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THE FUN IN ARMY LIFE

LAUGHABLE OCCURENCES IN CAMP.

Prepared by John F. Wellman for the Reunion of the 154th.

My Dear Aldrich and Comrades:--Your letter containing notice of reunion of our regiment at Ellicottville the 29th ult., and your kind invitation to write a few lines of remembrance to my comrades is before me, and duly appreciated. No greater enjoyment could come to me than to be with you and grasp again each kindly hand, but since distance precludes that pleasure I will try and write a few words that you may know that I do not forget.

I will call your attention, my comrades, briefly to one of the important factors in the success of our arms in crushing the most gigantic rebellion the world ever saw; viz.: The funny side of things. You all know, comrades, that we had in every company and regiment the boys who turned everything into a joke; whether in camp, march or battle, 'twas all the same, we had to laugh, and but for that we all should have been under the doctor's care, and Uncle Sam would have had no soldiers.

I can only mention a few of the funny things at which we laughed, but each of you comrades can remember a hundred more. I'll not call any names, because it isn't polite. In Co. B at Jamestown one of our boys used to entertain us after taps by bleating like a lamb 'till the whole barracks were in a roar; but some were in favor of putting that sheep in the guard house.

That same boy made us all howl with laughter at Chancellorsville, May 4th, when he appeared before the company without gun or strap and, with solemn face, told Capt. Poole that a solid shot had struck and smashed his gun in his hands, passing around his body and cutting off cartridge box, belt, haversack and canteen.

I think you will all remember the old Mexican veteran who at Jamestown used to call, when on duty at night, "Corporal th' guard; post next to mine," and who, when we were at target practice near Falmouth, Va., used to pull off his gun at 45 degrees.

I always have to laugh over a thing that happened at Jamestown. You know whiskey was contraband and was smuggled into camp more or less. I was on duty one night in the road below camp; I had charge of the guard, with special instructions to look sharp for contraband goods. Well, in one tent in G Co. the boys were thirsty and had cramps in their stomachs, so they got a pass to go down town for the doctor (a bottle). Well, we passed him down all right. He came back in about an hour, but no doctor in sight; it was quite dark. The guard hailed him. I inquired for the doctor, and even felt in all his pockets, but found no doctor, so I passed him on. As I did so I caught the sound of a swash of liquid in a bottle. I stepped toward him and put my hand on his back and in doing so placed my hand on a quart bottle (the doctor) between his soldiers. He had needed the medicine and taken a sup or two, and as a result it made a juggling noise when he walked. Well, he reached for the string round his neck and pulled the doctor out, and as he did so threw it to the ground

with a force which crushed the spirit out, saying as he did so, "Be Jobs! ye'll not have any of it!"

That soldier never liked me very well after that till, later, on the Rocky Faced Ridge I was in command of his company. We were up there just under the crest of the ridge when he was shot through his thigh and would have fallen down the rocks only I caught him in my arms and had him taken to a place of safety. If living, I would like to grasp his hand today. You all know how sore we felt for the comrades who went down that 8th day of May, and yet a few days later at Resaca the night we went to get the guns out of the fort, an Ohio regiment had left many of its dead in front of the fort. Our boys were ordered to lie down while the guns were dug out; they were tired and sleepy, and the officers walked about to see that they kept awake. In doing so they frequently made the mistake of trying to wake up a dead man, and after two or three attempts some of our boys would holler out, "Hit him ag'in, he's Irish!" And then the laugh would follow on the officer all along the line. And so we made a joke of death.

I remember the next morning you got the joke on me. I could not find Bowen, who had my blanket, so I crawled under a blanket with the first man who seemed to have any to spare. Some of you woke me in the morning and said that coffee and hardtack were ready. I roused up and took a cup of coffee some one gave me. The man beside me did not get up; I reached over and shook him, he did not stir; I threw the blanket back from over his face, he was dead. Then you fellows laughed long and loud, and suggested that I give him some coffee.

You all remember how the veterans of McClellan's army felt after Burnside's defeat at Fredericksburg. B and G companies were guarding the batteries overlooking Falmouth. One night as I lay in my tent I overheard one of our Co. B boys giving those batterymen a lecture. They had been through several battles, had been badly cut up and felt pretty blue. Our chap wound up his lecture by saying, "You fellows think you have had a hard time, but when you have been through what we have you will begin to know what war is." Captain Poole laughed until he cried to hear our chap talk.

I think some of you know something about cart peddlers' pies at Fairfax C.H. There was one of Co. B's boys who could buy one pie, and while he was talking to the driver and making change all the pies in the fellow's box would vanish away to the river through a line of boys who stood with honest faces.

I think you will all remember Christmas day at Stafford C.H., Va. The regiment went in for a jolly time, and had it. I recall a picture in Co. B's street that day toward evening. I have to laugh. I seem to hear the roars of laughter yet of Co. B, then nearly too strong. There had been plenty of army commissary in camp that day, and some of our boys had got pretty happy, and some had so much that they had to sleep it off. Among that number was a young chap who was something of a dandy in his way. He cultivated a curled mustache, and almost invariably when talking his fingers would go up to stroke his mustache. Well, some of his mates put a fine edge on a razor and, while he was peacefully dreaming of the girl he left behind him, slid that razor over his lip so carefully that his pride and joy was removed

without his waking. Then the drum was beat for parade, when our little man came forth into the company street, stretched himself and yawned, then the boys began to laugh. Up went his hands to his lip; the mustache was gone. He jumped three feet into the air, and came down raining fire and brimstone on anybody, he did not know who, while roars of laughter greeted him at every word.

But Co. B was not content with one act, so another was got up that afternoon. One of our nice boys in Co. B had chronic trouble and the joy of the day had been too much for him, and resulted in his having to remove his pants and drawers. Clothing was short with us at the time, and someone loaned him a pair of pants from which the seat had been cut preparatory to putting in a new one. Well, his chum put them on (he was too happy to know the difference) and marched up and down the company street while he sang songs and quoted Shakespeare, amid roars of laughter by the boys.

Another comic scene comes to mind: In camp at Lookout Valley one of Co. G's boys could mimic Col. Bushbeck to perfection. One day he got on a stump and went through the orders for brigade drill, imitating the colonel, while the boys laughed and hollered. But while the fun was going on, down the path comes Col. Bushbeck from the rear, and coming softly up put his hand on the boys shoulders and said; "Dot will do, boy, when I is far away; far away!" Our comrade was so scared that he nearly turned a somersault to the ground, while the colonel walked on, laughing. I am not sure, but I think the same boy had something to do with the chaplain's shirt on a pole back at Falmouth; at any rate, he was one of the boys who supplied the regiment with fun.

There were many funny things happened on our march from Atlanta to Savannah. I recall that one day we found a number of barrels of sorghum syrup on a plantation and the boys at once began to fill their canteens. Among the new recruits was a young boy who was very fond of the sweet stuff. He went on the run for the barrel, and crowded his way in much to the annoyance of those already there. Then some of you Old Vets stepped back and as he leaned over the barrel, took him by the heels and dipped him into the barrel head first. That was almost as bad as the Filipino water cure. Some of you may remember that I had the water cure administered to me on that march. 'Twas down on the Ocomulgee River, you remember we tore up a lot of railroad track and burned a bridge over that river. Well about the time we were ready to leave, up came a lot of darkies on the opposite bank, wanting to get across to us. You know the river was narrow, but deep. We shoved a lot of loose plank from the bridge across to them, and most of them came across all right, but one old mamma who would weigh 200 pounds got frightened when nearly over and made a lunge for the shore. I was stooped down holding the end of the plank, and she landed on my head and shoulders. The result was, I took the water cure head first, and all over in ten feet of water; just then the bugle sounded, fall in, and away we marched. You may believe I was not in a very comfortable mood, with all the regiment having fun at my expense.

And now comrades good-by. I think we may all thank the Lord for the fun making boys in the army, and that so many of us live today to recount them.

With kindly memories of you all I am sincerely yours, JOHN F. WELLMAN. Carlsbad, August 30, 1902.

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