

143rd VOLUNTEERS ARE SWORN INTO SERVICE

From the History of 109th Field Artillery

(Continued from last week)

1862

While there was uncertainty as to the seriousness of the war following the muster of the 8th Infantry, Wilkes-Barre continued to send out individuals and companies into the volunteer service. The grand army would need men, and yet more men, in the next few years. Foreseeing this need the Governor, in August, 1862, selected E. L. Dana to organize Camp Luzerne, in Kingston Township, in order to give recruiting a new impetus. This called for new effort and the ex-citizen soldiers of the Wyoming Volunteer and Eighth Regiments rallied to the call.

The Ross Rifles formerly a company of the Wyoming Volunteer Regiment, although not in the three months service, was the first to be mustered in and became Company A of the 143rd as the new regiment was called. On the following day Company C was mustered in; it had formerly been the Wyoming Artillerists or Company F of the Eighth Regiment. On the next day Company D, formerly the Wyoming Light Dragoons, or Company C, Eighth Regiment, was mustered.

Edward W. Wandell who had served with the Wyoming Artillerists in Mexico and Henry M. Gordon who had been a private in the three months service of our regiment organized and commanded Companies G and F respectively in the new regiment. Colonel J. W. Rhoads who had commanded our regiment in 1859 "brought a company of fine looking men from the lower end of the county and marched them into Camp Luzerne."

An additional company was obtained from Wilkes-Barre and the remaining companies of the regiment came from nearby localities.

Our seventeenth Commanding Officer, Edmund L. Dana, relinquished command of the camp and was appointed colonel of the new organization, the 143rd Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers as of October 18,

"The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot's grave to every hearth and hearthstone all over this broad land have been touched by the better angels of our nature and today we swell the chorus, 'Peace on earth, good will to men'."—Lincoln

1862. He was well fitted for the command of this regiment which would represent the "old historic Valley of Wyoming" on many sanguinary battlefields before its muster out. His military career had been interesting. In 1842 he became first lieutenant and shortly afterwards captain of the Wyoming Artillerists. The citizens of Wilkes-Barre had presented him with a handsome sword just before he departed with his company for the Mexican War. The experience and service of his command in that war, as told in the last chapter, was excellent preparation for the task confronting him in 1862. During the years between the Mexican War and the Civil War, he had developed in civil life, becoming major general of militia, and as he had no prospect of active service in that grade he came back to us as a colonel. Following the Civil War he became an additional law judge in the county and held other public and semi-public offices. On his death in 1889, it was said of him:

"His heroic devotion to his country in time of trouble marked him as a true patriot. His private life was filled with brilliant incidents. He has stepped from one position to another, higher and higher, and during peace and war he has at all times commanded the respect and confidence of the people. His sound judgment and quickness of perception, both as general and as judge, are incidents of his success in life."

The Regiment drilled and trained at Camp Luzerne until November 7th,—this was the place in which it camped for the longest time in its service,—when it was placed on duty in the defenses of Washington. This duty included heavy fatigue details building Fort Slocum, school, and much drill. These duties, and the hard cold winter with six inches of snow in January, removed the glamour of military life for many new soldiers. During this period there were four times as many desertions as there were in our subsequent service in the war. There were enough to worry the commanding officer and the order to report to General Hooker for duty with the Army of the Potomac were received with relief.

1863

On February 17th in a terrific snowstorm the regiment marched to the foot of Sixth street where they embarked on a transport and on arrival at Belle Plain the next day had their introduction to the waste lands of Virginia. After marching over roads of "unfathomable mud", in the rain, to make a new camp, the colonel notes in his diary, "a bleak, cheerless prospect—but better than former camp". On his birthday they had given him another new sword so those soldiers of the 143rd must have loved the "old man."

Knapsack drill by companies, with drill by battalions in the morning, is typical of the training day at this time. On Saturday afternoons they washed and cleaned up and on Sundays they were inspected. There were occasional tours of real out-post duty,—for only a few miles away, across the Rappahannock, were the Rebels. By these methods our regiment was gradually accustomed to the sights and sounds of battle. The officers were studying "Casey's Tactics" and had recitations in the evening at which time the colonel notes that "several were inattentive". "One evening a wild turkey, of great size, alighted in

the camp, was pursued and shot." By the middle of April, when the weather was "settling down", when the officers had reached the second volume of Casey and the men were circulating happily received rumours of pay-day, there came, "orders to the 143rd for three days' cooked rations to be kept ready in their haversacks—long orders as to methods of marching and preventing straggling. Additional orders after midnight." These were ominous, deep-toned rumblings of impending action which kept the colonel and his adjutant "up all night" studying and issuing orders.

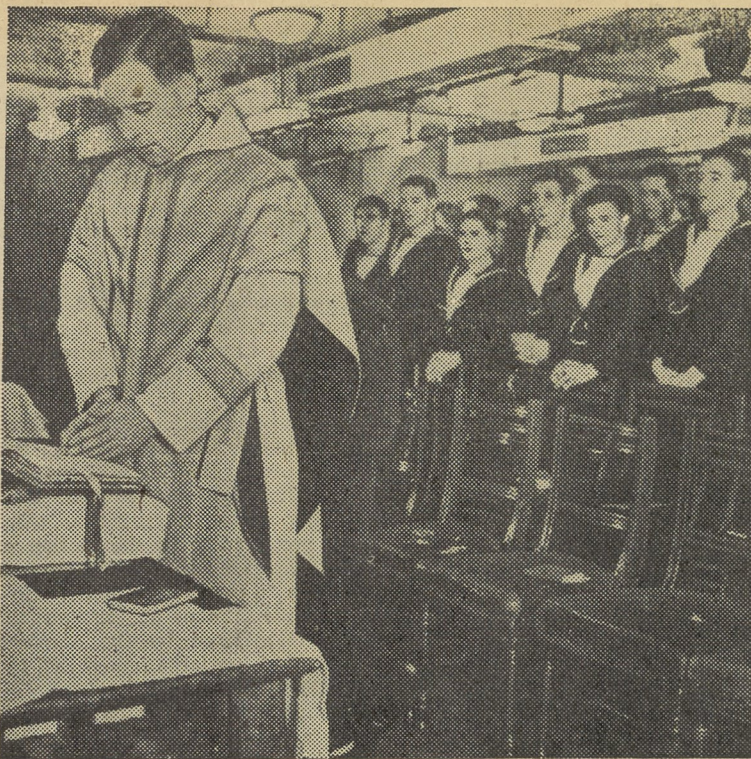
Our distinctive unity had been merged into a larger combination; we were now in Doubleday's Division of the First Corps which was commanded by General Reynolds and the battle of Chancellorsville

was in the making. General Hooker, "Fighting Joe", who had just taken over this responsibility, was going to demonstrate his ability to command the Army of the Potomac in battle.

On April 20-22 he sent us to Port Royal to bluff the Rebels into thinking we would cross the river at that point. We had pontoons that we displayed ostentatiously and when one was unloaded from a wagon we mounted a log on the axle and made it look like artillery. We also learned how to march all night, drop by the roadside in a cold rain to sleep for one hour, and then march some more weary miles without breakfast. Many can do this trick but only a good soldier can do it cheerfully and retain his mental and physical efficiency.

The battle of Chancellorsville began on April 27th and ended May

PRAYER ABOARD A MAN O' WAR



A chaplain leads a group of sailors in services aboard a British man o' war somewhere on the high seas. Unsung heroes of Britain's battle for existence, the naval chaplains take no part in actual fighting, but their work in bolstering the spirit of the men is considered vitally important.

6th. Our army had nearly twice as many men as the Confederates, yet we were defeated—it has been said that our commander, not our army, was defeated. Our First Corps had an excellent fighting record and we were able to learn from the veteran regiments about us. The first few days, as reserve of the left flank of the arm, we lay in bivouac across the river from Fredericksburg. As old soldiers know, being in reserve during battle is a difficult test of morale for a new regiment. We saw the wounded carried by, we changed our position several times to keep under cover from the Rebel artillery fire, we lay close to the ground so as to present but a small part of our body as a target for the shells bursting near us and when we were too cold to sleep we walked about to keep warm. On the 30th orders were received to prepare for an attack which only used up nervous energy as we were not called on anyway. Under cover of fog, rations and whiskey were issued next morning.

On the morning of May 2d General Hooker ordered the First Corps to march from the extreme left to the right flank of our army. Stonewall Jackson, who was to be momentarily wounded that night, with his Confederate "foot Cavalry" had made a wide detour and attacked our right flank. It meant, for us, a march of more than twenty miles practically all under enemy fire. We quote from the story of the battle written by our division commander after the war had ended.

"At sunset the First Corps went into bivouac on the south side of the United States ford, about four miles and a half from Chancellorsville. The men were glad enough to rest after their tedious march on a hot day loaded down with eight days' rations. We heard from afar off the roar of battle caused by Jackson's attack, and saw the evening reddened with the fires of combat, but knowing that Hooker had a large force, we felt no anxiety as to the result, and took it for granted that we would not be wanted until next day. An aide brought the startling news that the Eleventh Corps had fled and if we did not go forward at once, the army would be hopelessly defeated. We were soon

To Present Comedy

Members of the Junior Class will present a lively comedy in Lehman High School Monday, March 28 at 8 o'clock. Miss Dickover is director.

on the road, somewhat oppressed by the news, but not dismayed. We marched through the thickening twilight of the woods amid a silence at first only broken by the plaintive sound of the whippoorwill, until the full moon rose in all its splendor. As we proceeded we came upon crowds of the Eleventh Corps fugitives still hastening to the rear. They seemed wholly disheartened. We halted for a time in order that our position in line of battle might be selected and then moved on. As we approached the field a midnight battle commenced, and the shells seemed to burst in sparkles in the trees above our heads, but not near enough to reach us. When we came nearer and filed to the right to take position on Ely's ford road, the men struck up John Brown's song, and gave the chorus with a will. Their cheerful demeanor and proud bearing renewed the confidence of the army, who felt that the arrival of Reynolds' First Corps, with its historic record, was no ordinary reinforcement.

We took up a defensive position at 2:00 a. m. and, throwing up breastworks with abattis in front, held it for three days without being attacked; yet we could hear the Rebel yell as they charged to our left. The wood about us was set on fire by the enemy artillery. General Reynolds begged General Hooker to let his corps make an attack but was refused. On May 6th we withdrew unmolested across the pontoon bridge and after a circuitous march went into camp near Pollock's Mills. Colonel Dana reported the loss of considerable equipment, due to the forced marching, although no arms had been lost. He also protested the requirement that men carry sixty rounds of cartridges and eight days' rations. This experience was valuable to the regiment and as it cost but one casualty it was inexpensive. It was excellent preparation for the battles to follow.

(To Be Continued)

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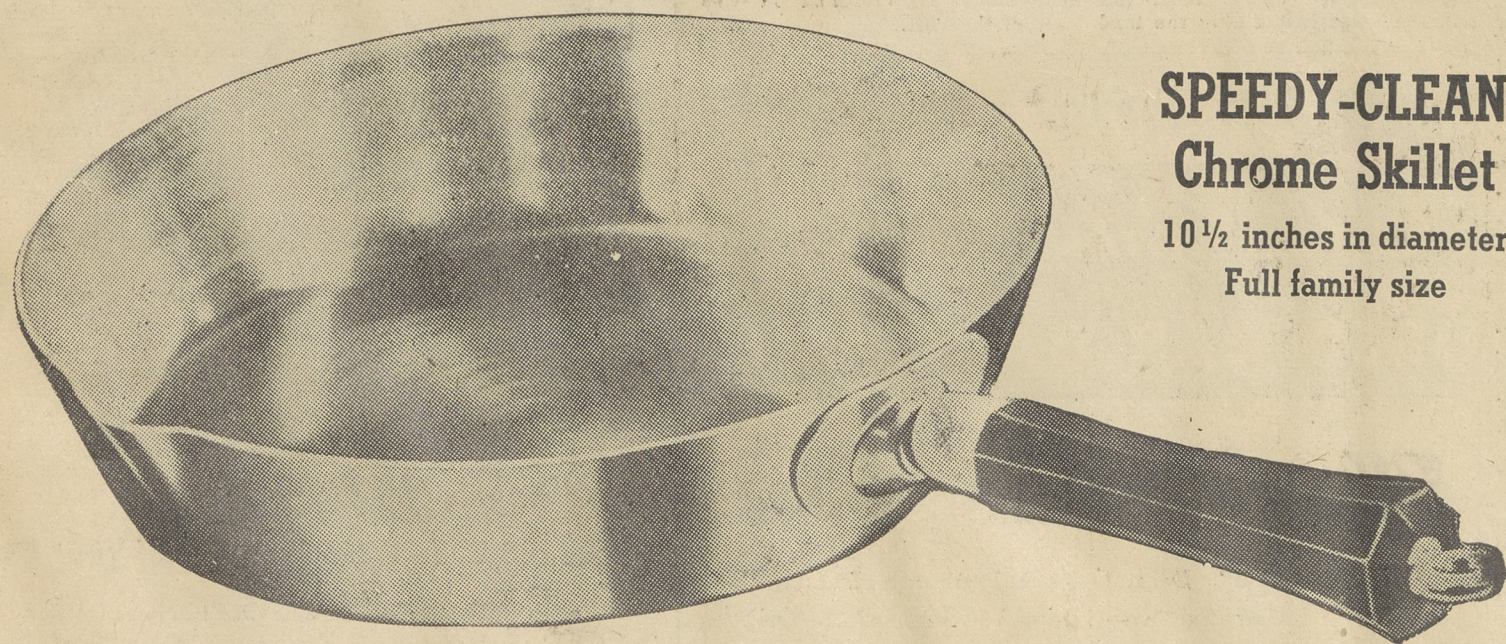
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