

Detroit Daily Tribune Article

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A Glance into the Camp of the Michigan Ninth

To the Editor of the Detroit Tribune

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Having an hour or two to spend ere the departure of the Jeffersonville train, I devote it to a hurried sketch of a recent peep into the camp of the Ninth Michigan, on Muldrough's Hill. The description of what I saw during a short stay with the regiment may be of interest to those having friends among its members. On the 19th, a few Michigan gentlemen (of whom I was one) having succeeded, though not without difficulty, in obtaining passes for West Point, started by carriage from this city, about nine in the morning, with a bright sky and a clear atmosphere, and a beautiful country extending itself on every side of us. The road to West Point, which lies 20 miles south of Louisville, is a turnpike or macadamized road, well constructed, running on to Elizabethtown in a South-westerly course until it strikes the lines of the enemy. Except the heavy blue Pennsylvania army wagon, freighted with provisions or munitions of war and rolling onward to the lines, no vehicle is seen, unless it be some wood wagon driven from the forest by some plantation negro, mounted on the near wheel horse and driving his team by a single line. The country is mainly what is called bottom land, very rich, used principally for grazing, and occasionally revealing a handsome dwelling and well fenced and tidy farm. The majority of the houses are not of a superior order. Lazy and sad looking negroes loiter around the gateways or hover about the wood pile, and the dreary silence of expectation seems to hang over the entire region. When about five miles from Salt River, Muldrough's Hill begins to lift itself up, and stretch itself away off to the left and eastward, while the Ohio, no longer vexed by thousands of busy keels, reveal itself on the right and west, and beyond it the high hills of Indiana frown down upon its silent waters.

A nearer approach shows the fortifications on the hill, some 450 or 500 feet above the plain, with cannon pointing Southward, and sentinels pacing along the perilous edge of the rocky bluff. We are now on the margin of Salt River, celebrated for its bourbon, which here passes it [sic] green waters into the darker flood of the more majestic Ohio. On its northern bank are seen two rude attempts at fortification, one of sand bags, the other of logs and mud, both perplexing the observer with the inquiry as to whether they are forts or pig pens. They were the work of the Louisville home guard, and stand as monuments of juvenile military inexperience. Here the road turns abruptly to the left, running down the bluff bank, to a floating scow manned by two antiquated old negroes, who evidently imagine that no ferry boat was every yet constructed equal to this, nor

one ever before so skillfully managed. By pulling pushing, paddling, sculling, shoving and swearing, old "Uncle Long" in some mysterious manner manages to get you across the stream, which is here about 150 feet wide; another steep ascent brings you face to face with the sentinels of the 9th Michigan, and to the entrance of West Point, which clusters under the towering hills just beyond, like the village of Mackinaw in our own State. Passing through guards as they recognize the faces of Michigan men, and tracking our way through hundreds of army wagons, horses, etc., we wind along a road to the left for a quarter of a mile or more, and suddenly, by an abrupt turn in the same directions, begin to climb the hill by the road upon its westernside [sic]. Soon we reach the headquarters of the Quartermaster's Department, where horses, wagons, mules, black-topped and gloomy looking ambulances, guard tents and heaps of forage, are promiscuously groped under heavy old oaks, whose branches are here and there ornamented with the green mistletoe bough, which abounds through all this region. Betaking ourselves to the well cut roadway, we climb, and pant, and climb, upward and onward, and still upward, until we strike another row of sentinels, outside the trenches of the fort, which crosses the summit of the hill and spreads itself over five acres or more to the right. Cannon frown from the parapets, one rifled and six smooth-bore, and all the earth works of a fortification capable of holding 1500 men stretch off to the southward; while on the left and north you turn your eye directly down the cliff, upon the town, the river, and the wide expanse of field and wood that, like a panorams [sic], unfold a scene as beautiful as it is tranquil, Sad indeed is the thought that frowning battlements and armed men are necessary to preserve the peace of that fertile plain from the desolations hand of fratricidal war.

A few more steps up the crest of the hill, leading up [missing] and newly reared huts, brought to the head quarters, where we were cordially received by Col. Duffield and his staff, Lieut. Col. Parkhurst, Maj. Fox and Adj. Henry M. Duffield. After the surprise of the visit and congratulation, on our success in passing the lines, we were complimented by the band, which soon appeared on the crest of the hill, and refreshed us with several beautiful pieces, evincing great improvement since their organization and much taste in execution. The Colonel and Adjutant excusing themselves for battalion drill, left us to enjoy with the rest of the staff a substantial dinner in the mess tent. This concluded we emerged to find the Regimental colors beautifully displayed over us and half a dozen horses in waiting to carry us to the field below, where the battalion was engaged at drill. For two hours and more, they were conducted through various evolutions on the field, showing that notwithstanding their sickness, the various companies had attained very great proficiency in the school of battalion. The drill closed with evening parade, when Col. Duffield announced to his officers the fact that they were favored with a visit from several of their Michigan friends, among whom he was happy to announce Col. Pittman, whose skill in military tactics and drill was known to them all, and under whose critical eye they had just been received. He then introduced the Colonel to the officers, who stepped forward and addressed them with much feeling and in a strain that engaged the attention of both officers and men. After passing the highest compliments upon both officers and men for the great skill displayed in their battalion movements, and congratulating them on their improved health, the reputation for honesty and good conduct which he had learned from Kentuckians they had already won, and the credit

they had tons reflected upon the State of Michigan, he proceeded to urge upon them gallant service in behalf of Kentucky. That noble state, which had mingled her blood with that of Michigan on the banks of the Raisin, must not be lost to the Union. She held the ashes of Henry Clay, and her children, he believed, entertained all his love for the Constitution and the Laws. They were here to help preserve and keep her from the hands of the spoiler, and he felt assured that when the hour of battle arrived the 9th Michigan would win a name worthy of the men who composed it, of the officers who would lead it, and of the state whence it went forth. Salutations were then exchanged and the battalion returned to camp. Meanwhile the staff officers and their guests were invited to the house of a neighboring planter named Henry Craycroft, where they were warmly received and entertained until after midnight. In accordance with the forms and usages of old fashioned Kentucky hospitality, old Bourbon (or "Burbon," as they call it here,) was introduced, and again at the proper time re-introduced; followed by a beautifully spread supper table, with all manner of good things showered upon it, the matron of the household gracefully doing the honors of the table, servants standing behind almost every other chair, and the worthy planter at the head supervising the plates of all his guests. Supper over, whist parties were made up, among the company, attractive young ladies from the neighborhood gathered in, the games ran merrily, and again, at the proper time, old Bourbon reappeared, and about 12 o'clock apple toddies were presented to such of the guests as had the courage to assail them. Yet all this was conducted quietly, decorously and cordially and the guests at parting felt that they would long remember the evening's entertainment. This was followed by a similar invitation for the following evening from Dr. Ambrose Geoghegan, another wealthy gentleman in the neighborhood, whose accomplishments as a physician, have done very much to check and restore the sick of the Regiment during the sad days of their acclimation. Some of the sick are also indebted to his very amiable lady, who not only attended upon them in the hospital, but received some into her own home, and with her daughters, gave all a mother's care to them in the time of their extremity. Mrs. Guthrie also, on whose estate the regiment is located, with her daughter, Mrs. White, deserve grateful acknowledgements from the people of Michigan, for untiring devotion to the sick of the hospital and the camp, for true womanly sympathy and service about the dead, and for a continued exercise of vigilant attention to such as are now slowly emerging from the hospital. Many a poor soldiers' cold breast received from their hands the tender tribute of white flowers, and from their eyes the sorrowing tear, when the sister and mother knew not that the absent one lay shrouded for his grave. The names of three women will be canonized as saints of the regiment, and well they may be, for their walk among the sick and dying was like to that of angels from above. In this connection it affords me pleasure to say that the sick list is rapidly diminishing, the cold weather scattering the typhus symptoms and reducing the list of those in hospital to sixty, with a constant daily decrease. The sickness now may be considered as almost at an end, the causes having been entirely removed. The high elevation of the camp gives a pure atmosphere, and the living streams of crystal water, that break on all sides from this rocky hill, afford a guaranty against any recurrence of such a sad experience as this regiment has just undergone.

The men are all hutting themselves for the winter in every variety of cabins, in pursuance of an order from Gen. Buell, "but your men without expense to Government." This does not in case, however, that the regiment may not have orders to move forward at any moment. As they now are situated they stand charged with the defense of the turnpike described above, and of Louisville in this direction. The position is a strong one and will doubtless be well maintained while provisions and ammunition remain. Beyond them on this road, quite a number of regiments are now in advance, the rebel lines being only some forty miles or thereabouts off.

Camp life is a busy one, the bugle and the drum sounding some call or other every few minutes. That those interested may see how time is occupied, I copy some of the soldiers' duties from the general order posted over the Colonel's desk. It runs them.

Reveille 5:30, Reveille Roll Call 5:35, Company drill 5:50, Recall 6:20, Breakfast 6:30, Surgeons call 7:00, Morning report call 7:30, 1st call for guard mounting 7:45, 2nd do 8:00, Battalion drill call 8:30, Recall 10:30, Officer's school 11:00 A. M.; Recall 12:15, 1st Sergeant's call for rations 12:30, Dinner 1:00, Battalion drill 2:00, Recall 3:30, 1st call for dress parade 4:00, Adjutant's call 4:10, Supper 6:00, Tattoo 8:00, Taps (put lights out) 8:30, Officer's taps 9:30, P. M.

In case the weather is unfavorable for battalion drill, the time is spent by the Colonel in his school, with the officers and by the Adjutant with his school of non-commissioned officers.

The best evidence of the good behavior of the Regiment, as to the property of citizens, is apparent from the fact that we heard pigs running round the camp at night, and observed a flock of sheep resting on the hill within the line of the soldiers [sic] quarters, and were told by the Colonel they had thus ranged unmolested ever since they had been on the hill, and he had no fears that his men would harm one of them. The only exposure the men have to meet arises from a whisky barrel sunk now and then somewhere in the neighborhood, with its concomitant drills. But on this enemy Sergeant Major Lohellaire [Dobbelaire] has already made one or two successful charges, capturing and shedding the infernal poisons without hesitation, his men aiding and assisting without venturing to hide it under their jackets - a fact creditable both to their morals and their discipline. But this letter has already swelled to too great dimensions and I have only time to add that the opinion here is that warm work is likely to begin very shortly on the lines, as Gen. Buell and staff went down to Green River to-day. By the time, therefore, that this appears in your columns, your telegraphic dispatches may be announcing the result of his first grapple with the rebel Buckner.