

Numedal society yearbook
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(can't find in regiment roster)

p. 48. My journey to America, and reminiscences of the Civil War, by Ole Nilsen Hegna.

I was born on the cotter's farm Hegna or Oselien in Nore, Numedal, on Nov. 19, 1840. I left my birthplace April 22, 1861 in order to seek a future home in America, where it was easier to achieve an independent position than in Norway. I used the Apostle's horse (i.e., walked- an idiom) until I reached Drammen. Here we paused three weeks since we had to wait for the ship to be readied, and to provide ourselves with provisions sufficient for two months, in case the voyage would take that long. I do not remember the date I left Drammen nor the captain's name, for the diary I kept has been taken from me. The ship's name was "Dansik" and it hailed from Larvik; it was however a poor sailing ship. It took us two weeks to reach Quebec. Sea sickness was not so bad during the first part of the voyage. A death occurred on board, a young widow died and was buried at sea. Upon arriving at Quebec we were examined by a doctor (as required by law) and the sanitary conditions were judged not very good. We lay outside Quebec a couple of days until we could get boat-passage up the St. Lawrence River to Montreal. That was very unfortunate for me, since I was out of money, food - and hat, which I had lost on the voyage over. One of the natives gave me a new straw hat, which delighted me - I was already half-American!

While we lay outside Quebec many of the passengers went on land, and many returned in the evening in an intoxicated condition. Among these was a giant Halling (man from Hallingdal) Torsten Dengjeruden. The first mate met him near the large hatchway midships. Dengjeruden grabbed the mate by both trouser legs and was going to toss him over his head off the hatchway, but then his fine cashmere trousers ripped in two and D. stood with the trouser legs, and the mate beside him in his underclothes. In the same instant four powerful sailors prepared to grab him, but the mate said that no one should touch him. He told D. to go to bed and sleep it off, and he would see about it in the morning. D obeyed the command. We were all up early the next morning to see the outcome. The mate and D were taken before the captain, who wanted to punish D, but the mate opposed that - and in a while the Halling began to sob like a whipped boy. He fell on his knees and thanked the mate, while offering to pay for the ruined trousers, but the mate refused payment and they acted like the best of friends.

We travelled up the canal to Detroit, and from there by railroad to Chicago. Here we were shoved in a large shack without a floor, where we were forced to stay for 24 hours in filthy conditions. Then we went on the train again until we came to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and late in the evening were carried over the Mississippi to McGregor, Iowa. We arrived there July 27 after about three months' journey from Drammen, Norway. We stayed overnight on the flood plain; then some of us ventured into the town. The captain who brought us over the ocean accompanied us this far. We who had been without money now had to settle with him. I owed him \$13 in travel fees for the journey on land.

Our first attempt now was to find a Norwegian with whom we could talk. Here we happened upon Ole Thompson from Opdal. He had lived in this country five years, and I recognized him. He lived in McGregor and was just going for his breakfast - he invited us to go with him, which was very welcome since we were starved as wolves. We were asked to the table, and among other courses there were boiled eggs. Since we had never eaten eggs this way, we speculated how we should proceed. My brother, who accompanied me on the journey, said to me, "You begin, Ole." I took a couple of eggs and cracked them, and began to eat them with the shells on. The woman or girl who waited on us broke out in laughter and soon everyone joined in. Now I had certainly done something foolish, I thought, and have little knowledge about how to eat eggs. We really could use a proper, beautiful meal, the first one in Clayton County, since we had not had a regular meal since we left Quebec. Just as we finished breakfast Lars Grønhovd from Wagner township came into town. He had walked through the night and arrived early in the morning to get help with the harvesting, so I and brother Even and a young girl who accompanied us from Norway

went with him to his home. That was more than twenty miles, and the day was rather warm - we walked the whole way. Late in the evening we arrived at Lars Grønhozd's house, sleepy and exhausted from the journey.

The next day we went out to harvest and bind wheat. We earned 50¢ a day. We were there a week and properly happy and pleased to have met such pleasant and comfortable people as Lars and his wife were. Mrs. Grønhozd had her husband buy some yards of drill-fabric with which she sewed a pair of trousers for me. I have always had a loving memory of these people and their goodness to me.

The day's wages were low at this time. I worked in various places during the fall and earned about \$20, and felt things were beginning to go very well. I worked for Americans and thus learned a little English as well, so I was well satisfied with America. I now had a chance to pay off my debt, which amounted to about \$22. Afterwards I worked around threshing for 25¢ a day. Pay was 50¢, but newcomers earned only half pay and even then had to take the worst jobs. I worked mostly for pleasant people.

When the weather turned cold I had to return to McGregor/ to get clothes for winter since those I had with from Norway were beginning to be worn out. Here I met many who intended to enlist in the war, which was all people talked about at this time. I and Tov T. Bakke, Adolph Olsen and Hans Laemm went over to Prairie du Chien to enlist. We waited there a few days and then met a Simunson who was recruiting for the 15th Wisconsin regiment. He became first lieutenant of Company F. We were sworn in (took an oath to the state of Wisconsin): that was Nov. 20, 1861. I had just finished my 20th year. Simunson travelled on to Decorah, and we spent the time waiting for him to return as well as we could. But since the railroad didn't extend further than Prairie du Chien, it took many weeks before Simunson returned. Therefore I went home to say goodbye to acquaintances and relatives in Clayton County, and since I was low on money and had a few outstanding accounts I wanted to collect them. After some questions and promises I resolved to go the 20 miles on foot. After I had gone a few miles I fell in with an American, but after having gone along with him awhile I noticed that he was going too far toward the east. It was clear but very cold. We came to a little hut along the way and warmed ourselves. Somewhat late in the night we reached his home, a little shanty. He had a wife and child: they were pleasant people. I slept well in the child's bed, without supper, until Sunday morning. I paid for bed and breakfast, using all my supply of Wisconsin money, a \$3 note. The man shook his head and said "Not good in Iowa, and so I forego payment." As I remember, the place was a little west of the newly established Monona.

I said goodbye to these pleasant people and I hurried to get home to my brother. There was no established route there, and I came through some low-lying flooded land, where I could walk on ice for a ways but it soon broke away and I waded to my knees. To go back was not to be thought of, I must go forward. But it was a cold bath. I thought: "If I die here in this mud puddle - then Wisconsin will be one soldier less, and I won't have the fun of playing with a uniform and a polished rifle." Nevertheless I cam through and in the afternoon came to Sevre Nelson's home where my brother and his wife were living. When I told of my tribulations, they laughed me down. They were dressed in Sunday clothes, and saw everything as fun - with a toddy glass before them. Since I was soaked, starving, and weary, I became angry and grabbed my hat to leave. But I wasn't allowed to do that - I was now treated with the best the house could provide, and stayed there until the morning. Then the leave-taking became fairly solemn.

Tov Bakke was also home to say goodbye and to participate in his brother's wedding, which took place in Tollefson, nearby, where St. Olaf now lies. On the way there I visited Lars Grønhozd and many others, and so arrived at the wedding-house late in the

evening. Here sat some drowsy, drunken men playing cards, and some others weren't sleeping very peacefully. I lay down in a corner on the floor and slept well enough. Early the next morning I and Tov Bakke had to return to McGregor. We accompanied a Søren Olson and an American. On the way to McGregor I met a Mr. L. who owed me \$3, but refused to pay me. Now he was drunk and made a coarse remark. "He had enough money," he said, "that he could buy the road from McGregor home if he wanted, but he would give me a beating." I said he must first pay me, then he could beat me as much as he wished. He threw money down in the snow and I picked it up. Mr. L. now attempted to get down from the wagon to carry out his promise. I took off my overcoat and stood ready to meet him. I was ready to say goodbye to him in a rather unpleasant manner, but those who were with L. held him back, whipped on the horses, and drove away. I had to run to catch up with my companions.

When we came to McGregor, Tov Bakke was tired, hungry and sleepy after the wedding trip and wanted to rest up. I went with them over to Prairie du Chien. Immediately afterwards Tov came, breathless, and wanted to beat up the newcomer, he said. I objected that it was bad for us to become enemies. We would both be in the war and should thus be friends. But nothing helped: I should be whipped, he said. Quickly as thought I tripped him and he fell on his back full-length. I grabbed his throat and stretched him out, thinking he could learn a little from a newcomer even. Then he became meek, begged forgiveness, and after a time we became better friends - a friendship which was longlasting. We shared brotherly bread-slices with each other while we were thousands of miles from home. In Prairie du Chien we met two other fellows and celebrated Christmas - that was my first Christmas in America.

A few days after New Year's Simunson returned with 18 young fellows from Decorah. We travelled to Camp Randall, Madison, Wis., and there met three other newcomers, the big T. Dengerud, an Ole Iverson, and a Swede called Andreas Berg. Here we were to be trained as soldiers. We served guard duty, marched around the town to show what kind of men the Norwegian regiment was made of. On Sunday we went to a large hall, where Pastor Clausen, who was to be our chaplain during the war, led services. Among other buildings and barracks there was a large jail, which was often visited - especially by soldiers from the 17th Wis. regiment, most of whom were Irish. One night alarm sounded, and we were called out with weapons - instructed to bring under control the "Irish hotel" as it was called. There was however no collision: the disagreement was compromised.

If one wanted to leave the camp he needed a pass, but many came back drunk and often brought a flask in their pockets. They were inspected and if anything was found it was confiscated. Many now began to hide their pocket flasks in their boots. That worked for a while, but soon a stop was put to that. They then thought of climbing over the plank fence and thus get out without a pass. They also cut a hole in a somewhat secluded part of the fence and pint flasks were smuggled into the eager, thirsty throats inside. This traffic was also stopped. It became more and more difficult to bring liquor in when everyone who was outside had to be back at a specified hour each evening.

We filled the whole time with military practice until the end of February when we received our new uniforms. On March 1 we received our pay, but they held one month's salary back. March 2 we went to the railroad station to go to Chicago. We were stopped on the way there by a terrible snowstorm, so we didn't arrive until late in the evening. We gathered in an open square, where Colonel Hegg welcomed us. A large Norwegian flag was presented to our regiment. Tears and laughter were all mixed up as men said goodbye to their relatives for the last time. We now went by train down to Cairo, Ill., where we waited a week, but had drill each day.

(Pages 54-70 describe the Civil War campaigns in which he participated.)

Page 70: last paragraph, bottom of the page.

We sailed down as ordered to Helena, Arkansas, but next down to New Orleans, Louisiana, then back to Helena. We arrived late after the battle was over. There was a battle between two regiments of our troops and a large army of General Forrest's cavalry, but the our troops had conquered. The wounded were brought into the town in large numbers. The town of Helena was a very unhealthy place. A large part of the buildings and sidewalks were on pillars in swampland, where a tributary stream emptied into the Mississippi. About one-half mile inland we had our camp. We had only guard duty to do. Our drinking water had to be carried from the Mississippi. When we had waited a month, many of our regiment were sick. A new regiment, which had been stationed at Fort Snelling, Minn., shrank by half within forty days. Our service time of 100 days was nearly over and all wished to go home. I was very sick and had nearly given up hope of recovering.

We now were ordered on a large ferryboat. Many had to be carried or helped and laid on the deck, and it was very hot. The next night our boat hit a large tree which had been submerged a long time. Our boat received a large hole below the waterline. The sick got up in a hurry! The boat swung around and the bow reached the shore before it sank, standing almost vertically. Many boats sailed past but none would take us on, so we lay there two days. Finally a boat came from New Orleans which took us to Cairo, Illinois. After some days of waiting there we went by railroad to Mattoon, Illinois. Here we were mustered out and given our pay. That was the end of October 1864. I was now healthy enough to get around a bit. Old men and women came from all directions to get their sons and take them home: but no one asked about me. Finally a man called J. Brakes came along, who had come to fetch a son who was in the war. He was from the same neighborhood where I was waiting. He had a horse and it took two days to get home. He had a very fine farm, but a not very good house.

I was quite sick and the doctor had to be fetched. Wilhelm, one of his (Brakes') boys was also sick. In a few weeks I was able to ride a horse part-way to the doctor. I gained strength little by little. The doctor said I shouldn't think of travelling farther. Yet I began to be homesick for Iowa and asked for the bill. He asked only \$4 for the medicine; for his work he wouldn't take anything. He said, "I would be ashamed my whole life if I would take payment from a man who had risked his life for our country and people."

The time of leave-taking came and it was solemn enough. Mr. Brakes had been like a father to me. He offered that I remain with him. "We have enough land," he said, "for three farms, and adjoining are 80 acres which could be bought for \$800. You have \$100 and I could take care of the rest. Yes, and if you want, you can have the very best thing I have in the house." (He meant his 18 year old daughter.) I was then in my 25th year. There were many reasons to accept his offer. He was sincere and upright, frank in his dealings. But I did not like the area: there were many Southern-sympathizing Democrats who would not resist an attack. After many conflicting thoughts I resolved to go on home, but the farewell was painful enough.

I arrived at the town five minutes too late to go on the mail wagon, which went only once a day. Despite my weak legs, I decided to walk the 18 miles. I had gone about five miles when I was tired and sat down to rest awhile. A man came along and offered to take me with him to town. I asked his price, but he wouldn't take anything from a Union soldier. I got to Olney that way, and from there travelled to Springfield, and from there to St. Louis, Missouri. I looked around the city a few days, riding in a trolley car pulled by horses. I travelled back to Springfield, then to Galena and over the Mississippi River to Dubuque and on to Strawberry Point. Here I had to wait until the mail wagon returned from Elkader. It had become warm, the snow was melting quickly, a rainstorm followed - and the result was that bridges were washed out. The mail

carrier lost one horse and went on horseback to Elkader. I didn't see how I could go on foot the sixteen miles, exhausted and weak as I was. I was in luck, however. When I had gone some miles I came to a farm where there was a soldier who had returned home. Here I had a good meal and was treated like a returned brother. A German drove by and I got a lift with him to Elkader, so luck followed me still.

This was Feb. 25, 1865. The town was in its infancy then. Now I had to discover if I could find a way to ride home the six miles to the Norwegian settlement. As I looked around, I heard someone speaking Norwegian, mixed with some English. I went out and hailed down my good friend L. B., whom I had the little encounter with on the McGregor road when I went to war. I recognized him, but he didn't recognize me. They had saddle horses so I would have to use my own legs if I wanted to get to the Norwegian settlement. When I had gone a mile they came along after me. Mr. L. recognized me now. He began to relate that he was married, had his own home, and the finest young woman in all of Clayton County as his wife: I must come and see her. With him was Ole Kjørren from Opdal, Numedal. When he heard who I was he jumped off his horse, took me like a lad and tossed me into the saddle, while he walked the whole way home. I stayed with him the night until Sunday morning, then left to find my own people.

What should I do now? I was not able to work. I had to take medicine daily to hold off the malarial fever. I went now to school through the spring. I worked a while in the summer. Next winter I went to school again. In spring 1867 I went along with some families which were going to Blooming Prairie, Mower County, Minn., where Father and Mother had taken a homestead. The first winter I was there I went to school for six months. Our pastor was old Pastor Clausen with whom I was acquainted since he had been our chaplain. He advised me to go to Decorah for school for six months, since I had taken a homestead near Blooming Prairie and was not able to be away a longer time. I wrote to Professor Larson but he responded that they did not accept students for less than three years.

I made my home with my parents for many years. My father, Nils Anderson, was born on Skjønnepladsen, Nore, Numedal. My mother, Margit Evensdatter Saeter, was from Nes, Hallingdal. They have both been dead for many years and rest in Blooming Prairie cemetery. In 1873 I moved to Clayton County, Iowa. In the spring of that year I married a widow from Madison, Wis., Julia Gunderfinger. She died Nov. 20, 1905. In spring 1906 I made a four-month visit to Norway. I also made a trip in 1914, visiting then for the first time the familiar places of my home community, among many other places. I returned to Gunder, where I live, on Sept. 16th of the same year. I am now 77 years old, have \$1.00 per day from Uncle Sam - enough for tobacco and coffee. Ole Nelson Hegna.

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18.

"With the best men I often found that
tears for the honourable man."

"all aboard!" the soldier takes a seat in the
waggon and - now they are on their way to the
battlefield! - Before we follow the regiment
further, we make a short visit to Camp Randall,
Camp Randall, Madison, Wis.

Camp R. is located in the town's westend, just
inside the town border. It is here that Dane County
holds its fair. Both before & after the
This place has been an exhibition place for farm products,
race animals, machinery, etc.; but during the
war it was used as camp & training camp.
By a loose estimate ab. 30 acres square & can
be described as a triangle, of which the one
corner facing the town is separated, is fenced in
with a hedge, which now is very scrawny; on the
northern side it has been filled in ab. 100 rods -
a good 100' - since the war. Since then many
long, whitewashed exhibition buildings have
been put up, which are close to their end; here
all is neglected.

150. 2nd page.

So from here it was that the brave "fifteenth" departed in bad weather that March morning to fight for the Union's army, for a great cause, for a great and glorious Fatherland.

Most of these were Norwegian farmers, of perhaps rather previous & their sons, farm boys & labourers - Officers as regulars, who after a few months training served with honour & glory in as bloody battles as any country's history can tell of.

Resumé of History.

The members of the "fifteenth" were Norwegians - with a few exceptions - and mostly from Wisconsin. They were sent to Camp Randall, where they were organized under Colonel Heg.

The regiment left the State March 2nd 1862 with orders to proceed to St. Louis in Missouri.

On the way to Chicago the train was delayed 5 hours by heavy snow that day. On arrival at 9 p.m. ^{some} not much fuss was made ab. the regiment. A Nora association gave it a lovely ^{problem}. After 3 hours stay proceeded to Alton. On this trip regular Stark Farson, who probably had a hangover, went out on the platform & fell off. He was thought killed, but after a couple of months S. G. returned to the regiment.

Ab. 5 p.m. train arr. at Alton, & the soldiers immediately boarded the steamer "City of Alton" & a.m. proceeded down the Mississippi to

21/ St. Louis.

Col. Heg had orders to report to Gen. Halleck & was by him ordered to board the steamer "^{Continental}" for Bird's Point in Missouri. The soldiers had to sleep on deck, it was cold, no fire, they were cold; but they wanted to have some fun anyway, & when the ship came close to a village, where the resident collected on the shore wearing hats & blankets, they raised the Norwegian flag given them in Chicago. Hats & blankets came down; the village people did not know what to think, not any more hurrahs till the Regiment came ashore & explained, & then it became lively.

arr. 5th a.m. Bird's Pt., above Cairo. Here they were quite well off, good barracks, now empty as few troops were left.

Col. Heg, who was senior officer, immediately took the Command. - The 14th Foot came down the Miss. with the cannon vessels & 6 (7?) Company of the Regiment boarded a transport to go with him & take part in occupation of Isle No. 10, while the remaining Companies stayed behind in the garrison under Major Rise.

Island No. 10 was a fixed point in the Miss. at 50 m. below Cairo. The island was quite small, perhaps 200 acres. There were several batteries, but the main defence was on the Tennessee side coast.

THE FIFTEENTH WISCONSIN

By Kristofer Janson

Translated by Harry T. Cleven

A HISTORICAL NOVEL

PUBLISHED 1837 IN COPENHAGEN

FROM NAHA ST. OLAF COLLEGE

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