

Winter Quarters

The following was taken from *Recollections of a Drummer Boy* by Harry M. Kieffer of the 150 Pennsylvania Volunteers

And now we had a busy time. We were to build winter quarters - a work for which we were poorly prepared, either by nature or by circumstance. Take any body of men out of civilized life, put them into the woods, to shift for themselves, and they are generally as helpless as children. As for ourselves, we were indeed "Babes in the Wood." At least half the regiment knew nothing of woodcraft, having never been accustomed to the use of the axe. It was a laughable site to see some of the men from the city

try to cut down a tree! Besides, we were poorly equipped. Axes were scarce, and worth their weight in gold. We had no "shelter tents." Most of us had "poncho" blankets; that is to say, a piece of oilcloth about five feet by four, with a slit down the middle. But we found our ponchos very poor coverings for our cabins; for the rain would run down through the unfortunate hole in the middle; and then, too, the men

needed their oilcloths when they went on picket, for which purpose they had been intended. The circumstance gave rise to frequent discussion that day: whether to use the poncho as a covering for the cabin, and get soaked on picket, or to save the poncho as a covering for the cabin with brushwood and clay? Some of us chose the alternative; others, the other; and as a result of this preference, together with our ignorance of woodcraft and the scarcity of axes, we produced on that hillside the oddest looking winter quarters a regiment ever built! Such an agglomeration of cabins was never seen before or since. I am positive no two cabins on all that hillside had the slightest resemblance to each other.

There, for instance, was a mess over in Company A, composed of men from the city. They had one kind of

cabin, an immense square structure of pine logs, about seven feet high, and covered over the top, first with brushwood, and then coated so heavily with clay that I am certain the roof must have been two feet thick at the least. It was hardly finished before some wag had nicknamed it "Fortress Monroe."

Then there was Ike Zellers, of our own company; he invented another style of architecture, or perhaps I should rather say he borrowed it from the Indians. Ike would have none of your flat-roofed concerns; he would build a wigwam. And so, marking out a huge circle, in the centre of which he erected a pole, and around the pole a great number of smaller poles, with one end on the circle

and the other end meeting in the common apex, covering this with brush, and the brush with clay, he made for himself a house that was quite warm, indeed, but one so fearfully gloomy, that within it was as dark at noon as at midnight. Ominous sounds came afterward from the dark recesses of "The Wigwam;" for we were a "skirmish regiment," and Ike was our bugler, and the way he tooted all day long, "Deploy to the right and left," "Rally by fours," and "Rally by

platoons," was suggestive of things yet to come.

Then there was my own tent, or cabin, if indeed I may dignify it with the name of either; for it was a cross between a house and a cave. Andy and I thought we would follow the advice of the Irishman, who, in order to raise his roof higher, dug his cellar deeper. We resolved to dig down some three feet; "and then, Harry, we'll log her up about two feet high, cover her with ponchos, and we'll have the finest cabin in the row!" It took us about three days to accomplish so stupendous an undertaking, during which time we slept at night under the bushes as best we could, and when our work was done, we moved in with great satisfaction. I remember the door of our house was a mystery to all visitors, as, indeed, it was to ourselves until we "got the hang of it," as Andy said. It was a hole about



two feet square, cut through one end of the log part of the cabin, and through it you had to crawl as best you could. If you put one leg in first, then the head, and then drew in the other leg after you, you were all right; but if, as visitors generally did, you put in your head first, you were obliged to crawl in on all fours in a most ungraceful and undignified fashion.

That was a queer-looking camp all through. If you went up to the top of the hill, where the colonel had his quarters, and looked down, a strange sight met your eyes. By the time the next winter came, however, we had learned

how to swing an axe, and we built ourselves winter quarters that reflected no little credit on our skill as experienced woodsmen. The last cabin we built--it was down in front of Petersburg--was a model of comfort and convenience: ten feet long by six wide and five high, made of clean pine logs straight as an arrow, and covered with shelter tents; a chimney at one end, and a comfortable bunk at the other; the inside walls covered with clean oat-bags, and the gable ends papered with pictures cut from illustrated papers; a mantelpiece, a table, a stool; and we were putting down a door of pine boards.



Company ...Front

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Happy Holidays

From the staff of the *Company ... Front*

Weed
John Dewey

Judy



