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Letter from the 7th Indiana by Chaplain R.W. Jewell
Bivouac 7th Indiana Volunteers,
Near Raccoon Ford,
Rapidan River, Virginia.

Editor Journal: On Thursday last, 24th inst., while all were quietly eating dinner, in camp near Culpepper, the "pack up" was sounded. Dinners were finished in double quick time, and in less than fifteen minutes all were prepared to go whithersoever the commander desired. It is both amusing and surprising to see how quick this army can prepare for marching. After the usual delay in taking up order of march, we were all put in motion toward the Rapidan, and after an easy and quiet march of some six miles over a narrow, unfrequented, but level and dry, though not dusty road, thickly hedged with pine, cedar and other undergrowth, we reached our present bivouac, about one mile from the river, and near a little mountain, from which the rebel camp and the "Johnny rebs" themselves can be seen plainly with the naked eye. It is but "a step" over, but we do not take that step, and in fact it is a rather a perilous step to take. We are not allowed to give the relative positions of the different commands. We do not pretend to know the objects of this movement, and will not therefore undertake to give them.

Execution of a Deserter.

Yesterday, 25th inst., near this place, Charles Williams, of the 4th Maryland volunteers, Company D, 1st Corps, 3d Division, at 4 P. M. was shot to death for desertion. I was present at this painful affair, and will give your readers a few facts, if you have not a more able correspondent.

The division to which the condemned man belonged was formed into a hollow square, the east side open, where was an open grave, the fresh dirt telling that it had been dug but a short time previous. At a little after 3 P. M. the convict was marched on the ground, in at the open side of the square, and all round the lines, close to the men. A brass band and muffled drums, led by the officer of the occasion, went in front, discoursing the most mournful music; indeed it seemed as if every instrument was a living, heart-broken thing. Next after the band marched the firing party, with their deadly

weapons at a shoulder, and bayonets unfixed. This party was composed of twelve soldiers. Then came the rough coffin, borne by four men; then came the doomed man, walking behind and looking upon that coffin which was soon to contain his earthly remains. He was a common sized man, dressed in black pants, white shirt, no coat, and a well worn round-crowned woolen hat, his face cleanly shaven. His step was firm, and in time with the dead march, he looked neither to the right nor the left. His left arm was drawn round behind, and his right arm down by his right side, the left wrist being handcuffed to the right arm immediately below the elbow, so that his breast was laid bare for the leaden messengers of death to do their awful work without hinderance. By his right side walked a Chaplain, but during the awful march no words passed between them.—Behind him with fixed bayonets marched a heavy guard. During the time occupied in marching around the lines, the whole multitude seemed to hold their breath and gaze with pity, and many with flowing eyes, at that healthful man, in the prime of life, marching to his own funeral dirge, and gazing upon the weapons that were in a few moments to pierce his heart and brain; and that coffin and grave so soon to receive his dishonored remains. Oh, God! what awful reflections were ours at that dread time; but how horribly awful must have been those of that doomed man! On went the solemn procession—his body the living hearse for his dead honor—the band making the very air to wail and weep. At last they file off to the open grave; here, at its edge, they halt; the coffin is let down by its side; the band marches from the scene; the guards and firing party take up their proper distances; the doomed man is left alone with the Chaplain; they both seat themselves, facing each other, astride the coffin, and, in this position, the man of God lifts his eyes and voice to heaven in earnest, eloquent supplication for that soul which was so soon to pass into the presence of its maker, to give an account of the deeds done in the body. What an awful position was this! Not many have sat upon the coffin with one who was so soon to fill it, and invoke the mercy of God upon that unfortunate being. Prayer over, the preacher made some remarks; then for some moments they stand in common conversation. There is not the least indication of fear; nor the slightest trembling or restlessness of position; not the blanching of eye or palor of countenance could be detected, but a firm attention, with a soldierly attitude, he stood and listened to the last words of his chaplain. Now the bugle admonishes us that the fateful moment is near; he hates to part with the preacher; presently the officer advances and the chaplain retires; the poor fellow takes a calm and deliberate survey of the heavens and earth and at the long lines of gleaming bayonets about him, and at his executors, who stand ready to carry out the sentence of death; then

with a sigh, submits his eyes to be blindfolded, and all earthly objects are shut out forever. The office retires, and then he stands beside his coffin, as firm as a marble statute. A note from the bugle, and every piece is at an aim; another note they belch forth fiery death into his bosom; he falls back over his coffin, and his head, neck and heart are pierced through; he moves not a muscle, he quivers not; the sentence is complete; he is dead.

As soon as the fact was officially announced by the surgeons of the occasion, the corpse of the executed man was placed on the ground, alongside of his coffin, and all the division were marched in review, so that every man might see the fearful fate which is before the man who deserts his cause, colors and comrades in this our hour of peril.

We had poor opportunities of gaining information, but learn this man had deserted some four or five times; hiring as a substitute, getting the money, and then deserting and hiring again. When arrested he was playing substitute in the 90th [? not clear in original] Pennsylvania, and while on drill was apprehended by his old captain.

We will now let him alone; he fills an ignominious grave. If he has relatives, a loving wife, with a high sense of honor, we pray God to comfort them. It is a matter of great regret that one who could meet death so firmly, should prove himself so unworthy to live, and live to so little purpose, and die so ignobly.

Rosecrans' Defeat.

There is great sorrow in this army caused by the defeat, or falling back, of this gallant General's command. All had hoped he would be able to hold his ground against the rebels, but it seems he has not. This army appreciates Rosecrans, and feels the importance of his complete success, and it is to be hoped that he may be able yet to turn the table on his enemy. It has been said here, ever since it was found that a portion of Lee's army had gone to fight Rosecrans, that the Western boys would find different material to deal with to what Bragg's forces are; yet it seems that Thomas's invincibles could make Longstreet's veterans run before them as chaff before the wind.

Burnside.

Much concern is also felt for Burnside, but all have confidence in

his honor and generalship.

What Will This Army Do?

God knows, but it is quite doubtful whether the President, Meade, or any of the subordinates do. We may cross, and we may not. We may stay here, fall back, or do something else, but time and circumstances can alone determine. One thing is true, and that is this: Whatever this army is ordered to do, if it be in the range of possibility, they will do it. No braver and more willing men live.- There is a foolish prejudice in the minds of some men who are always talking about going ahead. If these croakers desire to know why this army does not go ahead, or if they are very anxious that we should "go ahead," let them ask Uncle Sam for a "suit of blue," a gun, &c., and come down and go with us, and we will do them good;" show them the rebel rifle pits, artillery and muskets on the frowning heights of the Rapidan, and then tell them to "go wence." Talk is cheap, but it takes caution and courage to go ahead in the face of such opposition as is met with in this Department. This army has been talked into one or two fearful and disastrous battles, and it is time the Commanding General be allowed to do his own planning, and that those who cannot right face a squad of four men, and who are at home amid featherbed luxuries, either hold their piece, or speak words of encouragement, instead of disparagement. Thus let it be in the future.

The Weather

Is clear and dry, but quite cool, and rather windy; rather healthy than otherwise.

Health.

In this regiment, and the whole corps the health is good. I have not seen a funeral in the time I have been here, (except that of the deserter above spoken of,) which is nearly a month.