ESSENTIAL AMERICAN HISTORY

JAMES MADISON STONE

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF THE CIVIL WAR

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PREFACE

This volume does not claim to be a tactical, or strategic history of the campaigns of which it treats; it aims rather to be a narrative of the every-day life and experience of the private soldier in camp and field—how he lived, how he marched, how he fought and how he suffered. No sooner had some of the volunteers reached the front, and been subjected to the hardships and exposures of army life, than they fell sick, were sent to the hospital and were discharged without passing through any serious campaigns. Others were wounded early, were disabled and were never able to return to their regiments. The more fortunate passed sound and unscathed through battle after battle and campaign after campaign through the whole war. Three years of active campaigning and a year in the hospital was the allotment of the writer, who thus was in the service from the beginning to the end of the war.
Whatever the merits or demerits of this work may be, the impressions and the composition are my own. They are an elaboration of notes made during the war and directly after it, following which, it has taken the form of a diary.
The part of the work which has been least interesting, consumed more time and required some research, has been in fixing the dates when the different incidents occurred, they having passed entirely from memory long ago. With these few words, the work is submitted by the writer to his comrades of those four eventful and trying years, when the life of the Republic hung in the balance, in the hope that it may be an aid in calling to mind fading recollections of pleasant incidents, as well as heroic deeds performed by comrades.

Chapter I LEARNING TO BE A SOLDIER

Leaving Camp Lincoln for the front. At Baltimore, Maryland. Cantaloupes and Peaches. Annapolis, Maryland. Chesapeake Bay oysters. Assisting negroes to escape. Doing picket duty on the railroad. A Negro husking. Chaplain Ball arrives from Massachusetts. Assigned to the 2d Brigade, 2d Division, 9th Army Corps.

During the winter of 1860 and 1861 there was great uneasiness felt in the North. The South, through the democratic party, had been the ruling section of the country most of the time since the establishment of the Republic, but at the time of the election in the autumn of 1860 a northern political party had won. That party was not only a northern party, but it was an abolition party. The election of an abolition president, Mr. Lincoln, by the North, was at once regarded as a menace to the slave holding interests of the South, which section at once began to make preparations to withdraw from the Union. As the spring months passed and Mr. Lincoln, the new president, took his seat, secession was more and more talked about. Soon the 6th Massachusetts Regiment was attacked in Baltimore. Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor was fired upon. Battalion after battalion of the state militia were being hurried away south for the protection of the Capitol. It thus became more and more apparent that there was to be war, and the all-important question from the northern viewpoint was, the preservation of the Union. One Sunday in the month of June I went home to visit my family, I being at the time at work away from home, and while there, quietly asked my mother what she would say if I should enlist. Well, that question produced a shock, and was not answered as quietly as it was asked. I was told I could not enlist without her consent, which she should not give, and I was heartily laughed at by my brothers and sisters. However, when it became known that a company was being

recruited at Barre, I went quietly over there and enlisted, then I went home and told the family what I had done. There was a rumpus, of course, but it passed off, and after a few days, hearing nothing from the company, I decided to go back to work again and await developments. On the 22d I learned that the company was going into camp at Worcester the next day. I was on hand and went along.

A number of stage-coaches were provided to take us to Worcester. It was an interesting and picturesque ride of a little more than twenty miles. Arriving in Worcester early in the afternoon, we went to the Agricultural Fair Grounds, which had been converted into a campground and named Camp Lincoln from Levi Lincoln, the first mayor of Worcester and a Governor of Massachusetts, and set to work putting up tents and forming a company street. Sleeping in tents, drilling and doing guard duty seemed strange at first, and was a good deal of a change from the duties of a farmer's boy, but it was interesting to be among a lot of live young men who were brimful of enthusiasm, patriotism and fun.

When I joined the company at Barre, I was surprised to discover a number of Dana boys there: Henry Billings, Henry Haskins, German Lagara, Gil Warner and Harding Witt. Harding Witt and I had been schoolmates and good friends for a number of years, so I was especially glad to find Harding there. Reveille was sounded at five o'clock. Most of the boys did not find it difficult to get up at that time but a few of those boys made the greatest ado about getting up on the minute. They were very likely boys who had always been called by loving mothers and had been called two or three times every morning. A quarter of an hour after reveille every man had to turn out to roll call. The men thus had fifteen minutes to dress and put their tents in order. At six o'clock the breakfast signal was sounded and all fell in line to go to the cook-house and get their breakfasts. The cup and plate furnished by the

government were of tin, much like those I remember having seen children use in early boyhood. They were expected to stand the rough usage of army life. Knives, forks and spoons were of the same rude character. Pedlers, however, early appeared in camp with a combination, the three hooking together and making a very light, portable and convenient thing to carry, and many of the boys bought and carried them in preference to those furnished by the government. Some of the rations were served out to the men, as soon as received from the Commissary Department, such as sugar, salt, bread and salt pork. Other things like corned beef, beans and coffee were cooked by the company cook and served at meal times hot. Soft bread, a very good kind of wheat bread, was furnished at convenient times when we were in camp, at other times we received the regular army crackers. These were sometimes, during the first year, very poor; they had doubtless been in the government storehouses a long time, but later on when we received fresh crackers they were very palatable.

At eight o’clock every morning the surgeons’ call was sounded and any man who did not feel well could go and see the doctor, perhaps get excused from duty, get some pills or some quinine to take, or, if sick, be given a bed in the hospital. Although I spent nearly the entire year in the hospital (the last year of my service, after being wounded in July, 1864), previous to that time I only once answered the surgeons’ call and that was when every man in the regiment was ordered up to the surgeon’s tent and given a dose of quinine and whiskey. This was while we were at Newbern, North Carolina, when chills and fever were prevalent in the regiment. At nine o’clock in the evening tattoo was sounded, the signal for all soldiers to repair to their quarters, and fifteen minutes later taps gave the signal for all lights to be extinguished. This living in accordance with military regulation, seemed a little strange and reminded the writer of the time when he lived in a

factory village where a bell sounded the time to get up, where one is rung into the factory and rung out again, suggesting a kind of life where a man becomes simply a cog in a wheel.

We had been in camp about two weeks when we learned the Barre company was to be known as Company K, and that the regiment was to be the 21st Regiment of volunteer infantry from Massachusetts. We had wall tents with floors, and very good bunks to sleep on. If nothing else could be got a chip or a quart bottle made a candlestick, but a bayonet which could be stuck in the ground was more reliable. A large potato flattened on one side and a hole dug out for the candle, or a cake of soap were also pretty serviceable. When I enlisted at Barre I received a military cap, it was one of the caps of the Barre Militia Company. It was the only garment of a military character I had until I received my United States uniform just before leaving Worcester for the front. The color was navy blue and it was trimmed with a red cord. It was a French type of cap, but it was afterwards known as the McClellan cap throughout the army.

Drilling was, of course, the principal work of the day, at first in marching, company drill, platoon drill, squad drill, all to familiarize us with the movements of soldiers in two ranks. After a time we received muskets and then began the exercises in the manual of arms. Those muskets were of the most horrible kind imaginable, but they answered to drill with. That, however, was all they were good for excepting old junk. The name of our first captain was Parker. He was about six feet, six inches long. I think he was elected captain on account of his great length. He had been in the militia, I believe, but he knew as much about drilling or military matters generally as a South Sea Islander. As time went on, it was probably realized at headquarters that Captain Parker was not a suitable man to command a company in actual service, and he was never

sworn into the United States service, and when we left Worcester for the front, the company was commanded by Thomas Washburn, a Worcester man. The first lieutenant was a Methodist minister, a schemer and a shark. He expected to be made chaplain of the regiment and failing in that, soon left us, taking with him about $90.00 of the company's funds. The second lieutenant was a man by the name of Williams, a Barre man. I remember him as a man with a very large beard. A tall, slim man who was something of a drill master used to come over to camp, from the city and drill us occasionally. He wore a military uniform, stood very erect and had rather a military bearing. I think he would have accepted a commission in the company if one had been offered him, but he was not thus honored by Company K.

While in camp my sister Lizzie came down to Worcester and visited me, staying with some friends in the city, and the day we broke camp and started for the front, my brother John came down to see me off. August 16th, an officer of the United States regular army visited the regiment and mustered us into the volunteer service of the United States. The next day we received our uniforms, a woolen and an India rubber blanket. This last had a slit in the middle through which the head could be thrust, one end dropping down in front, the other end covering the back, thus taking the place of a waterproof overcoat. Our uniforms were of two colors, light or sky blue and dark navy blue. The trousers and overcoats were of sky blue, the latter having a cape. The blouse and cap were of a dark or navy blue. The cap was somewhat like the McClellan cap in form, but the circular stiff part on top tipped forward farther than on the McClellan cap.

The uniform of the non-commissioned officers, the corporal and sergeant, were the same as the private, they wearing chevrons on the sleeves of their coats to indicate their ranks. The commissioned officers were not expected to

associate with the privates at all; they belonged to another class of men entirely. They dressed in a very smart way. Their uniforms were all tailor-made, all dark blue in color; the dress coat quite a little like the Prince Albert coat; the cap they wore was usually the McClellan cap. Our accoutrements consisted of a belt, a cartridge box, cap box, bayonet-scabbard, haversack, canteen and knapsack. We were also furnished with new guns, Springfield smoothbores. These were a little better than those we had been using to drill with, but they were none too good. Thus, in a few days, these hundreds of boys were converted into a regiment of infantry soldiers, and on August 23d we marched forth from Camp Lincoln, our belts bristling with large bowie knives and revolvers, and started for the front. We took a train for Norwich, Conn. There we boarded a boat for Jersey City. As we passed along through the state, people in large numbers were gathered at the railroad stations to greet us, and from nearly every farmhouse a little flag or handkerchief signaled us a sympathetic goodbye. While we lay on the wharf at Jersey City, who should appear but George and Fred Lincoln of Brooklyn, N. Y. Their father was a Hardwick man and the family used to spend their summer vacations at the old family home in Hardwick at the time I worked for Mr. Walker. We had thus come to know each other quite well. They were two fine boys and I was glad to see them. About noon a train of freight cars were ready and we clambered aboard and started for Philadelphia. All the way through New Jersey the people were out in the streets waving their handkerchiefs and bidding us goodbye. So much goodbye-saying annoyed me after a time, and I withdrew inside the car out of sight and engaged my mind with other thoughts. About eight o’clock in the evening we reached Philadelphia. Here we were marched to the Cooper Shop saloon and were given a fine supper. We were very hungry and that supper was so good. We were made so welcome and

everything connected with it was so kindly and so genuine that through all our lives this was one of the incidents we looked back to with a feeling of grateful appreciation. If that was an example of Quaker kindness and Quaker charity I raise my hat to the descendants of William Penn and his colony.

Havre-de-Grace, where we arrived the next morning, August 25th, will always be remembered as the place where we received our first ammunition and where for the first time, we loaded our muskets with real ball cartridges. We were nearing Baltimore and would soon be on the edge of Rebeldom, but when we arrived in Baltimore, nothing occurred out of the ordinary. We marched unmolested and unnoticed through the city to Patterson Park, where we went into camp. I confess to not having slept much the first night we were there. It seemed as if it must be a city of dogs and the whole population was on the street barking all night. Such a barking, such a never-ending uproar—I never heard anything approaching it until I visited Cairo and Constantinople in recent years. Those cities are filled with tramp dogs, and as a result there is a constant breaking out of the barking of the dogs through the whole night. The second night we were at Patterson Park, the long roll was beaten at about one o'clock at night. We turned out, fell into line ready for business in short order but that was all there was to it; it was part of the exercise we were to become accustomed to, I imagine. We stayed at Baltimore three days and nothing out of the ordinary occurred. To be sure, we were not treated very cordially, but we were not insulted, we were just left severely alone. Personally, after I got a taste of the peaches and cantaloupes, I thoroughly enjoyed myself there. Those peaches and cantaloupes were of the finest kind and so cheap, I ate to my heart's content —rather to my stomach's content. August 29th we went to Annapolis, where we were quartered in the Naval School buildings. The cadets and everything that was movable had

been taken to Newport, R. I. The grounds of the academy supplied us with a fine drill field and we utilized it constantly and became, as we thought, quite proficient. But one fine day as the troops assembled there to go on the Sherman expedition to Bufort and Port Royal, S. C., there came two German regiments from New York City. Every man was by birth a German and they had evidently been through the military training incident to all native German boys. Well, the evolutions of those regiments as they drilled were a revelation to us. None of us had at the time seen anything comparable with it and it made us feel as provincial as you please.

At Baltimore we had a glimpse of negro life,—but it was only a glimpse. We were there so short a time, and not being allowed to leave camp, all we saw was the glances we got as we marched through the city on our way to the camp and as we went away. But at Annapolis and on the railroad out in the country we had a chance to see something of the negro and negro life. Those we saw on the street and about the town at Annapolis were fairly well dressed and looked a little poorer only than those one would see in a northern city. One day, however, while out rowing with a crowd of the boys we landed at the wharf of a man in the oyster business; boat loads of oysters were arriving at the wharf, brought in by negroes who raked them, and in a small building were a number of negro men and women opening oysters. These last were a sight to be remembered. The negroes were hardly dressed at all, and the few clothes they had on were of the very coarsest material, and they looked about like the kind one would expect to see in Africa. Our cattle and horses in the North have the appearance of being better cared for, and as those negroes worked, there was no intimation of intelligence; they worked like horses in a treadmill. Later on, while doing picket duty out on the railroad, I saw a lot of cornfield negroes at a negro husking. There was a long pile of corn

heaped up just as it was cut in the field and all around it sat the negroes husking. They sang most of the time a monotonous sing-song tune. There were present negroes from different parts of the plantation and there was a feud to be avenged. All at once each man whipped out an axe-handle and at each other they went with a fury thoroughly brutal, pounding each other on the body, head or anywhere. The overseers were soon after them and had them separated and at their husking again. The axe-handles, all that could be got hold of, were taken away from them. These field negroes, or cornfield negroes, are about the lowest and worst in the South. Great care has to be exercised to prevent them from getting hold of knives. Had half a dozen of these negroes had knives at that time there would have been a lot of blood spilled. There was quite a little spilled as it was.

October 22. There has been quite a bit of excitement the last two days in camp caused by the secreting in the grounds of a negro slave who was also assisted in his escape by some of the boys. The negro belonged to Governor Hicks and he was seen making his escape into the grounds. Colonel Morse did his best to find the negro but no one else gave himself any trouble about the matter. The negro was carefully hidden in an old chimney until night, when one of the boys stole a rowboat in the town, took it around to a little dark place behind some old sheds, loaded Mr. Negro into the boat, gave him a bag of hardtack and started him off down the sound in the direction of Baltimore.

It was no uncommon thing for negroes to be assisted in making their escape by the boys, but this negro, having been seen entering the grounds by the main gate, and the owner being no less a person than the Governor of the State, the affair was given exceptional importance.

Those of us boys who were fond of shell fish, had a treat at Annapolis. The famous Chesapeake Bay oysters were in