

HISTORY  
OF THE  
SIXTEENTH REGIMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
VOLUNTEERS.

BY  
ADJUTANT, LUTHER TRACY TOWNSEND

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Published by

HENRY L. JOHNSON AND LUTHER T. TOWNSEND.

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NORMAN T. ELLIOTT,  
PRINTER AND PUBLISHER,  
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1897.

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But the country was found to be so well defended and there were so many obstacles preventing the navigation of Bayous Teche and Atchafalaya that those undertakings for the subjugation of the Confederates in that section of the state were for the time abandoned.

General Butler a few weeks later was superseded by General Banks who after taking command of the army was equally impressed with the desirableness, if not necessity, of occupying that important territory: accordingly late in the month of January he organized two expeditions, one under General Weitzel with four thousand men, which was to move up the Teche country from Berwick, and the other under General Emory with three thousand men to move up the Atchafalaya from the same place. They were ordered to operate in conjunction, and capture Fort Burton at Butte a' la Rose and destroy its fortifications.

But owing to difficulties in securing suitable transportation, and owing to the supposed strength of the fortifications at Butte a' la Rose and the number of the garrison, that expedition likewise was abandoned.

But now that our troops were advancing up the Teche country it became necessary to undertake again the project that had been twice abandoned, namely, the clearing of the Atchafalaya of all Confederates and if possible the capturing of Butte a' la Rose; for while the enemy held that point not only was our advancing army imperiled, but there would be uninterrupted navigation for the Confederates between Red river and Brashear City, which if possible should be prevented.

In the adjutant's journal is this note, dated April fifteenth: "The intermations are that our regiment will garrison this place [Brashear] until our term of enlistment expires."

But on the morning of April eighteenth, three days later, we received orders to put the regiment in readiness for marching at a moment's notice. Accordingly, at noon we were relieved by the Fourth Massachusetts.

Our regiment without delay was organized into a battalion of six companies.

Company officers who were able to report for duty were assigned command according to their rank, in this new organization.

Meantime, the boys were busy preparing their outfit. They were ordered to supply themselves with one day's rations and one hundred rounds of ammunition.

When the order came to "fall in" they were ready and marched to the pier, whence they were to depart on an important, and what was considered perilous mission. The other four companies, being on detached duty, from which they could not then be relieved, were to follow a few days later.

We were distributed on four gunboats that had received orders "to proceed up Bayou Atchafalaya to clear it of obstructions and of Confederate gunboats, and to make an attack on Butte a' la Rose." If the attack proved successful, the Sixteenth was to be left to garrison and defend it.

The fleet, consisting of the gunboats *CLIFTON*, *ARIZONA*, *CALHOUN*, and *ESTRELLA*, was under the command of A. P. Cook. The major and adjutant were assigned duty on the *ARIZONA*, the courage and brilliancy of whose commander already were well known; the lieutenant-colonel was with Commander Cook on the *ESTRELLA*.

It should be borne in mind that the whole country for



fifty miles west of the Mississippi, including, therefore, the territory of which we are not speaking, is covered with countless bayous, lakes, rivers, and swamps that cross and connect with one another, many of them during the season of high water being easily navigable for boats of considerable draught.

At the time of which we are writing, the Atchafalaya was navigable from the gulf of Mexico to Red river, and as suggested, Butte a' la Rose was the key to those various connecting bodies of water and to the entire country lying between Opelousas and Port Hudson on the north, to the Gulf of Mexico on the south, to the Mississippi on the east, and to the Teche country on the west.

The accompanying map gives an idea of the number of the larger and navigable bayous in the part of Louisiana of which we are speaking; but aside from those there were numberless smaller ones.

In sailing up the Atchafalaya and across its chain of lakes and connecting bayous, nothing eventful happened during the first day, which was April eighteenth. Just before dark on the evening of that day, near the head of Grand Lake, the flag boat, *ESTRELLA*, signaled the

others that they were to tie up for the night. She alone cast anchor, the others as a precautionary and utility measure were moored to her by hemp hawsers. Should there be, as was somewhat expected, a night attack from the Confederate gunboats, which were just above us, the hawsers easily could be slipped and the boats quickly brought into position for action.

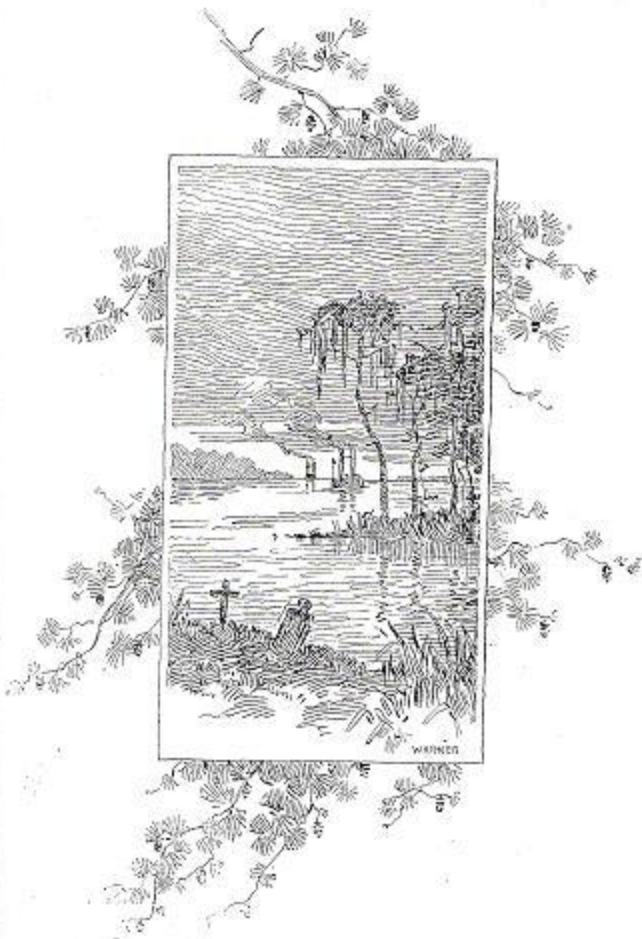
At nine o'clock, as an additional precaution, every light on the boats was extinguished or shaded; but the night passed without anything of importance transpiring.

At daybreak we were moving and early passed through Chene' bayou into a lake of the same name. The country was found everywhere flooded, in consequence of unusual high water, caused, it was said, by cuts in the Mississippi that Grant had made in his effort to capture Vicksburg.

The scenery along the margin of that bayou, as had been that along the shores of Grand Lake and other bayous the day before, was monotonous and uninspiring. The heavy foliage of the trees, the immense growth of moss, the dense undergrowth of vines, brushwood and saplings afforded the fittest place in the world for "the slimy pathway" of moccasin and rattle snakes and for the stealthy creeping of numberless alligators, turtles and other reptiles, but was a miserable enough place for men whose birthplace had been on the shores of the transparent streams and lakes and among the granite mountains of New Hampshire.

The vaporous atmosphere and tropical cloud-drapery of that section of Louisiana, apart from their novelty, were after the first few hours quite destitute of interest.

In the advance the gunboat *CLIFTON* was in the lead, but at nine o'clock she met with an accident by running into a tree and dropped back for repairs. The *ARIZONA* meanwhile took the lead. Near noon, being within two miles of Butte a' la Rose, she was made fast to a tree and we waited anxiously for the coming of the rest of the



A GLIMPSE OF GRAND LAKE.

fleet that had been detained by reason of the accident to the *CLIFTON*.

Commander Upton was desirous of making an attack on Butte a' la Rose alone, and most of our men were willing if not over-anxious that he should do this. But his orders from the cautious yet generous-hearted Captain Cook were explicit; he must, therefore, await the coming of the other boats. As they did not put in an appearance, the *ARIZONA*, late in the afternoon, dropped down the bayou, but in doing so became unmanageable; a strong current swung her against a tree and smashed the wheel-house.

At length, in a somewhat dilapidated condition, she reached the remainder of the fleet at the head of Lake Chene'. Here the boats were moored for the night in a manner similar to that of the night before.

The chief matters of interest during the day were the difficulties of navigating the tortuous bayous, the shooting of two of our gunners by Confederate guerrillas, who were concealed somewhere in the swamp and behind the trees, and the taking of two prisoners who were in citizen's dress, rather poor at that, and who were questioned and cross-questioned, but

the information gained was of no material value.

One of the men, who claimed to be a Unionist (of this, however, there was some doubt), after assuring Captain Upton of his perfect loyalty and thorough acquaintance with the entire country, was taken into the wheel-house to assist in piloting the boat.

At daybreak, April twentieth, the boats were again freed from their moorings and started up the narrow bayou, the *ARIZONA* this time being in the lead.

Coming within sight of the fort at Butte a' la Rose, she dropped back by order of Captain Cook, and the *CLIFTON*, under command of Captain Frederic Crocker, having by far the heavier armament, led the fleet.

Everybody then was in a state of expectancy. The guns of the fort and those of the two Confederate boats were trained on our slowly advancing fleet. We moved cautiously for no one knew but the Confederates had placed in the bayou dangerous obstructions and explosives. We were in danger, also, or at least felt we were, of being picked off by sharpshooters concealed among the trees skirting both sides of the bayou, who had wounded one and killed another of our gunners the day before.

At ten o'clock the "ball opened" with a hundred pounder from a Parrott gun on the bows of the *CLIFTON*. From that moment the work was lively on both sides. The reverberations of the larger guns among those dense forests skirting the narrow channel were deafening. The rapid discharge of muskets, too, showed that our boys were doing in earnest their part in the assault on the enemy's works.

The *CLIFTON* concentrated her fire upon the Confederate gunboats, while the *ARIZONA* brought her guns to bear on the fort. Captain Crocker, hearing the port guns of the *ARIZONA* and knowing that she would take care of the fort without his help, began a chase up the bayou after the retiring Confederates. Meantime, both





Near Botte à la Rose; Bushwhackers Firing on Federal Transports.

the *CLIFTON* and *ARIZONA* sent their broadsides of grape from the starboard guns into the forests to keep in check any lurking guerrillas that might be concealed there. Shell, grape, and spherical case were flying in every direction where an enemy was likely to be concealed, though the fort and Confederate gunboats received far the larger part of our attention.

While in close quarters with the enemy, a well-aimed solid shot from the fort struck the walking beam of the *CLIFTON*. She was thought at first to be completely disabled, but fortunately this was not the case. That was the last shot of the enemy. Under our rapid and close firing, the Confederates could not reload their heavier guns, and soon we saw their flag pulled down and a white flag, or rather rag, raised in its place.

The *CALHOUN* and the *ESTRELLA* next came into position; but all that was left for them to do was to take formal possession of the fort.

The *CLIFTON* and *ARIZONA*, without waiting for orders, started in pursuit of the two Confederate boats, the *WEBB* and *MARY T.*, which soon after the attack began, had taken flight. But within twenty minutes they mysteriously were lost from view, excepting the smoke they left behind. Our shells were sent after them and an occasional broadside was

discharged into the forests in reply to the sharpshooters who now and then sent us their greetings in the shape of Minie balls without, however, doing our boat much damage. Those concealed enemies were especially dreaded by both our boys and the marines. Even the fearless Upton was seen involuntarily to duck his head as the crack of the rifle was heard and the bullets went whistling past him. Those "swamp devils," as the boys called them, took their stand behind some huge log or tree or among its branches, fired their deadly rifles and the next moment were in perfect hiding.

The *CLIFTON*, being somewhat disabled, soon gave up the chase, but the *ARIZONA* continued until we were twelve miles up the bayou, beyond Butte a' la Rose, and still nothing but the smoke of the Confederate boats could be seen, which were then sailing well to the west of us.

Soon it dawned upon Captain Upton that we had been fooled by that tall, lank Louisiana (Yankee) whom we had taken on board the day before, who pretended to be a Unionist, who appeared to be honest as the days were long, who claimed to know thoroughly every waterway in the state, who was allowed to pilot us, and who confessed at length, that a bad mistake had been made, but that he was entirely innocent.

We believe, however, what he did was a very clever scheme attempted and carried out to prevent the capture of the Confederate boats. This man had allowed himself to be taken prisoner the day before by the foremost boat of the fleet, judging, no doubt, that it would also lead in the pursuit of the Confederate boats if they were compelled to take flight during the fight at Fort Burton. In this he had judged correctly. The *ARIZONA* was the fastest boat in the fleet and had taken the lead. As the *WEBB* and *MARY T.*



sailed up the bayou under cover of smoke they passed into a narrow channel that turned sharply to the left, while the *ARIZONA*, which quickly followed, kept on in what appeared to

be the main channel, but really was not. The channel taken by the Confederates was the main one, while the one taken by us was Bayou Alabama, an unimportant stream, which after meandering for several miles and becoming unnavigable, reaches again Bayou Atchafalaya.

At last the Rebel reported to the captain that owing to shoal water he could go no further. This was true, though the other things said by him we think were lies. We not had lost so much time that we could not return to the point of departure and renew the pursuit of the Confederate boats, which already were miles away.

After putting our lately self-constituted pilot under arrest, Captain Upton regretfully headed his boat for Butte a' la Rose. On the way down we landed on a plantation belonging to a Confederate, Davis by name, who had been a banker in New Orleans, but was then serving in the treasury department of the Confederacy in Richmond. His estate, one of the few then out of water, furnished excellent foraging ground. There were fowl, sheep, small cattle, swine, articles of household furniture, guns, and other useful articles that were appropriated without restrictions, for Banks' headquarters were now far away, and his staff officers could no longer forbid the execution of international military foraging laws.

On reaching Fort Burton we landed and took possession of better barracks than we had seen since our enlistment. They were more roomy and more substantially built than those at Concord, or than those in New York.

There were sixty Confederates, including five commissioned officers, who were made prisoners. Under guard of men detailed from Company A, Lieutenant Cooper commanding, those prisoners were sent to Algiers.

Had it not been for the stupidity or perfidy of our pilot, we certainly should have overtaken and captured the two Confederate gunboats, that afterwards caused us no little annoyance; and also we should have taken a much larger number of prisoners, for according to the reports of contrabands who had witnessed the flight, the two boats were crowded with those who had garrisoned Butte a' la Rose, the larger part of whom were young business and professional men from New Orleans—"the flower of the city" it was said.

We ought, however, to have been satisfied. We had lost but two men killed and two wounded, and those were gunners, and we had captured Fort Burton, the most strategic point north of Berwick Bay and south of Red river. But for our boys it was to be an expensive capture. Its Confederate commander, as we stepped upon the parapet, made a significant remark to one of our officers:

"You are doubtless glad to get here, but you will be gladder when you leave."

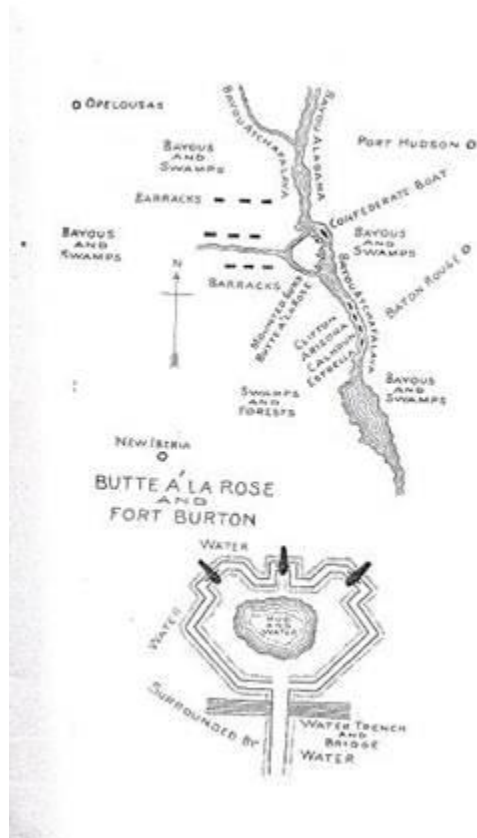
No prophet of early or late times ever has offered a truer prediction.

CHAPTER X.  
THE GARRISON OF DISEASE AND DEATH.

In our narrative we now return to Fort Burton, at Butte a' la Rose. It will be seen by the accompanying diagram that Butte a' la Rose is a slight elevation, which is said to have been artificially constructed by the Indians, before the appearance there of white men and was resorted to as a place of refuge when the surrounding country was flooded during the spring overflows.

Early in the war Butte a' la Rose was occupied by the Confederates, made into a fortification, and, as already suggested, was one of the most strategic points in the Southwest.

Southern Texas and southwestern Louisiana, when seeking the water-ways to the upper Mississippi, or to the Red river country, could best do so by entering the Atchafalaya. But as Fort Burton effectually commanded that great bayou, the Confederates had determined to hold it as long as possible. All the more anxious were they to do this because at that time the Mississippi was blockaded by our fleet both above and below Port Hudson.



When we took possession, Butte a' la Rose was essentially a little island surrounded for miles with water, expecting on the west, where land could be reached through a swamp at a distance of five or six miles.

At the north, also, there were two or three plantations on the shores of the Atchafalaya that

were not entirely under water; but at the south, as far as Brashear City, and east, as far as Port Hudson, even the arable land was covered with water in many places to the depth of from seven to ten feet, so that the small, flat-bottomed stern-wheel steamers that ply in those waters were sailing at that time through dooryards and over corn and cane fields. Nearly all fencing was out of sight under water.

Butte a' la Rose, aside from being a very strategic position from a military point of view, proved also to be such from several other points of view. It was the grand rendezvous of mosquitoes, fleas, wood-ticks, lice, lizards, frogs, snakes, alligators, fever bacteria, dysentery microbes, and every conceivable type of malarial poison.

From about sunset till daylight, the mosquitoes came upon us in dense battalions. Had it not been for the mosquito bars, that were issued to us when we were being devoured by those pests at Brashear City, not a man of us, seemingly, could have lived at Butte a' la Rose for a fortnight.

One of our correspondents in writing home thus speaks of those tormentors:

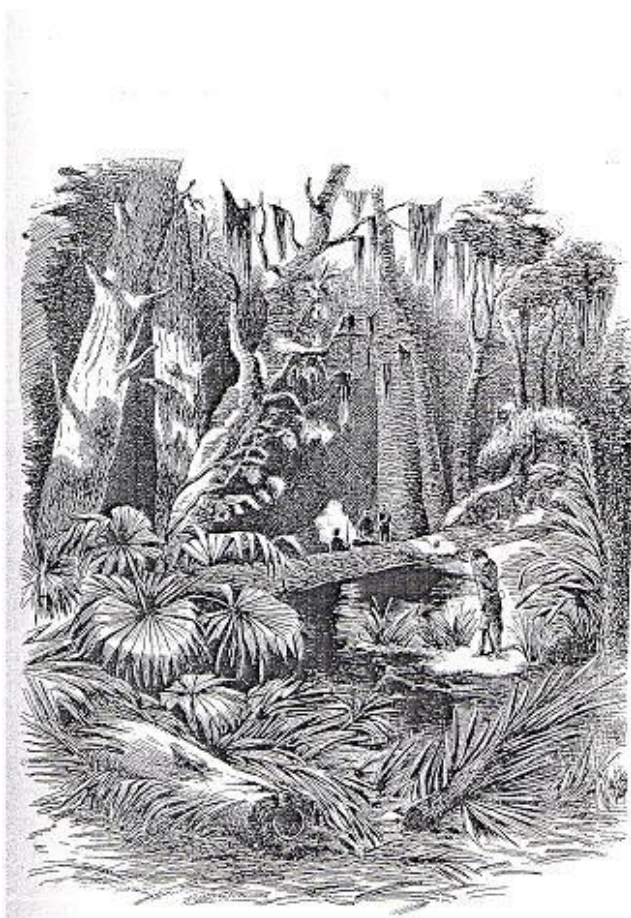
“Let me pay my respects to those little winged co-habités with ourselves of those detestable surroundings. These little rascals are comparatively civil and respectful during the day, but at the approach of night their scattered forces are heard returning from all quarters, and can be seen ‘massing’ their columns in the immediate vicinity of their intended point of attack, and piping up their accursed strains as a kind of prelude to combined assaults upon those whose blood they seek.

“Denuding ourselves of hat, blouse, vest, and pants, after a careful and most wary tucking of the folds of our net under the edge of the blankets and performing sundry imposing flourishes around our heads with some outspread Northern paper, we slyly but quickly raise a portion of the gauze aforesaid and make a plunge within its generous recess. Readjusting the net and straightening out our pedal limbs, we compose our thoughts and listen with complacency to the gathering of wrath and baffled malice from those infuriated bloodsuckers.

“And as we rest from the heated labors of the day within the mazy fortress, and listen to the continuous hum and buzz of those disappointed inhabitants of the swamps and marshes, secure in our assurance against their stinging lances, and think of the blood that would flow should they succeed in breaking down our frail barrier, we thank nature and art for gauze and muslin.”

For miles on still nights the croacking of frogs and hooting of owls could be heard, and were at first amusing but afterwards distressing. The moccasin snakes, whose bite is deadly, were so bold and numerous that they sometimes had to be shot out of our pathway while we were passing between the barracks.





PICKET DUTY AT BUTTE À LA ROSE.

Alligators, too, at night while hunting and killing their prey kept up an almost continuous splashing, which was doleful enough in those desolate regions, and more than once those treacherous and ravenous creatures compelled our pickets, who at night were not allowed to fire upon them, to move in near to our barracks for safety.

We must not forget in this enumeration of pests that we had, nevertheless, some friends among the insect or rather reptile family, which often warned us against the approach of snakes and other venomous creatures.

We mean the bright-eyed and sociable little lizards that at times seemed almost as numerous as house-flies in our Northern homes in summer time. They would run over our barracks and clothing, and in many ways appeared to be desirous of making our acquaintance and courting our friendship. At times when we were asleep they would drop into our hands and play at circus over our faces if we did not wake, or if we would allow them to do so. The only trouble was that their touch seemed a little too cold and slimy for solid comfort.

Almost from the date of taking possession of that fort we seemed at singular disadvantage. We had no sutler and scarcely any sutler's supplies. Our sutler had gone North with the body of his son, who was killed April thirteenth by falling from the cars on the passage from New Orleans to Brashear City. The afflicted father, who by his genial nature had won our esteem, had the heartiest sympathy of our men when the death of this promising lad was announced.

As the days wore on, we found ourselves without lemons, oranges, or fruit of any kind, for which we had an intense craving in consequence of the different kinds of fever that had begun to prey upon us.

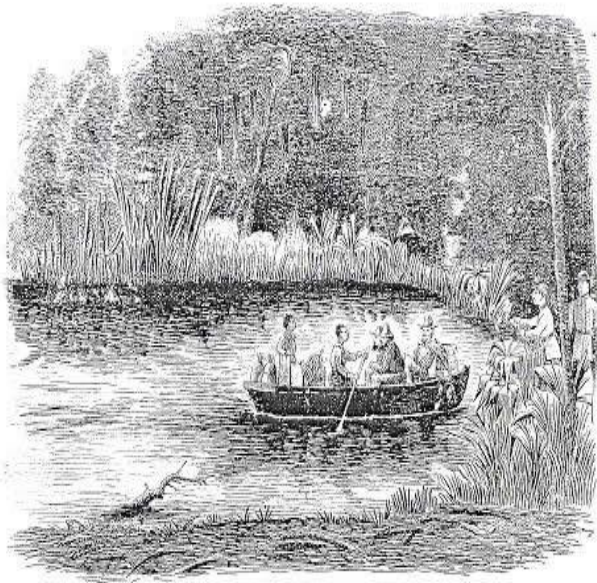
The discomfort of those who were deprived of tobacco was especially noticeable, and any of our readers who have used tobacco for years and then suddenly have been deprived of it know how keen is the distress.

The quids that had been chewed and even re-chewed were not thrown away, but were dried and then smoked. We do not vouch for the statement, but recently we were told by one of our comrades that some of our tobacco users during those days when no fresh supplies could be had, would secrete the second-hand quids under the flooring or among the timbers of their barracks and then stand guard over them with a musket.

It became manifest after a time that an effort ought to be made to furnish the men in some measure with what are known as sutler's supplies. Accordingly, for that purpose the adjutant, with full powers but without funds though having some credit, was dispatched to New Orleans.

At this point a confession that we promised to publish must be made. On inquiry as to what articles would be of special usefulness to the men, we were told that among other provisions a quantity of Hosteter's Bitters should be provided, as they would prove a most excellent prescription for such of our men as were suffering from chills.

A stack of recommendations extolling their merits and enumerating the remarkable cures wrought by them was



BRINGING IN FRESH VEGETABLES.

furnished, and accordingly two or three cases of Hosteter's Bitters were put on the invoice. Those bitters with other goods reached Butte a' la Rose in safety, and were sold to those who could pay for them and given to those who were without funds. But some of the men, who probably were more chilly than the others, took overdoses, and in consequence became staggering drunk.

The adjutant therefore, had the mortification of discovering that though he was president of the temperance society of the regiment, he had furnished almost pure whiskey to the men under the label Hosteter's Bitters. But as no ill had been intended he was not deposed from office.

We not only were without a sutler at that time but our chaplain in consequence of sickness had gone North on leave of absence and our quartermaster was not with us, and most of the time during our stay at Butte a' la Rose we were without a surgeon.

Dr. Campbell had died; Dr. Sanborn was North on a furlough; Dr. Fisk, besides being overworked, had been assigned duty, if we remember correctly, at Brashear City, and Dr. Sleeper, was late in reporting though as we recall the facts, it was without fault on his part. Meanwhile our men were sickening rapidly and dying almost daily. Had it not been that occasionally a negro or poor white would come to the garrison with a rowboat load of fresh vegetables, together with a few berries, and eggs, and a small quantity of poultry, which were exchanged for coffee and tea, we must have famished in our sick and nauseated condition, on such rations as the government then supplied.

Soon after we took possession of Butte a' la Rose, "bank of the rose", an exceedingly attractive and poetic but as misfitting a name as well can be imagined, the waters in the bayous and pools surrounding us commenced to fall, this uncovering to a tropical sun the decayed and decaying vegetable matter that for weeks had been submerged.



The atmosphere a little after sunfall and on through the night was almost insufferable, and our sick men when breathing it were conscious that every breath was so much more poison added to their blood.

There must have been on our rolls at one time or another while we were at Butte a' la Rose, not fewer than six or seven hundred men. But under date of May twenty-six the regiment could muster only one hundred and fifty for duty.

It should be borne in mind, too, that many of our number, in consequence of previous exposures and hardships, were sick and debilitated when they reached that place. As would be expected, a more pitiful sight than our regiment presented during the last two weeks of our stay at Butte a' la Rose hardly can be imagined.

Wasted away by various forms of disease, men who had weighed two hundred pounds or more were reduced to half that weight. One of our company officers, Captain Sanborn, Company E, whose ordinary weight was considerable above two hundred pounds, could not tip the scales at ninety.

Some of our men were covered with burning and painful eruptions, others were yellow as saffron, others were shaking with ague, others were bloated with dropsy, and all were sallow and emaciated.

In person and by letters we had pleaded repeatedly with the military officers who had charge of that western department, to transfer us from our deadly encampment; but this reply came back as often as the request was made; "You know the locality; there is not an available regiment we can send to relieve you. You must stay until our army retires down the Teche or crosses the Mississippi, which we hope will be at an early date."

They ought truthfully to have added.—"We will relieve you when we are through shipping cotton, sugar, and molasses to New Orleans." No one can deny that the lives of New Hampshire men were imperiled for a few bales of cotton and hogshead of molasses. And so we remained there at Butte a' la Rose until we came perilously near not being relieved at all, except by death or the Confederate troops.

At this point we introduce an episode that at least has a measure of importance by way of suggestion.

April twenty-sixth, General Banks and some members of his staff came down the Atchafalaya on the transport *LAUREL HILL*, reaching Butte a' la Rose early in the day. After a brief consultation with our officers, during which we again pleaded for removal from that fatal garrison, the boat proceeded down the bayou for Brashear City.

As various supplies were needed by the regiment, the adjutant, who at that time was expected to have general supervision of sutlers, quartermasters, ordnance officers and even medical supplies and who already had made six trips between Butte a' la Rose and Brashear City, again was dispatched on the *LAUREL HILL* with General Banks for New Orleans.

Not many miles from Butte a' la Rose the adjutant noticed that a bayou new to him had been entered. At first he thought that this course had been taken to secure deeper water,

but it soon became apparent that this could not have been the case, and remembering our misdirection during the mud march, and the probable misdirection that had deceived General Grover at Bayou Boeuff, and the trick played on the captain of the *ARIZONA* on the day we captured Fort Burton, he became uneasy and asked to see General Banks on an important matter. The interview was granted.

"You will excuse me, General," said the adjutant, "but I notice that this boat is not on the course usually taken by boats going down the river."

"Are you sure," asked the general, "that we are not on the right course?"

"I am sure, replied the adjutant, "that we are not on the course usually taken."

The captain of the boat was called, and the general said to him, "Captain, this adjutant, who has passed between Butte a' la Rose and Brashear City several times, says you are off your course."

"Not quite that," interrupted the adjutant; "I said 'this is not the course usually taken.'"

The captain replied, "I know nothing of these waters myself, but am trusting to the pilot and a stranger we have taken aboard to aid him."

Already we were in among logs and snags, and the water appeared to be shoaling. A consultation was held in the wheel-house. The stranger, who pretended to be a pilot in those waters, insisted upon going ahead, saying that the water would soon deepen. But every indication pointed otherwise. After further consultation, the boat, whose engine already had been stopped, was backed slowly and cautiously until breadth of water was found sufficient for turning. The boat then put back to Fort Burton and tied up for the night.

There is very little room for doubt in the adjutant's mind, at least, that that pilot intended mischief. Had the transport been snagged, and it is a great wonder that she was not, for that probably was the purpose of our Louisiana guerrilla pilot, she easily could have been fired during the night, and in that wilderness of woods and waters, with no clearing anywhere in sight, twenty-five or fifty armed Confederates in their skiffs without much difficulty could have gobbled up the general commanding the Nineteenth Army Corps, together with all the staff accompanying him.

If we remember correctly, that tricky assistant pilot was the next day placed in irons and taken to New Orleans.

More than once after the close of the war General Banks and the adjutant rehearsed the scenes of that day and speculated on what might have followed had the *LAUREL HILL* run on to a stump or had been mud-stuck in that out-of-the-way place, with Confederate scouts scattered all through the adjacent forests.

We return again to the perils that confronted our garrison at Butte a' la Rose.

Opelousas which was nearly northwest of us, and about fifty miles distant, was taken and occupied by the main body of the Federal troops April twentieth.

After remaining there for two weeks, waiting, as was alleged afterwards, to hear from General Grant, though our troops were busy all the time in forwarding cotton, sugar, and

molasses to New Orleans, General Banks moved on to Alexandria, which already had been captured by our fleet of gunboats. That was a difficult and wearisome march for the troops, and why it was made was an unanswered question then and is so still.

Admiral Porter, who had captured the city, writing of that campaign says: "General Banks marched a large portion of his army to Alexandria \* \* \* for what purpose nobody knows." So overrun was that part of Louisiana at that time with scattered Confederates, many of whom were "a nondescript class, neither soldiers nor guerrillas, but a sort of highwaymen mounted on mustangs, and armed with shot-guns," and so difficult in consequence of those roving bands was it for couriers to carry dispatches that it had taken forty days, from March twenty-third, to May second, for Grant and Banks to exchange communications. In consequence of those delays and the lateness of Banks in reaching Alexandria, and perhaps for other reasons known better to General Grant than to any one else, all intention on his part of securing a co-operation between the Thirteenth and Nineteenth Army Corps was abandoned, and General Banks was left single handed to lay siege once more to Port Hudson.

Accordingly, on May fourteenth, Grover's division marched from Alexandria to Simmesport, which in direct line is about fifty miles north of Butte a' la Rose, and there crossed the Atchafalaya.

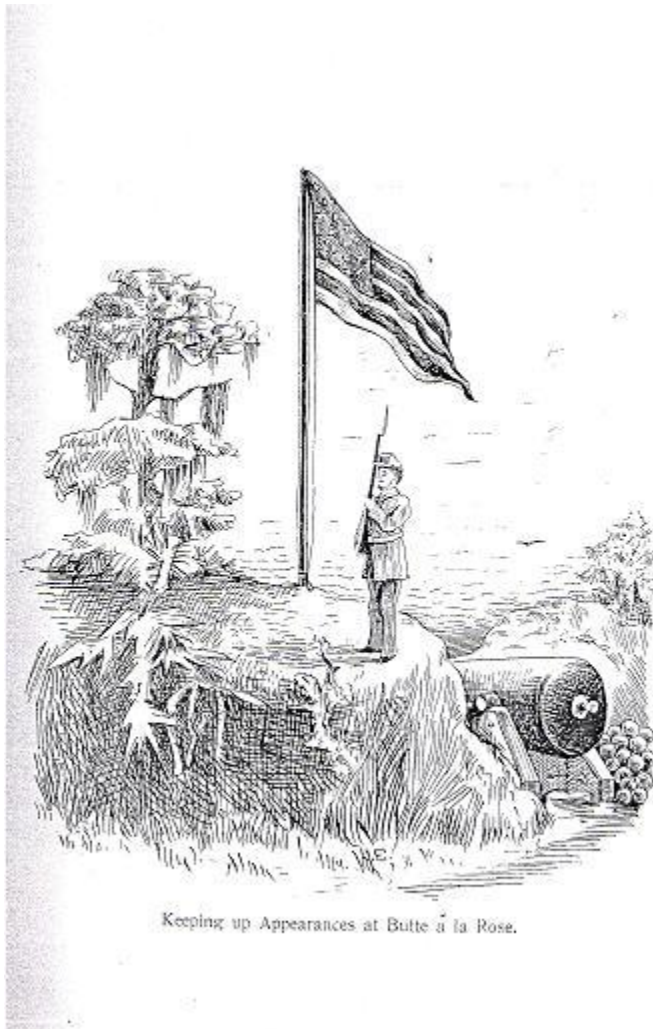
Two days later, Emory's division, then under command of Gen. H. E. Paine, followed and a little later Weitzel's division did the same. The entire force under those three generals then moved across the country to the Mississippi river, and down its west bank, about twenty-five miles to Bayou Sara. Here a crossing was effected, and on May twenty-fourth, the troops under Generals Grover, Paine, and Weitzel joined those under General Auger, who during the campaign up the Teche country had remained in the vicinity of Port Hudson. It will be seen, therefore, that from May sixteenth, until our regiment left Butte a' la Rose, we were not only in the valley and shadow of disease and death, but were also in the midst of the enemy's country without any military support whatever.

No sooner had Alexandria been evacuated by the Union troops than the Confederate, Major-General "Dick" Taylor took possession of the city and began the reorganization of his forces. Very soon between three and four thousand men were in readiness, and Taylor, together with Generals Mouton and Green, moved down and repossessed the Teche country. Those forces were in our rear and still no move had been made either for our release or protection.

At that time, in our weakened condition, a small detachment from Taylor's troops, say one or two hundred men, easily could have captured us. But perhaps he thought we were safely cooped up where we were and that he would leave us there till some other day.

In the meantime the waters of the Atchafalaya were constantly and rapidly falling, and the river would not be navigable much longer. The enemy's scouts were seen by our pickets almost daily and heard almost nightly. Every available man in our regiment was assigned to picket duty. We made in that way all the show possible, though dress parading, battalion

drilling and even formal guard mounting long since had been dispensed with. Deaths and funerals were distressingly on the increase, and pieces of pine board with lead-pencil marks upon them were the only headstones and inscriptions that could be used. We had received occasional assurances from transport boats that came up the bayou that we were soon to be taken off. But we waited day after day and still no definite arrangements for our departure appear to have been made. We were at times almost maddened by those disappointments and delays. Had an opportunity presented itself, the writer has no doubt that the officers of the regiment would have done what they did once before,—they would have taken matters into their own



hands and without orders from any one would have moved the regiment out of that detestable hole, whatever the consequences might have been. But escape by land was impossible. We had no guides, and though the water was receding, the mud, many feet in depth, remained.

May twenty-seventh, the small gunboat *ESTRELLA*, the last of the fleet of gunboats to

descent the bayou, called at the fort on her way from Alexandria to Brashear City. That, seemingly, was our last chance, and the adjutant once more was dispatched to Brashear City to ascertain if anything possibly could be done to relieve our regiment from its increasingly perilous situation. On the way to Brashear City, the captain of the *ESTRELLA* was made fully aware of the helpless condition of the regiment, but of course could do nothing without orders. His heart, however, had been touched.

The staff quartermaster at Brashear City could have relieved us had he chosen to do so, but he declined to act without specific orders from headquarters, and apparently he was not at all desirous of receiving such orders. All this was aggravating almost beyond endurance. In fact, the adjutant was nearly wild with anxiety lest, after repeated efforts, he should fail in his mission. The recollection of those hours even now while writing these pages makes him start to his feet as if in a nightmare.

The peril of the regiment, owing to the rapid falling of the waters in all the streams and bayous, was increasing with every hour's delay. In making the late passages, each of the larger transports, while crossing the chain of shallow lakes connected by the Atchafalaya dragged bottom, and had they attempted to sail a few feet either side of the channel they would have grounded or have been snagged. The transport *GEORGE A. SHELDON* already had struck a snag, and sank close by Fort Burton.

When all the facts are taken into account, it seems like a most manifest providential interposition that there was a young division staff officer from Massachusetts, who, at the same time the adjutant was pleading with those in authority to save our regiment from capture and death, reached Brashear City by order of General Emory, and began to interest himself in our behalf.

This officer was Captain Alpheus Hyatt. He was not long in coming into full sympathy with our situation and almost commanded an expedition to be sent to relieve us. It goes, perhaps, without saying, that one of the gladdest moments of the historian's life was when on board the *ESTRELLA*, in company with Captain Hyatt, he shook himself and found he was not dreaming and that the *ESTRELLA* and two transports were really starting for those imperiled comrades.

At this point we introduce a letter from Captain Hyatt which will make it clear that the historian was not over-estimated the perilous position we were in at the time of which we are speaking, or overdrawn the distressing, almost appalling, condition of our regiment when Butte a' la Rose was evacuated:

CAMBRIDGE MASS.,

*JUNE 21, 1893.*

"ADJUTANT OF THE SIXTEENTH REGIMENT,

"NEW HAMPSHIRE VOLUNTEERS.

“DEAR SIR:—My memory of the evacuation of Butte a’ la Rose and the events attending it has been kept clear by repetition, but of course many of the details have faded from my mind, because I have not yet met any one who had been an actor in the same scenes.

“I was at that time a captain in the Forty-seventh Massachusetts Volunteers and acting aide-de-camp upon the staff of General Emory, who was in command of the city and district of New Orleans and of the troops on the west banks of the Mississippi opposite that district.

“His adjutant-general gave me an order to proceed to Brashear City and then to Butte a’ la Rose with three steamers to be procured at the last named port, and to bring off the garrison at the port of Butte a’ la Rose, if, as was significantly but verbally added, they are still there. It was understood in New Orleans that this expedition might miscarry, since it was known that the Confederates were then pushing forward from Texas with the intention, if practicable, of reaching the banks of the Mississippi, and annoying, if not capturing, the weak garrison of New Orleans.

“I found at Brashear City that the expedition was looked upon as more risky than it was at headquarters in New Orleans. The Confederate pickets had possession of the opposite bank of the Atchafalaya and would be certain to note the departure of the steamers. The quartermaster at that place [Brashear City], in consequence of this opposed the execution of my orders, denying that Emory had any rights in that locality, which he asserted was directly under General Banks. When this was pushed aside after some hard talk and some words, which I do not remember, he still opposed the sending of steamers, on the ground that it was useless; there were no well-protected boats; it would be delivering the crews and the steamers into the hands of the enemy, and so on. I finally interviewed some of the captains of the boats and by proper representations enlisted the sympathy of one of them and got him to go with me to the quartermaster and volunteer his services for the attempt. He represented that the greatest danger was the possible lowness of the water which might prevent the return of the boats when loaded, but as he also admitted it would be easy to judge of this on the way up and possibly provide against it in the loading; this induced the quartermaster to grant the detail of steamers. We left Brashear City, I think, on the third day after my arrival there, and this delay made me very anxious for the safety of the garrison we were to take away.

“Although in full sight of the enemy at starting, we were not disturbed on the way, and arrived without accident at the fort. This fact and the welcome nature of the news we brought are events probably better remembered by the surviving soldiers of the Sixteenth New Hampshire than by myself. Although young, and a rather reckless young man at the time, I can never forget the interior of that fort, the tents set upon the sides of the dyke or road in the interior, to keep them out of the swamp. I had never seen before this an undisguised swamp in the parade-ground of a fort, and the terrible discomfort and danger of this to the troops were obvious.

“That any large proportion of your regiment lived to see civilization again, after such

prolonged seclusion in this black hole of swamp sickness, shows how tough New Hampshire constitutions are. The larger number of you men were sick, and if I remember right there were only one hundred and twenty-five capable of helping the crews of the steamers to remove the sick, the baggage, and the guns. The emaciation and pallor of those men working at night alongside of the sunburnt crews of the steamers was very noticeable. Their weakness was noticed by me in the fact that, although doing their best, they moved about with extreme difficulty; the entire one hundred and twenty-five, though doing their best, were not able to do one-fourth the work done by the crews of the steamers, who numbered fewer than one-half as many as your men. I ought to say here that I cannot recall whether I brought up three boats or two, but I feel quite sure about the number of men. I do not have a picture in my mind of a long procession of men carrying the sick on stretchers and spreading them out over the decks of the boats, and I distinctly recall going up to the pilot-house and looking down upon decks with solid piles of motionless, blanketed men stretched out straight on their backs, quiet as the dead that they so closely resembled. It was the most pitiful and impressive picture of suffering that can be imagined.

“The uneventful return to Brashear City is, of course, familiar to you.

“Yours respectfully,  
“ALPHEUS HYATT.”

Yes, we, too, remember that night scene; few recollections of a lifetime are more vivid. And no troops in greater misery and distress, ever placed health and life upon their country's altar than did the men of the Sixteenth during the time they garrisoned that dreadful “black hole” of disease and death.

The debt of gratitude we owe to Captain Alpheus Hyatt we never can repay. Had it not been for his persistent and resolute efforts in our behalf, and for the humane offices of the captain of the *ESTRELLA*, we do not believe one of the sick men of our regiment ever would have left Fort Burton, and the fate of the most of those who were still able to do duty after having been cut off from communication with our army and almost from the outside world, would have been more deplorable than any one can dream who is not familiar with that doleful place.

There we were, imprisoned, and without supplies. An escape through the swamps was impossible. It was then the last of May. The last of July General Taylor returned up the Teche country. At that time we should have been taken prisoners, if any of us had remained alive. Again and again we offer our thanks to the captain of the *ESTRELLA* for volunteering his services, and to Captain Hyatt for his earnest intercessions in our behalf.

## CHAPTER XI.

### EVACUATION OF BUTTE A' LA ROSE AND RETURN TO PORT HUDSON.

It was two o'clock on the afternoon of May twenty-eighth that the gunboat *ESTRELLA* and the transports *CORNE* and *KEPPE* started up the Atchafalaya on their mission of rescue. We reached Butte a' la Rose at ten o'clock on the morning of May twenty-ninth.

The letters written home at that time by our men attest their well-nigh inexpressible joy "when," as one of our correspondents in a communication to a newspaper says, "we were permitted to see, before our delighted eyes laying across the bayou, the gunboat and transports that had come to save us." No wonder the men were filled with joy, for the fate of prisoners of war in the hands of Texas rangers, or certain death from diseases then preying upon them, had seemed to be their inevitable doom.

The dismantling of Fort Burton began immediately. But the work was prosecuted with quietness during the day in order to attract as little as possible the attention of the Confederate scouts who had surrounded us and who, within a few days past, had greatly increased in numbers, boldness and activity. Indeed, we feared an attack at daybreak the next morning from those of Taylor's forces who had been left to prevent our escape into the Teche country and who appeared to be making a move to prevent, if possible, our departure on the transports that they must have known had come to take us away.

As darkness fell upon us the work of destroying the fortifications was pushed with as much vigor as the enfeebled strength of our men would permit. In the meantime the gunboat *ESTRELLA* had taken a position from which she could send her grape and shells down the roadway had the enemy appeared in force. Doubtless they were those precautionary measures of the *ESTRELLA*, or at least her presence there, that prevented a raid upon us that very night; for those Confederates who were surrounding us had learned from experience what speedy havoc a broadside of grape and canister could make when sent among them.

The scenes of that night, the loading of the transports, the painful efforts of our sick and enfeebled men to help on in the work, the carrying of the sick and dying men on board, already have been so well described by Captain Hyatt that they need not in this connection be repeated.

At midnight we set fire to all the barracks and made preparations to blow up the magazine which still held a large quantity of powder. At that hour, too, we came near meeting with a serious accident. As already mentioned, the transport *GEORGE A. SHELDON*, had struck a snag and had been run in close to the fort where she lay partly submerged.



During the day a small transport called the *UNION*, the last of her class to descent the bayou, reached the fort, coming, if we mistake now, from Simmesport, having on board a quantity of cotton. She was hailed by the *ESTRELLA*, and in spite of the protests and oaths of her captain, was pressed into service. Some of her cargo was thrown overboard to make room for our sick men, against which her captain offered additional protests. But the guns of the *ESTRELLA* at that time commanded those waters and the captain of the *UNION* had to obey.

Accordingly his boat had been made fast to the partly submerged *SHELDON* and was being loaded across her bows, which were the only part of her deck not under water. Without a moment's warning, the *SHELDON*, owing probably to the strain that came from the ropes with which she was fastened to the *UNION*, partly turned over and slid into deep water. As she sank, the *UNION* began to sink with her; the lines were so taut they could not be cast off and before they could even be cut, the decks of the *UNION* were well under water. She was fearfully near being capsized with many of our sick men on board. But fortunately the ropes parted just in time to save this threatened catastrophe in which the drowning of several of our almost utterly helpless men would have been inevitable.

At length all the men and their belongings were on board, together with the armament of the fort, and the *ESTRELLA* with the three transports swung clear of the fort and slowly dropped down the bayou.

Two of our men, one of whom was our lieutenant-colonel, remained for the purpose of lighting the fuse communicating with the powder in the magazine. A few moments later they were seen in the early grey of the morning rowing rapidly towards the transports and were taken on board. They had fired the fuse and we watched for the explosion, but nothing of the kind followed. In the light of the burning barracks, however, we plainly saw the Confederates moving up the causeway and along the embankments of the fort. They evidently had been watching all our movements, and probably extinguished the fuse within a few seconds after it had been lighted.

Indeed we can do more than say that they probably did this, for during our regimental reunion at the Weirs, August, 1896, one of our comrades, Corporal Rand, stated that he had met a Confederate soldier who was with those who had followed us up that night, intending if possible our capture, and was among those who saved the magazine from explosion, by extinguishing the fuse.

Our movements down the bayou were at first very slow, at least till full daylight, and then all possible speed was made. It became evident, especially while passing through both Mud and Chicot Lakes and even through the upper part of Grand Lake, that our departure from Butte a' la Rose had been none too soon. There were miles through which the rather heavily laden boats ploughed mud and at some points they dragged so heavily that for a time, fears were entertained that we could not proceed. Five, perhaps three days later the passage through those waters would have been impossible.

When the sun rose we were well beyond the sight of a spot we then presumed Federal

troops never again would be sent to garrison; a spot that had more than a local, it had at least a state reputation.

The reader doubtless will recall what the Confederate commander said to us on taking possession of that place. We now introduce another bit of testimony.

Soon after its capture, an announcement appeared in a St. Martinsville paper which was quoted in a New Orleans daily, reading thus:

“The Yanks have taken from us that *HOLE OF HELL*, Butte a’ la Rose, and we wish them great joy in its possession.”

After entering Grand Lake, navigation was easy. We began to feel that we were now on the way to some destination, though we knew not where, nor had we much concern. Indeed, does any reader suppose had the choice been left us on the one hand either to go into the trenches before Port Hudson, to storm that stronghold of the enemy, or to make any other bloody advance, and on the other hand to return to Butte a’ la Rose that it would have taken us one moment to decide.

Let us draw a picture or two; the first one involves patrol duty. The relief is ready and begins its march a half mile or more towards the enemy. The territory is deserted and lonely. The other vedette station is



THE SENTRY IN A THUNDER STORM.

reached. Two or three vedettes who had been on guard the first half of the night are relieved; the relief patrol turns back, leaving two, possibly three soldiers out there alone, but within hearing of the enemy's lines. They pull their rubber blankets about them to keep the pelting rain off; they stand ready with thumb on the hammer to cock their muskets; they peer into the darkness from which may come a blaze of fire the next minute sending a bullet crashing through the brain. Those are perilous and lonesome hours. But does any one suppose that they inspire half the dread that came to us while helplessly we did patrol duty in that "black hole" with disease stalking among us and picking off our men day and night?

On the "mud march" and at other times as skirmishers we had deployed under great difficulties. When rendering such service each man in the line expects in a few brief moments to be the mark for, perhaps a score of the enemy's rifles. Advancing in line they

hear the bullets whistling thick about them and are left to wonder that they hear so many without feeling a slight stinging sensation somewhere in the body, followed with the consciousness that suddenly it is growing dark about them; then it is that a soldier's courage is thoroughly tested. But we have no hesitation in saying that if the men of our regiment any time after the first ten days of their life at Butte a' la Rose could have purchased their release from that place by being ordered to make an advance in skirmish line every day in the week, there would not have been a moment's hesitation.

It is a trying experience, too, when soldiers are called upon to hold an important position with heavy odds against them until reinforcements can be brought to their support. But though the carnage is sometimes fearful, yet because it cannot last very long, it is far less dreadful than a defense continued through weeks of delay and suffering while the angels or fiends of disease and death are hovering over a smitten and suffering garrison.

*BUTTE A' LA ROSE!* Bank of Roses! With your swamp devils, monster alligators, venomous snakes, disease and death, it was you who tested the fortitude of the sturdy men from the granite hills of New Hampshire as the fortitude of men seldom is tested!

But now horrible place—farewell!—*FOREVER*. Such were our thoughts as Butte a' la Rose was hidden from view by a belt of trees on the morning we left it. Those experiences now come to us in memory not as a reality, but as a dream too strange and weird to be believed.

It was Sunday forenoon, May thirty-first, just forty-two days after our leaving for that henceforth unmentionable place, that we again landed on the wharf at Brashear City, and our men were as thankful as mortals could be that once more they were in the midst of at least some evidences of civilization.

Among the first rations issued to the regiment after reaching Brashear City was a large quantity of pickled cabbage. The craving of the men for something acid was so intense that they hardly could restrain themselves, or be restrained. Leaving all other food untouched they seized that cabbage by the handfuls and gorged themselves; and what seems singular, they did it, apparently without injury.

As soon as a train could be made up we were ordered on board. Algiers was our destination. That place was reached at four o'clock in the afternoon. Owing to recent orders to forward all available troops as rapidly as possible to Port Hudson, we were allowed no time for rest, though many of our men were too weak to stand at all but were carried on board the *SALLY ROBINSON* which had been ordered up the river to Springfield Landing, a short distance south of Port Hudson.

The adjutant was detained in New Orleans for a few hours, to report to General Emory the condition of the regiment, get the regimental mail and to notify any convalescents belonging to our command to report at Port Hudson. A few hours after the sailing of the *SALLY ROBINSON*, the adjutant and a few convalescents took passage on the steamship *FULTON*, and near sunfall, June first, reached the landing where the larger part of the survivors of the Sixteenth were bivouacked awaiting orders.

But the country was found to be so well defended and there were so many obstacles preventing the navigation of Bayous Teche and Atchafalaya that those undertakings for the subjugation of the Confederates in that section of the state were for the time abandoned. General Butler a few weeks later was superseded by General Banks who after taking command of the army was equally impressed with the desirableness, if not necessity, of occupying that important territory: accordingly late in the month of January he organized two expeditions, one under General Weitzel with four thousand men, which was to move up the Teche country from Berwick, and the other under General Emory with three thousand men to move up the Atchafalaya from the same place. They were ordered to operate in conjunction, and capture Fort Burton at Butte a' la Rose and destroy its fortifications.

But owing to difficulties in securing suitable transportation, and owing to the supposed strength of the fortifications at Butte a' la Rose and the number of the garrison, that expedition likewise was abandoned.

But now that our troops were advancing up the Teche country it became necessary to undertake again the project that had been twice abandoned, namely, the clearing of the Atchafalaya of all Confederates and if possible the capturing of Butte a' la Rose; for while the enemy held that point not only was our advancing army imperiled, but there would be uninterrupted navigation for the Confederates between Red river and Brashear City, which if possible should be prevented.

In the adjutant's journal is this note, dated April fifteenth: "The intermissions are that our regiment will garrison this place [Brashear] until our term of enlistment expires."

But on the morning of April eighteenth, three days later, we received orders to put the regiment in readiness for marching at a moment's notice. Accordingly, at noon we were relieved by the Fourth Massachusetts.

Our regiment without delay was organized into a battalion of six companies.

Company officers who were able to report for duty were assigned command according to their rank, in this new organization.

Meantime, the boys were busy preparing their outfit. They were ordered to supply themselves with one day's rations and one hundred rounds of ammunition.

When the order came to "fall in" they were ready and marched to the pier, whence they were to depart on an important, and what was considered perilous mission. The other four companies, being on detached duty, from which they could not then be relieved, were to follow a few days later.

We were distributed on four gunboats that had received orders "to proceed up Bayou Atchafalaya to clear it of obstructions and of Confederate gunboats, and to make an attack on Butte a' la Rose." If the attack proved successful, the Sixteenth was to be left to garrison and defend it.

The fleet, consisting of the gunboats *CLIFTON*, *ARIZONA*, *CALHOUN*, and *ESTRELLA*, was

under the command of A. P. Cook. The major and adjutant were assigned duty on the *ARIZONA*, the courage and brilliancy of whose commander already were well known; the lieutenant-colonel was with Commander Cook on the *ESTRELLA*. It should be borne in mind that the whole country for



fifty miles west of the Mississippi, including, therefore, the territory of which we are not speaking, is covered with countless bayous, lakes, rivers, and swamps that cross and connect with one another, many of them during the season of high water being easily navigable for boats of considerable draught.

At the time of which we are writing, the Atchafalaya was navigable from the gulf of Mexico to Red river, and as suggested, Butte a' la Rose was the key to those various connecting bodies of water and to the entire country lying between Opelousas and Port Hudson on the north, to the Gulf of Mexico on the south, to the Mississippi on the east, and to the Teche country on the west.

The accompanying map gives an idea of the number of the larger and navigable bayous in

the part of Louisiana of which we are speaking; but aside from those there were numberless smaller ones.

In sailing up the Atchafalaya and across its chain of lakes and connecting bayous, nothing eventful happened during the first day, which was April eighteenth. Just before dark on the evening of that day, near the head of Grand Lake, the flag boat, *ESTRELLA*, signaled the others that they were to tie up for the night. She alone cast anchor, the others as a precautionary and utility measure were moored to her by hemp hawsers. Should there be, as was somewhat expected, a night attack from the Confederate gunboats, which were just above us, the hawsers easily could be slipped and the boats quickly brought into position for action.

At nine o'clock, as an additional precaution, every light on the boats was extinguished or shaded; but the night passed without anything of importance transpiring.

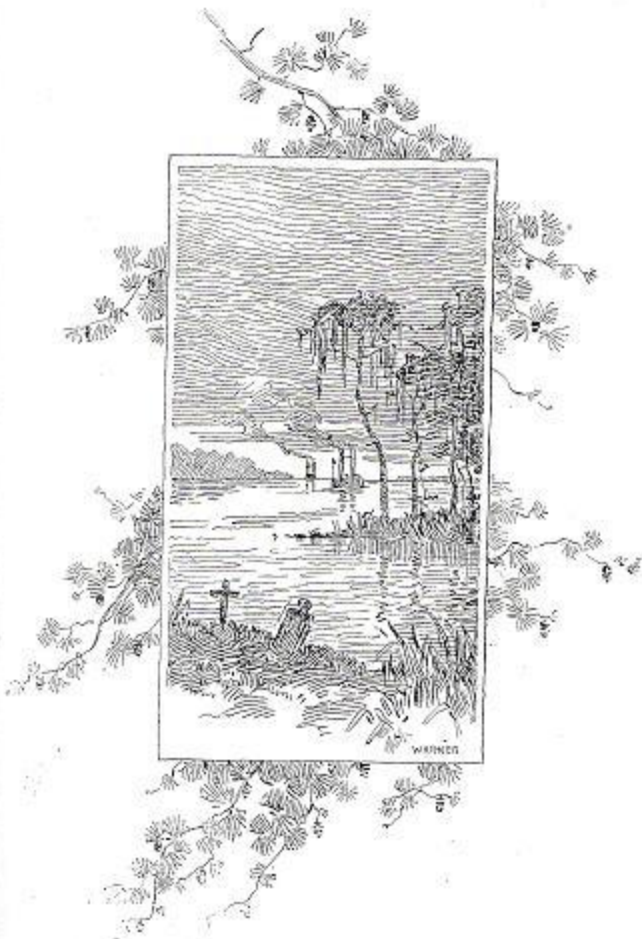
At daybreak we were moving and early passed through Chene' bayou into a lake of the same name. The country was found everywhere flooded, in consequence of unusual high water, caused, it was said, by cuts in the Mississippi that Grant had made in his effort to capture Vicksburg.

The scenery along the margin of that bayou, as had been that along the shores of Grand Lake and other bayous the day before, was monotonous and uninspiring. The heavy foliage of the trees, the immense growth of moss, the dense undergrowth of vines, brushwood and saplings afforded the fittest place in the world for "the slimy pathway" of moccasin and rattle snakes and for the stealthy creeping of numberless alligators, turtles and other reptiles, but was a miserable enough place for men whose birthplace had been on the shores of the transparent streams and lakes and among the granite mountains of New Hampshire.

The vaporous atmosphere and tropical cloud-drapery of that section of Louisiana, apart from their novelty, were after the first few hours quite destitute of interest.

In the advance the gunboat *CLIFTON* was in the lead, but at nine o'clock she met with an accident by running into a tree and dropped back for repairs. The *ARIZONA* meanwhile took the lead. Near noon, being within two miles of Butte a' la Rose, she was made fast to a tree and we waited anxiously for the coming of the rest of the





A GLIMPSE OF GRAND LAKE.

fleet that had been detained by reason of the accident to the *CLIFTON*.

Commander Upton was desirous of making an attack on Butte a' la Rose alone, and most of our men were willing if not over-anxious that he should do this. But his orders from the cautious yet generous-hearted Captain Cook were explicit; he must, therefore, await the coming of the other boats. As they did not put in an appearance, the *ARIZONA*, late in the afternoon, dropped down the bayou, but in doing so became unmanageable; a strong current swung her against a tree and smashed the wheel-house.

At length, in a somewhat dilapidated condition, she reached the remainder of the fleet at the head of Lake Chene'. Here the boats were moored for the night in a manner similar to that of the night before.

The chief matters of interest during the day were the difficulties of navigating the tortuous bayous, the shooting of two of our gunners by Confederate guerrillas, who were concealed somewhere in the swamp and behind the trees, and the taking of two prisoners who were in citizen's dress, rather poor at that, and who were questioned and cross-questioned, but



the information gained was of no material value.

One of the men, who claimed to be a Unionist (of this, however, there was some doubt), after assuring Captain Upton of his perfect loyalty and thorough acquaintance with the entire country, was taken into the wheel-house to assist in piloting the boat.

At daybreak, April twentieth, the boats were again freed from their moorings and started up the narrow bayou, the *ARIZONA* this time being in the lead.

Coming within sight of the fort at Butte a' la Rose, she dropped back by order of Captain Cook, and the *CLIFTON*, under command of Captain Frederic Crocker, having by far the heavier armament, led the fleet.

Everybody then was in a state of expectancy. The guns of the fort and those of the two Confederate boats were trained on our slowly advancing fleet. We moved cautiously for no one knew but the Confederates had placed in the bayou dangerous obstructions and explosives. We were in danger, also, or at least felt we were, of being picked off by sharpshooters concealed among the trees skirting both sides of the bayou, who had wounded one and killed another of our gunners the day before.

At ten o'clock the "ball opened" with a hundred pounder from a Parrott gun on the bows of the *CLIFTON*. From that moment the work was lively on both sides. The reverberations of the larger guns among those dense forests skirting the narrow channel were deafening. The rapid discharge of muskets, too, showed that our boys were doing in earnest their part in the assault on the enemy's works.

The *CLIFTON* concentrated her fire upon the Confederate gunboats, while the *ARIZONA* brought her guns to bear on the fort. Captain Crocker, hearing the port guns of the *ARIZONA* and knowing that she would take care of the fort without his help, began a chase up the bayou after the retiring Confederates. Meantime, both



Near Botte à la Rose; Bushwhackers Firing on Federal Transports.

the *CLIFTON* and *ARIZONA* sent their broadsides of grape from the starboard guns into the forests to keep in check any lurking guerrillas that might be concealed there. Shell, grape, and spherical case were flying in every direction where an enemy was likely to be concealed, though the fort and Confederate gunboats received far the larger part of our attention.

While in close quarters with the enemy, a well-aimed solid shot from the fort struck the walking beam of the *CLIFTON*. She was thought at first to be completely disabled, but fortunately this was not the case. That was the last shot of the enemy. Under our rapid and close firing, the Confederates could not reload their heavier guns, and soon we saw their flag pulled down and a white flag, or rather rag, raised in its place.

The *CALHOUN* and the *ESTRELLA* next came into position; but all that was left for them to do was to take formal possession of the fort.

The *CLIFTON* and *ARIZONA*, without waiting for orders, started in pursuit of the two Confederate boats, the *WEBB* and *MARY T.*, which soon after the attack began, had taken flight. But within twenty minutes they mysteriously were lost from view, excepting the smoke they left behind. Our shells were sent after them and an occasional broadside was

discharged into the forests in reply to the sharpshooters who now and then sent us their greetings in the shape of Minie balls without, however, doing our boat much damage. Those concealed enemies were especially dreaded by both our boys and the marines. Even the fearless Upton was seen involuntarily to duck his head as the crack of the rifle was heard and the bullets went whistling past him. Those "swamp devils," as the boys called them, took their stand behind some huge log or tree or among its branches, fired their deadly rifles and the next moment were in perfect hiding.

The *CLIFTON*, being somewhat disabled, soon gave up the chase, but the *ARIZONA* continued until we were twelve miles up the bayou, beyond Butte a' la Rose, and still nothing but the smoke of the Confederate boats could be seen, which were then sailing well to the west of us.

Soon it dawned upon Captain Upton that we had been fooled by that tall, lank Louisiana (Yankee) whom we had taken on board the day before, who pretended to be a Unionist, who appeared to be honest as the days were long, who claimed to know thoroughly every waterway in the state, who was allowed to pilot us, and who confessed at length, that a bad mistake had been made, but that he was entirely innocent.

We believe, however, what he did was a very clever scheme attempted and carried out to prevent the capture of the Confederate boats. This man had allowed himself to be taken prisoner the day before by the foremost boat of the fleet, judging, no doubt, that it would also lead in the pursuit of the Confederate boats if they were compelled to take flight during the fight at Fort Burton. In this he had judged correctly. The *ARIZONA* was the fastest boat in the fleet and had taken the lead. As the *WEBB* and *MARY T.*



sailed up the bayou under cover of smoke they passed into a narrow channel that turned sharply to the left, while the *ARIZONA*, which quickly followed, kept on in what appeared to

be the main channel, but really was not. The channel taken by the Confederates was the main one, while the one taken by us was Bayou Alabama, an unimportant stream, which after meandering for several miles and becoming unnavigable, reaches again Bayou Atchafalaya.

At last the Rebel reported to the captain that owing to shoal water he could go no further. This was true, though the other things said by him we think were lies. We not had lost so much time that we could not return to the point of departure and renew the pursuit of the Confederate boats, which already were miles away.

After putting our lately self-constituted pilot under arrest, Captain Upton regretfully headed his boat for Butte a' la Rose. On the way down we landed on a plantation belonging to a Confederate, Davis by name, who had been a banker in New Orleans, but was then serving in the treasury department of the Confederacy in Richmond. His estate, one of the few then out of water, furnished excellent foraging ground. There were fowl, sheep, small cattle, swine, articles of household furniture, guns, and other useful articles that were appropriated without restrictions, for Banks' headquarters were now far away, and his staff officers could no longer forbid the execution of international military foraging laws.

On reaching Fort Burton we landed and took possession of better barracks than we had seen since our enlistment. They were more roomy and more substantially built than those at Concord, or than those in New York.

There were sixty Confederates, including five commissioned officers, who were made prisoners. Under guard of men detailed from Company A, Lieutenant Cooper commanding, those prisoners were sent to Algiers.

Had it not been for the stupidity or perfidy of our pilot, we certainly should have overtaken and captured the two Confederate gunboats, that afterwards caused us no little annoyance; and also we should have taken a much larger number of prisoners, for according to the reports of contrabands who had witnessed the flight, the two boats were crowded with those who had garrisoned Butte a' la Rose, the larger part of whom were young business and professional men from New Orleans—"the flower of the city" it was said.

We ought, however, to have been satisfied. We had lost but two men killed and two wounded, and those were gunners, and we had captured Fort Burton, the most strategic point north of Berwick Bay and south of Red river. But for our boys it was to be an expensive capture. Its Confederate commander, as we stepped upon the parapet, made a significant remark to one of our officers:

"You are doubtless glad to get here, but you will be gladder when you leave."

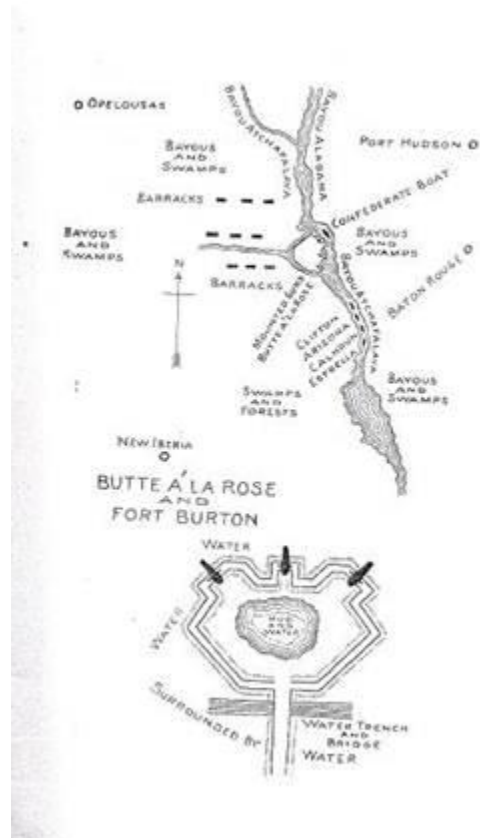
No prophet of early or late times ever has offered a truer prediction.

CHAPTER X.  
THE GARRISON OF DISEASE AND DEATH.

In our narrative we now return to Fort Burton, at Butte a' la Rose. It will be seen by the accompanying diagram that Butte a' la Rose is a slight elevation, which is said to have been artificially constructed by the Indians, before the appearance there of white men and was resorted to as a place of refuge when the surrounding country was flooded during the spring overflows.

Early in the war Butte a' la Rose was occupied by the Confederates, made into a fortification, and, as already suggested, was one of the most strategic points in the Southwest.

Southern Texas and southwestern Louisiana, when seeking the water-ways to the upper Mississippi, or to the Red river country, could best do so by entering the Atchafalaya. But as Fort Burton effectually commanded that great bayou, the Confederates had determined to hold it as long as possible. All the more anxious were they to do this because at that time the Mississippi was blockaded by our fleet both above and below Port Hudson.



When we took possession, Butte a' la Rose was essentially a little island surrounded for miles with water, expecting on the west, where land could be reached through a swamp at a distance of five or six miles.

At the north, also, there were two or three plantations on the shores of the Atchafalaya that

were not entirely under water; but at the south, as far as Brashear City, and east, as far as Port Hudson, even the arable land was covered with water in many places to the depth of from seven to ten feet, so that the small, flat-bottomed stern-wheel steamers that ply in those waters were sailing at that time through dooryards and over corn and cane fields. Nearly all fencing was out of sight under water.

Butte a' la Rose, aside from being a very strategic position from a military point of view, proved also to be such from several other points of view. It was the grand rendezvous of mosquitoes, fleas, wood-ticks, lice, lizards, frogs, snakes, alligators, fever bacteria, dysentery microbes, and every conceivable type of malarial poison.

From about sunset till daylight, the mosquitoes came upon us in dense battalions. Had it not been for the mosquito bars, that were issued to us when we were being devoured by those pests at Brashear City, not a man of us, seemingly, could have lived at Butte a' la Rose for a fortnight.

One of our correspondents in writing home thus speaks of those tormentors:

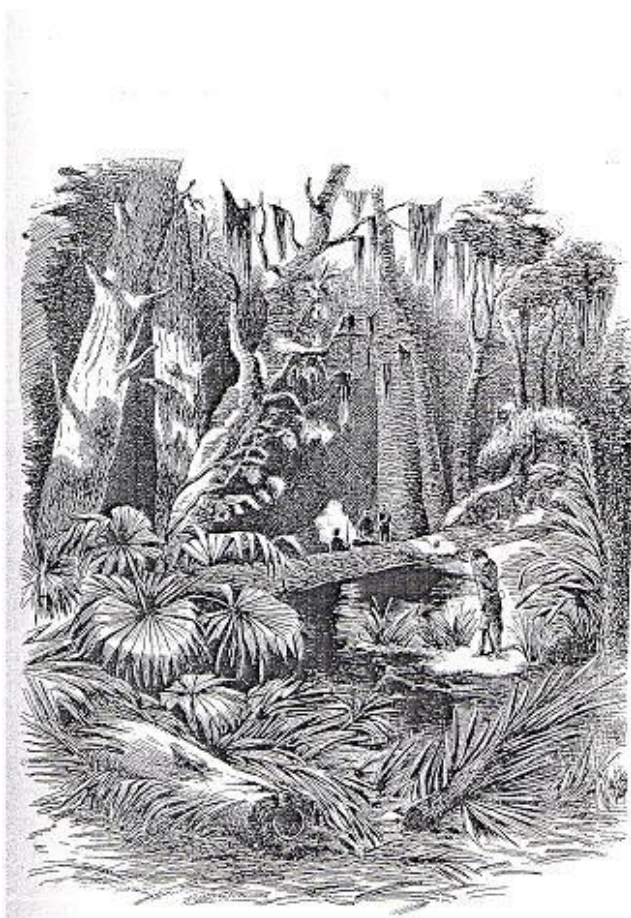
“Let me pay my respects to those little winged co-habités with ourselves of those detestable surroundings. These little rascals are comparatively civil and respectful during the day, but at the approach of night their scattered forces are heard returning from all quarters, and can be seen ‘massing’ their columns in the immediate vicinity of their intended point of attack, and piping up their accursed strains as a kind of prelude to combined assaults upon those whose blood they seek.

“Denuding ourselves of hat, blouse, vest, and pants, after a careful and most wary tucking of the folds of our net under the edge of the blankets and performing sundry imposing flourishes around our heads with some outspread Northern paper, we slyly but quickly raise a portion of the gauze aforesaid and make a plunge within its generous recess. Readjusting the net and straightening out our pedal limbs, we compose our thoughts and listen with complacency to the gathering of wrath and baffled malice from those infuriated bloodsuckers.

“And as we rest from the heated labors of the day within the mazy fortress, and listen to the continuous hum and buzz of those disappointed inhabitants of the swamps and marshes, secure in our assurance against their stinging lances, and think of the blood that would flow should they succeed in breaking down our frail barrier, we thank nature and art for gauze and muslin.”

For miles on still nights the croacking of frogs and hooting of owls could be heard, and were at first amusing but afterwards distressing. The moccasin snakes, whose bite is deadly, were so bold and numerous that they sometimes had to be shot out of our pathway while we were passing between the barracks.





PICKET DUTY AT BUTTE À LA ROSE.

Alligators, too, at night while hunting and killing their prey kept up an almost continuous splashing, which was doleful enough in those desolate regions, and more than once those treacherous and ravenous creatures compelled our pickets, who at night were not allowed to fire upon them, to move in near to our barracks for safety.

We must not forget in this enumeration of pests that we had, nevertheless, some friends among the insect or rather reptile family, which often warned us against the approach of snakes and other venomous creatures.

We mean the bright-eyed and sociable little lizards that at times seemed almost as numerous as house-flies in our Northern homes in summer time. They would run over our barracks and clothing, and in many ways appeared to be desirous of making our acquaintance and courting our friendship. At times when we were asleep they would drop into our hands and play at circus over our faces if we did not wake, or if we would allow them to do so. The only trouble was that their touch seemed a little too cold and slimy for solid comfort.

Almost from the date of taking possession of that fort we seemed at singular disadvantage. We had no sutler and scarcely any sutler's supplies. Our sutler had gone North with the body of his son, who was killed April thirteenth by falling from the cars on the passage from New Orleans to Brashear City. The afflicted father, who by his genial nature had won our esteem, had the heartiest sympathy of our men when the death of this promising lad was announced.

As the days wore on, we found ourselves without lemons, oranges, or fruit of any kind, for which we had an intense craving in consequence of the different kinds of fever that had begun to prey upon us.

The discomfort of those who were deprived of tobacco was especially noticeable, and any of our readers who have used tobacco for years and then suddenly have been deprived of it know how keen is the distress.

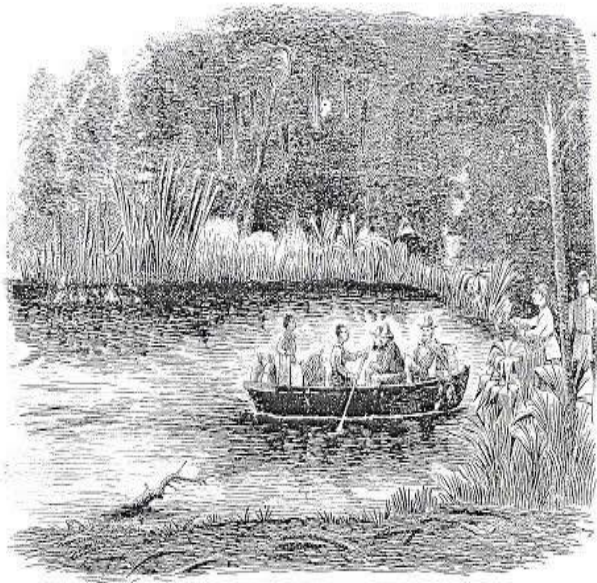
The quids that had been chewed and even re-chewed were not thrown away, but were dried and then smoked. We do not vouch for the statement, but recently we were told by one of our comrades that some of our tobacco users during those days when no fresh supplies could be had, would secrete the second-hand quids under the flooring or among the timbers of their barracks and then stand guard over them with a musket.

It became manifest after a time that an effort ought to be made to furnish the men in some measure with what are known as sutler's supplies. Accordingly, for that purpose the adjutant, with full powers but without funds though having some credit, was dispatched to New Orleans.

At this point a confession that we promised to publish must be made. On inquiry as to what articles would be of special usefulness to the men, we were told that among other provisions a quantity of Hosteter's Bitters should be provided, as they would prove a most excellent prescription for such of our men as were suffering from chills.

A stack of recommendations extolling their merits and enumerating the remarkable cures wrought by them was





BRINGING IN FRESH VEGETABLES.

furnished, and accordingly two or three cases of Hosteter's Bitters were put on the invoice. Those bitters with other goods reached Butte a' la Rose in safety, and were sold to those who could pay for them and given to those who were without funds. But some of the men, who probably were more chilly than the others, took overdoses, and in consequence became staggering drunk.

The adjutant therefore, had the mortification of discovering that though he was president of the temperance society of the regiment, he had furnished almost pure whiskey to the men under the label Hosteter's Bitters. But as no ill had been intended he was not deposed from office.

We not only were without a sutler at that time but our chaplain in consequence of sickness had gone North on leave of absence and our quartermaster was not with us, and most of the time during our stay at Butte a' la Rose we were without a surgeon.

Dr. Campbell had died; Dr. Sanborn was North on a furlough; Dr. Fisk, besides being overworked, had been assigned duty, if we remember correctly, at Brashear City, and Dr. Sleeper, was late in reporting though as we recall the facts, it was without fault on his part. Meanwhile our men were sickening rapidly and dying almost daily. Had it not been that occasionally a negro or poor white would come to the garrison with a rowboat load of fresh vegetables, together with a few berries, and eggs, and a small quantity of poultry, which were exchanged for coffee and tea, we must have famished in our sick and nauseated condition, on such rations as the government then supplied.

Soon after we took possession of Butte a' la Rose, "bank of the rose", an exceedingly attractive and poetic but as misfitting a name as well can be imagined, the waters in the bayous and pools surrounding us commenced to fall, this uncovering to a tropical sun the decayed and decaying vegetable matter that for weeks had been submerged.

The atmosphere a little after sunfall and on through the night was almost insufferable, and our sick men when breathing it were conscious that every breath was so much more poison added to their blood.

There must have been on our rolls at one time or another while we were at Butte a' la Rose, not fewer than six or seven hundred men. But under date of May twenty-six the regiment could muster only one hundred and fifty for duty.

It should be borne in mind, too, that many of our number, in consequence of previous exposures and hardships, were sick and debilitated when they reached that place. As would be expected, a more pitiful sight than our regiment presented during the last two weeks of our stay at Butte a' la Rose hardly can be imagined.

Wasted away by various forms of disease, men who had weighed two hundred pounds or more were reduced to half that weight. One of our company officers, Captain Sanborn, Company E, whose ordinary weight was considerable above two hundred pounds, could not tip the scales at ninety.

Some of our men were covered with burning and painful eruptions, others were yellow as saffron, others were shaking with ague, others were bloated with dropsy, and all were sallow and emaciated.

In person and by letters we had pleaded repeatedly with the military officers who had charge of that western department, to transfer us from our deadly encampment; but this reply came back as often as the request was made; "You know the locality; there is not an available regiment we can send to relieve you. You must stay until our army retires down the Teche or crosses the Mississippi, which we hope will be at an early date."

They ought truthfully to have added.—"We will relieve you when we are through shipping cotton, sugar, and molasses to New Orleans." No one can deny that the lives of New Hampshire men were imperiled for a few bales of cotton and hogshead of molasses. And so we remained there at Butte a' la Rose until we came perilously near not being relieved at all, except by death or the Confederate troops.

At this point we introduce an episode that at least has a measure of importance by way of suggestion.

April twenty-sixth, General Banks and some members of his staff came down the Atchafalaya on the transport *LAUREL HILL*, reaching Butte a' la Rose early in the day. After a brief consultation with our officers, during which we again pleaded for removal from that fatal garrison, the boat proceeded down the bayou for Brashear City.

As various supplies were needed by the regiment, the adjutant, who at that time was expected to have general supervision of sutlers, quartermasters, ordnance officers and even medical supplies and who already had made six trips between Butte a' la Rose and Brashear City, again was dispatched on the *LAUREL HILL* with General Banks for New Orleans.

Not many miles from Butte a' la Rose the adjutant noticed that a bayou new to him had been entered. At first he thought that this course had been taken to secure deeper water,

but it soon became apparent that this could not have been the case, and remembering our misdirection during the mud march, and the probable misdirection that had deceived General Grover at Bayou Boeuff, and the trick played on the captain of the *ARIZONA* on the day we captured Fort Burton, he became uneasy and asked to see General Banks on an important matter. The interview was granted.

"You will excuse me, General," said the adjutant, "but I notice that this boat is not on the course usually taken by boats going down the river."

"Are you sure," asked the general, "that we are not on the right course?"

"I am sure, replied the adjutant, "that we are not on the course usually taken."

The captain of the boat was called, and the general said to him, "Captain, this adjutant, who has passed between Butte a' la Rose and Brashear City several times, says you are off your course."

"Not quite that," interrupted the adjutant; "I said 'this is not the course usually taken.'"

The captain replied, "I know nothing of these waters myself, but am trusting to the pilot and a stranger we have taken aboard to aid him."

Already we were in among logs and snags, and the water appeared to be shoaling. A consultation was held in the wheel-house. The stranger, who pretended to be a pilot in those waters, insisted upon going ahead, saying that the water would soon deepen. But every indication pointed otherwise. After further consultation, the boat, whose engine already had been stopped, was backed slowly and cautiously until breadth of water was found sufficient for turning. The boat then put back to Fort Burton and tied up for the night.

There is very little room for doubt in the adjutant's mind, at least, that that pilot intended mischief. Had the transport been snagged, and it is a great wonder that she was not, for that probably was the purpose of our Louisiana guerrilla pilot, she easily could have been fired during the night, and in that wilderness of woods and waters, with no clearing anywhere in sight, twenty-five or fifty armed Confederates in their skiffs without much difficulty could have gobbled up the general commanding the Nineteenth Army Corps, together with all the staff accompanying him.

If we remember correctly, that tricky assistant pilot was the next day placed in irons and taken to New Orleans.

More than once after the close of the war General Banks and the adjutant rehearsed the scenes of that day and speculated on what might have followed had the *LAUREL HILL* run on to a stump or had been mud-stuck in that out-of-the-way place, with Confederate scouts scattered all through the adjacent forests.

We return again to the perils that confronted our garrison at Butte a' la Rose.

Opelousas which was nearly northwest of us, and about fifty miles distant, was taken and occupied by the main body of the Federal troops April twentieth.

After remaining there for two weeks, waiting, as was alleged afterwards, to hear from General Grant, though our troops were busy all the time in forwarding cotton, sugar, and

molasses to New Orleans, General Banks moved on to Alexandria, which already had been captured by our fleet of gunboats. That was a difficult and wearisome march for the troops, and why it was made was an unanswered question then and is so still.

Admiral Porter, who had captured the city, writing of that campaign says: "General Banks marched a large portion of his army to Alexandria \* \* \* for what purpose nobody knows." So overrun was that part of Louisiana at that time with scattered Confederates, many of whom were "a nondescript class, neither soldiers nor guerrillas, but a sort of highwaymen mounted on mustangs, and armed with shot-guns," and so difficult in consequence of those roving bands was it for couriers to carry dispatches that it had taken forty days, from March twenty-third, to May second, for Grant and Banks to exchange communications. In consequence of those delays and the lateness of Banks in reaching Alexandria, and perhaps for other reasons known better to General Grant than to any one else, all intention on his part of securing a co-operation between the Thirteenth and Nineteenth Army Corps was abandoned, and General Banks was left single handed to lay siege once more to Port Hudson.

Accordingly, on May fourteenth, Grover's division marched from Alexandria to Simmesport, which in direct line is about fifty miles north of Butte a' la Rose, and there crossed the Atchafalaya.

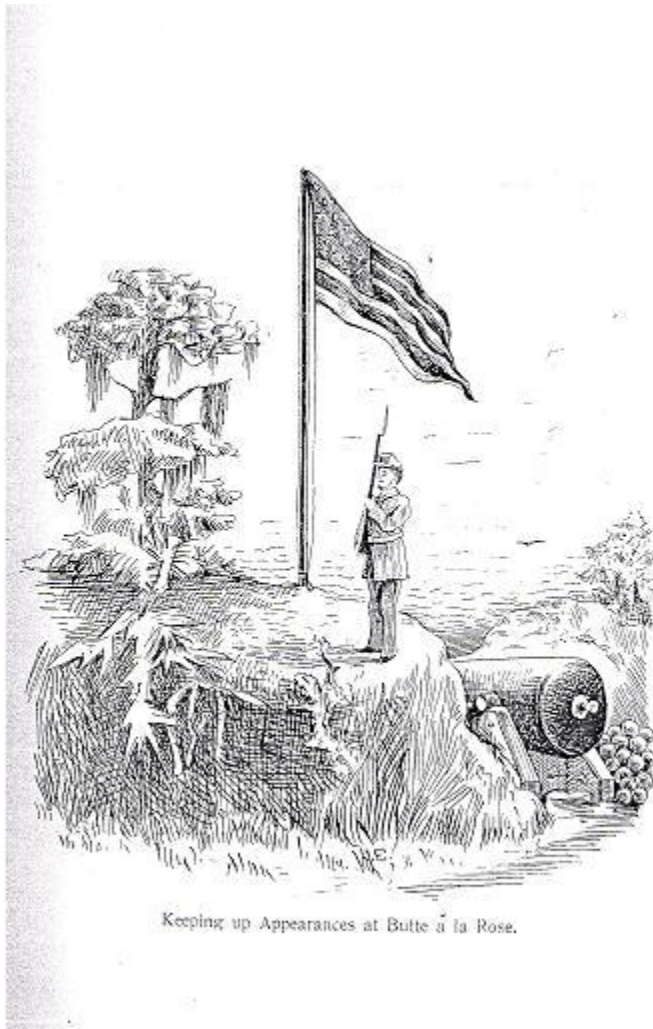
Two days later, Emory's division, then under command of Gen. H. E. Paine, followed and a little later Weitzel's division did the same. The entire force under those three generals then moved across the country to the Mississippi river, and down its west bank, about twenty-five miles to Bayou Sara. Here a crossing was effected, and on May twenty-fourth, the troops under Generals Grover, Paine, and Weitzel joined those under General Auger, who during the campaign up the Teche country had remained in the vicinity of Port Hudson. It will be seen, therefore, that from May sixteenth, until our regiment left Butte a' la Rose, we were not only in the valley and shadow of disease and death, but were also in the midst of the enemy's country without any military support whatever.

No sooner had Alexandria been evacuated by the Union troops than the Confederate, Major-General "Dick" Taylor took possession of the city and began the reorganization of his forces. Very soon between three and four thousand men were in readiness, and Taylor, together with Generals Mouton and Green, moved down and repossessed the Teche country. Those forces were in our rear and still no move had been made either for our release or protection.

At that time, in our weakened condition, a small detachment from Taylor's troops, say one or two hundred men, easily could have captured us. But perhaps he thought we were safely cooped up where we were and that he would leave us there till some other day.

In the meantime the waters of the Atchafalaya were constantly and rapidly falling, and the river would not be navigable much longer. The enemy's scouts were seen by our pickets almost daily and heard almost nightly. Every available man in our regiment was assigned to picket duty. We made in that way all the show possible, though dress parading, battalion

drilling and even formal guard mounting long since had been dispensed with. Deaths and funerals were distressingly on the increase, and pieces of pine board with lead-pencil marks upon them were the only headstones and inscriptions that could be used. We had received occasional assurances from transport boats that came up the bayou that we were soon to be taken off. But we waited day after day and still no definite arrangements for our departure appear to have been made. We were at times almost maddened by those disappointments and delays. Had an opportunity presented itself, the writer has no doubt that the officers of the regiment would have done what they did once before,—they would have taken matters into their own



hands and without orders from any one would have moved the regiment out of that detestable hole, whatever the consequences might have been. But escape by land was impossible. We had no guides, and though the water was receding, the mud, many feet in depth, remained.

May twenty-seventh, the small gunboat *ESTRELLA*, the last of the fleet of gunboats to

descent the bayou, called at the fort on her way from Alexandria to Brashear City. That, seemingly, was our last chance, and the adjutant once more was dispatched to Brashear City to ascertain if anything possibly could be done to relieve our regiment from its increasingly perilous situation. On the way to Brashear City, the captain of the *ESTRELLA* was made fully aware of the helpless condition of the regiment, but of course could do nothing without orders. His heart, however, had been touched.

The staff quartermaster at Brashear City could have relieved us had he chosen to do so, but he declined to act without specific orders from headquarters, and apparently he was not at all desirous of receiving such orders. All this was aggravating almost beyond endurance. In fact, the adjutant was nearly wild with anxiety lest, after repeated efforts, he should fail in his mission. The recollection of those hours even now while writing these pages makes him start to his feet as if in a nightmare.

The peril of the regiment, owing to the rapid falling of the waters in all the streams and bayous, was increasing with every hour's delay. In making the late passages, each of the larger transports, while crossing the chain of shallow lakes connected by the Atchafalaya dragged bottom, and had they attempted to sail a few feet either side of the channel they would have grounded or have been snagged. The transport *GEORGE A. SHELDON* already had struck a snag, and sank close by Fort Burton.

When all the facts are taken into account, it seems like a most manifest providential interposition that there was a young division staff officer from Massachusetts, who, at the same time the adjutant was pleading with those in authority to save our regiment from capture and death, reached Brashear City by order of General Emory, and began to interest himself in our behalf.

This officer was Captain Alpheus Hyatt. He was not long in coming into full sympathy with our situation and almost commanded an expedition to be sent to relieve us. It goes, perhaps, without saying, that one of the gladdest moments of the historian's life was when on board the *ESTRELLA*, in company with Captain Hyatt, he shook himself and found he was not dreaming and that the *ESTRELLA* and two transports were really starting for those imperiled comrades.

At this point we introduce a letter from Captain Hyatt which will make it clear that the historian was not over-estimated the perilous position we were in at the time of which we are speaking, or overdrawn the distressing, almost appalling, condition of our regiment when Butte a' la Rose was evacuated:

CAMBRIDGE MASS.,

*JUNE 21, 1893.*

"ADJUTANT OF THE SIXTEENTH REGIMENT,

"NEW HAMPSHIRE VOLUNTEERS.

“DEAR SIR:—My memory of the evacuation of Butte a’ la Rose and the events attending it has been kept clear by repetition, but of course many of the details have faded from my mind, because I have not yet met any one who had been an actor in the same scenes.

“I was at that time a captain in the Forty-seventh Massachusetts Volunteers and acting aide-de-camp upon the staff of General Emory, who was in command of the city and district of New Orleans and of the troops on the west banks of the Mississippi opposite that district.

“His adjutant-general gave me an order to proceed to Brashear City and then to Butte a’ la Rose with three steamers to be procured at the last named port, and to bring off the garrison at the port of Butte a’ la Rose, if, as was significantly but verbally added, they are still there. It was understood in New Orleans that this expedition might miscarry, since it was known that the Confederates were then pushing forward from Texas with the intention, if practicable, of reaching the banks of the Mississippi, and annoying, if not capturing, the weak garrison of New Orleans.

“I found at Brashear City that the expedition was looked upon as more risky than it was at headquarters in New Orleans. The Confederate pickets had possession of the opposite bank of the Atchafalaya and would be certain to note the departure of the steamers. The quartermaster at that place [Brashear City], in consequence of this opposed the execution of my orders, denying that Emory had any rights in that locality, which he asserted was directly under General Banks. When this was pushed aside after some hard talk and some words, which I do not remember, he still opposed the sending of steamers, on the ground that it was useless; there were no well-protected boats; it would be delivering the crews and the steamers into the hands of the enemy, and so on. I finally interviewed some of the captains of the boats and by proper representations enlisted the sympathy of one of them and got him to go with me to the quartermaster and volunteer his services for the attempt. He represented that the greatest danger was the possible lowness of the water which might prevent the return of the boats when loaded, but as he also admitted it would be easy to judge of this on the way up and possibly provide against it in the loading; this induced the quartermaster to grant the detail of steamers. We left Brashear City, I think, on the third day after my arrival there, and this delay made me very anxious for the safety of the garrison we were to take away.

“Although in full sight of the enemy at starting, we were not disturbed on the way, and arrived without accident at the fort. This fact and the welcome nature of the news we brought are events probably better remembered by the surviving soldiers of the Sixteenth New Hampshire than by myself. Although young, and a rather reckless young man at the time, I can never forget the interior of that fort, the tents set upon the sides of the dyke or road in the interior, to keep them out of the swamp. I had never seen before this an undisguised swamp in the parade-ground of a fort, and the terrible discomfort and danger of this to the troops were obvious.

“That any large proportion of your regiment lived to see civilization again, after such



prolonged seclusion in this black hole of swamp sickness, shows how tough New Hampshire constitutions are. The larger number of you men were sick, and if I remember right there were only one hundred and twenty-five capable of helping the crews of the steamers to remove the sick, the baggage, and the guns. The emaciation and pallor of those men working at night alongside of the sunburnt crews of the steamers was very noticeable. Their weakness was noticed by me in the fact that, although doing their best, they moved about with extreme difficulty; the entire one hundred and twenty-five, though doing their best, were not able to do one-fourth the work done by the crews of the steamers, who numbered fewer than one-half as many as your men. I ought to say here that I cannot recall whether I brought up three boats or two, but I feel quite sure about the number of men. I do not have a picture in my mind of a long procession of men carrying the sick on stretchers and spreading them out over the decks of the boats, and I distinctly recall going up to the pilot-house and looking down upon decks with solid piles of motionless, blanketed men stretched out straight on their backs, quiet as the dead that they so closely resembled. It was the most pitiful and impressive picture of suffering that can be imagined.

“The uneventful return to Brashear City is, of course, familiar to you.

“Yours respectfully,  
“ALPHEUS HYATT.”

Yes, we, too, remember that night scene; few recollections of a lifetime are more vivid. And no troops in greater misery and distress, ever placed health and life upon their country's altar than did the men of the Sixteenth during the time they garrisoned that dreadful “black hole” of disease and death.

The debt of gratitude we owe to Captain Alpheus Hyatt we never can repay. Had it not been for his persistent and resolute efforts in our behalf, and for the humane offices of the captain of the *ESTRELLA*, we do not believe one of the sick men of our regiment ever would have left Fort Burton, and the fate of the most of those who were still able to do duty after having been cut off from communication with our army and almost from the outside world, would have been more deplorable than any one can dream who is not familiar with that doleful place.

There we were, imprisoned, and without supplies. An escape through the swamps was impossible. It was then the last of May. The last of July General Taylor returned up the Teche country. At that time we should have been taken prisoners, if any of us had remained alive. Again and again we offer our thanks to the captain of the *ESTRELLA* for volunteering his services, and to Captain Hyatt for his earnest intercessions in our behalf.

## CHAPTER XI.

### EVACUATION OF BUTTE A' LA ROSE AND RETURN TO PORT HUDSON.

It was two o'clock on the afternoon of May twenty-eighth that the gunboat *ESTRELLA* and the transports *CORNE* and *KEPPE* started up the Atchafalaya on their mission of rescue. We reached Butte a' la Rose at ten o'clock on the morning of May twenty-ninth.

The letters written home at that time by our men attest their well-nigh inexpressible joy "when," as one of our correspondents in a communication to a newspaper says, "we were permitted to see, before our delighted eyes laying across the bayou, the gunboat and transports that had come to save us." No wonder the men were filled with joy, for the fate of prisoners of war in the hands of Texas rangers, or certain death from diseases then preying upon them, had seemed to be their inevitable doom.

The dismantling of Fort Burton began immediately. But the work was prosecuted with quietness during the day in order to attract as little as possible the attention of the Confederate scouts who had surrounded us and who, within a few days past, had greatly increased in numbers, boldness and activity. Indeed, we feared an attack at daybreak the next morning from those of Taylor's forces who had been left to prevent our escape into the Teche country and who appeared to be making a move to prevent, if possible, our departure on the transports that they must have known had come to take us away.

As darkness fell upon us the work of destroying the fortifications was pushed with as much vigor as the enfeebled strength of our men would permit. In the meantime the gunboat *ESTRELLA* had taken a position from which she could send her grape and shells down the roadway had the enemy appeared in force. Doubtless they were those precautionary measures of the *ESTRELLA*, or at least her presence there, that prevented a raid upon us that very night; for those Confederates who were surrounding us had learned from experience what speedy havoc a broadside of grape and canister could make when sent among them.

The scenes of that night, the loading of the transports, the painful efforts of our sick and enfeebled men to help on in the work, the carrying of the sick and dying men on board, already have been so well described by Captain Hyatt that they need not in this connection be repeated.

At midnight we set fire to all the barracks and made preparations to blow up the magazine which still held a large quantity of powder. At that hour, too, we came near meeting with a serious accident. As already mentioned, the transport *GEORGE A. SHELDON*, had struck a snag and had been run in close to the fort where she lay partly submerged.

During the day a small transport called the *UNION*, the last of her class to descent the bayou, reached the fort, coming, if we mistake now, from Simmesport, having on board a quantity of cotton. She was hailed by the *ESTRELLA*, and in spite of the protests and oaths of her captain, was pressed into service. Some of her cargo was thrown overboard to make room for our sick men, against which her captain offered additional protests. But the guns of the *ESTRELLA* at that time commanded those waters and the captain of the *UNION* had to obey.

Accordingly his boat had been made fast to the partly submerged *SHELDON* and was being loaded across her bows, which were the only part of her deck not under water. Without a moment's warning, the *SHELDON*, owing probably to the strain that came from the ropes with which she was fastened to the *UNION*, partly turned over and slid into deep water. As she sank, the *UNION* began to sink with her; the lines were so taut they could not be cast off and before they could even be cut, the decks of the *UNION* were well under water. She was fearfully near being capsized with many of our sick men on board. But fortunately the ropes parted just in time to save this threatened catastrophe in which the drowning of several of our almost utterly helpless men would have been inevitable.

At length all the men and their belongings were on board, together with the armament of the fort, and the *ESTRELLA* with the three transports swung clear of the fort and slowly dropped down the bayou.

Two of our men, one of whom was our lieutenant-colonel, remained for the purpose of lighting the fuse communicating with the powder in the magazine. A few moments later they were seen in the early grey of the morning rowing rapidly towards the transports and were taken on board. They had fired the fuse and we watched for the explosion, but nothing of the kind followed. In the light of the burning barracks, however, we plainly saw the Confederates moving up the causeway and along the embankments of the fort. They evidently had been watching all our movements, and probably extinguished the fuse within a few seconds after it had been lighted.

Indeed we can do more than say that they probably did this, for during our regimental reunion at the Weirs, August, 1896, one of our comrades, Corporal Rand, stated that he had met a Confederate soldier who was with those who had followed us up that night, intending if possible our capture, and was among those who saved the magazine from explosion, by extinguishing the fuse.

Our movements down the bayou were at first very slow, at least till full daylight, and then all possible speed was made. It became evident, especially while passing through both Mud and Chicot Lakes and even through the upper part of Grand Lake, that our departure from Butte a' la Rose had been none too soon. There were miles through which the rather heavily laden boats ploughed mud and at some points they dragged so heavily that for a time, fears were entertained that we could not proceed. Five, perhaps three days later the passage through those waters would have been impossible.

When the sun rose we were well beyond the sight of a spot we then presumed Federal

troops never again would be sent to garrison; a spot that had more than a local, it had at least a state reputation.

The reader doubtless will recall what the Confederate commander said to us on taking possession of that place. We now introduce another bit of testimony.

Soon after its capture, an announcement appeared in a St. Martinsville paper which was quoted in a New Orleans daily, reading thus:

“The Yanks have taken from us that *HOLE OF HELL*, Butte a’ la Rose, and we wish them great joy in its possession.”

After entering Grand Lake, navigation was easy. We began to feel that we were now on the way to some destination, though we knew not where, nor had we much concern. Indeed, does any reader suppose had the choice been left us on the one hand either to go into the trenches before Port Hudson, to storm that stronghold of the enemy, or to make any other bloody advance, and on the other hand to return to Butte a’ la Rose that it would have taken us one moment to decide.

Let us draw a picture or two; the first one involves patrol duty. The relief is ready and begins its march a half mile or more towards the enemy. The territory is deserted and lonely. The other vedette station is



THE SENTRY IN A THUNDER STORM.

reached. Two or three vedettes who had been on guard the first half of the night are relieved; the relief patrol turns back, leaving two, possibly three soldiers out there alone, but within hearing of the enemy's lines. They pull their rubber blankets about them to keep the pelting rain off; they stand ready with thumb on the hammer to cock their muskets; they peer into the darkness from which may come a blaze of fire the next minute sending a bullet crashing through the brain. Those are perilous and lonesome hours. But does any one suppose that they inspire half the dread that came to us while helplessly we did patrol duty in that "black hole" with disease stalking among us and picking off our men day and night?

On the "mud march" and at other times as skirmishers we had deployed under great difficulties. When rendering such service each man in the line expects in a few brief moments to be the mark for, perhaps a score of the enemy's rifles. Advancing in line they

hear the bullets whistling thick about them and are left to wonder that they hear so many without feeling a slight stinging sensation somewhere in the body, followed with the consciousness that suddenly it is growing dark about them; then it is that a soldier's courage is thoroughly tested. But we have no hesitation in saying that if the men of our regiment any time after the first ten days of their life at Butte a' la Rose could have purchased their release from that place by being ordered to make an advance in skirmish line every day in the week, there would not have been a moment's hesitation.

It is a trying experience, too, when soldiers are called upon to hold an important position with heavy odds against them until reinforcements can be brought to their support. But though the carnage is sometimes fearful, yet because it cannot last very long, it is far less dreadful than a defense continued through weeks of delay and suffering while the angels or fiends of disease and death are hovering over a smitten and suffering garrison.

*BUTTE A' LA ROSE!* Bank of Roses! With your swamp devils, monster alligators, venomous snakes, disease and death, it was you who tested the fortitude of the sturdy men from the granite hills of New Hampshire as the fortitude of men seldom is tested!

But now horrible place—farewell!—*FOREVER*. Such were our thoughts as Butte a' la Rose was hidden from view by a belt of trees on the morning we left it. Those experiences now come to us in memory not as a reality, but as a dream too strange and weird to be believed.

It was Sunday forenoon, May thirty-first, just forty-two days after our leaving for that henceforth unmentionable place, that we again landed on the wharf at Brashear City, and our men were as thankful as mortals could be that once more they were in the midst of at least some evidences of civilization.

Among the first rations issued to the regiment after reaching Brashear City was a large quantity of pickled cabbage. The craving of the men for something acid was so intense that they hardly could restrain themselves, or be restrained. Leaving all other food untouched they seized that cabbage by the handfuls and gorged themselves; and what seems singular, they did it, apparently without injury.

As soon as a train could be made up we were ordered on board. Algiers was our destination. That place was reached at four o'clock in the afternoon. Owing to recent orders to forward all available troops as rapidly as possible to Port Hudson, we were allowed no time for rest, though many of our men were too weak to stand at all but were carried on board the *SALLY ROBINSON* which had been ordered up the river to Springfield Landing, a short distance south of Port Hudson.

The adjutant was detained in New Orleans for a few hours, to report to General Emory the condition of the regiment, get the regimental mail and to notify any convalescents belonging to our command to report at Port Hudson. A few hours after the sailing of the *SALLY ROBINSON*, the adjutant and a few convalescents took passage on the steamship *FULTON*, and near sunfall, June first, reached the landing where the larger part of the survivors of the Sixteenth were bivouacked awaiting orders.

