

CHAPLAIN JOHN W. ADAMS

CIVIL WAR, 1863 - 1865

MY EXPERIENCE AS ARMY CHAPLAIN

You will perceive that my subject obliges me to talk about myself. My only apology is, that I have a more intimate acquaintance with the person referred to than any body else can possibly have.

but I shall refer to other, and better men, and to scenes and incidents of a strange past, which we cannot, and would not forget.

My ancestors, on both sides, had taken root in this country, long before the Revolutionary War; and they respectively took an active and honorable part in that struggle. At the knee of my maternal great-grand-father, a soldier of the Revolution, who died at 94 years of age, I took some of my first lessons in love of county and abhorrence of treason.

At the breaking out of the war of the Rebellion I was 29 years of age - old enough to appreciate somewhat, by study and observation, as well as by inherited patriotic instincts, the present and prospective worth and grandeur of the republic. My father, who began life a poor man, despised all the unjust class distinctions of every land which bore heavily upon the sons of poverty. He was a born antislavery man. He made me see the inconsistency and feel the reproach of tolerating in the freest government on earth, the vilest slavery that had existed among men.

I therefore resented the attack on Sumpter's flag and fort as a personal insult, and outrage; and the blood of my revolutionary ancestors boiled in my veins. I felt that God and the right, country and family required me to defend the union. And this was not a mere sentimental or unreasoning devotion.

I could see that if the principle of secession was either conceded, by the North, or compelled by the South, other secessions on slighter pretexts might, and would be likely to occur; and that disintegration, chaos and endless complications and wars would become the sad heritage of our posterity in both sections of the land. I believed that one war now, which should maintain the Union, would prevent the greater bloodshed of many future wars between rival republics, some or all of which might ultimately be absorbed by foreign powers. I believed that the peace, the security and the prosperity of the South, as well as the North, would be best subserved by defeating the purpose to dissolve the union. I believed that the Constitution and the Bible forbade the act, the spirit and the aim of secession. I speak of these things not to provoke anew the bitter discussions of the past, now so happily subsiding, but to answer the question which has been so often profounded to me - "How could you, a minister of the gospel of peace, counsel war, and participate in it?" I said, "The powers that be, are ordained of God", for national self defense, and to crush this iniquity." I said - "I will be subject to the higher powers." I believe in loyalty to the constitutional ruler, "for he is the minister of God to thee (us) for good." "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." This scripture was fulfilled. The South got all the damnation it could stand under, and more. I espoused the cause of the Union, not as an adocuturous [sic] romancer, or a political partisan, but as a Christian patriot. I addressed meetings called for the promotion of volunteer enlistments. I saw some of the first members of the first regiment, (afterwards

my own regiment), spring to their feet and give their name and pledge to our holy cause, amid the thundering applause of great loyal assemblies. I visited that regiment in its barracks at Portsmouth, to express my admiration of their readiness to do and dare for native land; and to bid them God-speed.

In the fall of 1863, a vacancy having occurred in the 2nd N.H. Reg't, and having expressed a desire to go, and having been recommended by the most prominent Methodist and other clergymen in the state, Gov. J.A. Gilmore sent me a commission as Chaplain of that famous organization -- famous as being the first to enlist for three years or the war, and the last to return from the field, as it was famous for the number of battles it fought -- always having been a part of the armies of the Potomac and the James, and having earned the title of the "Fighting Second".

My commission bore the date of Dec. 5, 1863, and reached me at No. Salem, N.H., where I had resided for seven months. I immediately took the oath of office, hired a house in Derry for my family, which then consisted of a wife and five children, and with the utmost dispatch, arranged to go to my regiment.

You can imagine the heroism of an affectionate wife, assuming the entire care and responsibility of so large a family of children, and tearfully, tremblingly, prayerfully sending me forth, in the name of God and country, to perils from which I might never return. In a different, but in no less real way, did the woman of those days earn laurels as bright and honorable as any which their husbands, sons or fathers wore.

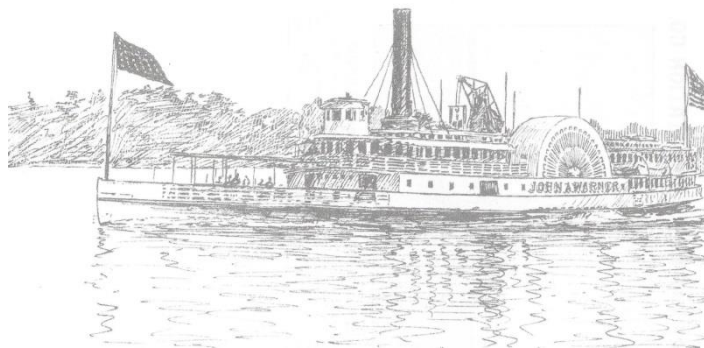
Monday evening, Dec. 21th, my precious jewels said their prayers at the mothers knee, and hied them to their crib and couch, as usual. They slept as sweetly as if no shadow rested upon the land, as if no peril menaced their home. The preparations for departure all completed, with lamps in hand I made the tour of the chambers, gazed a moment on each angel face, and left thereon the goodnight and the good-bye kiss; and commending them to God, started with my wife for Lawrence, Mass. - then the residence of my parents.

The Journey was made with horse and sleigh. The air was keen. The sky was clear, and the nearly full-orbed moon, flooding hill and valley, field and forest, enhanced the brilliancy of a scene I have never seen equaled. It had snowed and then rained a few hours before, but, of a sudden, the clouds disappeared, and the icy breath of the North had crystallized every tree and shrub, and bent the tender sapplings and innumerable boughs and twigs into the most graceful forms, These silver-laden loops framed many an enchanted arbor which was fringed and tasseled with the equally transparent, but more delicate figures. The undulating surfaces of the fields shimmered like wave of molten silver. How the lavish exuberance and the dazzling splendor of the scene could be heightened, it would be difficult to tell. Earth responded to heaven - beauty to beauty - silver to silver! The scene was fitted to be the border-land of Paradise! O the prodigality of Nature - the wealth of her dowry, when the frost King is wedded to the "pale empress of the night"!

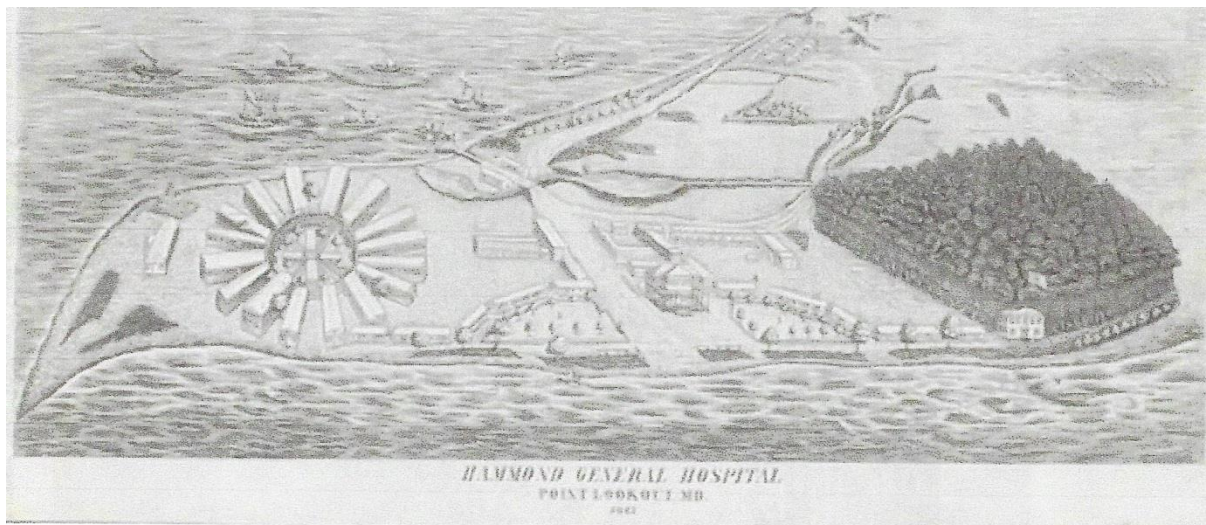
How strangely these enchantments contrasted with the reflections of that hour which bore me further and further from home, and nearer and nearer to the fields of carnage and death!

The next morning I parted with wife and parents at Lawrence and proceed by rail to Boston, where I hastily completed my outfit, and shipped a box of reading matter for my regiment. In the evening, I took the cars for Fall River; and then the steamer for New York, arriving at the latter city the next morning. I spent most of the day in Brooklyn with the venerable Rev. Samuel Norris and with his son. The latter, a wealthy and very patriotic gentleman, presented me with a very fine officer's army

overcoat. The afternoon of the next day I started for Washington, where I arrived the next morning - no thanks to sleeping cars - but many thanks to Fortune that that much of misery was over. Here I was met by the genial 225 pound Chaplain, Rev. E.W. Jackson, who tendered to me the hospitality of his quarters at Amory Square Hospital. He knew how to blend the most charming entertainment of stranger, with the most consummate business tact. The next day being Sunday, he detailed me to preach twice at the hospital. The following day I took the steamer John A. Warner, at 6th St. wharf on the Potomac, and in spite of rain and fog, and ice, I reached Point Lookout, Md. about 8 o'clock the next morning. Here I found my regiment, and reported myself at headquarters for duty. Col. Edward L. Bailey received me cordially. He at once called all the staff and line officers together, introduced me to them, and welcomed me in a very neat little speech, to which I replied as courteously and appropriately as I knew how.



Point Lookout was formerly a southern watering place. It is a long, narrow tongue of land, between the Potomac river and the Chesapeake Bay, terminating where the former empties into the latter. I found here the spacious Hammond General Hospital, constructed of wood, whose long wards and Chapel radiated from the headquarters and dispensary building, like a many pointed star. There were many summer residences here; also a large hotel occupied by Gen. Marston, formerly of the 2nd N.H. Vols, but then (having been promoted) in command of all our forces at this station.



Near the Chesapeake shore at Point Lookout, was a camp if rebel prisoners which numbered, at

different times, from 8000 to 13000. Their quarters were surrounded by a board fence, 12 feet high; and they were guarded by day and night by details of our soldiers, whose beats were traversed on an elevated platform attached to the outside of the fence, and from which they could look down upon every street and tent. Further up on the shore of the bay was the camp of the 5th N.H. Regt. A few hundred yard across the Point, on the Potomac side, lay a R.I. Battery. A little further up lay the 2nd N.H. Regt., and along side of it, the 12th N.H. Regt., the rear of the staff officers tents of both regiments being but a few feet from the rivers edge. This force of infantry and artillery, assisted by several gun boats in the bay and river, was here to guard these rebel prisoners. (Speaking of the 12th Regt., our nearest neighbor reminds me of an incident illustrating the boundless charity of Gen. Marston for the faith of the 2nd Regt.) The Chaplain's relations, and duties to the military service were somewhat unique. He was a staff officer, whose rank was then supposed to be about the same as that of surgeon, or major. He was a mounted officer, the gov't furnishing subsistence for his horse. When on parade, the surgeon, always insisted upon giving me the place of honor. I seldom received any formal orders. But I always found more work upon my hands than I was able to do with satisfaction to myself. I was often invited to participate in inspection, dress-parade, and battallion [sic] drill, as well as corps and division reviews, and did so.

I wore no uniform except the regulation overcoat and hat trimmings. My religious duties, which were always voluntary, were both formal and informal, or pastoral. My formal services, when at all practicable, were never omitted. But they were greatly varied according to the ever shifting circumstances and vicissitudes of army life. In the busiest campaigning, or even if on the march, I always made it a point to mark and hallow the sabbath day by some service or act which should remind the men of its sacredness. Sometimes it could be only by very brief prayer - sometimes only by distribution of religious papers or tracts, which were always gratefully received. But these slight reminders of the day had a perceptible effect, even under the most adverse circumstance, in promoting an unusual degree of quiet and evident thoughtfulness. Home, church-bell, anthem, prayer, sermon, - were they thinking of these? It was well. The chaplain believed that his slightest sabbath-day service would perpetuate in his men a regard for the day and ensure its better observance by them, when they should return to wife and children.

My formal duties on sunday at Point Lookout consisted chiefly in brief preaching services at the regimental hospital, and in prayers at dress-parade - the regiment by the courtesy of the Colonel often being formed in "hallow square" for that purpose. If pleasant, we would ask all to join in a verse of some familiar hymn - would read a short selection of scripture, sometimes follow with a ten minute sermon or talk, and always pray. Afternoons I would alternate with the other chaplains and Christian Commission agents in preaching at the Hammond General Hospital, or wherever special services were desired. In the evening we would often hold a union prayer meeting with Rev. Daniel L. Ambrose, the model chaplain of the 12th N.H. Much of the time regular week-day evening prayer meetings were held; for there were a few religious men in the command.

When possible, every deceased soldier received a christian burial. At the hour of the funeral, the men would "fall into line", and, keeping step to the muffled drum, would march to the grave. Here the "burial service" would be read, or few words would be spoken, and an extempore prayer offered, after which, the military salute was fired, and we returned to camp.

My pastoral work consisted in conversing with the sick and praying at their bedside - writing

letters for them; distributing reading in hospital and camp, and visiting in the camp generally as I could find time, and doing good in every way to the souls and bodies of the men as we had opportunity. A few weeks before we left Point Lookout, we had erected a new regimental chapel, of plained and matched boards, which cost nearly \$500.00, which was contributed by the officers and men.

I found my regiment, which had just been filled up to a thousand strong, with substitutes of all nationalities, very destitute of the scriptures. I obtained bibles and testaments from the Bible Society at Baltimore, in seven different languages, viz., English, French, German, Russian, Italian, Spanish and Norwegian, and hadn't, even there, varieties enough to go round. Many if these were preserved and read; and one of them, as you will soon learn, helped to prepare a condemned deserter for execution and heaven.

The coming in of these "substitutes" and "bounty-jumpers", greatly humiliated the old veterans of the regiment. Rigid restrictions were imposed on all, for the restraint of the few. Some of these ex-prison convicts would step behind a soldier in his own tent, throw his overcoat cape over his head and face, and clasping it with both arms, an accomplice would rob his pockets and escape before he could be seen. I was told that Col. Bailey never trusted himself alone with these men without his hands upon his side arms. But I had a chance to prove that "love is mightier than law" Unarmed and alone I would often enter and sit down in such tents, and in others where cards and money would be hustled out of sight on my approach; and, as I would enquire after home, wife and mother, eyelids would dilate with unaccustomed moisture; and I would be urged to come again. These men would swear by me, work for me, fight for me, if need be. But they would seldom swear in my presence, except by accident. The abrupt termination of some of these accidents, as my presence would suddenly be discovered, would seriously interfere with the grave expression, even of a chaplain's face. The skillful and devoted boss carpenter of my new chapel was well known as having belonged to a desperate gang of New York thieves.

One day a sensation was produced at Point Lookout by the arrival of 400 Confederate officers. They were assigned to unoccupied wards in the Hammond General Hospital. These intelligent men who had led and inspired our foes in the shock of battle, and whose sullen hauteur still revealed the untamed spirit within, were objects of much interest to us. We could study them more leisurely now and from nearer, and very much safer standpoint. They ranked from Lieut. to General, - Brig. Gen. Jeff. Thompson heading the list. A colored regiment which had arrived a few days before, kept guard outside. Among the blacks, to their rage and mortification, some of these rebel officers discovered some of their former slaves. (You know old acquaintances will meet sometimes in the most unexpected moment and manner.) You ought to have seen the uniformed "sambo" strut before the prisoner of his former owner and heard his sarcastic replies to "ole massa's" alternating threats and persuasions. Never had genuine African wit fuller scope, or rare opportunity. This "turning oaf of the tables" was a grim sort of justice, but it was times dilatory, though sure vindication, suggesting that "the mills of God grind very slow, but exceedingly fine". At one service which I attended at Ham. Gen. Hosp. chapel, it was filled with these rebel officers. When we said, "Let us pray", every man fell upon his knees. I said to myself, "disloyal and dangerous as these men have been, they can teach stiff-kneed yankees a much needed lesson in reverence."

It has been asserted that we treated rebel prisoners as inhumanly as they treated ours. My Point Lookout observation disproves this assertion. They had the same quantity and quality of rations that we

had. I have seen heaping wagon loads of blankets hauled into their camp. They were permitted to form into squads and under an officer, go outside and bring in all the cord wood they pleased from the landing. The police and sanitary regulations were very strict. Dr. Fairchild who visited the prison camp and weighed scores of them, and returned a few weeks afterwards, found that nearly every man had gained in flesh. Nothing was more common than to hear our soldiers grumble that the rebels fared better than they. Of other camps I cannot speak, but I can testify that the rebel prisoners under Gen. Marston's guardianship at Point Lookout, fared well. Enough of these men to make up two regiments, enlisted into our service, having no faith in the justice or the success of the Rebellion.

On the whole, Pt. Lookout was a quiet camp. Occasional rumors of an insurrection among the prisoners, or of an attack from outside, would break the monotony, and furnish a fresh topic for discussion and conjecture. The great snow storm of March 23, 1864, and the hotly contested snow ball battle the next day, between the 2nd and 12th regiments, which lasted for hours, and resulted in bruised limbs and blackened eyes, was another episode to which reference will not soon cease to be made at re-unions.

Welcome as thjs Pt. Lookout quiet and comparative security was to the veterans of three years service, it was becoming somewhat tedious. The order therefore to "prepare to move in three days", which came April 4, 1864, was not altogether distasteful. The 7th of April we embarked on the steamer "Escort", and set our faces toward Virginia; and one off the most memorable campaigns of the war. Thursday morning, the 8th of April, we landed at Yorktown, now doubly historic in the military annals of our country. We marched through the small collection of houses, one of which is famed as the headquarters at one time of Lord Cornwallis, and at another time of Geo. Washington. We then passed through the Revolutionary line of breastworks, still visible, out beyond the later defences [sic] into the broad green slope a few rods southward. Gen. Wistar was in command here. For two weeks our forces gathered on this and the Gloucester side of the York to organize the 10th & 18th A. corps for the campaign of the James

As I almost daily faced the long line of my regiment, so thoroughly drilled, so beautifully equipped and uniformed, and so full of spirit; and thought of the horrible mutilation and destruction by bullet, shot and shell, grape and cannister [sic], which would be poured into these living ranks; and of the domestic ties that will be rent and quiver with anguish, when the slaughters are reported, I felt, O the cruelty of secession! O the responsibility of these who plotted and inaugurated it! An O, how fortunate for us, that the veil of the future hides its woes; and permits us, while preparing for the worst, to hope for the best!

Just below, and in full view of our camp, a tree marks the memorable spot worth a weary pilgrimage to visit, where Lord Cornwallis did, really, show his distinguished partiality for Geo. Washington, by presenting him with a sword. Now George had a sword of his own and exceeding effective one, and did not need another. But, as 'twould please Lafayette and end the war, besides making his country independent, George didn't require much urging to accept of it. I always thought well of George for that: and so did Martha. He did just as I should have done. When "a feller" can have two swords, and a "hatchet", just as well as not, he should "go in", whatever may become of the cherry trees.

The first night in Yorktown, I slept in the open air, among the baggage, a rank taste of army life. Jack Frost called me early. The next night, though under a tent, it rained so powerfully that when I

awoke, a good sized brook was running across under my bunk. To reach my pants and balance to put them on, was the vexed question. Twas done. Henceforth Yorktown will be doubly memorable for Geo. Washington's achievement, and mine.

While at Point Lookout, I purchased a very intelligent and high spirited roan mare; whose mother was said to have been a wild horse. She was noted for her speed in New Hampshire; and was taken into the army by Capt. Perkins of Exeter. With Lieut. Col. Carr and Surg. Merrow I spent one day in riding around the rebel and union lines of works at Yorktown, constructed in 1862, while McLellan was in command.

But now I have to describe one of my most painful experiences. Our "bounty jumpers" concluded that Yorktown was a good place to jump from. But it wasn't. Of the nearly 70 who tried it, about 60 were captured and thrust into an old wooden jail. To check the increase of these ventures, a court-martial was organized and began its work. One day Gen. Wistar sent for me. I entered his quarters and saluted him. He said, "Chaplain, John Eagan of your regiment has been tried and found guilty of desertion, and is sentenced to be shot tomorrow afternoon. I wish you to inform him of the sentence, and to tell him that the order is irrevocable". I hastened to the jail, and, as best I could, informed him of what impended. He was one of the four men who were found in a boat pulling for rebeldom. He declared the innocency of his intentions, and complained of the cruelty of the verdict. But by reasoning with him, he soon became calmer. I counselled him as well as I could. But being a catholic, he wished me to find him a crucifix and a priest. Both were obtained. His execution was delayed two days, until Henry Holt, the next case on the docket, was tried, and received the same sentence. I informed him also of his fate, and did what I could to prepare him for it. Seeing the impossibility of quiet, prayerful reflections in a company of 60 noisy desperadoes herded together, I said to Eagan and Holt, "I will get you out of here, if I can." They said - "We wish you would". I called at once on the Provost Marshall - told him the two men were to die tomorrow - that the confusion of the jail made it a poor place in which to prepare for eternity", and remarked, "If you will take those men out and put them into the old church nearby, you may iron them heavily, and put as strong a guard over them as you please. He saw the propriety of my request, and it was granted at once. The priest and myself visited them in the old church. The next day I walked with the priest in the awful procession, and witnessed their execution. The impression upon the regiments present was very deep. At dress-parade a few hours after, I made the event the subject of a practical discourse, which I felt most profoundly, and which all seemed to feel.

The two companions of these men, James Scott and Owen McDonough were speedily tried, and were executed at Williamsburg, Ap. 29th, to which place we had moved on the 22nd. McDonough being a catholic, received the ministrations of a priest. Scott, who was a Norwegian and a protestant, solicited my services. He was an intelligent man. I became greatly interested in him, and took his case upon my heart. I have no doubt he was the victim of bad companionship. He had two full days in which to prepare for execution. Army justice was swift. I informed him of his fate Ap. 27th. At first he was very angry and unreconciled. I urged that nothing could be gained by any protestations he might make - that the worst was coming very soon, and that he should lose no time in preparing for it. He soon became calm; asked if I could find him a Norwegian bible; and requested me to visit him often. I prayed with him, urged him to examine his heart, and carry his case to the all-merciful Father. He promised to do so. I soon found among the Norwegians, the bible he desired. It was one of those which I had distributed

the preceding winter at Point Lookout. It had the English and Norwegian in parrallel [sic] columns, so I could refer him easily to any passage I wished. I carried it to him. He grasped it with tears of gratitude, as if he realized, what was really true, that it was the "word of life". So it proved to him. I turned down the leaves at several of the promises made to persistent and contrite sinners, and he promised to read them carefully, and with prayer. In a few hours I called again. He had read the passages, but could not believe there was mercy for him. God was showing him his heart, as he had never seen it before. He upbraided himself for his wicked life. I sat down beside him, and we read over together the revelations of mercy and grace, so abundant and free, for the unworthiest, who will accept them. From time to time I would turn to my doomed and brokenhearted pupil and say, "Scott, that is plain" - "that reaches your case" - "cant [sic] you believe that"? His gaze was riveted on the word, but he again and again despondingly shook his head. I went on and on with the same result. But I must not falter! The destiny of the immortal was being decided, and besides his God, no other friend was near, but me. It was a supreme hour. God and eternity, his soul and mine focalized in that pivotal moment. I read on and on, for, thank God, the promises to seeking souls are not few - nor small. Now he is silent, as I press these healing leaves to his wounded heart. Hope dawned, and my own faith gets a better foothold. At last I read that royal epitome of the gospel - "God so loved the world", i.e., all the world, even James Scott the deserter, "that he gave his only begotten son", the greatest gift possible, "that whosoever believeth on him" - not excepting the vilest of the vile, "should not perish, but have everlasting life." I said "the God who cannot lie, wants very much to save you, and has given this promise to meet your case. There can be no exceptions here - cant you believe it"? He turned his tearful, but now smiling face up to mine, and said, "Yes"; and added, "I am all right now"! Faith had matured and the work was done. Father: "Thy sine w. a. many a. all pray, thee.", Jesus: "Today thou s. be w. m. in paradise." He was my brother man before, now he was my Christian brother. He grasped my hand. It was the warm grip of Christian fellowship. He had received the spirit of adoption. We were both in one family, and there was "joy in heaven". We kneeled and praised God together. The next time I met him his face shone with the radiancy of hope. He said, "I knew the law, and violated it. The penalty is just. I blame no one". "I am prepared to die". He gave me some of this history, the address of some of his kindred, and asked me to come to his quarters (which were in Fort Magruder) before the hour of execution, and accompany him. I did so. At the last interview we prayed together - talked of Jesus and heaven, and then the doors were opened, and we, with his doomed companion, went forth. The band playing a solemn dirge, led off, the two coffins came next, and behind these, myself and the culprits, the guard following us. We moved on, until we entered a "hallow square", open at one end, and composed of 10,000 or 15,000 men. Taking our places near the open end of the square, and facing the other end, the coffins just behind the condemned, I then stepped one side until the "findings of the court-martial" were read. Then I approached the men, and we all knelt in prayer, - the troops at "parade rest", after which we arose; I shook hands with each, who thanked me for my services, and, as I said to Scott, "forget what is about you now, and look only to Jesus, and all will be well", not a muscle quivered, he smiled assent, I returned to the ranks. Their faces were thin bandaged, 12 men stepped to a few paces in front of them, and faced them; and when the provo. marshal dropped his white handkerchief, every gunlock clicked, and the fatal bullets hastened to their marks, and James Scott and Owen McDonough threw up their arms, fell backward lifeless upon their coffins, and the stern penalty of military law was paid. There was a sad pleasure in ministering to these men, but it cost me days of nervous prostration, quite unfitting me for service.

But the campaign just begins to open! Five days after this, or May 4th, we leave the tumble-down city of Williamsburg, and march toward the James river. Night overtakes us, and I take a nap in a wheat field mad soft by recent rains. At 2 o'clock in the morning, we reached a wharf on the James river, and went on board the transport "Leader". The river is full of transports.

The evening of May 5th we reached Bermuda Hundred. The next morning we disembarked and marched towards Petersburg, to near the Point of Rocks. Nearly every day our forces contend now for the Petersburg & Richmond Railroad; we tearing it up, & they repairing it, and the Point of Rocks Hospital is a busy scene. From the 12th to the 14th of May we fight our way towards Richmond, till we are in sight of Fort Darling, on Dwight Bluff. Weary and wet, with no covering of tents, we lay down this saturday night, behind the trees which protect us from the sharp shooters, just outside the rebel fort. Today the assistant surgeon while pressing against my side, was slightly wounded. Yesterday surgeon Bunton picked up a piece of shell which plunged into the ground and threw the dirt over me; and he said, "Chaplain, that was meant for you, you had better carry it home". I just put it into my haversack, but lost haversack and all before night. But now we are before Fort Darling. Sunday morning dawns. We were in the woods with an opening between us and the fort. Glancing about 20 feet in front of me, I saw Capt. J H. Platt. Who was he? He was the man for whom the Veterans camp at the Weirs was named in 1881. I knew him over 45 years ago in Lawrence, Mass. The lady he had then selected for his wife boarded in my father's family. He was one of the first to meet and greet me, as I first met my regiment. During the campaign thus far, we had often conversed upon our past associations, and inquired after the mutual friends and dear ones at home. I was not surprised to find that he was an officer of such important rank, and that he was popular with his men. He was a man of quick intuitions, of great energy and courage - a born soldier. He entered upon the campaign with great enthusiasm. As we lay before Fort Darling this sunday morning, I said to him, "I have got a late "Lawrence American". "Would you like to see it?" He replied "Yes". I threw it to him. In a few minutes he said, "John, come up here". I crept as carefully and hastily as I could to him, for every movement drew the sharp-shooters fire. We talked of home and friends with an interest such as soldiers were want to feel. And then we talked of the future. As I was about to leave, he remarked, "I have come safely through all the past, and I am going in once more, to live or die". And then he added in an apparently premonitory tone, "If anything happens to me, I want you to look after me, and inform my wife". I promised. That was our last interview. The next morning, the enemy reinforced, dashed upon us in the fog; and the "Old Second", by the aid of telegraph wires stretched from stump to stump, in our front, by the pre-caution of Capt. Steel, held their position, mowing down the rebels fearfully as they ... (?) upon these ... (?) till the regiment on our left had fallen back. My regiment killed or wounded 2,000 rebels. At the beginning of this tremendous assault, Capt. Platt, standing by and inspiring his men, was shot through the head with a bullet. I heard some one shout, "Capt. Platt is killed!" I followed along the line from left to right till I found him. He was breathing heavily, but senseless. To save the body if possible, was my greatest anxiety now. We placed him on a blanket, and grasping one corner myself, and three soldiers the other corners, we bore the body hastily back, before our retreating line, amid showers of bullets, until we reached the field hospital, which had been cleared of everything except one stretcher. Just what we wanted. We laid the body on this, sent two of the men back to their regiment, and just as a solid cannon ball flew 15 feet above our heads, we started with the stretcher down the turnpike toward the ambulance train. We gained it just in time. Capt. Hubbard found a place for the body in one and I sat with the driver, and we fled to Pt. of Rocks.

Thank God, the body was safe! Here I got a soldier to make a rude box, while I drew the contraband nails out of a picket fence to fasten it together. In this we placed the body of my old friend. Under the apple trees near by, I wrote his wife the sad message I have now rehearsed; and this my pledge of the day before was fulfilled. We got a soldier furloughed who took the body to Baltimore, where it was placed in a metallic case, and then sent to Manchester, where his wife then resided. The Capt. now rests beneath a beautiful monument in "Valley Cemetery".

Whipped, and sent back to our defences [sic] at Point of Rocks, we remained there strengthening our works until May 25th, when, during the evening and the night, we marched to City Point. No one seemed to know our destination. During the long hours of the night march I had a chance to relieve some of my weary men by putting them, by turns, into my saddle, and carrying their guns and knapsacks. The next morning we went on board the "Gen. Lyon", and with our Division we steamed down the James. It was sunday. My men were together. Blessed day for weary bodies! But it is a blessed day for the soul. The christian Captain cordially favours a service. We will have it early, and then allow the men to read or sleep as they choose. Chaplain DeForrest if the 11th Conn. is on board, but says I must preach. The deck is my church, a box is my pulpit, the blue dome of heaven is our frescoe, the blazing sun is our chandilier, and our audience is gathered from the ends of the earth. Our text is Isa. 5:4, and reveals God's utmost endeavor to redeem, and save, and bless his dependent and needy creatures. This gospel is just as good for soldiers as for anybody. They have a right to it; and we are right glad to offer it to them. I never had more respectful listeners than soldier always were. The service over, we dine, distribute the reading, sing, chat, sleep and watch the shore. We pass Harrison's landing, Hampton, Rip Rocks, Fortress Monroe, and there night shuts in. The morning dawns. (May 30) We are going up the York River. We enter the Pamunkey. It may not be respectful to charge Nature with crookedness. (Human nature often warps) But Nature perpetrated the crookedest transaction I ever knew her to, when she traced the channel of the Pamunkey river. How we ever reached our destination, when so much of the time we were going the other way, is a mystery. I don't know as we ever should, if the rebels had not sunk obstructions which delayed us. I wont tell you all the facts about it, lest it ruin my reputation for veracity. But we actually reached White House Landing the next day, May 31st, by sailing up this river. In the afternoon we marched 14 miles, and a poor Virginian let us sleep in his best unfenced door yard. It was very level, so we did'nt have any fear of rolling out. The next day we reached Cold Harbor and halted, the enemy having fenced up the road, and in other ways objecting to our advance on Richmond. The third day of June, my regiment participated in the memorable "battle of Cold Harbor". Nearly 100 of my men were killed or wounded. This was one of the great battles of the war, in which neither side gained any perceptible advantage. We have heard a great deal about soldiers "spoiling for a fight". My greatest fear was of spoiling in the fight. But, as the leaden storm came on, and the distinct clatter of dozens of muskets swelled into the continuous roar of many thousands, I thought of the wounded I might rescue and relieve, and of the dying to whom I might minister; and shame hurried me to the the carnival of death. As I came under fire, I said, "If heaven wills that I should fall, that is best; but if otherwise, I am as safe here, as anywhere". "I am absolutely in God's hands". In the broadest sense, the post of duty is the safest place. As I committed all my interests to the God of battles, he calmed and strengthened me. I believe that a large percentage of our religiously trained army learned this peace-giving secret of supreme trust in God. This steadied their aim, and served their army in the day. The battle was terrific. The continuous roar of musketry and artillery, swelling and subsiding,

but never ceasing, was more deafening and awful than the thundering rage of the angered sea, as it smites the rock-ribbed shore. I spent most of the day in getting the dead and wounded into ambulances, and in helping the field surgeon, who temporarily dressed the most dangerous wounds of those who were being carried to the more remote field hospital. Here is Capt. Gordon, fatally wounded in the head. He never thought much of chaplains. But never mind, - let us lay him carefully into the ambulance. Here is Capt. Smith, fearfully wounded in both limbs, and writhing in agony. Take him to the field hospital on the stretcher. There's too much jar to the ambulance. He will die. Here is Sergt Freeman, whose left arm is terribly mutilated, and must come off. Sergt Haywood must lose his right arm - put them into the ambulances quick, and hurry them to the rear, for the shell are bursting all around us. Here is a German infidel, who despises everything christian. His wound is agonizing. We lift him into the ambulance. He begs for water as wounded soldiers often do. I pass him my canteen. He takes a swallow, and, after turning the balance upon his wound and returning the canteen, seizes my hand and kisses it, while tears of gratitude bathe his face. Thus I get my "100 fold in this present life". And so the work goes on, with little cessation, till 4 o'clock. Early in the battle, I stood by the side of "Carlton" (C.C. Coffin) whose description of this engagement was one of the most graphic of any which ever appeared in the "Boston Journal". As he was questioning me, a solid shot struck in the pine tree under which we were standing, the force of which brought down limbs large enough to crush us. This terminated the conversation, as he immediately sought another position. At 4 p.m. I went back to the field hospital, to see what care was being taken of my wounded men we had been sending there. They had been hastily and promiscuously dropped, with hundreds of others, upon the grounds lying about the surgeon's quarters. Scores had received no attention yet. The surgeons were overwhelmed with work. As I carefully moved about among the prostrate bodies, many of my men recognized me, and appealed for relief. "Chaplain, wont you please give me a drink of water?" came from many feverish lips. "Please put up a bush, or something to shield me from the sun", said others who had broiled in the heat for hours. "Please ask the surgeon to give me my turn next" said still others. O, that havoc of war! the horrors of the battlefield! must be seen to be realized. Here I spent the balance of the day, trying to relieve these men whose flesh was torn, whose limbs were crushed and some of whose backs were broken. Nor true Chaplain could be a bummier [?], or 5th wheel in the coach of the regimental staff. Many a life I trust was saved by these little attentions, and by securing the opportune services of the surgeons. The dying were there, and the spiritual agencies were blended with the material. Those whose wounds had been dressed, and whose limbs has been amputated, I visited last. I shall never forget the proud smile of satisfaction that lit up their pale faces, as I complimented them on what they had done and suffered for their country. (Freeman & Heywood - swap gloves.) Near the tent of Dr. Merrow, our own surgeon, in which was the bloody operator's table, was a large trench filled with severed feet and hands, legs and arms, that in childhood had been fondled by loving mothers, but now had done their last work. And at the foot of the slope, was the much larger trench, the common and indiscriminate sepulchre, where scores of the patriotic dead wrapped in their own blankets, would hallow forever the soil, yet to be consecrated to freedom and union.

It was a privilege to represent the dying soldier's sister, wife or mother, at the mercy-seat, as the breath was going out. Grateful letters from the sorrowing families at home, were oft mingled with the Heavenly Father's benediction upon these humble services. I have no memories more sacred or satisfying than these. I fondly hope that sometimes in heaven my attention will be arrested by the familiar salutation -

“Chaplain!”

June 15th finds us back again to Pt. of Rocks. June 21st we marched to the front, which was now within two miles, and in sight of a portion of Petersburg. On the way to the front, and within a mile of our works, was a piece of woods, in which was a division of colored troops, under command of Gen. Hinks. I was riding in the rear of my regiment. After we had passed this camp a few rods, we met President Lincoln, Gen. Hallock and several others, who were on horseback, returning from the front. Having a curiosity to see if Lincoln would be recognized by these colored soldiers, I halted, turned my horse about, and awaited the result. The scene then enacted was worthy of a painter. I had not mistaken the instincts of these patriotic freedmen. As their great- hearted “emancipator” was recognized, hundreds rushed to the roadside. Cheers upon cheers, mingled with screams of delight and ejaculations of gratitude and blessing rent the air; hats were tossed, and arms were swung. As the President raised his hat and bowed his acknowledgements, the furor of this spontaneous outburst of appreciation rose higher and higher, and was only limited by the possibilities of such a demonstration. To account for that scene, one must take the freedman’s standpoint, and contrast the woes of the long dark night of cruel bondage, with the unspeakable joys of freedom’s golden day; and must see in the homely, but benignant passer by, the embodiment of that sentiment which had broken beyond repair, 4,000,000 of galling fetters. I am glad I witnessed that scene. And I am more glad that he, who was so soon to be martyred, could read in this demonstration, an index of the universal gratitude of the emancipated race. I was proud to occupy even the background of such a historic picture as that. During the many weeks we were before Petersburg, my regiment served alternately in guarding Gen. (Baldy) Smith’s headquarters, and in the trenches. Disease and bullets robbed me of quite a number of my men. I was busy in camp, and hospital, and trench, caring for the souls and the bodies of my comrades. My tent was under a tree in the corner of a flower garden, at the head of a beautiful walk, at the “Friend House”. The spires of Petersburg were in full view, as was also the lower plain between. Many a screaming, venomous Whitworth shell came from the rebel battery, Just across the Appomattox, smote the top of my tree, and exploded in the ravine behind me. Toward evening, one day, I sat in front of my tent, facing down the walk. I was reading a “Boston Journal”. I raised my eyes a moment, and saw a horse which stood across the other end of the walk, hitched to a tree, drop. Some soldiers rushed to him. In a few minutes they brought me an unexploded shell, which they judged was intended for me, but which, being nearly spent, had buried itself in the horses chest. Thus, by many a seeming trifle, were the missiles of death turned aside or quenched.

While here, Rev. R.S. Stubbs of my Conference, then serving the Christian Commission, called upon me. He was my guest on the memorable night when the rebel batteries gave us an awful and sublime exhibition of fireworks. I took him up through the roof of the “Friend House”, to the “Lookout”. Stretching away for miles to our left, we could see these shells streaming with their fiery trail, and bursting, rending the heavens by their explosions. “Impossibility grand”, he said, “if we could dissociate them from the havoc they were making with human life!” We were then so well protected however, that the damage was comparatively slight.

Early autumn found us on the north side of the James, near the Newmarket road, on the “Chapin Farm”. From a fort, we can see the enemy’s breastworks, but a few rods away. We can also see the James river on our left, and the “Dutch Gap” locality, upon the river.

Oct 27th, we were ordered with our division to make an attack on the rebels at “Fair Oaks”. Grant was at

the same time to attack on the left, south of the James. We reached Fair Oaks about noon. On our approach, we saw that very exciting movement, called a "cavalry charge". Our cavalry dashed across an open plain, drove the rebels into the woods, where they found refuge behind their works. Col. Patterson succeeded Col. Bailey in command of my regiment (June) when the three years men who did not re-enlist went home in June. With him and Gen. Marston I rode along the line of battle in which we were placed, on the right of the Williamsburg turnpike. The advance was soon made. The union troops soon took and occupied a portion of the rebel works.

They the rebels, soon rallied with unexpected numbers, and our men were driven back. In this affair the 10th N.H. suffered severely, About sunset, the infantry firing had nearly ceased. But the rebel artillery continued to shell the turnpike. I said to Ass't surgeon Stark, "Let's go back to the rear, and find our horses, and turn in for the night". He assented, and we started. On our way, we overtook two New York officers who were wounded, and endeavoring to make their way to the rear. We offered our assistance, each taking the arm of man. Our pace was slow; the shelling of the road increased. We could not avoid the road, nor honorably forsake our men. Shells exploded to right of us, to left of us, and in front of us. It seemed every moment that the next must annihilate us. When we got beyond their range, Dr. Stark remarked, "In my more than three years service, I have never been so frightened before"!

We found our horses. It was raining. Darkness came on and we lay down under our neighbors tent. That grateful sleep for which the weary sigh, was drawing near, when some one shouted, "We are ordered to fall back"! What, retreat on such a night as that! - the rain pouring down in torrents, and the darkness total? Well! We dressed, felt for our saddles and threw them on to our horses, mounted and taking our bearings by the retreating baggage wagon lanterns, we found the road. The whole force was in motion, but it was strangely mixed. As we could not recognize each other in the darkness, the surgeon and I agreed to speak often one to the other, that we might not get separated. The artillery wheels cut deep ruts, which filled with the descending rain. Ever and anon a footman would slip, and we would hear a splash, and then an oath or a laugh, as the victim's mood might be. On we slowly went till after midnight when I suggested, "We must be at a safe distance - let's turn out, try to build a fire, and lie down." It was agreed to. We found some fence rails, whittled some shavings and started a fire. But my hostler had the blankets and shelter tent and he was not to be found. In my frock coat, then, I must lie down in the rain, upon a pile of brush, with my feet to the fire. Here I actually fell asleep till the fire waning, I awoke with cold. Dr. Stark was dressing a colored boys wound. The fire was replenished, and we stood up and steamed before it, till warmth returned, then laid down and slept again. So the night wore away. The next day, though the rebels threatened to cut off our retreat, we reached our old camp at Chapin Farm. When the baggage train came up, a few hours later, my new valise, with new winter suit and other valuables, was gone - and, it never returned.

We spent the winter here. It was a season of unusual religious interest. I dedicated two beautiful rustic chapels, one for a Mass. and the other for a Conn. regiment. The Christian Commission services were largely attended, and very useful. Here I was associated with Capt. H.G. Turnbull who died in 1893. Ed. S.S. (?)Finney. The war now hastened to its close. After Wilmington N.C. was taken, a salute was ordered to be fired all along the line. As I was approaching my quarters from the rear, I met Mike, the colonel's bright young Irish hostler. Just then a salute was fired from all the batteries along our 30 mile line. It jarred everything. Mike didn't understand it, and gasped - "Chaplain, an what does that mean"? "Why", I said, "Mike, that is in honor of the capture of Wilmington"! The tears started to his eyes, he lifted his

hand, and said, - “By, by, by, an sure its to God we ought to be grateful”! No one but an Irishman, in the presence of his Chaplain, could so skilfully turn an oath into a pious and grateful ejaculation.

Other incidents of interest occurred during the winter, among then our Christmas mock dress parade and the remarkable sagacity of my horse on a certain occasion.

But I must hasten to describe our entry onto the city of Richmond.



Fall of Richmond April 2, 1865 by Currier & Ives

We did not participate in the final struggle which resulted in Lee’s surrender.

But, being on the north side of the James, we had the never-to-be-forgotten privilege and honor of marching into the rebel capitol, and with Gen Devens Division, occupying it, April 3, 1865. The rebel army and president had evacuated the city. The mayor met our forces, and tendered the city to us. The city was on fire, the result of the act of the rebels in burning the bridges and such military stores as they could not remove. Our troops helped subdue the fire, and preserve order. The next morning, the old veterans, who had fought on all sides of Richmond during the 4 years terrible conflict, awoke, rubbed their eyes to be sure they were clear, and looked around them, and assured themselves that they had not been deceived by a happy dream - they were really in secure and peaceful possession of the rebel capitol!

Our patriotic, citizen soldiery, who loved their erring brothers, though they hated secession, were too weary of strife, and too full of grateful emotion to resort to retaliation,. “The stars and stripes” which they had so wearily followed in the dust and smoke of so many campaigns, never was so beautiful and so dear as when they beheld it waving over the capitol and other public buildings in the city of Richmond. Their hearts swelled and heaved with a gladness they could not express. They were surfeited with Joy.

The following day, I visited Libbey prison; but they “boys in blue” were on guard, and outside. I went

into the capitol, sat down in the speaker's desk; and with rebel pen, ink, and paper, wrote one of the gladdest messages of my life, one to the press, and another to my wife.

The following day, as Gen. Devens was standing on the steps of the governor's house, facing capitol square, he was serenaded with our national airs by the division bands. In passing, I gave him my hand and hearty congratulations. "Ah, Chaplain", said he, with streaming eyes, "it is all of the wonderful goodness of God"!

I could spend hours in detailing the interesting incidents of those first few days in Richmond - but I must forbear.

The assassination of President Lincoln, and its effects, and memorial observance - the final surrender of all the rebel armies, and the capture of Jeff Davis - the returning march, through the rebel capitol, of the Potomac and Gen. Sherman's Victorious armies, occupying 7 ½ hours each, - the resumption of civil functions during our necessary military occupancy - and our glad and grateful return, and home reception, are chapters my weary audience will wish me to omit. The right prevailed, the Union was maintained, freedom was made universal, and the perpetuity of these priceless legacies is the patriotic veterans richest reward.

Malarial poison, wounds, hardship and exposure have already removed more than one half of the survivors of the Union army. Duly honor, and tenderly care for the surviving few. They will not long be with you. Many of them feel the burden of years, and this will abbreviate their final march to the last rendezvous, where the tramp of armies and the bugle call of battle will never be heard.

But, before we join that camp, so rapidly filling, and so nearly full, we charge the generations coming after us, to preserve forever, and at whatever cost, the priceless legacies of freedom, Union, and the Constitution, which the valor and sacrafices [sic] of the past are now transmitting to them!

Written on bottom and sides of last page:

Chichester NH May 21, 1913

Methuen M.E. Ch. Dec. 14, 1904

Marlboro, N.H. Oct. 7, 1904 Lawrence & Haverhill Pres Meeting Feb 28, '04

Epping Dec. 14, 1892

Henniker Mar 9, '92

Stratham Feb 4, 1892

Chelsea YMCA Nov. 8, '89

Antrim N.H. Dec. 13, '86

Brentwood Feb. 16, 1887

Barre Mass. Nov. 6, '89

Winchester Y MCA, at Keene Apr 1, '89

Greenland Dec. 3, 1891

Newport

Exeter Mar 15, 1886

Meuthen Mass YMCA Mar 10, 1890

NOTE: Westbrook Historical Society - Copy of Diary donated by Dr. Wm. Buker, grandson of John Adams
Diary copied as written. Photos from internet