

27 Sept 1956

Dear Paul:-

You might like it better if I write from time to time about Marie's copy of the Diary of Charles Kroff, Company "F", 11th Indiana Infantry.

It happens that I have two subsidiary interests in this diary. One is that our grandfather John Madaris fought through the Civil War as a Corporal in one of the Indiana Regiments. So there may be a paralleling of experiences. The other is that Kroff served in the Indiana Division, General Lew Wallace, the initial commander. Wallace is famous as the author of "Ben Hur". He was also territorial governor of New Mexico. Had no children but considered a nephew of his, as his heir. That nephew married a niece of Grand Mother Madaris's, and both went to live in New Mexico.

A pet coyote bit the couple and both died on their ranch. The husband wrote a letter in snatches to Grand mother about the death of his wife and his own sensations before he succumbed. The bodies were found a week or so later - the wife layed out in death and the husband on the floor where he succumbed. Lew Wallace

forwarded this letter from his nephew addressed to Grandmother with a few appropriate remarks of his own.

As to source materials, I own Grant's Memoirs (not very reliable), Sherman's Memoirs, Rawlings Memoirs (Grant's Chief of Staff, and the Memoirs of Lew Wallace.

It so happens that I made quite a careful study of the Battle for Fort Donelson, Kentucky, during a course in Methodology at the Command and General Staff School.

At the outbreak of the war, the Union had no militia. The Regular Army of the United States was less than 20,000 Officers and men, and the bulk of the officers had resigned to join the South. Also, quite a lot of arms and ammunition had been stored by the Secretary of War, under Buchanan, a Southern sympathizer, in Southern arsenals where it fell into the hands of the Confederacy.

Now there had been a war in 1846, the Mexican War, and so there were a few old soldiers about with military training. Taylor and Scott were the American Generals in this war. After it, Taylor

was elected President and died in office very shortly after election. Scott was the head of the Army at the time of Sumpter, although a very old man.

The North and South were equally aroused at the outbreak of war. The first calls for Volunteers were especially well answered. But here the problems began. Units were raised by States and there were very few individuals in the North with much military experience.

I can sympathize with Kroff in his recruit and basic training as related in his diary. It was a case of the blind leading the blind. Also, we had a very inadequate Sanitary Corps. and drugs were scarce. Conditioning of men was not thorough and the men took quite a long time learning how to look after themselves.

Kroff complains several times about no tents and bad weather. That's pretty much recruit talk.

I have read with great interest the diary account of the 11th Indiana Infantry at Fort Donelson.

I don't know whether you realize that the fight for Nashville Tennessee, the capital of that state, was made at Fort Donelson, Kentucky. Grant attempted to take it by investment using Fort's gun boats on the river.

When the troops left Fort Henry, the weather was warm and springlike: many of them left overcoats behind; next day a storm of sleet and snow came with a north wind and continued through two nights.

The land investiture by Grant's Army of 27,000 had McClelland's division on the right, holding the Nashville Road, Lew Wallace's in the center and C. F. Smith's on the left. Smith was a regular.

The Confederates attempted to break out of Fort Donelson and to recover the Nashville Road. McClelland was thrown back and nearly lost the road. Grant suddenly appearing, ordered all three Division Commanders to charge - and Smith effected a lodgement in the entrenchments of the enemy. The others advanced with vigor also and McClelland regained his original position and possession of the Nashville road.

Grant made arrangements for an assault at daybreak next morning. But, after Forrest escaped with his cavalry during the night and Pillow and Floyd of the Confederate Command fled by boat; General Simon Bolivar Buckner asked for an armistice to settle terms of capitulation in the early morning hours - and surrendered the Fort.

Grant took some 15,000 prisoners, 20,000 stands of arms, 48 pieces of artillery and 17 heavy guns.

Wallace relates in his book how Grant called on Mc Clelland and him to retake the Nashville Road. Mc Clelland told Wallace. "Grant is right. But, Wallace you know I am not ready to undertake it." Wallace understood Mc Clelland wanted him to do the job. The fortuitous arrival of the 11th Indiana (Kroff's regiment) and the 8th Missouri (mentioned by Kroff) gave Wallace the forces. So he had them attack. General Smith's division at about this time made its advance into the enemy entrenchments and so Wallace's forces succeeded.

One does not have to read much to see that Wallace had little use for Mc Clelland

professionally or as a man neither
do I. But he outlasted Wallace
as a Commander - In fact it was
after Champion Hill that Sherman
told Grant McClelland had to
be fired.

Fort Ponchartraine surrendered on 16 Feb
1862. Kroff's details of the attack
by his regiment are accurate. The
8th Missouri led the assault and took
the brunt of the enemy fire. I fear
the diarist's viewpoint is quite restricted.
But he does make you feel this battle
as the soldiers did, and he shows
you the state of training and the
lack of confidence the men had in
their Company officers. But why should
they have confidence? The officers
were elected, sometimes by bribes
and by barrels of whiskey for their
partisans.

Eric Fries