

Col. William T. Shaw

ISSN 0003-4827

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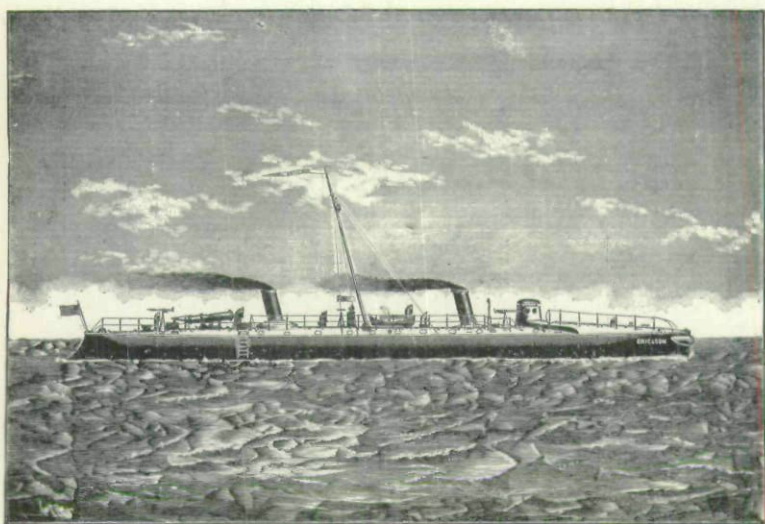
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Recommended Citation

"Col. William T. Shaw." *The Annals of Iowa* 3 (1898), 465-468.

Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/annals-of-iowa/vol3/iss5/15>

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THE TORPEDO BOAT "ERICSSON" AT SEA.

This vessel was built at Dubuque, and launched May 12, 1894. This cut, by kind permission of Johnson Brigham, is copied from *The Midland Monthly*.

ANNALS OF IOWA.

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

COL. WILLIAM T. SHAW.

In another place we present an article by this illustrious Iowa soldier, in which he corrects sundry errors in the official reports of the Red River Expedition of 1864, under Maj. Gen. N. P. Banks. This article is supplemented by one from the pen of Capt. Charles T. Granger, (now a distinguished judge of the Supreme Court), who acted in that affair as his Assistant Adjutant General. Col. Shaw commanded the 2d brigade, 3d division, 16th Army Corps, which bore the brunt of that disastrous engagement. The full and impartial history of that curious and most futile expedition is yet to be written. That the official reports are very faulty is fully shown by the statements of Col. Shaw and Capt. Granger. The subject is a large one, out of which books will grow in future years. The articles which we herewith present fully show that there are two sides to the story. It is apparent from the meager reports, that generals sought to cover themselves with glory who never reported a man killed or wounded, while Col. Shaw lost in killed and wounded, fully a third of his command. Three of his regiments of infantry came from Iowa—the 14th, 27th and 32d—and when the lists of casualties were published there was deep mourning in many communities. Col. Shaw was indignant at the confused blundering which characterized the entire movement up Red River—the needless sacrifice of valuable lives—and wrote a letter of bitter denunciation of Gen. Banks and some of his generals, which appeared in the newspapers. For this, without a hearing, he was dishonorably dismissed from the military service. Later, upon a representation of the facts, this order of dismissal was revoked by the Secretary

of War, and he was "honorably discharged from the service of the United States, to date Nov. 16, 1864, the date of muster-out of his regiment." This order was a cutting rebuke to those who had brought about his dismissal, though their reports went into the government archives and appear printed at length in the War Records. It is to set aside some of the more important errors in these reports that Messrs. Shaw and Granger place on record their clear recollections of the events in question. Their statements will be implicitly believed by all Iowans. We also copy a letter to *The Des Moines Register*, written soon after the battle by the late Capt. T. C. McCall, afterwards a distinguished Iowa legislator. It fully corroborates the statements of Col. Shaw.

William T. Shaw was born in Steuben, Maine, September 22, 1822. His grandfather was Francis Shaw, Jr., a Major in the Massachusetts service, who was sent to the eastern part of the province of Maine as general agent to keep the Indians friendly in that sparsely settled country. His great uncle, Major Samuel Shaw, was also Assistant Secretary of War under Gen. Henry Knox, and afterwards first Consul to China. The subject of this sketch was educated in the common schools and at the seminary at Readfield, Maine. Coming west at the age of 19, he lived for a time in Indiana, where he became a teacher in a private school. Removing to Kentucky in 1842, he remained there until the outbreak of the Mexican war. He enlisted in the 2d Kentucky Infantry, and was appointed corporal and afterwards sergeant. William R. McKee and Henry Clay, Jr., Colonel and Lieut.-Colonel of this regiment, were both killed in the battle of Buena Vista. When Clay fell, mortally wounded, the first one to go to his aid was Capt. George W. Cutter, afterwards famous as the author of "The Song of Steam," a poem which was much quoted 45 years ago. In response to an order, Sergt. Shaw sent Corporal Robert Baker and Private Wood Herenden, of Co. C, to carry Col. Clay to a place of safety. He saw no more of Clay until the next morning, when he went over the field with a detail to look after the dead and wounded of his regiment. He found Clay and Baker dead, and Her-

enden mortally wounded, lying near together in a ravine. The deaths of Clay and McKee occasioned the profoundest regret throughout the Union. When they fell, the regiment was left without a field officer, the Major being absent at the time of the battle.

Returning from the war Shaw strayed into Arkansas and the Indian territory, finding his way some months later to California where he engaged in mining until 1851, when he came to Iowa. He returned in 1852 to California, coming back, however, to Anamosa in 1854, which was thenceforward his permanent home. He was commissioned Colonel of the 14th Iowa Infantry in 1861, serving three years, participating in the battles of Donelson, Shiloh, Pleasant Hill, Yellow Bayou, and many affairs of lesser note. When he finally retired from the army in 1864, Maj. Gen. A. J. Smith paid him the highest compliments for his "courage, patriotism and skill," during the fifteen months that he had commanded a post, brigade and division in the 13th army corps. The officers of his division made him a present of a beautiful sword, which has been deposited in the Historical Department of Iowa. He was a cousin of the father of Col. Robert G. Shaw, who was killed at the battle of Fort Wagner, South Carolina. Col. Shaw served in the 16th General Assembly as a member of the House from Jones County.

As an officer, Col. Shaw was one of the "bravest of the brave," and the idol of his men. He was a warm-hearted, impulsive man, kindly disposed toward everybody, honest and fair in all things, a lover of justice, but given to the use of very energetic language whenever his indignation was aroused. It is mildly stating the case to say that the old soldier "swore terribly"—and does still. But he stood by his men, protecting them from the greed of suttlers, and every other species of injustice. To the humblest and most unknown private he was always accessible, and always ready to redress his wrongs or share his hardships. He broke up the saloons at one of his posts, heavily fining their proprietors who disregarded his orders not to sell intoxicating liquors to "my men," and disbursed the fines collected for the relief

of Union refugees who had come thither for protection. Wherever "red tape" interfered with efficiency or the prompt discharge of duties, he disregarded it wholly, finding his justification in the unquestioned merit of his transactions. He fairly won promotion by skill and bravery in battle, and the only reason why it was not awarded to him was his lack of deference to mediocrities in high places.

THE VALUE OF NEWSPAPER FILES.

Since the Historical Department was organized in 1892 the writer has occasionally had to defend the effort to accumulate and preserve files of Iowa newspapers. Several good people have expressed fears that these papers would so accumulate as to become a great burden. This is doubtless true, unless adequate space and cases are provided for them. But since the Hon. George E. Roberts, Director of the United States Mint, compiled in the summer of 1896 a great statistical and historical pamphlet—the demand for which reached 160,000 copies—from these newspaper files, there has been less objection to them. It has curiously happened that some of the gentlemen who have most seriously inveighed against this branch of the State Historical Collections have come to the rooms day after day to consult files of newspapers! On such occasions—their eyes having been pried open—they have indulged in complaints that Iowa has not had more of these resources of historical information. It would have been so convenient to find what they especially wanted!

But reference to examples in other communities and countries may serve to justify the very limited work which has been done in this State as well as to smooth the way for its enlargement. Wisconsin and Kansas are striving to secure files of all the newspapers, periodicals, books and pamphlets published within their borders. This fact the writer has often printed in these pages and elsewhere. But just now we have read something of this branch of historical collecting as carried on in the British Museum under the

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