

Benson

1893

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A Story of the 154 Regt. N.Y. Vols.

Written for the 30 Anniversary of the Battle of Chancellorsville V.A.-- Dedicated to my comrade and friend friend, Hon. A.W. Benson, late Capt. in the 154 Regt. N.Y. who was wounded in that battle, and left for dead on the field, but who lived to read his own obituary published in the Jamestown Journal at the time, and who now lives a and is present at this anniversary meeting, to tell the story of his escape from death.

*By John W. Ellman
The 154 Regt. N.Y. Vols.*

Do you mind comrade; tis thirty years tonight,
Since our regiment received its baptism in fight;
We had seen some service; in camp and on march;
and knew what it was for our throats to parch-
For want of water, in ^{the} Old Dominion dust;
And we ate pork, and hard-tack, because we must.
We had marched "mit Seigle" oer the field of Bull Run;
Where the dead lay in heaps, *to bleach in the sun;*
We had marched to Fredricksburg, in mud to our knees,
While we took in the chickens we found at Dumfrees;
We were ordered to be there by a certain day;
But the short legged Dutchmen got stuck "mit de clay;"

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"mit Seigle" we got there, ten hours late;
 which probably saved us from a much worse fate.

When we reached the field, it was nearly night,
 And just too late to get into the fight;
 But we covered the retreat of Burnside's men -
 From that terrible hell, called the Slaughter Pen.
 We were ordered to Stafford, not liking it much,
 So we shouldered our axes, and beat the Dutch;
 In building some fine winter quarters.

Our camp we built ~~there~~, in right splendid style;
~~we~~ Making fun of the Dutchmen's work meanwhile,
 Because their quarters resembled a sty;—

But we laughed too soon, you will remember why.
 Burnside was designing a winter campaign;

And in laying his plans, that end to attain,
 He ordered Seigle to send a battalion of men.

Over to the river, to a thick pine glen;
 To cut away the timber, and to make some roads;
 A way for the heavy pontoon loads.

So Seigle, looking over "mine famous Dutch Corps";
 And spying ~~the~~ the fellows who, if nothing more,

Knew how to handle their axes and chops;

Said "Colonel Shonés, you takes dot regiment, and trot,
 Right over by the river, into dot grove of pine!
 Twas mighty cold weather, but no use to whine.
 So in mid winter, we left our quarters so grand,
 And the Dutch, took possession, without demand.

It snowed that night, we bivouaced in the timber;
 And some things were said, like "blixum", and "blinders",
 Or, knocking the Dutchmen all into "flinders".
 But with hard-tack, and coffee, and a sleep in the snow,
 We awoke in the morning, better natured I know;
 But wondering much, if the order was legal;
 Or, if this was the way, we "fights mit Seigle".
 We were ^{seen} chopping too hard to grumble, or shiver,
 And making the roads, to lead down to the river.
 What this kind of work might all be about,
 We were not very long, to be left in doubt;
 For one dismal morning, we were all ordered about,
 And were retracing our steps by the selfsame rout.
 After marching a few miles to the rear that day,
 We found the roads crowded by troops in our way.
 We were ordered to halt, and ^{to} let them pass;
 We complied, not forgetting to give them the "sass"

In fifteen minutes, the guns were stacked,

we had learned while on skirmish, "mit Seigle";-

For "Gray Backs"; which in the army was legal.

The roads were frozen all smooth, and strong,

And the trundle of artillery, was loud and long,

And must have given Lee's army *fair* warning;

To look out for Burnside's *army*, before morning:

And they did, as you will most surely recall;

And it made our army too, feel rather small.

Well; then we were ordered to stack arms, and wait-

The slow coming up, of the huge pontoon freight,

Which we were to guard, going down the pine ridge

To the river, and to help ⁱⁿ build _{ing} the bridge,

Over which, our troops were to rush en mass,

Then, just gobble the "Johnneys"; but alack, and alas!

All day it portended a downfall of rain;

While we were still waiting for the pontoon train.

At three oclock P.M., the rain began to fall.

The boats were heavy, and hard to haul;

The rain increased, till it came in a flood;

And the roads were fast *becoming* a bed of mud.

for The artillery wagons, with their heavy loads,

were cutting the crust of the frozen roads;

In fifteen minutes, the guns were stacked,

The mules were floundering knee deep in mud;
 And the pontoon train, was down to the hub.
 The teamsters were cursing, the unlucky mules;
 Not minding at all, the government rules.
 We were soaked clear through with the pouring rain,
 While stuck hard and fast, was the pontoon train.
 The night was as dark, as dark could be,
 And we stood in the mud, with back to a tree,
 While our boys struck up the old army song;
 Which was responded to, loudly and long.
 "So let the pontoons, wag as they will,
 We'll be gay, and happy still".
 The rain had ceased, and the morning light,
 Showed Burnside's army in a comical plight;
 Certainly, not in good trim for a fight:
 For the army was plastered, with Virginia clay;
 And the batteries looked, as if planted to stay—
 Right where they were, till some other day.
 Lee's army, delighted, just called it a joke;
 And wrote on the sign-boards, — big capital stroke, —
 "Burnside's grand army is stuck in the mud!!"

In fifteen minutes, the guns were stacked,

While they quietly grinned, and chewed their cud.
 Among things which happened, that miserable night,
 Was the loss of two men, who vanished from sight.
 Their guns were found, sticking fast in the clay;
 But where the men were, none ever could say.

Did they sink out of sight, in that bottomless mud?
 Or, purposely stick up their guns, and scud?
 Certain it is, that we ne'er saw them more;
 Either in the Eleventh, or in any other Corps.

Like a whipped cur, our army returned to its place,
 Begrimed all with mud, and with rather poor grace.
 But the hard-tack regiment, were played out of their ^{camp;}
 And we bivouaced on the ground, in the mud and the damp.
 But the clouds kindly dropped, a mantle of white,
 On the sleeping Hard-tacks, through the silence of night;
 And the morning sun shone on a comical sight;
 As our boys bobbed up, from their bedquilt of white.
 So we set to work then, to build a new camp,
 Which was well completed ere time for the lamp.
 Here ended our service "mit Von-Seigle alore";
 For he now disappeared to be seen no more.

In fifteen minutes, the guns were stacked,

Leading the men, who the crescent wore.

His honor had come, from a fight with ^{Gen} Price,

At Pea Ridge, whence he 'scaped, in a way which was nice;

So the news papers said, all over the land;

And that he a corps, really ought to command.

So they made him Major General, there, ~~out~~ off hand.

The winter of eighteen sixty two, and three,

Will long be remembered, by us, you see;

For it was darkened, with doubt, and fear;

From dismal shrieks, ever howled in the rear;

That the terrible war, was a failure great,

That we never could whip a rebel state;

And the coppersy guns, which fired this yell;

We verily wished were shut up, in h-ll.

Yet, brave hearts were active, through those gloomy times;

The army, drilled, and strengthened, in all its lines;

A new general in command, with courage, and *might*;

Proposed to crushing rebellion, in one *big fight*.

Joe Hooker, was the man who promised success:

And all our hearts beat, "may it be nothing less".

In fifteen minutes, the guns were stacked,

By April, all was ready for a campaign grand;
 And Lincoln came out, to review the command.
 While we all loved the man, we scarce could but laugh,
 At the figure he made, mounted, and leading his staff,
 As he rode at a canter, beside General Joe;
 Who was a superb rider, as you all well know.
 But when before Lincoln, we marched in review,
 And looked in his face, so loyal and true;
 It seemed to inspire us with deeper devotion
 For our country, and flag, *our heart's best* emotion.
 With hope in our breasts, from this inspiration,
 We were ready to battle all the Rebs. in the land; —
We Felt sure, success awaited Joe Hooker's command.

In April, we were ordered to Kelly's Ford,
 In advance of the rest of the army horde;
 To do picket duty, along the Rappahannoc River;
 But were ordered to keep our main force, under "kiver";
 So as not to attract attention, 'twas said;
 Lest the Rebels come over, and catch us abed.
 The pontcons were sent down, and hidden from sight.
 Next day we drew 60 rounds, all *ready to fight*

In fifteen minutes, ^{the} the guns were stacked,

Just at dusk, we moved silently down to the ford,
 And volunteers were called for, the boats to board.
 When all ready, we shoved to the southern side.
 The Rebel Videts fired, but the balls went wide,
 For none were hurt, and we scrambled up the banks,
 And in brief time, the shore was lined with Yanks.
 The night was as dark as dark could ^{be} be.
 Neither Rebels, nor any thing else, could we see.
 We quickly formed in line of battle, ready,
 And the Colonel's voice rang out, clear and steady, —
 "Fix bayonets, forward, guide center, double quick, charge!!"
 And into the darkness, we plunged with a will,
 Which soon brought us up against Keller's, old mill.
 Here pickets were thrown out for the night;
 And there we rested on our arms, till light.
 Just at the dawn, in the morning mist,
 A tole was taken, of all the millers grist:
 Likewise chicken, turkey, pigs, and eggs newly laid,
 Were all taken in, by the requisition made.
 But the bugle sounded, and we marched away,
 For we must cross over the Rap idan, that day.

In fifteen minutes, the guns were stacked,

We reached Germania Ford, about three oclock,
 And found our corps train piled up, in a block.
 The river was high, and Rapid-ann indeed,
 And many a mule found out his need
 Of longer legs, and more weight to the pound,
 In which case he would not have been drowned.
 Well, after a long and tiresome delay,
 We were all across, and ^{again} under way,
 Then darkness settled over our dreary road,
 And our knapsacks, seemed such a heavy load,
 As footsore and weary, we trudged on in the dusk,
 So tired, we would gladly have laid down in the dust,
 And stretched our tired limbs, right there in the road,
 Just to free our shoulders from their heavy load.
 But every souldier knows, and that full well,
 That it ^{never} would ~~do~~ do any good for him to tell
 The general; twas time to halt, for a spell.
 Twas near midnight, when we finally came to a stop;
 Many of us, so tired, we were ready to drop.
 Twas right on the plank road, as I now recall,
 Just where, next day Jackson opened the ball.
 In fifteen minutes, ^{after} the guns were stacked,

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The knapsacks unslung, and thrown over back,
Our boys were all sleeping in blissful repose;—
Kind natures panacea, for all our woes;
While scattered about, our army corps lay,
Nor dreamed, of the scenes of the coming day.

The reveille was sounded, at the morning's dawning,
And we all got up, with a wonderful longing
For coffee, bacon, and goodhard-tack;
Of which each had five days rations, in *havensack*.
But just when our coffee, was almost done;
The rebels bethought them, to have some fun.
Whiz, whiz, bang! bang! just over our head.
'Twas only some stray rebel shell, they said.
But it made just then, quite a lively commotion;
In which our boys, lost of their coffee a portion.
A few more shells, came, just to let us see
How polite, the rebels intended to be,
By giving us salutes, for our coffee and tea
That breakfast was swallowed in rather quick time,
And we were soon ready to fall into line;
But as our General did not seem to be in a hurry,

We concluded 'twas useless, to get in a flurry;
 But to look about, and see the lay of the land;
 And to decide what to do, in case we lacked sand,
 When the orders came, to stand up and fight;
 Without losing control of our own legs quite.

Position of the Corps given.

At nine, Hooker and Staff, rode over our way;—
 Had a short talk with Howard, but did not stay.
 Had he known Howard then, as he knew him that night,
 A change of commanders had come, outright.
 What plans were brewing, we weren't supposed to know;—
 We were only to be ready, whenever told to go.
 But like any one, without too much rank /
 We saw through the timber, the move toward our flank;
 Which to our minds, clearly, boded no good;
 And was the theme of our talk, as waiting, we stood;
 And watched them, through the opening in the wood.
 Our corps seemed then, to be taking its ease;
 And the bands were all playing, their light airy glees;
 Which sounded like this, or more so, if you please. —

"yankee doodle doodle doo,

Yankee doodle dandy;

We shall whip the Johny Rebs

Just as neat, and handy".

As the day wore on, and nothing was done,

We became uneasy, and watched the lowering sun.

To our left, we sometimes heard a random gun,

Which woke the sullen silence of our waiting foe;

But just what was going, we could not know.

It must have been near to five o'clock, when

Some wild deer, rushed through the ranks of the men

of the third and ~~first~~ divisions.

The boys chased the deer, and began to yell,

Not know that behind, was a regular hell,

With Stonewall Jackson as leader.

A moment later, there came a rattle of picket shot,

Which called our attention to the spot.

Then came, a long and deafening rifle roar;

As if loosed were the guns, of the whole Rebel corps.

The next thing we saw, from that ill fated spot,

Were the flying Dutchmen, yelling "mine Gott".

"Zee whole Rebel army, have got in our rear,
 "And if only General Franz Seigle were here,
 "For we fights mit Seigle, and runs mit Howard,
 "And gives not a zam, mit you call us a coward."

The surprise was so sudden, their guns were left in stac ^(k)

They came down the road, like a race horse on track.
 Soon the third division swept over us, En-mass; —

We were face, to face, with the Rebels, at last.
 Our regiment was now, about six hundred strong;
 And we ha^d bragged of our prowess, ever so long.

Now a word ^{to} explain something of our position.

Farlow, with the best brigade in our division,
 Had gone with General Sickles, off on a scout;

Not more than ^a half ~~an~~ hour before the rout.

We were left thus, without any support.

But very much quicker than I can tell,

The Rebels came on, with the terrible yell,

Old soldiers all learned to know so well;

For it meant to many, the sad death knell.

On, on, they came, like a line of grey mist;

Out of which, the leaden balls, shrieked and hissed

Their stars and bars, floating out *mid* the smoke,
 Full plainer, than even their rifles, spoke,
 Just who; and what they were.

But our regiment stood, a loyal line.

Our banner unfurled, to the breeze so fine.

A moment, and our colonel broke the spell, —

"That's the Rebels boys, give them hell"

Then a steady roar, from our rifles pealed;

And the thick grey line before us, reeled.

And staggered, as if from a mighty blow,

From the unseen hand of a hidden foe.

But on they came, just as if they must; —

Now surely, their line is biting the dust;

And the brown grey mass is getting thin; —

For the way we were firing, it was no sin.

For our blood was up, and our guns were hot,

And how long this lasted, I tell you not;

For none can measure the time in a fight,

With the *expectation* least of getting it right.

But while the grey line in our front went down,

The *long* flanks of the rebel Corps swept round,

And the first we knew, there was into us poured,
 A rear flank fire, from the rebel horde;
 And our boys were falling, thick and fast; —
 Still, the old flag waved, mid the deadly blast.
 Every other regiment, from the field had fled;
 Followed by Howard, crying, they said: —
 But the hard-tack regiment, was there to stay;
 So long as there was any hope, of the day.
 Our Colonel was wounded; our ~~adjutant~~ ^{adjutant} dead,
 The Lt. Colonel ordered, "fall back"; for he said
 "We can do nothing more than to stop their lead."
 Its hard to think of our retreat that hour;
 For we were raked, with a terrible shower-
 Of leaden death, and of bursting shell;
 And we had to go pretty much pell-mell,
 For a quarter mile, to reach the timber.
 For the air was full, of the hissing lead.
 And ^awonder any escaped, it ^{will} might be said.
 For one, I felt just a little queer;
 And wished for once, I was not in the rear.
 At last we reached the third corps line,

And found them standing ^{all} firm and fine .
We formed in their rear, round our colors there ,
And gave three cheers for the Sergeant; who dare,
To hold, and wave them, in Stonewall's face ;
As we checked him there, in his rapid chase
Of the eleventh corps, in its headlong race .
For we ~~held~~ ^{held} for an hour, Joe Hooker said ,
In that deadly storm, of the Rebel lead ,
The flower, of Jacksons corps ;
And saved the army, from further rout ,
By giving them time to wheel about ,
And fill the breach, the eleventh had made ,
And meet Stonewall, in his flanking raid .
But the price we paid, was a terrible cost ;
Of more than half, our number in lost .
Our Sergeant had paced, with a firm free tread ,
Back and forth, through the storm of ~~of~~ lead
Which riddled the colors, in their silken strands,
And splintered the standard, between his hands .
All honor now, to that Sergeant so brave ,
For his blood stained the banner he loved to wave .

On Gettysburgs field, he fell in his might; —
 Neath the folds of "Old Glory" he fought his last fight.

 Our depleted regiment, now closed up its line,
 Took position ^{and} was ready for a second time,
 For another round, if they chose to come,
 For we were in rear of many a gun
 Which ~~was~~ shotted with canister and ^{with} grape,
 And ready to receive them, in good shape -
 Batteries stretched from the plank road, a quarter mile,
 And were put in as thick as they could well pile -
 It had now been dark, for some little time,
 We could hear the Rebs again, getting into line,
 Just up the plank road, there in the wood.
 Maybe 'twas wicked, but we felt good,
 That they were about to get their pay,
 For the way, they had used our corps, that day -
 A moment of silence, and then their "Hi! Hi, Hi!!"
 A signal for our batterys, to just let fly -
 Right into ^{their} faces our batterys pote,
 The missiles of death, which through their ranks tore;

While in the woods beyond, our shot and shell,
 Rang in turn to them, the sharp death knell.
 Three times that night, with courage and might,
 Those Rebels charged, right up to the light,
 Of our guns, which shone ^{full} into their faces. —
 As the files went down, others stepped in their places,
 With a courage worthy of a better cause,
 Than trying to rend ^{down} our flag, and our laws.
 Ceased the fighting at length, and all was hushed,
 Save the groans of the wounded, all mangled and crushed,
 As the blue and the grey together had rushed.
 There, silent in death, they lay in their gore,
 And were sleeping the sleep that wakens no more.

 Thus ended the battle of the second of May.
 But of our brave boys, ah, what shall I say?
 Wounded, and dying, they were scattered about;
 And much of the fault of this criminal rout,
 Was just for the want of a man in command,
 Who would see that his corps had a chance to stand.
 Perhaps I am wrong, but I never could see

The slightest excuse for Howard to be,
That day, surprised .

Among the boys ^{that} we missed that night,

Was one from Co.H, who fell in the fight.

A bullet had pierced him through the breast,

As he stood in line, and was doing his best .

His rifle was smoking, the muzzle was hot; —

He was seen to fall right where he was shot .

As the regiment fell back, he was carried part way,
By whom, he was never able to say .

But I found him propped up, against a tree,

And more dead than alive, he looked to be .

The blood was flowing from his breast, and back;

From the cruel wound of the bullets track .

It seemed to me he would surely die .

And no one was near, to help me try

To carry him off the field .

I had but a moment with him to spare

For the Rebels then were almost there .

I said goodbye to my old schoolmate ; —

Compelled to leave him thus to his fate .

of course
He was reported as among the dead;

But in some way he beat that Rebel lead,

And is here tonight, for himself to tell

How he lived to crawl out of that terrible hell.

For we raked those woods, with shot and shell;

And how he escaped, 'tis a wonder.