

## DRUCILLA LYTTLE WATKINS COTNER FILE

At the beginning of the "Civil War" or "The War Between the States", as it is sometimes called, in early 1861, I was a little girl, barely seven years old, but I retain a vivid recollection of the great struggle from beginning to end. I think I must have inherited and absorbed a political trend, for I certainly took a lively interest in the tragic affairs of the times. Our home was not far from the Virginia and Kentucky lines in the great Appalachian region, which is practically one hundred percent American and almost pure protestant. [sic] Even at this time, 1930, in our little home town of Jefferson City, Jefferson County, Tennessee, among its three thousand inhabitants are to be found only one foreigner and only one Catholic. This is the same Appalachian country in which the immortal Bob Taylor and his illustrious [sic] brother were born and reared in their home of "Happy Valley", which is so beautifully described in that masterpiece of literature "The Career and Life of Robert Love Taylor", written by his three talented brothers.

This Mossy Creek Valley of the same region was perhaps not less lovely than Taylor's own "Happy Valley". The white winged dove of peace which had hovered so long over this lovely pastoral scene, with drooping head, was winging away to a more congenial resting place; while the ebony plumed vulture of despair [sic] was wailing not far away, to assert its right to reign.

Tennessee had seceded with other Southern States and was later known as the Volunteer State because it sent more soldiers to the Civil War than any other state in the United States. While the middle and west divisions of the state were almost solidly Confederate, as those same divisions are almost solidly Democratic today, the eastern or mountainous [sic] part of the state gave a majority to the Union, just as it is largely Republican today. However, a majority of the leading wealthy slaveholding citizens, even in East Tennessee went with the Confederacy. Still, some influential men, and here and there a sprinkling of slave holders adhered to the Union, not believing the slaves would be freed.

When war was declared, the First and Second Confederate Regiments were organized in West and Middle Tennessee respectively, and the Third Infantry in East Tennessee. At the time, I had two brothers in College, one aged seventeen and one fifteen, also an Irish lad of eighteen by the name of Johnnie Toland, whom my father brought home with him from Washington City five years before and placed in school with his own sons. Johnnie was a very polite and bright orphan boy whose parents had both died on the ocean coming across so that he, with his two brothers and sisters were literally landed

and stranded in America. He found a place as page in Congress, and his ability and attractiveness won my father's interest. One day he asked him if he would like to go home with him and receive a College education with his own sons. He was very grateful and said above everything in the world he would like an education. His older sister gave her consent and he came. Johnnie was a wonderful student and was so pleasant and respectful, with such good manners that he soon won a place for himself and we all loved him and treated him as one of the family.

My older brother and Johnnie left college at once and enlisted in Company A, 3rd Tennessee Regiment. My younger brother was wild to go but was so young my mother perswaded [sic] him to wait a while. He enlisted one year later at the age of sixteen. Many organizations were joining both Federals and Confederates in our community; neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend; sometimes even brother against brother. From most every home one or more donned the blue or the gray and marched away to fight for the cause which each deemed just and right, many of them never to return—the flower of our fair Southland, the fairest and best. Fathers, husbands, brothers, sweethearts, friends, baptized [sic] with tears, consecrated by prayer. Women desolate, hearts broken, the soldiers marched forth in their handsome new uniforms and equipment with heads erect, daring and hopeful; with laughter and song, banners flying and drums beating. I remember some of our neighbors sent five or six sons to the Confederate Army.

Many entertainments and parties were given in our community for the departing soldiers. There was dancing and feasting and all was as merry as a "Wedding Bell." I remember the lovely ball dresses worn by my older sister and cousins to the occasions where youth and beauty met and the spirit of gayety pervaded the festive scene—then tomorrow—off to war.

The first event that touched me personally was when my older brother left for the front. The volunteers from our community entrained at a little station on the Southern Railroad one and a half miles from our home. Our family preferred to say their sad goodbyes at home, but I was always different. I wanted to see them off so I asked my mother if I might go to see my brother take the train. She gave her consent and I walked the mile and a half alone across the pasture fields of my father's plantation to Talbott Station. I don't think there is one incident of my life more indelibly impressed upon my memory than this one. It was early morning in April 1861. The sun had just arisen from her saffron couch and donned her most resplendent robe of gold and turned her smiling face upon our world, as if mocking the tragedy of war. The air was crisp and cool and the dew still sparkled upon the grass. The birds were trilling their mating songs and flitting from tree to tree. I can see distinctly, today the little winding path that ran across

the fields, and the wild strawberry blooms that grew beside the way and in the old rail fence corners—a day of supreme loveliness to greet a world of woe.

When I reached the little village, I stopped with a family we knew who lived near the station, and waited and watched for the train to come in. The village was full of soldiers and their friends to see them off. When the train came in at last I ran down to the track. Many of the coaches were already loaded with soldiers from further south, who cheered lustily as the train drew to a stop. When the local troops began to file into the coach I went and stood right at the foot of the steps and watched for my brother. I was so afraid that he would not see or notice me. But when he started up the steps he saw me and reached down and took my hand and said “Goodbye”. There were tears in his voice, but I was so proud and pleased that he noticed me that I do not believe I shed a tear. Soon he wrote me a letter. The first I ever received. He said he wrote it on his knapsack, and I thought it was wonderful.

During the first year of the war I do not remember anything that impressed me especially. As a child of seven I could not realize the full import of what was transpiring. Things at home went on pretty much the same. We children were in school under a governess. There were no actual engagements near us until later. Our brother was home often, as well as other soldiers coming and going. Soldiers were marching and counter marching. The Confederate soldiers and their constituents full of hope and optimism, for up to the battle of Gettysburg everything was favorable to the Confederacy. The enemy had not invaded our territory and it was thought the conflict would soon end. (Favorably for the South)

At the beginning of the second year of the war, my second brother enlisted. He joined a regiment of picked Cavalry commanded by Col. Brazelton, a first cousin of my father's. They were all men of fine appearance with fine horses splendidly equipped. Their regiment was called “The Brazelton Dashers.” I remember my brother rode a fine claybank horse of which he was very proud, named Gilpin. My brother was a boy of very fine appearance. He was tall and slender and agile. He was of a very thoughtful mein [sic], still with a saving grace of humor. His reputation and character were above reproach. Just before he entered college there was an academy of girls opened in our community by a very fine lady teacher. There were several boys who wanted to enter the school to prepare for college. She said there were only two boys she would admit. One was my brother and the other boy was Jimmy Hill. They were modest, of good behaviour [sic], and fine students. The president of the college that he attended told me after the war was over that he was the best student that he had in the college during the time that he was president, which was seven years. He was planning to study law. He

was so young when he enlisted that my father placed him under the personal care of Col. Brazelton, and Carlo always rode with him on a march or in battle.

About this time our real troubles began. The Federal forces invaded our territory and actual fighting began in our midst. First one army and then the other had possession of our homeland. Deprivations and retaliations were everyday occurrences. [sic] Our stock and provisions were taken from us, our houses ransacked and nothing was exempt. Events crowded thick and fast; the Federal army west of us, the Confederate army east of us, constantly advancing and retreating, skirmishing and raiding each others [sic] lines. Sometimes the Federal soldiers would march up the highway two or four abreast from daylight until dark—thousands and thousands of them. Oftentimes they would drop out of rank by two's or three's or more and come to the house for water or something to eat, or just to look around. We children were regular little fire-eating rebels, proud of it, and delighted to tell them so. I learned all the catchy war songs. Dixie, and several others, and sang them to the Yankee soldiers with great gusto upon every occasion, much to their amusement. One of the songs we used to sing went like this:

Oh yes, I am a Southern girl,  
And glory in the name  
And boast it with far greater pride  
Than glittering wealth or fame.

I envy not the Northern girl  
Her robes of beauty rare;  
Though diamonds grace her snowy neck,  
And pearls bedeck her hair.

I scorn to wear one bit of silk,  
One bit of Northern lace;  
But I will make my homespun dress,  
And wear it with much grace.

We have sent our sweethearts to the war,  
But dear girls never mind.  
Your soldier love will not forget  
The girl he left behind.

and another –

Dearest love, do you remember

When we last did meet?  
How you told me that you loved me  
Gently kneeling at my feet?

Oh, how proud you stood before me  
In your suit of gray  
And you vowed to always love me,  
And your country never to betray.

Chorus – Weeping, sad and lonely  
Sighs and tears are all in vain.  
When this cruel war is over  
Praying that we meet again.

There is perhaps more of it which I do not remember.

The Yankee soldiers would tell us that they were marching on to Richmond to capture the capitol of the Confederacy, then in a few days they would come back, maybe stampeding with the Rebels in hot pursuit, much to our delight, and we would chant to them, “You didn’t get to Richmond, did you?” “You didn’t get to Richmond, did you.?”— This same thing occurred [sic] several times, until finally they did get to Richmond and the Southern Confederacy was in their hands. That was a blow to the cause of the South, yet they still hoped against hope.

One year after my second brother enlisted, he was slain in the battle of Murfreesboro, Tenn. Shortly before he had had a narrow escape at the battle of Fishing Creek in Kentucky, and came home on a short furlough. When he started back, to his command he left with Mother some trinkets he especially prized. Among them, a medal he had won in college.

The battle of Murfreesboro lasted two days of hard fighting. The first day was won by the Confederates, but the second day the Federals attacked again and were victorious, getting possession of the battlefield. Col. Brazelton said he and my brother were side by side on the battlefield as usual, when he saw Carlo put up his hand, and he said, “Are you shot my son.?” “Yes, in the breast,” my brother replied.” Then ride [missing word] the field while you have the strength,” but Carlo answered, “Not while I can shoot.”

The Federals then charged and the Confederates were repulsed. Brazelton said, as he turned to lead his regiment off the field, he [illegible] for Carlo and he was falling off his horse, and that before he had ridden far his horse cantered up beside him, riderless,

and went with him to camp. He sent him home to us, and writing of my brother said, "A [illegible] boy, a finer soldier I have never seen and he was brave to a fault."

My father made every possible effort to get some information, [illegible] recover his body, but to no avail. This sad event changed everything for our family, and I think broke my mother's heart.

About this time Johnnie Toland and my older brother were with a detachment of the army on the Mississippi River and were in the seige [sic] of Vicksburg, where they were entirely surrounded by the enemy and cut off from all supplies and communications. They were forced to eat [illegible] meat, which my brother who always made the best of everything, said would have tasted very well to a starving man if he had killed the [illegible] mules, but they only ate those which were too poor for duty. Indeed [missing text] were reduced almost to starvation before they surrendered.

They said sometimes the Confederate officers called the soldiers together and laid the situation before them and said, "Shall we surrender?" The unanimous reply would be, "No, who wants to surrender. Though many of them were dying daily. When finally the few that were left did surrender my brother came home and suffered a long spell of [sic] [illegible]ness before he was able to return to his command. Once while in the seige [sic], they sent out a spy who slipped through the Confederate army to get information and possible aid. Johnny Toland wrote on a scrap paper less than an inch square, "Ike's well", gave it to the spy, told mother's address to this man, and asked him if he ever got through the enemy lines to send it to her. I remember the excitement and relief when my mother received the little paper. Though was no name [illegible] to it, we knew Johnny was at least alive and able to write, for we knew his writing. Wasn't that a thoughtful act of kindness? The man who carried it would have met instant death if it had been found on him [illegible] he concealed it somewhere.