

The following is a transcript of the personal, hand-written account of the experiences of Corporal Walter S. Gilman, Company D, First Maine Heavy Artillery Regiment, during the 34-day period leading up to the unit's disastrous charge at Petersburg on Saturday, June 18th, 1864.

Life in Virginia
or
Thirty Four Days in Grant's Army
In the Field

By

A Crippled Soldier

W.S.G. Bangor Aug 1864

Preface

The writer having participated in some of the battles of Grant's 'Great and glorious campaign' of the summer of 1864, takes pleasure in placing before his friends his experience at the front for the short period of thirty-four days during the most active part of the summer campaign.

All that is written in this volume is truth, as it all came beneath the eye of the illustrious author.

The dates of every event herein mentioned are correct, so as to add to the truth of the great work.
G.S.W.

Entered according to Act
of Congress in the year 1864
by Walter S. Gilman
In the Clerks Office of the
District Court of Shantytown

With feelings of joy, the orders for the 1st Maine Regt Heavy Artillery to take the field were received. The boys had been hoping to hear such news for a long time before it came, but it came at last. On **Saturday the 14th day of May 1864**, orders came for the 1st Maine Hvy Arty (Colonel Daniel Chaplin, Comdg) to be prepared immediately to take the field. In less than two hours every man was ready and waiting for the movement of the officers. On **Sunday morning** this Regt commenced a style of army life that they had not before participated in. At about 2 o'clock we were turned out to draw our three days rations and to make all preparations for an immediate departure. At that time we thought it rather rough on us to be obliged to turn out and leave our comfortable quarters, and go forth in a severe rainstorm.

Everything ready and we were off for the war as the say is. We marched from our Forts and Batteries and joined as a regiment just above Georgetown D.C. From here we proceeded down through Georgetown and through Pennsylvania Avenue Washington to Seventh St. and down this to the Potomac. where we took the transports that were to transport us down the river to Belle Plane Landing where we arrived after a five hours passage.

We were all very much surprised at finding a place with such an even name to be so rough and hilly. We had some trouble in getting through the mud on the shore. That was mud, and I had never seen any of it before or since, nor have I any strong desire to see any more. Such affectionate soil. It clings to a fellow like an only brother. We all made our way through about a half a mile of this low land. Then we came to a high but not very dry land as it had been raining nearly all the day. After partaking of some raw

pork and hard-tack we all managed to get stretched out on the cold damp ground and tried to sleep, but whether they all succeeded as well as I did, I am not able to say. Thus ended my first day.

Monday, May 16th. When I awoke I looked around to see where I was, and I was not able to decide for some minutes. Not until I had raised up on my elbows and rubbed eyes open. Then I saw that I had slid down hill about a half or two thirds my length, and another person with his feet set firm against my shoulders helping me on. We all turned out and prepared some breakfast. That is, we made some coffee and cooked some pork on a stick over a fire, frizzled it. This day was spent in issuing rations and bathing to get some of the soil from our bodies and clothes. We wrote our friends word of our arrival in "Dixie Land" that beautiful, charming country. In the afternoon we made preparations for an easy bed, by driving stakes into the ground to brace out feet against. We had the pleasure of seeing some of the fruit of Grant's victories. Just to the rear of our camping grounds there was a large camp of prisoners that had been sent in by Gen Grant during the preceding ten days. Just at dusk our band struck up and played for our amusement. Thus ends day No. 2.

Tuesday, 17th – We were turned out early this morning, having had orders to proceed at once to Fredericksburg. For the first six or eight miles we had quite an easy march. But after that, orders came for a forced march down to Grant's Army near Spotsylvania. We halted at or near Falmouth and got a little bite which some called a dinner. Then we started on across the Rappahannock River through Fredericksburg. We kept on for about 5 or 6 miles beyond Fredericksburg and there we made a halt for supper and a short rest of about one-half hour. Then we took up the line of march and arrived at Genl Meade's Headquarters near Spotsylvania Court House about twelve o'clock that night. This day I threw everything but my rubber blanket and shelter tent in shape of cover. This endeth the 3rd day.

Wednesday 18th – Cool and cloudy. At about daylight we were turned out and moved up into the third line of rifle pits. There was considerable artillery firing while there. This was our first time under fire and we were actually under fire, for the Johnnies (Rebels) would cast a stray shot among us once in a while. Often enough to get us acquainted with the whistling of bullets and the screeching of shells. We laid in these pits until noon when we were marched off to the left of our lines about three miles and camped in the woods in sight of the battlefields. And camped there until night when we had two days rations issued to us and then we turned in for the night and had a very good nights sleep.

Thursday 19th – This was a great day with us all. We laid in the woods until about three o'clock p.m. when we were marched about one mile nearer to Genl Meade's Hd. Qrs. And, were making preparations to camp for the night when we were started by the sound of musketry and then the order to fall in as quick as possible, and our Col. informed us that we were called upon to go and join in a battle that was to take place at the point of the firing heard and he wanted us to do it like men and we did. We got ready in a less time than it takes to tell the story and were off on the double quick. When we got to the scene of the action we drove the Rebs from a wagon train that they had captured and gave them what is called a complete cleaning out. We engaged Ewell's Corps of Veterans for two and a half hours before we received any support whatever, then we were relieved after having suffered a loss of four hundred and sixty killed wounded and missing. We then went to the rear and supported the line that relieved us. After lying here about one hour we were moved to the right and at about 12 pm were permitted to turn in for the night.

Friday 20th – After a very cold and sleepless night we were turned out and made preparations to march back to our old grounds. We all made some coffee and smoked a little pork, and that devoured, we were ready for anything that came along. We have heard the report of our losses in killed, wounded, and missing. It was four hundred and seventy six in all. The boys all felt very bad when they saw how many of their comrades had fallen a victim to the Reb's bullets; but this is the fortune of war. After all was ready, we marched back across the battlefield to our old ground and made preparations to camp that night. There we received three days rations and made preparations to march the next morn bright and early. So we turned in to get what little sleep we could before we would have to start for a long and forced march down neared to Richmond.

Saturday 21st – This was a long and wearisome day to me. We were turned out at about half past twelve and then we were in for it. Then we started on our march. We marched about 6 miles and then laid until daylight, and then up and away was the word with us all. We kept on our feet until nearly sundown when we halted at Milford Station on the Washington and Richmond Railroad, about thirty-five miles from our starting point. After we had commenced to get some supper a detail was made for picket. Co. D was, of course, called upon and responded, through not very cheerfully of course. For who would, after so long a march. And now this gave us a good chance to lay awake the greater part if not all of the night before us. We were posted five on a post with one of my most intimate friends. And we thought that we were in for a

fine time. But not longer than until dark did the Johnnies wait before they began throwing their shells at us. We lay so near them that we could head them talking with each other. And thus this day ended.

Sunday 22nd – At sunrise I started from our post to find the reserve under Lt. Sellers, but not a reserve could I find. But I saw where they had been driven in and left their things scattered on the ground. Then I went back to the post and we made preparations to return to camp. We left our post and when we arrived at camp we found that all the pickets had been driven in leaving five of us all alone to take the whole line in charge. The Rebs had got between our post and our Army, and thus cutting off our retreat. But we knew nothing of it until we got into camp, which we did in good shape after they had fallen back. But without alarming our post by their appearance. The Col. told us that he was glad that we had spunk enough to stand our ground and not get scared at our own shadows. When we got little food into us we had to commence working in the trenches which we finished before nine o'clock. Then the rest of the day we had for a rest and we made the best of it. We received two days rations and then turned in for the night. Lost one man. Thus endeth the 7th day.

Monday 23rd – We turned out quite early and made preparations for a march onto Richmond or some other place which we reached at about three o'clock p.m. And there had been some brisk fighting going on in front of us during the whole of the march. The 3rd and 9th Corps driving the Johnnies before them on the run until they reached the North Anna river where the Rebs made quite a stand but were finally driven from their works and put to flight by our gallant boys. And they crossed the river and took possession of their line of works at the point of the bayonet. Our regt laid in the reserve and threw up some rifle pits and then at about eleven p.m. were permitted to lie down for about two hours when we were turned out and had to change out line of pits.

Tuesday 24th – We laid in the reserve until about three o'clock when we moved up and crossed the North Anna under a murderous fire of artillery. But we crossed without losing a single man. Here we were put into Mott's Brigade, Birney's Div., and Hancock's Corps. We had quite a heavy rain, and then we started for the front line where we threw up some rifle pits and laid in them that night or part of it.

Wednesday 25th – We turned out and finished our pits and laid in them that day. Saw part of the 31st Me. Regt. At night we were relieved and went back into the rear line and had a night's rest in the rain.

Thursday 26th – We laid in the 3rd line of trenches and drew 3 days rations, and at dark we were ordered forward to relieve the second line of troops. Preparations were made to evacuate the place. Our regt was one selected to cover the retreat of the Army and we laid until the front line had left their pits and gone to the rear of us. Then we left our line and marched about three miles towards Richmond and then turned in for the night, or rather morning.

Friday 27th – We rested until noon and then marched off. Left in front and kept on marching until late at night when we were halted and turned in for the night.

Saturday 28th – Turned out bright and early, and got some coffee and beef for our breakfast. Started about eight o'clock for the Pamunkey River which we crossed, and there commenced to throw up entrenchments which we worked on all the night by reliefs.

Sunday 29th – This day was mostly spend in the trenches at Poplar Hill. We saw the 5th, 6th and 9th Corps pass by us. Also the 1st Maine Cavalry. Saw the 31st Me. At about 4 o'clock we marched for Hanover Station and arrived at our stopping place at 10 o'clock pm and there we threw up some pits and laid in them all that night.

Monday 30th – Laid in the pits until noon and then marched down to the left of the Army and laid in reserve. There we commenced to draw rations and then marched to the center and built some strong rifle pits and stopped therein. Albert Ellis was carried to Division Hospital.

Tuesday 31st – We finished our pits and then we advanced about ½ mile, and the Johnnies skedaddled from their works and we moved into them and held them until night. I was detailed to go out under the fire of their batteries and throw up some works. And then at night the Regt moved forward and went to building pits.

Wednesday 1st – Early in the morning we were ordered back to our old position and remained there during the rest of the day until half past ten at night when we resumed the march for Cold Harbour.

Thursday 2nd – When we arrived at our destination at about 9 or 10 o'clock we were permitted to take a short rest of three or four hours and then we moved off to the left and camped in the woods that night. While marching, the Johnnies were pretty busy throwing their shells at us. But I believe no one was injured by their carelessness.

Friday 3rd – Drew rations and then prepared to get up and get. We went into the reserve. Had one man struck by a canister shot. In the afternoon we moved into the front and threw up some

breastworks. The Rebs were plagued careless of their shot and shell. They would throw them right among us while we were busy at work on the pits. No one of our Co. hurt. We prepared to sleep that night. Very heavy musketry on our left. The Johnnies charging on our works were repulsed three times with very heavy losses each time.

Saturday 4th – Laid in the trenches most of the day. Cooking and eating the most of the time. The Rebs were trying to shell us out but they could not come in. At about half past four, the Ninth Corps relieved us and we went to the rear and prepared for a good night's rest, and we were in for it.

Sunday 5th – Received our first mail since starting from Washington. Drew rations and laid around our camp reading and answering our mail. Reading the news in the papers. At five o'clock p.m. we made preparations to march and went down near the Chickahominy. We were shelled by the way, all along the march. We arrived at Barkers Mills. Commenced to build breastworks. Worked by reliefs. Had a little sleep.

Monday 6th – Laid in the trenches after we had finished. Then we made them very strong and defensive. Had a good chance to bathe in Beaver Creek. Wrote home and to Charles E. Sylvester. Have a good prospect for a good rest. At night we stood guard by reliefs.

Tuesday 7th – Still in the trenches. Very quiet. The pickets have made the agreement and it is a General Order for no firing on the picket line unless one side advances on the other "All quiet on the Potomac".

Wednesday 8th – A beautiful day, but rather uncomfortable laying in the trenches. Wrote a letter home and expected to receive one but did not. Very quiet and very hot.

Thursday 9th – Very warm, but we are made comfortable by a good breeze. Had to clean out our pits and fix up for a long stop there. Received two days rations. I was doing some Company writing. Drew clothing for the men. I had to take account of it and made out the rolls. Received mail. Got a letter from Walter G. Iseleman(?). Turned in for the night and had to turn out again for guard.

Friday 10th – Pleasant. I did not feel very well and I went to the Doctor. Got some pills and made me feel much better. Drew rations of whiskey. Bold "D" went on picket. I was excused by the Surgeon and did not go out.

Saturday 11th – Laying around the trenches all day. Our Co. on picket. Had nothing to do but eat and sleep. Feel better than I did yesterday. We got a small mail. I recd one letter from home. The Company came in from picket about ten o'clock. All quiet.

Sunday 12th – Laid in the rear of the regiment all day. Very warm and uncomfortable. Making preparations to march for Petersburg. Got a mail. I received some papers from home. We were all owed just enough sleep to aggravate us and then turned out and started off on a long march for the James River.

Monday 13th – On the march all day for the James River. Arrived at Wilcox Landing at dark and made preparations to turn in for the night. Had a very good nights sleep.

Tuesday 14th – Remained at our old ground until noon, then made preparations to cross the James. Went down to the landing and took transports and landed at Williams Point, and marched about three miles back from the river and prepared for a rest, but there was no "rest for the wicked". Company D was detailed to go and sack lumber on our backs about two or three miles to build a wharf.

Wednesday 15th – At daylight we returned to the Regt and tried to get some rest, but about ten o'clock the order came to march, and at twelve we started for Petersburg and after a very hard march we arrived at the outer works and camped for the night. The negro troops had been there ahead of us and taken the 1st line of works "Bully for the Neg".

Thursday 16th – Went into the works and turned them on the Rebs. They were very strong works and they could never have taken them from our boys. At night we advanced about three fourths of a mile under a very heavy fire and threw up some rifle pits and laid in them until that night.

Friday 17th – At daylight we were relieved and fell back behind a hill and drew rations for two days. Lost two men killed and one wounded out of Co. D. After dark our Battalion moved forward in to a line of works that had been captured during the day. There Maj. Sabine was wounded. The Rebs charged on us twice and were repulsed. Bully for us.

Saturday 18th – A big day for the Heavies. We made an advance in the morning on a line of works that the Johnnies had evacuated during the night. We advanced about three fourths of a mile and brought up at the Petersburg road where we halted. Our Battalion, and Co E & D, were swung out on the left to hold a hill (on which there was a large house) until a Battery was planted there. But the Sharpies (Sharpshooters) got such good range on us that they were picking off our best men and we had to fall back to the road and then throw up some pits or works to lay in. Here we lost 1 killed and three wounded. Here

we laid until about four o'clock. Then we were relieved from this to take something worse. Our Brigade was formed and marched up to the road and then we knew what was up with us. Col. Chaplin had charge of the Brigade and gave the order "forward 3rd Brigade" and the 1st Maine holding the first line, and then we went in for a grand charge or slaughter as you may have it. In about eight minutes we had lost five hundred and seventy six killed and wounded. I was one of the wounded ones. I was wounded in the left arm and leg. I laid on the field until after dark and then managed to get to the rear. Our folks were repulsed and our killed and wounded could not be got off for several days. Lieut. Drummond, Frank S. Robinson, and Albert C. Ellis were killed in this charge and many others of Co. D. Thus endeth the thirty-four days in Grant's Army.

The Property of Walter S. Gilman
(Brother of Lewis Gilman – Father of R.P. Gilman)