

CHAPTER VI.

COVERS THE TIME DURING WHICH I REMAINED AT THE POST OF BENTON BARRACKS, NEAR ST. LOUIS, MO., AND EMBRACES FROM APRIL 10, 1863, TO DECEMBER 29, 1863, THE LATEST DATE BEING THAT OF MY DISCHARGE FROM THE SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES AS PRIVATE OF COMPANY "B" EIGHTY-EIGHTH REGIMENT OF INFANTRY ILLINOIS VOLUNTEERS.

1. AT the first thought I concluded that an account of my life at Benton Barracks would necessarily include a lengthy dissertation upon the "technique" of army life—the peculiar arrangements existing there, treating of the various officers and their separate duties, and methods of performing them; but I have since amended my plan so that I will only give in this place a general account of my experiences at the post, and when I am bound to mention anything beyond the legitimate limits of such a project I will endeavor to be as brief as possible. My nominal office, as I have already stated at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, was that of "Post Bugler," but upon

the day of my arrival I was set to work in the office of the Post Adjutant, and assisted in the preparation and making out of what was called a "Tri-Monthly Post Return." That document comprised an official statistical account and history of the post for the previous ten days; the number of officers and men, their several names, ranks, companies, and regiments, and the nature of the details of those who were on special duty; also the names, rank, and regiment of all who had died or been transferred during that period; and much other information prescribed by the rules of the Adjutant General's Office. I was not long in becoming familiar with the requirements of that branch of the business, but I was altogether relieved of it within a few days, and installed at a separate desk, having in my charge the issue of passes to go in or out of the camp lines. I soon began to recruit my health, and in about a month I had procured a small sharp-tongued bugle, and one morning I surprised the Post Band by sounding the "first call," with a number of variations possible on that instrument. The post of Benton Barracks was situated on what was called Grand Avenue, and included the Fair Grounds belonging to the Agricultural Society of St. Louis and a large tract of land adjoining on the west. The whole of the Fair Grounds, with the numerous buildings, large and small, belonging to it, were monopolized, and used as a sort of General Hospital. This General Hospital was almost entirely independent of the post, and was carried on under the direction of Surgeon Ira Russell, U. S. V. Colonel B. L. R. Bonneville was, as I have said, our post commander.