

# **J. L. VAN BUREN**

**MAJOR AND A.D.C. AND BREVET BRIGADIER GENERAL, U. S. VOLS.**

James Lyman Van Buren was-born in 1837, on the 21st of June, at Dunkirk, N.Y. His schoolboy-life was all spent within the State, and most of it in the city of New York. In 1860 he entered one of the Ward schools, then rapidly improving in character under the stimulus of the recent establishment of the Free Academy, and recruited by the hundreds of students who, like Van Buren, sought ultimate admission to that institution. In the summer of 1852 he was admitted to the Academy, and in the autumn began his studies there. The five years' course he reduced to four, by passing from the class of 1857 to the class of 1856. He stood well in his studies; prevented from standing among the highest only by his unwillingness to give equal attention to all branches, while he excelled in those he most enjoyed. He graduated in 1856, and remained afterward for a year in connection with the Academy, studying the modern languages, especially German.

In 1857 he began the study of law, in the office of a firm of large practice in New York. He remained there a student for some time, afterward beginning to practice in a small way, and progressing rapidly until, in June, 1859, there came an opportunity to visit Europe. He went out by sailing-ship to London, travelled afterward through much of Western Europe, especially Switzerland and Italy, lived awhile at Rinteln, in Hesse, where he studied hard at the language, and returned in January 1860. Mr. Lincoln had been elected. The country was full of excitement. Van Buren, whose opinions as to the evil of slavery and the right and importance of nationality had never been doubtful, and never disguised, was almost content to have the questions at issue transferred from politics to arms. "When the first call for troops was made, he was eager to take the field, and was, with difficulty, kept from going with the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment, New York State National Guard, on its first march to Washington.

In the autumn he entered the 53d Regiment New York Volunteers, called the D'Epineuil Zouaves, with the commission of Second Lieutenant, being unwilling to accept any higher rank. He joined his regiment at Staten Island, and went with it to Annapolis, where it became a part of Brigadier-General Burnside's army, intended for some coast-wise expedition, destination unknown. While at Annapolis, he was transferred to the Signal Corps, under a general order, detailing two lieutenants from each regiment to learn the signal code. Thence he was assigned for duty on Brigadier-General Foster's staff, and soon after, the expedition sailed, encountering heavy gales, which drove the little vessel which carried the Signal Corps far out to sea, and into great danger.

Lieutenant Van Buren's first battle was Roanoke Island. General Foster mentioned him in his official report of the battle as conspicuous for marked coolness and bravery. He was engaged in carrying orders all through the fight, exposed to a heavy fire. The victory of New Berne followed soon after, where he was also engaged as aide-de-camp. When head-quarters had been established in New Berne, Lieutenant Van Buren was transferred to General Burnside's staff, and discharged the duties of Department Judge Advocate. In June, 1862, he was transferred to the position of Military Secretary to Provisional Governor Stanley, at the request of the latter, remaining still at New Berne. His rank of

Major and Aide-de-camp dates from about this time. He had been very unwilling to leave General Burnside, and had been promised a position on the staff again if the General should leave North Carolina. This soon came to pass, when McClellan had been defeated before Richmond, and Burnside brought up a part of his army to re-enforce the Army of the Potomac. Major Van Buren was left behind, but soon after went to Washington, and then to New York, on duty; and at once hurried on by way of Harrisburg to join the army, reaching the head-quarters of the newly formed Ninth Corps the day after the battle of Antietam. He remained with General Burnside while he was in command, first of that corps, and afterward of the Potomac Army, but came home in the winter, and lay for a time dangerously sick, and before he rejoined the army, General Burnside was succeeded in its command by General Hooker.

In the spring of 1863 the Department of the Ohio was formed, the Ninth Corps sent to the new department, and General Burnside established his head-quarters at Cincinnati. In August the General and his staff went to the front, and the East Tennessee campaign began. In September the army entered Knoxville. The winter was spent in driving the rebels out of East Tennessee and in defending Knoxville against Longstreet's siege. In the spring of 1864, the Ninth Corps was sent East again and ordered to recruit, head-quarters being fixed at New York. It entered Virginia to join [General] Grant's campaign against Richmond. Major Van Buren was constantly engaged and exposed in the furious fighting of that May. For services in this campaign he received the brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and afterward brevet rank of Colonel for the Knoxville campaign. In the assault on the rebel works at Petersburg, after the mine was exploded, Colonel Van Buren was detailed to accompany the commanding officer of one of the assaulting divisions, and distinguished himself greatly. When General Burnside received leave of absence, Colonel Van Buren came North with him, but returned afterward to join General Parke, who commanded the corps. His services at the Fort Steadman fight were signal and fully recognized. For gallant and good service before Petersburg he received his brevet grade of Brigadier-General.

After the fall of Petersburg, General Van Buren was kept at Washington for awhile on duty, and was then ordered to join General Parke at New York, in command of the district. Soon after this, in August 1865, he was attacked with the commencement of a sickness, from which he never recovered. His disease contracted long before, perhaps in North Carolina, slowly developed itself, and he died on the 13th of April last [1866], at his father's residence.

He was a brave and affectionate man; with his heart right, and with strong sense of duty always awake. He was conscientious and candid beyond most men. Knowing himself and his faults very well, he was magnanimous in the true sense; he had noble ambitions, and ready sympathies. He was a sagacious officer, full of resources, and prompt in action. And he always loved his country with that truer love that desired her moral greatness more than her material prosperity.

Source:

"THE UNITED STATES SERVICE MAGAZINE., VOL. V. NEW YORK:  
CHARLES B. RICHARDSON, 540 BROADWAY. LONDON: TRUNER & CO., 1866, p. 565.