

# *Richmond Speaks:* *Voices from the Military Front*



Thank you for visiting the Richmond Civil War Visitor Center at the Tredegar Iron Works. The following is a transcript of the "Voices from the Military Front" in the order that they appear in the exhibit. For your convenience, we have duplicated the recorded passages below and included a short biography of each of these eyewitnesses to Civil War Richmond.

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Confederate Captain Allen of the 4th Georgia Battalion, writes to his wife in 1862:

June 22nd. My Dear Susie,

I dreamed last night of being at home with you and telling many things that occurred in our recent campaign. Would to God it were reality. I understand that we will move forward tomorrow and am somewhat impatient to be going, although we have not rested but three days. I hear different rumors about our destination. Some say Richmond. Some Fredericksburg. My dear, some thief went into my carpet sack and stole your ambrotype. It is truly mortifying to see how depraved and perfectly unmindful of all sense of honor men become in an army. You must be sure and write often and very long letters. . . .

--Captain Ujanirtus Cincinnatus Allen, 21st Georgia Infantry: Born in January 1839, Allen was orphaned at age three. He attended several small schools including Emory & Henry College in Virginia. Allen returned to the Old Dominion in the first year of the war, and was present at most of the war's major battles until he was fatally wounded during "Stonewall" Jackson's famous flank attack at Chancellorsville. Allen died May 8, 1863.

## *Voices from the Military Front continued*

Union Lieutenant **Charles B. Hayden** of the **2nd Michigan** writes to his family during the same spring:

June 27. If this should be the last news from me good bye all at home... Arthur will use what money I leave to complete his education... We all realize our situations but everyone is calm, cheerful and determined... If I fall it will be in vain for you to attempt to recover my body. Having spoken of the dark side I may say that we by no means acknowledge that we are not to be victorious... Arthur, my boy, if I should not see you again be of good cheer and console yourself with the thought that I died in a good cause... What tries my heart the worst is the disaster to the country if we are beaten. It is awful. Do not however despair. They will lose at least as many men as we & ours will be easier replaced...

July 1. At 2am we withdraw as quietly as possible and commence our retreat. Our dead and all the wounded who could not walk had to be left... At sunrise we came to a large, open undulating field in sight of James River. It was as beautiful a country as my eyes ever beheld.

--Lt. Charles B. Haydon, 2nd Michigan Infantry: A native Vermonter who had lived in southwestern Michigan most of his life, Haydon was 28 years old in 1862. He had graduated from the University of Michigan and practiced law at Kalamazoo before the war. He was wounded later in the war in Mississippi, and unexpectedly died of pneumonia in March 1864.

Union soldier **Theodore Smith** from New York writes to his father:

All last winter in camp you could hear nothing but "Going Down to Richmond." It was the song of every soldier through out the Potomac army. While we were at Alexandria my regiment serenaded General McClelland at his headquarters... The general came out and made a short speech, yes says he, we're going down to Richmond...

Well, after the labor of two months, the horrible sickness of thousands of our men poisoned in the swamps of the Chickihominy, the loss of probably more than ten thousand, he finds himself twenty five miles from the city with an army so small that it is not pretended that he can reach Richmond.

I want to see this war closed. There has been blood enough shed.

--Theodore Smith, 32nd New York Infantry: Born about 1839, and enlisted in the 32nd New York at Ithaca. Wounded at the Battle of Crampton's Gap during the Maryland Campaign, but survived the war and was mustered out in June 1863.



## *Voices from the Military Front continued*

Union Private Wilbur Fisk of the 2nd Vermont Volunteers writes from Gaines' Mill during the second Richmond campaign:

June 11. The breastwork against which I am leaning is not more than 200 yards from the enemy's lines and in front of us are skirmishers, and sharpshooters still nearer. This is what I call a charming place to sit and write letters. The music of these bullets puts a fellow in a pleasing vein for writing. Since I commence this one, a bullet has struck the breastwork behind me, spattering the dirt all over my sheet. The earth is like a pile of dust, and it dances before every breeze like Vermont snow in midwinter. Our clothes are filled with dust, and our coffee and everything else. We are near to where the famous battle of '62 was fought. Both armies have become inured to war since then... The other night after it was safely dark, the rebels jumped upon their breastworks and invited the Yankees to come on. They said it would take a long time for us to dig into Richmond. Our boys replied that we should dig them into Hell and walk into Richmond.

--Pvt. Wilbur Fisk, 2nd Vermont Infantry: Born 1839 in Sharon, Vermont. Mostly self educated, Fisk became a rural school teacher prewar, and a Kansas farmer and preacher after the war. He died in 1914 at Geneva, Kansas. Fisk's published war letters are a very famous source of first person Army of the Potomac material.

Confederate Adjutant Robert T. Coles, of the 4th Alabama Volunteer Infantry, remembers Cold Harbor:

The 4th Alabama was witness to many a field of carnage and blood, and imagined before we reached Cold Harbor that nothing could surpass the horrors and brutalities of cruel war, which we had for three and a half years been encountering, but this was the most horrible of any we had ever experienced. Under the rays of the hot June sun, the bodies of the fast decomposing dead sent over into our trenches a most sickening and nauseating stench, while the helpless and fly infested wounded were left to die a most horrible death... A flag of truce, on the 5th, appeared in our front, which was met by one of our staff officers, who returned bearing a unique proposal... which was, that, hereafter, when no battle is raging, either party be authorized to send unarmed men bearing litters to pick up their dead or wounded without being fired upon.

We sat on top of our breastworks and watched the numerous details as they busily worked at the gruesome task, but when the six hours allotted General Grant expired, the dead still remained thick upon the ground.

--Robert T. Coles, 4th Alabama Infantry: Born in Virginia in 1842, his 20th birthday fell during the week of the Seven Days Campaign. He grew up in Madison County, Alabama, and was wounded at Gaines's Mill. After the war, he farmed in Alabama and raised five children. He died in 1925.

## *Voices from the Military Front continued*

Confederate General Edward Porter Alexander remembers the fall of Richmond:

It was after sunrise of a bright morning when we turned to take our last look at the old city for which we had fought so long and so hard. It was a sad, a terrible and a solemn sight. I don't know that any moment in the whole war impressed me more deeply with all its stern realities than this.

The whole riverfront seemed to be in flames, amid which occasional heavy explosions were heard, and the black smoke spreading and hanging over the city seems to be full of dreadful portents.

I rode on with a distinctly heavy heart and with a peculiar sort of feeling of orphanage.

--General Edward Porter Alexander: Born in Georgia in 1835, and graduated from West Point in 1857. Alexander is credited with being the de facto chief of artillery for the Army of Northern Virginia during the final two years of the war. Afterward, he occupied himself as an engineer and author, and lived until 1910.

Garland H. White, a member of the 28th U.S. Colored Troops tells his story to the *Christian Recorder* of Philadelphia:

My regiment was among the first that entered Richmond. A vast multitude assembled on Broad Street, and I was aroused amid the shouts of ten thousand voices, and proclaimed for the first time in that city freedom to all mankind... In this mighty consternation I became so overcome with tears that I could not stand up.

Among the many broken-hearted mothers looking for their children was an aged woman, passing through the vast crowd of colored, inquiring for one by the name of Garland H. White, who had been sold from her when a small boy. Some of the boys soon found me. I was questioned as follows: What is your name, sir? What was your mother's name? Where was you born? Where was you sold from? What was the name of the man who bought you? This is your mother, Garland, whom you are now talking to, ... who has spent twenty years of grief about her son...

--Garland H. White, 28th United States Colored Troops: Born in 1829 in Hanover County, Virginia, White escaped from slavery in Georgia, and became a minister. He helped to recruit the 28th U. S. C. T.