The Army Sketch Book

AN ARTIST'S STORY OF THE WAR.

BY EDWIN FORBES,
SPECIAL ARTIST with the Armies in the field;
Author of "LIFE STUDIES OF THE GREAT ARMY;"
CENTENNIAL MEDAL—HIGHEST ART AWARD;
MEMBER OF THE FRENCH ETCHING CLUB,
ETC., ETC.
An Artist's Story of the Great War

BY EDWIN FORBES.

Special Artist with the Armies in the Field; Author of "Life Studies of the Great Army;" Centennial Exposition—Highest Art Award; Hon. Member of the London and of the French Etching Clubs, etc.

When the Civil War broke out, one of the most brilliant and famous editors of New York said, "This war will absorb public attention and be the ruin of the newspapers." On the contrary, it was the making of the newspapers. The correspondents in the capital and in the field leaped to their opportunity, and suddenly developed elements of quickness, sagacity and comprehension that were potent factors of public education in all that the war was.

Among those who won fame in that daring pursuit of information was a young artist whose graphic sketches and pictures in the very midst of the varied scenes of camp, march, hospital, bivouac and battlefield, made their reality familiar to the home public through the illustrated papers of the day, and whose accumulated material gave him in later years the means of vividly recalling those exciting times in a series of forty large etchings, published as "Life Studies of the Great Army."

It was no small honor to Edwin Forbes, when the International Art Commission at our Centennial Exposition of 1876 gave to him the highest award in their power, privately expressing their wonder that one man should have been able to produce such a splendid array of artistic plates; and this was followed by unsought honorary memberships of the foreign Etching Clubs.

That is perhaps of even more interest to us in these present days, is the strong and uniform witness of men to whom every phase of army life in that war was familiar, that Forbes' pictures are in very truth "life studies," and reproduce with startling realism the almost forgotten minutiae of the scenes they portray—the beauty, the fun, the tragedy and comedy, the brightness and dullness, the gayety and the toil, the infinite variety of picturesque fact in all arms of the service. The series of large etchings, of course, are on the United States War Office walls, but they are only a small part of his interesting material.
Grant in the Wilderness.
An Artist's Story of the Great War.

I.

AWAITING THE ATTACK.

A TRIP ALONG THE LINES DURING A BATTLE.

"Will you venture down to the front this morning?" asked my companion, who was a special newspaper correspondent. "Except a scattering skirmish fire, an occasional boom of cannon and crash of shell in the woods, matters seem quiet enough." Fighting had been in progress for two days, but now there was a lull.

So off we started, both intent on seeing life along the lines. As we rode toward the front we passed through fields of wheat and rye that had once waved in peace, but were now trampled and destroyed by the army's march. Moving further on, meeting several ambulances going to the rear and a number of wounded men limping toward the hospital, we soon approached the fortified lines and knew that danger was near. Sounds of skirmishing grew louder, and stray bullets whizzed across the field and raised clouds of dust where they struck the ground.

Leaving our horses in care of some infantry posted in reserve in a piece of woods, we advanced slowly toward the line of breastworks in the extreme front. We took all possible cover by creeping through woods and behind fences until we reached the line of redoubts and breastworks facing the enemy's position.

A non-combatant is strangely impressed at the quiet, nonchalant air of the men who hold important position on the line. If it were not for the sharp crack of skirmish fire in front one could almost imagine himself enjoying the delights of a summer camp, although the Napoleon and Parrot guns pointing through embrasures at intervals along the log-breastworks had an air of significance, and the smoke-begrimed muzzles and mud-covered wheels and carriages showed the severe service they had rendered.

We found many of the men asleep along the line; some were playing cards, and others attending to camp duties, such as washing clothes, etc. All seemed free from any care about what might occur; that was somebody else's business.

A sudden rattle of musketry in the woods in front caused a momentary stir and suggested an advance at any moment by the enemy, who was in strong force. We moved cautiously along the line in search of friends (infantry officers) whose brigade held the extreme front, and found them ensconced in a bit of woods on the further side of the hill, which partly protected them from the enemy's musketry fire; yet the skirmishers in front kept the minie balls flying through the bushes and snapping sharply against the pine trees.
Awaiting the Attack.

Seeking the shelter of a low earth-work, my friend and I smoked a pipe and discussed events, watching meanwhile the scenes along the line.

Within a short distance a party of artillerymen was building a bomb-proof roof in the hill-side as a refuge from the scorching fire of the enemy's guns, for the shell had cut down many of their comrades during the two days' conflict. Their method of procedure was to dig an opening into the hill, brace the sides and end, and cover the roof with logs. In many instances the shelter was covered with earth and sand, and thus rendered safer; one of these places would give refuge to about half a dozen men. Our position was not as pleasant or safety as secure as we might wish, for the enemy soon began to show signs of decided animation. The rattle of musketry became brisk, although the lines in front and the artillery opened fierce fire. My friend and I mutually agreed that our situation was becoming rather more than interesting, and that however much we might desire newspaper information, discretion was the better part of valor; so we made for the rear. In doing this we crossed the line of fire and were compelled to dodge the missiles of the gentlemen in gray, who sat in the tree-tops and leisurely popped away at any one sufficiently incautious to leave cover.

We were much relieved to reach our horses, which we soon mounted, and riding further to the rear found a position on a hill-top where we could rest in safety and watch the progress of the battle, which was now in full activity. The din and turmoil at the front had grown to be simply terrible. The continuous roll of musketry, the crash of guns and bursting of shells made an awful confusion, while the great clouds of smoke and dust that came up from the woods in front of the Union lines, and the fierce Indian yells of the Rebs as they leaped forward into battle, gave to sight and hearing a sickening realization of what it all meant.

After a time the firing of the combatants slackened; the clouds of smoke gradually disappeared, and, except for the sad story which could be gathered as the many wounded came to the rear, persuade one's self that so recently taken place. and wounded, and the relief that death had been accomplished quarters to learn, but were too plain for far too terrible for any
BEHIND THE BREASTWORKS.
WAITING THE ATTACK.
II.

ARTILLERY IN ACTION.

THE LIGHT BATTERY.

The manoeuvres and engagements of a great army offer no sight more thrilling than the dash and spirit of the field-artillery. In repose, also, the grouping of the men and horses is in itself a picture. I was sitting one morning by a battery of field-guns watching men take the horses to water and others groom the glossy sides, and was just thinking that they were rather thin from the hard work of the campaign when sudden orders came for a drill.

I followed to the parade-ground and was much interested in the picture and enjoyed greatly the excitement produced upon both men and horses as they manoeuvred to the shrill notes of the bugle. An hour of target practice followed, and I found great pleasure watching the bursting shells as they struck the target on the far off hill-side, and threw up a column of dust in the rear. On our return to camp the dinner-call had sounded and we did justice to the frugal meal of "hard-tack" and coffee.

We had idled away the afternoon, and I was sitting on a fence smoking my pipe when there came a distant rumbling. Observing the cumulus clouds above the distant mountain, I concluded that a thunder shower threatened; but I soon heard a rumbling louder and more regular than before; and now the captain came anxiously out of his tent, and the men gathered in groups and looked toward the south. Suddenly a mounted orderly with dust-covered clothing and foaming horse dashed down from headquarters, and, reining up before the captain, handed him an order.

Bustle and apparent confusion now prevailed. Word had been received that the enemy was advancing in strong force, that the fords of the Rapidan had been passed and that our cavalry had been pushed back; but the heavy cannonading told of the Union forces' stout resistance. Soon everything was in readiness, and the battery dashed along the road through clouds of dust, followed by infantry. On, on we went, passing quiet farm-houses whose inmates glanced furtively from the windows and whose cattle dashed about the barn-yard with tails high in air. We soon began to meet wounded soldiers coming to the rear, some on horseback, others in ambulances. Further on we met a strange group coming down the hill. Gray and ragged, with tattered blankets thrown over their shoulders and canteens clattering at their sides, it took but a moment's thought to conclude that they were Rebel prisoners. On close approach we found them to be well-formed, muscular fellows, with an evident air of contentment as though they had accepted their capture as a fortunate occurrence rather than a hardship. But we passed on towards the scene of action, and from the increasing sounds of the field-guns and the bursting of many shell we knew that the conflict was raging. An officer dashed suddenly up with an order from the commanding general, and in an instant the battery was turned off the road, driven at great speed through a waving rye-field and posted on a commanding hill. Thus near to the line of battle hundreds of wounded soldiers met our eye: some, who were able, hurrying to the rear, others more seriously wounded limping slowly and sighing with pain at every step.

Far off in the front, through dust and smoke I saw the Union line of infantry posted
along a length of fence, and on a long rolling ridge sweeping round to the right the musketry rolled heavily, and our line was evidently being sorely pressed. Reinforcements of infantry were sent in at intervals, and the crash and clanger of opposing guns increased in volume. Dense clouds of mingled dust and smoke arose and fierce yells filled the air as the Rebs charged our line in front, and soon a mass of men in gray, with flags flying through their lines, were seen advancing on our right-front. Then our battery came to the defense. The guns were loaded with canister and sighted, and with a roar that shook the earth were discharged. Again they were loaded, "double-shotted" with canister, and the captain's voice rang out, "Fire by battery! — Fire!" Immediately after, the great mass of men in gray seemed to melt from view, the flags sank, and the force that within so short a time had seemed irresistible had been repulsed with terrible loss of life.

Our battery soon advanced to a more commanding position and opened fire on one of the enemy's batteries that had made sad havoc along our line. Shells were dropped among their guns, and one fired a caisson which exploded with a tremendous crash, and so badly crippled the enemy's battery that it was compelled to retire from the fight. Shortly after, the struggle ended and the enemy retired from our front in defeat.

Our officers and men now buried the dead, cared for the wounded, and repaired as far as possible the damage done. Soon the moon came peacefully up through the smoke of battle, fires were lit, coffee and "hard-tack" were taken from the haversacks, and by the light of burning fence-rails the much needed food was taken. At tattoo, lights were put out; and now no sound broke the stillness save the tread of the sentinel at the guns, or the stamp of the artillery horses as they stood munching their corn or wheat.
BRINGING UP A BATTERY.
"JUST IN TIME!"
III.

A WEEK WITH THE CAVALRY.

OR picturesqueness of scene and romantic beauty the cavalry affords greater variety than any other part of army life. The brilliant array of gay trappings, the movements of the spirited horses, and the many incidents in camp life and on the march, combine to make a picture that time cannot efface from memory.

It was in the spring of 1862, while with the army of Gen. McDowell at Fredericksburg, that news came from the Shenandoah Valley of the defeat of Gen. Banks at Winchester by Stonewall Jackson, who was just then rising into fame. Orders came from Washington detailing Gen. Bayard’s cavalry and a large force of infantry to the Valley with the idea of intercepting the enemy before they could escape southward with plunder. The columns started, passing through Warrenton Station and Manassas, the cavalrymen riding and walking alternately. The main body reached Manassas on the second day and after a short rest pushed on through Thoroughfare Gap, a gorge in the Bull Run Mountains through which the Manassas Gap Railroad passes on its way to the Shenandoah Valley. Debouching into the London Valley, which lies between the Bull Run Mountains and the Blue Ridge, the column took a meandering course over hills and through intervals, being stared at in amazement by the inhabitants. The white people glared at us with lowering brows, but the negroes greeted us with furtive smiles and grimaces.

We passed through Manassas Gap without adventure, but when we arrived at Front Royal (in the Luray Valley, parallelising the Shenandoah), we found all the paraphernalia of war: columns of infantry were marching along the main street and groups of officers were seen scattered about the town. On a clear sunny morning we came in sight of the Shenandoah Valley, a fair land resting in peace and plenty, which one could not imagine was so soon to be made desolate. Intelligence was received that Jackson’s army was still in full retreat down the Valley and that his trains were passing through the town of Strasburg on the Valley Pike, about nine miles distant. Gen Bayard was ordered to push forward with the cavalry and make an attempt to capture the enemy’s wagon trains.

On reaching the ford of the Shenandoah River, where the railroad-bridge crossed it, we forded the stream, climbed the hill on the opposite bank, and sighted the town of Strasburg. Viewing the ground with field-glasses, we discovered the Confederates in full march toward the south. The trains of white-topped wagons were lumbering along the pikes; on the hill-tops near the town long lines of infantry and cavalry were marching; and north of the town, in the fort built by Gen. Banks, the enemy’s artillery was posted to guard the passage. Scouts were sent towards us to gather the significance of our appearance, but no further moves were made except the sending of a shell at one of our staff officers who ventured too near their lines.

While examining the enemy’s position with my glass, I discovered in an open field below the town, a body of men dressed in blue, drawn up in a line. Close inspection proved them to be Union prisoners that had been captured from Gen. Banks’ column. The poor fellows could see plainly our advance on the hill-top, and perhaps had hopes of rescue, but it would have been indiscreet on the part of Gen. Bayard to attack without infantry, so they
were doomed to further bondage. Quite remote in the distance beyond the retreating enemy, rise of smoke and boom of cannon told us that Frémont had come from West Virginia, but like ourselves, had arrived just too late to join forces in cutting off the enemy's retreat. His advance and our advance were not yet in strength enough to act. A small force of Union infantry came up late in the afternoon and fortified the railroad-bridge over the Shenandoah, but it was not until the next morning, when more of our troops had come up, that we were ordered to advance into the town where we met the advance of Frémont's column. The enemy meantime had escaped, passing between the divided Union forces.

On riding into the town of Strasburg, I saw on the porch of the village church a group of Union soldiers, among them a Zouave whom I had known before as one of Banks' body guard. He greeted me with a hearty hand-shake, and related how a part of the very prisoners I had seen through the field-glass had escaped. They had been placed for safe-keeping during the night in the village church, and taking advantage of the darkness a number had secreted themselves under the floor of the pulpit and escaped thus during the confusion of the retreat, the Rebel guards being too hurried to count them.

The pursuit of the Confederates was energetically continued by Frémont. He placed Bayard's cavalry in the advance with his own mounted force, who pressed the enemy's rear guard at every opportunity. At Mt. Jackson we found that the bridge over the North Fork of the Shenandoah had been burned by the enemy and were delayed until a pontoon could be laid. This was soon accomplished, and we crossed the river and pushed on to Harrisonburg, the cavalry skirmishing briskly on the way, and a field-battery occasionally brought into play. I had the pleasure of accompanying the "Jessie Scouts" (a Missouri company named after Gen. Frémont's wife) during this part of the march, and no days during my army life were as full of excitement and incident as those. We often were within short gun-shot of the enemy's rear-guard, but the scouts were utterly fearless of danger and seemed to live a charmed life; harrassing and skirmishing with the enemy, but elusive as the wind. Beyond the town of Harrisonburg the cavalry advance under Col. Percy Windham was ambuscaded through gross carelessness, being forced into the woods without precaution. I escaped the slaughter, however, by having stopped on the road-side to read a Richmond paper I had secured in the town. The ambushade was avenged in the afternoon, for a force of one hundred and ten infantry Bucktails under Col. Kane attacked Jackson's rear-guard under Gen. Ashby, and after a most desperate fight defeated them and killed their daring officer, but with a loss to the Bucktails of more than half their number.

Frémont finally caught the fleet-footed Jackson below Harrisonburg, fought an inconclusive battle with him at Cross Keys, and, owing to the disobedience of his orders to a brigadier of McDowell's force to burn the Shenandoah bridge in front of Jackson, he was mortified to have the Rebs slip off by night, cross the river, and burn the bridge behind them. As Jackson afterwards said to one of Frémont's officers captured in Pope's campaign, "If as good work had as Frémont did in the Shen would have got away for 

Altogether, it was a week that I passed with my desire for adventure, quarters during the remarching with the main
IV.
THE PONTOON TRAIN.
THE ENGINEERS.

Although perhaps not the most attractive, the Engineer Corps, which in all preparatory work is the most scientific, is in its special department one of the most necessary branches of the service of the great army in the field; and, while not generally engaged in the intense action of combat, its danger is not slight and its work is indispensable. The corps includes as its working force the sappers and miners and pontoniers, or bridge-builders. In time of peace their labors are of permanent importance, and in time of war they select and lay out the camp, construct or plan for the destruction of works of attack or defense, and have especial charge of the multiform duties connected with the movements of forces.

When an advance was to be made towards the enemy's line, the Engineer Corps often worked well to the front and removed with dispatch all obstacles that would impede the march. Bridges were rebuilt in a twinkling, and when a wide river was reached the work of laying pontoons was commenced. This was often accomplished under severe fire, such as no timid man would care to face.

One of the finest sights during the march of the great army was the pontoon train. The huge scows resting on their heavy wagons went tossing over the rough roads, pulled by six-mule teams which were urged on by frantic and sometimes profane drivers. Often a wagon would get stalled in the mud where a stream crossed the line of march. It would then be necessary to detach the teams from the rear pontoon wagons and with them make an effort to drag the stalled pontoon to solid ground. Sometimes they had to attach a long rope to the tongue of the wagon, upon which hundreds of infantrymen would seize, and help the mules to drag it from the mire.

On nearing a stream, a road was chosen where the approach to cross would not be too steep. The wagons were drawn near the bank and the pontoon boats were slid off from the rear of them into the water. This work was often accomplished under the enemy's fire from an opposite bank of the river; but our men worked with a will, loading the boats and pushing them off with a dash and a cheer to clear the enemy away.

Then the real work of building a bridge would begin. Boats would be pushed out, turned lengthwise with the current, and placed at regular intervals across the stream, anchored at both ends. Then a set of men would quickly attach stringers from boat to boat and another set would hurry forward with planks to place over them, thus forming a floor. In an incredibly short time the bridge would be completed and the main body of the army would march across amid great cheers. On reaching the bank the troops would deploy across the field and make lively work for the enemy if their passage had been opposed.

A night march over a bridge is highly picturesque and full of incidents of interest. Bright fires would blaze in the fields near the bridge-heads, and by the light the infantry and artillery would march across apparently in great confusion; but the great mass of men appearing so much out of order to a spectator were under complete control, and could be called immediately into rigid form at an officer's command. The ammunition-trains would make
great clatter in crossing, and mules would often get balky and delay progress. A sudden storm would produce great excitement; rain would pour in torrents and in a few hours a placid stream would become a raging torrent. Extra anchors and guy ropes had to be put out to prevent the bridge from being swept away, for the water would often rise above the banks and sweep around the approaches. At times the engineers’ efforts would avail nothing, for the bridge would break loose at one end or a part be forced from the line elsewhere. Then repairs had to be made; and no praise is too great for the brave men who went cheerfully to work and skillfully made good the damage.

When an army had crossed a pontoon-bridge and pressed on in pursuit of the enemy, the bridge would be taken apart, the boats and the tackle loaded on to the wagons, and the pontoon-train would in a few hours reach the head of the column again, in full readiness to facilitate further advance of the army. At times a railroad-bridge would be destroyed by the enemy’s rear guard and the engineers would obtain a duplicate bridge from the rear and quickly get it into place. These duplicate bridges speeded the army’s progress to such a degree that the Rebs made many jokes about them, and on one occasion when a Southern soldier was informed that a tunnel had been destroyed which would delay Sherman’s progress, he replied, “O no, it won’t, for Sherman carries duplicate tunnels with him.” When time did not admit of the use of a duplicate bridge, the engineers would hastily construct a bridge of trestle-work out of logs cut from adjacent woods.

I always found a night march with the Engineer Corps quite an exciting experience. The enemy’s rear guard seemed to find a malicious—though perhaps natural—pleasure in placing all manner of obstacles in the way of the Union advance. Trees were felled across the roads and impassable labyrinths of interwoven boughs would have to be cleared by the engineers’ axes.

The Engineer Corps was often called upon to lay out a line of breastworks to cover the front of the army from a surprise. It is not easy to realize how severe this labor was and how hard the soldiers worked at it. A ditch had first to be dug in the front with pick and spade; then the trees were felled by the axe, cut into lengths, and used as a backing for the bank of earth thrown up from the ditch. Traverses were built to protect men and guns from flanking fire, and the front covered by an abatis made of limbs of trees lying lengthwise with sharpened ends placed toward the enemy. Another fence which is sometimes placed in front of a fortified line is made by sharpening heavy logs and burying butts in the ground with points forward. This can be removed only by the axe, and if attempted under fire great loss of life is the result.

The Engineer Corps also has its share of destruction to make. Railroad-bridges are burned and canal-locks blown up, or the channel of a river is obstructed to prevent the enemy’s advance. These men were seldom idle; in winter camp or summer march there was always something for their well-trained heads and skilled hands to do. Their loss of life was not as great as in other branches of the service: but they were exposed to much hardship and frequent peril; they did a very noble and indispensable duty, and no army could avail much without their assistance.
SOME CRITICAL OPINIONS.

LTHOUGH the proof of the pudding is the eating, and the best way for a man to be satisfied of the truthfulness and beauty of these war-stories told to the eye is to see them, yet we all like to know what the best judges of fact and art think about such things. So highly are Forbes' sketches rated as historical data that a bill has been introduced into Congress to purchase his collection of pencilings for the Government archives of the War Department. Here are given a few brief expressions, which are to the point, concerning the "Studies."

President Grant,

Writing to Mr. Forbes about the "Life Studies," took pains to express his "appreciation of this valuable work of art."

U.S. Grant

General SHERMAN.

" I considered them most valuable; so much so, that I had already instructed my A. D. C. Colonel Audenried, to purchase the first set of proofs now on exhibition at the Centennial in Philadelphia, which set I design for the decoration of my new office in the War Department, when finished. I am sure that these pictures will recall to the survivors the memory of many scenes which are fading in the past."

Gen. Grant

General SHERIDAN.

"A capital reminder of the days when we were in the field against the enemies of the republic. I take great pleasure in testifying to their artistic excellence and accuracy."

Gen. Sheridan

HORACE BINNEY SARGENT,

Commander Dept. of Mass., Grand Army of the Republic.

"Very life-like and interesting. They vividly and in a most spirited manner recall the old scenes. For the halls of Grand Army Posts I can conceive of no more delightful decoration."

H. B. Sheridan

Rev. EDWARD EVERETT HALE, D.D.

South Cong'l Church, Boston.

"They have remarkable interest, both as works of art and as a memorial of the experience of thousands of our friends which we cannot afford to forget."

The BOSTON ADVERTISER.

"It is only necessary to commend the etchings as combining in an exceptional manner realistic representation of scenes peculiarly American, and historical as well, and to declare them worthy a place in any collection. Mr. Forbes has proved himself an artist of special talent, and his etchings rank him among the first in his profession."

The BOSTON TRANSCRIPT.

"A work creditable in the highest degree to American art, and a worthy commemoration of the great episode in American life which it so vividly illustrates. As etchings, simply, the collection will be sought for by amateurs of art, and not a few of the pictures will find a worthy place framed and hung beside the best examples of modern art."

The CENTURY MAGAZINE.

"The port-folio of etchings is one of the most authentic and valuable series of illustrations of the war. The etchings are well known to collectors and others."

The ARMY AND NAVY JOURNAL.

"They present the most perfect idea of the army of the American Rebellion that has yet been given to the public."

The NEW YORK HERALD.

"The subjects of these works have an appearance of nature, which is so seldom seen except in the sketches of artists, and Mr. Forbes' experience as an army artist corresponds for one of the New York illustrated papers gave him unusual opportunities for obtaining material for the work."

The CHRISTIAN UNION.

"No such series has ever been completed with a degree of skill sufficient to command the general attention of artists and connoisseurs. And these are no fancy sketches. As 'field artist.' Mr. Forbes followed the fortunes of the Union armies during their hardest and most important campaigns, and filled his sketch book with memoranda and finished drawings which now afford him an inexhaustible mine from which to make up a truthful record of the private soldier as he lived in camp or trench, in the bivouac or on the march, on foot or on horseback, in rain, sun, summer or winter."

Mr. THOMAS OLDHAM BARLOW.

Hon. Secretary London Etching Club.

"The etchings were very much admired by the members, and I am instructed to convey to you their best thanks. I have the pleasure to communicate to you that Mr. Redgrave, R.A., proposed you as a Foreign Honorary Member of the London Etching Club. Mr. Mills, R.A., seconded the proposition, and you were unanimously elected."

COPY OF CENTENNIAL AWARD.

The undersigned having examined the product herein described "Life Studies of the Great Army," respectfully recommend the same to the United States Centennial Commission for award, for the following reasons, viz: For Excellent Studies From Nature and Life, Circus in Tone, and Spirited Execution.

[Signed by the Ten Judges.]
Number Two of the "ARMY LIFE SERIES"

WILL CONTAIN

The Ever-Hungry Soldier,
Roadside Commissaries,
The Drummer Boys,
Winter Huts,
The Commissary's Headquarters,
Commissary Sergeant's Headquarters,
A Scouting Party,
On the Alert.

Do These Topics Interest You?

Show This to Your Comrades and Interest Them.