

General Fred Grant's Scare at Vicksburg

FEW of our generals began their experiences "at the front" as early as Major-General Frederick Dent Grant, who died recently in New York City. At the age of twelve, when most boys are either in school or playing baseball on vacant lots, young Grant was with his father before Vicksburg, where a hail of bullets were pouring into the Union lines, says the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*. And he was not hidden away behind heavy breastworks all the time either. He frequently disobeyed his father and exposed himself to the fire of the Confederates. On one occasion a bullet hit him in the leg and for a short time he was convinced that he had been mortally wounded. After the fight the Governor of Illinois promised the youngster a captaincy, and several years later a congressman introduced a bill to give him a war record. We read:

His father, too, was pleased with him. In his memoirs he said:

"On leaving Bruinsburg for the front I left my son Frederick, who had joined me a few weeks before, on one of the gunboats asleep, and hoped to get away without him until after Grand Gulf should fall into our hands, but on waking up he learned that I had gone, and being guided by the sound of the battle raging at Thompson's Hill—called the battle of Port Gibson—found his way to where I was. He had no horse to ride at the time, and I had no facilities for even preparing a meal. He therefore foraged round the best he could until we reached Grand Gulf."

General Grant also wrote that Fred, throughout the campaign and siege of Vicksburg, "caused no anxiety either to me or to his mother, who was at home. He looked out for himself and was in every battle of the campaign. His age, then not quite thirteen, enabled him to take in all he saw, and to retain a recollection of it that would not be possible in mature years."

It was in March, 1863, that little Fred Grant left school to join his father at the front, and very soon after getting there he had his baptism of fire. His father took him along on a nocturnal reconnoitering trip on the Mississippi. The two Grants were on a gunboat. The Confederate batteries promptly opened on her, and shells were soon bursting around over her bows in uncomfortable proximity to the veteran Union commander and his tender-foot boy. But the father smoked, just smoked—as he always did on almost every occasion in war and peace.

Young Grant took another gunboat trip later on, and had his first sight of the horrors of warfare. He saw dead and wounded sailors lying about, some badly mutilated, and the sight sickened him. Admiral Porter, tho badly wounded by a Confederate shell, had grit enough left to joke with the boy, and asked him if he wanted to stay aboard and take the place of a gunner who had been killed.

Little Grant at Vicksburg

But Fred had been sickened by the horrors he had seen, and diplomatically replied that he didn't think his papa would like him to join the Navy.

What he had seen on Porter's gunboat didn't make him want to give up and go home, however. That was proved a few days later. The fighting around Vicksburg had become so constant and hot that General Grant had forbidden Fred to go ashore. This command the boy deliberately disobeyed. Eluding the watchers on the gunboat to which he had been relegated, he made a landing, pushed farther and farther inland, and soon found himself in a genuine battle.

While the bullets were flying, some one yelled to him that his father was coming, and as the thought of the paternal wrath was more terrible to the boy than anything that the Confederates were doing, he slunk quietly away, and presently found himself at a field hospital.

What he saw there was more horrible than anything he had witnessed on Porter's gunboat. He felt worse than he ever had in his life, and crumpled up under a tree, utterly disgusted with war. As he sat there a cavalryman came galloping up and shouted:

"Look out! Your father's coming!"

Again the magic words struck terror to the boy's soul. He leapt to his feet to see General Grant a short distance away, calmly drinking coffee. When the father saw his disobedient son his remarks were few but effective. Nevertheless, the boy managed subsequently to get himself into danger more than once.

He managed to secure an enormous white horse, foraged around till he got a saddle for it, and galloped all over through the Union lines perched on his lofty eminence until he became quite celebrated among the soldiers.

His father, apparently finding it useless to keep him out of range of the Confederate fire, no longer interfered with him. Fred roamed where he pleased. For a good part of the time he got his meals at headquarters with his father and General Sherman and other Union chieftains, but he found the food they ate so abominable that he seceded to the ranks and shared the meals doled out to the common soldiers. As the latter were accustomed to eking out their rations by foraging on the sly, their cuisine was more to the schoolboy's liking.

One expedition of young Fred's lone-hand expeditions took him suddenly into the midst of a body of Confederates who were in retreat before their Union opponents. But the boy's blue uniform—which he had provided for himself somehow—was so covered with mud that the passing troops didn't notice it.

On another occasion young Grant walked among a lot of Confederate wounded, and one of them, feeling by no means kindly toward anything Northern, threatened to assassinate him. He made a quick exit. Shortly after he was much relieved to fall in with a squad of Union men, who recognized him and gave him three cheers.

Not long ago General Fred Grant wrote for the *New York World* his own recollections of the days before Vicksburg. He recounted how he was wounded, and many other exciting incidents. Here is what he said about it:

Little Grant at Vicksburg

We made an early start, and moved toward the Big Black River. When we halted near the railway bridge General Grant and his staff occupied the porch of a fine plantation-house, while "Pony," an orderly, and I went off to a pigeon-house to investigate some matters of high military importance—the procuring of a mess of squabs and other forage. Apparently the enemy thought as much of the squabs as we did, for they opened fire with some seventeen or eighteen guns, and made our neighborhood so hot that I soon followed "Pony's" example and beat a retreat.

Our troops were now moving on the enemy's line at a double-quick, and I became enthused with the spirit of the occasion. I galloped across a cotton-field and went over the enemy's works with our men. Following the retreating Confederates to the Big Black, I was watching some of them swim the river when a sharpshooter on the opposite bank fired at me and hit me in the leg. The wound was slight but very painful, and I suppose I was very pale, for Colonel Lagow came dashing up and asked what was the matter.

"I am killed!" I promptly said.

Perhaps because I was a boy he presumed to doubt my word, and said:

"Move your toes," which I did with success, upon which he recommended our hasty retreat. This was accomplished in good order.

On the 22d the great assault was made upon the fortifications of Vicksburg. Early in the day Generals Grant and Logan had a narrow escape from a shell which was fired directly down a ravine which they had just entered. They were unhurt, however, but were covered with yellow dirt thrown up by an explosion. On this day I saw a sight that will probably never again be witnessed in this country—an artillery battle extending over seven miles in length. Beneath the smoke of this cannonade the Army of the Tennessee could be seen moving to the assault under the enemy's lines, which became a sheet of fire from the forts and rifle-pits. At one point our flags were planted right at the base of the enemy's parapet.

An incident of the day was illustrative of youthful heroism and of my father's tender nature. A small boy, with blood streaming from a wound in his leg, came running up to where Father and Sherman stood and reported that his regiment was out of ammunition. Sherman was directing that some attention be paid to his wound, when the little fellow, finding himself fainting from loss of blood, gasped out, "Caliber 56!" as he was carried off to the rear. At this moment I observed that my father's eyes were filled with tears.

The wound in the leg which I had received early in the campaign now began to trouble me very much, and under Dr. Hewitt's express fears of having to amputate it I remained at headquarters. Because of this I saw a great deal of my father's methods, his marvelous attention to detail, and his cool self-possession. I also witnessed the devotion of his men to him and the enthusiasm with which they greeted "the Old Man," as they called him, when he passed along the lines.

One day during the siege of Vicksburg young Grant was with the skirmish-line of the Eighth Missouri regiment and a party of Northern visitors happened to be there. One of the visitors wanted a souvenir

Little Grant at Vicksburg

to take home with him and it was suggested that a hat with a bullet hole through it would be the very thing to get. One of the Eighth Missouri men remarked that the Confederates were always ready to shoot holes through the hats of persons behind the Union breastworks. The visitor, forgetting to put the hat on the end of a ramrod, held it up in his hand. The bullet pierced the hat all right, but it went through the hand too. The narrative continues:

The siege went on. Our parallels slowly but surely approached the doomed city. Deserters came in more frequently and reported the desperate condition of the garrison. There was a rumor that our troops would celebrate the Fourth of July by a grand storming of the works. Doubtless this rumor found its way into the beleaguered city, for on the third of July a flag of truce was reported. General Grant betrayed no excitement, but on the afternoon he rode out with his staff to a point opposite Fort Hill, I accompanying him. Soon a white flag appeared over the enemy's works. Father was immediately joined by the largest assemblage of general officers I had ever seen—the heroes of the most brilliant campaign and siege recorded in the history of the world. They had conquered and taken in their power the largest number of men, the greatest quantity of war materials and spoils, ever surrendered in battle.

After conversation General Grant dispatched a note to the defender of Vicksburg, and the group of officers dispersed. I remained in the tent, sitting on my little cot. Father sat at his table writing. Presently a messenger handed Father a note. He opened it, gave a sigh of relief, and said calmly, "Vicksburg has surrendered!" I was thus the first to hear the news officially announced of the fall of the Gibraltar of America. Filled with enthusiasm I ran out to spread the glad tidings. Officers rapidly assembled and there was a general rejoicing.

The next day—the glorious Fourth—as Father was starting for the front on the Jackson road, the booming of guns was heard, apparently on our right. General Grant looked vexed, and was about to order the arrest of General Steele, whom he supposed to be responsible, saying that he "ought to know better than to allow any triumphing over our conquered countrymen." When Steele himself rode up, the blame was definitely located on our left and the salutes were stopt. Soon after the Confederates were seen filing out of their works and stacking their arms—31,600 brave men surrendering 172 cannon and 60,000 muskets to the conquering Army of the Tennessee.

Passing through the city, where the Union flag had already been hoisted over the Court-house, General Grant went on board the *Benton*, where Admiral Porter congratulated him upon the victory. The next day he established headquarters at the house of a Mr. Lum, who soon became his warm friend, and during my father's last illness some of the most beautiful letters received by us were from members of this charming Vicksburg family.

I remember with the utmost interest my life in camp, and with deepest affection the men whom I met in the army. Much

Little Grant at Vicksburg

of my time was spent among the private soldiers, who were never too tired or too worn out to comfort and pet the boy of thirteen—the son of “the Old Man.” Young as I then was, my camp life was of such nature, I saw so much of the hardships, the self-denials, the sufferings and labors of both privates and officers, that my proudest moments are when I am recalling my associating with the old warriors of the Eastern and Western armies, the veteran comrades of my father.

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