

THE SPENCER GREYS.

—
BY ONE OF THEM.

In 1844, an independent volunteer company of Infantry was formed in this city, with Wm. L. Sanderson as captain, Stewart W. Cayce and James C. Moodey lieutenants.

The company was named the Spencer Greys, for captain Spencer, a brave Indiana soldier, who died bravely on the bloody battle-field of Tippecanoe. The uniform was grey, appropriately embellished; and the arms, Springfield muskets of the latest patent.

Captain Sanderson was a thorough drill master, and within a year from its organization the company was the best drilled of any in the state, and had few superiors any where; and upon many occasions won prizes for drilling and at the target.

Being fully organized and equipped, when war was declared against Mexico, the company, as such, volunteered, and with but few exceptions, its members were sworn into the service, by Col. Churchill, of the regular army on the 20th day of July 1846.

Before the muster, however, an election was held for officers, and Capt. Sanderson and Lieut. Cayce were re-elected. Thomas S. Kunkle succeeding Judge Moodey, who declined entering the service.

Afterward Henry Pennington was elected additional lieutenant.

The company was attached to the second regiment of Indiana Volunteer Infantry, and consisted of the following officers and men.

COMMISSIONED OFFICERS.

William L. Sanderson, Captain.
Steward W. Cayce, First Lieutenant.
Thomas S. Kunkle, Second Lieutenant.
Henry Pennington, additional 2d Lieut.

SERGEANTS.

Aug. M. Jackson,
R. F. Freeman,

Thomas Gwin,
Geo. W. Lapping.

CORPORALS.

Ben. F. Scribner,
Geo. W. Smith,

Enos Taylor,
Thomas V. Stran.

PRIVATES.

William Aikin,
William J. Austin,
Goodheart Abbott,
William Abbott,
George Adams,
Frank Bailey,
James Bailey,
Michael Burris,
William Bell,
Isaac Buzby,
Sam Buchanan,
Larkin Cunningham,
Hiram W. Catlin,
William Cook,
William Canada,
Lewis Coulter,
Jesse Fox,
Samuel Finley,
Thomas Frazier,
Berry Gwin,
James F. Gwin,
Charles H. Goff,
Albert L. Goodwin,
John M. Hutchings,
Martin Howard,
Daniel Howard,
John Howard,
Thomas Howard,
Samuel Howard,
William Hopkins,
John Hitch,
Luther N. Hollis,
George Hoffman,
August E. Hughes,
Henry Hardy,
Alex. M. Jackson,
Granville Jackson,
William Lee,

William H. Lilly,
Edwin R. Lunt,
John T. Lewis,
Walter J. McMurtry,
John M. Laughlin,
Conrad Miller,
Joseph Morgan,
Nathan McDowell,
John N. Mitchell,
James B. Mulkey,
Henry M. Matthews,
Richard S. Morris,
Emanuel W. Moore,
John D. McRae,
Harvey Paddock,
William Pitt,
Wesley Pierce,
Hiram J. Reamer,
Warren Robinson,
Thomas Raper,
David Rice,
Apollos Stephens,
Luther Stephens,
Thomas W. Sinex,
James Smith,
Calvin R. Thompson,
William W. Tuley,
John Taylor,
James Taylor,
Thomas J. Tyler,
Luke Thomas,
James Winger,
James B. Winger,
James Walts,
Henry W. Welker,
Charles Wright,
Miles D. Warren,
Philip Zubrod.

Joseph Lane was the first Colonel of the Second Indiana Regiment, but being appointed by president Polk Brigadier General, an election was held while the regiment was camped near this city and Capt. Sanderson

was fairly elected, but through the chicanery of certain parties the votes of the Evansville Rifles were destroyed and the election declared void. The regiment was under command of Lieut. Col. James R. Haddon and Major James A. Cravens until it arrived at Brazos Santiago, when Wm. A. Bowles was elected colonel.

We were transported from New Albany to New Orleans on the good steamer Uncle Sam, captain Charles Van Dusen, who is long since dead.

Notwithstanding the vicissitudes of a soldier's life then and there begun – for many had left homes of comfort, and tables of luxuries, to sleep upon the hard deck of the steamer and eat off a tin platter fried “sow belly and hard tack,” we had a jolly crowd. On steamer Uncle Sam was organized the string band that enlivened many an hour either at the camp fire or in the “stag” dance.

At New Orleans we encamped for two days, on the battle ground where Gen. Jackson closed the war of 1812, by his signal victory over Packenham; then on the ship Gov. Davis embarked upon the water once more; crossed the gulf of Mexico, and landed at Brazos Santiago, near the mouth of the Rio Grande river. Then it was that Dr. Bowles, a man without one particle of military knowledge, was elected colonel. A greater misfortune could not have befallen us.

Brazos is a low sandbar, called an island, but does not deserve the dignity of the name, as we found nothing there but brackish water, hot sand, a few small oysters. We remained there a short time however, and went up the east bank of the Rio Grande a few miles, and pitched our tents at “camp Belknap” hallowed by the memory of many happy days spent there.

The writer of this does not propose to give a detailed account of the campaign, but is tempted to dwell in the camp at Belknap, as the incidents of more than thirty years ago come crowding on his memory. It would take several columns of the PUBLIC PRESS to tell of the eccentricities of Austin and Bell, the peculiarities of the “tiger tails,” the tramps of Hopkins, Freeman, Taylor and others, the sharp practice of the steamboat engineer to see the old folks at home and not return, and many other incidents that would be relished by the old soldiers, but would be of little interest to the public. But our pleasure was not without alloy. The dark shadow of death came at Brazos and took Joseph Morgan.

Martin Howard and John T. Lewis died at Belknap.

At camp Belknap the hunting and fishing were excellent, the climate delicious, no enemy near and the regulations of war not very strictly enforced. There were about eight thousand men at camp Belknap.

Two fine steamers belonging to the U.S. Quartermasters Department were running on the Rio Grande from Brazos to Camargo, transporting troops and munitions of war.

The natural companions of the Greys were the Louisville Legion, and there are few of the old company who do not remember Cols. Ormsby and Rodgers; captains Harper Bullou, Howe, Sanders and Triplett and many others of that gallant regiment, which was so soon ordered to the front, and gained renown by its great gallantry at the battle of Monterey.

Much time was spent at Belknap in drilling by regiment and company, and before the main body was ordered forward the army was in good condition, and ready for a fight. On the 29th day of September the news came of the victory at Monterey, and from that time the troops of the Rio Grande were eager to go forward and participate in the struggle.

On the 6th day of December 1846, after a sojourn of nearly five months, we struck tents and embarked on a steamer for Camargo. We slowly stemmed the swift current of the Rio Grande and gradually our almost second home melted from our view, and camp Belknap was deserted.

Camargo lies at the head of navigation on the Rio Grande, and is a small village with nothing worth notice, except the fort that was constructed by Gen. Pillow contrary to all rules of engineering, and caused a smile of derision on the face of every regular army officer who passed that way.

On the 19th we left Camargo, for Saltillo, and then "came the tug of war." With knapsack on the back containing all his clothing, forty-four rounds of ball cartridges at his side, and a heavy musket on his shoulder, the soldier who had a good time at Belknap fell into ranks and through a dust six inches deep marched into the heart of the enemy's country. The sun was hot, very hot, the dust stifling, the water in our canteens warm, and there were few of us but felt that first day of actual service like re-entering for another year.

The country along the route from Camargo to Monterey is not thickly settled. Towns there are at intervals of about twenty miles but the intervals are almost solitudes. The little town of Meir, on the banks of the Rio Grande, twenty-six from Camargo, stands upon a hill and can be seen from Monterey road many miles. It has many beautiful houses, two large catholic churches, a pinzu, or public square, fountains, etc.

On the sides of some of the houses are marks of bullets left there when the fight took place which culminated in the taking of the "Meir prisoners," who were decimated, and every tenth man shot by order of Santa Anna as Perote. We saw more women at Meir in proportion to the population than in any other place in Mexico.

Another nice town in our route was Seralvo. I find in my note book, written nearly thirty-five years ago the following:

"We camped at Seralvo about four o'clock this evening and after pitching our tents, Billy Bell, Hi. Reamer and I went down to bathe in the limpid stream that flows through the town, and take a look at things in general. Soon we were beneath the arch of a beautiful stone bridge, in a

cool, clean stream of water. On one side of us towered the cathedral built of cut stone, said to be one hundred and sixty-six years old; within the cupola of which swung two ponderous bells, whose chimes were then awakening echoes in the neighboring heights. On the other side stood a thick grove of fig trees in the midst of which was a cottage over whose roof clung beautiful vines in full bloom. Water clear and cool flows through every street, and take it all together, Seralvo is almost the prettiest little town I ever saw."

There are few other towns of note on the route to Monterey.

At Seralvo we caught a first view of the Sierra Madre mountains. The sight was grand, and to a tourist would have afforded great pleasure, but to the tired soldier, it was only the giant mile post in the dim distance pointing to the end of his journey.

MONTEREY.

Late in December, we arrived at Monterey. At the base of a mountain whose towering summit reaches to the clouds, and upon whose top "the tall pines dwindle into shrubs in dizziness of distance," stands Monterey, the strong city of Mexico. On either side of it are mountains of equal magnitude, so that the city is situated in a strong natural fortress.

The bishop's palace, where General Worth and his men fought so desperately, and won so signal a victory, is upon a ridge upon the west side, and being strongly built of stone, formed a formidable fort. Batteries were ranged in front and rear of it, and in the face of galling fires the gallant Worth stormed its heights and virtually gained the battle at Monterey. The Black fort and Saucer fort bore marks of the terrible charge made by Butler and his volunteers.

It was at Monterey that the volunteers gained the applause of the regular army officers, who were forced to admit that they were equal to the regulars in a quick, desperate engagement. We encamped at the Walnut springs, near Monterey, several days, and had a good opportunity of seeing the city. The houses are built of stone and painted universally white; the streets paved with cobble stones, and concave, with water running through the center of them. Queen Isabella's bridge is a fine structure, thrown over a basin in the center of the city. A statue of the queen crowned stands on one side of it. The cathedral of Monterey is one of the finest in Mexico, it covers about an acre of ground, has a full chime of bells, a clock in its tower, and an immense organ, but no seats. The floors are mosaic, and there the devotee kneels or stands upon the hard stone for hours, while the solemn service of the Roman catholic church is said or sung.

SALTILLO.

Saltillo is quite a large city, but possessed none of the natural beauties of location of Monterey – no orange or fig trees, a few straggling vines and an occasional century plant relieve the monotony; many of the natives half clad, dirty and idle, lounge in the streets, beg from door to door, or sleep on the stones in the suburbs. It is celebrated for goats, pulque, fleas, shaggy ponies and beggars.

There is, however, some industry displayed by a few weavers, who manufacture fancy colored blankets, used by both sexes. The houses here, as in all Mexico, are built of unburnt brick and stone, two storied, of almost universal height, plain and white. Very little wood is used by the Mexicans in building. The ceilings are generally arched and the roofs made of cement and soil, and often flower gardens are cultivated on the house tops; no glass in the windows, but iron grate bars are universally used. The cooking is done over square ovens with charcoal, and the vessels stone crockery ware. Stoves were then unknown, and as the climate is mild, no other fires were maintained except for cooking purposes. It was a dirty place, and fleas the natural product of the dust of the city.

On the outskirts of the city are some fine residences of rich men, but the city proper, though substantially built, is not at all fascinating. There is, however, one building very majestic and beautifully proportioned, the cathedral, second in grandeur to the grand cathedrals at the City of Mexico and Puebla. It is ornamented with rich carvings in fresco and elegant mouldings adorn the wings.

Thirty-five years ago several of the Greys entered the cathedral together. Frank Scribner, George Lapping and the writer are still living here. Goff and Warren Robinson are dead and the others scattered, and may be dead for aught I know. It was crowded to overflowing – men, women and children all standing – suddenly, at the bidding of the priest, all kneeled upon the bare stone floor, making diverse and sundry crosses with their hands upon the forehead and breast, and chanting in concert. It was a solemn scene. After the vast crowd of worshippers had finished their adulations and retired, we advanced into the interior to view the splendors of the altars and the glittering ornaments of the towering dome. Above the grand altar blazes forth beautiful carvings in gold, so brilliant as to dazzle the eyes of the beholder. On one side was a statue of the Virgin Mary, on the other the bleeding Savior on the cross. The thunder tones of the organ were hushed and silence reigned while we contemplated and surveyed the temple erected to the worship of God. The dome is embellished with frescoes of angels reveling amid stars of brilliancy and exquisite softness. The paintings are very fine, representing various saints, the virgin and child, the Savior, etc. The simplicity of the services in our catholic churches at home dwindle into insignificance beside the stately grandeur of the holy Mass in the churches of Mexico.

At Saltillo, Larkin Cunningham died. We were now in the heart of the enemy's country with a very small army of men, and it became necessary to use every precaution to guard against surprise. Forts were erected and batteries stationed on the south and west sides of the city, the troops were drilled daily, and every soldier was required to be ready to march at a moment's warning, or to defend the position if attacked by the enemy. Yet, amid the busy preparation, I find by referring to my note book, that on the 14th of July, 1847, "Charley Goff, Capt. Ransom, Mathews and myself attended a grand banquet at the 'Great Westerns,' and Gen. Lane and Capt. Sanderson presided," etc.

During the month of January the city was full of rumors. Now it was that Santa Anna was advancing and but a few miles distant. The next day perhaps it would be whispered that we were to advance to San Louis Potosi. Then again, the Mexicans would suddenly disappear by the hundreds, and speculation as to the future was rife.

On the 26th day of January we received news of the capture of Major Gaines and Capt. Cassius M. Clay and a part of their cavalry by the Mexicans, and then it became apparent that Santa Anna was indeed advancing and intended attacking us with a superior force.

On the 2^d of February, General Taylor arrived at Saltillo with the Mississippi battalion of infantry, and was received by the troops with much joy, as his name alone inspired the army to such an extent that each individual soldier felt that defeat was impossible.

On the 6th of February Saltillo was evacuated by all of our troops, except a company of regular artillery under command of Lieut. Donaldson, which remained to garrison the forts and protect the rear. We pitched our tents in the midst of a beautiful plain at Agua Nueva. The atmosphere was full of rumors daily, from that time until the 20th, and on the last named day the squadron of regular dragoons, under command of Charles May, who so signally distinguished himself at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, and Capt. Washington's flying artillery, which had been out on the plain reconnoitering, returned and reported that the enemy in great force was marching on us. That night Capt. Ben. McCulloch, of the Texas rangers, came in about midnight and reported the enemy but ten miles distant. Then the long roll awakened the camp. Rapidly preparations were made, and e'er the morning sun had gilded the peaks of the sierras, Agua Nueva was deserted and our whole army on the way to Saltillo. About sundown of the 21st we halted at the Hacienda of Buena Vista, pitched our tents, and there learned that Gen. Taylor had selected that as the spot upon which to give battle to the enemy.

During the whole of the next day preparations were being made for the impending conflict. Officers were galloping their horses on the field, positions for batteries selected, wagons parked at the ranche, every

weapon of warfare carefully examined and put in order for business, councils of war held, consultations among the officers and men, and "non cupative" wills made by many, who knew not what the morrow might bring forth.

That night we slept, or rather lay upon the battle field. There was a cold, drizzling rain, and the various rumors of the magnitude of Santa Anna's army was not calculated to give us complete rest of mind or body.

The morning of the 22d of February, 1847 came, and on the distant plain the first rays of the sun flashed upon the serried ranks of Santa Ann's 20,000 men. It was a beautiful sight. When first descried they were some six miles distant. Their sharpshooters deployed upon the mountain side, and by noon were upon our left flank. Then came an afternoon of great excitement. Our riflemen had climbed the heights, and a deep mountain gorge only separated the skirmishers of either army. Then the firing at will commenced, and from the plains below both armies watched the conflict; and as our men were armed with long-range rifles, and the Mexicans with the short, smooth-bored muskets, they were at a great disadvantage. Time and again would some greaser fall beneath the aim of our men down the mountain gorge. In the meantime, young Lieut. Kilburne leveled his howitzers upon the foe on the mountain side and did some excellent work. While the skirmishing was going on briskly on the mountain the artillery of Santa Anna, stationed on a slope south of the main battle field, kept up a steady cannonade, firing at our troops who were upon the plain, but no great damage was done, as the range was too long and the aim too uncertain. Night came and we again lay upon the field, fully convinced that Santa Anna would give us battle on the morrow. Gen. Taylor and staff went to Saltillo that night, leaving Gen. Wool in command. It is not my intention to attempt to give a detailed account of the battle of Buena Vista. The story has been often told.

The Spencer Greys were a part of the 2d Indiana. Early in the morning of the 23d that regiment was posted by Gen. Joe Lane nearly a half mile in front of the line of battle. There it remained under the galling fire of infantry in front and artillery on the left flank until twenty-one rounds of cartridges had been fired, and the wavering foe and lines of dead on our front showed that we had done good service. Gen. Lane was about to give the order to advance at charge bayonet, when he ascertained that the right of the regiment had ceased firing and were retreating. Then old Joe Lane "swore a blue streak." Yet file by file ceased firing and retreated to the main line of battle. It was not then known, except to those on the extreme right of the regiment, that Colonel Bowles had given the order to cease firing and retreat. Capt. Sanderson, with his ribs broken, was taken off the field. James Bailey and Apollos Stephens were shot early in the action. Lieut. Kemple seized the flag of the regiment and

bore it on the field until the battle was over. The regiment, under command of Lieutenant Colonel Hadden and Major Cravens remained upon the battle field and particularly signalized itself by participating in the repulse of the charge of Mexican lancers upon the somewhat celebrated V, formed and operated by General Lane out of the Second Indiana and the Mississippi battalion; yet Jeff. Davis, who commanded the Mississippians, got the credit of it in the official report of the commanding general. Davis was the son-in-law of Gen. Taylor. When night came and the firing had ceased, we learned that Charley Goff and Warren Robinson had fallen. We expected the battle to open anew on the 24th, but the rising sun shone upon the dead and wounded, and our army, but Santa Anna had departed.

Such is my recollection of the battle of Buena Vista. Many personal reminiscences might be of interest, but the great lapse of time makes memory uncertain, and I will not attempt to tell of personal exploits of valor, etc.

Bela C. Kent, now Mayor of New Albany, although not attached to the army, was upon the battle field the whole day, and did service as an independent rifleman.

After the battle of Buena Vista the writer of this, being on detached service, was not with the company, and knows nothing personally of its history.

In June, 1847, the company was mustered out of the service at New Orleans. That day I heard Sargent S. Prentiss deliver an address of welcome, and at night I saw the elder Booth play Richard the III, two events of a lifetime.

On the morning of the 4th of July we arrived at New Albany, when we were received in grand style by the citizens.

WHERE ARE THEY?

General Lane, the first colonel, died recently in Oregon. Of the officers Second regiment, Major Cravens, of Washington county, alone survives.

All of our commissioned officers are dead except Lieut. Pennington, who resides in this city.

The sergeants are all dead except George W. Lapping, of this city.

The corporals all reside in this city, but Enos Taylor, and he may be living or dead.

Wm. Akin is one of the firm of Akin & Drummond, founders, Louisville. Wm. J. Austin is in Florida. Wm. Bell died last year at Oxford, Indiana. Calvin E. Thompson, E. W. Moore and Sam. Finley are in Iowa. Wm. Cook is in Bowling Green, Ky. Berry Gwin, Alex. Jackson, John McLaughlin, Conrad Miller, Wesley Pierce, H. J. Reamer, Wm. W. Tuley, James Taylor and Miles D. Warren are all residents of this county. J. F. Gwin lives in northern Indiana; John M. Hutchings, the Howards, Wm. H. Lilly, in Clark

county, Indiana; Nathan McDowell, at Glasgow, Ky.; James B. Mulky is practicing law at Bloomington, Ind.; Richard S. Morris at Galveston, Texas; Wm. Pitt, dead. Where the others are, or whether living or dead, I know not.

- Public Press 14 December 1881