very face of formidable guns, and held an untenable position, accomplishing by strategy and ingenuity, an achievement that brought me the hearty appreciation of Admiral Porter, and as a recognition of my service, a leave of absence for sixty days was given me, with permission to go outside the United States.

When Vicksburg surrendered the Lt. Col. commanding the water batteries sought out our Brigade Commander and asked him to take him over and let him see what kind of a contrivance we had for secreting our gun. He said that after each shot, they would think they must have demolished anything far and near around the location of the gun. They could not account for the long line of smoke that would rise up from the ditch after each discharge. All sorts of theories were afloat, and finally they decided that the gun was put in a pit or hole, and raised up by a derrick when it was discharged and then lowered into the

hole until the next shot. His approbation upon examining the fort found vent in that expression in which they compliment and account for all our northern courage, ingenuity and get up and get, "Well, that's one of the best 'Yankee tricks' I have ever seen."

The reason that the first and second ball did not cross the river was explained by Capt. Groshon. A railroad station had once stood in front of our location. It had burnt down and the safe had been left there, imbedded in the dirt. It happened to be right in the line of our range; about fifty feet from the mouth of the ditch, and it took the two shots to dislodge it. He said nothing could shake the men's faith in the strength of the fort after a hundred pound cannon ball hit the casemating about the sally port, doing no further damage than making a dent about the size of a man's head.

And so when the "boys" of the Marine Brigade tell of the wonderful exploits, the nights and days that was spent in Fort Adams will not be among "the least" nor the "soonest forgotten."

CHAPTER XI

VICKSBURG AFTER DEFEAT CAPTURE OF CONFEDERATE PAYMASTER, SEPTEMBER, 1863

U. S. Steamer *B. J. Adams*
Mississippi Marine Brigade
Boliver Landing[1] Miss.
Sept. 10th, 1863.

Dear Sir:-

I returned to the fleet lying off Vicksburg from my sixty days leave of absence August the 27th,[2] where I found the following named steamers belonging to the brigade lying at anchor in midstream, namely: *B. J. Adams*, my head quarters boat *The Baltic, Diana* and *Fairchild,* our commissary supply boat and the *Woodford Brigade Hospital Boat.*

Here they had been inactive since the 20th, our Brigade Commander had gone North on leave of absence, taking with him the steamer *Autocrat.* The *John Raine* was ordered to New Orleans for needed repairs. The river was too low to allow our towboats to bring us a supply of coal and as the low water season promised no immediate relief it looked as though our inactivity was of long dura-

1. *JUSSD.* Sept. 9, p. 115, "at Bolivar Landing." September 10, "Left the landing at 5 P.M."

2. *Ibid.,* There are no Currie orders in the *Diana* Log Book between the dates of June 22 and August 27, pp. 79-111. The August 27 entry reads, "nothing of importance transpiring except the arrival of Lieut. George E. Currie from leave of absence." They were laying alongside Vicksburg.

tion. During my absence Col. Charles R. Ellet[3] and Adjutant Curtis of my regiment had resigned and gone home leaving Major Hubbard of the Cavalry in command. His written instructions from the General before leaving were as follows:

"Head Quarters, M. M. Brigade
Flag Ship Autocrat
Vicksburg, August, 21st, 1863.

Major

You will assume command of the boats remaining at this place as soon as the *Autocrat* leaves.

Until the arrival of coal from above now expected daily by the *Lioness,* you will be unable to perform any service but you will devote all your attention to getting the boats repaired as far as is possible to accomplish that object with the means at your disposal. For this purpose you will make details of any soldiers asked for by the chief carpenter who will be paid for by the day for all such services performed at fair wages and in proportion to their usefulness. As soon as the *Lioness* arrives with her tow, you will at once have all the boats full coaled, after which you will proceed up the river with the four boats carrying troops, leaving the *Woodford* and *Fairchild* here in charge of all our bayers. [sic] You will keep a sharp lookout along the river to prevent the crossing of the enemies [sic] troops and act as necessity seems to require for the protection of boats against attacks from the shore.

You will devote your special attention to that part of the river above Greenville and below Napoleon not going further North unless it is clearly evident that your services are required above. In which event you must act as your best judgment will

3. JUSSD. Friday August 21, p. 107, "Lay all day opposite Vicksburg Col. Ellet and Ajdt. Curtis left for home, the resignations having been accepted and approved. . ."

dictate. On the last of the month you will observe to have the command mastered [mustered out?].

You will sign all official documents as Commander of Detachment of M. M. Brigade before Vicksburg.

Very respectfully,

Alfred W. Ellet, Brig. Gen'l
Com'g M. M. Brigade

Major Hubbard
Com'g Detachment
Before Vicksburg''

The above order was handed me on my arrival, as I become commander of the brigade by reason of seniority in rank. To follow it to the letter I would hold the fleet off Vicksburg until the arrival of coal from above and as then the river was too low to admit of tow-boats running, and still falling with no prospects of sufficient rise for months to bring us needed fuel, our prospects looked gloomy enough. But I was not long in making up my mind what to do. I immediately resolved to disobey the instructions left by the General and change the manner of handling the Brigade. Instead of sailing up and down the river as we had been doing watching for the guerrillas [sic] to come out of their hiding places and attack us, I would land the brigade and seek a fight in their own haunts. This part resolved upon was all very good but how was I to run the boats without fuel this summer, the most difficult feature of all? But I resolved to do or die, now that I had full command of the brigade and I was determined on getting the boats away from Vicksburg. So on the night of my arrival I called a meeting of all the boats' first masters at my head quarters to find out how much coal each boat had on hand. I found some boats had little or none while other[s] had quite a good supply. I directed that an equal distribution of the coal be made among their boats on the following day and to have steam ready to leave on the day after, the 29th in the morning.

The following day full preparations were made for the start. I employed part of the day looking over the city of

Vicksburg that had surrendered July 4th[4], during my leave of absence, and for the first time privileged to walk its streets and examine the effects [of our] bombardment that left little but shattered buildings and destruction. Prominent among the objects worth seeing was the excavations made in sides of hills on which the city is located wherein the people laid during the siege. The openings into these caverns like abodes was scarcely larger than an ordinary doorway, beyond which they widened out into rooms from ten to fifteen feet square. Many being en-suite [in suites?] some of which were elegantly furnished with home comforts, even to Brussel carpeting laid on the ground. Into these subturaneous [subterranean] bomb proofs, like hibernating animals secure from harm from shot and shell that poured with [into?] the doomed city both day and night for three months, were gathered the women and children of those whose husbands, fathers, and brothers were engaged on the fortifications in and around the cities [sic] defences, whose scanty supplies of subsistence was often reduced to one ration of mule meât per day, and whose safety lay in never venturing outside of their dens, made the condition one of living death. But resolute as the Southern women are, they endured all this, even sickness and death, in their midst without complaint. Marveling at the endurance of these people for a principle they think is right and having but a limited time to remain on shore I went to Paxton's foundry which was the incentive for building Fort Adams on the peninsula opposite the city during the siege to learn the exact danger [damage?] my gun had done to it. I found the ball had penetrated the brick wall surrounding the boilers, passed through it and the outer shell of the boiler nearest the gun and dropped to the bottom of the boiler inside and with the aid of one of the engineers of my boat [I] enlarged the small main hole in [the] front end of the boiler and with a hook drew forth the twenty pounder shot that had been threw [sic] from the fort on the third day's firing and which effectually put a stop to the remoulding of our fragments of shot and shell

4. *JUSSD.* Saturday, July 4, 1863, p. 84, "at 8 o'clock a.m. news came of the surrender of Vicksburg. . . . ."

into balls for the enemies [sic] guns. I then returned to the fleet and the following morning at nine o'clock [we left the boat] at Griffin's Landing, Miss., from which point I made the first scout through the country with my small Cavalry command. It strengthened my theory of managing the brigade, for at nine o'clock in the evening we retired with seven prisoners, procured a quantity of beef and found during our absence the boat hands had procured a large quantity of wood.

But at this point another great difficulty presented itself. I had but two companies, "B" and "D" of Cavalry, and the first day's scout proved conclusively that it was too small a body of men to venture so far away from the boats, and the weather being too hot and the movements of the Infantry necessarily too slow to operate with. So I resolved to assume the authority of capturing a sufficient number of mules to mount the Infantry and each day thereafter from the first to the seventh [of] September, I sent out all the mounted men I had and some Infantry on foot who never failed to ride home in the evening. In this way I worked my way up the river to Luna Landing, sending [out] each day a rather formidable command.

I now resolved that egnssive [offensive or aggressive?] work should begin in earnest in order to prove that my plan of managing the brigade was the correct one and being unhampered by the presence or orders of the General it gave me full scope of action. But my Infantry were poorly mounted and eqiped [equipped]. The mules were unbroken for riding, saddles and bridles were of the most primitive sort, being captured or improvised as only a soldier can originate, but it gave me the advantage of rapid movements, saving the strength of my men for active work when we met the enemy. I also found to my sorrow that we lacked transportation on board the boats for the vastly increased numbers of animals, so another difficulty had to be met. Near the place we found tied to the bank an empty coal boat and near it a saw mill where we procured sufficient lumber to dock it and build a comfortable stable for fifty or more mules. This work required two days time, all being done by the soldiers who worked like beavers, the officers ably assisting to make the new departure a success. All this preparatory work

was accomplished in time for us to leave Luna on Wednesday September 9th[5] at day light in the morning and run to Beulah Landing, Mississippi, arriving about eight o'clock, when I disembarked two companies of Cavalry and two companies (C & E) of mounted Infantry for a scout through the country to Bolivar Landing to which point I ordered the boats to meet me at sundown the same evening.

We proceeded on our scout, throwing the advanced company on ahead rapidly to surround the houses of the first plantation and allow no person to leave until I came up with the main command, then another company was dispatched to the next plantation for the same purpose and after searching the buildings for guerrillas, arms, etc., we moved on to the adjoining plantation, dispatching another company ahead as before. In this way we dashed through the country so rapidly that we kept ahead of the reports of our presence in that section, thus securing many persons who were loitering around these plantations waiting to concentrate at some given point on the river to fire upon passing transports and otherwise prosecute their nefarious mode of warfare. During our passage between two of these plantations, as I was riding at the head of the column about fifteen miles from our starting point, I saw a road leading from our left down a little decent [sic] and soon lost sight of by the growth of small trees. Turning to Captain E. G. Hughes whose company was then at the head of the command, I directed him to take his company down that road a mile or so and we would wait his return at the next plantation, and in less than half an hour after our arrival Captain Hughes was seen coming up with an old fashioned stage coach drawn by two of the largest mules I ever saw and seated on the coach was four men, the driver on the box making five. I ordered the men searched for arms and upon each was found a nine chambered revolver of some English make, entirely new and fully loaded but so sudden were my men upon

5. *JUSSD.* September 9, 1863, p. 115. Here is the report of the apprehension of the paymaster who had $1,200,000. Currie's party met the boat at Bolivar Landing.

them as they met on the road they surrendered without firing a shot.

We made no further search of the prisoners as it was then growing late in the afternoon and we had a long distance yet to march before reaching our boats at Bolivar Landing. So placing a guard around the coach I allowed the prisoners to ride into camp which we reached a little before dark, the boats having already arrived there as ordered. Taking the persons on board my boat, a thorough search of their personal effects revealed nothing of interest but in the bottom of the stage coach on which the men rested their foot was a black carpet sack, containing One Million, Two Hundred Thousand Dollars in Confederate money and a draft for One Million more, together with a large package of official documents among which were letters written by Jefferson Davis to officers in the army and a large number of commissions for officers recently promoted. The lieutenant in charge of the party was a paymaster in the Confederate Army en-rout [sic] to Little Rock to pay off the soldiers of the [Confederate] Mississippi Army. He was terribly frightened as he expressed himself afterwards. He thought from reports that the Yankee soldiers was sure to rob their prisoners and most likely kill them. So to provide against the act he slipped a small Swiss watch he carried down his boat [boot?] leg when he saw no chance of escape and which he brought forth soon as he could assure himself there [sic] reports were fallacious and with it told the story of his [life]. I never saw a more grateful man in my life than he, when he became assured of the safety of both property and life. He was an educated man, possessing many excellent qualifications. I gave him quarters in my cabin, where he is allowed his freedom under promise of not making an effort to escape. We soon became friends as he proved to be excellent company and remained on board some days waiting an opportunity to send him and his men to Memphis.

On the day of his departure he made me a present of an an[t]ique scarf pin [set with] a lump of North Carolina gold never having been in the Crusable [crucible] as an evidence of his friendship. Some two weeks after I received a letter from him, (as he promised to write) dated

at Johnson's Island near Sundacky, [Sandusky] Ohio, in Lake Erie. After receipt of this letter I never heard of him again. I reported the capture of the money to Maj. Gen'l McPhurson [sic] commanding at Vicksburg, who ordered me to send it to Washington, D. C. and turn it over to the department. I detailed an officer for the purpose and learned afterwards the government used it in the secret service in providing spies with Confederate [money] to spend when sent [spies] into their lines, that it was worth fifteen cents on the dollar in good money which made the $120000 [$1,200,000] worth to the government $180,000. The draft for the million of course was of no value.

The short time I have been in command of the brigade proved conclusively to my mind that the new departure in its managements is the correct one, which stimulates me to further offensive movements against the guerrilas.

So tomorrow I shall proceed to scout the country on the opposite side of the river, promising to write you fully of my adventures from time to time, as events seem to justify.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIGHT AT LAKE VILLAGE AGAINST REBEL GENERAL MARMADUKE'S FORCES - JUNE, 1864

On Board *U. S. Steamer Diana,*
Mississippi Marine Brigade
Greenville Miss. June 10th, 1864[1]

Dear Sir:

Cowper once said that a letter might be written about anything or nothing just as that anything or nothing happens to occur: I have both something or nothing to tell you and still may not make a letter of it. The "nothing" has been the events of the past month. Daily sharp, short skirmishes with the roving bands of guerillas, varied with the daily bickerings of those almost intangible enemies, the flies by day and mosquitoes by night are fast telling upon the usual good nature of the fleet. So, to add to our discomforts the malarial water we are compelled to drink, and the excessive hot weather make us sigh for Peace— Peace that means for us home, friends, and genial climate with the turbulent waters of Secession checked, overcome and turned into the channels of submission and loyalty.

This trying guerrilla war-fare, phoenix-like in its character, subdued, yet, day after day rising up out of the ashes of its defeat again to menace us, inflamed itself into alarming proportions, bursting out on the sixth[2] in a

1. *JUSSD.* June 9 and 11, 1864, p. 156, "Laying at Greenville, Miss."

2. *Ibid.* June 7, p. 155, Report of a contact with Marmaduke's Forces."

fierce struggle at Lake Village, the county seat of Chicot, Arkansas.

First, to describe the location of the little hamlet: The Mississippi makes a horse-shoe curve here, known to steamboatmen as Cypress Bend, and, embedded in it like a gem in a jewelled horseshoe on "my Lady Nature's" finger is the little hamlet of Lake Village from which radiate country roads leading to various landings along the river bank; the two most important being the road leading up to Luna Landing, distant about three miles, and the other, down to Sunny Side about eight miles away. Between these two landings was a river distance of over thirty miles around the bend. Back of the village, forming a background, bristling with shadows and dangerous retreats was an almost impenetrable swamp. Before the village, looking eastwardly, a clear cool lake stretched along for five miles or more reflecting upon its mirror-like surface the dark, rich green of the foliage, the waving trees, the clean, white huts of the plantations, and the deep blue of the Southern skies; making in all as fair a picture as one could wish to see.

Lake Village, deriving its name from the lake, had at best not more than one hundred people; but it was a ren-de[z]vous of desperate characters, guerrillas and other rebels selected by them for its advantageous position. They could watch our movements for up-wards of thirty miles on the river, and if pursued would flee to the village, and thence, by a road le[a]ding back about one hundred yards to the swamp, which to them was an open escape, but to us as closed and impassable as the cave of the "Forty Thieves." To cle[a]nse this country of these bands I have made frequent incursions and have become quite well acquainted with the village people. They have always treated me with such respect and confidence that I naturally began to feel kindly disposed toward them.

The last one of these trips brought me back to the village about sun-set and as we had travelled upwards of forty miles that day I ordered a halt, intending to rest awhile before going to our fleet which was lying at the Leland plantation, thinking it would be acceptable to both men and horses. Scarcely had I dismounted, when a citizen came to me and in undertones advised me not to

remain as the rebel General Marmaduke was in camp near there with a large force of Infantry and Artillery and intended giving us battle on the morrow; that even then a messenger had been sent hastily to inform him of our presence, and it would lead to a certain attack if we remained.

It was a timely warning. Without delay we resumed our march to the boats and reached them none too soon for the rebel advance came up on our rear guard when within a half mile of the fleet; but for some cause did not press the fight that night. We embarked under cover of the guns on our boats that were trained upon the shore.

I sent a hurriedly written report of the enemy's presence in force by a dispatch boat to Vicksburg that same night and received on the following evening by the same messenger an order to report at once with my entire command to Genl. A. J. Smith at Vicksburg, held in readiness for action. We got under way at once and on the following night at eleven o'clock reached Vicksburg, when I reported to the General on his head-quarter's boat, he having sat up awaiting my arrival. During a pleasant chat of an hour or so I gave him all the information I could relative to the position and number of the enemy. It was decided that with his army corps of ten thousand men and Artillery (just returned from the Red River campaign) we would return at an early hour in the morning, disembark at Sunny Side and offer battle.

The order of sailing placed my boat, the *Diana,* in the lead of twenty seven others,[3] and at ten o'clock we were under way. My vessel was the flag-ship of the expedition. It was somewhat disabled, having burnt out one of the sheets in her battery of six boilers immediately over the furnace so that a constant stream of water and steam poured out upon the fires, making it difficult to keep up over ninety pounds of steam. This slacked our movements, making the trip last until four in the afternoon of

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3. *JUSSD.* June 4, p. 154. Here Currie's letter and the Journal are at variance. The Journal says 18 transports plus 4 of the Marine Fleet. The fight at Lake Village is described in nearly the same words as are Crandall's, *op. cit.*, pp. 413-417.

the second day before we reached Sunny Side. As soon as the *Diana* struck the bank as was pre-arranged, four companies of Infantry who had been held in readiness, sprang ashore and formed a skirmish line to cover the landing of the entire troop. Genl. Smith then placed me in command of all the mounted forces; which consisted of two squadrons of the 4th Iowa Cavalry in addition to the Marine Brigade. With one twelve pound howitzer I was to make a reconnaissance and locate the enemy, but to abstain from fighting that evening.

Keeping a sharp lookout as we started we had not gone a mile when, at a bridge crossing a small creek, we met the rebel skirmish line who showed fight. Dashing upon them we drove them across an open field into a skirt of woods, probably a quarter of a mile wide, along the edge of which the rebels were gathered in force waiting for us to come up. To dislodge them from so advantageous a position, I dismounted my men and formed a line of battle within musket range of the rebels, diverting one company under Capt. Harper to the left in order to flank them. As soon as the flankers were in position, the line both in the front and on the flank moved up and opened fire with such good purpose that the rebels were driven back into the woods, allowing us to take their position in the timber. And now both sides were in about equally sheltered positions. Fortune still smiled upon us; and here, as before, we drove the rebels still farther back until they disappeared over a levee thrown up around the lake.

Leaving my command under cover of the woods, with a small body guard I rode around the inner slope of the embankment to look over the situation. Not very long did we remain undisturbed. Our practiced ears soon caught the click of the guns and a shower of bullets fell like hail around us. Quickly ordering my guards to dismount, and charge up the side of the levee to dislodge the rebels, I galloped back across the open space to the brigade to bring them to the point of attack. Mounted, as I was, I made an excellent target for the rebel sharp-shooters, and the bullets, hissing hot, anxious to strike me, whizzed all around. My horse, as if possessed by all the witches of Tam O'Shanter's ride flew over the ground, and, more fortunate than poor Meg, escaped injury.

In the meantime, the men who had charged up the levee were engaged at short range with the rebels, and when I brought up the command we once more drove the rebels from their stand. Our only casualties were, one man shot in the top of the head as he was climbing over the embankment; and another, hit in the mouth with a bullet, the shot taking off a piece of his tongue. It was now near dusk and we started on our return to the boats, reaching them safely and embarking for the night. That night, the next day's plans were arranged: As before, I would command the mounted brigade, make an early start, and, upon reaching the enemy, form line of battle and have everything in readiness for the fight to ensue as soon as General Smith came up with his army. Through a drenching rain next morning, which put the roads in a wretched condition, we marched over the route of the previous evening, and, strange to relate, encountered the rebels in the same place where we had met them the day before, and we had to fight them over the same ground. I formed my command in line of battle on the south side of an open field with the right resting on the levee, separating us from the lake. The rebels had a more favorable position, being posted under cover of a strip of timber on the north side of the field. Dismounting, we advanced as Infantry, throwing out skirmishers under command of Capt. I. D. Newell who were soon engaged with the rebel advance and our men drove them back to their main line in the woods. And now, the fight became serious: the enemy stubbornly and determinedly resisted, and their firing at such short range was so scathing that our men lay down in the weeds and grasses to protect themselves as best they could.

It was still raining hard. At one time, Capt. Newell commanding the skirmish line sent me word he could not hold his position much longer. I directed him to remain, giving him the hope of speedy help. During all these terrible moments which seemed hours to us as the ceaseless firing of the muskets augmented by the echoes grew deafening, evidencing the perilous position of our line. Our only safety lay in keeping the enemy from gaining any ground on us: any wavering, any attempt to withdraw a part of the whole of our skirmishers would result in a charge from such overpowering numbers that capture or

death would result to us. My part of the arrangement was to hold them in line until the arrival of General Smith with his ten thousand Infantry and four batteries of field guns. This command had left the fleet soon after us, but as we were mounted we had made the distance an hour or more in advance of the Infantry, whose march over the poor country road was made still slower by the heavy rain.

I had obeyed my orders which had directed me to meet the enemy, form line, and begin the contest so that the Infantry could step right into the fray. I had done so; and now the serious part of the question was to hold them off until re-inforcements arrived. My command was but a handful compared to the large force opposing it, but the men knew what depended upon keeping the rebels in check until the arrival of General Smith, and bravely and well they acted their part in holding this advanced and dangerous position for one hour until the Infantry arrived.

I pointed out my line of battle in the weeds to the General upon his arrival: he then ordered a brigade of Infantry and one four gun battery under command of General Moewr [Mower] to file to the left and take position in front of my line; thereby relieving my command, who fell back to their horses, taking their wounded with them. Was there any killed and wounded? Quickly as the line could be formed, General Mower opened fire with a section of his artillery, when, to our astonishment, it was returned by the rebels whose guns, concealed in the woods, had not up to this time been used. So nearly had they the range of our guns, that the first shot barely missed them, and after firing but two rounds General Mower limbered to the rear, withdrawing his Artillery from the position, moved up his Infantry line, and the firing of muskets resumed, soon becoming terrific, but not of long duration this time as the rebels fell back. They had not selected this position for a battle; they had made careful arrangements, selecting a battle ground most advantageous to them, and it was now their intention to draw us on to this ground. Retreating about a mile toward Lake Village, they crossed a sluggish bayou about two hundred feet wide, emptying into the lake, being ferried over by a large flat-boat to their main army.

It now became evident that up to this time we had been contending with only a small part of their force, their

main army being most judiciously posted in a forest on the opposite side of the bayou. They had thrown out a small advance across the bayou probably as a foil to test our strength, ere retreating to draw us on near enough to their main body to ensure our speedy annihilation. Our approach to this bayou was made through a cotton plantation that extended to its bank. The lines never halted until we reached the stream, and, although forewarned by Capt. C. G. Fisher of the impassibility of the bayou General Smith pushed on the men, expecting to ford the stream, discovering the inability to do so too late to withdraw his forces and prevent an immediate battle. Imagine our position! Think of the advantage the rebels had, sheltered as they were behind the trees, while our men were compelled to take chances in an open field with an impassable barrier for Infantry between them.

During the engagement my command was doing flanking duty near a cotton gin, about a half mile to the left and rear of our line. Here, the hospital was established, and as soon as the battle began four ambulances were used bringing in the dead and wounded. In less than a half hours time one hundred of our brave boys lay side by side on the floor of the building, wounded, dying, dead, keeping a dozen or more surgeons busy affording what relief they could. The fight was short but bitter.

Seeing the enemy wavering, General Smith ordered up the Cavalry to ford the bayou and charge the rebels. The water was shallow, but the bottom was covered with a black, thick muck which rendered the passage very difficult. I led the charge, and, on reaching the opposite bank, found myself there alone and the next horseman did not reach me for some minutes. Was I frightened? Well, it was a perilous position, I can assure you, and I fully appreciated all the danger. Just as soon as a score of men succeeded in crossing, we struck out on a gallop after the now retreating rebels. A half hours run brought us to their hospital, and stopping to make inquiry of their movements, we were joined by additional Cavalry and, pushing on less rapidly, were soon overtaken by the remainder of the brigade. Upon coming to a junction of two roads, one of which led to the village, and the other to the swamp, I found both showing so many marks of fresh

traveling that one could not tell which direction the rebels had taken. I sent back an orderly to General Smith asking for orders as to which road to take, stating the reason for so doing. He directed me to proceed along the one leading to Lake Village as it was near night and we would camp in the village.

While my command had been fording the bayou, General Smith had ordered the burial of the dead where they had fallen. The wounded were put in army wagons and his army was then ferried over by the same flat-boat which the rebels in their retreat had used, and failed to destroy. It had been brought over from the opposite bank where the rebels had landed it. Steadily, all day, the rain poured down and still at sunset, when the entire army had reached Lake Village the rain continued.

Then we went into camp: every available house and building in the town was converted into sick rooms for the wounded, while those more fortunate to escape injury were collected in messes in and around the town. Fences, chicken-coops, out-buildings, and every thing that would burn was used for fires to warm and dry the thoroughly drenched men, and cook the evening meal.

And now, what a change! Is it the shifting scene in a panorama? The little gem that yesterday lay shining in the morning sun was now torn from its beautiful setting and lay trodden in the mud. The very heavens seem to weep in sympathy. Was it for those brave boys we burried [sic] where they fell? Was it for the destruction of the beautiful little village? It must have been for both, for, where the one was deprived of life, the other was being stripped of all that makes life bearable. In this trying hour the villagers came to me (being the only officer they knew) imploring my protection. I sympathized deeply with them and went in person to General Smith who, in courtesy, allowed a guard to be placed over the little they had left. That was all I could do for them.

At eight o'clock next morning we broke camp and marched to Luna Landing, where, by pre-arrangements the fleet met us, having come up from Sunny Side, where, you remember we disembarked and went to the fight the day before. The fleet, at anchor in midstream, was hailed by a secret signal known only to the Marine Brigade, a

necessity against being decoyed into the hands of the guerrillas by a false signal in our absence. The fleet weighed anchor, and the boats of the Marine Brigade landed at Columbia, while those belonging to General Smith's division landed three miles above, at Luna Landing. The river was very low, and the banks at Columbia Landing so steep that a passage way had to be cut down the bank for the horses to get on board the boats. Being very tired with my two days skirmishing, I left my horse with an orderly and made my way down to the boat. Shortly after, General Smith sent one of his staff officers with the request that I report to him on his headquarter boat lying three miles above at Luna Landing. I intended making the trip on tug, or despatch [sic] boat of the fleet, but found her without steam, as the captain, not thinking it would be needed so soon, had ordered the boilers cleaned. Passing up the bank, I mounted my horse, still standing where I had left him, and taking an orderly with me, rode up the river bank to Luna. Dismounting, and leaving my horse with an orderly on shore, I passed on board the General's boat and remained with him an hour or more, discussing the days battle. During my stay the captain of the tug-boat had raised steam and run up along-side of the boat without my orders, but giving as a reason that he knew I was tired riding horseback; which indeed I was, and very glad, too, of his thoughtfulness; and since then I have had cause to [be] more grateful as the sequel will show.

I kept two saddle horses, one for work, and the other for pleasure. The latter I had not as yet taken into a fight. My work horse was in some way disabled, and as the only resource, I had to press "Johnnie," my favorite, into service and rode him all through the two days fighting. He behaved so well that I was better pleased with him than ever before, and, anxious to favor him all I could I tried to get him aboard the tug, rather than have him walk back to Columbia. Upon finding this would be both dangerous and difficult on so small a craft, I again put him in the orderly's care to take back by land while I went by boat. I stood on the bank watching my beautiful horse as he was led away and then, boarding the tug, was soon alongside of my headquarters, the *Diana*.

I went immediately to my state-room without giving a thought as to the welfare of the orderly or my horse; as I never dreamed that any danger could befall either, riding as he was, along the river bank in plain view of both fleets, and fully ten thousand soldiers. But one is never certain of anything in this world, unless it be his own uncertainties. A quarter of a mile below General Smith's fleet, the road leading to Lake Village sent off a branch leading to the right. On reaching here the orderly, riding his own horse and leading mine, was pounced upon by a half a dozen or more rebels who captured him and the animals while he was yet dazed at the unexpected attack. I had always put the best equipments on my favorite. My saddle, bridge, and housings, together with a very fine pair of 6 in. Colts navy revolvers. This daring feat was accomplished so quietly that those who witnessed it from the fleet thought the orderly had been joined by some of our own men and had ridden off with them for some reason.

From a prisoner we captured a few days later who belonged to the rebel General Marmaduke's forces, I learned that the General himself was riding "Johnnie" and was very proud of him. The orderly had been sent with other prisoners to Macon, Ga. What a lucky thought of the captain to come after me with the tug. The rebels, no doubt, having known of my visit to General Smith's had intended to surprise me on my return. That was one time when a soldier acted without orders with a most happy termination.

During the day, General Smith taking the wounded on his fleet, steamed up the river to Memphis, leaving the Marine Brigade once more to take up its monotonous warfare. The next day after the battle, finding the rebels had evidently abandoned the locality, we ran down the river to Greenville, Miss. We gained the battle, but our loss was very severe--probably over one hundred and twenty being killed and wounded. We could not ascertain the enemy's loss as they must have carried off their dead and wounded with them in their retreat, none of them falling into our hands.

Upon what little threads our destiny depends! Yes, if the tug boat had not been brought up for me I would have

fallen without doubt into the rebel trap and they would have held a public rejoicing over the capture of one who had been so long harassing their guerrilla movements. What does Burns say about the schemes of mice and men? Well, this one:

> "Gang aglas, and left me here happy that
> I am able to write you all's well tonight
> with me."

Geo. E. Currie

CHAPTER XIII

BATTLE OF COLEMAN'S PLANTATION— JULY, 1864

On Board U.S. Steamer Diana,
Mississippi Marine Brigade
Rodney, Miss. July 6th, 1864[1]

Dear Sir:

Since my last letter to you, we have been sharply skirmishing with the guerrillas up and down the Mississippi every day for a month, generally fighting in the woods along the banks of the river, the guerrillas invariable selecting such positions as offering many advantages for their mode of warfare, and to conceal their actual strength. For some time following this persistent surveillance, they had been remarkably quiet; falling back into the country either for re-inforcements, or both. Watching their movements, and awaiting a resumption of their attacks we drifted down the river to Vicksburg, our rende[z]vous when not in action. Here, our fleet of vessels lay inactive for ten days or more toward the close of June, 1864.

Our boats were much in need of repairs, and the weather so excessively hot that fighting on board was as dangerous to the new men (not yet acclimated) to the extreme heat, as from the enemy's bullets. So, we took advantage of the cessation of hostilities to repair the vessels[2] and rest until the weather moderated, if the guerrillas should

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1. *JUSSD.*, Wednesday, July 6, 1864, p. 160. "Laying at Rodyen, Miss."

2. *Ibid,* Tuesday, June 14, p. 156. The report says they were laying off Vicksburg and repairs of the boilers, etc. were made.

keep quiet that long. But the change did not bring the promised rest; we were inactive, confined on board the vessels anchor [e] d in mid-stream, and as each boat was required to keep up 150 pounds of steam to be always in a state of readiness for sailing, with the intense heat of this semi-tropical climate, made the situation almost unbearable.

It was with genuine delight we hailed an order issued Saturday, July 2nd.,[3] to weigh anchor, land at Vicksburg, to take on supplies and two regiments of colored soldiers and hold ourselves in readiness to proceed to Rodney one hundred miles down the river. We were under way at sunset, sailing in our usual way, and on the following morning, July 3rd., landed safely at Rodney, where the debarkation of all the troops at once took place.

Our movements were shrouded in mystery. Our brigade commander had not communicated one of his plans to the officers whom before he had entrusted and consulted with [on] every minute detail of an engagement on which we were bent. He studiously avoided, on this occasion, the least intimation of his intentions. His order to prepare for sailing and follow the flag-ship had been faithfully adhered to up to our arrival at Rodney. It was his duty to command; our's to obey. Nor, did his next move explain but rather deepened the mystery. Instead of forming the command in two brigades, the white troops in one, and the colored regiments in the other, he ordered the line in three divisions as follows: First; the four squadrons of Cavalry, Capt. Jno. R. Crandall commanding in front; second; the two regiments of colored Infantry; third: a train of thirty or more army wagons; and fourth: my regiment bringing up the rear.

To say the train of army wagons was a surprise to the officers except those on the flag-ship, but feebly expressed it. None knew that they were brought down in that vessel but those aboard of her, and conjectures were numerous as to the object of that march. While we were

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3. *JUSSD.* Saturday, July 2, p. 159, "The painting is yet unfinished. . . Ordered to raise steam. . ."

unable to get at a reason for our movements, the wagon train precluded all idea of fighting on this trip. Such a useless encumbrance would require too large a force of available men to protect it in case of battle, reducing our numerical strength to the enemy's advantage. Cooked rations for two days were put in the haversacks, and about nine o'clock that morning the bugle sounded the advance, and away we marched toward the South. We proceeded very slowly as the weather was extremely hot, necessitating frequent halts for rest and water, so, that it was two o'clock in the afternoon before we reached the Coleman Plantation but twelve miles from Rodney.

The Coleman residence stood on the left of the road from Rodney, in an angle formed by a road running from East to West between Port Gibson and Gallatin. When the head of our column reached these cross roads we were halted and ordered to go into camp; each commander being privileged to select his own location, while the residence, occupied by the most rabid of Southern women, was to be occupied as brigade headquarters. About five hundred yards east on the road leading to Fort Gibson was a beautiful grove which I had selected for my camp ground. The Cavalry stationed themselves Southwest from headquarters; the colored troops to the West, and the wagon train was parked in an open field south of, and in front of the residence. Pickets were put out on each of the three roads about a mile from headquarters, and, soon the quiet of camp was only broken by some hilarious group of men in usual camp enjoyments.

Near sundown Genl. Ellet sent one of his staff officers requesting me to report at headquarters for orders for the next day which were in effect as follows: at an early hour reveille[4] would be sounded from headquarters, and as soon thereafter as possible I should march with my regiment eastward toward Port Gibson; while, at the same time the Cavalry would go in an opposite direction on the same road toward Gallatin, on a reconnoissance, and

4. On this page of the George E. Currie letter press book, three typing errors have been corrected. These are three of the five error corrections of this type in the letter press book.

should either of us meet an enemy too strong to handle, we were to send back for assistance - the two colored regiments and mountain howitzer being held there in reserve. We began an early celebration of the "Glorious Fourth" of July,[5] for, at half past three in the morning reveille sounded, and before an hour I left with my command, the Cavalry riding off opposite at nearly the same time. The ride was most refreshing, the morning clear and cool. On our way through a community formerly wealthy from the indication but now the plantations were deserted, and weeds and desolation had taken the place of the busy life and cultivation of a prosperous Southern plantation.

We had ridden perhaps three miles from camp, when a courier came dashing up, his horse covered with foam, bringing an order from the General to counte[r] march my command and re-inforce the Cavalry, who were then hotly engaged with a much superior force on the Gallatin road. Rapidly, we retraced our steps, and were soon in front of brigade headquarters, the general himself, on foot at the roadside greatly agitated at the reports the orderlies were constantly bring[ing] him from the battle-ground. We learned that the Cavalry had proceeded but two miles when they met the enemy in force, evidently approaching to attack the camp. A fight ensued, and, already, the general had sent the two Infantry regiments, and the howitzer to their relief; but at last accounts the battle was still in progress.

"Take your regiment," said he, "and move on to their assistance and you are to assume command of all the forces in the field. Should you want me in person, send for me and I will join you without delay." "But," answered I, "General there is an officer already there who outranks me." "Tell that officer," said he, "it is my orders that you take command." Without further parley we moved on toward the battle field, and had scarcely gone two miles when we saw the first marks of the battle.

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5. *JUSSD.* Monday, July 4, 1864, p. 159 reports a ". . . severe engagement with the enemy at 'Coleman's corner' ".

On both sides of the road fences were razed to the ground, the result always of a Cavalry fight, and the ground over which they had charged was litterally [sic] plowed up, with here and there and everywhere dead and wounded horses, while a half a mile beyond, both armies apparantly [sic] exhausted were resting in the sight of each other.

A cursory view of the situation convinced me that while our men had gained in position, we were evidently the greater losers in number. In order to reach the head of the column I passed along the line of Cavalry, now dismounted, finding both men and horses greatly fatigued by the struggle just passed through, and suffering from the burning rays of a Southern sun. The Infantry arriving after the Cavalry charge, had taken an advance position to relieve them in case of another attack from the rebels, now in their immediate front, but they, like our men, were taking advantage apparantly [sic] of the lull to rest before renewing the attack. I soon found the ranking officer, but happily was relieved from the delivery of the General's order that I take command, for, as soon as he could get to me he requested that I take command, saying: "You understand this mode of warfare better than I", which I willingly did.

Pointing out to me the rebels whose lines were formed on the brow of a hill in a skirt of woods at our left, I made preparations for a fight. Deploying two colored companies of Infantry to the left of the road as skirmishers at the foot of the hill; the remainder of the colored troops formed in line in their rear to support them. I placed the mountain howitzer on an elevated position to the right of the road as to enfilade the enemy's lines as soon as they opened fire on our skirmishers. My own regiment took position near to support the gun while the jaded Cavalry was held in reserve. All in readiness, I gave orders for an advance which was done in perfect line; not a shot being fired, as ordered, until the skirmishers had nearly reached the summit of the hill, when the rebels let go a volley of musketry quickly answered on our part and by a well directed shell from the howitzer, which forced the enemy back into the woods, and the skirmishers returning

their fire, charged the rebels, who gave way and fled in disorder through the skirt of woods across an open field, into another belt of timber beyond.

Leaving the Infantry, our mounted forces pursued the flying rebels, but as we could not get near them we fell back to the Infantry, resting an hour or so and returning to the camp. While unsaddling our horses we received a challenge, thrown into our very teeth. The rebels, unobserved, had followed us and fired a volley of shots right into our camp from the summit of a hill in our front to our great astonishment and alarm, as we supposed they had retreated and given up the fight. Not so, it seemed they were determined to try [their] chances with us again and had hoped to gain by our discomfiture.

Hurried preparations followed the "boots and saddles" call of the bugle and in a twinkling the command was ready for the fight which now assumed an alarming phase and showed the desperate character and determination of our assailants. Together, with the General and his staff we rode out in the direction of the firing to overlook the situation. Dismounting at the foot of a hill, we sheltered our horses from the firing and, dodging behind trees and stumps got up the hill to our picket line, south of headquarters, which had been constantly returning the rebel shots all this time. From my experience in guerrilla fighting I thought from the scattered firing of the enemy, that this was simply a feint to divert our attention to this part of the field while the rebels were skirting our forces in some other direction to bring on an attack unawares. But my opinion was at variance with the General's whose views were strengthened by those of his staff, and he finally concluded that it was best to order up the two Infantry regiments to the support of the pickets and that he would visit the out-posts on the Port Gibson road east of my camp, and see how matters stood there.

To do this, we passed my quarters. My regiment being formed ready to march. We had not passed my camp but a short distance when we were stopped by an old Negro, coming in breathless haste and terrified, saying that "forty thousand mounted rebels were passing around the picket line to get into our rear." My theory was correct.

The firing on our front was but to blind us to the real design, which was to get in our rear on the Rodney road, so cut us off from our flat [sic], whip us, and complete the victory by capture of our vessels left poorly guarded at Rodney. A deep laid plot, a victory that meant for them a complete annihilation of the Marine Brigade, a prize worth winning, a defeat that held for us but death.

I turned to the general, saying; "We will fight on our rear in less than half an hour. Let's get ready." We immediately started toward headquarters and when I reached my command, still mounted since that unexpected volley, ready for action, we marched down the road, halting as the right was opposite the Coleman house. Meantime, the General, who had galloped on ahead of me, had sent four squadron of Cavalry down the road leading to Rodney, at best but a narrow country lane, to ascertain the real whereabouts of our assailants. Scarcely had they gone a half mile when the rebels charged upon them, routing them completely, and driving them back in terrible confusion into our very camp. The narrow passage was filled with men and horses in an inextricable mass, their very numbers their greatest difficulty rather than their chief assistance. Riderless horses came snorting and plunging into camp with fierce eyes and distented [sic] nostrils, while their riders were caring for themselves as best they could, fled [fleeing?] before the rebel horde, hotly pursuing them, seeing their advantage in following up the attack.

General Ellet all this time had been sitting on his horse at the junction of the roads, a silent spectator until the shots of the advancing fire drove him back, and, seeing the almost hopeless position in which so serious a blunder had placed us, came riding up to the head of my regiment where I was sitting on my horse, and excitedly said, "Colonel, in the name of God what shall we do?" "Do?, Let's fight," said I. Bring down the Infantry from the hill (where he had sent them to support the skirmishers after the first intimation of the rebels there), form there in that field west of the Rodney road. I will dismount my regiment and whip them in my front in five minutes."

I had no such expectation. We did not know the strength of the enemy. The old Negro, allowing for the proverbial exaggeration of their class, made their numbers somewhere in the thousands, but courage is half the battle and I wanted to inspire the General with some confidence and restore his presence of mind. Instead of sending one of his aid[e]s, off he galloped himself, and brought the Negro troops down on the double quick; forming them in line of battle on the south side of the field, the right resting on the Rodney road. The rebels formed in line at the north end of the field, stretching across the road so that one half of their forces confronted the Negro troops and the other half were in my front. Dismounting my regiment, and leaving the horses in a sheltered position in the road, we moved up in line in the rear of the Coleman house to a rail fence and outhouses that enclosed a field of growing corn through which the rebels were then advancing. Behind this fence I stationed my men with instructions not to fire a gun until the rebels were so close upon them, each could select his man and not miss aim. With a few men I entered the Coleman house and took position on a second story porch overlooking the entire battle field, securing our position by a barricade of furniture, mattresses, and other articles; and there, awaited the advancing foe.

The corn was so tall and rank, it completely shielded the rebels from our view; we telling their position by its parting and waving as the men crunched through it. But just across the road through a cleared space, we could see the two armies draw near each other; both firing simultaneously, and the battle was on. At almost the same moment my men fired a volley at short range on those in our front so effectively, that the line halted; and taking advantage of the surprise we charged them with fixed bayonets and drove them from the field. We had "whipped them in our front in less than five minutes." And now, the fight on our left in the open field became desperate. The rebels, whom we had so severely repulsed, moved across the field and re-inforced those fighting there, and with this united strength made such terrible onslaughts on the hated Negroes, once their slaves, now their equals in the fight, that it seemed for a time they would succeed.

But those black columns never wavered. It was the enemy that had to advance again and again upon them, only to find an unswerving line that opposed them with deadly effect. They had learned to endure under the lash, and they now displayed such desperate courage and determined endurance, that it amounted to heroism; and after each attack drove their former masters from the field until they withdrew from the contest, leaving their dead and wounded behind. They fell back down the Rodney road, thus barring our only exit to the fleet, leaving us to believe they would renew the fight later on.

In a consultation of the officers, it was decided best to return to the fleet that night, even though we had to fight our way through. At sunset we set out on our return as follows: the four squadrons of Cavalry in the lead, with my regiment following; second, the train of army wagons, into which our dead and wounded were placed; third, the General bringing up the rear with the two colored regiments and the mountain howitzer. Said he, "When the rebels attack you, if you need my assistance, send an orderly for me and I will come to the front."

The road to Rodney lay through a chain of river hills, made passable in many places by narrow cuts sometimes twenty feet in depth. An enemy as fierce as Pharaoh, excited with the hope of victory, maddened with thirst for vengeance against his escaping slaves, made that twelve miles a Red Sea,[6] through which no passageway seemed granted to our prayers for safety on that perilous night march. I took precautions to prevent a surprise, scattering the troops fully half a mile in advance of the main command, with the road on either side well flanked so that I felt secure enough in my position that the enemy could not attack before I could form line of battle. But when they would attack us, would they dog our steps like human cayotes [sic], or would they fly in our faces as we emerged from a narrow defile, cutting us off where it was impossible to push troops through in time to help each other, or would they lie upon those hills and pick us

6. Exodus 14:5-28.

off as we passed through? The very night was in sympathy with them, shrouding their movements in darkness. To our astonishment, on and on we passed, and yet no attack. Had they given up the idea? Not yet. Just as our rear was passing through the second cut, the enemy made such a desperate attack upon the colored troops that we a half mile in advance thought the entire number was killed or captured. The darkness but increased the terror of our position. But we were there, and our only resource was to fight our way through blindly. We had chosen what appeared the lesser of two evils, to attempt the passage to our fleet at Rodney rather than risk a night attack at the Coleman plantation. We were in the rebel's country. It had been their inheritance. Every foot of that ground was known to them, and this knowledge of advantageous positions, and the darkness, most favorable to conceal their movements, made it seem almost useless to try a defense. At every attack General Ellet called upon me for re-inforcements, asking for two or more companies at a time until my command was reduced to a few men who acted as advance guard and flankers. Litterly [sic] cutting our way through, we at last arrived near the river at midnight, when the rebels, seeing the coveted prize slipping through their fingers made an almost superhuman effort to capture us. But like the rest, it failed.

Quickly repairing to the boats, a hasty roll call showed upward of a hundred of the Infantry who did not answer to their names. But by morning enough straggl[e]rs who had been isolated from their command came in to reduce that number until the actual casualties were twenty killed, and eighteen wounded, all from the colored regiments excepting two Cavalry men. The white troops, although in the brunt of every attack during the day, escaped with but a few slightly wounded.

The battle of Coleman's plantation was one of the most desperate I engaged in during the war. Had the rebel plans, well laid as they were, "not gang aglae," without doubt the entire command would have been destroyed, as the guerrillas would show no quarter to the Negro troops, and we shared the odium of their association and the capture of our entire fleet would have made it one of the most important victories of the South.

I have been minute in detail because it was necessary to understand my position. Between the General and myself, as men, there was the closest accord: between us as military commanders, there was often a clash of opinions, he generally being upheld by his staff, his son being his chief aid[e]. I had been fighting guerrillas for a year and a half up and down the Mississippi, and while I arrogated to myself no extraordinary military ability, my experience was often a guide that led to correct judgement. It was during one of those little estrangements that this exploit occurred, and I felt the rebuke when we started out by being assigned to the rear, the second position of honor, when the command ought to have been divided in two brigades, white and colored, and then my rank would have been next to his. Occurring as it did, had not affairs taken so dangerous a turn by the rout of our Cavalry, I had determined to fight independently, wherever I could engage the enemy. As it was, my regiment bore the honors of the day, and, to succeed under such adverse circumstances reconciled us all.

So the "Glorious Fourth" of July passed away, and with it, all attempts of the guerrillas at the complete annihlation [sic] of the "Invincible Marine Brigade."

Very Truly

Geo. E. Currie

CHAPTER XIV

COLONEL CURRIE RESIGNS FROM SERVICE - NORTHBOUND STEAMER ATTACKED BY GUERILLAS - AUGUST 1864

Saint Louis, Mo.
August 17th, 1864[1]

Dear Sir:-

There were signs of a departure among the boats of the Mississippi Marine Brigade on the 4th inst. They had been inactive at Vicksburg since the 31st of July[2] repairing the boats and now were about to start for Omeiga Landing, La., about fifty miles up the river where camp was to be established, boats renovated and everything put into ship-shape order to receive Major General Dana, who was coming up from New Orleans to inspect the troops in this department, leaving the *Autocrat* to convey General Dana from Vicksburg to our camp. The fleet consisting of my vessel the *Diana, John Raine, B. J. Adams, Switzland* and *Monarch* started for Omeiga. Upon our arrival on the following day we established our camp on the shore. We had very few facilities for camp and poor ones at that, but "the boys" had lost none of the ingenuity of the Yankee soldiers, and considering inconveniences as

1. *JUSSD.* The last entry in the Journal is dated, Thursday, August 11, on page 168. "Laying at Vicksburg. All of the Brig. property is being turned over to the Govt." However the duty roster extends to Jan. 22, 1865.

2. *Ibid.* Monday, August 1, p. 166. "Laying at Vicksburg. . . boilers and machinery being repaired. . ."

secondary to the relief of being once again on shore, soon made themselves comfortable. The officers kept their quarters on the boats.

For me the days passed with a snails pace. I had sent in my resignation on the 14th of June and now as impatient as a school boy looking forward to a long promised vacation as soon as relieved, I was going home, where I could once again breathe the cool invigorating breezes of the north. We were inactive, the gurrillas [sic] were as silent as though they had been stamped out, and after the stirring times we had passed through, this idleness in the hot climate full of miasma and pestilence seemed a torture long drawn out. Day after day passed and not a sign of a gurrilla [sic], and we supposed they had retreated back from the banks of the river afraid of the Argus eyed fleet that had been so effectual in their extermination.

General Dana arrived on Sunday the 7th[3] and ordered inspection of my regiment at three that afternoon, first as dismounted, and three [then?] as mounted Infantry. The exercise lasted about two hours and at its close General Ellet, our Brigade Commander, handed me a note, which I herewith incert [sic],

"Head Quarters M. M. Brigade,
Flag Ship Autocrat,
Omeiga Landing, La.
August, 7th 1864.

Colonel

I am sorry to have to tell you that I brought up with me your discharge and will relieve you from duty as soon as I can return from Goodrich Landing. I would not of course relieve you until after the inspection. I can assure you that personally you made a very favorable impression. Let me see you as

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3. *JUSSD.* Sunday, August 7, 1864, p. 167, "Inspected by Major Gen. Dana. . ."

soon as I return to-morrow and of course you will retain command until relieved.

Yours Very Sincerely,

Alfred W. Ellet
Brigadier General
Commanding M. M. Brigade

My release had come, my soldier days were advancing to a close, the very news I had so feverishly waited for was here, and the next day I would be relieved from military duty ready to embark on the first transport that was bound up the river. I did not show the letter to any of the officers, but had it read by the adjutant the same evening at dress parade. The news though [when known] by officers and men, seemed to have a depressing effect and during the evening many came to express their regrets; [the] next day came and went and the General did not return. What a long time it was. I was so anxious to go. At noon on the nineth [sic] the *Autocrat* with General Ellet on board landed at Omeiga and I was handed my resignation and [was] relieved from duty. It read as follows:

War Department
Adjutant General's Office
Washington, D. C.
July 12th 1864

Special order #235 Extract----------

31st Lieutenant Colonel.

Geo. E. Currie first Infantry Mississippi Marine Brigade having tendered his resignation is hereby discharged [from] the service of the United States to enable him to accept another Commission.

By order of the Sec'y of War,

E. D. Townsend, Ass't Adj't Gen'l

My soldier days were over. Hasty preparations were then made for my departure on the first steamer that should

pass, but when it would arrive was the question, as we were outside of any means to ascertain. All that could be done was to get ready and wait like the poor sinner for the wagon.

While I was busy getting my traps together the officers of the regiment held a meeting in the forward part of the boat's cabin and passed a series of resolutions in which they tried to convince me by the most desperate efforts that I had done all the work and they only looked on and saw fair play. The resolutions were as follows:

U. S. Steamer *Diana,*
Mississippi Marine Brigade
Omeiga Landing, Louisiana,
August 8th 1864.

At a meeting of the officers of the mounted Infantry Marine Brigade held on board U. S. steamer *Diana* at Omeiga Landing for the purpose of preparing some testimonial of esteem for the late commanding officer of said regiment Lieutenant Colonel Geo. E. Currie resigned. Captain I. D. Newell Company "A" was elected President and adjutant, Joe Tinker Secretary. The meeting being only organized it was on motion of Captain E. G. Hughes Company "C" voted that a committee of three consisting of one captain, One first and second Lieutenant be appointed to draft resolutions, expressive of the feelings of the meeting. On motion of Captain T. C. Groshorn Company "F" it was voted that Captain E. G. Hughes Company "C" and first Lieutenant and regimental Quarter Master A. J. Pendleton, and second Lieutenant J. C. Fortum, Company "D" comprise said committee. Committee met pursuant to the above when the following resolutions were adopted.

First--That we part with the Colonel with feeling of deep regret.

Second--That in all our associations with him since the organization of our regiment we have found in him a true gentleman a patriot and soldier.

Third--That in parting with him we feel that we have sustained a severe loss and that the service loses a brave and valuable officer.

Fourth--That for whatever of merit we have attained as a Military Command we are indebted alone to the untiring energies of our noble Commander.

Fifth--That whatever his lot in life may be, we most heartily wish him unbounded happiness and prosperity.

Six--That the proceedings of this meeting be published in the "Mississippi Democrat, Chicago Tribune and Cincinnati Commercial" and that a copy of the same be presented to Lieutenant Colonel Currie.

Captain I. D. Newell, President

Lieutenant and Adj't. J. Tinker, Secretary

The officer diputised [deputized] to hand me copy of the above resolutions also deliver [ed] a verbal instruction from the officers to be presented [present?] that evening at a bayonet [banquet] on board the *Diana* there being prepared in honor of my departure and while he was delivering the message the smoke of an ascending steamer was seen around a bend in the river some miles below like an advance courier of the separation that was to take place. It soon came in sight and proved to be the *Empress,* Captain John Mulley bound from New Orleans to St. Louis loaded heavily with freight and passengers. When this discovery was made, I declined the invitation, regretfully determined to take passage on the steamer, which was hailed by the *Diana* and was soon along side of my boat. Meantime the *Diana's* cabin was filled with as many soldiers of my regiment as could conveniently find standing room in open ranks and I passed down between the two lines of men standing at present arms, seeing in their faces reflected some of the sorrow that was in my own heart. I had been with them through all manner of

hardships and trying times, but this parting unmanned me, more than all the danger and could I only have recalled that resignation, I would have done it most willingly. I had not sought popularity in the command and did not know how well the men liked me. I did not think how much I thought of them until I had to leave them. I believed in the sternest discipline, the most flexible [inflexible?] will and demanded prompt obedience as most essential to good results and I supposed that the spirit of such brave men yielded me obedience as a commander, while they denied me friendship. When I learned how deeply fixed were the bonds that made us comrades, the pain when they are snapped asunder made this parting as hard a one as I shall ever be called to make. I passed on board the *Empress*[4] with their goodbyes and shouts ringing in my ears. I could only acknowledge them in silence for my heart was too full for words. The boat glided out into midstream and as I wished to keep the fleet in sight as long as possible I went up to the hurricane roof and sat on the railing. I sat long after it had passed out of view and memory does not fail me now when I say that I thought of them all better than I ever did before.

Presently one of the pilots came, slapping me on the shoulders, inquired if I was not Colonel Currie. [I replied] replying in the affirmation [affirmative]. He said some ladies in the pilot house would like to speak to me. I went with him and found two ladies, the wives of planters who lived back from the river near Goodrich's landing, and who were enrout[e] to St. Louis to purchase supplies. I did not know them but they had seen me frequently passing their houses, when we were out on trips scouting the country for Gurrillas [sic]. On one of these trips we haulted [sic] at a country house and one of these ladies had given me a glass of milk, she said; and thought this like conduct entitled them to claim an acquaintance, even

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4. *JUSSD,* Tuesday August 9, 1864, p. 168, ". . . at 3 o'clock P.M. the steamer Empress came up the river and was hailed by the *Diana*. Our much esteemed Lt. Col. Currie being discharged from the service got aboard of her and proceeded up the river."

though unlike Jacob I had come as an enemy and not a suitor. They especially as they were entirely alone with no friends on the boat asked my assistance as an escort. They proved very agreeable and then [their] society somewhat diverted my thoughts from the gloomy channel into which they had been caused by the parting with my late command. Nothing unusual transpired during the evening, except a little stir that was made by the captain of the boat who threatened to put these ladies ashore for singing at my request, some rebel songs, all they knew. But upon explaining to him that I, and not they were at fault, he said no more.

We reached Columbia landing above Cypress Bend just after dinner the next day, and about fifteen persons in all, among whom were these lady acquaintance[s], the two pilots and mate of the steamer, were assembled in the pilot house, the most comfortable place on the boat, owing to its crouded [sic] condition, there being over four hundred people on board, mostly soldiers enrout[e] home on furlough, some of whom had been released after a year's confinement in a Southern prison pen. The conversation naturally run [sic] on our liability of being attack[ed] by gurrillas [sic] as we were in the immediate vicinity of their head quarters, and if we shoud [sic] pass Columbia and Luna Landing, we would be safe, as a Bayon [sic] emptied into the Mississippi river about two miles above Luna, which precluded the enemy from getting their artillery above that point. While thus discussing our chances of escape, if attacked and enjoying a lunch on Water Melon [sic], the pilot at the wheel called my attention to a smoke rising from behind the levee at Columbia, that I concluded was from a camp of rebel soldiers. Slowly the steamer advanced from [forward?] for we were running very slow, owing to the heavy cargo and green wood used for fuel. When opposite the landing and without previous warning a masked battery of six guns was uncovered at the waters edge and all discharged at our boat at the same time, while apparently a whole division of rebel Infantry swarmed upon the levee just back of the battery, [fired] volley after volley of musketry at short range, while the Artillery kept up a constant and rapid firing, each shot perforating the boat's cabin and sweeping the decks.

It was the most terrible and trying time in all my army experience. Pent up in the pilot house, a room not more than fifteen feet square in which probably fifteen people, one half of whom were women, and means of escape cut off, the only exit was over the open deck of the vessel, which made us targates [sic] for the rebel sharp shooters and certain death or wounds would be the results, should we attempt to go below. The situation was most critical for all on board, but ours was the most exposed, as we were unable to protect ourselves by any obsticles [sic] such as those in the cabin possessed. We were compelled to remain in the frail structure made only of half inch boards and windows.

The attack was so sudden and unexpected that it threw the occupants into the wildest consternation, the ladies gave vent to loud screams and bewailed their fate in taking passage on that steamer, all the time denouncing the attack as unjustified and cowardly in firing upon an unarmed vessel with a mixed croud [sic] of passengers, many of whom were sympathizers with the rebels, especially so was it the case with the women in the pilot house. At the first discharge of artillery I was standing on that side of the pilot house next to the enemy. In front of me stood a young girl whose home was in New Orleans and who was accompanied by her mother enrout[e] to St. Louis for the purpose of entering a Catholic School. I immediately took her in my arms and pulled her to the floor, placing her between my feet as I sat with my back towards the enemy, thus doing all I could to shield one of the lady passengers. All dark scenes have their light shades here and there to relieve the darkness. Fashion was then revelling in the largest of hoops and as most of the ladies on board seemingly aspired to outrank each other in size, their attempts to lie flat on the floor, at my bidding, made the scene one that was recalled afterwards with roars of laughter. At the time self preservation was the first law and they obeyed my instructions with an alacrity that would have astonished a verteran [sic]. All of the foregoing transpired between the first and second shot of the artillery, so you can judge our movements were not slow. The rebels poured shot and shell into the defenceless boat

so rapidly that it seemed a veritable shower of iron with the discharge of the cannon, which never was worked more rapidly on a battle field; the bursting of shells, the constant whistling of Minnie balls; the breaking of glasses and the crash of timbers as the shells penetrated our frail boat, were the mutterings of as fierce a storm as plutonic fury could invent to hurl against its foe. The boat being one of the largest in the trade between St. Louis and New Orleans loaded to the guards [rails] with freight and people and contending against a six mile current in the river and having to depend on green cotton-wood to make steam, its progress at best was not more than four miles an hour, now in midstream and not more than three hundred yards from the enemies cannon, it seemed as if she was at a complete standstill, for she did not move fast enough to prevent a point blank range of the battery that was pou[r]ing into her broadside. An average of four shots per minute from each gun, and as there was [sic] six guns in the battery, they were enabled to fire twenty four shots per minute, every one striking the boat in a vulnerable place, to say nothing of the deadly effects of the musket balls, equally as effective from a thousand or more expert sharp shooters mingled with the terrible reports of arms and rising above all the bursting of shells and roar of the cannon came the shreaks [sic] and groans of the wounded and dieing [sic], adding additional terror to the situation. In the midst of all this the wheel of the steamer, on the side next to the enemy ceased turning. Calling to the pilot for the reason, he answered "he did not know." Then ask the engineer, said I, and the answer came through the speaking tube (leading from the pilot house down to the engine room) the Cain [chain?] is broken. Tell him to repair it, if possible, said I, and go ahead, but alas it was so badly disabled by one of the cannon balls that repairs for the time were impossible and with one wheel to propel the vessel, it was all that could be done for the boat to hold herself against the current without making any headway in the river.

Being abreast of the battery and the boat standing still, enabled the enemy to fire on us with uner[r]ing aim. It seemed that now we were doomed. The passengers who

were mainly soldiers, some on furloughs, other[s] just released from a rebel prison, having been exchanged and all enrout[e] to their homes and friends for a pleasant visit, must again be sent back to these horrid seraglios from where they so recently came. The boat after being stripped of everything valuable and useful to the Confederate soldiers would be burned. All these thoughts no doubt passed through the minds of those on board. At this point was heard the clarion voice of the first mate of the steamer, (who was among the number spoken of in the pilot house) directing the pilot to blow the boat's whistle to surrender, saying that he did not propose being made a target of for the purpose of saving the soldiers on board from capture. As the pilot obeyed his instructions by giving the usual signal to land the boat, I slipped out from behind the young lady that I was protecting and looking out forward, saw the boat lying quartering across the channel and rapidly flanking in towards the shore under the enemies guns during which time the firing never ceased for the reason perhaps the rebels did not understand our signal of "surrender." But as we drifted nearer and nearer to the shore each shot told with more deadlier effect, if possible, than when the boat was in midstream as the range was shorter. Taking in the situation at a glance I knew that to surrender was either death or that which I feared worse (imprisonment in some lothsome [sic] Southern pen). It seemed that this must be [the only possible] result and yet I determined to make a desperate effort and by holding the boat out in the stream as far from the battery as possible take the chances of escape. Pushing aside the pilot on watch at the wheel I put the wheel hard up and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the vessel flanking away from the enemy to the other side of the river. This afforded us a better chance to escape capture owing to distance, and the shifting of the boats position. But firing into the boat was unabated during these terrible moments, the effects of each shot as they struck the boat evidenced by the groans of the wounded that increased with each volley of cannon and musket[r]y. The breaking of glass and the crash of timber, as the shots and shells plowed through the boat's cabin,

were distinctly heard, all of which tended to make our position the more perilous and untenable. After getting the boat as far away from the enemy as possible, owing to the shallowness of water near the opposite shore, I turned my attention to finding some means out of this death trap, for I clearly saw that to save the vessel and the many valuable lives on board, I had to assume command of the boats management as the officers in the pilot house were of one mind, to surrender the vessel; and as I was the only one present, whom they supposed had the authority, being in full dress of a Federal officer, but in fact nothing but a civilian, as I had my resignation in my pocket, but unknown to them. I directed the pilot to stand the boat as far away from the rebel battery as possible in hopes that we would escape in some manner either by getting the disabled engine repaired so that we could go ahead on both wheels and thus soon pull out of their reach, so [or?] if we failed in that to back the boat down stream with the one wheel and thus withdraw out of their range. Fortunately in looking ahead I saw the smoke of a steam boat lying around a point in the river about two miles distant, apparently at anchor. I then directed the pilot to blow the whistel of distress, known to all river men, and in a very short time, saw the vessel coming to our assistance. It fortunately proved to be a small gun boat known as "Tin Clad." As she came around the point indicated, she opened fire on the rebel battery from her two bow guns, which she kept up until reaching our boat. Then [she] rounded to, and took us in tow, soon after landing us at the place where she was [had been?] lying, [and from] where we called her to our assistance. This place was entirely out of range of the rebel battery, and being protected by the gun boat that lay along side of us. I promised to take a survey of the damage done to our boat and assist in the carrying of the wounded, the burying of the dead, and [the] repairs to the engine.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when our boat was safely landed out of reach of the rebel shots and from that time until dark those of us who were able were kept busy at our mournful tasks. First our attention was directed towards the wounded and separating them from

the dead, for they were both lying here and there, sometimes in groupes [sic], sometimes singly, where they had taken refuge behind the boat's chimneys, baggage and other protections, during the firing. Some were wounded, others dead. One of these groups I remember was found huddled behind a large iron bound express messenger's trunk that was on the boiler deck forward of the cabin. This chest was filled with the usual express packages, common to that traffic and of course temptingly offered shelter to those who sought safety behind it. But a cannon ball had passed entirely through the chest and either killed or wounded every one of them. Others clustered behind passengers trunks and baggage and articles of furniture, no matter how frail or flamsey [sic], just so there was a barrier, to make them feel more secure. Others, more used to such events, stood upon the open deck, and took their chances and in many instances faired [sic] equally as well as those who tried to avoid the danger. Our first move was to clear away all baggage from the boiler decks, forward of the cabin and, improvising cots for the wounded, and carrying to the lower deck the dead, where they lay side by side, preparatory to bureal [sic]. To the work of arranging the cots and making the wounded as comfortable as circumstances would permit, the bandaging of the wounds and administering to their wants, none were more active than the half dozen or more Southern ladies who were in the pilot house with us, during the attack. They proved themselves veritable Florence Nightengales [sic], never ceasing their efforts night or day by turns, until the wounded were taken off the boat at Helena and Memphis three days later. So attentive were they to these poor Federal soldiers, who enlisted to fight against their friends and principles, that they won the admiration of all on board. During the preparation of this improvised hospital, and placing the wounded on the cots, preparations for the burial of the dead was in progress. The boat hands were engaged in digging a trench on the bank of the river. This trench was seven feet long by three feet deep, and the men extended the length sufficiently to receive the dead lying side by side. The graves were arranged by spreading on the bottom blankets

belonging to the men, their bodies then laid on them in one row. Other blankets were then spread over them and the trench filled with dirt, thus closing them forever in their earthly homes, whose doors never open outward.

Here lay thirteen loyal, true and brave defenders of their Country. All the dead were soldiers who had obtained leave of absence to visit home and friends after a long perilous service in their Country's cause, while others were then exchanged who had been confined in some southern prison pen for months, weak and emaciated, now on their first visit among friends in the North since they enlisted, to recuperate their strength. Turning our attention again to the wounded who by this time had been made as comfortable as inadequate means and want of surgical attention allowed by converting the open spaces on boiler deck forward of the cabin into a miniature hospital, the cots being arranged in rows so that a narrow isle [sic] or walk between them enabled their attendants to administer to their comforts. The suffering of those poor fellows as they lay wreathing [sic] with no surgeon to dress their wounds for in all the large passenger list on board the boat, there was not one surgeon nor was there any military station nearer than Helena Ark., fully two days run of the steamer under the most favorable circumstances, where surgical aid could relieve their sufferings. But soldier like, there was no complaint. Each seemed to understand the situation and try to make the best of it, seeing that every comfort and attention was being paid them that was possible to render

Leaving this part of the boat I went into the cabin for the first time and see the condition of things there. Here the passengers were huddled together in groupes [sic] discussing the [e]vent and congratulating one another upon their miraculous escape. The cabin was puforated [sic] in every direction with shot and shell. Look where you would daylight was visable [sic], through this shattered cabin. Furniture lay broken and scattered upon the floor. Here lay upon the sofa in the ladies cabin a handsome intelligent boy of perhaps eight years who had received a flesh wound in the left arm. He was suffering considerably but was having the kindness and best

attention from the lady passengers. The poor little fellow had no relations on board, but was placed in care of a male friend of his family to bring him North.

Passing along still further in my search for incidents I learned that the captain of the boat was standing on the opposite side of the officers cabin or texas (as it is called) from the battery. During the bombardment a cannon ball had passed through the cabin, struck him in the back of the neck just above his shirt collar and took off his head as sharply as if done with an axe. As he fell forward the body rested on the upper deck of the boat while the detached head was carried overboard, running down the scuppers into the river. So completely was the head severed from the body that in falling on the deck his shirt collar was not soiled. I remember that during the firing we heard groans so distinctly in the pilot house that we could not account for them. Not one of our party having been hurt, afterwards we concluded it was his body that had given these groans at the time of the decapitation. He was picked up tenderly and carried to St. Louis, his home, for burial. On going to the main or lower deck of the boat the terrible effects of the shots and shells were everywhere visible. On the side of the boat next to the battery and along its boilers was a double row of mules, tied and in the efforts of the rebels to disable the boat they had directed most of their shots at the boilers and would have succeeded in piercing them no doubt, had it not been for the mules which severed [sic] as a protection. Out of the number of fifty or more fully one half of them were actually shot to pieces, and when their bodies were thrown overboard many of them had to be shoveled, so terribly were they mingled [mangled].

Night had now come on, the dead had been buried, the wounded made comfortable, decks cleared of the dead and wounded animals, the engine nearly repaired, when our attention was turned toward making the living comfortable, righting the broken furniture and preparing the evening meal. It was not relished very much, owing to the surroundings of suffering, the mangled human beings, whose moans of distress were so audable [sic]. A consultation of the boat officers and passengers was held

[because] it might be possible that the enemy had moved their artillery along the bank of the river above where we were lying. It was concluded that our best plan would be, in order to save the lives of those on board, to remain where we then were until after midnight. By that time the damage to the engine would be repaired, then darken the boat around the fire doors, by hanging tarpaulins around them; extinguish the lights in the cabin, hold the boats [?] as near the opposite shore as the stage of water would permit and thus hope to escape any future injury. The evening was spent talking over the sad events of the day and exchanging mutual congratulations on our fortunate escapes and refraining upon making demonstrations that would lead the rebels to think that we intended leaving during the night.

At about the time appointed, however, we quietly raised steam and being convoyed by the gun boat that had remained with us during the night quietly started on our journey up the river. But the passengers were in a terrible excited condition of mind and body. Gregarious as the human family are when danger is threatened, nothing could prevail on them to keep out of the cabin, no argument could prevail that safety lay in taking refuge behind any obstacle on the steamer, however slight, it would offer some protection. To all these appeals the answer came "no." Especially so was it the case with the ladies, all must come into the cabin. Be seated and when done lights must be extinguished, commencing at the forward part of the cabin etc. When all was in readiness I found myself surrounded by the ladies that were in the pilot house during the day, some on chairs, others sitting on the floor and all having one or both hands clinging to me. In this way I was situated when the last light was put out in the cabin and the place became total darkness. These ladies seemed to think safety for them lay in holding to me as tightly as possible. Surrounded by them so closely, with the large number of passengers in the cabin, the doors closed and it being a warm summer's night I soon found myself decidely uncomfortable. In a few minutes after we got under way I made some excuse and grooped [groped] my way through the darkness to the outside of

the cabin, where I remained until they concluded the boat was out of danger. Then the lamp in the cabin was relighted, the gun boat that convayed [sic] us returned to her station, and we were once more steaming along, unmolested from this time on, until we reached Helena two days later.

Our entire time was spent in carrying [caring?] for the wounded, making them as comfortable as possible with our limited means at command. Poor fellows, the sufferings they endured are undiscribible [indescribable]. Their wounds and shattered limbs, from lack of surgical attention were terrible, growing worse and worse each hour and with the increased sufferings made the task of carrying [caring?] for them more difficult. At length we reached Helena where surgeons came on board and those who were pronounced "incurable" were taken on shore, while others from [for] whom there was still hopes had their wounds dressed, their fractured limbs amputated and all made as comfortable as possible. We were ordered to leave them at Memphis ninety miles further up the river. The over crowded condition of the hospital at Helena precluded them being taken off. After an hour or so delay at this point the steamer proceeded on her way and on the following day we reached Memphis, where all the wounded were taken off the boat and cared for at the Government Hospital.

The boat [was] now free of the suffering humanity that had endured untold agonies during the past three days. The improvised hospital was abandoned and the decks cleared of its furniture and belongings and the passengers settled down to the ac[c]ustomed means of passing away the time. We had passed the danger line and there was no longer any fears of the gurrilla [sic] molestation on the trip. Our next stopping place would be Cairo and as we had now reached telegraphic communication, the news of our disaster was heralded all over the country from Memphis, so that when the boat landed at Cairo the levee was crowded with people anxious to hear the details and examine the boat. They came rushing on board by the hundreds, so great was their curiosity. to see and learn the extent of [the] damage done. We lay at the wharf an

hour or more putting off freight and then started for St. Louis, our destination, arriving there during the afternoon of the following day. Here as at Cairo it seemed the entire population of that great city had assembled at the water's edge in position to jump on the steamer as soon as she came near enough. Here it was that most of the boat's crew lived and hence the greater anxiety of the people to learn of the safety of friends on board. Before the boat hands had time to get out the lines to make her fast to the shore the people climbed and jumped on board and soon the cabin was so full of them there wasn't room for another soul to get in.

On calling the roll of the boat's crew all answered to their names excepting the captain, John Mulley. His body lay in ice in the boat's hold and his funeral took place on the following day from his residence, followed by one of the largest concourse of friends ever held in the city.

I remained in the city three days, during which time the escape of the *Empress* from capture by Marmadukes gurrillas [sic] was the talk of the town and those of the passengers who were known to have been on board of her at the time were the lions of the day, and as a reward for saving the boat, "the first mate was made its captain."

CHAPTER XV

FINALE

The Mississippi Marine Brigade was discontinued in accordance with orders issued in August, 1864. The *Diana* was turned over to the quartermaster at Morganza, Louisana. General Ellet's final order of August 26 disbanded the gallant Marine Brigade. The last record in the *Diana* logbook of an active soldier concerns R. S. Ellet, January 21, 1865.

Warren Daniel Crandall, Captain and Assistant Adjutant General of the Mississippi Marine Brigade says, "Colonel Currie's resignation was a serious loss to the command. In many respects he was an ideal soldier. In person he was tall, erect, and soldierly in his bearing. He was well versed in the tactics, handled his men with rare skill, and in action was prompt and intrepid. He knew how to be genial and courteous, though he had a superior air, and was at times harsh in manner and sharp in utterances-quick to take affront, and slow to forget. Nevertheless, his men highly esteemed him as a leader, and followed him with implicit confidence."

After the war he lived at Cincinnati, Ohio, and died sometime before 1907.

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APPENDIX A

Following is a table of cross reference between the Chapters, Title and pages of this book and the original George E. Currie Letter Press Book.

WARFARE ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI			CURRIE LETTER PRESS BOOK		
Chapter	Title	Pages	Letter No.	Date	Pages
I	George E. Currie and the 59th Regiment	1-12	--	--	--
II	Fighting in Missouri and Arkansas-1861	13-21	12	Dec. 20, 1861	[143-156]
III	Battle of Pea Ridge, Ark.	23-34	6	Mar. 10, 1862	[61 - 77]
IV	The March to Shiloh-Transferred to the Ram Fleet	35-44	8	June 1, 1862	[102-114]
V	Ellet's Rams Conquer Rebel Fleet at Memphis	45-53	11	June 20, 1862	[134-142]
VI	The Mississippi Marine Brigade	55-62	--	--	--
VII	Capt. Currie Transferred to Miss. Marine Brigade	63-69	9	Nov. 28, 1862	[116-125]
VIII	Organizing the Miss. Marine Brig., Benton Barracks	71-75	10	Mar. 1, 1863	[127-132]

Appendix A continued

WARFARE ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI			CURRIE LETTER PRESS BOOK		
Chapter	Title	Pages	Letter No.	Date	Pages
IX	Guerrilla Warfare and Burning of Austin, Ark.	77-84	4	May 26, 1863	[36 - 46]
X	Before Vicksburg and Building of Ft. Adams	85-92	5	June 30, 1863	[48 - 59]
XI	Vicksburg After Defeat, Capture of of Conf. Paymaster	93-100	13	Sept. 10, 1863	[158-167]
XII	Fight of Lake Village Against Marmaduke's Forces	101-111	3	Jun. 10, 1864	[19 - 34]
XIII	Battle of Coleman's Plantation	113-123	2	Jul. 6, 1864	[3 - 17]
XIV	Col. Currie Resigns - Northbound Steamer Attacked	125-141	7	Aug. 17, 1864	[79 -100]
XV	Finale	143	-	---------	--------
Appendix C		153	1	---------	[1]

APPENDIX B

THE GEORGE E. CURRIE LETTER PRESS BOOK

The letter press book[1] containing thirteen letters of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie, once contained 497 ten by twelve inch semi-transparent pages, an index section in the front and the whole was bound in board covers.

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1. The letter press, so commonly used around the turn of the century, can be considered an instrument of a lost art. It is difficult to find instructions for the use of the letter press and the search is further complicated by the use of the term to apply to the instrument being discussed here.

Letter press methods were adopted by business and particularly by small railroads and express agencies, where in some remote areas they were still practiced as late as the 1920's. The original is made using an indelible pencil, sometimes called a copying pencil, or a special "carbon" paper similar to the present day hectograph "carbon" paper. If a typewriter were used a ribbon inked with an aniline dye was needed. After the original was made, it was placed face up on a light cardboard and under a sheet of semi-transparent paper, sometimes referred to as onionskin copy paper. Over this was placed a damp cloth or blotter, covered with another piece of light cardboard that could serve as the bottom for the next sheet, etc., until as many sheets as were desired were stacked. The 'stack' was then placed in a letter press.

The usual form of a hand operated letter press consisted of a heavy cast iron base called a bed platen. Over this was placed the stack. A movable platen was then placed over the stack and pressure applied by a heavy screw mounted in a yoke attached to the bed platen. After about four to ten minutes the press was loosened and the dampeners and separators removed. The soluble ink was absorbed into the back side of the duplicate paper. The original was not harmed and usually it could not be discerned that a copy had been made.

A one-page index, handwritten in ink, precedes the letters proper, followed by the thirteen letters occupying pages [1] to [167]. Between each letter is a single blank page. Pages [153] and [155] are missing. The story is unbroken by the missing pages, and it seems probable that they were removed due to some error at the time transfer was made, or the page numbering machine failed when the book was made, skipping these two numbers. There are no entries on pages [168] to [401] or [487] to [497]. Pages [402] to [486] have been crudely hacked from the book. There is nothing to show there was or was not writing on the missing pages; however, the wide margins remaining give no evidence of any entry.

Letter No. 10 is in a blue aniline dye while all the others are in purple. All of the letters are in typescript. The letters have not been placed in the letter press book in any sequential order. It may be that Currie added the letters to the book as he prepared them for some friend, historian, or other person. It is also possible he had the material copied and the operator of the letter press paid no attention to the order of composition.

Practical typewriters, having both upper and lower case letters, did not come into use until after 1878. In letter no. 12, page 17, Currie states that "the Railroad had since been connected to California." In Letter No. 4, pages 78, 82, and 84 letter No. 7, page 130 and letter No. 12, pages 13, 19, and 20 as well as in letter No. 1, page 153, he indicates words to the effect that, "the events are as clear in his mind today as when they happened." Currie's accuracy of detail, the dates on the letters, and cross checks wherever possible indicate complete accuracy both as to the time and the event. With the exception of letter No. 12, which appears to have been composed of two different letters, there is complete agreement between the letter dates and the events.

The letters have a freshness, a familiarity with detail and an appeal of sincerity and honesty that remove all doubt as to their originality. In fact, the frequent poorly constructed sentences, long rambling statements connected with "and," "etc.," the frequent change of tense and person, gives one the feeling of sitting in the old soldier's

room. You can almost see him there, sitting on the edge of the chair, and with motions of hands and expressive face, as he repeats the stories of intensive action, pausing now and then to express his feeling of sympathy for mankind. As a master tactician, he criticizes his superiors and actions of men, but as a good soldier, he always obeys.

One is forced to conclude, therefore, that Currie composed the letter-press material from original letters, or from a detailed diary.[2] Throughout his copy he refers to "the last letter," "the letter sent you from," or "in the next letter," etc. Any rearrangement of his composition destroys the feeling of closeness to the narrator. It is for this reason that the letters are presented to the reader in their exact, original form. With the exception of a few added commas and breaking a sentence here and there, the story is published as it was written.

It is not known to whom the first copies of the letters were addressed. A thread of evidence throughout the letters lends credence to the thought that the letters had been sent to one person, a friend, or the husband of the old landlady who gave him the blanket and pillow, or some other person, who, as the author believes, saved the letters and returned them to Currie after the conflict. In several places, he describes and defines military terms, indicating the recipient was not a military man. The second set of letters, of which the letter press letters are duplicates, were prepared and sent to some person who was pressing Currie for his story.[3]

It has been suggested by some readers of the Currie letters that the works were prepared and sent to W. D. Crandall, one of the authors of the *History of the Ram*

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2. According to notes on page 179 of the *Journal of the United States Steamer Diana,* the logbook was given to Lieutenant D. E. Wilson by Sergeant Major Alonzo W. Owens on January 22, 1865. D. E. Wilson died on September 28, 1886 and his brother, E. W. Wilson, sent the logbook to George E. Currie, who received it October 11, 1886. The logbook was lent to W. D. Crandall in September 1887 and returned to Currie February 27, 1888.

3. See copy of Currie's letter one in Appendix C.

Fleet and the Marine Brigade.[4] It is ture that Crandall quotes a letter from Currie similar in subject matter to letter No. 3 in the letter press book. (Quoted in this book, Chapter XII, pp. 103-110) however, more than a third of the letter press book is material that Crandall was not writing about. Crandall was a Captain and Assistant Adjutant General of the same military organization as was Currie, so it does not seem plausible that Currie was transmitting this material to Crandall in this form. It has also been suggested that the material was prepared for Corporal George W. Herr.[5] It is true that a letter quoted by Herr contains similar material to that contained in Currie's second letter, (pages 9 and on of this book); however, the same reasoning applied to Herr as to Crandall. It further is not plausible that Currie would have addressed either Crandall or Herr as he does in his first letter.

A search has been made and authorities consulted to see if the Currie material is extant other than in the Clarke Historical Collection and the fragmentary material published by Crandall and Herr. No references have been found, and the editor believes that over the years the other Currie material has been lost or destroyed.

As the population increases in the Mississippi Valley, more interest is being expressed in the events of the Civil War which occurred in what was then the Western United States. The Currie letters add measurably to the scanty sources that describe Infantry forces, the Ram Fleet, known primarily through Alfred W. Ellet's paper,[6] and the practically unknown Marine Brigade which fought the guerrillas along the Mississippi River.

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4. Crandall, W. D., *op. cit.*, pp. 414-417
5. Herr, George W., *op. cit.*, pp. 443-447.
6. Ellet, Alfred W., "Ellet and His Steam Rams at Memphis," quoted in Johnson and Buel, *op. cit.*, Volume 1, pp. 453-459 (1884-1887).

APPENDIX C

Letter one, unfortunately not dated, of the George E. Currie letter press book, follows:

Dear Sir:

I have at last yielded to your repeated request to tell you all of my experience while serving in the Federal Army during the Rebellion.

I know of no more powerful incentive to long talking than a good listener, and that I will have one in you, the eager interest with which you have received the few accounts I have told you, assures me, and persuades me to enter upon the task.

The scenes through which I will lead you are as fresh in my memory as though but yesterday intervened between then and now.

I entered the service as a 1st Lieutenant and came from it as a Lieutenant Colonel. For the most part, I was engaged in guerrilla fighting on the Mississippi river, a warfare as treacherous as the Indian, and as difficult to surpress [sic]. And though oftentimes I may become tiresome with the mononotonous [sic] routine of military and dry details, there are many stirring events that will excite a far less immagination [sic] than yours and make the narrative worth the telling.

You have, with premeditated design, started a soldier story telling and you must bear the consequences.

Yours Truly,

Geo. E. Currie