

LIEUTENANT CORNELIUS VAN CAMP

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

LIEUTENANT CORNELIUS VAN CAMP was born in Lancaster, Pa., November 24th, 1833, a son of John C. Van Camp, Esq., a prominent citizen of the community, and his wife, Mary Bowen. He attended the local high school and old Franklin College from 1847 to 1851. In June of the latter year, he entered the military academy at West Point as a cadet, and having graduated, with distinction, in the class of 1855, he received the appointment of second lieutenant of the Second regiment of cavalry. From that time he served with his regiment with great credit, and with promise of distinction and usefulness in the service, until he met a soldier's death, at the early age of twenty-five years.

While stationed with his regiment at Fort Belknap, Texas, an expedition, under the command of Major Van Dorn, started for the Wichita mountains, about a hundred and thirty miles north of the fort, in the Indian Territory. It was accompanied by Lieutenant Van Camp in the capacity of topographical officer and adjutant.

The country through which the expedition passed was rugged and picturesque. Much of it had not been charted and included the vast territory in the south-western part of the United States which had not been wholly civilized. As the expedition proceeded on its way topographical notes were collected and much valuable data was recorded. Cornelius Van Camp was known for his manly and amiable qualities. His never failing good humor is said to have been a potential factor in endearing him to the soldiers under him.

While engaged in the duties of the expedition, the command encountered a band of hostile Comanche Indians, encamped near Otter creek, C. N., at the foot of the mountains, and the troops immediately charged upon the enemy. Lieutenant Van Camp was among the first to enter the hostile camp, and was the first to fall, pierced by an arrow to the heart. His death occurred on October 1st, 1858. Major Van Dorn was also severely wounded. The engagement resulted in the defeat and flight of the Indians, leaving from sixty to seventy of their warriors on the field of battle.

Lieutenant Van Camp was skilled in all the sciences necessary to the soldier, active and diligent in the discharge of his duties, an excellent linguist, amiable, accomplished and brave; his devotion to his profession is manifested in the following extract from a letter written by him to his parents the week before the fatal event which put an end to all his noble aspirations: "I love my profession, and will do all I can to exalt and ennoble it. A great many, far too many, look upon it as a means of subsistence; I still regard it as a noble art. Perhaps the time may come when I, too, will lose the interest and delight I now take in it, and when disgust will replace admiration. But till then, I shall live on in hopes of something turning up which will prove that arms are still as glorious as in the days of old."¹

Such were the thoughts of this young and intrepid soldier, facing perils and hardships in a land which was practically unknown. By his devoted and exemplary conduct he had gained the regard and esteem of his associates and superior officers, and his death merited the special notice of Lieutenant-General Winfield Scott, who, in general orders, mentioned the services and admirable character of the gallant young officer, and commending them to the grateful recollection of the country he had so faithfully and creditably served.

Owing to the slow means of communication, the sad news of Lieutenant Van Camp's death did not reach Lancaster until sixteen days later.² After the battle which resulted in his death, his body was buried near the place where he fell. Four months afterwards it was exhumed, and after being placed in a specially constructed metal coffin, it was brought to the place of his birth to be re-interred. More than a month was required to convey the remains to Lancaster.

The Daily Evening Express of Tuesday, March 15th, 1859, contains the following:

"Last night, according to arrangement, a committee from the military companies of this city, proceeded to the railroad depot, for the purpose of receiving the remains of the deceased officer [Lieutenant Van Camp]. Notwithstanding the inclemency of the

¹ Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Saturday, April 2nd, 1859.

² The Daily Evening Express, Saturday, October 16th, 1858.

weather some four hundred persons were present, anxious to catch a glimpse of the tenement which enclosed the remains of this much respected young man. At half past seven o'clock the train arrived and the corpse was delivered to the committee; it was conveyed into Adams's Express office where the outer wooden box was taken off; the large, handsome rosewood coffin, containing an inner one of metal, was then placed on the bier and conveyed to the residence of the deceased's parents, and was placed in the back apartment of the first floor. It was received by Alderman John C. Van Camp, father of the deceased, with due solemnity and with thanks to members of the committee of the military, who then retired. The females of the family were not present. They were overcome with uncontrollable grief at the arrival of the inanimate form of one they had long looked forward to meeting in the bloom of health and manly strength.

"For the satisfaction of the deceased's friends, the lid of the rosewood casket was taken off and the inner coffin proved to be of stout metal, made expressly at San Antonio, Texas; there being no glass in the head portion, the features could not be seen. We understand that the metallic coffin was not unsealed here. A piece however, was cut from over the face and a lock of hair taken from the head. The aperture was then immediately closed.

"Yesterday, the trunk of the deceased arrived by express and was received by his parents. It is a large, spring closed one, and contained many relics of the deceased's equipments, amongst which were his sword, a double-barreled shot gun, which had been broken in the stock, in two or three places, by his horse falling on it, but which had been repaired; there was also the shot bag containing the charges of slug, used on such occasions as he was engaged in when he fell. Beside these and other military equipments, such as his cloak, etc., there were some few articles for diversion, when not actively engaged."

The body remained in the parental home, at No. 7 South Queen street, which was then on the corner of South Queen and

³ Since that time the numbers of the houses have been changed; the even numbers are now on the west side of South Queen street, and the uneven numbers on the east side.

Penn square, now occupied by the Conestoga National bank,³ until eight o'clock on the following morning, when a detachment of the Fencibles conveyed it to the Fencibles' armory, which occupied the second floor of Fulton Hall, now the Fulton Opera House, 14 North Prince street. The body was laid in state on a catafalque, prepared expressly for the purpose. The catafalque was surmounted by a rich, black canopy, on the top of which was an eagle, and underneath it the shield of the United States. The canopy was supported by four pillars, surmounted with plumes of white feathers. By the side of the coffin lay Lieutenant Van Camp's sword, and on the foot of the coffin the splendid flag of the American Mechanics' association, which was specially loaned to be used as a pall. At the foot and on top of the catafalque the national flag was spread. The walls of the armory were draped in black. Truly it presented a mournful appearance. At the entrance of the hall a guard was placed; and also at each door of the entry into the armory. Two guards paraded at each side of the catafalque. On Tuesday afternoon the armory of the Fencibles was crowded with people eager to view the remains of the deceased. So great had the concourse become in the evening, that even with all the excellent arrangements made, many retired without obtaining admission. In the afternoon additional equipments of the deceased and also a wreath, had been added to the articles surrounding the coffin.⁴

In the evening between thirty and forty scholars of the old Franklin College and high school met at John Michael's Grape hotel. George F. Breneman was called to the chair and Albert Sanderson acted as secretary. A committee, consisting of B. F. Bear, Adolphus Shenk and George H. Markley, was appointed to

⁴ The Daily Evening Express of Friday, February 25th, 1859, contains the following relative to Lieutenant Van Camp:

"Among the interesting relics of the deceased, we saw the other day the last work of his hand, as topographical engineer, being a map of the route of the army from the camp of organization to the point from which Lieutenant Van Camp started on his last and fatal expedition. The original was forwarded to Alderman Van Camp by General Winfield Scott, who in an autograph letter, expresses the high esteem in which the deceased was held in the army—adding that, knowing this map would be highly prized by the family as the last professional work of the deceased, he had caused a copy to be made for his own use, and had forwarded to them the original."

act as marshals. They were also requested to draft resolutions expressing the sense of the meeting.⁵

The funeral took place at three o'clock on the afternoon of Wednesday, March, 16th, 1859. The military companies, city councils, and fellow students of the deceased, having taken position opposite Fulton Hall, the corpse was brought down from the armory and placed in the hearse. As the bearers passed through the ranks, the Portuguese hymn was played with beautiful effect. As soon as the coffin was placed in the hearse, the procession moved forward in the following order:

Fencibles' and Rifles' bands.

Col. Duchman.

Jackson Rifles—Lieut. Cox commanding.

Lancaster Fencibles—Lieut. Franklin commanding.

Brigadier General Shaeffer and Staff, and Brigade Inspector Amweg.

Major Dickey, Major Shirk, and Captain Daniel Herr.

Hearse containing corpse, with guard of honor on either side.

Mayor and City councils.

Students of Franklin College and of the high school from the years 1847 to 1851, inclusive.

Soldiers of the War of 1812, and of the Mexican War.

City Clergy.

Family and relatives of the deceased in carriages.

Citizens in general.⁶

The procession proceeded up West King street to Penn square, where it was joined by the relatives, the clergy, and friends of the

⁵ The following resolutions were adopted at the meeting of the school-mates and friends of the late Lieutenant Van Camp at John Michael's Grape hotel, on Tuesday evening, March 15th, 1859:

"Resolved, That with the community in which he was so well known and generally beloved, we mourn the untimely death of Cornelius Van Camp, late lieutenant in the Second cavalry, U. S. A., at the opening of a career which had already given rich promise of a future brilliant with glory to himself, and cheering to the pride of his fellow-citizens.

"Resolved, That as former fellow-students and associates of the deceased, in the warm intimacy of youthful attachments, the daily witnesses of his eminent intellectual power, unshrinking courage, hearty generosity, and warmth of soul, we most heartily sympathise with his relatives in their bereavement of him who seemed destined, in public service and by the fire-side, to be the pride and joy of his devoted parents and loving family.

"Resolved, That in respect to the memory of the deceased, we attend his funeral in a body, wearing the badge of mourning upon the left arm, and that a copy of these resolutions be transmitted to the family of the deceased and to the press for publication."

⁶ The Lancaster Intelligencer, Tuesday, March 22nd, 1859.

deceased. Here the order of the procession was slightly changed, the hearse closing in after the staff officers, and the relatives, followed by the friends, taking position after the students. Appropriate music was played. The procession moved up North Queen street to Lemon, and east on Lemon until the Lancaster cemetery was reached. Upon approaching the burial place, in the southeastern portion of the grounds, the military filed off and the relatives and citizens passed through to the grave. The coffin was then placed in its final resting place, and a discourse appropriate to the occasion, was delivered by the Rev. Walter Powell, pastor of the First Presbyterian church.⁷

Mr. Powell passed cursorily over the life of the deceased, commending the valor of the soldier which had unfortunately caused his career to be so summarily brought to a close. As a minister of the gospel, while admitting the necessity of such means of protection in the present state of society, he looked earnestly forward for the promised time when the sword will be turned into a plough share and reaping hook; and the roar of cannon and din of battle, into the busy hum of commerce, trade and husbandry; he exhorted all who knew the deceased to emulate him in all the virtues they were convinced he possessed; and to be prepared, in the event of being suddenly called upon to render a proper account of their actions through life. When the preacher had concluded his sermon, the Rev. Edward W. Appleton, assistant rector of St. John's Protestant Episcopal church, read the service for the burial of the dead. The clergy and relatives then retired, and the Fencibles filed up on the north-west side of the grave and fired three salutes. The relatives, friends, city councils, and students having retired, the military returned in reverse of the former order.

Thus was written the final chapter in the life of one of Lancaster's most honored heroes, whose death was deeply mourned by city, county, state and nation. The Daily Evening Express stated that more than three thousand people attended the funeral.

⁷ The Daily Evening Express, Thursday, March 17th, 1859.