

Documents

An Indiana Doctor Marches With Sherman: The Diary of James Comfort Patten¹

*Robert G. Athearn**

On April 12, 1864, Dr. James Comfort Patten, of Princeton, Indiana, received the commission of Assistant Surgeon of the 58th Indiana Volunteers. His training and qualifications consisted of two years' study at the Ohio Medical College (1847-1849) followed by fifteen years of practice.

Immediately after the Civil War, Patten studied at the Evansville Medical College, in his home state; upon graduation he resumed practice at Princeton. He later moved to Francisco, residing there until his death in 1903.²

As soon as the thirty-eight year old doctor received his military commission, he set off to join his regiment.³ Because of a series of delays and misdirections, which amounted to a comedy of errors, he was unable to find it until the end of the month of April. On May 2, he wrote from Chattanooga: "I have at last succeeded in unwinding sufficient red tape to get mustered into the service." The delay had cost him half a month's pay.

The 58th Indiana was attached to the Seventeenth Army Corps commanded by Major General Frank P. Blair, Jr. The regiment was a part of the "Left Wing" of the Corps, under the command of Major General Henry W. Slocum, made up of the 58th Indiana Pontoniers and the 1st Michigan Engineers. The Indiana regiment's work in bridging streams by means of portable canvas pontoons brought praise from the Chief Engineer of the Military Division of the Mississippi, who wrote of the two pontoon trains in charge of the 58th

* Robert G. Athearn is Associate Professor of History at the University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado.

¹ The James Comfort Patten diary manuscript is in the possession of Lewis B. Patten, Denver, Colorado.

² Patten was born near Columbia, Tennessee, on March 2, 1826, and died on February 19, 1903. Princeton *Clarion*, February 20, 1903.

³ In September, 1861, a number of Princeton citizens sent a petition to Governor Oliver P. Morton, asking permission to raise a volunteer regiment. The request was favorably received and the number assigned to the new regiment was the 58th Indiana.

Indiana Volunteers and the First Missouri Engineers: "Their efficiency became a subject of remark throughout the army."⁴

On May 5, the regiment moved toward Ringgold, Georgia, in the general movement on Atlanta. Dr. Patten, working under Dr. Samuel E. Holtzman, whose recent promotion had made a place for Patten in the organization, now began his active military experience. General William T. Sherman's army was in Marietta, Georgia, and the giant pincers maneuver which would end the war was fully under way by July 4, 1864, when the diary begins:

July 4th [1864] Moved into Marietta and our regt camped in the spacious front yard of one of the Aristocratic mansions of the place. There were many fine shade trees and altogether it was a very pleasant camp . . . Marietta is a very fine place a sort of headquarters for the aristocracy of this part of Ga. It is laid off in large lots with plenty of shade and a great deal of fine shrubbery and flowers in abundance and fine dwellings the business houses are also very good. The State Military College of Ga. is located here. It is a very fine looking establishment seen from the outside, and our men say that the prospect from the top is grand and beautiful . . . We only spent one night in this place.

[During the next few days the diarist was on the march, toward the Chattahoochee River. His notes simply record the distances covered.]

July 10th Roused up at half past two and got Breakfast and started on the march about noon we reached Soap Creek near where it runs into the Chattahoochee. Here we put together some boats and launched them in the creek . . . While the men were putting the boats together [Private] Jos Wilson tried to make some coffee away back half a mile in the rear and as far to the right. But our smoke soon drew the attention of the enemy, and the explosion of a shell not far off gave us notice to quit. We were too hungry to give it up so, and so after a bit another shell repeated the warning and was immediately followed by an order from our Brigade Commander to put out our fires, of course it was done and we had to rest content with crackers and raw meat. But hunger is a good sauce and we ate it with a good relish . . .

⁴ Captain Orlando M. Poe to Brigadier General R. Delafield, December 26, 1864, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (70 vols., Washington, 1880-1901), Series 1, XLIV (1893), 58.

fall backwards and another row of stakes presented when he tried again to climb with the same result. Our works and those of the rebs were in some places but a few yards apart. Truly the Spade wins more Battles than the sword. We got our dinner and then marched on (having received the first mails for ten days) for the railroad bridge which we reached after an absence of twenty two days

Sept. 8th I suppose we will stay here for a good while for we are building shops and storehouse for the forage and commissary store and are likewise very busy putting up huts for quarters.¹⁰ I went round the fortifications here today. They are pretty extensive and very strong and well planned, so far as I have been able to judge of such matters. I notice that they were so arranged that they cannot be raked from any outside position whatever.

Sept 9th Nothing remarkable today except an order of Col Buel breaking up most of the officers messes, by ordering that in future no private or non commissioned officer should mess with any commissioned officer. The order aroused considerable indignation among the Officers, as it was understood to be a quiet way of charging them with living on other men's rations, a charge that they are not disposed to submit to in silence, especially coming from a man whose record is not as immaculate as snow—*not quite*. And our worthy Col who would be a Brigadier may perhaps find that he has stirred up a hornets nest that he will find hard to settle. The men are busy cleaning up camp and making preparations for a long stay. Some of them are building comfortable shanties that would do very well for winter quarters.¹¹

Sept. 11th Sunday. Had preaching by Bryant who gave us a pretty good discourse. It is a lovely day rather hot but still pleasant. I sat in the shade on a pine box and listened to the discourse as well as I could but somehow I would still catch my mind running off to the church in Princeton and

¹⁰ "The line officers usually have huts, covered with condemned boat canvas. This is dirty, from long use beneath the surface of the water, but it is water proof. The line also has a number of cook shanties. Usually, there are from four to six officers in a mess." Hight, *History of the Fifty-Eighth Regiment*, 367.

¹¹ In September, 1864, Captain Alfred Lacey Hough wrote: "The houses on the outskirts of the city are being torn down to furnish lumber for the soldiers' huts, and I could not but think of how little these people knew what war would be when they commenced it." Alfred Lacey Hough to Mary Hough, September 21, 1864, Hough Papers.

Sept 2nd Again ordered forward, and heard that we had the rebel army cut in two. We went on, occasionally meeting trains of ambulances, with wounded men going to the hospitals. We crossed Flint River near its head where it is not more than twenty feet wide and soon came to the Battle ground.⁶ Our dead and wounded were all taken away but a detail of our men were busy burying the rebels and had most of it done. Our line of march did not take us over the worst of the field and I did not see any of them. Some of the men passed where the burying party were at work about a hundred yards to our right and their description of the scene is sufficient the rebels at one time made an attempt to charge and storm our batteries and rifle pits. This did not of course last many minutes and occasioned but little loss to us. But the slaughter on their side was awful. It is said that nine hundred of them lay in a space of less than two acres. A little further on we came to Jonesborough and went through, the band playing hail columbia, a tune that I suppose the inhabitants had not been much used to of late. Our men had torn up the r.r. here very badly. It has been a very pretty town but there is a look of Desolation on it now that is pitiful Some of the people were there but many had left. On the far end of the town we saw the ruins of a large mill We went on down the r.r. till we passed a mile post marked 25 miles to Atlanta and 78 miles to Macon, we went on a half a mile, and turned into an old field and camped

Sept 4th (Sunday). Started at noon and marched back through Jonesborough, on to rough and ready station where we camped in a field, and the inevitable rail was as usual called into requisition, softened in my case as usual by the down of the Georgia Goose, alias pine brush. While I was plucking my goose an order came up to me and told me that Colonel Buel⁷ wished me to see a sick woman in a house a little way back. I went of course, and found her very low with typhoid fever, of twenty one days standing. Her daughter informed me that they lived in Atlanta but that our shelling had driven them out and they came there and were unable to get her back, on account of her sickness. Some Dr. had been attending her, but he was now gone. I gave her

⁶ The Battle of Jonesboro which decided the fate of Atlanta.

⁷ Colonel George P. Buell, commanding officer of the 58th Indiana.

some medicine but advised the girl not to promise herself too much as the prospect was by no means favorable. I did not see her again for we were called up at three o'clock next morning and were on the road at four.⁸

The r.r. from Jonesborough to this station is utterly ruined. The ties burned and the rails bent I saw one rail bent entirely round a tree of course the heat of the rail would kill the tree but if it had not the compression would have done so before many years. I saw another bent in the same way round a telegraph pole.

Sept 5th Our men are rejoicing in the fact that this is the day of the draft and hoping that some of their copperhead neighbors may draw their fortunes today in uncle Sam's lottery, where all have a chance and don't have to pay anything for their tickets. I hope some men I could name may have to come out. I want to see them with a gun on their shoulder. They have been wearing the uniform long enough and doing nothing for their country and I know that nothing short of a draft will bring out men who have no more spunk than to abuse the soldier and the cause he is fighting for while at the same time they will wear his cast off clothes. I wonder how they will stand fire. I would like very much to see them tried. We marched on till we came in sight of the rebel works around Atlanta. Here I saw the most pitiful sight I have ever yet witnessed. A young looking woman was at work by the roadside skinning a cow that had been killed and a little girl some six or seven years old had a piece of the raw bloody meat in both hands devouring it with the eagerness of a starving dog. I could see the leaders in this thing starve but the poor children—.

We soon came in sight of Atlanta and here all of a sudden Col. Buel concluded that we must begin to put on style and show off. He began to scold because the men had their coats off. He wore a light linen one himself. The men naturally did not like it to be abused so unreasonably, when they were not in fault, and so when showing off time came they became very awkward. One who did not know might have thought

⁸ "Many of the country people call on Dr. Patten for medicine and medical attention," wrote Chaplain Hight, toward the end of September. "It is unsafe for him to be riding about the country, hence he refuses all calls for visiting outside of camp. He gives out medicines, although his supply is small." Hight, *History of the Fifty-Eighth Regiment*, 373.

them not half drilled. The Col looking along the line had his anger stirred by the sight of a man going through the manual with his gun wrong end up. He was almost ready to burst. He fairly boiled over, and putting spurs to his horse went for him. When he got there he could not tell which man it was for all was right when he got there and no one knew anything about him. The Soldiers are all know nothings. He was mad but how could he help himself. I am glad he did not ask me who it was for I would not have told him nor would I have denied knowing, and at the same time I did not want any fuss with him. We got in order at last and the Col who would be a Brigadier, rode away with his staff as proud as a kitten with two tails. He rode straight on through the city and the regt following in such order as pleased themselves and the officers could not see it for they sympathized with the men in the whole matter. My own opinion is that the Colonel had a canteen of something stronger than coffee. The City is about the size of Evansville [Indiana] and is terribly shattered. I had often heard of the terrors of a bombardment of a crowded city but I never realized it before. Houses were shattered and torn in every shape that can be imagined, some utterly destroyed and some but little injured. Some had shell through the doors, some places the shell had burst inside of a house and torn it all to pieces.⁹ After seeing the destruction I no longer wondered at the insane fury with which they charged our works, rushing on as they often did with their hats pulled down over their eyes so that they could not see the certain destruction that awaited them. I am glad that I have taken part in this campaign. I would not for a great deal have missed that ride through Atlanta. It almost paid me for the whole campaign.

We passed through and halted outside of the works. They had an ingenious contrivance to keep the line from being stormed, a sort of a revolving Cheveaux de Friese [Chevaux de Frise] all along the front of their works so that when our men should attempt to climb over it would turn, and let them

⁹ Captain Alfred Lacey Hough, who was in Atlanta at this time, recorded that "about one half of the city shows the marks of our shells, the house we mess in has five holes through it, the one I live in has only one some houses are perfectly riddled." Alfred Lacey Hough to Mary Hough, September 18, 1864, Hough Papers (Unpublished letters in the possession of John N. Hough, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado).

fall backwards and another row of stakes presented when he tried again to climb with the same result. Our works and those of the rebs were in some places but a few yards apart. Truly the Spade wins more Battles than the sword. We got our dinner and then marched on (having received the first mails for ten days) for the railroad bridge which we reached after an absence of twenty two days

Sept. 8th I suppose we will stay here for a good while for we are building shops and storehouse for the forage and commissary store and are likewise very busy putting up huts for quarters.¹⁰ I went round the fortifications here today. They are pretty extensive and very strong and well planned, so far as I have been able to judge of such matters. I notice that they were so arranged that they cannot be raked from any outside position whatever.

Sept 9th Nothing remarkable today except an order of Col Buel breaking up most of the officers messes, by ordering that in future no private or non commissioned officer should mess with any commissioned officer. The order aroused considerable indignation among the Officers, as it was understood to be a quiet way of charging them with living on other men's rations, a charge that they are not disposed to submit to in silence, especially coming from a man whose record is not as immaculate as snow—*not quite*. And our worthy Col who would be a Brigadier may perhaps find that he has stirred up a hornets nest that he will find hard to settle. The men are busy cleaning up camp and making preparations for a long stay. Some of them are building comfortable shanties that would do very well for winter quarters.¹¹

Sept. 11th Sunday. Had preaching by Bryant who gave us a pretty good discourse. It is a lovely day rather hot but still pleasant. I sat in the shade on a pine box and listened to the discourse as well as I could but somehow I would still catch my mind running off to the church in Princeton and

¹⁰ "The line officers usually have huts, covered with condemned boat canvas. This is dirty, from long use beneath the surface of the water, but it is water proof. The line also has a number of cook shanties. Usually, there are from four to six officers in a mess." Hight, *History of the Fifty-Eighth Regiment*, 367.

¹¹ In September, 1864, Captain Alfred Lacey Hough wrote: "The houses on the outskirts of the city are being torn down to furnish lumber for the soldiers' huts, and I could not but think of how little these people knew what war would be when they commenced it." Alfred Lacey Hough to Mary Hough, September 21, 1864, Hough Papers.

then the group of blue coats around me would fade away and instead of them would come up the familiar faces of the congregation at home and I could almost feel Morgan¹² leaning his head on my knee to go to sleep. I can't help wishing many a time that I could be back at such times in the old congregation. But then I think again this is all wrong If God had intended me to stay there he would have left me there instead of sending me out here. And so I will try and await patiently the result, but I hope that it will not be long delayed and that our next news may come to us as good as that which we have been able to send from here. I hope that Grant in his place may have as good success as Sherman the crazy has here. He may be very crazy but I guess the rebs think by this time that there is almost too much method in his madness and that if he is crazy, save them from the grasp of one who is sane

[Sept.] 14th . . . The cars run by us here just in sight of our camp. We can see that they are swarming with men moving to the front. Gen Sherman is evidently strengthening himself for some important movement, but what it is, or where he is going to take us is more than we can guess. We may go to Mobile or Charleston or Richmond.¹³ We would like to know, and I doubt not that gen Hood would like it better than even we would

Sept. 14th to 20th. Nothing of any interest. We have almost daily visits from the women from a good many miles round bringing in vegetables to barter for something to eat. They will not take money but want *bread* or flour or meat. They say that money would be worthless to them as there is no place that they would be able to buy anything with it. They tell some pitiful stories of starving children, and the worst is that they are true. I have seen some things that I never expected to see and I hope I may see no more such. . . .

[Sept.] 24th . . . We still hear occasionally from home and the news is rather more cheerful. Our work here at Atlanta has had a good effect on the traitors at home, they begin to think that we will soon have the rebellion crushed

¹² His second eldest son.

¹³ Chaplain Hight thought they were going to Richmond and noted that "if a part of this army does not go to Richmond, it should. Now is the time to overturn this slave-holding empire." Hight, *History of the Fifty-Eighth Regiment*, 372.

here, and then for the traitors at home. They already begin to shake in their shoes for they feel that they have lost the game on which they have staked their country and the Birth-right of their children. And they even now begin to feel the weight of that infamy that will ever be a traitor's doom, knowing full well that their names will go down to posterity so blackened that Arnold will pass for a patriot and Iscariot for an honest man by comparison with them. . . .

[Sept.] 26th. A good many women came in as usual to trade for something to eat. Some of them bring in beans, some chinkapins and muscadines, while some I have reason to believe resort to more questionable means of obtaining the desired food. But who shall blame them, when their children are starving. Shame on the man who will take this advantage. But I have no doubt it is done every day, and that too by men whose position should be the guarantee of their good conduct. There is whiskey in camp again and such a time as we will have while it lasts. I wish our commanding officers could once get it beat into their heads that whiskey is an unmitigated nuisance. . . .

Oct 4th . . . The Women still come in to trade but our stock is rather short and we will soon have nothing to trade. A little girl wanted to sell me some muscadines yesterday. I offered her the money for them but she said she could not eat money, and as I had nothing else, we did not trade. I shall be glad when we get out of this for I am tired of war and all its sights and sounds. I don't think I shall ever want to hear another Bugle Call, or to see another six mule team. Some of the men are making a little speculation in tobacco. John Clark bought a hundred dollars worth yesterday and today sold out for one hundred and forty, a pretty good move for one day. Some of the others have done equally as well. [Sergeant] John Farmer, I suppose has made more money out here than he could possibly have done at home. . . .

Oct 5th . . . Some women are in camp trading. They have a little boy about three years old along. As they start out he sings out goodbye Yankee. These natives are known among the soldiers by the name of Elm Peelers. Some of the men have got a receipe for making muscadine pies. They say that it was given them by one of the natives. The principal and most interesting part of the process is the seeding of the fruit which is done by sucking out the soft part of the fruit and

leaving the tough leathery skin to make the pie of. Our Major calls them squirrel skin pies. Some of these people are neat in their appearance and show some little trace of refinement but most of them are about as slouchy a set of birds as I have ever seen anywhere. Some of the men have a good deal of sport with them but for my part when I think of the way they treated our men who passed long here after Chickamauga, I don't feel like associating with such a set of She devils. The Chaplain and Col [Joseph] Moore [of Francisco, Indiana] stand back and look as if they were afraid the creatures would touch them and I suppose I look the same way to them.¹⁴

Oct. 6th Some contrabands¹⁵ came in today who state that they came from 60 miles beyond Atlanta. I saw one of them eat. The cook gave him some cold coffee, he smacked his lips and said it was the first he had seen since the war began.

[Oct.] 7th Had another big scare in camp about being attacked and went to fortifying, but as Col. Buel was gone we took things easy, and made no attempt to kill ourselves or each other We get very little news from the front but what little there is is encouraging. The report yesterday was that gen. Thomas had captured two brig'ds of inftry & 2 regts cav. We can today sometimes hear cannon in the distance and report says that the fight is at Allatoona, also that the Johnnies are badly whipped and that Gen. Sherman is driving them northward. . . .

Oct 8th Turned cool in the night and this morning I find the men with overcoats on and standing round the fires like midwinter. Even I found a heavy coat very comfortable. . . . There is a man in camp who once belonged to the 42nd Ind., and had his leg shot away at the battle of Perrysville [Ken-

¹⁴ The Chaplain recorded his own reaction to the natives in his book. "Our camp is daily visited by women, children, and a few men. They are nearly all lean, lank, cadaverous people. They sell butter, butter milk, green beans, chickens, tomatoes, muscadine grapes, etc. They exchange these things for our rations. As we cannot buy for cash, we cannot purchase very extensively. The people in these parts are pretty well starved for the necessities of life. It is this that drives them to this trade. Some come in begging, and they tell most pitiful tales. We cannot give them much, as we do not care to feed the women and children of men, who are lying in the bushes and attempting to cut the railroad which brings the food. Can anything be more ridiculous than for these women to come snubbing about our camp, while their lantern-jawed lords are lying in ambush to shoot us?" *Ibid.*, 373.

¹⁵ Negroes.

tucky, October 8, 1862]. He has a peep show of different stereoscopic views. He has been with the army all through this campaign and I have been told that he has made it quite profitable. . . .

Oct 10th. . . . A lot of women came into camp begging for something to eat today. One of our officers asked one of them if there were any rebels near where she lived. If there were I would not tell you was the reply. They are venomous. We give them not much comfort for we don't like to furnish them with Bread and divide with bushwhackers who lie around to pick off our men and I don't see the propriety of feeding them while they starve our men in prison. . . .

Oct 12th. . . . We are all anxious now for news from the old Hoosier state as the election came off yesterday and we are all anxious to know whether the Traitors can triumph in our homes. Our men were all anxious to vote just to show the villains that the Hoosier soldiers know how to appreciate both their friends and enemies and that they are not to be caught by the whining and fawning of a set of Traitors that prefer party triumphs to the good of their country and don't care how many of us loose [*sic*] our lives so that they keep clear of the draft and the irrepressible nigger. The men are anxious to know who is drafted and almost every one can tell of some that he hopes may have drawn a prize in Uncle Sam's lottery. . . .

Oct 15th . . . News has just come to us from the draft at home and it is received with shouts of applause as some one read over the names. It was a scene worth seeing as one or other recognized the names of some of their acquaintances. Such a shout is not often heard as went up when they read the names of some of the prominent traitors at home, not so loud but hearty and accompanied with many gestures of intense satisfaction. . . .

Oct 25th . . . Dr. Holtzman and I spent the day yesterday fixing up our quarters for winter. We put down timbers on the ground and laid a floor of planks on them, and built up a couple of bunks one over the other. He sleeps in the upper one and I sleep in the lower. I think in some respects I have got rather the advantage of him in this arrangement as the nearer we get to the ground the warmer we sleep. I have got some pine forks and sawed them off and nailed boards

on the butt ends and they make most excellent stools. If I could do so I think I should send one of them home as a curiosity, a kind of specimen of camp life. I am going to pluck a Georgia Goose, or in plain English, I am going to get some pine brush and lay it in my bunk. It is as good as straw for a bed. If we stay here this winter we can make ourselves very comfortable but if we have to move much we will have a hard time of it. But no matter, we are no Feather bed Soldiers and we did not expect the comforts of a home down here among the Heathen. Our people fare right royally compared to Hoods army. They are cut off from any base of supplies and have to live off the country and that is a very poor dependence. A few days ago we captured one of his supply trains and it was entirely loaded with sorghum. We learned that this green cane was almost the entire subsistence of his men, each one taking a stalk and eating as they go. Unless they get out into a country where they can get better food I think they will surely be compelled to submit. Gen Sherman at the last account was still crowding mercilessly on their rear and by this time I hope he has them completely demoralized. I feel pretty certain that so far as this part of Dixie is concerned we have the game all in our own hands, except the annoyance of occasional guerilla bands who steal our stock and pick up stragglers, but even this has the good effect of keeping our men from leaving camp and straying round all over the country as some of them would be sure to do if they were not in the way. . . .

Nov 3d . . . There is great talk of a move about to be made, some say to Mobile, some to Savannah and some to Charleston. For my part I don't care much. So far as I have any choice I rather prefer Charleston. . . .

[Nov.] 11th . . . Some of our conscripts are coming in daily and I think before long they will all be here. They are as a general rule a better set of men than we looked for and look well.¹⁶ There is one old fellow among them who is over age but some time back he wanted to get a young wife, and

¹⁶ Hight was not so charitable in his comment. "The conscripts, on the average, are larger and older men than the volunteers. There is not as much life and enthusiasm depicted on their countenances. They are not the men to be carried away by the music of a fife and drum, or the flapping of the star-spangled banner. They are men who have fully meditated on bullets and chronic diarrhoea, and remained at home." Hight, *History of the Fifty-Eighth Regiment*, 403.

represented himself as being several years younger than he really was. This did very well then but when the draft came he did not find it quite so funny for the authorities took him at his own valuation, and sent him down here to meditate at his leisure on the benefits of misrepresentation and the other conscripts are having more fun out of him than if he was a circus. The signs of some great movement are getting stronger every day. Shermans army is coming on and will most probably begin to cross here today or tomorrow. And then away down further into the heart of Dixie and perhaps to the Atlantic or Gulf Coast. . . .

Nov 13 Last night we could see fires all along the r.r. where our men were destroying the track. Today a great many troops passed us on the way to the front and this evening four hundred men were sent from the 18th to destroy the r.r. bridge which they accomplished in four hours. About 40 axe men cut the braces and the rest pulled it down with ropes. It is rumored that we march at 5 in the morning.

[Nov.] 14 Started on the grand raid. We were astir early in the morning, packed up what we intended to carry along and left the rest in our huts. We then set fire to them and at twelve all our houses, shops and stables were in ashes. . . .

Nov. 15 Had orders to move at 5 o'clock, the train being divided, Col Buel taking 6 Co's and Col [Joseph] Moore 4. I went with Col Moore. We were ready and on the road at the hour (the other part waiting till next day) but we were delayed by trains passing till after noon, when we moved out to Decatur¹⁷ and by dark had passed that place 4 miles. Here we began to find a more level country. We could see Atlanta burning. I looked at my watch and could see the time very plainly at a distance of ten miles. The trains kept halting and starting and, [Brigadier] Gen [William T.] Ward being in liquor and out of patience, came and abused Col Moore for stopping. In this way we marched all night and got into camp just as the advance were eating breakfast.

[From November 15 to December 2, the diarist was on the road, and his comments comprise only notations concerning his geographical location. He was in the state capital,

¹⁷ "Decatur is a dilapidated old village. The wooden houses are marked with age, and the commons are thickly set with grass. Only a few of the citizens remain." *Ibid.*, 413.

Milledgeville, on November 23 and commented, "A poor town it is for a capital."]

[Dec.] 2nd. Moved on through a fine country. Passed a splendid mansion in the midst of a large plantation, one of the most aristocratic places I have seen. There was a long avenue of trees of several kinds that I did not know. . . . The avenue extended $\frac{1}{2}$ mile on each side of the house. There was a new made grave in the garden and some of the men being suspicious opened it and found that it contained quilts and clothing boxed up. One old rebel in this neighborhood told some of the men that he honestly thought the war was going on all right and that they were using up the Yankees rapidly till he saw us coming. The people here have a fashion of putting their churches on some spot that is good for nothing else. At Davisboro for instance it is out of town on the opposite side of a big swamp on a little tongue of land that runs out into the swamp that could not be profitably used any other way unless for a hog pen. In another place we found one, a very nice building too just at the edge of a swamp and no other buildings in a mile. This country is very thinly settled, the plantations being very large and the houses from 2 to 3 miles apart.

[Dec.] 3d. Moved on over pine Barrens along the bank of a very pretty lake . . . the banks and shallows covered with cypress and it in turn draped with strange looking Spanish moss. The romance of the thing was at length knocked in the head by coming to a mill dam and finding that our lovely lake was only a very common place mill pond on a little creek and owing to the level country it had spread out over a great space. We soon destroyed the whole affair and went on our way meditating on the way these southern gentlemen are going to ride through the north armed with plantation whips as soon as they can get the southern heart sufficiently fired. Some of our men went off the road to the Stockade prison where they kept our men. They describe it as a horrible place, filthy in the extreme and with no shelter for the prisoners except mud huts that they built themselves. Our men counted 650 graves in the prison enclosure. They were thrown in and covered about three feet with earth. The prisoners got water out of the swamp on which the prison was placed. The prison itself was an enclosure of several acres, the fence being made of twenty foot logs set on end

close together six feet in the ground. We crossed Buckhead yesterday evening and today we destroyed the Savannah & Augusta R.R. so far as it lay in our reach. . . .

[Dec.] 9th Moved on to Eden, and stopped for dinner. Looked in vain for the garden. Saw instead a dilapidated church and a grave yard. Still the same sandy plain with cypress swamps interspersed and the dry land covered with pine. Towards evening the land seems better. . . . The mile posts this evening indicated that we are within sixteen miles of Savannah. There has been heavy firing in that direction all day probably from the fleet.

[Dec.] 10th Moved on ten miles and crossed the r.r. which we of course destroyed. The swamps get deeper and wider. The R.R. runs much of the way on trestle-work. The dirt road is wide enough for two waggon and is as fine a road as I ever saw. Almost every man is eating sugar cane which is getting very plentiful. We passed a large plantation yesterday. The quarters looked neat and there was a church for the Slaves where doubtless they were taught the fundamental doctrine of justice of Slavery. Not far off was a church for white folks. The men went for everything movable. I doubt not the owner thinks the Yanks are a hard set. We are now within five miles of Savannah and there is heavy firing in front. We have passed some of their works.

[Dec.] 11th. Moved down the bank of the river in company with the other division of the train. They seem to have had a rather hard time of it; short rations. Gen. [Jeff. C.] Davis ¹⁸ seems to be rather a hard customer. Would not let the men forage. He did a most dastardly trick with the negroes that were following his corps. He took up the bridges and left them in the hands of the enemy. Some of the old men and women and children were drowned in trying to get over on logs, the enemy being too near to allow them to make any kind of rafts. If I had the power I would have him as high as Haman.¹⁹ There is great indignation among the troops. I

¹⁸ General Jefferson C. Davis was born in Clark County, Indiana. He was promoted Brigadier General, United States Volunteers, December 18, 1861; brevetted Major General, August 8, 1864. (*Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana* (8 vols., Indianapolis, 1866-1869), II, 210. He commanded the Fourteenth Corps during Sherman's march to the sea.

¹⁹ The Chaplain was as angered over the affair as Dr. Patten. Calling the abandonment of the colored refugees "a scene disgraceful to American history," Hight bitterly castigated Davis: "He is a military tyrant, without one spark of humanity in his make-up." Hight, *History of the Fifty-Eighth Regiment*, 426.

should not wonder if the valiant murderers of women and children should meet with an accident before long. We are now camped on a great rice plantation. The rice is in stacks and makes good horse feed. . . .

[Dec.] 14th This morning moved camp a little nearer the river and the regiment was again thrown together as before we left Atlanta. Some of our men were detailed to run the steamboat that was captured the other day. By the way there was some dispute as to who captured her. The Artillerists claimed the honor and a Col of infantry who was on the island rushed on board with his men and claimed the boat. Gen Slocum sent Col Buel with men and rope to help tow her over to this side of the river but as soon as Capt Smith went on board the Col on the boat cursed him and ordered him off. Capt Smith told him if he could not treat him as a gentleman he might get across the best he could. The Col finding the kind of a man he had to deal with backed down and tried to excuse himself on the ground that he mistook him for a private. This of course did not mend the matter for it only showed him a dog by his own statement. . . .

[Dec.] 18th When we get through this job I expect we will turn and pay South Carolina a visit, and I think our welcome will be anything but cordial. I think that they will be able to see our track for a generation to come. We have laid a heavy hand on Georgia, but that is light compared to what S.C. will catch. Very often when we have been destroying property the women would say "Well, I don't care, if you will only serve South Carolina the same way for they got us into this scrape" and the men would say Never mind, we won't leave anything there. We will make it a desert. . . .

[Dec.] 24th. We arrived in the city²⁰ day before yesterday. The wind was from the north and as usual seemed to come the shortest way. The cold here when it does come is as hard to bear as it is at home. The ground froze a little and the wind seemed to reach to the bones, wood was hard to get and what we did get was very poor and would hardly burn at all. Seemed to me that it would be good material for fire-proof buildings. . . . This is a fine town—some of it very old. There is a very fine monument to Pulaski here, the gallant

²⁰ Savannah, Georgia.

Pole who died for American Liberty.²¹ The inhabitants are proud of it but at the same time they have been exposing their lives for American slavery. I have not been over much of the city yet. What I have seen of the business part of the town is well built and well arranged except that many of the streets are too narrow for any convenience. It is reported that we captured supplies enough to last our force twenty days. . . .

[Dec.] 28th We have free communication with the coast now and the wharf presents quite a lively scene Steamboats coming and going, bringing rations and carrying away cotton and rice, etc. A good many sail vessels also come up. There are now three schooners lying in the river discharging freight. . . . After many delays and many promises the paymaster at length made his appearance today in the person of Major Fleming, but he only paid us up to the thirty-first of October, so that we are still two months behind. I really think the government is acting very shabily [*sic*] with us, as our wages are the same as they used to be and the government at the same time charges us three times as much for our rations and the uniform costs more than double, and on top of all this as adding insult to injury comes an income tax of eight per cent, which is retained out of our wages, so as to leave us apparently receiving higher wages than we really get. . . . I think a few more days will see us on our winding way, most probably for Charleston or Augusta and perhaps eventually for Richmond. This is what I call studying practical geography to some purpose and really no other way would give so clear an idea of the country as this. I have now wandered over a good deal of the Sacred Soil of Dixie. I have passed by dirt town and dark corner, I have been in the gate city and traversed both mountain pass and open plain, the fine plantation and the Piney woods, the dry upland and the cypress swamp, the land of cotton and the cane, the live oak grove and the rice fields and after all, day by day I like the Hoosier state better and better so that when I once get back again I don't think anything in this direction will

²¹ Hight also noticed the statue, and, upon examining it more closely than did Dr. Patten, made this note: "There is, on each side, a spread eagle, resting on the shields of Poland and Georgia, and holding in either talon the olive branch. The insertion of the shield of Georgia instead of that of America, for which Pulaski fought and died, is a manifestation of that sectional pride, which has finally led the people of this State to ruin." Hight, *History of the Fifty-Eighth Regiment*, 447.

tempt me to leave it. I used to think our climate was too changeable but really it is not as bad as this. I don't envy the inhabitants of the Sunny South either their country or their climate or their institutions. I have no liking for any of them. . . .

[Dec.] 29th . . . I am getting rather tired of this place and would like very much to be moving. I am very anxious to give the confederacy another blow such as the last one. I don't think the old rotten concern will stand more than one or two more of Shermans crazy spells. If they are all such as the last one I don't care how soon he takes another. I understand this place is to be garrisoned and held as a military post. This will not require much force and will stop one avenue for the blockade runners and let loose our fleet for more effectual work at other points. There are many points of interest here but I have not visited them yet.

[Dec.] 30th Yesterday a sloop from Nassau ran the blockade and came up to the wharf and the Capt went ashore to report to Gen. Hardee [Lieut. Gen. William J. Hardee, C.S.A.] but was surprised to find a yankee commander in his place. He was taken in.²²

²² "On the 31st of December, 1864, the non-veterans of the regiment [58th Indiana Volunteers] were mustered out at Savannah and returned home." *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana*, II, 568. Patten is listed as "Mustered out with Regiment." *Ibid.*, 560.