

# Preface

The author of this work enlisted at the age of *fifteen years*, and served through the war of the Rebellion. At the close of the war his regiment, with a few other volunteer regiments, was ordered to the Rocky Mountains to assist in protecting the frontier, guarding the overland stage line, running the mails through to the remote Northwest, and in protecting the Government posts along the North Platte river. During the winter of 1865 he was severely frozen while in active service in Wyoming, from which he has never recovered. He trusts that his little book will be read with interest by the old vets, of the late war, for whom he entertains in his heart a sincere love, which increases with his declining years.

Yours in F. C. L.,<sup>1</sup>

THE AUTHOR.



# 1

Westward Ho!—After Lee's Surrender—Troops en Route for the Plains—A Glance Backward—A Fearful Collision—An Ex-Rebel Captain the Cause—All our Horses Thrown from a High Trestle Work—A Large Number of Soldiers Killed.

Time passes rapidly by, and we are whirled on, on, passing milestone after milestone, until a greater part of the journey of life is passed. We look ahead, not heeding the stations as they are passed, until we are appalled at the irresistible speed at which we have been driven.

And now we attempt to review the journey, casting longing glances back over the road which fate has compelled us to travel. We count a score of milestones—yea, forty, sixty, it may be three score and ten—and we are warned that we are about to enter the Great Union Depot—the end of the journey of life.

As I sit down to write, my mind involuntarily wanders back to the dark days of the war for the Union. I review again the army of the Potomac. I seem to hear the tramp, tramp, tramp of tired feet. I hear again the iron hoofs of a legion of war horses, as they tread all through the long night over the stony street. I hear again the sound of musketry and the roar of battle. I see the smoke spreading over the battle field like a funeral veil. Then again I seem to hear the groans and sighs of wounded and dying men. I see them borne from the fatal field by tender hands. I hear their piteous prayers for mercy as they pass, mingled with the endearing words, of mother, sister, and of loved ones at home.

But now look! See, the battle is on! There they charge; on, on—now they are checked by a volley, only for one instant; their ranks are thinned. But no matter, on they charge, into the very jaws of death. Now the rebel lines are broken—they flee. The battle is ours. The air is rent with the shout of victory.

No pen can describe, no tongue can tell it. But now, after a lapse of fifteen years, in the far off distance, I seem to hear the dying echoes of the roar and din of a dozen battles. Again I recount hairbreadth escapes, long dreary marches by day and by night. Privations and hardships that can never be told. Camping at

night in dense snow storms or drenching rains, with nothing but the canopy of heaven as a shelter.

Then again I cross deep streams filled with floating ice, until the chilling waters reach the back of my tired and jaded horse.

In short, the scenes and privations, the bitter and sweet of over three years in the saddle, passed before my mind as though it were a dream of last night, or a tale that were told.

And now as I sit at my own fireside, surrounded by a loving wife and little children, I can scarcely realize that seventeen years have passed since then, and that I, who now love so well the quiet and peace of my own family circle, am the same boy of seventeen years ago—then so reckless of life, with nothing to care for—save my own country.

Passing thus hastily over an experience which would make material for a volume of interesting reading, and one such as almost any soldier could furnish, I come to the final end of the Rebellion.

The battle is fought and won, and now the boys, with glad hearts and proud spirits, are returning home. A great assemblage of the victorious armies is ordered to take place at Washington. For three long days brigade after brigade, division after division, corps after corps, marched down Pennsylvania avenue by platoons, passing the White House, where they were reviewed by President Johnson and Cabinet, and all the foreign ministers then in the United States.

This "Grand Review"<sup>1</sup> was one of the most magnificent spectacles ever seen in the world, and will always have a reserved seat in my memory as the grandest scene of my life.

My regiment was the Sixth West Virginia Veteran Cavalry, formerly the old Second and Third West Virginia Mounted Infantry. A large proportion of this regiment had enlisted at the "first call" and had "seen her through," as they expressed it. And when it became known that we were ordered across the plains to assist in squashing the hostile tribes of Indians then on the war path in Dakota, Wyoming and Montana, instead of being mustered out as were hundreds of regiments whose service had not been half so long and hard as ours, the wrath and indignation of some of the older men, who had family ties at home, knew no bounds. But with many of us younger boys the news was received with demonstrations of joy.

Visions of "scalps," wild "ponies," "buffalos," and love among the little "squaws" perhaps marriage among some of the dusky daughters of the Rocky Mountains. And then fighting Indians would be child's play compared with the stern realities of war through which we had just passed. All these and many other

pious thoughts filled our young minds until we really feared that the protests of the older members of the regiment might prevail and the order be countermanded.

Leaving Washington City about the 16th of June, 1865, with all our horses and equipments of war packed into a train of box and hog cars, via. the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad,<sup>2</sup> we found ourselves in full sail for the Great West, to engage in a new kind of warfare.

After being a few hours on the road we began to notice fresh signs of devastation and general ruin in many of the little and some of the large towns through which we passed.

"I'll bet my life," said one of the boys, "that a New York regiment has passed over this road within the past few days." Whisky shops were gutted, groceries and peanut stands were riddled, and in fact everything presented the appearance of having passed through a hurricane, or perhaps been shaken by an earthquake.

Our train stopped at Grafton,<sup>3</sup> where the storm seemed to have struck its hardest blow, and we asked a dejected looking man, who seemed to have forcibly retired from business, the cause of all the smashed up stores. "Don't ye know? Why, the Twenty-first New York Cavalry stopped here about fifteen minutes yesterday, and here it is. It shows for itself. But I reckon the Government will make it all right."<sup>4</sup>

And our train moved out, leaving the broken merchant cussing all soldiers in general and New York troops in particular. So then we learned for the first time that this "bummer"<sup>5</sup> regiment was before us, and that they, too, were en route for the plains. This was not cheering news for the boys, for we had a great contempt for this regiment, whose subsequent history I will detail further on.

The summer of 1864, '5 and '6 marked a period of unusual peril to the daring pioneers seeking homes in the Far West. Following upon the horrible massacres in Minnesota in 1863,<sup>6</sup> and the subsequent chastisements inflicted by the expeditions under Generals Sibley and Sully<sup>7</sup> in 1864, whereby the Indians were driven from the then western borders of civilization in Iowa and Minnesota, and the white settlements of Dakota, in the Missouri Valley, the great emigrant trails to Idaho and Montana became the scenes of fresh outrages, and from the wild and almost inaccessible nature of the country, pursuit and punishment was almost impossible.

Then the Government had been sorely taxed in her efforts to put down the Rebellion, and the red men of the plains had had their own way to a great extent. But now the war in the South had come to an end, and Uncle Sam turned his attention to the wild boys of the West, who had been so unruly while the "Great Father" was chastizing his subjects in the South.

Little did any of the four hundred men who composed all that was left of that once proud and magnificent regiment think of the hardships and perils that were in store for them in the land of the setting sun. Many who were of that little regiment died of scurvy, others were frozen to death in the mountains, while others were killed and their scalps now ornament the walls of the "tepe" of the noble red man.

But we go back to Parkersburg. Here we unshipped our stiff and hungry horses from their railroad prison, as we had done many times before. We crossed the Ohio and many of us were in our native State, for the first time for many months.

What a difference we found in the hospitality of Virginia and Ohio people! Talk of your boasted Virginia hospitality! Perhaps Virginia had had her stomach overloaded with troops, and the burden had made her sick of them. Be that as it may, we met with the very kindest of treatment all along the line of the M. and O. R.R.,<sup>8</sup> notwithstanding the aforesaid New York bummers had passed over the road just ahead of us, and had grossly insulted and mistreated the good people, who mistook them for a part of the Army of the Potomac, and wanted to treat them kindly.

At many of the towns along the road our train was stopped, where great kettles of hot coffee and bean soup until you couldn't rest (never turn a cold shoulder on bean soup, boys,) had been prepared, and thousands of pies and cords of ginger bread were lying in reserve for us. Our stomachs being entire strangers to the latter, we found some trouble in introducing the rich strangers, and more trouble in maintaining the new acquaintances. At any rate, some of the boys became, as they declared, "sea sick," while others asserted that in their "honest opinion they had been pizenized by Buckeyes." But I think now that the facts in the case were that pine top whisky,<sup>9</sup> bean soup, coffee, dried apple pies and ginger bread, thoroughly stirred up by the motion of the cars over a rough road, was a combination of delicacies never intended by nature to lay tranquilly on the craw of even a soldier. And unless that railroad company used those cars immediately after we vacated them for shipping hogs, they certainly lost money in that transportation of troops.

At Cincinnati we were joined by the Third Massachusetts Cavalry, Fourteenth Pennsylvania Cavalry, and Twenty-first New York Cavalry,<sup>10</sup> all destined for the seat of the Indian hostilities in the West, and under Major General Frank Wheaton.<sup>11</sup>

A night parade through the streets of the Queen City, then a camp during the remainder of the night on the streets, and next morning we were loaded into three trains bound for St. Louis via. the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad.

Had not a dreadful collision occurred near Carlisle, Ill.,<sup>12</sup> in which we lost several men and nearly all our horses, the trip would not be worth noticing.

Reader, have you ever witnessed a collision of railroad trains loaded with soldiers and all their munitions of war, together with several hundred horses? If not, don't pine for the spectacle. It is one of those things which it is easier to imagine than look upon.

Collins Station is a little village on the O. and M.R.R., and is situate three miles east of Carlisle, a thriving town on the same road.

It was eleven o'clock at night when our train halted at Collins Station to await orders. We were an extra train and running "out of time." The order soon came to run down to Carlisle and pass an east bound train lying on the switch.

About the same moment the conductor of the east bound train received an order to wait on the siding until our train would pass. He was told by the operator who gave him the order that the west bound train was loaded with "Yankee troops."

This conductor had but a few months before held a commission as captain in a Missouri rebel regiment, and of course still held a grudge against the men who had borne a part in wiping out his little Southern Confederacy. In fact, his treacherous heart yearned for revenge.

Here was such an opportunity as would never be afforded again. Stepping down to his engineer, he ordered him to run with all speed up to Collins Station, where he would pass an extra freight on the siding.

Immediately his train moved on to the main track, making all speed for Collins Station. So it will be seen that the two trains left the two stations about the same moment, each engineer thinking that he is to make good time, and that the other is waiting for him to pass.

Half-way between the towns is a trestle work a half-mile in length across a vast swamp. On this the collision occurred.

But I can better describe the scene by my own observation and personal experience. It was now midnight, and dark as Egypt. Nearly every man on our train was in the "land of repose." We were in box cars. Behind the train was passenger coach, in which the officers were stored. My company occupied the third car from the rear. The next car in advance of ours was filled with two companies. Then there were eight or ten cars immediately behind the engine filled with horses and equipage.

I had taken off my boots and made a pillow of them. We were "sardined" upon the floor of that car as compactly as was possible. No man could turn over without the consent of the whole squad, and then the order "right spoon" or "left spoon"<sup>13</sup> had first to be given, so that all turn at once, when a general flopping over followed, not, however, without a good deal of "cussing" by those who had to be "waked" in order to successfully execute the command.

Suddenly the shrill scream of a whistle is heard, then another—only two—in close succession. Then a terrific shock—a crash—a crash—then a dead halt. The very earth seems to quake and tremble. In an instant we are rushing to and fro in wild confusion. Nothing can be seen. Presently a side door is pushed open and a man leaps out into the darkness—down, down, he falls, sixty feet, into the marsh and among the logs that lie beneath us.

One glance out, and we see fire falling from the engine, and realize at a glance that we are upon a high bridge. The door is closed immediately. Now the hissing of steam, the dying groans and prayers of wounded and mangled men, the struggles and hard breathing of hundreds of horses are borne to our ears, and we begin to realize that a terrible accident has occurred.

Now the sound of voices is audible. Those who have escaped unhurt begin to cast about for some means of escape. The alarming fact that we were upon a high trestle was communicated one to another. Then the cry was raised that the bridge and wreck were on fire, and that the bridge would soon fall. This caused a stampede, and several men were hurt in the rush that followed. Every man on that bridge fully believed that the whole mass would go down together before we could possibly escape.

For the first time since the battle of Winchester<sup>14</sup> I tried with all my heart to feel religious. But I found that my desire to reach the “shore” at the east end of the bridge far out-weighed my longing to plant my feet firmly upon the shore of that “bourne from which no traveler ever does get back.” Perhaps it was because I realized that I was much nearer the earth than the heavenly land.

But while I was preparing to meet the end, which I thought would soon come, some of the boys seized their carbines, and with the butt ends commenced to smash in the end of the car. Soon a hole appeared, and in a twinkling the end of that car was demolished, and we were climbing to the roof. Running to the rear of the train we found several hundred men upon the top and inside the officers’ car. Here a dim lamp was procured, and by its light we commenced an extremely perilous trip back over the trestle work, not knowing how far or when the land would be reached.

Such a spectacle was never seen before nor since. In fact, it was too dark to be seen on that night. There were nearly four hundred of us—a general, colonel, lieutenant colonel, two majors, several captains and lieutenants—all together, astraddle of the two rails “crawfishing” it, for none dared to attempt to walk the ties in the darkness.

To add to our already embarrassing situation, a sudden gust of wind put an end to our light, and we found that we were in for the rest of the journey aided only by instinct. It was an hour of intense horror, which no pen can portray, no tongue can tell.



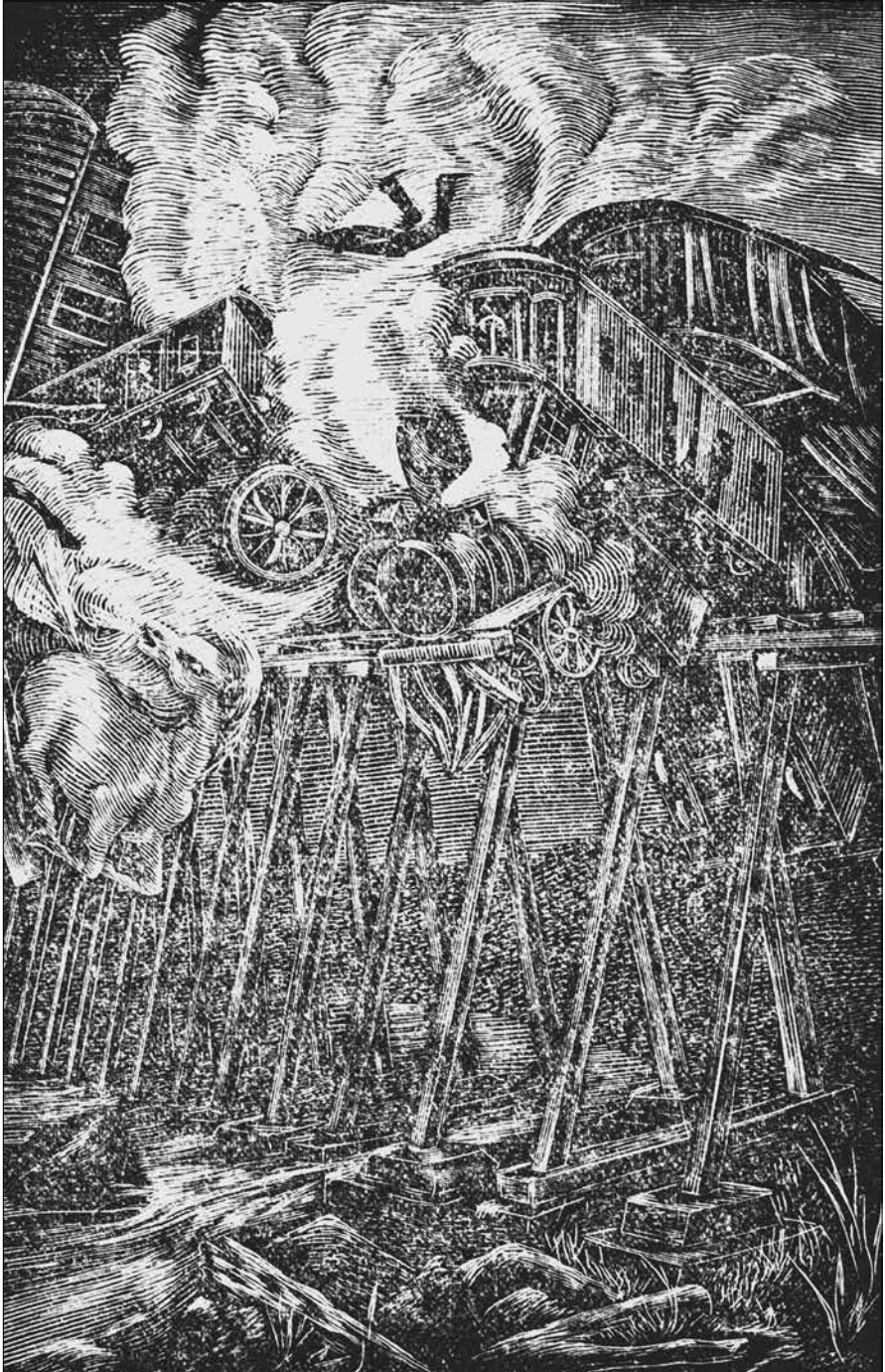


FIGURE 1.3. "A Crash. Then a Dead Halt." George H. Holliday, *On the Plains in '65* (1883), page 10. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago

This all occurred in less time than I could write two lines of this narrative.

We had proceeded in this way nearly a quarter of a mile, making as rapid strides as possible, when the advance sent back the glad tidings that land had been discovered, and soon we stepped with weak,<sup>15</sup> one by one, upon terra firma, with a fervent "thank God" for our safe delivery.

Now our thoughts are wholly turned upon the work before us of rescuing our unfortunate comrades. We now stand upon a high hill and cast our eyes in the direction of the wreck and try to scan the situation.

Our hearts are melted by the sounds which arise from the debris away down in the swamp below us. A bright light flashes up near the engines and reveals the surroundings. It is the beacon light to guide us to the rescue. Then a voice is heard: "Help! help! in God's name, help! The bridge is on fire!"

The burning embers fall down, down until the wreck beneath is ignited and a lurid light illuminates the terrible scene. We are now able to see our way, and we hasten down the embankment and are soon among the debris assisting the living and removing the dead. I remembered the man who jumped from the car when the collision occurred, and by the aid of a torch light we found him, in a half-stooping position—dead. He was a Sergeant by the name of Ashburn.<sup>16</sup>

In an hour after the accident the towns of Carlyle and Collins Station, and all the surrounding neighborhood, were depopulated and the people massed at the scene of the disaster. Such a throng of people had never before been gathered together in that section of the country, especially at midnight.

By the aid of a thousand willing hands, the flames were soon extinguished, the wounded cared for, and the dead gathered up.

The cry for help which had been heard came from the engineer<sup>17</sup> of our train. His legs were securely fastened between the tender and boiler, which had been jammed together, and by the light of the slowly burning bridge his pallid face could plainly be seen hanging from the cab window, and his now faint voice could be heard pleading for assistance. It was more than any man could stand, and several of the boys attempted to climb to him at the risk of their own lives, for it was thought that the whole structure would fall before morning.

After repeated efforts one of our men reached, and made every effort to release him, but, alas! to no purpose. He died while giving a message to be delivered to his young wife and child, and his white face dropped and hung lifeless by the window of his engine.

The fireman's<sup>18</sup> body had been severed, and his lower limbs and part of his body hung beneath the bridge by his suspenders—a ghastly sight for his wife to look upon when she arrived by a special train from St. Louis the next morning.

Underneath the trestle, on either side, were vast heaps of dead and crippled horses, together with the debris of eight cars which had conveyed them to the scene of their death. Fortunately for us the horse cars were in advance, and of course saved us from total destruction.

A forage car containing corn and hay and a half dozen men had gone with the wreck. These men were all killed.<sup>19</sup> The two engines seemed to have almost buried themselves in each other, while the rear cars of both trains were still upon the track.<sup>20</sup>

An enterprising photographer was early upon the spot, and photographed the wreck and sold about one thousand pictures at fifty cents each, as we afterwards learned.

Upon the trestle near our engine lay a few dead horses, upon which the bottom of a car securely rested. The sides had fallen from this car, dragging with them all the horses it contained—save one. There he stood like a marble statue. This horse belonged to a Sergeant Cabel,<sup>21</sup> who called him “Garibaldi.” Everybody knew this horse, and respected him for his noble qualities. Cabel loved him and was loved in turn by “Garibaldi.”

The old mustang had carried his master through two years of hardship, and was never known to flicker, and could live as long on wind and go as far in a week as any horse in the army of the Potomac. He had stood by his master in many tight places—waiting patiently in a fence corner for hours for his wayward master to get sober, on more than one occasion—and now, could Cabel desert him? Not much! He would listen to none of the propositions suggested “to put the horse out of his misery;” but hastened to Carlisle and soon returned with block and tackle, and by the aid of hundreds of volunteers, the old pony was lowered to the ground amidst the deafening shouts of eight thousand sympathetic souls. This old mustang has a further history, which I will relate further on.<sup>22</sup>

The wounded men were kindly taken care of by the good people of Carlisle, as indeed were all who wished to avail themselves of the proffered hospitality.<sup>23</sup> Engines were soon brought from Cincinnati and St. Louis, and by night the track was cleared. Out of the thirty-three horses in my company but one remained—“Garibaldi.”

Of course you ask what became of the rebel captain. I can't tell you. For a whole day we searched the woods and every corner in the town, but could gain no clew. One thing was evident, he never got on his train after giving his engineer his orders. Had we found him, his carcass would have dangled in the air beneath that fatal bridge.

Leaving our wounded to the tender care of the good people, and after burying our dead in sorrow, we embarked on another train for St. Louis.