

Muldrough's Hill, or the Soldier's Complaint

Song by John E. Richardson, Company F
9th Michigan Volunteer Infantry

Tune - "Hard Times"

Come listen kind friends a while to my song,
And I will unfold a tale of my wrongs,
Of labors severe and likewise the swill,
Endured by the soldiers on old Muldrough Hill.

Chorus – It's hard times on Muldrough Hill,
It's hard times I say.

We rise in the morning at five of the clock
And make our hard bed of the butts of cornstalks,
The down in the valley we all trudge amain,
To wash off the filth that in camp we have gained.

Then when we have washed we climb up the hill,
And every man carries his legs at his will,
But once at the summit our strength is all gone,
And go fast or go slow we are fain to sit down.

We rest half an hour then our labor begins,
And the first we commence at is working our chins,
Or in terms more explicit that you'll understand,
We partake of a breakfast the cream of the land.

And now give redoubled attention a while,
And I'll dish up the breakfast in excellent style,
To strengthen your courage and stomach also,
For the sumptuous repast you're about to review.

The first on the hill to age and in strength,
Is a side of fat bacon full three feet in length,
With a crust on the surface to keep in the oil,
A plump inch in thickness of Kentucky soil.

Then as to its age we are all in the dark,
But suppose it was smoked in the flues of the ark,
And I think 'tis the case tho I don't recollect,
Each man as he eats doffs his cap in respect.

The next thing in order are crackers so hard.
Cut out with a chisel in shape like a card,
Punched full of small holes to make it more brittle,
To crumb in the coffee that's stewed in the kettle.

The kettle so rusty and dirty to match,
Not fit to make slop for the very old scratch,
But that which a digger or dog wouldn't eat,
Is thought by the soldier a deuce of a treat.

But kind friends have patience, don't think I have done,
Tho I've dealt out the rations I've only begun,
For when we've ate breakfast we trudge off to work,
To stand upon guard or to dig in the dirt.

On guard we must go every third day or less,
Where all sorts of men are mixed up in a mess,
And when off our posts we endeavor to sleep,
And get ourselves curled all up in a heap.

Just as we get into a comfortable snooze,
Along comes the Sergeant and raises the deuce,
And every poor fellow from yonder to here,
He pulls them and shakes them and yells in their ear.

Ho! Man, says the Sergeant, "what is your relief,
First, second, or third? Ah! man are you deaf?
And when the man grumbles about his hard fare,
The officer tells him tho hard it is fair.

Full twenty-four hours we're expelled from the camp,
To sit round the fire or lie down in the damp,
And when we're released from our labor severe,
We don't feel like stirring again in a year.

Yet when we get home in our tents at length,
And lay ourselves down to recruit our lost strength,
As we shut up our eyes and get ready to snore,
Along comes the Corporal, and peeps in the door.

"Say, boys, I want four men to go for some water,
Come! Get up and go with me-hurrah, don't lotter,"
And then from our couches still rubbing our eyes,
We have fall out and fall in at our size.

And when we get back and begin to feel good,
Again comes the Corporal, with "Hurrah for wood,"
And we find the relief which has been our desire,
Is like jumping from frying pan into the fire.

Altho' we're worn out by hard work and no sleep,
We're obliged when on guard awake to keep,
For it the Grand Rounds comes round to our post,
And catches us napping our honor is lost.

For when he has gone his way on the rounds,
As soon as he gets to the guards camping grounds,
He sends out a Sergeant and two ugly mugs,
And claps the poor Sentinel straight into jug.

There are two or three times I would not forget,
And ere closing my story I'll mention them yet,
A likeness from life I'll endeavor to draw,
Of evils arising from under the law.

The first is the Sutler, who keeps in his shop,
A choice lot of dainties to mix with our slop,
Cakes, candies, and pies, nuts, sugar, and teas,
Eggs, butter, and spices, with crackers and cheese.

In short on his shelves as you run you may read,
He keeps for the boys everything they don't need,
But for aught that is needful tho humbly you pray,
He replies "we don't keep it because it don't pay."

Then to crown the whole matter our officers scold,
Because we take tickets instead of the gold,
The gold Uncle Sam keeps locked in his chest,
And we can't get a quarter by trying our best.

And then there's another sublime institution,
For testing the strength of a man's constitution,
I allude to the hospital over the way,
Where sickness and death are supreme in their sway.

If I were a savant instead of a soldier,
I'd sift the whole matter before a day older,
For there's one thing I've learned among nature's laws,
'Tis "that every effect has a definite cause."

And were I permitted an inference to draw,
According to nature's immutable law,
I'd have full in view of the hospital walls,
That the slops and the Sutler have peopled its halls.

Were it not my kind friends that your patience would tire,
I'd open its walls for you all to admire,
But fearing already I've kept you to long,
I'll not try you further by lengthening my song.

I'll say naught of the nursing or medical skill,
Which the boys must receive with or without will,
How long since the mansion's been graced by a broom,
Nor of twenty poor fellows crammed into a room.

And now my dear friends let me say in conclusion,
That soldiering is a most fatal illusion,
And if you'd be happy, respected, and rich,
Just take my advice and keep out of the ditch.