

Emmett & George Brockway

Two brothers who served in the 35th Iowa Infantry kept voluminous diaries during their terms of service which give an inside view of that regiment's activity from late 1862 until the end of the war in 1865. Emmett Addiss Brockway and his younger brother, George Brockway, came from an old American family. An ancestor, Wolston Brockway, had emigrated from England to Connecticut in 1659. Descendants eventually moved to New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. Members of the family fought in the American Revolution and the War of 1812. In 1842, the first Brockway in Iowa settled in Orono Township in Muscatine County.ⁱ

Following President Lincoln's call on July 2, 1862, for an additional 300,000 volunteers to assist the Union armies, the State of Iowa formed 22 new regiments of infantry, including the 35th Iowa Infantry. Emmett, then 26, enlisted in Company B on August 13 and was mustered into service on August 29.ⁱⁱ The regiment was sworn into national service on September 18. George did not enlist until December, 1863, so Emmett witnessed the Vicksburg campaign before George's arrival.

It is not known what if any words their father, James Brockway, had for Emmett when he left home for military service but in the back of George's diary is a solemn yet loving letter penned by James with a father's advice to a son about to embark on perhaps the defining moments of his life. This heartfelt letter endorsed the virtues of patriotism, bravery, hatred of treason, justness toward others, and noble traits of character. Perhaps the shades of his ancestors from the Revolution and the War of 1812 were directing James's words as he heartened George to:

...let patriotism & love of country be your rule of action & union & liberty be your rallying watch word...Learn a soldiers duty & unhesitatingly perform it, and let me rest with the fullest confidence & assurance, that I have not placed my Sons on the alter of our Country's Liberty in vain... Never flinch from duty, let the peril be ever so great. Let me sooner learn of your Death than your cowardice...Never associate with profane, lewd, or obscene characters...Be just to others, to yourself & to God.

Like other soldiers, George probably had many moments in camp and out in the field when, left momentarily to his thoughts and diary entries, he could have re-read his father's words for both courage and guidance as well as feeling his presence vicariously.

Emmett definitely had his own thoughts at the time of his enlistment about the adventure he was about to embark on. His very first diary entry on August 13, 1862, includes these words of resolution:

This day I have again offered my services in the defence of my country to put down this rebellion. I have long wished to do something but it will prove one of the greatest events of my life in my obscure history, may it prove for good in the cause of the restoration of the Union and for the good of our fellow creatures generally.

Emmett was with the 35th Iowa Infantry during its participation in the siege around Vicksburg and the raid on Jackson. George actually reached the regiment's encampment on March 5, 1864, and both brothers were in the Banks Expedition in the spring of that year. Apparently, Emmett did not know that George had joined the regiment or his company until the latter's arrival. Emmett described his reaction to seeing his brother's unannounced arrival:

...what was our joy and surprise at the arrival of brother George and W.D. Cone and such a meeting and visit as we had will long be remembered by our little mess. For G and I disturbed their ears with our chat till the wee small hours of the night all the scenes of friends and home was all talked over as we thought of by gone times.

George's account of the reunion was much more succinct but colorful and full of good humor. According to George, the moment Emmett saw him enter the camp, "his (Emmett's) eyes stuck out 2 feet."

Like most other Union soldiers, Emmett understood the importance of capturing Vicksburg and described in detail the unsuccessful frontal assault that many Iowa troops participated in on May 22, 1863. He witnessed heavy shelling by Union gunboats during the night followed by getting into a position where the regiment was confined to a steep ridge under murderous enemy fire.

Balls whistling by as thick as hail and bombshells a bursting about our ears which was not very pleasant music. The loss in the two charges had been heavy in killed and wounded but not knowing the particulars I cannot form an estimate but our brave boys planted the stripes and stars on the rebel works but then could not get over on account of high stockades and deep ditches.

After the fall of Vicksburg Emmett went with the 35th Iowa as part of General Sherman's raid on Jackson, the state capital of Mississippi. He summarized the many local battles across the western part of the state in an entry in his diary in August. Apparently he had little admiration or respect for his Confederate adversaries, noting that "Jackson again vomited forth the very dregs of treason and I have no doubt but the City is very much relieved since." Upon returning to Vicksburg in November he described the shattered city.

Vicksburg at first sight presents a hard looking sight with its tattered walls and shivered roofs and well presents the appearance of withstanding the storm of iron hail for 47 days. The court house, catholic church, Methodist church, Prentiss House, market house and Prison are among the principal structures of interest and some of them display fine workmanship.

The rebel works around the City are leveled down and fortifications of a far superior structure are being thrown up much nearer the city the engineering and fortification will certainly make the city impregnable.

The brothers often commented in their diaries about the same events, but they each focused their attention more on some aspects of military life than the other. For example, Emmett frequently commented on how early their day started, with many entries noting the time the bugles sounded or the drums beat to wake the troops. It was

very common to be up by 4 A.M. and frequently an hour or two before that. He also commented more than George did on drunkenness. On one occasion when one of the soldiers from the 24th Iowa Infantry (known as the Temperance Regiment because of its members' public pledge of sobriety) got drunk, Emmett was on guard duty on a nasty rainy day but nevertheless had an enjoyable day.

...I have to stand guard but among bad weather there is some fun for we got one of the boys in the guard house for getting drunk. He was from the temperance Reg't and a very bold representative of it too for he did not go behind the cook house to drink his whiskey. I had a good time guarding him and trying to keep him quiet until they bucked and gagged him then he became as docile as a lamb.

However, neither brother saw much humor in an incident a year later when an officer got drunk and got special treatment. The regiment was traveling north by boat on the Mississippi and stopped at Cape Girardeau on its way to St. Louis. All the men were required to stay on board but the officer of the day went into town, got drunk very quickly, and had to be helped back to the ship but was not punished for his indiscretion. George commented that "...if it had been a private, he would have been severely punished so you can see the partiality shown between officers and privates thus we had to stay on the Boat pent up..." and Emmett even more harshly wrote of "the injustice and partiality shown between officers and soldiers." The similarity of their entries that day indicates that they, as well as many other men on board, were talking about the incident that day.

Nevertheless, the common soldiers also had their opportunities, as at Christmas in 1863, when some of the troops celebrated the birth of the Savior with "a drunken row all last night particularly in Co. G...one of their men was found dead in his bunk this

morning...Four or five fights in the evening was nothing uncommon, but my conscience is clear of any such evil deeds.”

Both Emmett and George married and had families after the war but were single at the time of their service. Both shared soldiers’ interests in girls, but George wrote more about it. While he was waiting at Camp McClellan near Davenport, prior to being shipped out, he was exceedingly bored and would get a pass to go into town to find anything interesting to do including talking with local girls. However, after joining the regiment outside Vicksburg, he discovered that he had less use for southern girls. While in the Vicksburg area, one day he and several other fellows walked by a house when two girls came outside. At first he wanted to talk with them but:

I soon found out that I did not want to talk to them much for they were rather too much Secesh to talk to much for I knew that if I did talk to them long that I would have to give them a piece of my mind and that would have made them mad and there would have been a Battle rite there...

Emmett and George could not have helped but notice the tragic aspects of war. More men died from sickness and accident than in battle during the war. When a friend from Muscatine and fellow member of Company F, Andrew Lord, became deathly ill in early October, 1864, both brothers commented somberly on Andrew’s sickness and death. Emmett noted that Andrew “was very sick all day and suffered much in fact everything riding in the ambulance over those stony hills was taken worse and died at six o’clock, poor boy his trouble and suffering are over...” George, whose diary entries were usually shorter than those of Emmett’s, wrote a longer and very moving description of Andrew’s death agony and burial.

...saw Andrew he laid on his blanket on the ground I tuck him by the hand thy were real cold also his feet the cold sweat stood on his brow which told me that Death was near at hand his breath was short he seemed to be conscious that he could not last

long yet he seemed to be happy til the last when he died easy at 6 in the eave. was buried about 12 in a good Box under a walnut tree where he rests in peace, to awake in that happy home in Heaven.

Then almost nonchalantly George mentioned that at 12:30 a.m. the regiment was getting ready to march.ⁱⁱⁱ

The brothers were not overly political but their sympathies were distinctly Republican, which was very common among Union soldiers. In the fall of 1863, they both voted for Republican Colonel William M. Stone for governor of Iowa over Democrat Brigadier General James Tuttle. Emmett noted in his diary that the regiment voted lopsidedly for Stone, 211-123. Stone won the election statewide by a margin of 38,000 votes. In 1864, when Lincoln ran for re-election, the brothers both voted enthusiastically for the president over General McClellan. The regiment's vote was even more decisively for Lincoln than it had been for Stone for governor the year before, 123-31. George happily noted several days after the election that "Evry day brings us good nues from the Election in favor of Old Abe Evry time. I think we have got him juged for the next 4 years shure."^{iv}

Their views of slaves and other African-Americans also changed during the course of the war. At the beginning of the war some diary entries indicated very condescending views of blacks. Emmett wrote in April, 1863 of men in the regiment treating some freed slaves with hard crackers but "...we made the little rascals dance for them..." Two years later, near the end of the war, he noted in one instance when his regiment had returned to Vicksburg that he saw a black artillery company on drill and that they performed well. A few days later he saw a company of the 52nd U.S. Colored

Troop on drill and noted that they “acquitted themselves finely.” In a dress parade a few days later, he wrote:

The 52nd (colored infantry) came out from town to day and had dress parade just to show us that (African-Americans)^v had gumption enough to handle a gun and oh how much style, brass horns, blacked shoes white gloves and real stripes by the mile but that is regular style and they done first rate.

The 35th Iowa Infantry experienced a lull in their activities in Georgia in the early summer of 1864. Emmett and George were able to secure a large supply of lemons and opened a lemonade stand. They also found large amounts of apples ripening by mid-summer, gathered as many as they could, used a cider press that was available, and made large amounts of cider. These may seem like mundane activities, but it should be remembered that the typical soldier diet included very little fresh fruit and that scurvy was not unknown among Civil War soldiers. To find large quantities of fruit, especially citrus, was an important event to soldiers in the field. Also, when units were inactive, many soldiers found less constructive things to do than Emmett and George did, and frequently with less desirable results.

Each of the brothers noted his first anniversary in military service. In November, 1863, Emmett wrote of the continuing necessity to destroy the rebellion but also of the sadness of the past year.

Just one year ago today our regiment left Muscatine for the seat of war to battle with secession and treason for the rights which are due to every true loyal man. But how many are the changes that have taken place in our regiment. Many a poor soldier has found an early grave. Many a wife has been left to mourn and many orphans lament the loss of a noble father and all has been done in hope of soon restoring law and order once more.

A year later, December, 1864, as George approached his first anniversary in military service for the Union, he was even more downbeat. The regiment had been

chasing General Price across central Missouri but George had been down with diarrhea, perhaps even dysentery,^{vi} for several months and had spent what seemed an interminable time in a military hospital. He glumly wrote that he had been in 5 battles, 21 skirmishes, and that he weighed only 129 pounds. He added somewhat bitterly that “Just one year ago to day I sold myself to Uncle Sam or rather my country...” Nevertheless, he expressed no real thoughts of regret or desire to discontinue his service. A few weeks later, in the midst of the holiday season, he wrote “am getting tierd of keeping a journal in the Hospital as I now that it will not be interesting to any one to Read.” George discontinued his diary after February 20, 1865, when he noted that his furlough papers had come through. He started the diary again in May after he had returned to Muscatine, and received his discharge before the end of the month.

Emmett’s health had been better. He remained active with the regiment right to the end of the war, touring New Orleans in February, 1865. He noted the Jackson monument on the location of the 1815 Battle of New Orleans. He also toured the city, walking up Canal Street and by the ship docks on the riverfront by the downtown, and then marched with the regiment up to Lake Pontchartrain. On February 28, 1865, a Tuesday, he witnessed what was probably a Mardi Gras celebration and wrote:

It seemed to be a gaily day in the City among the natives as a portion of them were dressed in masquerade style from the novel, fancy and to the ridiculous, causing much laughter and excitement in the streets.

The regiment then departed for Mobile and was in the area when news came of Lee’s surrender to Grant. His next to last entry came on April 30 when:

...the sadest of sad news was read to the reg’t this evening received by dispatch vis the assassination and death of Abraham Lincoln and Seward (Seward had actually survived an assassination attempt), the news strikes like a thunder bolt and words cannot

express the indignation that reigns throughout the whole camp and may the bitterest vengeance overtake the perpetrators of the bloody deed.

After the end of the war, both Emmett and George returned to the Muscatine area. Emmett married Jane Davisson in 1869, and they had three children. He died in 1912 at the age of 76. George married Isadora Clementine Brobst in 1867 and they had nine children.^{vii} His illness affected him the rest of his life, but he did live to the age of 65 when he died in 1907.

ⁱ The basis of this article is found in the diaries kept by Emmett and George while on duty with the 35th Iowa Infantry during the Civil War. These diaries are found in the Iowa State Archives in the State Historical Building in Des Moines. Unless otherwise noted, factual information in this article is from the diaries. The family history information is from the Brockway Family Website. Click on the Family Journal of the Brockways of Eastern Iowa on this website.

ⁱⁱ The official troop roster listed Emmett's age as 20 (See Guy Logan, *Roster and Records of Iowa Troops in the Rebellion*, 35th Infantry. State of Iowa, 1911.) However, information on the Brockway family website indicates Emmett's date of birth as May 11, 1836, making him 26 at the time of his enlistment.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lord had joined the 35th Iowa Infantry when it was organized and mustered in August, 1862. He attained the rank of corporal. See Logan, *Roster and Records*.

^{iv} Lincoln won about 90 % of the Union soldier vote, but only about 55% of the total national popular vote. Without the soldier vote, Lincoln might have been defeated for re-election.

^v Substituted for inflammatory racial term.

^{vi} George referred to his problem as diarrhea, but his extreme weight loss plus the fact that the problem festered month after month indicates that it was probably dysentery.

^{vii} The family website lists only seven children, but apparently many years after the war, entries were made in George's diary listing the births of nine children.