

FIRST MARCH IN MUD

Trying Experience of Pennsylvanians on Sacred Soil.

MAJORITY FELL EXHAUSTED.

First Assistant Secretary of the Interior Ryan Recalls How the 141st Pennsylvanians Were Hastened Back by Night to Guard the Chain Bridge—Regiment Without a Round of Ammunition.



“VIRGINIA mud became incidentally a theme of conversation among a company of Kansas veterans, who called yesterday at the office of First Assistant Secretary of the Interior Thomas Ryan, ex-Minister to Mexico and an ex-captain of the 141st Pennsylvania volunteers.

“Did you ever flounder around in the sacred soil, judge?” inquired one of the visiting jayhawkers of the First Assistant Secretary.

“What a lot we used to hear in war days about the sacred soil,” was the reply, slowly, as a far-away look spread over his face. “Yes, I have marched and floundered in Virginia mud. It was the first march our regiment had, and it was the hardest and, I believe, the most disastrous, for some of the men became permanently disabled from the effects of it.”

Enthusiastic for reminiscences, the veterans listened sympathetically. “The 141st Pennsylvania,” continued Judge Ryan, “like many other Pennsylvania regiments, came from Harrisburg to Washington. We came out in 1862. I don’t remember very much about the Washington of that day, except that it was as nasty and dirty a city as I had ever looked upon. We stopped one night in some barracks here, which I could not accurately locate just at this moment. Some of us had uniforms and some of us didn’t. I recall that I wore a gray civilian suit, which, nevertheless, would have passed well for a Confederate uniform.

Armed with an Ancient Waepon.

“Our guns—well, we didn’t have any till we got here to Washington, as I remember. But, at any rate, before we left this city we had received some sort of an old arm with a foreign name.”

“The old Belgian rifle,” interposed one of the assembled veterans. “The government bought a lot of them from Belgium at the beginning of the war and was terribly cheated. Some of them were made of cast iron and exploded when they were fired. I guess they killed more of our own men than they killed of the enemy.”

“Well, after camping here one night we marched across the Long Bridge and over to Arlington Heights,” resumed Judge Ryan. “Forthwith we were moved off into Virginia, and at 9 or 10 o’clock that night halted. I am sure there never was a more tired set of men. They were all raw recruits, unused to the hardships of army life. Every man of them was so tired that he almost fell asleep in his tracks when the order to halt came. That day the battle of second Bull Run had been fought.

“We hadn’t been resting more than two hours when an order came for us to hasten back to Chain Bridge, which was about twelve miles away. That order means that the Rebels had won the second battle of Bull Run, and we were expected to get back to help defend Chain Bridge against their forces, should they attempt to attack Washington.

“But in the meantime it had begun to rain. And such rain,” ejaculated Judge Ryan, with a sweeping gesture. “Oh, it rained terribly; the water just fell in sheets, and the pike that led back to the Chain Bridge was one broad stretch of Virginia mud. How we slipped and struggled, dragging one foot after another in trying to cover ground back to the Virginia end of Chain Bridge! I don’t know how we ever reached there. It rained unceasingly, and the night was so black one couldn’t see three feet ahead.

Fell Out From Exhaustion.

“In some fashion about one-third of the regiment arrived at their destination the following morning. The others had fallen by the wayside, and it is no exaggeration to say that they had fallen from sheer exhaustion. The regiment had come out from Harrisburg 1,000 strong. The men were proud of their regiment, and I think it true to say that not one of our stragglers had fallen out from any intention to shirk. They marched as long in that terrible mud as they had the physical strength to move an inch.

“I was one of the survivors of that march. When we reached the end of Chain Bridge it was still pouring down, and it is needless to state that no one of us had a dry rag on his body. I wrapped my blanket about me and fell upon the earth. Never since the day I was born have I enjoyed sweeter sleep. Two minutes after I rolled up in that blanket, I was oblivious to the floods, and slept on as though reposing in the most comfortable bed that could have been made for me.

“The humorous part of it comes in here,” chuckled Judge Ryan, as he looked around at the circle of veterans. “There was a fort near, I think that it was Fort Marcy, but we were expected to defend that bridge with our men and prevent the rebels from sweeping down upon the Capital. For that purpose we had made the

here, but it wouldn’t fit our muskets, and for some time thereafter we guarded the bridge without being able to fire a shot, but our stragglers came up gradually. I am certain the impression of that march remains with every man of the regiment now living. As I have said, it was by far the hardest march we had during our entire service, and not a few of the men never recovered entirely from the effects of it. Perhaps we traversed stretches of Virginia mud afterward, just as difficult of passage, but we had become seasoned to that sort of thing, and did not mind it so much.

“Before many days the army that had fought the second battle of Bull Run came our way and passed over the bridge. About that time they were singing some sort of a parody about ‘Pope with headquarters in the saddle’ and another line that ended with ‘skejadd’e.’ I remember the sight of Gen. Howard’s soldiers best. They came back singing many different songs, and were a very cheerful organization of soldiers.

“Prior to their coming we had many scares about the rebels. Frequent rumors reached us from no one knew where,



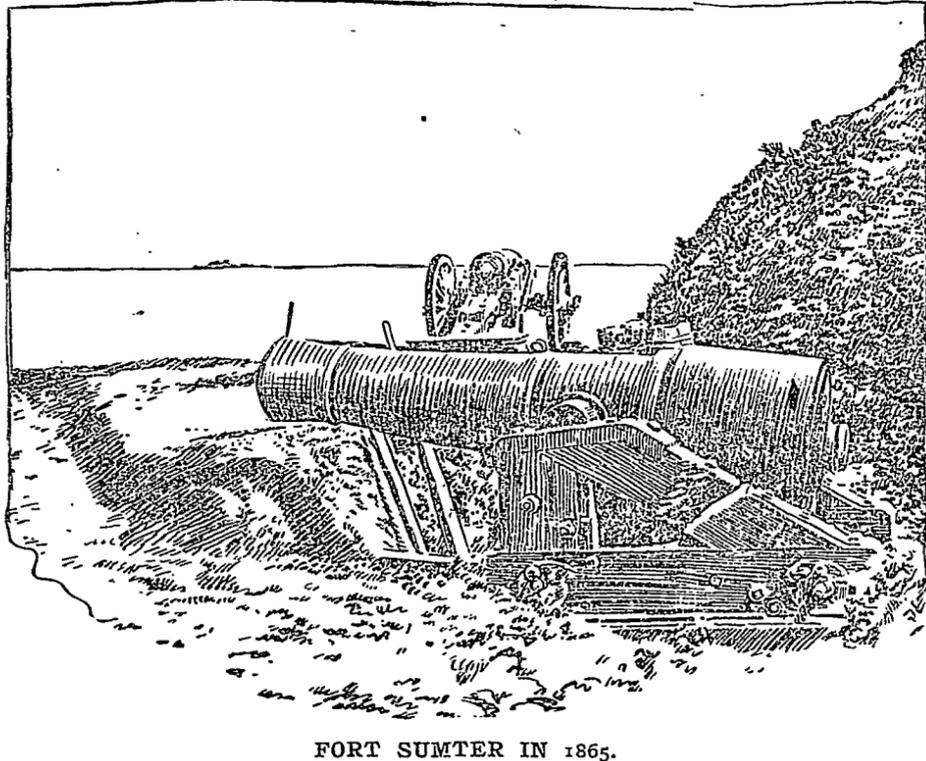
Hon. Thomas Ryan.

First Assistant Secretary of the Interior.

that the rebels were advancing, and would soon attack us at that end of the Chain Bridge. After one of these rumors the lieutenant-colonel and myself went out some distance, and peered long and carefully from a tree to catch a sight of the foe but we did not see him.

Upset a Trader’s Wagon.

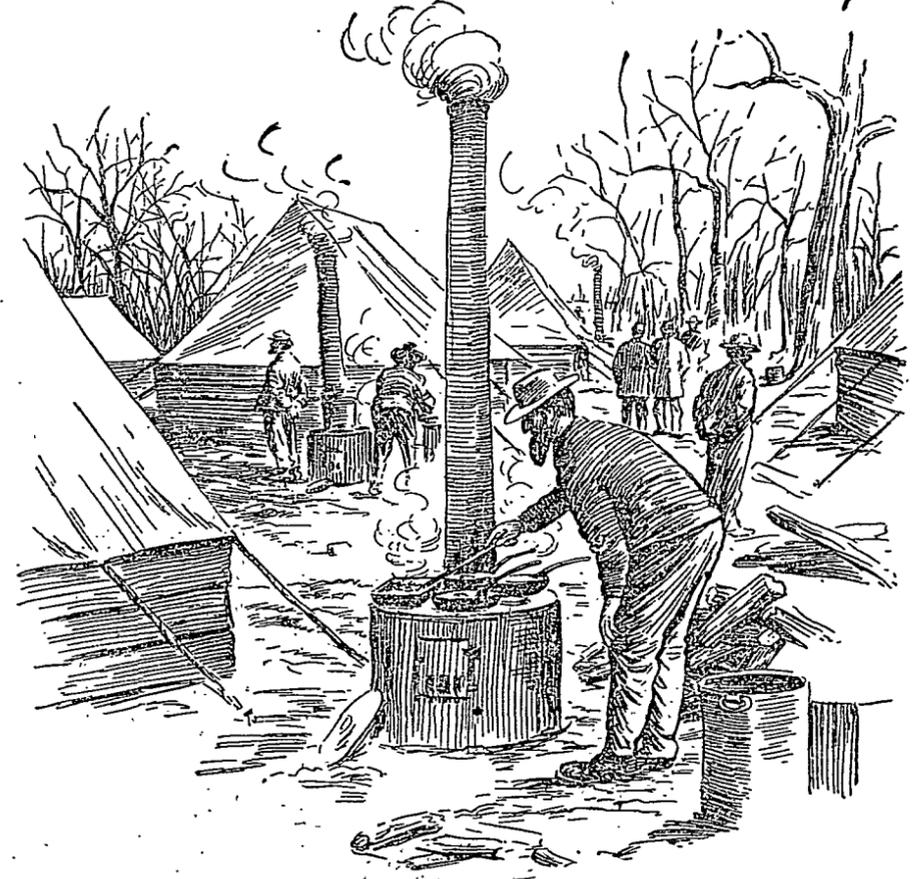
“When the troops had crossed the Potomac there was a brisk trade between them, and some of the citizens of Washington, who had things for sale. One fellow came out with a very nice and span team, including a nicely painted wagon. A part of his stock was tobacco, for which he encountered a very lively demand. He began to sell at reasonable



FORT SUMTER IN 1865.

prices, but as the demand increased his prices rose, and it required a wallet full of money to deal with him. His wagon was on a side hill, and the soldiers watched the price for tobacco soar with waxing indignation. As it reached a point that taxed their wrath to the limit, some of the more mischievous ones passed a signal and rolled the trader’s wagon over and over down the hill. He got out of that country as rapidly as he could.

“The armies soon passed on up to Antietam,” concluded Judge Ryan, “where the great battle was fought, but the 141st remained for some time, guarding the Virginia end of the Chain Bridge. We saw some severe fighting before the end of the war, particularly in the Wilderness campaign.”



IN WINTER QUARTERS.

forced night-march. However, up to that time there wasn’t a round of ammunition in the regiment, no not a round of ammunition. Just think of it.

The Ammunition Wouldn’t Fit.

“And if the rebels had come upon us, what could we have done? Finally, they sent us some ammunition from the city