

SOME CIVIL WAR RECOLLECTIONS OF LUTHER MILLER,
COMPANY E, 81ST INDIANA VOLUNTEER INFANTRY

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THE FOLLOWING RECOLLECTIONS WERE RECORDED BY MISS MARGARET TINDALL, DAUGHTER OF MR. & MRS. WILLARD TINDALL, AND GRANDDAUGHTER OF THE LATE MR. MILLER, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF JUDGE THOMAS J. WILSON. MR. MILLER DIED ON MONDAY, APRIL 20, 1931 AND THE MANUSCRIPT WAS READ AT THE FUNERAL OF MR. MILLER BY MR. HARRY McGRAIN ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 1931.

In August, 1862, I went to Jeffersonville, passing through New Albany, in company with Buff Watson, John Fravel, John Stepro, Bill Rosenbarger, Nevil Boone, John Timberlake and others I do not remember.

We were sworn into the services at the fairgrounds in New Albany and then went up to the grasshopper camp east of Jeffersonville and were there about two weeks. One night they called us out and ran us across the river in a ferry boat at Jeffersonville, then took us up about to LaGrange. One of the boys, John Pindle, gave out on the march and sat down to rest and Timberlake, who was an officer, went up and struck him with the blade of his sword. We found no enemy there with which to start a skirmish. After marching all night we returned to grasshopper. It is my recollection that we stayed at the camp about a month, then crossed the river again by ferry boat and went up to Perryville. As well as I remember, it took us about three days. We did not get there until in the evening and the Battle of Perryville had begun at noon. We reached there about five o'clock, and formed in line of battle, but never actually got into the fight.

We went from Perryville to Bowling Green and camped there for a while; from there we marched to Nashville, Tennessee. It took us some days to walk that distance, and there again went into camp.

From Nashville we went to Murfreesboro and got there in the evening. We spent a miserable night, I would say, for it rained all night and we were not allowed to have a fire because the enemy would know our location. We were told to lay over our guns to keep them dry, and the next morning the battle began. We were forced to fall back and when we stopped to make a stand, while I was taking aim, my gun resting on some limb or bush, I was seriously wounded in the right knee. I was put in the ambulance and about 12 o'clock at night I arrived at the hospital. My knee swelled up until it was as large as three knees.

The next morning an old citizen came to our hospital and walked up and down the aisles, looking at the men and observing their condition. He said he had one boy in the

Rebel Amy and one in the Union Army. The one in the Rebel Army got killed at Middlesboro.

This old man walked around the aisles about three times and on the third round came to where I was laying and asked what was the matter with me? I told him nothing much was wrong, but when he looked at my leg he said he thought it was pretty bad. He then kindly asked me if I wanted to go home with him. I first told him I would not but he kept inviting me and persuading me to go with him until finally I said, "All right." I did go after the doctor said I could. He went to ask the doctor and came back to get my name, company and regiment. The doctor treated my wound and then came to the man's house to treat it.

I was allowed to go home with this old man, William Jack. The doctor (I do not remember his name) said he'd "come over there and dress my knee, as Mr. Jack did not live very far from the hospital" – about 400 yards. I suppose the doctor thought he would get a square meal if he came over. At least he'd come over every day, and he came almost every day at meal time and Jack always had a nice meal for him. I could not have been treated more kindly, if I had been at home with my own people. Mr. Jack explained his sympathy with all soldiers by saying he had one son in the northern Army and one in the southern.

While I was staying at Mr. Jack's, I was really what they call a featherbed soldier, because I slept in a nice feather bed all the time I was there. I refused to get into the bed until I had had a good bath and thoroughly cleaned, because I did not want to pass on to their house the vermin, that we called graybacks, and I noticed during the World War, they called them "cooties". The old man was fine enough to make a pair of crutches for me.

The hospital was a Baptist church about 400 yards from his home, so I often saw the wounded men during all the time I was there. After my bath and being put into this comfortable bed I stayed there about seven weeks in bed and as my leg got better I stayed there about three weeks longer. On account of my anxiety to keep clean and to keep their bed and bedding free from vermin, Mr. Jack's wife said that she knew I came from a good family.

GUARDED BENEFACTOR'S CORN

One morning he asked me if I would go out to the barn, and I took my crutches and hobbled out there and he then explained why he had wanted me to come out. He had about 2000 bushels of corn in the barn and he had seen some northern men coming to take possession of it. When they saw me in the Union uniform, they naturally thought I was guarding it and rode on, leaving his property alone. Later the government got the corn but paid for it.

When my wound had healed I left there and joined my regiment at Murfreesboro. When I had been there with them about a week, I had the misfortune to be stricken with typhoid fever. I lay on the ground in April with one blanket under me and one over me. When the fever left me, "it fell to my feet" as was the expression then, and I suffered greatly from the pain in my feet and ankles. Raising the feet as high as possible would give me relief and as I was lying in a tent I would have my feet tied to the center pole, during

my sickness Dr. Harve Wolfe and Tom Stevens waited on me but they gave me very little medicine. I lay there very sick in this tent and then again went on the march.

We started out in April not knowing where we were to be taken, as that knowledge was kept from us. We arrived at Chickamauga on Saturday, the 19th of September. The battle started that same day. I fought a half day in what you might call a running fight. One side would drive the other forward then the other would drive that one back. The Union Army did not use their cannon but depended on their muskets and bayonets. I fought on Sunday in a single line and on that day, Sunday, September 20, 1863 at 10 o'clock in the morning, I was captured with about nineteen others out of our regiment. The Southerners came up on us five regiments deep, one after the other, and cut through our line, surrounding us so that we were captured.

We were started for Richmond, Virginia on the 21st of September, 1863. I think we were taken to Columbia, South Carolina, then were put on a train and taken from there to Richmond, Virginia. We were kept in a prison which was an old tobacco factory and food was practically nothing but bread and water. We had to sleep on the floor without cover or fire.

After about three months of this, we were taken to Dannville, Virginia. There also we had not fire or blankets or any protection from the cold. This prison was also a tobacco factory, being a large brick building. We had to sleep right on the bare floor and rations consisted of a piece of corn bread in a square about three inches in each dimension. We had no meat except after a battle when they would give us mule meat, and as it is coarser than the horse meat, that is the way we could distinguish it; sometimes neither the horses nor mules were very fat. We had nothing to drink but water.

We would appoint one of our number as corporal to draw our rations and he would draw rations for a hundred men and divide it among us.

DIGS TUNNEL AND ESCAPES

We finally got hold of a strip of iron about 18 inches or 20 inches long and two inches wide, getting it off of a tobacco press. Fifteen of us started with this to dig a tunnel under the building. There was an engineer in our crowd and he figured by digging a tunnel under the building we could come up on the outside of the prison in the cellar of a darky cabin. We dug under the building, working after night and when we came out we would cover the entrance to our tunnel with empty tobacco boxes that were lying there. We came across an old well under the building into which we threw most of the dirt. Our tunnel was 153 feet long, running the length of the building and then on out under a bank. We dug under the fence. The darky cabin had a floor up off of the ground a couple of feet, and we came out under the cabin as had been calculated at night and they were all asleep and did not know it. We would only work at night and slept during the day, carrying the dirt we dug along in our clothes. The floor of the prison was so near the ground that we dug our trench along under it eighteen inches deep in the ground.

In those fifteen men one of whom, as I said, was an engineer and had planned the course of our trench or tunnel and where we would come out. From where we left our

building we tunneled for about 53 feet, about 20 feet of which was through gravel and we came up under the Negro hut as we had calculated. We divided our work, as only one man could dig at a time and several behind him would pull the dirt out and crawl along and put it in the old well.

Just as I came out I saw a white man standing across the street and he said, "Go to it, boys" and, of course, we did. We got away from there just as fast as we could.

About three hundred soldiers crawled out that night and there were several thousand in the prison. The last Sunday night in February we walked about two miles and came to a branch. Of course, we knew by this time that bloodhounds would be on our trail so we waded up this stream several miles to throw them off the scent. They overtook quite a number of the men with the bloodhounds.

We took the first road that crossed the stream and at the first house we came to we stole, or rather took, a bee hive and a goose. We found that the bee hive was empty and did not carry it very far and we went ahead with the goose and in a hollow stopped and built a fire and roasted it. We never stopped to clean it at all, as this was the first thing we had to eat since our escape from prison and we thought it wonderfully good. We ate it, feathers and all, as we were half starved.

The first night we slept in a brush pile. "We" does not mean all of the three hundred soldiers. But only my squad in which there were seven men. The only food we could get as we went along came to us from the Negroes, who were kind enough to risk giving us their meals.

The fourth night out one of the boys got sick, and we left him at a Negro hut where they risked hiding him. I am told that they kept him there three months. He was from Ohio and I later learned that he got through the lines safely and returned to his home.

The next man we lost was a man whose turn it was to go after food, as we took turns about in this risky business. He went into a farmhouse and never returned. We were watching and waiting for him about a quarter of a mile away, and he never came out of the house while we were there. It seems the man's house he went into was a sheriff's and he came out of the house with bloodhounds. This farm house was a fine place, a plantation set between two hills. I lay down to escape the notice of the hounds but one of them came up and I thought my end had come. I was lying beside a log, but this hound came up and looked over the log at me and looked me in the face but then went on. I can't explain why he didn't bark and give the alarm, but all of us escaped from that danger, except the one man who had gone into the house.

We had nothing to eat during that day, of course. We would not travel but remained hidden in the brush all that next day with nothing to eat. We marched on the next night without any food whatever. On our way after night we met five Rebels. We stopped and talked with them. We told them we were Rebels, also, and they thought we were going to meet our regiment. They let us go but the next day there were guards after us on our trail. In order to throw them off we crossed over to another road and followed a public road that led us to the James River and were lucky enough to find a wooden boat that was used to

transport wood from one town to another. We took possession of this and pushed it out into the stream and as the water was shallow, being only about three feet deep, there were poles in the boat and by using them we pushed across the river quite easily.

The next night it was my turn to go after something to eat. I went to a Negro hut and knocked on the door. When they opened it, I asked for something to eat. I told the man, "I am a Yankee, and very hungry, and would like to have something to eat." He grabbed me by the hand and pulled me inside and fixed up the best meal that we had had for many a long day. I wish I knew his name for I certainly would like to thank him. As I started out his daughter came in. She was almost white, mulatto or quadroon. "Good God," I said, "I am caught." For I thought she was a white woman and I supposed I had been trapped. "No, no, Massy, she is only my daughter," the old Negro woman (his wife) exclaimed. I was so overjoyed after hearing this that I will say that this girl was prettier than any I had ever seen.

FIVE MILES FROM THE UNION LINES

After eating, I took the lunch he had fixed for all of us and went to where the others were waiting. We marched all that night, which was Sunday. We kept on as before, lying hidden during the day and traveling at night, begging and getting what food we could from the Negroes. The next Sunday night we went into a colored hut and got something to eat, and by this time we were confident we would make our escape successfully. We were within five miles from the Union lines at Suffolk, Virginia. This Negro wanted to keep us that night but we wanted to go on; we were so eager to get to safety. This man went on about two miles ahead of us to see that the coast was clear.

We planned to cross Black Water, a small branch there, but that night seven Rebels came up with us. We were almost too weak from our long march and lack of food to offer them any resistance. They were armed and we had no arms whatever, and so we had to surrender. They took us about fifteen miles that night. In a few days we reached Richmond, Virginia, where they put us in a room which was really a very small dungeon. They put five of us in a small room only four feet wide and five feet long. Of course, we could not lay down or rest. We were kept in there for three days. They kept the Northern prisoners who were officers in a room above us; they were treated very well. One of the lieutenants about us cut a hole through the floor, which was our ceiling, and managed to make an opening big enough to talk through. He wanted to know where we were from and took a very generous interest in our welfare. He also managed to push some dried beef through to us. I don't know where he got it but it was certainly appreciated. I do not remember his name but do remember that he was from the 81st Regiment of Indiana Volunteers, that being my own regiment.

We had only one meal in three days besides this small amount of dried beef that he gave us, which was insufficient to do us any good, though generous of him to give it to us. We had only one meal in three days and no water. I suppose this was punishment because we had escaped from the other prison.

From there we were taken to Belle Island and we were kept there for about two months and treated as was usual at that prison. We were fairly well fed but still lacked for proper clothing, cover and shelter.

SENT TO ANDERSONVILLE

Then from Belle Island, we were sent to Andersonville. We were taken there on a train and Philip Rosenbarger, who was from Crawford County and I intended to jump off the train in order to escape. Philip jumped and I was ready but Philip had accidentally knocked the guard's gun as he jumped and awoke him. He did not know for certain that Philip had escaped and he said to me, "Sit down there, you damned Yankee." And of course there was nothing for me to do but obey. Philip did not get through. He was recaptured and they took him to some other prison.

When we arrived at Andersonville we were treated there the worst of all my experiences in all the prisons. We had no shelter but were out in a thirty acre open field. Those of us who had blankets could, of course, make a crude shelter from them. Our main rations were a small piece of corn bread about three inches square and perhaps once a week one tablespoon full of raw beans. We were not furnished any regular way to cook them. There were more bugs than beans. Some few that could get hold of fuel or vessels to boil them for soup did so. A coat of bugs would boil up as thick as the beans. I was taken there in April and in some way managed to survive until November.

It was just luck that I got out when I did as the North and South were exchanging prisoners. They had the number to be exchanged from our prison all counted out there at the prison gate when they found that they were entitled to exchange one more man. Will White was one of the prison guards who knew me and he came to me and said, "Miller, do you want to go home?" Of course I did, but I didn't know that he meant there was any chance for me, so I answered him in a sort of sarcastic way and said, "Go and leave this fine boarding house?" He replied, "No, Miller, I am not joking, we are exchanging men and we need one more now." I joined the men that were exchanged and in that way got started on my way home.

We were first sent to Savannah, Georgia, and from there to Annapolis, Maryland, then to Pittsburg and from there on home. I came from Pittsburg by train to Indianapolis and I was sent by train from there to New Albany and from New Albany got to Mauckport by boat, reaching there about midnight in January, 1864.

These incidents are some of the principle experiences I had while in the Army and as you can see from reading this, I had a very hard time and suffered much in prison. Yet, I am glad I could serve my country and gladly would do so again, if able.

LUTHER MILLER

COMPANY E, 81ST INFANTRY