

Lt. Charles Labuzan, Witness to a Nightmare

One of the most often repeated quotes of the Civil War comes from the pen of Union general William T. Sherman who said, "War is hell." He was right, of course, but the quote is perhaps the greatest understatement of all time. Just three words to state how horrific war can be. In truth, there is no describing the horrors of war. Some tried to express what they went through in letters home but they rarely went into graphic detail to the folks at home. It was simply too much to describe the shocking sights while assuring family and friends they were fine and there was no need for worry.

Boys in their teens and early twenties became men, often sooner than they should have had to. Occasionally one of these young men would attempt to describe the indescribable. One of these was Charles Labuzan of Mobile, Alabama.

Charles had a nice job before the war started. He was the acting British Consul in Mobile, a lofty position for a twenty year old. Then along came the war and in April 1861 young Charles enlisted in the "Mobile Rifles" which soon became the 3rd Alabama Infantry. He ended up taking a promotion into a second regiment which ended 12 months of service without seeing any action.

Lieutenant Labuzan then signed on with his third and final unit, the 42nd Alabama Infantry. In June of 1862 the new regiment arrived in Tupelo and took up Provost duties, sort of like MP's or Military Police. The chance to see action was dashed again when the Army of Tennessee marched away on campaign and the 42nd was left behind. At long last they were assigned to the new Army of West Tennessee under General Earl Van Dorn and by the 30th of September they were marching north from Ripley headed for Corinth.

Charles' baptism of fire came on October 3rd when his brigade charged the old Confederate earthworks near Oliver's Hill. For the first time he saw men killed and wounded and, amazingly, took time to make entries in his journal. "Am writing on the battlefield at 2 ½ o'clock while heavy firing of artillery is going on ahead." The regiment was in the thick of it in the fighting around Battery F. "Within about 50 yards they opened an awful fire and our men fell flat on their faces and replied with awful ruin."

He spent the night on a captured "yankee" blanket talking with his close friend Gatsby about the men they had seen shot and what the morning would bring. It would prove to be far worse than anything they had ever seen.

An artillery bombardment woke Charles at 4 a.m. "The shells flew thick and fast cutting off large limbs and filling the air with fragments, many burst within twenty feet and the pieces passed within two or three." At 10:15 Col. William P. Rogers of the 2nd Texas Infantry called on the men of the 42nd Alabama to join in a charge against Battery Robinett. The men of Alabama responded. "Rising the crest of the hill the whole of Corinth with its enemy fortifications burst upon our view. The US flag was floating over the forts and in town. We were now met by a perfect storm of grape, canister and cannon balls and minie balls. Oh God, I have never seen the like, the men fell like grass. I

saw men running at full speed stop suddenly and fall on their faces with their brains scattered all around with legs or arms cut off shrieking within a few feet of me. I gave myself to God and got ahead of my company. The ground was literally strewn with corpses. I rushed to the ditch of the fort right between some large cannon. A man within 2 feet of me put his head cautiously up to shoot into the fort but he suddenly dropped his musket and his brains were dashed in a stream over my fine coat. Oh, we were butchered like dogs. I could see men falling as they attempted to run some with their heads to pieces and others with blood streaming down their backs. It was horrible. One poor fellow lying almost on top of me told me his name and asked me to take his pocket book if I escaped and give it to his mother and tell her he died a brave man. I asked him if he was a Christian and told him to pray which he did with cannon thundering deadly accompaniment.”

Miraculously, Charles not only survived, but was not even wounded. He took cover behind a stump and the enemy captured him at the end of the fight. He remained a prisoner in Corinth for several days but was given permission to walk the battlefield to look for his friend. The terror of the field returned to him as he walked among the dead. He saw Colonel Rogers “shot with four balls” and several others but not his good friend Gatsby who he would later learn had made it through the fight unscathed. He was treated well by his captors, one Union captain even going so far as to take him to his quarters where “he pressed a clean shirt on me so humanely that I could not refuse.”

Lazuban was paroled and soon exchanged for another soldier and returned to duty. He was captured again at Vicksburg and a third time at the end of the war while in a Georgia hospital. With his parole in hand he returned to Mobile and took a job as a produce merchant. He married rather late in life and a single child, a daughter, gave him three wonderful grandchildren. The years in uniform had ruined his health but despite the ravages of time and war he lived to be 90 years old, finally joining his fallen comrades in June of 1930.