

CAMP AND FIELD,

THE OLD 19th OHIO,
BY HATCHET.
No. LIX.

Nowhere in the southern States since leaving the mountain country, had we met people with whom we entertained such friendly feelings as these Germans. To strike tents and march away was an experience not thoroughly enjoyable to the boys that had got slightly "smitten" in their two short months' acquaintance with the fair skinned Prussian girls. War had laid a gentle hand on the town of Indianola, and while we garrisoned the place the inhabitants were subjected to few of the inconveniences common to the presence of an army. Twelve years afterward (1876) a furious cyclone swept along the coast of Texas and killed thousands of people and destroyed many towns. The pressure of the wind raised the water of the gulf and drove it far inland over the level country. During the prevalence of this, over six hundred of the Indianola folks lost their lives. After the storm, corpses were found five miles back on the prairie.

Our march to the island was by a road that ran close to the bay. In the after part of the day we made slow progress on account of two bayous that were too wide to "pontoon" with the limited material we had with us. Sections of the pontoon bridge were built and floated between two cables that extended from shore to shore. It made an excellent ferry for calm weather, but to-day the wind was strong and made it a little dangerous for big loads to cross. When the "float" was brought up snug against the shore a mule team would be driven on, and enough soldiers to complete the load would follow. The crossing of the first bayou was effected with but one mishap, which resulted from the dipping of the pontoon. Some of the boys got "ducked," but nobody was hurt and no property lost. An officer's horse got tangled in something and very near drowned. The owner of the animal offered five dollars to any one that would bring it out alive. A soldier promptly plunged in at the peril of his own life and brought the bewildered creature safely to land. And the officer, without pay, or thanks, mounted and rode away.

The crossing of the lower bayou was attended with a serious loss of life. Twenty-three soldiers were drowned. The poor fellows nearly all belonged to Company K, 69th Indiana. When the "pontoon" was out in the deepest part of the bayou and to all appearance getting along all right, one side suddenly began to fill with water and sink. Almost a hundred men and a mule team slid off. Many of the soldiers had knapsacks and accoutrements on. Some were pressed down and there was hope for them from the start. Others clutched frantically at anything that was in reach. Some coolly divested themselves of accoutrements while under water, and a few gave up the ghost while so doing. One corpse was afterward found with a hatchet grasping cartridge box and canteen strap in the act of slipping it over his head. Others that were recovered had their hands full of sea-weed. Every possible help was extended by comrades on shore, and some that got out safely stripped, and went back to save others. A young negro belonging to a heavy artillery company plunged in twice. Being a good swimmer he helped a man out each time. The third time he was clinched by a dying man, and being unable to release himself, perished with him. About half of the drowned men were taken from the water that evening; the rest rose to the surface within the next eleven days. The night of this disaster was a clear one to us as we crouched on the lee side of sand banks and temporary shelters to escape the force of the cold wind that blew strong all night. Near up in the camp of the 69th, and under the restless bosom of the bayou, were the lifeless bodies of the soldiers whose requiem to-night was the roar of the wind and waves that had been their slayers.

Batteries with heavy guns mounted were already erected here at this bayou to command approaches from the north. All troops, except the 16th, moved down the island to the vicinity of Fort Esparranza. Our water for drinking and cooking was hauled from shallow wells several miles distant. Long trips for fuel were also made. The details for this purpose sometimes encountered and killed rattlesnakes, some being very large. The little "saurian," improper name for the "horned-toad," were met with here, as they also were at our other camping places in Texas. There was a guard stationed at the bayou crossing, a part of whose duty was to report the appearance of any corpse that rose to the surface. When any were seen a boat was sent out to bring them to shore. There came up together one day. One was the surgeon of the 69th; another a Lieutenant. The former had a splendid gold watch and some money. The watch came near being "spilted away" by nimble fingers before friends came to take charge of personal property. The Lieutenant was holding his sword scabbard firmly with the right hand and elevated to the height of the shoulder. The third was a private soldier with accoutrements all on, and hands clutching the straps, and head forced back as if death had caught him in his last desperate attempt to free himself of the weight that held him down. Fishes or other marine creatures had nibbled the ears, lips and noses of the dead. From these raw places blood flowed red and pure looking. This was due to the preserving qualities of the salt water.

One day, before we had been on the island very long, a sailor claimed that he lost a wallet containing \$1,800 near our camp. In a state of mind bordering on frenzy he searched and inquired but found nothing. Matagorda Island is about sixty miles long and from one to six miles wide. A few scrubby trees that have been planted here is the only timber that is growing on it. Salinas, destroyed by fire before our occupation of the island, was a small village near the site of our camp. Broken foundations and charred posts were all that was now left of the place. We had some exceedingly pleasant weather here. Much time was given to drill, and treading the loose sand was often very tiresome. During the hours of company drill, officers frequently had the men stick axes and take long rests. On a fair day the boys found pleasant entertainment watching numerous sea-birds that were always in sight. Flocks of huge pelicans settled down in shallow water within gun shot of camp. John McCluggage bagged one of these birds by a pretty clever shot at long range. monstrous garfish, ten feet long, often showed themselves in the bayou. Schools of porpoises coasted along the shore, rising to blow and then plunging out of sight again.

A camp of citizen refugees was situated down the island some distance from us. They received rations regularly the same as the soldiers. We used the big seine here again, generally getting a pretty fair supply of good fish in a short time. Our seining work was several times improved by bringing to the beach some dangerous specimens of the deep. A sneaky little shark over three feet long was taken in. His biting propensities were not subdued by being out of the water. At another time a saw-fish seven feet long was captured. He was a rough customer and tore the seine some before he was landed. His snout was a foot and a half long. This is now (1882) in the possession of Mason D. Froce, of Millersburg, O.

The gunboat Monongahela lay in the pass between the island and Doerow's Point. Its crew came ashore to blow and then caught a maw of fish for the vessel. In one of these excursions they unexpectedly secured a rare specimen of fish with very large silvery looking scales. The average diameter of the scales was about two and a half inches. Natural history makes no mention of this species—the sailors called it the "silver fish."

Easter Sunday came on the 27th of March without special event and without eggs or delicacies for us. As this was the lot of nearly all soldiers in the field we philosophically submitted. The steamship Clinton crossed the bar today and cast anchor. The paymaster was aboard, so on the following Tuesday, the 30th, we received pay.

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