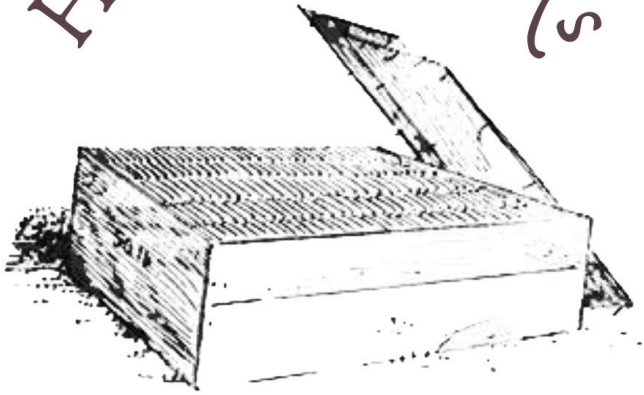




# Hardtack Books



*all things civil war.*

[www.hardtackbooks.com](http://www.hardtackbooks.com)

By George Alfred Townsend

*The Life, Crime, and Capture of John Wilkes Booth*

*The Real Life of Abraham Lincoln*

*Poems*

*The Mormon Trials at Salt Lake City*

*The New World Compared with the Old*

*The Swamp Outlaws*

*The Great Conflagration: Chicago, It's Past and Future*

*Washington, Outside and Inside*

*Events at the National Capital and the Campaign of 1876*

*Tales of the Chesapeake*

*Bohemian Days*

*Mrs. Reynolds and Hamilton: A Romance*

*The Entailed Hat, or Patty Cannon's Times*

*Columbus in Love*

*Katy of Catoctin, or the Chain Breakers: A National Romance*

*Poems of Men and Events*

*The Delaware Peninsula*

---

By Jeffrey R. Biggs

*William Penn Seville's History of the First Delaware Volunteers*  
(editor)

*They Fought for the Union: A History of the First Delaware*  
*Volunteers in the Army of the Potomac (author)*



*Campaigns of a Non-Combatant*

The Memoir of a Civil War Correspondent

EDITED BY JEFFREY R. BIGGS

© 2024 Hardtack Books  
all rights reserved

This is an abridged publication of the original edition published in New York entitled *Campaigns of a Non-Combatant and his Romaunt Abroad During the War* by Geo. Alfred Townsend, 1866

Designed in Garamond type

Cover Illustration: George Alfred Townsend., from *Tales of the Chesapeake* (New York, 1880)

The copyrighted portions of this book may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission of the publisher, except when permitted by law.

Identifiers:

ISBN 978-0986361531



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

*Editor's Introduction* x

*Introduction* xv

Part 1: "This is no Place for a Civilian"

March 1862 - July 1862

- 1 The War Correspondent's First Day 3
- 2 A General Under the Microscope 12
- 3 A Foraging Adventure 19
- 4 What a March is in Fact 28
- 5 Down the Chesapeake 38
- 6 On to Richmond 47
- 7 Rustics in Rebellion 56
- 8 Put Under Arrest 65
- 9 After the Victory 77
- 10 Seven Pines and Fair Oaks 86
- 11 Stuart's Raid 98
- 12 Fever Dreams in War 105
- 13 Two Days of Battle 114
- 14 McClellan's Retreat 124
- 15 A Battle Sunday 133
- 16 By The Riverside 144
- 17 The Hospital Transport 154

Part 2: "Boys, I Guess We're Beat"

July 1862 - August 1862

- 18 On Furlough Awhile 165
- 19 Campaigning with General Pope 174
- 20 Army Morals 183
- 21 Going into Action 192



- 22 Cedar Mountain 198  
23 Out with a Burying Party 208

Part 3: “We are Under the Shadow of Ruins”  
April 1865

- 24 A Correspondent Once More 221  
25 Five Forks 226  
26 Richmond Desolate 241  
27 The Ruins of the Rebellion 250

*Index*

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

George Alfred Townsend, more famously known as the post-Civil War literary figure of “Gath,” was born on January 30, 1841, in Georgetown, Sussex County, Delaware, and grew up traveling throughout the Delmarva Peninsula following his father’s occupation as a Methodist preacher. In his young, formative years, the Townsend family moved across state lines multiple times, living in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. George Alfred was the youngest of the four children of the Reverend Stephen Townsend and his wife, Mary Milbourne. The two oldest children never survived infancy, but the third child, Stephen Emory, was five when the youngest of the family was born. The region of his birth would forever stay with Townsend even after his popularity rose, inspiring his most well-known work of fiction, *The Entailed Hat*, the dark tale of Patty Cannon and the smuggling and murder of enslaved persons in the early 1800s.

George Townsend’s success with the pen is a testament to the quality of education he received despite his father’s modest income. His education began around 1849/50 in Chestertown, Maryland, when he was eight or nine. He received an early education at the highly esteemed Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland, which, at the time, accepted students of all ages, including young children and older teens. Later, in 1851, after the family moved to Newark, Delaware, George Alfred enrolled at the Newark Academy, another school which offered instruction for pre-teen boys. In 1853, the family relocated to the urban environment of Philadelphia, where the young man was placed in the Fox Chase School. George Alfred enrolled in Philadelphia’s Central High School in 1856. The school was highly regarded and granted a Bachelor of Arts degree after four years of learning, putting it on par with many colleges.

Townsend’s social awareness and his disdain for the institution of slavery was aroused by the political happenings in the late 1850s. He became aware of the enslavement of others by reading his father’s copy of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In a later comment, he credited Harriet Beecher Stowe’s work for inspiring him to pursue a literary career. His writing skills improved after becoming involved with Central High’s student newspaper. One of his articles, “The Colored People of this City,” called for equal opportunities for the city’s free African American population and was published in local newspapers.

---

Townsend accomplished a significant milestone in January 1860 as he turned nineteen and obtained his Bachelor of Arts from Central High. Seeking a literary life and a career in journalism, he secured a job with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* with pay at six dollars a week, where in 1860 covered several newsworthy events, such as the first visit from an embassy from Japan and a visit from Queen Victoria's oldest son, Edward. Of course, the year's most significant event was the November 1860 presidential election. Even though he was just nineteen, the young reporter crossed the Delaware River to New Jersey to cover the Republican nominee, Abraham Lincoln, visit to the Garden State. After witnessing Lincoln's passionate speech, the riotous New Jersey atmosphere spurred Townsend to comment that "the North was ready for war and rather desired it."

In the early months of 1861, Townsend's career prospects improved after Abraham Lincoln was elected president. The *Philadelphia Press* hired him from the *Inquirer* and he was soon promoted to city editor and dramatic editor where he would meet many of the up-and-coming actors of the nation, including John Wilkes Booth. The outbreak of the Civil War gave Townsend the chance of a lifetime as a special war correspondent covering war events for *The Press*. In the spring of 1862, he left behind his city beat in Philadelphia and, after a brief interview with Secretary of War Stanton, crossed the Chain Bridge and began writing dispatches on the sounds and sights of the American conflict.

During the early stages of the war, correspondents were encouraged to reveal their identities. In March 1862, in his first dispatch, Townsend identified himself as "G.A.T." and was assigned to shadow General McCall's Pennsylvania Reserves. His tenure at the *Press* was brief. He soon drew the ire of the censors at the War Department after divulging too many details about the Pennsylvania Reserve's covert midnight march to Annapolis on March 17, 1862 and his Philadelphia handlers removed him from his assignment.

The New York press was eager for active correspondents, and the young writer's talents and abilities were recognized. In May 1862, Townsend returned to the front, but this time as a correspondent for the *New York Herald*. Most of Townsend's dispatches before the Seven Day's Battle were focused on the area north of the Chickahominy River, where he would travel around the vast supply depot of the White House located on the Pamunkey River; however, at the beginning of Lee's offensive on June 25, 1862, Townsend was sick with swamp fever south of the Chickahominy. Fortunately, he quickly recovered, recrossed the river, and witnessed McClellan's army's retreat to the James River. Townsend sought safety on a hospital transport to the capital after ar-

iving safely at Harrison's Landing. He arrived in New York in early July 1862 and gained attention after writing a ten-column article about the peninsula fiasco and McClellan's retreat to the James River. The *Herald's* headline on July 4th was the first confirmation of the reversal of fortune on the Virginia Peninsula, and it caused concern among many northern supporters of the war.

By the middle of July 1862, Townsend was again in the saddle, this time attached to John Pope's Army of Virginia that was massed along the line of the Rappahannock River to take Richmond by an overland advance. Townsend was on hand to witness the sharp battle of Cedar Mountain on August 9, 1862, and the strange scene of Jeb Stuart, the storied Confederate cavalry leader, cajoling his old West Point acquaintances with tales of his exploits during a brief battlefield truce to recover the wounded.

During the late summer of 1862, Townsend abandoned his anonymous life as a correspondent (by the summer of 1862, special war correspondents were not identified by name) and began a lecture tour in England instead. He entertained his European audiences with stories of his correspondent experiences and contributed articles to the British press. In the spring of 1865, Townsend accepted an offer from the *New York World* to return to the field and cover the war's final months. He was again the first to offer his paper one of the war's greatest scoops: The Battle of Five Forks. This significant Union victory was the final blow to the Confederacy and Townsend's description of the Civil War's last major battle made him an instant success. His subsequent dispatches detailing the assassination of President Lincoln and the pursuit of John Wilkes Booth brought him even more fame. By the end of the war, Townsend was one of the most famous newspaper correspondents in the country.

The focus of this work is solely on Townsend's experiences during the Civil War; however, by the 1870s he was well on his way in establishing a long and distinguished career as an independent opinion writer. He was not associated with any particular newspaper, rather his opinions were serially carried by many newspapers. As a result, he became a nationally recognized literary figure, thanks to his skills as both a novelist and an opinion writer.

Holding an affinity for western Maryland and seeking relief from the Washington, D.C. social scene, in his later years, Townsend purchased land in the Catoctin Mountains - atop the South Mountain battlefield and near Antietam Creek, the bloodiest battlefield of the Civil War - where he built a baronial estate, he called Gapland. For a time, the estate was quite the social scene, and carriages could be seen driving from the Capital on the way to Gapland, where Townsend would

---

entertain his guests with tall tales of his travels and experiences. Townsend's life took a turn with the loss of his wife in 1903; he seemed to age rapidly and died an invalid and near penniless during a visit with his daughter in New York on April 15, 1914, at the age of seventy-three. While the name of George Alfred Townsend has largely left the American vocabulary, the War Correspondents Arch, which Townsend spearheaded in the 1890s, remains standing, a final testament to Townsend and his fellow correspondents who, in their own way, tried to communicate the madness of those Civil War years.

Shortly after the end of the war, Townsend issued his memoir entitled "*The Campaigns of a Non-Combatant and his Romaunt Abroad during the War.*" The book was published in early 1866 and was one of the first memoirs by a war correspondent. Two chapters of the memoir were based on articles he wrote in England for *Cornhill Magazine*, "Campaigning with General Pope" and "Richmond and Washington during the War." Other excerpts were included in articles published in *Chamber's Journal*. The 1866 edition includes several chapters which fall outside the scope of Townsend's Civil War narrative and have been omitted from this revised edition. The memoir received little attention in the press and was soon overshadowed by the *New York Times* war correspondent William Swinton's *Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac* which was published the same year. Townsend's work went largely unnoticed until 1950 when The University of North Carolina Press published an edition entitled *Rustics in Rebellion: A Yankee Reporter on the Road to Richmond 1861 - 65*. Few changes were made to the original and no editorial footnotes were added to the 1950 edition.

The goal of this updated edition of Townsend's memoirs is not to alter the text of the original or even improve it but rather to introduce twenty-first-century readers to the engaging work of a young, ambitious correspondent living through the most important events of his lifetime. With that charge in mind, the narrative has some minor alterations for clarity. The everyday nineteenth-century use of "hither" and "thither" has been modified to modern use with brackets to designate a change. Current spelling usage has replaced nineteenth-century usages (i.e., stove-pipe, standard-bearer, defence and centre) without the distraction of brackets. The active voice is used for consistency, requiring the occasional rearrangement of minor word usage. Townsend's work was a contemporary one; as such, there is the occasional error, such as the statement that Stonewall Jackson's nickname was because of his bravery at Winchester instead of Manassas; obvious errors in the narrative are addressed in the footnotes.

The editor uses brackets to designate the names of dates and military units when they are not identified in the narrative. Townsend wrote dozens of dispatches to his parent newspapers during the period covered in his memoir. Although not identified by name, per the policy of the War Department, we can infer some of Townsend's dispatches based upon the location, dates and nature of the dispatch. Some of the memoir is verbatim lifted from these original dispatches. For clarity, the editor has referenced some dispatches within the footnotes when the identity of Townsend's hand is not in question.

The memoir has been revised and is presented in three parts. Part One follows Townsend's journey from his assignment to the Pennsylvania Reserves on March 13, 1862, until he witnesses the Battle of Malvern Hill from Harrison's Landing and escapes aboard a hospital transport on July 1, 1862. Part Two begins with Townsend's assignment to the Army of Virginia, his arrival in Washington, D.C., on July 12, 1862, and takes us to the Battle of Cedar Mountain on August 7, 1862. Finally, Part Three, written in a more contemporary hand than the other parts, concludes Townsend's war correspondence with a story of the Appomattox Campaign, focusing on Phil Sheridan's victory at Five Forks, and a visit to the ruined Confederate capital of Richmond.

The Townsend memoir is a product of the mid-nineteenth century and contains words and expresses views which may be racist or otherwise offensive; however, we recognize them in their original form without editing, redacting or deleting anything. We trust that scholars and the general public will accept this editing decision and recognize the historical importance of maintaining the integrity of the original work.

This is not a facsimile copy of the original work, the text has been updated with a modern Garamond font and supplemented with dozens of photographs and illustrations connected to the original. The captioned text and the editorial footnotes are the editor's alone and any errors are the part of the editor and not the originator of the work.

## INTRODUCTION

In the early part of 1863, while I was resident in London, — the first of the War Correspondents to go abroad, — I wrote, at the request of Mr. George Smith, publisher of the *Cornhill Magazine*, a series of chapters upon the Rebellion, thus introduced:

“Few wars have been so well chronicled, as that now desolating America. Its official narratives have been copious; the great newspapers of the land have been represented in all its campaigns; private enterprise has classified and illustrated its several events, and delegates of foreign countries have been allowed to mingle freely with its soldiery, and to observe and describe its battles. The pen and the camera have accompanied its bayonets, and there has not probably been any skirmish, however insignificant, but a score of zealous scribes have remarked and recorded it.

I have employed some leisure hours afforded me in Europe, to detail those parts of the struggle which I witnessed in a civil capacity. The Sketches which follow are entirely personal, and dwell less upon routine incidents, plans, and statistics, than upon those lighter phases of war which fall beneath the dignity of severe history and are seldom related. I have endeavored to reproduce not only the adventures, but the impressions of a novice, and I have described not merely the army and its operations, but the country invaded, and the people who inhabit it.

The most that I have hoped to do, is so to simplify a campaign that the reader may realize it as if he had beheld it, travelling at will, as I did, and with no greater interest than to see how fields were fought and won.”

I cannot hope that they will be received with the same favor, either here or abroad, as that which greeted their original publication. But no man ought to let the first four years of his majority slip away unrecorded. I would rather publish a tolerable book now than a possibly good one hereafter.

*George Alfred Townsend, 1866*





PART 1:  
“THIS IS NO PLACE FOR  
A CIVILIAN”  
MARCH 1862 - JULY 1862



PREVIOUS SPREAD: May 29, 1862. The 5th New Hampshire, reinforced by the 64th New York and the Irish Brigade, strengthening the Grapevine Bridge, named for its tortuous course across the Chickahomy River [*The Photographic History of the Civil War*, V. 2].

## CHAPTER 1

### The War Correspondent's First Day

Looking back over the four years of the war, and noting how indurated I have at last become, both in body and in emotion, I recall with a sigh that first morning [March 13] of my correspondentship when I set out so light-hearted and yet so anxious. It was in 186[2]. I was accompanied to the War Department by an attaché of the United States Senate. The new Secretary, Mr. Edwin M. Stanton,<sup>1</sup> referred me to a Mr. Sanford,<sup>2</sup> "Military Supervisor of Army Intelligence," and after a brief delay I was requested to sign a parole and duplicate, specifying my loyalty to the Federal Government, and my promise to publish nothing detrimental to its interests. I was then given a circular, which stated explicitly the kind of news termed contraband, and also a printed pass, filled in with my name, age, residence, and newspaper connection. The latter enjoined all guards to pass me in and out of camps; and authorized persons in Government employ to furnish me with information.

Our Washington Superintendent sent me a beast, and in compliment to what the animal might have been, called the same a horse. I wish to protest, in this record, against any such misnomer. The creature possessed no single equine element. Experience has satisfied me that horses stand on four legs; the horse in question stood upon three. Horses may either pace, trot, run, rack, or gallop; but mine made all the five movements at once. I think I may call his gait an eccentric stumble. That he had endurance I admit; for he survived perpetual beating and his beauty might have been apparent to an anatomist but would be scouted by the world at large. I asked, ruefully, if I was expected to go into battle so mounted; but

1 Edwin M. Stanton was named the Secretary of War on January 13, 1862 after the resignation of Simon Cameron. The Senate approved the nomination two days later.

2 An early proponent of the telegraph, Edward S. Sanford was the president of the American Telegraphic Company at the outbreak of the war. He was commissioned a Colonel of U.S. Volunteers and served in his official capacity as Military Supervisor of Telegraphic Messages.



The Chain Bridge, as it appeared during the Civil War, was the vital point of transportation between the capital and the Federal fortifications in Fairfax County. *Library of Congress*

was peremptorily forbidden, as a valuable property might be endangered thereby. I was assigned to the Pennsylvania Reserve Corps<sup>3</sup> in the anticipated advance, and my friend, the attaché, accompanied me to its rendezvous at Hunter's Mills.<sup>4</sup> We started at two o'clock and occupied an hour in passing the city limits. I calculated that, advancing at the same ratio, we should arrive in camp at noon the next day. We presented ludicrous figures to the grim sabremen that sat erect at street corners, and ladies at the windows of the dwellings smothered with suppressed laughter as we floundered along. My friend<sup>5</sup> had the better horse, but I was the

3 The Pennsylvania Reserves consisted of thirteen infantry regiments mustered in Pennsylvania in the spring of 1861. Officially designated as the 1st through 13th Pennsylvania Reserves, the regiments were also assigned state designations of the 30th through 42nd Pennsylvania Volunteers. The thirteen regiments were brigaded together until 1864. The first division commander was George A. McCall. Later commanders were John F. Reynolds, George G. Meade and Samuel W. Crawford.

4 Townsend's correspondence "The Onward Movement, Hunter's Mill, March 13" in *The Press*, March 17, 1862 details crossing the Potomac on March 12 and his arrival at Hunter's Mill later that same day.

5 In a 1863 article written for a British journal, Townsend identified his companion as Arthur Lumley, an artist for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *New York Illustrated*, although he misspells his name within the body of this narrative. See "A Romance of a Non-Combatant," *Chamber's Journal*, May 23, 1863.

better rider and if at any time I grew wrathful at my sorry plight, I had but to look at him and be happy again. He appeared to be riding on the neck of his beast, and when he attempted to deceive me with a smile, his face became horribly contorted. Directly his breeches worked above his boots, and his bare calves were objects of hopeless solicitude. Caricatures, rather than men, we toiled bruised through Georgetown, and falling in the wake of supply teams on the Leesburg turnpike, rode between the Potomac on one side and the dry bed of the canal on the other, till we came at last to Chain Bridge.

There was a grand view from the point of Little Falls above, where a line of foamy cataracts ridged the river, and the rocks towered gloomily on either hand, and of the city below, with its buildings of pure marble, and the yellow earthworks that crested Arlington Heights. The clouds over the Potomac were gorgeous in hue, but forests of melancholy pine clothed the sides of the hills, and the roar of the river made such beautiful monotone that I almost thought it could be translated to words. Our passes were now demanded by a fat, bareheaded officer, and while he panted through their contents, two privates crossed their bayonets before us.

“News?” he said, in the shortest remark of which he was capable. When assured that we had nothing to reveal, he seemed immeasurably relieved, and added — “Great labor, reading!” At this his face grew so dreadfully purple that I begged him to sit down, and tax himself with no further exertion. He wiped his forehead, in reply, gasping like a triton, and muttering the expressive direction, “right!” disappeared into a guard-box. The two privates winked as they removed their muskets, and we both laughed immoderately when out of hearing. Our backs were now turned to the Maryland shore, and jutting grimly from the hill before us, the black guns of Fort Ethan Allen pointed down the bridge. A double line of sharp abattis protected it from assault, and sentries walked lazily up and down the parapet. The colors hung against the mast in the dead calm, and the smoke curled straight upward from some log-huts within the fort. The wildness of the surrounding landscape was most remarkable. Within sight of the Capital of the Republic, the fox yet kept the covert, and the farms were few and far apart. It seemed to me that little had been done to clear the country of its primeval timber, and the war had accomplished more to give evidence of man and industry, than two centuries of occupation. A military road had been cut through the solid rocks here; and the original turnpike, which had been little more than a cart track, was now graded and macadamized. I passed multitudes of teams, struggling up the slopes, and the carcasses of mules littered every rod of the way. The profanity of

the teamsters was painfully apparent. I came unobserved upon one who was beating his beasts with a refinement of cruelty. He cursed each of them separately, swinging his long-lashed whip the while, and then damned the six in mass. He would have made a dutiful overseer. The soldiers had shown quite as little consideration for the residences along the way. I came to one dwelling where some pertinacious Vandal had even pried out the window-frames and imperiled his neck to tear out the roof-beams; a dead vulture was pinned over the door by pieces of broken bayonets.

“Langley’s,” — a few plank-houses, clustering around a tavern and a church, — is one of those settlements whose sounding names beguile the reader into an idea of their importance. A lonesome haunt in time of peace, it had lately been the winter quarters of fifteen thousand soldiers, and a multitude of log huts had grown up around it. I tied my horse to the window-shutter of a dwelling and picked my way over a slimy sidewalk to the rickety tavern-porch. Four or five privates lay here fast asleep, and the barroom was occupied by a bevy of young officers, who were emptying the contents of sundry pocket-flasks. Behind the bar sat a person with strongly marked Hebrew features, and a watchmaker was plying his avocation in a corner. Two great dogs crouched under a bench, and some highly colored portraits were nailed to the wall. The floor was bare, and some clothing and miscellaneous articles hung from beams in the ceiling.

“Is this your house?” I said to the Hebrew.

“I keepsh it now.”

“By right or by conquest?”

“By ze right of conquest,” he said, laughing; and at once proposed to sell me a bootjack and an India-rubber overcoat. I compromised upon a haversack, which he filled with sandwiches and sardines, and which I am bound to say fell apart in the course of the afternoon. The watchmaker was an enterprising young fellow, who had resigned his place in a large Broadway establishment, to speculate in cheap jewelry and do itinerant repairing. He says that he followed the “Army Paymasters, and sold numbers of watches, at good premiums, when the troops had money.” Soldiers, he informed me, were reckless spendthrifts; and the prey of sutlers and sharpers. When there was nothing at hand to purchase, they gambled away their wages, and most of them left the service penniless and in debt. He thought it perfectly legitimate to secure some silver while “going,” but complained that the value of his stock rendered him liable to theft and murder. “There are men in every regiment,” said he, “who would blow out my brains in any lonely place to plunder me of these watches.”

At this point, a young officer, in a fit of bacchanal laughter, staggered rather roughly against me.

“Begurpardon,” he said, with an unsteady bow, “never ran against person in life before.”

I smiled assuringly, but he appeared to think the offence unpardonable.

“Do asshu a, on honor of gentlemand officer, not in custom of behaving offensively. Azol leave it to my friends. Entirely due to injuries received at battle Drainesville.”

As the other gentlemen laughed loudly here, I took it for granted that my apologist had some personal hallucination relative to that engagement.

“What giggling for, Bob?” he said; “honor concerned in this matter, Will! Do asshu a, fell under Colonel’s horse, and Company A walked over small of my back.” The other officers were only less inebriated and most of them spoke boastfully of their personal prowess at Drainesville.<sup>6</sup> This was the only engagement in which the Pennsylvania Reserves had yet participated, and few officers that I met did not ascribe the victory entirely to their own individual gallantry. I inquired of these gentlemen the route to the new encampments of the Reserves. They lay five miles south of the turnpike, close to the Loudon and Hampshire Railroad, and along both sides of an unfrequented lane. They formed in this position the right wing of the Army of the Potomac and had been ordered to hold themselves in hourly readiness for an advance.

By this time, my friend S. came up, and leaving him to restore his mortified body, I crossed the road to the churchyard and peered through the open door into the edifice. The seats of painted pine had been covered with planks, and a sick man lay above every pew. At the ringing of my spurs in the threshold, some of the sufferers looked up through the red eyes of fever, and the faces of others were spectrally white. A few groaned as they turned with difficulty, and some shrank in pain from the glare of the light. Medicines were kept in the altar-place, and a doctor’s clerk was writing requisitions in the pulpit. The sickening smell of the hospital forbade me to enter, and walking across the trampled yard, I crept

6 Fought on December 20, 1861, the Battle of Drainesville was a small affair engaging a brigade-sized command under Brigadier General J.E.B. Stuart against an equally strengthened command of Pennsylvania Reserves under Brigadier General Edward Ord. Both commands were caught unexpected and a sharp firefight ensued resulting in three hundred total casualties for both sides. This was the first action in the east since the debacle at Ball’s Bluff in October and given that the Pennsylvania Reserves held the field - Stuart withdrew from the fray in the mid-afternoon - it was touted in the northern press as a resounding victory.

through a rent in the paling, and examined the huts in which the Reserves had passed the winter. They were built of logs, plastered with mud, and the roofs of some were thatched with straw. Each cabin was pierced for two or more windows; the beds were simply shelves or berths; a rough fireplace of stones and clay communicated with the wooden chimney; and the floors were in most cases damp and bare. Streets, fancifully designated, divided the settlement irregularly; but the tenements were now all deserted save one, where I found a whole family of “contrabands” or fugitive slaves. These wretched beings, seven in number, had escaped from a plantation in Albemarle County, and travelling stealthily by night, over two hundred miles of precipitous country, reached the Federal lines on the thirteenth day. The husband said that his name was “Jeems,” and that his wife was called “Kitty;” that his youngest boy had passed the mature age of eight months, and that the “big girl, Rosy,” was “twelve years Christmas comin’.” While the troops remained at Langley’s, the man was employed at seventy-five cents a week to attend to an officer’s horse. Kitty and Rose cooked and washed for soldiers, and the boys ran errands to Washington and return, — twenty-five miles! The eldest boy, Jefferson, had been given the use of a crippled team-horse, and traded in newspapers, but having confused ideas of the relative value of coins, his profits were only moderate. The nag died before the troops removed, and a sutler, under pretense of securing their passage to the North, disappeared with the little they had saved. They were quite destitute now, but looked to the future with no foreboding, and huddled together in the straw, made a picture of domestic felicity that impressed me greatly with the docility, contentment, and unflinching good humor of their dusky tribe. The eyes of the children were large and lustrous, and they revealed the clear pearls beneath their lips as they clung bashfully to their mother’s lap. The old lady was smoking a clay pipe; the man running over some castaway jackets and boots. I remarked particularly the broad shoulders and athletic arms of the woman, whose many childbirths had left no traces upon her comeliness. She asked me, wistfully: “Masser, how fur to de nawf?”

“A long way,” I said, “perhaps two hundred miles.”

“Lawd!” she said, buoyantly—“is dat all? Why, Jeems, couldn’t we foot it, honey?”

“You a most guv out before, ole ‘oman,” he replied, “got a good ruff over de head now. Guess de white massar won’t let um starve.”

I tossed some coppers to the children and gave each a sandwich.



“You get up dar, John Thomas!” called the man vigorously; “you tank de gentleman, Jefferson, boy! I wonda wha your manners is. Tank you, massar! know’d you was a gentleman, sar! Massar, is your family from ole Virginny?”

It was five o’clock when I rejoined S., and the greater part of our journey had yet to be made. I went at his creeping pace until courtesy yielded to impatience, when spurring my Pegasus vigorously, he fell into a bouncing amble and left the attaché far behind. My pass was again demanded above Langley’s by a man who ate apples as he examined it, and who was disposed to hold a long parley. I entered a region of scrub timber further on, and met with nothing human for four miles, at the end of which distance I reached Difficult Creek, flowing through a rocky ravine, and crossed by a military bridge of logs. Through the thick woods to the right, I heard the roar of the Potomac, and a fingerboard indicated that I was opposite Great Falls. Three or four dead horses lay at the roadside beyond the stream, and I recalled the place as the scene of a recent cavalry encounter. A cartridge-box and a torn felt hat lay close to the carcasses: I knew that some soul had gone hence to its account.

The road now kept to the left obliquely, and much of my ride was made musical by the stream. Darkness closed solemnly about me, with seven miles of the journey yet to accomplish, and as, at eight o’clock, I turned from the turnpike into a lonesome by-road, full of ruts, pools, and quicksand, a feeling of delicious uneasiness for the first time possessed me. Some owls hooted in the depth of the woods, and wild pigs, darting across the road, went crashing into the bushes. The phosphorescent bark of a blasted tree glimmered on a neighboring knoll, and as I halted at a rivulet to water my beast, I saw a solitary star floating down the ripples. Directly I came upon a clearing where the moonlight shone through the rents of a crumbling dwelling, and from the far distance broke the faint howl of farm dogs. A sense of insecurity that I would not for worlds have resigned, now tingled, now chilled my blood. At last, climbing a stony hill, the skies lay beneath me reddening with the flame of camps and flaring and falling alternately, like the beautiful Northern lights. I heard the ring of hoofs as I looked entranced, and in a twinkling, a body of horsemen dashed past me and disappeared. A little beyond, the road grew so thick that I could see nothing of my way; but trusting doubtfully to my horse, a deep challenge came directly from the thicket, and I saw the flash of a sabre, as I stammered a reply. Led to a cabin close at hand, my pass was examined by candlelight, and I learned that the nearest camp of the Reserves was only a mile farther on, and the regiment of which I was in quest about two miles distant. After another half hour, I reached Ord’s brigade, whose tents were



A post-war image of Colonel John H. Taggart. An officer of the 12th Pennsylvania, Taggart was familiar with Townsend from the newspaper business.

*Courtesy of ancestry.com*

pitched in a fine grove of oaks; the men talking, singing, and shouting, around open-air fires; and a battery of brass Napoleons unlimbered in front, pointing significantly to the West and South. For a mile and a half, I rode by the light of continuous camps, reaching at last the quarters of the [12th Pennsylvania], commanded by a former newspaper associate of mine [Colonel John H. Taggart]<sup>7</sup>, with whom I had gone itemizing, scores of times. His regiment had arrived only the same afternoon, and their tents

were not yet pitched. Their muskets were stacked along the roadside, and the men lay here and there wrapped in their blankets, and dozing around the fagots. The Colonel was asleep in a wagon, but roused up at the summons of his Adjutant, and greeting me warmly, directed the cook to prepare a supper of coffee and fried pork. Too hungry to feel the chafing of my sores and bruises, I fell to the oleaginous repast with my teeth and fingers, and eating ravenously, asked at last to be shown to my apartments. These consisted of a covered wagon, already occupied by four teamsters, and a blanket which had evidently been in close proximity to the hide of a horse. A man named "Coggle," being nudged by the Colonel, and

<sup>7</sup> Born in Georgetown, Maryland, in 1821, John H. Taggart held several publishing positions in Philadelphia including correspondence assignments with the *Sunday Mercury* and the *Philadelphia Press*. After the April 1861 call for volunteers, Taggart formed the Wayne Guards and served for fifteen months in the 12th Pennsylvania. He later served on a committee in charge of military officers assigned to colored regiments. After the war, President Johnson appointed him a collector in the Internal Revenue service.

---

requested to take other quarters, asked dolorously if it was time to turn out, and roared "woa," as if he had some consciousness of being kicked. When I asked for a pillow, the Colonel laughed, and I had an intuition that the man "Coggle" was looking at me in the darkness with intense disgust. The Colonel said that he had once put a man on double duty for placing his head on a snowball and warned me satirically that such luxuries were preposterous in the field. He recommended me not to catch cold if I could help it but said that people in camp commonly caught several colds at once and added grimly that if I wished to be shaved in the morning, there was a man close by, who had ground a sabre down to the nice edge of a razor, and who could be made to accommodate me. There were cracks in the bottom of the wagon, through which the cold came like knives, and I was allotted a space four feet in length, by three feet in width.

Being six feet in height, my relation to these Procrustean quarters was most embarrassing; but I doubled up, chattering, and lay my head on my arm. In a short time, I experienced a sensation akin to that of being guillotined, and sitting bolt upright, found the teamsters in the soundest of Lethean conditions. As the man next to me snored very loudly, I adopted the brilliant idea of making a pillow of his thigh, which answered my best expectations. I was aroused after a while by what I thought to be the violent hands of this person, but which, to my great chagrin, proved to be S., intent upon dividing my place with me. Resistance was useless. I submitted to martyrdom with due resignation, but half resolved to go home in the morning, and shun, for the future, the horrible romance of camps.