

The history of 115th Ohio Civil War Regiment, from recruitment, training, assignments, duties, camp life, battles, prisons, soldier's recollections, to final muster-out.

**War Behind the Lines:
The Civil War History of The 115th Ohio Infantry Regiment 1862-1865**
By Rexford G. Wiggers

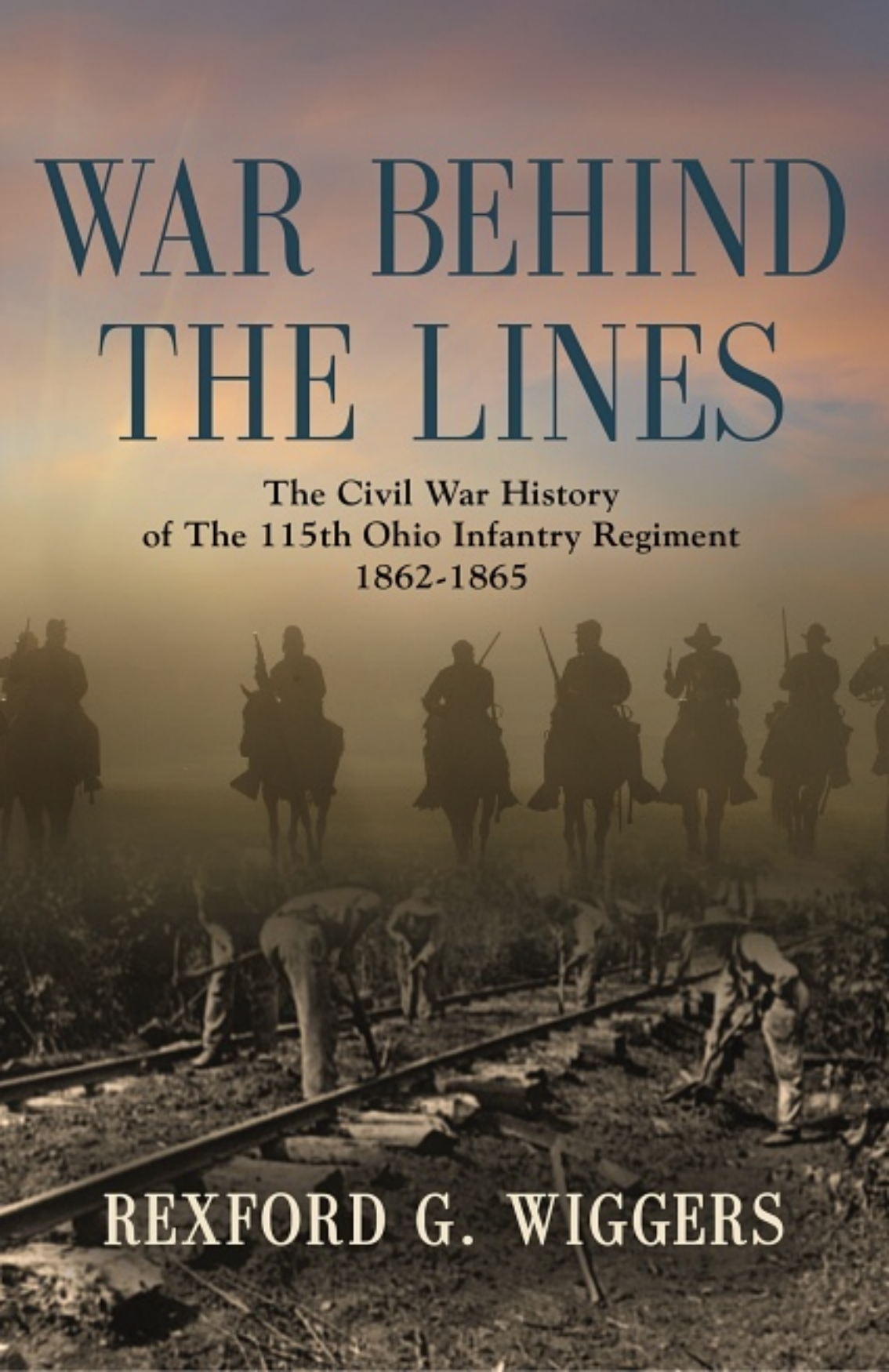
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WAR BEHIND THE LINES

The Civil War History
of The 115th Ohio Infantry Regiment
1862-1865

The background of the cover features a sepia-toned photograph. In the upper portion, a line of soldiers on horseback is silhouetted against a bright, hazy sky. Below them, several mules are harnessed together, pulling a set of railroad tracks that recede into the distance. The ground is uneven and appears to be a battlefield or a rugged terrain. The overall mood is historical and somber.

REXFORD G. WIGGERS

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CHAPTER 2:
Ohio: A Northern State Divided

*“I do not like this scuffling, gouging,
scratching and pounding”*

...2nd Lieutenant George L. Waterman

BEFORE THE TWO TRAINS PULLED away from the Massillon City station, the 115th's commander, Colonel Jackson A. Lucy, had wisely posted guards on the outside platforms of the passenger cars obliging the soldiers to stay inside. As the trains rumbled through the countryside, the soldiers slid open the windows for fresh air and gazed at the beautiful fall vistas appearing and disappearing before them. Some of the men noticed that numerous corn fields were damaged by an early frost. One observant soldier counted eighteen school houses seen along the route—noting that many of the schools looked newly built. Quite a few soldiers bought apples from local farm boys during the many fuel and water stops, negotiating the price of the fruit through the open windows of the cars.

The soldiers had been ordered not to expose arms or heads outside of the car windows especially when the trains were moving, but the order was largely ignored. It mattered little if the trains were stopped or in motion for the men leaned out the windows to buy fruit, gaze at the sights, and to wave, shout, gawk, and cheer at citizens standing trackside, with the loudest cheers being reserved for pretty girls.

It was afternoon as the trains crossed the Scioto River near Columbus when seventeen year old Private Henry Crocker's interest was caught by something he saw outside. To get a better view, Crocker leaned far out the car's window with his head turned toward the rear of the train. Engrossed in the view rearward, the young soldier never saw the rapidly approaching truss bridge. Striking the back of his head on a beam of the bridge, Crocker was rendered unconscious with blood flowing profusely from a deep laceration.

The young Private was taken to the sleeping car, and the regiment's surgeon, Dr. Henry B. Johnson, was summoned to treat the unconscious

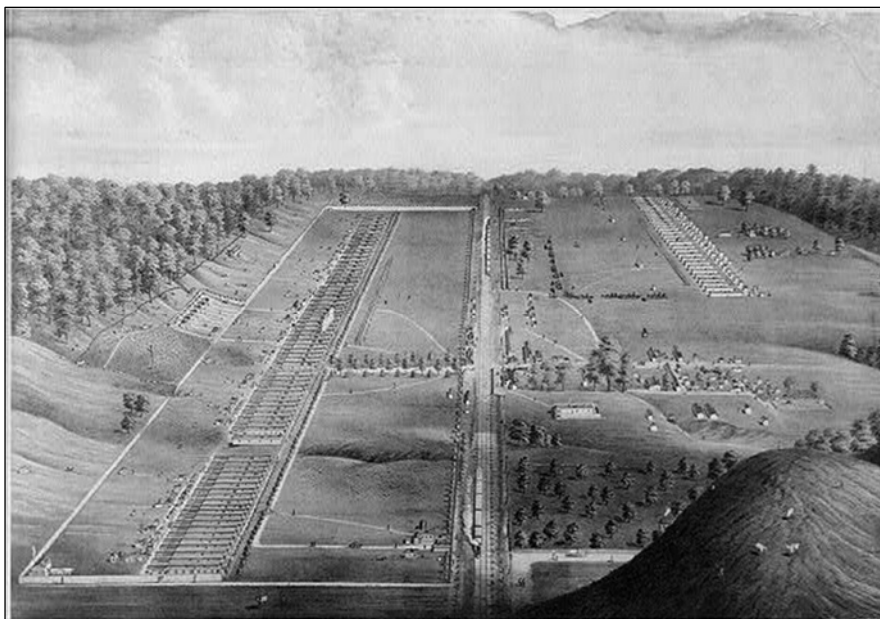
soldier. After dressing the wound, Crocker was made as comfortable as circumstances permitted aboard the cramped, lurching car. Nothing more could be done for Crocker until the train reached its final destination.

As the hours passed the novelty and excitement of the train ride began to dissipate. A few soldiers idly watched the sunlight fade into darkness while others reached into their cloth and leather haversacks and ate the last bits of bread and cooked rations. Small talk and card games, illuminated by the light of hanging oil lamps, helped pass the time as early evening crept into the deepening night. Spending the entire day on the trains, some fifteen hours, the regiment arrived at their destination near midnight. One soldier recalled the men made the 240 mile trip in "perfect order" without anyone becoming intoxicated; the officers and the guards posted by Lucy had done their job well.

The move south was to a military site called Camp Dennison a few miles outside of Cincinnati, Ohio. Arriving too late to be assigned quarters, the men were forced to spend the night sleeping on the seats of the parked trains.⁵³

As the disheveled, bleary-eyed soldiers detrained early the next morning, they must have been impressed by what they saw. Illuminated in the red glow of the morning sun was a vast military establishment. Stretching over a mile into the distance north to south were two separate rows of barracks that could house over eight thousand men. Besides the barracks, twenty-seven hospital buildings were located at the southern end of the westernmost row of buildings. In front of the two rows of barracks and hospitals was a vast treeless parade ground. Also seen here and there about the place were a handful of new recruits awaiting transportation to regiments at the front. Other than 1,200 soldiers in the camp's hospitals, few troops were in the sprawling compound.

Ignoring the vast size of the encampment, one amorous soldier noted the lack of trees and the lack of ladies as the biggest difference between the oak-shaded Camp Massillon and the barren landscape of Camp Dennison. Some of the less amorous and more wide-awake soldiers noticed the injured Crocker being carried toward one of the hospitals.



Bird's-eye View of Camp Dennison

Camp Dennison was situated on the west bank of the Little Miami River and enclosed over four hundred acres of land. The tracks of the Little Miami Railroad bisected the camp allowing for quick transportation of men and supplies to and from the site.⁵⁴

Courtesy Library of Congress LC-DIG-pga-02195

The men, standing in ranks by the tracks, watched as their officers scurried about trying to locate quarters. Even though Camp Dennison was nearly empty of troops, the regiment had to await orders for barracks to be assigned to each company. The assignment orders came haphazardly and slowly. Lucky Company K men marched to their barracks at 10:00 a.m. while other unlucky companies didn't secure quarters till after dark—the soldiers of these unfortunate units cursing lustily during the day-long wait.

Finally, after waiting near the train tracks for an interminable time, the remaining companies marched from the railroad to their quarters. On arrival at their barracks, the soldiers were pleased with their accommodations. Each company would be housed in commodious, wood-framed buildings measuring approximately one hundred feet by twenty-two feet. Three tiers of bunks, with bedding, were placed on each long side of every barrack, and a kitchen (with two stoves) was sensibly

placed inside each structure. Officer's Quarters were also logically attached to every barrack. More important perhaps than the housing, good water was plentiful and nearby.⁵⁵



Captain John Alfred Means, Company C Captain Means had prior military experience before joining the 115th having been Colonel of the First Rifle (Militia) Regiment in 1840. With blue eyes, black hair, and standing five feet ten and ½ inches, the fifty-two-year-old Means had also been a teacher, farmer, surveyor, tanner, and a clerk of the court.

Courtesy of Kent State University Libraries, Special Collections, and Archives.

The soldiers spent the early part of the next day in cleaning their barracks, stowing baggage, arranging bunks and cooking breakfast. As the day was the Sabbath, Captain John A. Means, of Company C, found time to hold a short bible-class in his quarters for the men of his

command. However comfortable the arrangements, the regiment would be quartered at the camp for only eight days.⁵⁶

The short stay at Camp Dennison was not without fatalities. Several soldiers of the regiment died of disease during the brief stop at the camp. Nineteen year old Private Amos Shultz, of Company E, died of encephalitis in one of Dennison's hospitals on October 5. Amos's older brother, Henry, also suffered with encephalitis and died four days later. In all, eight members of the regiment perished at Camp Dennison and were buried in the nearby Waldschmidt Cemetery, the two Shultz brothers being interred side-by-side.⁵⁷

The injured Private Henry Crocker was also one of the eight soldiers buried at Dennison. At first it appeared as if Crocker would recover from his head wound. When Crocker's condition worsened, the camp doctors operated and discovered his skull was fractured. Medically, nothing further could be done as Crocker lingered on for six more days, dying on October 8. Private Crocker left behind a grieving, widowed mother who was solely dependent on her deceased son for financial support.⁵⁸

Three other soldiers of the regiment died while on sick leave during this time. At forty-two, Corporal Adam Long was one of the older enlisted members of the regiment. Long had contracted diphtheria at Camp Massillon and was sent home to Bayard, Ohio, where he died on October 10. Fortunately, Long's wife would apply for and receive a widow's pension to help care for her seven children. Twenty-two year old Private John Carver, of Company C, died at his hometown of Bath, Ohio, a victim of typhoid fever. The third soldier, Private Ransom Parks, age twenty, succumbed on October 2nd to "brain fever" at Cuyahoga Falls.⁵⁹

Despite the spate of deaths and resultant melancholy among the members of the regiment, duties and assignments had to continue. Private Luther T. Swartz was assigned guard duty at Camp Dennison during a warm and stifling October night. Private Swartz, born in the small village of Lexington in Stark County, Ohio, was the youngest of three children of Martin and Hannah Swartz, both of whom were over sixty years old. Knowing that his older sister and brother would care for his aged parents relieved Luther's anxiety about his decision to enlist in company F.⁶⁰

This night, however, thoughts of home were far from Swartz's mind as tired, sweaty, and sleepy, he completed his stint of duty at 4:00 a.m. on Saturday morning. Luckily, Swartz had finished his guard duty and

returned to his barracks just before it began to rain. He had not yet fallen asleep when marching orders suddenly arrived. The regiment was ordered to prepare two days rations and be ready to leave the next day.

On Sunday, the regiment was called out and formed ranks at 4:00 a.m.⁶¹ As it often happens in military movements, the regiment was forced to wait, standing in ranks, until 9:30 a.m. when orders finally came to leave Dennison and proceed to Cincinnati (by a late-arriving train). On reaching the city the regiment left the rail station and marched directly to the riverfront. At the river bank the soldiers broke ranks, reached into their haversacks, ate, and rested.

After the meal, the soldiers were then sent across the Ohio River to nearby Covington, Kentucky, crossing over on a pontoon bridge. While crossing the river, Private Swartz saw upon the surrounding hills several large Union forts that guarded Cincinnati.⁶² Lieutenant Waterman also saw the imposing forts and surmised that Cincinnati could easily fend off any Rebel attack. As Waterman continued across the bridge he wondered why the citizens of Cincinnati flew into such a panic with every rumor of a Rebel raid.⁶³

Upon entering Covington on the further bank, the regiment marched through the town and headed south using the Bank-Lick Turnpike. About three miles from Covington, the regiment halted and made camp near the pike on a point of barren land bordered by two ravines.

That night the regiment slept under the cover of the stars as tents had not arrived. Fortuitously, the tents arrived the next night at 8:00 p.m., just before the fickle weather turned suddenly cold. The regiment's bivouac was named Camp King, although the soldiers had many other names for the campsite.⁶⁴

Private Swartz was particularly pleased with the arrival of the large, twenty-man tents. Each tent had a small sheet iron stove (with a pipe chimney) to provide heat. Swartz surmised that the warm tent would help rid him of the persistent diarrhea he had contracted while at Camp Massillon. Along with the tents the regiment finally received their regulation knapsacks, caps, and canteens. The men had been without these items for almost a month.

The next day, after good night's sleep in the warm tent, Swartz took time to visit another regiment stationed at the campsite. The 115th Illinois had arrived at Camp King about the same time as the 115th Ohio. The identical numerical designations of the two regiments would bring

bad luck to Swartz and the rest of the Buckeye State soldiers. The baggage wagons and mules meant to haul the Ohio regiment's heavy tents, accoutrements, and camp equipage were mistakenly given to the 115th Illinois. The regiment from the "Prairie State" kept the misappropriated wagons and mules, and for the time being Swartz and the rest of the Ohio soldiers had to make do without wheeled transportation.⁶⁵

Not long after their arrival at the Covington camp, some of the men of the 115th Ohio had a "severe engagement" with a flock of geese at a nearby farm. Nearly one hundred "enemy" birds were laid low by pistol shots during the so-called "Goose Battle." The casualties of the feathered flock ultimately wound up in the cook-pots of several messes. Although the enlisted men considered the geese fair game, the officers of the regiment did not. An irate Company officer caught one unlucky soldier with an incriminating bird-in-hand, and for punishment the soldier was forced to parade around the camp with the dead goose tied to his back.

Private Lawrence Pfiester of Company G, a thirty-five year old German immigrant, who was not involved (or perhaps not caught) in the geese snatching, could not see the harm of "Rebel" birds filling the stomachs of his fellow comrades. Pfiester became indignant at the punishment given to the guilty soldier and impulsively took a knife and cut the strings holding the bird on the man's back; the limp fowl falling to the ground. Pfiester's overt act was a direct violation of an officer's order. When taken to task for his action, Pfiester argued with Captain Deming N. Lowrey about the injustice of the punishment. Pfiester's arguments did not sway the Captain's mind and both men flew into a rage.

The feisty Pfiester was arrested and at a court-martial was found guilty of disobeying orders. On November 2, 1862, Pfiester was sentenced to ten days confinement with a fine of five dollars—almost half of his monthly army pay. This, however, did not end the feud between Pfiester and his Captain. A future court-martial would find the Private guilty of "dissolute and disorderly conduct and disobedience of specific orders given on March 29, 1863." For this infraction Pfiester was sentenced to one year of military prison, and after serving his time the irascible soldier was dismissed from the army on July 1, 1864. Soon after his discharge, Pfiester reenlisted in the 188th Ohio and mustered-out at the end of the war with the rank of Corporal, successfully avoiding further quarrels with superior officers.⁶⁶

War Behind the Lines

A short time after the “Goose Battle” escapade, Private Swartz sat outside his tent during a sunny but windy day. The young soldier placed a sheet of paper on his knees and wrote a letter home. In the letter, Swartz mentioned a rumor that said the regiment was being sent to duty in West Virginia, a rumor that later proved false. In the same letter he also told of his improved health, no longer being plagued with diarrhea. Swartz ended his correspondence sooner than he wished because the persistent high wind jostled his paper and made it too difficult to write.⁶⁷



Colonel Jackson A. Lucy

A lawyer from Columbiana County, Lucy had been Captain of Company A of the Thirty-second Ohio Infantry Regiment prior to becoming the Colonel of the 115th. Courtesy of Marcus McLemore

A humorous incident occurred while the regiment was at Camp King, and the cause of the merriment was the much aligned, seldom respected, army mule. While inspecting the regimental camp, Colonel Lucy happened upon a stalled six-mule wagon, the harnessed draught animals steadfastly refusing to budge. Graciously if not impatiently, the

regiment's Colonel stopped to assist the beleaguered teamster in getting the wagon moving.

All efforts by Lucy to vocally coax the mules into motion had no effect. Unable to persuade the stubborn beasts by voice command, Lucy finally resorted to the use of a pine board upon the animals' rumps. The mules responded to the pine board "coaxing" with loud brays and surprising alacrity accelerating the wagon through the camp at break-neck speed. Lucy now had to "arrest" the stampeding team. The sight of the Colonel running full tilt through clouds of dust after the fast disappearing wagon was viewed by most of the regiment who cheered (and laughed) at the Colonel's "success" of getting mules to obey his orders.⁶⁸

Army mules at Camp King continued to provide entertaining diversions for the men of the regiment. Orders came for the 115th Ohio to break-in a nearby herd of the half-wild animals. The "mule busting" took several days and made for much levity—at least to the watching soldiers who did not ride the untamed beasts. Many a brave soldier received bruises from the raw and rebellious creatures. One soldier drolly thought that the first blood shed by the regiment for the preservation of the Union would happen while breaking the unruly, long-eared creatures. After the dust settled and the mules were broke in, the men bestowed Private Garret Williamson, of Company H, with the title of *Head Mule Buster*. Luckily, all the men involved with the mule busting came off the assignment un-bloodied, if not a little black and blue.⁶⁹

A few days after the mule busting, Colonel Lucy received orders to move the regiment out of Covington. On Thursday morning, October 9, 1862, the regiment's Quartermaster issued two days of raw rations to each soldier. During the late morning and early afternoon the men busied themselves cooking the food over open fires and stuffing the prepared rations into their haversacks. Then the tents were struck and packed away with other camp equipage and baggage. At 3:30 p.m. Colonel Lucy ordered the men into column and marched the regiment back to Covington and the southern bank of the Ohio River.^{70*}

*Left behind at a Covington hospital was twenty year old Private Edward D. Lahm, whose father, Samuel Lahm, was a lawyer, a Brigadier General of the Ohio Militia, and a former member of the thirtieth Congress. Private Lahm died of typhoid at Covington's Seminary Hospital on October 24 and was buried in nearby Linden Grove Cemetery.⁷¹

The regiment trudged back across the river via the pontoon bridge to Cincinnati where Colonel Lucy received further orders. The soldiers of the 115th were astonished, dismayed, and disgruntled at their new assignments. The Left Wing of the regiment, commanded by Lt. Colonel Thomas C. Boone, was ordered to Columbus, Ohio, to guard a Confederate prison at Camp Chase, while the Right Wing, under command of Colonel Lucy, was ordered to guard arsenals, prisoners, and warehouses in Cincinnati. As the Right Wing was marched off to various locations in the "Queen City," the Left Wing proceeded to Cincinnati's rail station and boarded a waiting train that took them northeast toward Columbus.⁷²

The Columbus bound train stopped briefly at Camp Dennison where Lieutenant Arthur L. Conger disembarked. Conger was ordered to check on the sick men of the regiment that were confined at the Camp's hospitals; the assignment requiring the lieutenant to spend the night in the medical buildings. The next day Lt. Conger found time to talk to a few draftees lounging about the camp. Conger was amazed and annoyed to hear that some of the draftees were offering up to five hundred dollars apiece for a substitute to take their place in the army. After his dialogue with the draftees the disgusted Lieutenant boarded a northbound train and left Camp Dennison.⁷³

Conger arrived at Camp Chase on a cold and rainy Friday, only to find that the regiment's tents and baggage (by the mistake of some army transportation officer) had been sent to another camp. The Left Wing soldiers had spent a damp chilly night in an old, leaky barracks and were in a surly mood. Fortunately, the baggage train arrived later in the day.⁷⁴



Born in Germany and standing five feet eight with blue eyes and light hair, Private Christian Shaffer, Co D, became ill while at Camp Chase. After recuperating for nearly ten months at Columbus's Seminary Hospital, Shaffer was transferred to Co H of the Eighth Veteran Reserve Corps.

Previously unpublished image
Courtesy of Marcus McLemore



Interior View of Camp Chase showing Confederate Prisoners of War. Named after Salmon P. Chase, Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury, the camp was approximately four miles west of Columbus and encompassed over 160 acres of flat farmland.⁷⁵
Courtesy Ohio Historical Society

The men of the regiment's Left Wing were assigned to guard the Rebel prisoners and patrol the camp, but the Left Wing soldiers also managed to find time to continue with military drills. On October 15, the Companies marched to a nearby woodlot to target practice with their Austrian rifles—the men exhibiting good marksmanship despite the hard recoil and limited range of the smoothbore firearm. That night the soldiers nursed bruised and tender shoulders caused by the jostling and bouncing of the light musket.⁷⁶

After the rifle practice, around 9:30 p.m., twenty-four year old Private Hiram Johnson of Company G stepped outside his tent to seek permission from the guard to go to the camp's hospital. Hiram had been complaining of chest pain for a day or two, and soon after stepping out of his tent to converse with the guard, he collapsed. Hiram was quickly taken to the hospital and died a few minutes later from heart failure.⁷⁷

The next day Johnson's remains were placed in a coffin and then taken in a wagon some four miles to the train depot. All the soldiers of Company G (including John H. Johnson, Hiram's younger brother) escorted the casket to the station. The regiment's Major, Asa H. Fitch, who was from the same town as Johnson, then accompanied the coffin back to Northfield, Ohio. Private Hiram Johnson was laid to rest in the Northfield-Macedonia Cemetery, his unmarked grave to be grieved over by his young wife, Eliza.⁷⁸

The day that Johnson's remains were being escorted to the depot, twenty year old Private Norman L. Darrow (also from Company G) died from typhoid fever at the Camp Chase hospital. The eldest son of Charles Darrow, a Summit County farmer, Private Darrow would also be given the courtesy of military escort to the rail depot. Captain Deming N. Lowrey escorted Darrow's remains back to Stow, Ohio.⁷⁹

Another soldier from Stow, nineteen year old Private Samuel B. Bradley had been left behind at Camp Dennison since October 5—too ill with typhoid to move from a camp hospital. Samuel's mother and uncle had traveled to the camp to minister to the sick soldier and stayed with the young man until the end. The only son of John and Ruth Bradley died on October 19, 1862.⁸⁰

As the soldiers of the Left Wing guarded Camp Chase's Rebel prisoners, drilled, and mourned the loss of their comrades, the soldiers of the Right Wing were busy at various posts and guard duties in Cincinnati. At times, small details of soldiers from the Right Wing escorted military prisoners from Cincinnati's Kemper Barracks to other Union prison camps. Occasionally a company or two of the Right Wing would be called upon to guard bridges at nearby Falmouth and Warsaw, Kentucky, as well as patrol outlying areas around Cincinnati. Patrolling the city streets and guarding the ordinance depot on Sycamore Street rounded out the duties of the Right Wing troops.⁸¹

During off duty time in Cincinnati Private John B. Smith wrote in his diary about the housing accommodations for the soldiers of the Right Wing. At first, Smith and his fellow comrades lived in tents between Race and Elm streets in the 8th Street Park.⁸² Three days later the soldiers moved their tents to a hill in the northeast section of the city. The hilltop campsite (either Pendleton Hill or Prospect Hill) had recently been used

by Union cavalry, and the ground was well fouled by equestrian activity, making the men select their tent sites with care. Worse still, the weather as reported in a local newspaper, turned “quite wintry.” The soldiers on the hilltop site had only one blanket apiece with which to sleep on the bare ground inside the tents, and no wood or facilities to make fires to fend off the cold temperatures. Extra clothing had not been issued, and the men had to make do with one set of “daily clothes” for duty and for sleeping.⁸³

Three miserable, cold weeks later the Right Wing battalion packed away their tents and moved to Cincinnati to be quartered in (what the soldiers must have considered a luxury) the Burbank Barracks, formerly the Palace Garden Hotel on Vine Street. Some of the soldiers of the Right Wing would also be quartered in the Garesche Barracks at 7th and Sycamore Street near the arsenal building. Later, two companies of the Right Wing would be quartered at Kemper Barracks in Cincinnati guarding Union deserters and “stragglers” sequestered there.⁸⁴

While doing duty with the Right Wing in Cincinnati, one soldier would cheat death. Nineteen-year-old Private John Ririe and his squad of Company C soldiers had finished delivering Confederate prisoners to Johnson’s Island (a prison on Lake Erie) and were returning by train to Cincinnati. As the cars neared Dayton, Ohio, a soldier carelessly handling a revolver accidentally discharged the firearm, the pistol ball going through the forward seat and striking Private Ririe in the back. The stricken soldier was taken off the train and transferred to a Dayton hospital. The wound appeared fatal as the pistol ball had traveled through Ririe’s back and lodged at the forward end of a rib. The doctors, fearing the worst, let the pistol ball remain in Ririe’s chest deeming it too risky to remove. Private Ririe, notwithstanding the doctors’ dire prognoses, proved resilient and recovered from the accidental wound.⁸⁵

As the youthful Ririe recuperated at Dayton, Private Luther Swartz and the rest of Company F was detached from the Right Wing at Cincinnati and sent to Camp Dennison for guard duty. While off duty on a warm fall day, Private Swartz wrote a letter to his brother. In the letter Swartz mentioned that he had just been ordered to take a small group of Confederate prisoners to Baltimore, Maryland. Happily, Swartz explained his good fortune of having his upcoming trip courteously paid for by the U.S. Government. Swartz also thanked his brother for sending the box of sweets and other “goodies” saying that the treats from home

were “mightily enjoyed” even if the cake and pies were “smooshed” a little by careless package handlers.⁸⁶

While Swartz was enjoying his cake and pies at Camp Dennison, the soldiers of the Left Wing at Camp Chase had started to construct winter quarters. The men had toiled on their shanties for several days and were understandably surprised when they were suddenly ordered to cook three days rations and prepare to leave for Cincinnati. The soldiers spent a chilly Monday morning hovering over smoky cook fires preparing their rations and finished the day packing away tents and baggage. At least the soldiers of Company H had no regrets and looked forward to leaving their campsite along with its resident population of rats.⁸⁷

The men of the Left Wing departed Camp Chase on October 21 and arrived by train at Cincinnati at 1:00 am the next day. Arriving at such a late hour, the soldiers were obliged to sleep about the depot. One officer was pleased with how well the movement was made without any of the soldiers getting drunk.⁸⁸

At Cincinnati, the Left Wing received orders to return to Kentucky. It was at this juncture that Colonel Lucy decided to trade places with Boone, ordering his Lieutenant Colonel to stay with the Right Wing troops in Cincinnati while he went with the Left Wing. The flip-flop was done, arguably, because Lucy thought his best chance to lead troops in combat was more likely in Kentucky than Ohio.

After taking over command at the rail station, Colonel Lucy marched the Left Wing soldiers to the riverfront where they boarded the steamboat, *Venango* bound upriver for Maysville, Kentucky. The boat ride would consume two days during which time the ill-fated steamer grounded on sandbars no less than three times. Each time the boat grounded, some four hundred irritated soldiers would disembark and wade ashore; each man loaded down with his musket, knapsack and accoutrements. The boat, lightened considerably by the absent troops, would then work itself off the sandbar and continue upriver.

The soldiers would walk along the riverbank a mile or more in wet clothes, and when the boat reappeared the men were obliged to wade out into the river and clamber back aboard. When the last grounding happened at dusk, the officers, fearing attacks by Rebel guerrillas, placed a few pickets on the riverbank during the night and let the rest of the men sleep on the stranded steamboat.⁸⁹

Finally, on the 24th of October, the soldiers left the unlucky steamer for good and marched the rest of the way to Maysville. On the way, while

passing through the village of Augusta, Kentucky, the men saw for the first time, stark evidence of warfare. Shuffling along the dusty streets of the deserted town the Ohioans silently ogled the desolate burnt dwellings that had been shelled and set afire by Confederate artillery. Arriving at their assigned destination on October 28, quite a few soldiers noted the contrast between the burnt-out village of Augusta and the well-kept brick homes of Maysville, untouched by war.⁹⁰

At Maysville, the soldiers of the Left Wing were quartered in barracks located on a steep hill some two hundred feet above the town. The men were lucky to have shelter, for the day after the Left Wing arrived at Maysville the weather turned wintry with snow and wind.

Along with the first snowfall at Maysville came the death of nineteen year old Milton Freed. Freed had been a soldier less than two months before succumbing to fever. Mourning his death were his brothers Emanuel and David who were in the same Company as Milton. A soldier's grave in the Maysville cemetery became the final resting place for the young warrior.⁹¹

A few weeks after the death of Freed, Colonel Lucy ordered Lieutenant Conger and twenty-four men to prepare two days rations and proceed to Germantown, Kentucky. The purpose of the expedition was to find and arrest three suspected Rebel sympathizers. Since the three men were well-known locals, Lieutenant Conger feared resistance by the townspeople. The nervous Lieutenant and his men entered the village as quietly as possible and quickly arrested the three suspects.

The soldiers completed the volatile mission without incident, and with their prisoners, returned triumphantly to Maysville the next day. Upon reporting at Headquarters, Conger was somewhat taken aback to find that the Left Wing had just been ordered back to Cincinnati.⁹² When the citizens of Maysville heard the regiment was being sent away, the ladies of the city prepared a farewell picnic for the departing soldiers.⁹³

The Left Wing soldiers were packed and ready to leave the day after the sumptuous impromptu picnic, but the river transports did not arrive until three days later. The soldiers had nothing to do but wait, whiling away the time with card games and other amusements until the boats arrived. Finally in a drizzling rain on November 18, the soldiers boarded steamboats *Emma* and *Eureka*, and with a clanging of ship's bells and

shrill blasts from steam whistles, the vessels left the landing and headed downstream. As the boat's paddle wheels churned away from the shoreline, the Ohio men gave three hearty cheers for Maysville. Many citizens responded from the riverbank by waving handkerchiefs and giving shouts of farewell to the departing Yankees. All told, the soldiers had a pleasant experience while on duty in the "southern" town.⁹⁴

Unlike the steamboat ride upriver to Maysville in October, this trip down the rain swollen waters of the Ohio River was without incident with both boats reaching the Covington city landing early the next morning. After arrival, Companies B, D, and H were assigned garrison duty at various forts and batteries protecting Covington and Cincinnati while Companies G and K were ordered to proceed to Camp King, the site of the "mule busting" earlier in the year. At Camp King, Companies G and K relieved the 120th Ohio Regiment which had been ordered to join General Sherman's army.⁹⁵

After the Left Wing's return to Covington, Colonel Lucy sent a report to headquarters detailing the assignments of his command. Of the 362 soldiers of the Left Wing, eighty were assigned guard duty at Fort Shaler. Another seventy-three men were detailed to garrison Fort Mitchel, while sixty-six soldiers were assigned provost duty in and around the city of Covington. All totaled, only 137 men of the Left Wing were available for relief details for the various guard, provost, and garrison duties—a number that Colonel Lucy deemed insufficient. Lucy requested Department Headquarters to transfer two more companies of the Right Wing from Cincinnati to Covington. The request was ignored by headquarters.

By December, Company H (of the Left Wing) was sent from Cincinnati to Covington. The men of Company H were then mounted and assigned the onerous duty of "hunting" for Rebel guerrillas. As he prepared for a patrol, Company H Private Noah Coblentz was wounded in the hand by an accidental gunshot. The wound was serious enough for Noah to receive a disability discharge on December 10.⁹⁶

Coblentz was not the only soldier to go home that December. Near the end of the month, Private Noah Bushong, of Company K, walked up to his squad's commander, Lieutenant Albert W. Thompson, to ask for a leave home. Private Bushong explained that his older brother, a sergeant in the 120th Ohio, had died on December 27, and that he (Noah) wished to be home for his brother's funeral. Lieutenant Thompson listened to the request and knowing the company Captain often granted leaves of

absence, sent the young Private to Captain William Ramsey's headquarters.

Captain Ramsey listened sympathetically as Noah repeated his entreaty, but Ramsey could not give Noah permission to go home stating there were already too many soldiers on "French Leaves." However, the Captain strongly hinted that "they would not do too much," to a soldier who went on an unauthorized leave for a family funeral. Armed with the Captain's implied permission, Noah left the regiment, without an official written leave, and went to his hometown of Fairfield, Ohio.

If Private Bushong had returned within a few days there probably would have been little, if any trouble. Unfortunately after being absent for several weeks, Captain Ramsey was compelled to report Bushong as "deserted, cause unknown," the Captain apparently feeling that Bushong had taken too much advantage of the French Leave. The young soldier was subsequently arrested and tried for desertion. At the trial it didn't help Noah's case that during the interim time of his faux leave, Captain Ramsey had resigned, and was replaced with another Captain who had much less compassion for such matters.

Noah Bushong was found guilty of desertion and sentenced to one year of hard labor. The youthful Private was a model prisoner, and according to company records returned to the regiment within six months. Noah served faithfully with the 115th regiment, was later transferred to the 188th Ohio and mustered-out with an honorable discharge on September 21, 1865.⁹⁷

While Bushong was on his unauthorized leave home, his comrades continued with the drudgery of endless guard and patrol duties. The soldiers of the 115th stationed at various posts in Ohio and Kentucky did not like the breakup of the regiment, but they obeyed orders. Lieutenant George Waterman summed up the thoughts of the men by saying, "So we are here although it is with no good feelings."⁹⁸

At least one officer, Lieutenant Conger, made the most of the disliked assignments. Conger, a patron of the arts, attended several plays and operas both in Cincinnati and Covington. He also took time to have social dinners with the officers of Company C, and with Dr. Henry B. Johnston, the regimental surgeon.⁹⁹

War Behind the Lines

The year of 1862 would end on a cold, downcast, rainy day befitting the depressed mood of the soldiers. The past year had claimed the lives of twenty-three members of the 115th; typhoid and dysentery causing most of the deaths. The regiment's dead were scattered in lonely graves at Camp Dennison, Cincinnati, Covington, and Maysville. Eleven other members of the 115th had left the regiment with medical discharges for various illnesses and accidental wounds. In less than four months the regiment had lost over thirty soldiers and had yet to fire a single musket at a bona-fide Rebel soldier.¹⁰⁰

January and February of 1863 would bring the deaths of other members of the regiment. Private William H. Bowers of Company E died from typhoid fever on January 5. Sergeant Henry Meffert of Company E died of "inflammation of the bowels" on January 22 at the 3rd Street Hospital in Cincinnati. Suffering with long term consumption (tuberculosis), Captain James W. McConnell of Company I died February 8. All three soldiers were buried in Spring Grove Cemetery at Cincinnati.¹⁰¹

Another victim of disease was thirty-nine year old Private David Lee of Company C. Tormented by chronic diarrhea, Lee had been sent to the Regimental Hospital in Cincinnati. It first appeared that he would get well. Lee was seen walking about the hospital conversing with friends, when without warning, he fainted once, regained consciousness, fainted again, and then lapsed into a coma, dying February 26.¹⁰²

Lieutenant Waterman had personally enlisted Lee, and distressed by Lee's death, paid out of his own pocket for Lee's funeral expenses. Lee's burial was at Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati with a gravestone memorial placed in Cedar Grove Cemetery at Peninsula, Ohio. Lee's death left his young wife, Mary, as sole provider for their five children—the youngest a one year old toddler.¹⁰³

In early February, an army mule cut short the military career of forty-three year old Private James Stanbridge of Company G. Stanbridge, an immigrant from England, was struck on his left foot and ankle by the flailing hoof of a spooked mule. The injury inflicted by the pack animal was serious enough that Stanbridge received a surgeon's certificate of disability and was discharged from the army. The limping veteran subsequently returned to his blacksmith shop in Ohio. ¹⁰⁴

The monotonous, mundane, seemingly superfluous guard duty coupled with the deaths and medical discharges of comrades sorely depressed the morale of the regiment. The families back home did what they could to encourage the dejected spirits of the soldiers. One such concerned citizen, David A. Alexander, gave notice in a local newspaper, the *Summit County Beacon*, about his designs to send a box of “good things” to the boys of the 115th Regiment. Alexander offered to put anyone’s “goodie packages” into his commodious shipping box. His only stipulation was to leave the packages at his home along with two cents per pound postage. Another citizen, S. A. Colvin, had visited the 115th soldiers at Cincinnati and suggested sending a few kegs of butter to the regiment as it would be “a great luxury to them.”

One such care-package from the Ohio towns of Bath and Richfield was sent to the Kemper Barracks in Cincinnati. The box contained twenty pounds of butter, a half barrel of apple butter, dried apples, peaches, cherries, currents, tomatoes, various canned fruits, dried beef, sausages, lard, tea, and other miscellaneous items—the whole package weighing over seven hundred pounds. A thank-you note from the appreciative soldiers was later published in the *Summit County Beacon* ending with the exultation, “Bully for Bath and Richfield...Yours for the glorious Union, Bath Boys of the 115th.” The boxes of edibles, according to another thank-you note published in the same newspaper edition, helped many soldiers “to revive drooping spirits.”¹⁰⁵

As some lucky soldiers savored the treats from home, other members of the 115th were too busy to partake of the delicacies. Companies of the regiment were being continually shuffled to different assignments in southern Ohio and northern Kentucky.

The duties of Company B illustrate the convoluted assignments delegated to the regiment. After Company B was sent from Maysville to Cincinnati in November, 1862, the unit was split into four squads and posted in the various fortifications surrounding the “Queen City.” Company B soldiers performed garrison duty at the forts until February 21, 1863, at which time the company was ordered to Covington, Kentucky. Just six days after arriving at Covington, Company B was ordered back to Cincinnati and assigned to guard and patrol duty in the city. Company B was also one of several units of the regiment sent, from time to time, to quell anti-war riots and anti-draft protests in various counties of southern Ohio.¹⁰⁶

During the year of 1863, Ohio anti-war protests and riots reached a crescendo with the implementations of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Enrollment Act. To many white Northerners, the purpose of the war had changed with the Emancipation Proclamation. From the onset, many Northern whites had blamed abolition as the root-cause of the war. Numerous white men were willing to fight for unification of the country but were not willing to die for emancipation. Working-class white men foresaw newly freed Black men as cheap laborers that would flood the North and sweep away the white men's jobs. In addition, unnatural fears of "racial mixing" also caused deep anxiety for many white families. For a large segment of the Northern white population, freeing the slaves was an entirely unacceptable proposition.

Anti-war sentiment was aided by recent military reverses suffered by the Union armies causing disenchantment to grow among many families north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Men were loath to volunteer for a losing cause and enlistments for the army correspondingly dried up—shriveling to alarmingly low levels. So serious was the need for recruits that the Federal Government resorted to authorizing the first national military draft. The Enrollment Act of March 3, 1863, specified that all able-bodied men in the loyal states ages twenty to forty-five were subject to federal service.

The national Enrollment Act included exemptions that provoked resentment, especially among the working classes. The hiring of a substitute to take the place of a drafted man was included in the act, but a more detested exemption in the draft law was the Commutation Fee. A wealthy man could pay a Commutation Fee of \$300 that exempted the payer from the draft. The commutation and substitute provisions of the draft law made the war appear to be a "rich man's war, but a poor-man's fight." Poor whites who were previously indifferent about abolition now felt coerced to fight for emancipation. Others felt the act detestable and insulting to the American tradition of voluntary military service. Before the Enrollment Act, the individual states had traditionally raised the necessary manpower requested by the Federal Government.

The Enrollment Act also imposed the federal presence on the loyal northern states as never before. Provost marshals, federal marshals, and district attorneys were seemingly everywhere forcing men to enroll for the federal draft. For many northern citizens it appeared that the national government was invading their privacy and impinging on

individual rights. Many northerners began to mistrust their own government.

Some drafted men who were too poor to hire a substitute or pay the Commutation Fee fled to Canada. Others joined fire companies since firemen were exempt from the draft. A number of men suddenly acquired strange maladies to get a medical disability exemption—throughout the northern states a sudden plague of near-sighted, deaf, and lame men appeared.¹⁰⁷ Other poor men avoided the draft by simply disappearing into remote backwoods areas. Drafted men, not wanting to hide, feign sickness, or flee to Canada, joined together in large, armed groups to resist the federal authorities.

Ultimately, warrants of arrest were issued for drafted men who failed to report for muster. Often federal marshals delivering the arrest warrants were threatened, stoned, or even shot by civilian draft dodgers. The frustrated marshals turned to the federal army for help.¹⁰⁸

To resist the draft in Noble County, Ohio, over 100 men had taken up rifles and muskets and organized themselves near the town of Hoskinsville. The local Provost Marshal was powerless against such a large armed group and appealed to the Union Army for help. On March 18, 1863, Companies B and H of the 115th were sent to Hoskinsville to “coerce” the draft resisters into surrendering. The volatile and potentially deadly situation was defused when U.S. Marshals, backed by the leveled bayonet-fixed rifles of the soldiers, arrested, disarmed, fined, and imprisoned the ringleaders of the draft resisters. After five days with order restored and no blood spilled, Companies B and H left Noble County and traveled back to Cincinnati arriving there on March 27.¹⁰⁹

Besides draft resisters and anti-war protestors, the regiment’s soldiers had to deal with Union deserters and bushwhackers. Just four days after returning to Cincinnati, one hundred men of Companies B and H were mounted and sent to the Kentucky counties of Gallatin and Owen to patrol the railroad and rid the area of bushwhackers and army deserters. The mounted soldiers were also ordered to break up a Confederate recruitment camp rumored to be operating near the town of Warsaw.

The tasks of the two companies were made difficult by the local citizenry. Most of the bushwhackers and deserters could rely on sympathetic relatives and friends to hide them from the roving Union patrols. With the local help of relatives and friends, the bushwhackers and deserters easily evaded the pursuing Yankee soldiers. Playing this

adult version of "Hide and Seek," the soldiers of Companies B and H remained in Kentucky for several frustrating weeks and then returned to Cincinnati on April 25.¹¹⁰

Earlier on March 26, 1863, Companies C and E of the 115th and Company C of the 118th Ohio had been hurriedly ordered to depart by train from Cincinnati to Cynthiana, Kentucky, amid much excitement of impending Rebel attacks. So urgent was the order that the men took only muskets and ammunition and had no time to pack knapsacks or even grab their canteens. Upon nearing Cynthiana the companies were ordered to guard railroad bridges and trestles at Townsend Creek and Licking River. Throughout the night and following days came persistent rumors that Clark's Rebel command was hell-bent on destroying the 325-foot long, 85-foot high bridge at Cynthiana.

Happily for the anxious Union soldiers, Clark's Rebel hordes never materialized. Duty at Cynthiana ended uneventfully on April 27 and the companies returned to Kemper Barracks at Cincinnati. Private Frank Hathaway of Company E declared that despite the lack of excitement in Kentucky, the men had enjoyed fishing in the Licking River during their prolonged stay in "Dixie."¹¹¹

The last of April, 1863, concluded with a large-scale military expedition. A Federal Army was being collected to intercept a large Confederate force of cavalry and infantry operating in western Virginia. On April 29, Colonel Lucy and Companies G, K, and parts of C, D, and F were ordered to Parkersburg, (West Virginia) to co-operate with Union General Robert C. Schenck's forces in an effort to capture or destroy the Rebel raiders.

The apprehensive Ohio soldiers boarded a gunboat at Cincinnati and steamed up the Ohio River. At Parkersburg the Ohio men disembarked and joined other Union soldiers marching east along the *Baltimore and Ohio Railroad* toward Clarksburg. Company G's Corporal, Harvey S. Hogue, wrote in his memoirs that "a couple of hundred of our regiment [115th Ohio] were sent up to West Virginia, landing at Parkersburg, and from there sent out to intercept a band of rebels who had destroyed several miles of railroad. We found no enemy, however, and no fighting."¹¹²

After two weeks of fruitless searching for the elusive Confederates, Hogue and his fellow soldiers boarded boats and steamed downriver to their old campground at Covington, Kentucky. Although the soldiers found no enemy, there was one casualty of the 115th during the

campaign. While at Parkersburg, Private Andrew Nagle (Nagel) of Company D was seriously wounded by an accidental gun discharge. Forty year old Private Nagle was taken to a hospital in Parkersburg where he died on July 13, 1863.

Returning to Covington from the Parkersburg expedition, Colonel Lucy asked for a fifteen-day leave of absence. In a letter written to the Assistant Adjutant General, Lucy explained his reason for the leave:

I received 3 o'clock the 6th (June, 1863), a dispatch from Parkersburgh, Va, stating that my only child, a little girl six years old, was dangerously ill and from the delicate condition of her health will not live many hours, and as I have already buried my only son, since being in the service, when so situated as not to be permitted to see him, I feel, if it is not contrary to every degree of propriety, to the interests of the service, anxious to visit my family under the circumstances. I will report [back to the regiment] sooner if possible.

Lucy was granted the leave and helped nurse his daughter to a full recovery. The Colonel may have become infected with his daughter's contagion, for after he returned to the regiment the Regimental Muster Rolls for July and August list Colonel Lucy as "present," but "sick and not on duty."¹¹³

During the West Virginia expedition, a speech given in Ohio by a former U. S. Congressman set in motion a chain of events that would personally involve many soldiers of the Regiment.

Ex-congressman Clement Laird Vallandigham was a politician from Ohio who fervently opposed the Lincoln Administration and the military subjugation of the South. Speeches made by Vallandigham in 1861 had already branded him as an anti-war agitator.

"The Constitution as it is, the Union as it was," was Vallandigham's political position. Modern day parlance would call Vallandigham a peace activist.¹¹⁴

Vallandigham was at the time garnering support for re-election with a view toward the governorship of Ohio. As the war continued with no end in sight, Vallandigham's pacifist views attracted more and more followers. Vallandigham's political activities even attracted the notice of

President Abraham Lincoln, who became fearful that the former Ohio Congressman, as a newly-elected governor, might sway enough citizens of Ohio to vote that state out of the war. Lincoln realized the loss of Ohio's soldiers would be disastrous, if not fatal to the Union war effort. Contrarily, Vallandigham was convinced that Lincoln was using the war as an excuse to suppress the Constitutional rights of American citizens.

On April 27, 1861, in an effort to curb blatant anti-government actions by spies and saboteurs, President Lincoln had suspended the Writ of Habeas Corpus; a Constitutional safeguard against arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. The suspension of the Writ incensed Vallandigham, who argued that Habeas Corpus, free speech, free press, and other Constitutional rights were not to be suppressed—regardless of the consequences to the war effort. Vallandigham would use the suspension of the Writ as evidence of Lincoln's unlawful disregard for Constitutional rights.¹¹⁵

Vallandigham's anti-war speeches also attracted the attention of Union General Ambrose E. Burnside, the Union military commander of the Ohio Department in which Vallandigham was campaigning. To curtail and negate anti-war agitators such as Vallandigham, Burnside issued General Order #38. Burnside's famous (or infamous) order cited specific acts of aiding the enemy that would be considered traitorous and further stated, "that treason expressed or implied will not be tolerated in this (Burnside's) department." The punishment for anyone disobeying the order was exile, and in extreme cases, death. Burnside felt his order would end the actions of anti-government dissidents in his department—in particular Vallandigham.¹¹⁶

Conversely, Burnside's order had the opposite effect on Vallandigham. Soon after the publication of the order Vallandigham spoke at a political rally at Mount Vernon, Ohio. At the rally Vallandigham's speech blasted the policies of the Lincoln administration for curtailing civil rights, and the "wicked, cruel and unnecessary war" being forced on the nation. Further, Vallandigham spoke against Burnside's Order #38 as "a bane usurpation of arbitrary authority," and that he (Vallandigham) could "spit upon it and stamp it under foot." Vallandigham had carefully chosen his words to intentionally test the legality of Lincoln's wartime measures, and especially Burnside's Order #38.¹¹⁷

Among the crowd of some ten thousand Ohioans at the rally listening to Vallandigham were two army officers inconspicuously

dressed in civilian attire. The two soldiers had been sent by General Burnside to “observe and take notes” at the political rally. One plain clothed soldier stood at the edge of the speaker’s platform, and busily wrote notes of Vallandigham’s speech. The other officer moved about the crowd keeping close to the platform. The two officers were Capt. Harrington R. Hill and Capt. John A. Means of the 115th Ohio.¹¹⁸

After the Mount Vernon Rally ended, the two officers quickly returned to Cincinnati and immediately submitted their reports to General Burnside. On reading the evidence presented by Captains Mean and Hill, Burnside decided to arrest Vallandigham.¹¹⁹

Meanwhile, Clement Vallandigham had returned to his home in Dayton, Ohio. Unbeknownst to Vallandigham, he and his family were being watched by a “friendly” Dayton resident. The same friendly resident telegraphed Burnside that Vallandigham would be at his home in Dayton the evening of May 4, 1863.¹²⁰

Having decided to arrest the troublesome agitator, Burnside delegated his Aide-De-Camp, Captain Charles Hutton, to head the expedition to apprehend the ex-congressman. Hutton was advised to take a full company of soldiers with him as resistance to the arrest was anticipated. Hutton selected a squad of “Regular” soldiers and part of the 115th’s Company C for the assignment.¹²¹

Clement Laird Vallandigham Former Ohio Congressman arrested and convicted for violating General Burnside’s General Order #38.

Banished to the Confederacy, the fervent politician eventually returned to Ohio where he practiced law until dying of an accidental gunshot wound in 1871.

Courtesy Library of Congress LC-DIG-cwpbh-01194



In Cincinnati during the quiet cool darkness of a late evening on May 4, a detail of soldiers from Company C and the squad of Regulars boarded a waiting northbound train. At 2:00 a.m. on May 5, the train stopped at Dayton, Ohio, and the Union soldiers silently exited the train and fixed bayonets. After leaving a squad of men to guard the train, the rest of the expedition quietly marched down the empty dark streets to 323 First Street, Clement Laird Vallandigham's residence. Soldiers were deployed around the perimeter of the house to prevent any interference from townsmen and to capture any occupants fleeing from the house. The squad of Regulars followed Captain Hutton to the front entrance.¹²²

Clement L. Vallandigham was awoken by the sounds of his front door bell and the shouting voice of Captain Hutton. Vallandigham leaned out from an upstairs window to ask what the soldiers wanted. Hutton informed Vallandigham that he was under arrest and that he (Vallandigham) should quietly acquiesce. After a few exchanges of lively argument between Hutton and the ex-congressman, Hutton ordered his men to break into the residence.¹²³ Seeing that the soldiers would soon enter his house to consummate the arrest, Vallandigham prepared to resist, making several curious (and unsuccessful) calls for help from his bedroom window.¹²⁴

After breaking-in a back doorway, the soldiers entered the darkened house and proceeded to the second floor. Within a few minutes Hutton's men had knocked down the locked bedroom doors and arrested Vallandigham, while his wife and sister-in-law screamed hysterically at his side.¹²⁵

The few Dayton citizens who appeared in the street outside were witnesses to the bizarre act of armed Union soldiers breaking into a private residence to arrest a former Ohio Congressman. The tiny group of citizens stood quietly in the darkness, at a respectful distance, and gave the armed soldiers no trouble. Vallandigham was quickly and unceremoniously taken from his house and marched through the still, early morning blackness to the waiting train (Vallandigham had dressed before surrendering to Hutton). The whole affair at Dayton had taken, perhaps, thirty minutes.¹²⁶

The train took Vallandigham to Cincinnati where the ex-congressman was placed under house arrest until a military trial could be arranged. The military court, relying on testimony from Captains Hill and Means, ultimately found Vallandigham guilty of violating General Order #38. As a consequence, Vallandigham was banished to the

Confederacy. (Unknown are the sentiments of Private Clement H. Vallandigham, a regimental bugler of Company A, who was a nephew of the famous anti-war activist. It is unlikely, given the circumstances, that Private Vallandigham visited his Uncle after the arrest, or during the military trial.)¹²⁷

The immediate result of the arrest of Vallandigham was a full-blown riot at Dayton. The fact that a local dignitary had been forcibly taken—kidnapped from his very house in the middle of the night, infuriated most Daytonians. The smoldering animosity against the arrest might have eventually cooled, but a local anti-war newspaper fanned the sparks of resentment into a conflagration of overt hostility.

On Tuesday morning, the day of Vallandigham's arrest, the local Democratic paper, *The Dayton Empire*, published a provocative editorial. The newspaper editorial blamed the trouble on abolitionists and hinted at a call-to-arms with a banner headline that trumpeted, "*Vallandigham Kidnapped, A Dastardly Outrage, Will Free Men Submit? The Hour for Acton Has Arrived.*" The effects of the newspaper's inflammatory rhetoric, plus copious amounts of saloon liquor, had the inevitable result upon the town's ruffians. The building housing the local pro-war Republican newspaper, *The Dayton Journal*, was vandalized, torched and burned.¹²⁸

An appeal for help in quelling the riot was telegraphed from Dayton to the army headquarters at Cincinnati. In response to the request, Lieutenant George L. Waterman, Lieutenant John Eadie, and forty men of Company C were sent by express train at 10:30 p.m. and arrived at Dayton near midnight. The men of Company C joined another Union detachment from Columbus, making a force of 155 men. The soldiers formed ranks at the rail station and marched into the town, winding their way along the streets illuminated by the eerie red glow of several burning buildings.¹²⁹

A soldier from Company C described what happened next as the soldiers fell into line and:

...marched up near the jail, when a squad was sent under Sergt. [Charles] Way to protect the fire engines then trying to extinguish a fire which the mob were determined to prevent them from

extinguishing. As soon as the Sergt. arrived at the scene of trouble he deployed his men along the hose with orders to stick their bayonets into any one who would attempt to cut the hose; and the consequence was, several [townsmen] went away with a hole about the seat of their pants.¹³⁰

The action of the soldiers had the desired effect, and the mob quickly dispersed. The fires were rapidly put out and order restored.

After sunrise riotous crowds began to gather around the smoldering ruins of several buildings. Company C again fixed bayonets and dispersed the unruly mobs, arresting several suspected ringleaders. As a final consequence, Dayton and all of Montgomery County, Ohio, was placed under martial law.¹³¹

Dayton was not the only Ohio city to turn to violence. After suppressing the riot and restoring order at Dayton, a detachment of the 115th was sent to calm a disturbance at Hamilton on May 12. Lieutenant George L. Waterman was one of the soldiers sent to bring order to the city. In a letter to his parents, Waterman told of his Company C being sent to Hamilton to arrest deserters and “quell a possible riot” brewing there.¹³²

Unlike Dayton, duty at Hamilton was not unpleasant, at least not for Waterman. The disturbance was easily dealt with, and it seems the residents of Hamilton were not all anti-Union, especially when young unmarried officers were in town. When Lieutenant Waterman was later ordered back to Cincinnati, he wrote to his father saying that he would miss the social life at Hamilton, especially the young ladies. After returning to Cincinnati, Waterman was assigned to clerical duties and report writing, much to his disgust.¹³³

On a warm Friday, June 19, Waterman left his office early to visit a Company C soldier, Private George Cassie. Cassie was dying of “congestion of the lungs” at the military hospital in Cincinnati. Sensing Cassie’s death was near, Waterman stayed with the dying Private. Waterman’s bedside vigil did not last long, with Cassie dying quietly after a few quick breaths. The soldier’s death troubled Waterman, who had enlisted Cassie at the Boston City recruitment rally less than a year ago.

Lieutenant Waterman sent Cassie’s remains back to Peninsula, Ohio, for burial, assigning Private James Dolan from Company C as an escort. Waterman discreetly sent a letter to his father asking his parents

to help Dolan, who was illiterate. Waterman's father dutifully helped the unschooled soldier with all legal documents and funeral arrangements. With his mission completed, Dolan boarded a train and returned to Cincinnati.

On June 25, 1863, the *Summit County Beacon* newspaper printed Private Cassie's obituary. The news article, written by Lieutenant Waterman, gave the date, place, and cause of the soldier's death and declared the loss of Cassie was "deeply regretted" by his company. Born in Scotland, George Cassie was laid to rest in the soil of his adopted country at Cedar Grove Cemetery in Peninsula, Ohio.¹³⁴

Three weeks after the death of Private Cassie, the Confederate Cavalry of General John Hunt Morgan caused much excitement for the regiment. Morgan, with 2,400 Rebel cavalymen, had crossed the Ohio River into Indiana on July 8, successfully evading Union pursuit. Morgan had with him several telegraph key operators who tapped into telegraph lines spreading false alarms and sending out misleading information to confuse the Union efforts to capture the invaders. All along the path of the raid, Morgan's men destroyed bridges, railroad infrastructure, and government stores. Wild exaggerations as to the size of Morgan's force caused panic among the citizens of Indiana. Then on July 12, Morgan decided to leave the "Hoosier State" and headed toward western Ohio.¹³⁵

To help stop the intrepid Rebels, Companies H and C of the 115th boarded a special train that sped northwest from Cincinnati to the Indiana border. Just across the Indiana State line, the train's engineer slowed and then halted the cars before the blackened remains of a bridge burnt by Morgan's horsemen.

Since the stringers of the torched bridge still spanned the river, the soldiers detrained, formed ranks, and gingerly crossed the blackened girders of the trestle. A member of Company H remembered the weakened bridge "just fell in as we got across."

Sometime after their inauspicious entrance into Indiana, a platoon of Company H, under the command of Captain Sturgeon, caught sight of a distant group of armed horsemen. According to a company soldier, ten to fifteen volleys of gunfire erupted between the two factions, after which the suspicious mounted troops departed. The long-range

skirmish between the distant and indistinct horsemen caused no casualties on either side.¹³⁶

A Company C sergeant would confess that the Confederate cavalry raid caused much alarm in Ohio, but, with the exception of the Company H platoon, no action for the 115th. After six days of scouting, the footsore soldiers of the regiment returned to Cincinnati without a single Rebel prisoner.¹³⁷

Morgan's Rebels continued into and across Ohio, skillfully avoiding federal pursuit, and baffling the federal high command as to the raiders' whereabouts and intentions. On July 15, Colonel Lucy at Covington was ordered by General Burnside to, "send out [a] messenger to the commanding officer of your force at Alexandria [Kentucky] with instructions to keep a good lookout for the [river] crossings at Liverpool, California, and Bealemont, and give early notice of any movement of the enemy."

To avoid capture at the crossings of the Ohio River, Morgan's horsemen simply bypassed the river and headed toward eastern Ohio.¹³⁸

During Morgan's Rebel raid, Private Daniel L. Sharpnack of Company H was on furlough visiting friends and relatives in Salem, a town in eastern Ohio. If Daniel expected a restful and peaceful leave in a town located far from the frontlines, he was wrong. Salem's town bell pealed an alarm on July 26, gathering a large throng of fretful townspeople. A plea from the mayor was given to the gathered crowd for volunteers to defend the city from an expected attack of Morgan's cavalry.

Over five hundred indifferently armed townsmen responded to the call and were stationed at makeshift barricades placed across several of the towns' streets. While the men manned the barricades, the ladies of Salem kept busy providing meals and refreshments to the hastily formed and inexperienced, Salem defense force.

Luckily, Sharpnack and the other townsmen were spared any trouble by Morgan. News soon arrived that Morgan and his entire force had been captured some twenty miles south of Salem. The Salem "Militia" disbanded that night without experiencing combat, much to the great relief of many a reluctant defender.¹³⁹

As Morgan and his Confederate raiders were being chased and captured by Union Cavalry, Lieutenant George Waterman, at Cincinnati,

received some welcome news. On a bright July Sunday, Waterman was ordered away from his disliked and confining desk job. Lieutenant John Eadie had been hurt in a fall from a horse and along with his bruises had contracted a debilitating fever. Waterman was sent to relieve Eadie and take over command of Eadie's mounted detachment at Hamilton, Ohio.¹⁴⁰

As Waterman traveled to Hamilton, it is likely the young Lieutenant was looking forward to renewing certain female acquaintances at the town. Waterman, however, did not have much time to socialize, for the mounted detachment was abruptly ordered to the troubled city of Dayton. However glad Waterman may have been at leaving his hot, stuffy office in Cincinnati, he would regrettably find Dayton's citizens still burning with resentment toward the Federal government, and especially toward Union soldiers.

Waterman's orders were to patrol Dayton's streets and byways, police the town, and somehow maintain the fragile peace. The task given to Waterman was difficult, as Dayton was rife with hot-headed civilians who looked upon the Union soldiers as an occupying force. While on patrol the soldiers had daily run-ins with the local town ruffians. "I do not like this scuffling, gouging, scratching and pounding; not a day passes but we have a row with some one," noted Waterman. Continuing hot weather did not help the civil unrest in the tempestuous city.¹⁴¹

Most of the soldiers of the regiment agreed with Waterman's aversion to such irksome assignments. Monotonous guard duty, endless patrols, and constant harassment by civilians caused many officers and enlisted men to long for reassignment to the front lines. Some of the soldiers of the 115th vented their frustrations in letters sent home. In a missive to his parents, Lieutenant Waterman described himself derisively as a "home guard" a wry comment about the regiment's rear-area duties.¹⁴²

There were a few members of the 115th who felt themselves lucky and rather enjoyed the duty of being guards and living in barracks. Private Harvey Hogue wrote in his post-war memoir that "Personally, I [Hogue] was peculiarly favored in being located so long at places and in comfortable quarters, for having quit school at the age of fifteen I found upon entering the army and coming into contact with so many young men of my own age, that in the things which I should have been informed I proved woefully ignorant. So before we had been many months in the

service J. M. Darrow and myself had some books sent us with which we spent a portion of our time, profitably, no doubt. ”¹⁴³

At the time, Corporal Hogue and thirty other soldiers were stationed at Burlington, Kentucky, with orders to arrest Rebel recruiting officers rumored to be in the area. The soldiers had no luck finding the Rebel soldiers, but fully enjoyed the generous hospitality of the townspeople. Especially liked was a hotel owner who frequently treated Hogue and his squad to free lunches.

Despite the pleasantries at Burlington, a murder was narrowly averted. During one rainy afternoon on June 19, 1863, Hogue and a dozen or so men of Company G were in the barracks (the second floor of the town’s Courthouse) when an altercation broke out between Private William Lyons and Private Charles Sheldon. Lyons had been drinking heavily and was thoroughly intoxicated. Sheldon had infuriated Lyons over some frivolous matter, and Lyons, losing all restraint, grabbed a musket and shot at Sheldon. The musket ball struck Sheldon’s legs collapsing him to the floor. Lyons then stood menacingly over his helpless victim and started to “brain” the prone Sheldon with the butt of the rifle. It was with difficulty that other soldiers stopped the crazed Lyons from further injuring the wounded soldier. It took several men to subdue and bind Lyons who was then dragged off through the rain and mud to the local jail.¹⁴⁴

Lyons eventually sobered, was punished for the infraction, and returned to duty. As for Private Sheldon, he survived his wounds, but his recovery was agonizingly slow. After rudimentary medical treatment at Burlington, Sheldon was sent to Woodward Hospital in Cincinnati where he was a patient for nearly three months. Then in September, Sheldon was given leave to return to his hometown of Richfield, Ohio. From Richfield, Private Sheldon was sent to the United States Army General Hospital in Cleveland for further medical treatment. A little more than a half year later, Sheldon left the General Hospital and joined the Fifth Veteran Reserve Corp at Indianapolis, Indiana. Sheldon’s wounds eventually healed, and by October, 1864, he was assigned duty as a Fifth VRC Company cook. The 115th Ohio’s long absent Private was finally transferred back to the regiment from the Reserve Corps on December 22, 1864. Surprisingly, Sheldon’s regimental muster rolls and hospital records listed his wounds as “accidental.”

Bad luck followed Sheldon after his return to the regiment. On April 8, 1865, while on patrol at LaVergne, Tennessee, Sheldon was wounded

by a bushwhacker. The wound was apparently slight but required a prolonged two month stay at Hospital #1 in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. In what must be a dubious record of sorts, Private Charles Sheldon spent one year and nine months recuperating from his two gunshot wounds—more than half of his three year enlistment.

At the time Lyons and Sheldon were having their altercation, the Right Wing Commander, Lt. Colonel Boone, was dealing with a legal confrontation while on duty at Kemper Barracks, a small military prison in Cincinnati.

Kemper Barracks at times variously held Confederate prisoners, Union deserters, Union “stragglers,” paroled Union soldiers, and political prisoners. The brick building, located on Second Street, was thirty-three feet wide by one hundred feet deep. The five stories that composed the structure were each ten feet in height. Windows were only on the south and east side with nine windows on each floor, except the first floor which only had six. Deserters and Confederate prisoners were kept on the fifth floor (making an escape a bone-breaking experience) while the fourth floor housed paroled soldiers and stragglers. The first and third floors of the building each housed a full company of soldiers with the second floor reserved for officer’s quarters. The building also had “water closets” (privies) on each floor, which made it ideal to house prisoners and deserters.¹⁴⁵

(One of the deserters was a thirty-seven year old Private of Company C. The Private had convivial trysts with certain ladies of Cincinnati, the end result being the soldier was ordered to a military hospital for treatment of venereal disease. Perhaps his conscience troubled him, for one day he got up, left the hospital, and went home to his wife.

The fugitive soldier was soon arrested, sent back to the 115th Regiment, and at court-martial was given a sentence of thirty-days police duty and loss of one month’s pay. A few weeks later, the wayward Private, disillusioned with military life, left the regiment for good—deserting while on duty at McLean Barracks. The man successfully eluded further arrest by taking up residence in Windsor, Canada.)

The jailed Union soldiers and political prisoners confined at Kemper Barracks often appealed to the Cincinnati Civil Court of Judge Alexander Paddock for succor in getting released from the prison. In eight months,

the sympathetic Paddack issued over twenty-one Writs of Habeas Corpus; each demanding Colonel Boone to bring the soldier (or civilian) to Paddack's Civil Court and show evidence as to each prisoner's guilt.

Boone considered the prisoners in Kemper Barracks to be under military and not civil law and soon began to be annoyed with the deluge of Judge Paddack's Writs. As a way of solving the annoyance of the Civil Court, Boone started to delay replies to Justice Paddack, and later simply ignored the Writs altogether. Judge Paddack, equally annoyed by Boone's blatant failure to answer the various summons, ordered the arrest of Boone for contempt of court on August 8, 1863. A county Sheriff was dispatched to deliver the warrant and arrest Boone, specifically for not bringing a soldier named Hicks to Judge Paddack's Court.

Boone was aware of the impending arrest and judiciously summoned his Headquarters' guard. When the Sheriff arrived at Boone's Headquarters he was greeted by the specter of eight guards with loaded, leveled, bayonet-fixed muskets. The Sheriff, shocked and thoroughly unnerved "reconsidered" delivering the warrant. Fearing for his life, the red-faced sheriff returned the warrant to Judge Paddack. Boone, a few days later, sent a reply letter to Judge Paddack stating that the jailing of Hicks was a military matter and not a concern of the Civil Court and besides, wrote Boone, Hicks had been transferred from Kemper "elsewhere." In Boone's mind, his reply had ended the matter.

However Judge Paddack did not consider the case against Boone closed. Paddack issued another arrest warrant for Boone on August 14 for Boone's failure to deliver a soldier named James Archibald to Civil Court. Then on October 22, and October 28, Judge Paddack issued two more arrest warrants—this time delivered by U. S. Marshall A. C. Sands. All three arrest warrants went unheeded and were not enforced, the cause of the undelivered documents being Boone's menacing guards. The judge, realizing he would not find any way to deliver or enforce his warrants, grudgingly dropped the case.

Boone's disregard for Judge Paddack's Writs of Habeas Corpus caused the Cincinnati newspapers to give the Colonel much unwanted notoriety. In a letter Colonel Boone wrote to his wife, Mary, he mentioned about taking his meals at a nearby hotel accompanied by a guard detail; somewhat tongue-in-cheek telling Mary that he (Boone) was probably the only Union officer in Cincinnati that needed bodyguards.

In the letter Boone also mentioned that the female waitresses at the hotel queried Boone as to why he was accompanied with such, “good looking” soldiers—to which he replied he brought the soldiers as “beaus” for them. Somewhat satisfactorily Boone noted this created a lot of excitement among the female staff at the hotel.

Near the end of the correspondence to his wife, Colonel Boone revealed that he did free one of his prisoners. A sixteen year old girl had been discovered in a Union regiment wearing a soldier’s uniform. The young female soldier had managed to hide her true identity from her fellow male comrades for eleven months, all the while never missing company drills, participating in two engagements, and even seeing duty as an orderly sergeant. While at Kemper Barracks the girl confided to Boone that she “now wants out of the service.” She also admitted becoming rather fond of “britches,” but now supposed she would have to give them up for petticoats. The girl, whose name was not mentioned by Boone, was quickly mustered-out of the service.

As Boone dealt with disparaging newspapers stories about his “disagreement” with Judge Paddack, some of the Right Wing troops of his command were garnering a slovenly reputation. Indeed, many complaints were sent to regimental and district headquarters about groups of the regiment’s soldiers exhibiting rowdy, insulting behavior. Other complaints centered on the unkempt conditions of the regiment’s barracks and posts that caused obnoxious odors to permeate nearby homes and businesses.

One soldier from Lt. Colonel Boone’s command was arrested on August 23, for “Conduct Unbecoming a Soldier.” Twenty-one year old Private Edward Gibbons, of Company H, had gone to a city jail to visit some “ladies” kept in the lockup. Within a short time at the jail, the young soldier had become very agitated and menacing toward the women, at which point the jailer requested that Gibbons leave. A row broke out between the two men when Gibbons suddenly drew his pistol and threatened to kill the jailer.

Although the jailer was not harmed, the end result of the confrontation landed Gibbons in the prison at Kemper Barracks, from which, on August 28, the young man promptly escaped and deserted. The miscreant soldier was never seen again.¹⁴⁶

Just before Gibbons desertion, a freak accident took the life of a young officer of Company E. Captain Joseph S. Harter was walking in the company’s room at Kemper Barracks when a loaded pistol fell from a

wall peg. The weapon's hammer struck the floor causing the gun to discharge. The barrel of the revolver happened to be pointing upward, and the random shot struck Harter in the abdomen. Taken to an army hospital in Cincinnati, Harter suffered intense pain until dying the next morning, Wednesday, August 26. Captain Harter's remains were sent back to Canton, Ohio, escorted by his younger brother, Lt. George Harter.¹⁴⁷

In addition to Captain Harter, four other members of the 115th, three of whom were nineteen years of age, died during August, 1863. Typhoid claimed teenagers Private George Holden, of Company G, and (the uniquely named) Ohio J. Smith, of Company A. The third teenager, Private Mosheim Kindig, Company H, died of an "unspecified disease." The day after Holden died, Company G Private James Clark, age twenty-two, died of dysentery while on sick leave at Colerain, Ohio. Clark was laid to rest in an unmarked grave at the Northfield Macedonia Cemetery. The three teenage soldiers were buried in Cincinnati's Spring Grove Cemetery.¹⁴⁸

Throughout the sunny-hot August days the regiment's soldiers continued their daily patrol and guard duties in southern Ohio and northern Kentucky. The hardest and most difficult duty was in Dayton. Quartered in tents in Dayton's town square, a company of the 115th regiment was an obvious presence. The square, sometimes called the "park," was treelined and surrounded by a low wrought iron fence. The trees provided some shade for the soldiers, while the iron fence made a convenient boundary between the townspeople and the soldiers' campsite.¹⁴⁹

Being assigned to Dayton, Lieutenant George Waterman was kept busy looking after his soldiers, managing the numerous patrols, and supervising the arrests of deserters and protestors in the rebellious city. Waterman was particularly peeved at one obnoxious protestor who tore down, tramped on, and finally burned the National Flag. In a letter to his father the Lieutenant confessed of wishing to settle the incident with his pistol rather than arrest the flag-burner. Waterman did, however, manage to control his anger, and the citizen was arrested and placed in the town jail.¹⁵⁰

In mid-August Lieutenant John Eadie returned to duty, and Waterman was appointed Provost Marshal of Dayton. The Provost assignment further irked the restless Lieutenant, who considered the desk job as limiting and restrictive. Along with the appointment came another piece of bad news; Waterman received word that a long-awaited furlough home was once again denied.¹⁵¹

During the last days of August the weather turned cooler, but the lower temperature did not diminish the heated turmoil in Dayton. The many supporters of Vallandigham did not forget or forgive the federal government's arrest of their prominent townsman. The burnt and charred remains of a city block gave mute testimony to the latent paroxysm still smoldering in the minds of the citizens. In the first week of September a confrontation occurred between civilians and soldiers that reignited the passions of civil unrest.

The late night air of September 2nd was pleasant as Waterman sat in his tent on the town square. The young Lieutenant had finally received his coveted furlough home and was scheduled to leave Dayton on the 1:00 a.m. train. Lieutenant Eadie was with Waterman passing the time in idle gossip while waiting for the early morning express.¹⁵²

On many previous late night occurrences, town ruffians had taunted, jeered, and harassed the sleeping soldiers. These nighttime nuisances were largely ignored by the sleepy men.¹⁵³ This night, the heckler's taunts aroused the anger of Eadie and Waterman. Both men were quick to anger, and both men were wide awake.

Eadie and Waterman left their tent and rushed to the low iron fence bordering the square—the angry officers looking for the source of the harassment. On the other side of the fence, across the street, were two Dayton citizens “hurrahing” for Vallandigham. The two townsmen, Tom Spielman and William S. Huber, had been to a Copperhead anti-war meeting held earlier that night at the Courthouse. Spielman and Huber had more recently left a saloon, as both appeared intoxicated. Seeing the two officers arrive at the fence prompted even louder jeers and taunts from the two townsmen. In no uncertain terms the two Lieutenants asked the hecklers to leave. Spielman and Huber answered, in similar unkind terms, that they would not leave.

At this point, the tall, muscular, and athletic Lieutenant Eadie vaulted over the iron fence and ran toward the hecklers. Eadie's actions bespoke of physical violence. Waterman also vaulted the fence following Eadie. Spielman drew a pistol from his pocket—perhaps hoping to scare

off the charging officers. A shot rent the night and a bullet struck Waterman in his left thigh. "My God, I'm shot," gasped Waterman as he slumped to the street.

Eadie rushed toward the nearest heckler and struck the man with his fist. The powerful blow given by Eadie landed Huber in the roadway. Eadie then ran after Spielman who was making fast for Markgraff's Saloon. Just before entering the crowded bar, Spielman turned and fired another shot that grazed Eadie's face. Ducking inside the crowded saloon, Spielman was quickly disarmed by another soldier and immediately collared by Eadie.

At this juncture, part of Company C's Provost Guard entered the saloon with one of the guard handing Eadie a pistol. Taking the pistol, Eadie promised to shoot anyone who interfered with the arrest of Spielman. Eadie's visage and demeanor left no doubt as to the sincerity of the promise, and no one in the packed saloon gave any resistance.

Meanwhile Huber had recovered from Eadie's blow and ran off into the darkness leaving Waterman in the street, blood coursing from his wound.¹⁵⁴ The stricken Lieutenant was taken to the Montgomery House Hotel and placed in room number 13. While lying in the hotel room Waterman's first act was to write a letter home. Waterman knew his parents would soon learn of the incident, and in the letter he tried to assuage the fears of his worrisome mother and father. He wrote in detail of the wound noting that the wound was "not serious," and that he was doing well. He asked them not to come to Dayton as he would soon be home on leave "in a few days as soon as I can travel."¹⁵⁵

The hotel room number proved unlucky for Waterman. At first, the wound did not appear mortal. The ball had passed cleanly between the bone and artery of the inside left thigh. A local doctor and the Regimental Surgeon had both examined the wound considered it "not dangerous." Seven days later Waterman wrote a last letter home. In the letter he told of the wound as still painful, but the doctor's prognosis had the wound beginning to heal in ten to twelve days. Waterman admitted that he would not be able to come home for two weeks at best.¹⁵⁶

Although the surface of the wound appeared to be healing, internal gangrene had developed. On Friday, September 18, the wound started hemorrhaging, and the pain became excruciating. The next day, a doctor made an incision into the wound to tie off a lacerated artery. It was then the doctor found "mortification of the flesh." After a quick consultation with another doctor, it was decided to amputate the leg at the wound as

a last attempt to save Waterman's life. Lieutenant George L. Waterman died shortly after the operation. Weakness, loss of blood, shock, and necrosis were given as the cause of death. Besides the doctors, Waterman's mother had arrived and was present during the ordeal. Waterman's grieving father arrived late the next night.¹⁵⁷

After a short funeral service in a Dayton church, Waterman's parents and a military escort of five soldiers took the Lieutenant's body back to Ohio for burial. A large group of civilians at Hudson, Ohio, met the funeral escort at the rail station. Under gray, rain filled skies, the somber funeral train of buggies and wagons then traveled five miles to the village of Peninsula where a funeral service was held at the Waterman home. Waterman's parents then buried their only son in Cedar Grove Cemetery within sight of the grave of George Cassie, the soldier that Waterman had sent home for burial three months previously.¹⁵⁸

The day before the shooting incident at Dayton, Lieutenant Waterman had been summoned to regimental headquarters at Cincinnati. At headquarters Waterman was surprised at being informed he was to be assigned to the staff of the Union Commander of the District of Ohio. The Lieutenant was to begin the new assignment after returning from his furlough. It would have been a choice assignment for the young, intelligent officer.¹⁵⁹

As the mourning throng of people quietly left Waterman's gravesite and returned to their homes about Peninsula, the city of Dayton bordered on the brink of calamity. Huber had been arrested, and along with Spielman, had been taken to the provost military jail to wait arraignment before a military court. The news of the arrests quickly spread through the city and fueled the fears and hatred of the people of Dayton. With the memory of the Vallandigham affair fresh in their memories, the citizens of Dayton reacted to the latest arrests of the two townsmen with escalating vehemence and hostility. Dayton was on the verge of another full-scale riot.¹⁶⁰

Wishing to avoid another divisive civilian confrontation (and the negative publicity that would result) the new Union commander of Ohio, General Jacob Cox, arrived at the convenient determination that Lt. Waterman was "officially" on furlough at the time of the shooting and was therefore not acting in a "military capacity." This reasoning allowed Cox to dispose of the necessity of a military trial and allowed Spielman and Huber to be turned over to the Dayton civil authorities.

Conveniently forgotten by Cox was Lieutenant Eadie who, while on active duty, was grazed by a shot from Spielman's pistol.¹⁶¹

No legal action was ever taken against the two townsmen by the sympathetic Dayton city court. Spielman, who was known as being rather "fast," steadfastly claimed his innocence of firing the shot that struck Waterman. On September 21, Spielman was set free on \$200 bail supplied by the city's Mayor. Further, after a cursory preliminary examination, Spielman was discharged and set free. The Mayor of Dayton reasoned that Spielman was "justified in the shooting" of Lt. Eadie as an act of self-defense. William Huber, a usually quiet young man, was an intoxicated innocent caught up in the action. Huber had simply been released from jail a few days after being arrested.¹⁶²

The impulsive Lt. Eadie also contributed to the continued unrest at Dayton. On September 17, Eadie had gone to the Montgomery Hotel to visit the dying Waterman. Eadie was in the act of leaving the hotel lobby when Frederick Brown, a local citizen, entered the lobby from the street and started cheering loudly for Vollandigham. Eadie, not in the best of moods, immediately confronted Brown. To Eadie's remarks Brown replied, "Vollandigham is no more a traitor than you are." At this, the impetuous Eadie seized Brown and tossed him out the hotel door knocking Brown to the pavement. Brown, while lying in the street, drew a pistol and fired two shots at Eadie, both shots missing. Eadie then drew and emptied his pistol at Brown, who still lay prone in the street. Although struck three times, twice to the head, Brown, miraculously, was not seriously wounded.¹⁶³

The news of Eadie's confrontation quickly reached headquarters at Cincinnati. On hearing of the shooting, Colonel Lucy and Lieutenant Sumner Nash rushed to Dayton. To avoid another riot, Lucy ordered Nash to take command at Dayton, and Eadie was quickly sent off to Cincinnati. Brown was arrested, but like Spielman, never faced a court trial. Lieutenant Eadie was also arrested and tried at court-martial for "Conduct Unbecoming an Officer" with the specific charge of "willfully and maliciously shooting with intent to wound, maim, or kill Frederick Brown." The military court ultimately found Eadie acted in self-defense and was innocent of any wrongdoing.¹⁶⁴

The month of September ended with Ohio soldiers and civilians having another confrontation, this time in Cincinnati. Some Cincinnati toughs "hurrahing" for Vollandigham drew the attention of a passing Union artilleryman. Perhaps not using any discretion, the soldier

entered into an uneven fight with several city hooligans. Other passing Union soldiers, including Corporal Daniel C. Miller of the 115th, entered into the fray to help their downtrodden comrade. When fists proved insufficient, weapons were drawn, and both groups fired shots, resulting in three Cincinnati citizens being wounded. Like the gunfights at Dayton, no one was brought to trial over the fracas in Cincinnati.¹⁶⁵

Luckily, less than a month later the regiment would be reassigned to another location far away from the troubled cities of Dayton, Hamilton, and Cincinnati. Rumors of an impending movement had circulated promiscuously within the regiment—most rumors proved false. On a crisp October night Private Luther Swartz pondered the latest rumor while guarding the ordinance depot on Sycamore Street. Swartz had heard the regiment was being sent to Tennessee. This time the rumor proved true. On October 23, 1863, the regiment was ordered to join the Federal army at Chattanooga.¹⁶⁶

CHAPTER 9: **Death on the Mississippi**

“Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori”
(It is sweet and honorable to die for one’s country)

...Inscription on 1866 memorial at Oakwood Cemetery in
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

THE SOLDIERS OF THE NINTH Indiana Light Battery were onboard the steamboat *Eclipse* headed to their home state for reorganization. The men were in a happy if not festive mood, for soon they would be among family and friends. The Hoosier State boys were hardly concerned that the *Eclipse* was slowly winding down the Tennessee River with the aid of a tow from another steamboat. The *Eclipse* apparently had mechanical problems, but this didn’t bother the soldiers, for the men in all probability were thinking of loved ones at home.

Some seventy soldiers of the artillery battery were aboard the *Eclipse* when disaster struck. Near Johnsonville, Tennessee, in the early morning hours of January 27, 1865, the boilers of the *Eclipse* exploded spewing scalding steam, boiling water, and shards of wood and metal on, among, and through the boat’s passengers. The vessel’s shattered decks and hull were soon ablaze from the exposed coal fires of the boilers. The explosion, scalding steam, and fire killed twenty-nine of the Indiana soldiers, wounded some thirty more, and left only ten men uninjured.⁵⁶¹

The loss of the *Eclipse* was a mirror image of a far greater steamboat disaster. On April 27, exactly three months to the day after the *Eclipse* catastrophe, the steamboat, *Sultana*, had its boilers explode, killing and maiming its human cargo. Both tragedies happened on western waters in the early morning hours and involved soldiers going home to friends, families, and loved ones. Only the size of the disasters would differ. The *Eclipse* was a small packet steamboat while the *Sultana* was twice as large and carrying many, many more soldiers than the *Eclipse*.

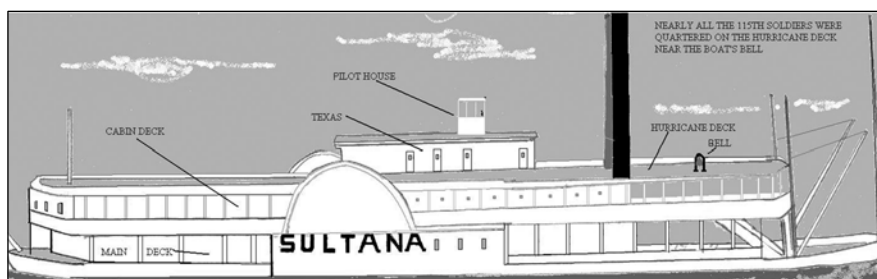
The paroled soldiers boarding the *Sultana* at Vicksburg may have heard about the *Eclipse* tragedy, but even if they did, few cared, for they were going home.⁵⁶²

The Camp Fisk parolees were placed onboard the *Sultana* in a logical order by State and by regiment. Since the boat's cabins were reserved for paroled officers and paying civilian passengers, virtually all the enlisted soldiers were assigned quarters on the open decks. The first paroled men to board were quartered on the top (Hurricane) deck. As more parolees arrived, they were successively quartered on the Cabin deck and then the Main deck—effectively loading the boat from top to bottom, keeping the later-arriving parolees from tramping around and over the earlier arrivals. The 115th Regiment's parolees (who were among the first soldiers to board the *Sultana*) were placed on the Hurricane deck.

Eighty-two enlisted men of the 115th Ohio were assigned an area in front of the pilothouse on the top deck.* This topmost deck was simply a roof for the Cabin deck below and the soldiers quartered here were exposed to sun, rain, wind, and occasional whiffs of smoke and hot cinders from *Sultana's* two immense smokestacks. The waterproof roof of the top deck was made of felt mixed with tar, sawdust, and sand—the sand acting as a fire retardant for the embers that occasionally fell from the smokestacks. The 115th parolees, unfortunately, had the bad luck of being clustered around *Sultana's* immense signal bell. Blissfully, the huge bell (weighing several hundred pounds) was used only infrequently and at times when most of the men were awake.⁵⁶³

After claiming the area around the bell and stowing away their meager possessions, the group of soldiers from the 115th took time to survey their new quarters. The men noticed that the huge signal bell was operated from the pilothouse by means of a long rope. When looking toward the front (bow) of the boat, the Ohioans saw two tall spars just in front of, and to the left and right of the Hurricane deck. The two spars, on occasion, were used like cranes to help lift the boat over the Mississippi's many sandbars. The men also noticed a tall jack staff (flagpole) in the very bow of the boat; the staff was used by the boat's pilot to literally aim the vessel through the many winding curves of the river.⁵⁶⁴

*Major Lewis Hake, Captain Deming Lowrey, Lt. John Eadie, and Lt. Jacob Sheaffer were quartered in rooms on the Cabin deck.



Steamboat Sultana

Nearly all the men of the 115th Regiment were quartered near the boat's bell.

Looking back toward the stern, the Ohio men gazed up at two colossal black-iron smokestacks and an elk's antlers hanging from the spreader bars between the stacks; the antlers symbolically identified the *Sultana* as a fast boat. Directly behind the smokestacks, the men observed the Texas (crew's cabin), and atop the Texas, the pilothouse. Behind the Texas some of the men caught a glimpse of the skylights running down the middle of the deck from the back of the Texas to the stern (the skylights helped brighten the long Cabin deck hallway below). A few Buckeye State men noticed the steamboat's yawl (small row boat) hanging from its davits over the stern. All of the Ohio soldiers were conscious of the fact that every inch of the deck around them from front to back, bow to stern, was covered with soldiers.⁵⁶⁵

Every available space of the Cabin deck and the Main deck was also crowded with soldiers. The men were used to cramped conditions of the prisons, but space on the *Sultana* was even more limited. The men, when sitting or lying down, took up all the floor space on all three decks making it almost impossible to walk or move about. Most, if not all of the ex-prisoners did not complain of the grossly crowded situation. The soldiers were going home, and a few more days of inconvenience mattered little. The soldiers were in a good mood, "(A) happier crowd I never saw," one soldier would remember.⁵⁶⁶

Initially, the Captain of the *Sultana*, James Cass Mason, had seen the transport of the parolees as much needed profit for him and the co-owners of the vessel. However, on seeing the crowded conditions, Captain Mason had qualms about so many soldiers being put aboard his boat. Mason protested to a Federal officer about the large number of parolees on his vessel asking that no more soldiers be placed on board. His protests went unheeded by the officer and the boarding continued

until all the remaining soldiers from Camp Fisk were on the steamboat.⁵⁶⁷

The various units, more or less, would remain together as they were placed aboard the boat. However, some mixing of men did occur as individual soldiers milled about the *Sultana* sightseeing or finding better sleeping spots. In all, from 2,100 to 2,300 hundred paroled soldiers representing 222 regiments had been packed aboard the vessel. Another two hundred some passengers and crew made for load of approximately 2,300 to 2,500 souls crammed aboard the steamboat.^{568*}

In addition to the passengers, seventy to one hundred head of horses and mules, sixty hogs, a cow, a pet dog, and the ship's mascot—a seven-foot six inch long alligator were all stowed away on the *Sultana*.** Besides the living creatures on the steamboat, the cargo hold of the *Sultana* held over two hundred hogsheads (barrels) of sugar, each barrel weighing about 1,200 pounds. Also packed aboard the boat were feed for the livestock, ninety-seven boxes of wine, and sustenance for the crew and passengers.⁵⁶⁹

When the loading of people and cargo was finished, the *Sultana's* pilot sounded the signal bell (waking up napping soldiers on the Hurricane deck), and shortly afterward the steamboat's immense paddle wheels churned at the brown face of the mighty Mississippi river. It was a few minutes after 9:00 p.m. on April 24, when the grossly overcrowded steamboat backed away from the riverbank and crossed the Mississippi to a coaling station opposite Vicksburg. One hour later, with its coal bunkers filled, the *Sultana* began a final journey up the darkened waterway laboring against the springtime current of America's largest river.⁵⁷⁰

As the *Sultana* left the coaling station, hungry soldiers on the Hurricane deck realized food rations had not been issued. Rations for the men had been placed on the Main deck, but the crowded conditions made food distribution impossible. Parolees on the Hurricane deck went without food that night, filling their empty stomachs with river water caught in buckets and drawn up to the top deck with ropes.⁵⁷¹

*Because of the missing records and errors made in the counting of parolees, the exact number of people aboard the *Sultana* will never be known.

**The unusual mascot was a pet of the crew. The alligator was kept in a wooden crate placed near the main stairway.

The humanity filling the steamboat's decks not only hampered the distribution of food, but also caused another inconvenience. The crowded condition on the *Sultana* made toilet facilities a problem. Toilets on the *Sultana*, as common on all side-wheel steamboats, were located in the left-side wheel housing on the second deck, but the crowded conditions kept most of the men from reaching the busy commodes. Soldiers, many still suffering from dysentery and diarrhea, simply relieved themselves over the rails of the boat. Some creative-minded soldiers on the Hurricane deck used the boat's fire axes and chopped holes into the paddle wheel housings to use as makeshift toilets.⁵⁷²

In the darkness the paroled soldiers made laborious lavatory trips to the wheel house commodes (or side rails), talked, joked, laughed, sang, smoked, and gradually settled in to their new surroundings. As the boat continued steadily upriver, the men began to bed down for the night and fall blissfully asleep. Those who were lucky could lie down on the deck. Other soldiers had to sleep in a sitting fashion, leaning against railings or cabin walls as there wasn't enough room for all the soldiers to sleep in a prone position. The night passed uneventfully as the *Sultana's* huge wheels rhythmically dipped into the dark waters.

Somehow during the early dawn, the commissary sergeants, despite the solid carpet of sleeping soldiers, had managed to distribute food to all of the decks. Rations of hardtack and raw salt pork were distributed to the men. A small stove for cooking was located on the Main deck, but only a fraction of the mass of soldiers could use the range. The men on the Hurricane deck simply ate their rations raw swallowing down the hard bread and uncooked flesh with gulps of muddy river water.

Notwithstanding the many inconveniences, and being sick with a fever, Sergeant Arthur A. Jones celebrated his 21st birthday on the crowded deck. His celebration was, of necessity, extremely modest given the circumstances.⁵⁷³

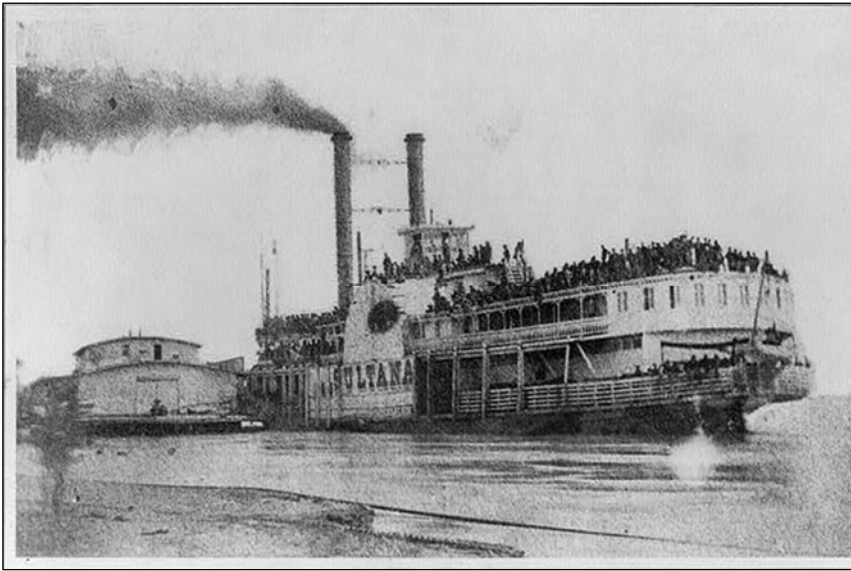
Jones's 21st birthday was a bright and fine day according to Sergeant Ely. From the lofty eminence of the Hurricane Deck, Ely saw that the river was very high and had spilled over its banks. In fact, the floodwater had spilled over several miles on each side of the river making the Mississippi look like one vast lake. Only the absence of treetops sticking above the waterline revealed the course of the river channel.⁵⁷⁴

The day and night passed without mishap as the soldiers slowly adjusted to the nuisances caused by the crowded conditions. Near seven

War Behind the Lines

o'clock on Wednesday morning the *Sultana* made a brief one-hour stop at Helena, Arkansas. It was here that the *Sultana* nearly capsized while docked at the town's landing.

The sight of such an overloaded boat caused a local photographer, T. W. Bankes, to set up his camera near the *Sultana* to record the scene. The soldiers aboard the *Sultana*, each wanting to be visible in Bankes's picture, crowded to the side of the boat facing the camera. The crowding of so many soldiers to one side made the *Sultana* list dangerously, and only the stringent efforts of Captain Mason and the Union officers got the men to return to quarters, bringing the boat back to even keel. After the boat had leveled and the men were settled, Bankes then took the last photographic image of the *Sultana*. The photograph also shows the last images of most of the passengers visible in the picture.⁵⁷⁵



The overloaded *Sultana* as it looked on April 26, 1865. The 115th Regiment's parolees are barely visible on the top deck in front of the smokestacks opposite the wharf boat.

Courtesy Library of Congress LC-USZ62-48778

The listing of the boat at Helena may have caused more stress on *Sultana's* boilers. Water in a steamboat's boilers would slosh if the vessel listed or careened from side to side. As the boat listed, the parts of the steamboat's boiler not touching water would turn red-hot. Then, when the boat returned to even keel, the water would slosh back onto the red-hot portions of the boiler and instantly turn to steam, overriding the safety valves, and causing excessive pressure on the boiler's iron plates. If the *Sultana's* boilers had been stressed or ruptured because of the photographic event, it was not evident to the boat's engineers. After one hour, the *Sultana* slipped away from the Helena dock and proceeded upriver.⁵⁷⁶

Around 7:00 p.m. that evening, the steamboat made its next scheduled stop at Memphis, Tennessee. As the boat neared the city's wharf, an Illinois cavalry regiment stationed on the bluffs above Memphis plainly saw the name *Sultana* painted on a wheel housing. The cavalrymen knew that Andersonville and Cahaba parolees were onboard the vessel and gave a loud cheer from the bluff that was clearly heard on the river. The paroled prisoners aboard the *Sultana* enthusiastically returned the compliment with a resounding shout.⁵⁷⁷

After landing at Memphis, the crew and city stevedores unloaded a good deal of the heavy cargo from the hold of the boat; the task taking almost four hours. Two hundred hogsheads of sugar, each weighing more than half a ton, were unloaded along with the boxes of wine and the hogs. Some of the paroled prisoners helped unload the hogsheads of sugar—receiving money in return for their labor. Unfortunately, a lot of the money the temporary stevedore-parolees earned went immediately into the coffers of the nearest saloons.⁵⁷⁸

With the exception of the soldiers who helped unload cargo and a few who went drinking or sightseeing, most of the parolees stayed on board the steamboat. As the evening grew long, the men bedded down for the night. The Ohio men sleeping in front of the Texas were rudely awakened a little before 11 p.m. when the *Sultana's* huge bell rang to signal the impending departure of the steamboat. It was with difficulty that several inebriated soldiers were rounded up and put back aboard the boat. A handful of parolees who went sight-seeing in Memphis missed the departure of the boat and unwittingly saved themselves from the horror that soon happened.⁵⁷⁹

Leaving the Memphis wharf, the *Sultana* steamed across the Mississippi to a coaling station on the farther shore. It took perhaps an

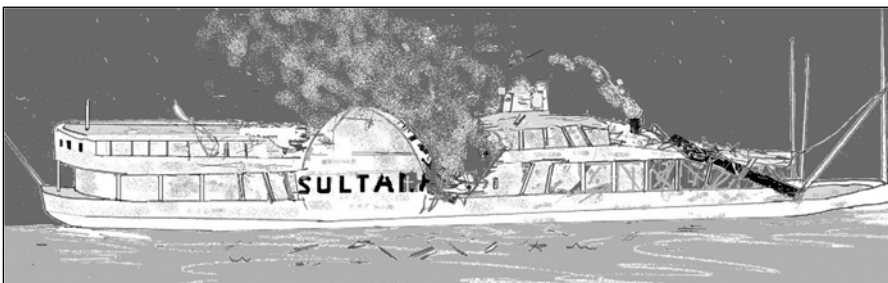
hour to load the one thousand bushels of burlap-bagged coal, along with some cordwood, into the boat's coalbunker. After being refueled, the *Sultana* pulled away from the coal barges about 1:00 in the morning.⁵⁸⁰

The *Sultana's* pilot steered the boat into the main channel and headed upstream, gradually reaching a speed of ten miles an hour against the onrushing river current. A light rain started falling soon after the steamboat left the coaling station, but the gentle rain bothered the soldiers but little. As the boat's immense wheels steadily churned the black water, most of the soldiers were lulled to sleep, dreaming of home.⁵⁸¹

As the adventures of the day faded into memory, men who were still awake looked for places to sleep. With blankets being scarce, Sergeant Arthur Jones shared his blanket with two regimental comrades, Private Martin Bair and Private Robert Gaylord. At some point during that evening Sergeant John C. Ely wrote his last diary entry, "Very fine day, still upward we go."⁵⁸²

At approximately 2:00 a.m. in the early morning darkness of April 27, some seven miles upriver from Memphis, disaster struck the *Sultana*. One of steamboat's four overworked boilers exploded. Within a split-second two more boilers exploded with a force equal to a ton of gunpowder.

The escaping steam from the ruptured boilers blew upward and rearward tearing away the middle of the boat. A huge section of the *Sultana* from the boiler deck to the hurricane deck between the wheel housings forward to pilothouse was simply obliterated. Passengers above and beside the boilers on this part of the boat were torn to bits and simply disappeared.



Rendition of the *Sultana* immediately after the boiler explosions.

Pieces of red-hot iron from the boilers, hot coals from the furnace, pieces of cord wood, slivers of the boat's planks and boards, all were propelled shrapnel-like, maiming or killing all living things in the path of the explosion-flung projectiles. Debris blown skyward rained into the river or back onto the stricken boat. Within seconds after the explosion the huge smoke stacks, now unsupported by guy lines, fell, with one stack crushing what was left of the pilothouse and the other stack falling toward the bow and hitting squarely on top of the signal bell. Moments after the stack hit the bell, the forward part of the Hurricane deck collapsed onto the main stairway crushing many soldiers to death.

The scene immediately after the explosion was chaotic. The wounded and dead were everywhere. Hundreds of soldiers were trapped between the crushed decks, lying buried under shattered boards and beams. Others lay upon the wreckage with broken bones or bleeding from wounds caused by the flying debris of the explosion. The bursting of the boilers had also unleashed a killing mist of scalding steam and spray of boiling hot water on the densely-packed soldiers causing hundreds of men to be horribly maimed.⁵⁸³

After the explosion fire broke out on the doomed steamboat. The blast had scattered live hot coals about the boat and exposed the fire of the furnaces where the boilers had been located. Debris from the decks fell down upon the live coals of the ruined furnaces and soon flames shot up from the destroyed middle section of the boat. Incredibly, the *Sultana*, even with its midsection shattered and on fire, still floated.

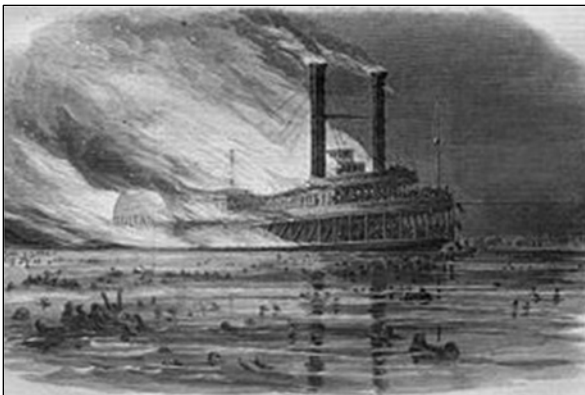


Illustration of the burning *Sultana* in Harper's Weekly, May 20, 1865.

Incorrect in the illustration are the smokestacks and forward decks, these structures had fallen and collapsed moments after the boilers exploded.

The fire quickly spread from the middle to both ends of the boat. Men trapped in debris between the wrecked decks cried for help as the flames rapidly approached them. Soon screams of agony from human victims being burned alive mingled with the piercing cries of dying animals and the confused shouts and exhortations of the panic stricken passengers. Badly wounded and scalded men on the boat begged to be tossed into the river preferring to drown rather than be consumed by the soaring red flames.⁵⁸⁴

Seeing the flames rapidly advancing to both ends of the boat, most men who were able jumped overboard. Soon hundreds of men were log-jammed together in the dark, cold river alongside the burning wreck. Men who could not swim grasped others so that whole groups would go under the water and drown. In the river desperate drowning men clawed and hit at others, cried out, cursed, shouted, or prayed. The water was a churning mass of heads and thrashing arms illuminated by the devilish, bright-red glow of the burning steamboat.⁵⁸⁵

Corporal William H. Norton, Company C, 115th Regiment, was asleep on the Hurricane deck when the explosion and the cries of the wounded awakened him. Norton remembered, "Men were rushing to and fro, trampling over each other in their endeavors to escape. All was confusion." Soon the flames leaped up from the middle of the boat, and Norton stood mesmerized as he, "listened to the awful wail of hundreds of human beings burning alive in the Cabin [Deck] and under [the] fallen timbers."

Making his way down to the Cabin deck Norton discovered the staircase leading to the Main deck was blocked by debris. Norton, who escaped the blast uninjured, managed to get to the Main deck by descending on a rope. There on the Main deck, the raging fire illuminated the tragic scene occurring in the river. Corporal Norton plainly saw hundreds of men struggling in the water grasping at anything that floated, including other men, with entire groups of twenty or more going under water to drown together.

As the flames neared the front of the boat Norton decided to take to the river. Shedding his shoes and all but his under-clothing, he jumped into the cold, black water. As he surfaced from his plunge several men leaping from the boat fell on him, forcing him below the surface for a

second time. Norton was able to surface again but was grabbed by a drowning soldier. Escaping the grasp of the drowning man, Norton swam back to the side of the boat and took hold of a mooring ring.

Instantly another drowning man clasped Norton. Norton hung on to the mooring ring and at the same time tried to free himself from the drowning man's death grip. Norton eventually broke away from the man's grasp and struck out for a patch of open water. Luckily, he found, floating in the water, an eighteen inch, square wooden box. The small wooden float became Norton's life preserver.

The night was dark and vision on the river was limited to a few yards. Alone on the river holding onto his box and drifting with the current, Norton could still hear screams and cries for help coming out of the watery darkness around him from burned and scalded men. Norton recalled later that "A little further on I was washed up against a log which had caught in the young cotton wood trees." Norton clung to the log till about nine o'clock in the morning when a man in a canoe rescued him. The unknown canoeist took Norton over to the Arkansas shore. Eventually a rescue steamboat stopped and took Norton back to Memphis. Although numb with exposure to the cold water, the young Corporal was among the few lucky, uninjured survivors.⁵⁸⁶

Sleeping near Norton at the time of the explosion were two Company F soldiers of the 115th, Sergeant William H. H. Smith and Private John Zaiser. Zaiser and Smith were sleeping next to *Sultana's* large iron bell frame when the boilers ruptured. Seconds after the explosion, one of the boat's smokestacks fell forward striking directly on the bell frame with a resounding crash. The stout bell frame held firm causing the metal smokestack to break part. A heavy piece of the hot iron smokestack then fell upon Sergeant Smith killing him instantly.

Awaking to the pandemonium, Zaiser, who narrowly missed being hit by the stack, realized that Smith had been killed. Seeing the fire beginning to envelope the boat, the twenty year old Private picked his way through the rubble of the ruined steamboat, and seeing his chance, jumped overboard. With great luck, Zaiser avoided the grasps of drowning men and managed to swim safely away from the doomed vessel. According to Private Zaiser, he swam ashore where he was later rescued.⁵⁸⁷

Sergeant William H. H. Smith,
Company F, 115th Regiment
Smith perished in the
Sultana disaster.

Courtesy of Marcus McLemore



Also sleeping near the iron bell frame were two friends, Private James Stuart Cook, an Irish immigrant and shoemaker from Cleveland, and Private James C. Cook (no relation) a hazel-eyed, six-foot tall “track master”—both men members of the 115th’s Company C. The two men were startled awake by the explosion and the crashing of the smokestack. Although showered by cinders and soot, neither was hit by the pieces of iron that killed Sergeant Smith; the huge stack fortuitously falling on the opposite side of the bell frame from the duo.

However, the smokestack that had killed Sergeant Smith had also caused the Hurricane deck to partially collapse onto the Cabin deck below entrapping the two men in debris. Luckily, both men were able to force their way out from under the tangled wooden wreckage. Somehow in the ensuing confusion, the two friends became separated. James C. Cook was never seen again, simply disappearing that dark night.

Seeing the flames rapidly approaching, James Stuart Cook took a piece of board and jumped into the frigid, inky-black water. Missing the grasps of drowning men and nearly dying from hypothermia, Cook was eventually pulled aboard a rescue boat, the *Bostonia II*. On the boat Cook was given a change of clothing, placed near the boat’s warm stove, and given whiskey. Cook, who wasn’t fond of liquor, admitted that “This is the only time that I felt whiskey did me any good.”⁵⁸⁸

Another 115th Regiment member, Private John H. James, Company F, was also lying near the bell frame near Sergeant Smith and Private

Zaiser. James was briefly trapped under a large piece of the fallen smokestack, but was able to get out from underneath the hot metal. Finding he had no broken bones or serious burns, James managed to get into the water and quickly swim away from the clutches of drowning soldiers. Floating and swimming until near dawn, the chilled and exhausted soldier was rescued by a Union gunboat. Oddly, James could never recall how he had extricated himself from under the heavy iron smokestack.⁵⁸⁹

Private Frank A. Clapsaddle, also of Company F, was sleeping near Zaiser, Smith, and James when the boilers exploded. Clapsaddle was aware of something striking the bell frame, but in the darkness he didn't realize that the smokestack's brace work had fallen on him. It must have taken some time for Clapsaddle to free himself from under the smokestack's brace rods and entangling guy lines, for when he emerged, the Hurricane deck was deserted. Not being seriously injured, he was able to jump to the second (Cabin) deck and from there to the Main deck.

On the Main deck Clapsaddle noted the pandemonium of drowning men in the water near the bow of the boat. Carefully picking his way through the burning debris and the dead and dying men, Clapsaddle made his way to the middle of the boat near a wheelhouse where the water was relatively clear of swimmers. Grasping a small board he leaped overboard into the chilly water. Fiercely clutching the board Clapsaddle quickly swam away from the wreck. While floating along he had the good fortune to come across two more pieces of wood and fashion a type of life-preserver by putting the two pieces of wood under his chest.

The makeshift wooden life-preserver saved Clapsaddle from drowning for soon he was tormented by painful cramps in his arms and legs caused by hypothermia. Clapsaddle was eventually rescued by several men on the riverbank who tossed him a rope and pulled him safely to a patch of dry land.⁵⁹⁰

Regimental Sergeant Arthur A. Jones, who was still ailing with a fever, was sharing a blanket with Privates Bair and Gaylord on the Hurricane deck when the explosion occurred. Jones would later recall, "My blood curdles while I write, and words are inadequate; no tongue or writer's pen can describe it. Such a hissing of steam, the crash of the different decks as they came together with the tons of living freight, the falling of the massive smoke stacks, the death-cry of stronghearted men

caught in every conceivable manner, the red tongued flames bursting up through the mass of humanity....”

Immediately after the explosion, Jones, along with other soldiers, was trapped between the wreckage of the collapsed decks. After a desperate effort to get out from underneath the beams and splintered wood of the Hurricane deck, Jones went to a side of the boat. From the edge of the deck Jones was able to look down on the human mayhem in the water. He watched in shock as men would cling together until they were borne under by their own weight and drown.

While watching the turmoil in the water, Jones heard the cries of men and women both wounded and dying, the neighing of horses and braying of mules still tethered in the stalls of the doomed boat, the crack and popping of the raging fire; the sights, sounds, and smell of burning flesh were horrific and were never forgotten by the young Sergeant.*

Jones, looking around, grabbed a plank to use as a raft. Just before jumping into the water a panicked soldier tore the plank from Jones’s hands and dove into the Mississippi. As Jones stood on the deck pondering what to do next, another plank came from underneath the boat and appeared upon the surface of the water. Jumping into the river and grabbing the fortuitously appearing plank, Jones floated out beyond the maddening sights, sounds, and smells of the wreck.

Private Thomas Spencer,
Company F, 115th
Regiment
Twenty-five-year-old
Private Spencer perished
during the *Sultana*
steamboat explosion.
Courtesy Marcus
McLemore



*There were thirty-some women and children on board the *Sultana*, including twelve Sisters of Charity.

At length, Jones floated seven miles downriver to the outskirts of Memphis where a rowboat picked up the hypothermic survivor. Jones was soon taken to Memphis's Washington Hospital. Upon examination Jones was found to be unhurt, but still nursing a fever. His two friends who had shared the blanket, Private Martin Bair of Company B, and Private Robert Gaylord, of Company C, were never seen again.⁵⁹¹

A few soldiers stayed on the boat did what they could for their fellow comrades who were thrashing and drowning in the dark Mississippi. Several men aboard the burning boat tossed doors, shutters, wooden rails, pieces of planks and board—anything that could float, for those in the water to use as life rafts. James Mason, the boat's captain, was last seen throwing pieces of boards and other floatable items into the water to aid the struggling men. The 115th Regiment's Captain Lowrey was said to have stayed on board calmly and coolly throwing pieces of wreckage to aid the struggling men until he too was compelled by the heat and flames to leave the stricken vessel. Like Captain Mason, Lowrey vanished during that dark April morning.⁵⁹²

Jumping from the wreck of the *Sultana* and swimming in the dark water, Company F's 2nd Lieutenant Jacob N. Sheaffer luckily came across a cabin door. Sheaffer floated on the door to Memphis when he was pulled ashore by Black troops stationed at Fort Pickering. Nearly dead from exposure, Sheaffer was given a blanket and offered whiskey and hot coffee. Sheaffer was soon placed in Memphis's Gayoso hospital where he was treated for exhaustion.⁵⁹³

Corporal Perry Howard Alexander, Company G, 115th Regiment, had left his Ohio comrades at the bell frame earlier that evening and tiptoed his way among the sleeping soldiers to the stern (rear) portion of the Hurricane deck where he bunked for the night. When the boilers exploded, the escaping steam blew heavily toward the stern maiming hundreds of men and giving Perry severe scalds on his face and back.

In the intense excitement after the explosion, a panicked crowd of soldiers rushed toward the stern pushing Alexander off the Hurricane deck. Instead of falling into the river, Alexander hit the boat's stern guardrail and fell injured onto the main deck. Temporarily immobilized by the fall, Alexander lay helpless for quite some time as he watched the flames devour the midsection of the boat and creep ever closer to where he lay.

Gathering his strength and waiting until the heat from the fire was unbearable, Alexander painfully pulled himself up and over the stern

guard rail and slipped into the water. Luckily by this time, the water around the boat was clear of struggling men, as most had drifted away or drowned. The badly scalded and injured Corporal did not record how he managed to swim, or how he was rescued. After being found on the river, Alexander was taken to Memphis's Adams hospital for treatment of his burns.⁵⁹⁴

The soldiers floating in the river who managed to avoid the mass drownings had to contend with the cold water and current of the Mississippi. Although the air was springtime mild, the river water temperature was at most sixty degrees Fahrenheit. Men that were still weak from prison illnesses had little stamina to fight off hypothermia caused by the frigid water. Even strong, expert swimmers drowned from the numbing effect of the chill waters that caused arms and legs to cramp and become useless for swimming. Other soldiers had wounds, broken bones, or severe burns and scalds that left them vulnerable to drowning in the fast flowing river current.

The survivors in the river realized the need to cling to any bit of scantling, piece of board, or any floatable object. Those fortunate enough to find a piece of floating wreckage had to fight off others trying to steal their life-saving raft. Men's voices were heard over the dark river fighting over a single piece of driftwood. Often so many survivors clung to a piece of wreckage that the float, and those clinging to it, would go under the water, and all would drown. Sadly, even those men lucky enough to have a piece of board or other floatable would often lose consciousness from hypothermia, and quietly slip off their raft and disappear into the dark depths of the river.⁵⁹⁵

Stronger swimmers were able to reach the flooded river banks and climb onto treetops sticking above the surface of the water. Those chilled victims who climbed into the trees along the river faced another torment with the light of dawn. Cloud-like swarms of buffalo gnats (black flies) and mosquitoes enveloped the survivors and bit them mercilessly. The biting insects were a particular torment to those with scalds and wounds.⁵⁹⁶

Somehow survivors among the trees and those still floating in the river found humor in the situation. Knowing the treetops were on a group of submerged islands known as "Hen and the Chickens," half-

naked men in the trees flapped arms and crowed like roosters. Others sang songs or mimicked frogs as they clung to their precarious perches. Another soldier swimming for his life in the swift water noticed a large, uprooted tree floating nearby. In the exposed roots of the floating tree clung three or four soldiers all of whom were gleefully singing *The Star Spangled Banner*. The ridiculous sounds and singing must have relieved the terror of the explosion and added some levity to an otherwise unbearable situation.⁵⁹⁷

Help eventually came to the survivors. About an hour after the disaster occurred, a steamboat on its maiden voyage, *The Bostonia II*, was first to arrive upon the horrendous scene of the burning boat. Seeing the immense amount of humanity struggling in the water, *Bostonia's* pilot stopped midstream, and the crew immediately sent out a lifeboat rescuing two hundred fifty survivors from the cold water; one of whom was James S. Cook. While the lifeboat was away, other crew members of the *Bostonia II* dumped chairs, tables, hay bales, and other floats into the water to aide those survivors downriver and already out of reach of the *Bostonia's* rescue efforts.⁵⁹⁸

Eventually other steamboats and water craft came to pluck the unfortunate *Sultana* passengers out of the water and treetops. In all, at least a dozen steamboats, plus several yawls and skiffs joined in the rescue effort.⁵⁹⁹

Help for some of the *Sultana* victims came from an unusual source, an ex-Confederate Lieutenant named Frank Barton. Lieutenant Barton, who lived on the west bank of the Mississippi, was awakened by *Sultana's* exploding boilers. Going outside of his cabin to discern the cause of the noise, the Rebel Lieutenant could see the burning wreck and hear the screams and cries of the boat's victims. Barton, still wearing his Confederate uniform jacket, jumped into a dugout canoe and raced across the dark water to the rapidly burning steamboat. Barton would eventually rescue fifteen men, including Corporal William Norton. Credit is due Barton, who although a Southerner and former Confederate soldier, came to the aid of his former foes.⁶⁰⁰

Almost everyone, if not all of the surviving *Sultana* victims in the river were so exhausted and benumbed by the cold water they could not move their legs or arms and had to be lifted onto the rescue boats. Some

were so badly scalded their skin hung or fell off their bodies when pulled out of the water. Almost all of the rescued soldiers were naked or partially clothed, having shed clothing and shoes to make swimming easier.

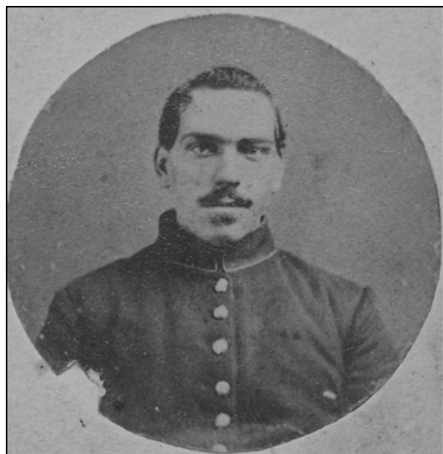
By midmorning most of the living soldiers, crew, and civilian passengers of the *Sultana* had been collected and taken to Memphis where the city's Sanitary Commission gave them blankets and clothing while the citizens of Memphis supplied hot coffee, whiskey, food, and other needed articles.⁶⁰¹

The seriously wounded were taken to one of the town's five hospitals; Washington, Gayoso, Adams, Officers, and Overton. Those unscathed or those with slight wounds went to the Soldiers Home for temporary lodging. By early afternoon, the survivor search was discontinued. Of approximately 2,500 passengers on the *Sultana*, only 786 passengers were rescued. More than 200 of those rescued would die from injuries within the next few days.⁶⁰²

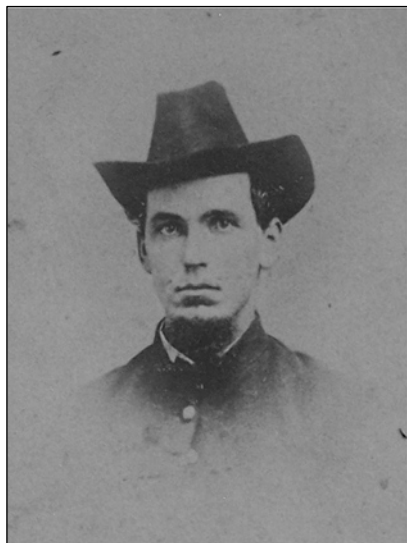
The day after the catastrophe, Sergeant Arthur A. Jones (still recovering from his fever) searched the Memphis hospitals for survivors of his Company. Jones could find only seventeen of forty-two soldiers of Company C. Private Peter W. Weaver, who earlier at Camp Fisk had written to his sister about his hopes of a quick parole, was one of those missing. Another Company C soldier, nineteen year old Private Christopher Maley, who had been a prisoner of war for more than half of his military career, was also one of the twenty-seven members of company C who perished that early Thursday morning.

The unlucky Company C Private, John Ririe, who had previously been accidentally shot by a fellow comrade, suffered from disease at Murfreesboro, was captured at LaVergne, and incarcerated at Andersonville, was one of the survivors of the steamboat explosion. Ririe was unscathed by the disaster—his streak of bad luck had finally ended.⁶⁰³

Private Frank A. Clapsaddle found that eight out of fifteen of his Company F comrades were killed in the *Sultana* tragedy. Another member of Clapsaddle's Company, Private Lewis K. White, later died from wounds in a hospital at St. Louis, Missouri, bringing the total to nine killed among Clapsaddle's small group.⁶⁰⁴



Private Lewis K. White, Company F
Captured at Blockhouse #2.
White survived prison captivity only
to be seriously wounded from the
Sultana explosion.
Private White was sent to a hospital in
St Louis, MO, where he died
on May 16, 1865.



Corporal Benjamin H. Crew, Co F, killed
on the *Sultana*
Corporal Crew's brother, Emmor, who
owned a photography shop in Ohio,
made this last image of Benjamin.

Courtesy Marcus McLemore

Thirteen Company G parolees were known to have been aboard the *Sultana*; only six survived the disaster. Among the seven Company G parolees killed was Private Robert Cox, the "mutineer" who had been implicated in Cahaba's failed prison uprising.

Only one member of Company K was aboard the steamboat, Musician John Everhart, who survived unharmed. Musician William

Dean and Principal Musician Edwin W. Garrett were the only two members of Company H on the steamboat; Dean survived while Garrett died.

Captain Lewis Hake and Martin V. B. Bair were the only soldiers of Company B on the *Sultana*. Hake survived without any serious injury, but Private Bair perished. Blair, like so many others, simply disappeared that dark, dreadful morning.⁶⁰⁵

Three hundred and fourteen bodies from the *Sultana* were later recovered from the Mississippi River. Most of the recovered bodies were never identified and were buried at the National Cemetery in Memphis under headstones marked "Unknown U. S. Soldier." The rest of the *Sultana's* dead, over one thousand, disappeared forever in the Mississippi River—forever lost in the enveloping river bottom mud or washed ashore and eaten by wild animals.⁶⁰⁶

Of the eighty-six soldiers of the 115th regiment onboard the *Sultana* on April 27, 1865, forty-five perished from wounds, burns, or drowning during that horrific Thursday morning. Only a handful of the regiment's dead were ever identified. A signed lottery ticket (likely purchased at Andersonville) and a military pass found in the pocket of Corporal James W. Eadie's clothing identified his body. Sergeant John C. Ely's body was known by his pocket diary he habitually carried. It is not known how Private William Price was identified, perhaps his remains were recognized by fellow Company survivors. Other than Eadie, Ely, Price, and perhaps one or two others, the rest of the dead of the regiment lie under nameless headstones at the National Cemetery in Memphis, or somewhere in the cold embrace of the Mississippi River.⁶⁰⁷

Within a few days, the most ambulatory survivors were placed on board two steamboats for transport upriver to Cairo and Cincinnati. The *Sultana* survivors had understandable nervous misgivings about river travel as they tentatively boarded the vessels. The two steamboats, the *Belle of St. Louis* and the *Belle of Memphis*, took the five hundred and fifty jittery (or outright paranoid) soldiers to Cairo, Illinois. The survivors of the 115th Regiment that reached Cairo were then taken by train to Camp Chase where, after some weeks, they received an early discharge from the army and were sent home.⁶⁰⁸

Left behind in the Memphis hospitals were two men from the 115th's Company G: Corporal Perry Alexander with bad scalds on the back and face, and Private Charles Napp who was suffering from scalded hands. Also left at Memphis were two members of Company C, Private George A. Dosenbury, dealing with a slight, but painful bruise, and Corporal Henry Nickerson who had a "slight scald" on one foot. Corporal Nickerson along with Alexander, Napp, and Dosenbury, would eventually recover, get discharged, and be sent home.⁶⁰⁹

Although the physical wounds of the survivors healed, many carried the mental scars of the catastrophe for the rest of their lives. Few survivors could ever forget the sights, sounds and terror of that fateful night, visiting the disaster again and again in their dreams.

Private James Stuart Cook confided that the saddest part of his experience was the loss of his friend, twenty year old Private James C. Cook—and the mental breakdown of dead soldier's father. James C. Cook's father went into denial upon hearing of his young son's death. Habitually, at least four or five times a day, Cook's father went out on the front walk of his house to look for his missing son, keeping up his vigil for years while he (the father) lived.⁶¹⁰

If not for chance, there would have been many more parolees of the 115th Regiment on the *Sultana*. About half of the prisoners at Andersonville were sent to the eastern seacoast to parole camps at or near the city of Jacksonville, Florida. Though most of the parolees sent to Jacksonville were from the eastern states, there were soldiers from the Midwest, including approximately 63 men from the 115th Regiment.

At first, the Midwestern soldiers who missed the trains to Camp Fisk felt providence had been unkind, consigning them to a longer stay at Andersonville prison and the circuitous, prolonged route home from the east coast. Without doubt, upon hearing of the *Sultana* tragedy, many of these soldiers reflected upon the fact that being sent to Jacksonville had likely saved their lives.⁶¹¹

The 115th regiment on duty at Murfreesboro and Fortress Rosecrans did not hear of the *Sultana* tragedy until several days after the disaster. The news of the deaths and wounding of their comrades from the steamboat explosion climaxed several weeks of extraordinary, emotion-draining events for the Union soldiers at Murfreesboro. On

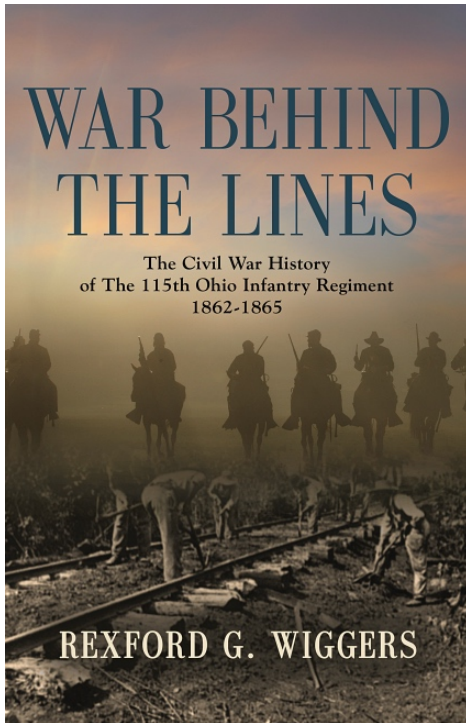
April 9, 1865, the soldiers at Fortress Rosecrans heard the news of Lee's surrender to Grant, causing a spontaneous celebration and raucous rejoicing throughout the town and at the fortress. A few days later the soldiers at Murfreesboro were devastated by the news of President Lincoln's assassination.

The sudden turns of emotion at Murfreesboro continued when reports reached Fortress Rosecrans of assassin John Wilkes Booth's capture (and death) on April 27. Then on April 29, the Yankee garrisons heard of the surrender of General Joe Johnston's Rebel army at Greensboro, North Carolina, effectively ending the Civil War. The next day after the report of General Johnston's surrender, the men of the 115th Regiment were shocked and saddened by the news of the loss of their comrades from the *Sultana* disaster.⁶¹²

As for the *Sultana*, the burning wreck had drifted along and eventually grounded in an eddy near the shore and sank with only her jack staff protruding from the water to mark the site. As the Mississippi flood waters receded, the remains of the *Sultana* became exposed. The burnt hulk was inspected by authorities, and anything left of value was taken off.

Even before the flood water receded to expose the remains of the steamboat, the United States Army collected statements from the survivors to determine the exact cause of the explosion. After receiving several Courts of Inquiry reports, the verdict hinted at, but did not specify that the repaired boiler was the predominant cause of the disaster. In the end, no one was arrested or punished for the gross overcrowding and explosion of the *Sultana*.⁶¹³

As the months and years passed, river silt and mud buried what was left of the once stately steamboat. Eventually, the wandering Mississippi River changed course, moving away from the *Sultana* and leaving its charred remains buried twenty feet below a present day Arkansas soybean field. With a death rate over seventy-five percent (some 1,900 people) the *Sultana* tragedy reigns as America's worst maritime disaster.⁶¹⁴



The history of 115th Ohio Civil War Regiment, from recruitment, training, assignments, duties, camp life, battles, prisons, soldier's recollections, to final muster-out.

War Behind the Lines:

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