

**STATEMENT OF R. MORRIS
COPELAND, ASST. ADJUTANT-
GENERAL AND MAJOR OF
VOLUNTEERS, DISCHARGED
FROM SERVICE, AUGUST 6, 1862**

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Statement of R. Morris Copeland, Asst. Adjutant-General and Major of Volunteers, discharged from service, august 6, 1862 by R. Morris Copeland

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R. MORRIS COPELAND,

Asst. Adjutant-General and Major of Volunteers,

DISCHARGED FROM SERVICE

AUGUST 6, 1862.

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1864.

STATEMENT.

HAVING suffered a grievous injustice which covers me with suspicion, and, in the judgment of many, with deep disgrace, I have eagerly hoped that some tardy justice would come to me; or at least that some opportunity would be vouchsafed by the executive officers of our Government to meet such accusations as may have been lodged against me, in order to confess their truth, or to triumphantly refute them.

In a war like ours, many persons must suffer; and, if it is for the general good, the sufferers must be content: but it is hard to understand how the general good can be advanced by driving an able, healthy, and willing officer from a post of honor and danger into absolute retirement.

I have waited patiently and impatiently for some statement of the charges against me, and have wearied every official to whom I have access by my urgent entreaties for his aid to induce the Government to listen to me.

The Governor and a Senator of Massachusetts, and many of the most esteemed citizens, have in vain repeatedly requested the President, and Secretary of War, to permit me to know explicitly and officially for what I was discharged the service.

Too much occupied to attend to all the cases of apparent injustice which might occur, the Government created a commission of officers of high rank to examine the cases of those who deem themselves aggrieved. I have humbly and earnestly

asked permission to have my case reviewed by that commission. This, too, is denied. The Government turns a deaf ear to every entreaty; and the commission confess that they have no power to examine my case, unless it is specially sent to them by the War Department: and thus I am now more than a year out of the service, without any definite knowledge of the charges against me. I have never been examined, or had an opportunity to say whether the charges which have been preferred against me are true or false.

Having been accused of the gravest fault, which, as stated in the words of my discharge, may mean treachery, cowardice, or theft, is it strange that I should exhaust every effort to know what is my accusation, and, if possible, to restore my reputation? My friends and family deserve that I should make every effort.

I have done so, and failed; and my only resort now is to tell my history as briefly as I can to those who care enough for me or for justice to listen, hoping that I may satisfy those who read this account that I have done my utmost to maintain and forward the Right; and that, if I have erred, it has never been in any manner which should subject me to the charge of having "violated an important trust."

When I recall the circumstances of my military life, which had been prosperous and honorable and commended up to the day my dismissal was published, and yet find myself, after a year, still waiting to know why I have been dismissed the service, it seems as if it must be an ugly dream.

The President, and Secretary of War, have each indirectly denied that the causes alleged by the other are the real reasons of my discharge, and both have referred me to Gen. Banks as the person who brought the charges against me, and therefore the proper person to tell me what they are; to which Gen. Banks replies, that he has never made any charges against me.

In such confusion, when those who have dismissed me, and who hold supreme power, seem specially pledged to withhold

redress, it is useless to hope for any other justification than that which may be found in my military life, the circumstances of which I will narrate as briefly as I can; and, as I have to prove a case where I am ignorant of the charges, I must be excused if I introduce some letters and facts which are not pertinent to my discharge alone, but which serve to establish the character which I held amongst my companions, equals and superiors, as a man of honor and ability.

Immediately following the call of the President for seventy-five thousand volunteers, the Secretary of War authorized the raising in Massachusetts of certain regiments for three years or the war.

The Second Massachusetts Regiment was raised under that permission, and was the first of the three-years' regiments organized in the country. On the 22d of April, I was appointed quarter-master of the regiment, and did my utmost to make my department worthy of the regiment; remaining with it through Patterson's campaign, and until Aug. 8, 1861, when I was appointed aide-de-camp to Major-Gen. Banks.

On accepting my resignation as quarter-master, Col. Gordon wrote me the following letter:—

MARYLAND HEIGHTS, CAMP SECOND MASS. REGT.,
Opposite Harper's Ferry, Aug. 8, 1861.

DEAR SIR,—I have received your letter enclosing the transmission of your resignation as quarter-master of this regiment, to take a higher rank upon the staff of Major-Gen. Banks, commanding corps at this station.

I have neither right or desire to stand in the way of your promotion; and in accepting, so far as my authority goes, your resignation, I wish to bear this testimony to your entire faithfulness in the position of regimental quarter-master; to express my satisfaction perfect and entire with you in the discharge of your daily duties, and my regret that you cannot find your interests so well furthered with us as elsewhere.

I shall take immediate steps to fill your place; and, in bidding you God speed wherever you go, remain truly your friend,

GEO. H. GORDON, *Col. Second Mass. Regt.*

On the 15th August, the following general order was issued from headquarters:—

GENERAL ORDER, No. 40.

First Lieut. J. L. Kirby Smith, Topographical Engineers; first Lieut. R. M. Copeland, Second Mass. Regt.; and second Lieut. O. G. Babcock, Corps of Engineers, — are hereby appointed aides-de-camp to the Major-General commanding.

They will be obeyed and respected accordingly.

By order of MAJOR-GEN. BANKS.

ROBT. WILLIAMS, *Assistant Adjutant-General.*

I remained with Major-Gen. Banks as aide-de-camp, and doing no especial duty, until, Lieuts. Smith and Babcock having been relieved, and Capt. Williams promoted, I was the only officer left on Gen. Banks's staff not in the quarter-master, commissary, or medical departments. By necessity of position, I became acting assistant adjutant-general, and did also the duty of aide-de-camp, until the 27th of November; when I was regularly appointed assistant adjutant-general, with the rank of major, by the President.

During this interval, the army was stationed along the Potomac River, from Hancock to Great Falls, in Maryland, and partook of the disastrous affair at Edward's and Conrad's Ferries on the 22d of October.

Whilst the army was stationed at Frederick, Md., in the winter of 1861, I was invited by Brigadier-Gen. Cooper to take command of a new Maryland regiment which he was empowered to raise. I agreed to do so upon the condition that I might select all the officers; to which the following extract from a letter of Brigadier-Gen. Cooper, of Feb. 12, 1862, is an answer:—

“But what I intended to propose was, that when the Fifth Regiment is organized, which will be shortly commenced, I will give you such aid as I can in officering it to your liking, and by such men as you may indicate. It would be well, however, that a part of the field-officers should be Marylanders, and also a fair proportion of the company-officers.”

I afterwards declined this regiment, from a necessity having arisen for taking a field-officer who would have been incompetent.

In February, the army moved into Virginia, and followed Gen. Jackson up the Valley of the Shenandoah. During the campaign, I was a participant in four skirmishes, and in the severe battle of Winchester, when Jackson returned to attack the force commanded by Brigadier-Gen. Shields; and was complimented, with other officers of Gen. Banks's staff, by Gen. Shields, in the following letter:—

WOODSTOCK, VA., April 16, 1862.

To Major R. MORRIS COPELAND, A. A. G., Depart. Shenandoah.

SIR,— In a number of the "Herald," whose exact date I now forget, I read the other day what purports to be my official report, which contains some material errors, or rather omits some important particulars.

The printed report in the "Herald" purports to be addressed to Gen. Banks; when it was addressed to you officially, as assistant adjutant-general.

In speaking of Gen. Banks's staff, the published report goes on to say "that the officers of his (Banks's) staff having remained behind, intending to leave for Centreville in the afternoon;" but omitted the following, which will be found in the official report:—

"These officers afterwards participated in the battle; and my whole command, as well as myself, are highly indebted to them for valuable services."

The tribute which was so justly earned the "Herald" omits. The omission is something which I deeply regret. I knew nothing of its publication until I accidentally fell upon a number of the paper the other day, or I would have corrected it at once.

Respectfully, your obedt. servt.,

(Signed)

JAS. SHIELDS,

Brigadier-General, Commanding Division Department Shenandoah.

Early in April, the First Regiment of Vermont Cavalry, under command of Col. J. P. Holliday, was ordered to join Gen. Banks. On its march, the colonel committed suicide.

At the request of some of the officers, who addressed a letter to Gov. Holbrook, requesting that I might be appointed to the command of the regiment, I applied to the Governor for the appointment, enclosing letters of recommendation from Gens. Banks, Shields, Williams, and others, which will be found in the subjoined Appendix, A.

Capt. Tompkins, of the cavalry of the regular army, was finally appointed to the First Vermont Cavalry; the Governor