

You'll learn of a small Confederate chaplain from Tennessee,
who exploded into words and action, when
you open the covers of . . .

3rd TN

DAVENPORT'S DIARY

by Larry Arnett

"Are you a minister of the gospel?"
The question came from one of two
Chicago district Methodist ministers,
and the Confederate Chaplain who
was being held prisoner of war, answered
calmly: "I am."

"Of what church?"

"The Methodist Church, South."

"Of what conference?"

"Memphis."

"Where were you stationed?"

"At Pontotoc, Mississippi."

"Were you in the fight at Donelson?"

"I was."

"Did you fight any?"

"I did."

"Did you take aim?"

"I did."

"Well, that is considered murder
to take aim in battle, is it not? You
should let God direct the ball."

"I do not know. I went out to kill."

The year was 1863, and the Civil
War was going full blast. The scene
was Camp Douglas, Illinois, and the
man—an undersized version of the
featherweight; but no frail person by
any means—whose curt and abrupt

replies soon brought that briefest of
interrogations to a shrieking halt,
was Thomas Hopkins Davenport,
clergyman and private soldier in the
Army of the Confederate States. He
was also a chronicler of his times, and
the preceding dialogue (following
which Davenport was imprisoned for
seven months, before making his es-
cape) has been taken verbatim from
his private journal, written between
the years 1861-1864, while he served
as the Chaplain of the 3rd Tennessee
Regiment of the Confederate Army.
Nearly forgotten since his death in
1888, Davenport returned only re-
cently to the circle of public interest
when his witty and fascinating diary
was presented, as requested in writ-
ing, to the manuscript division of the
Tennessee Library and Archives, by
his daughter, Mrs. Alan Leftwick
Jemison, nee Lizzie Beall Davenport.
Mrs. Jemison had unexpectedly re-
ceived her father's lost diary in 1895
from Attorney Henry McLean, of Mar-
ion, Kansas, a son of Captain James
K. McLean of the 3rd Illinois Cavalry,
Davenport's last captor.

It was then learned by Mrs. Jemi-
son that the diary—unintentionally
left behind when Davenport made his
last escape—had been found among
the Chaplain's abandoned belongings
by Captain McLean, who had kept the
journal and sent it home, along with
other personal effects.

Twenty years after the war had
ended, McLean rediscovered Daven-
port's diary—where it had lain for-
gotten in the family garret—and as
he read the journal with absorbing
interest, his eyes chanced upon a pas-
sage written by Davenport more than
a score of years earlier, which read:
"If anything happens to me, please
send this book to the lady I love."
The passage did not include a name
or address of the lady in question,
however, and a search through the
pages of the journal led to an unfruit-
ful conclusion.

Captain McLean at once composed
several notices, which were published
in a number of southern papers, but
there were no replies to his inquiries.
Then in January of 1895, McLean's

son, who had enthusiastically participated in the search for the diary's author, decided he would renew the efforts at trying to locate either the Chaplain or the aforementioned "Lady" and so began to place ads in papers.

A friend of Mrs. Jemison noticed one of the ads and immediately sent word to the daughter of the deceased Chaplain. Mrs. Jemison, who in 1895 was a resident of Birmingham, Alabama, wrote Henry McLean, and shortly thereafter received the cherished diary from the Kansas attorney. The diary is even now in an excellent state of preservation and will later be transferred from the manuscript division of the State Library and Archives, to the Confederate Room of the nearby Tennessee Museum.

Almost all that can be learned of Thomas Hopkins Davenport today must necessarily be based upon what he had to say about himself in the contents of the journal. He seldom attempted to objectify his feelings in his writings or to interpret unprecedented situations theologically; he simply reported civil war matters factually. We do know that he behaved splendidly in captivity: he was captured six times and he escaped six times.

He was born in Pulaski, Tennessee in 1837. It was here that he was raised and educated and later became a minister of the Methodist Church. Shortly after assuming ministerial duties he volunteered to serve with the South in the War Between the States. Apparently, his decision to keep a record of his thoughts and experiences was reached immediately following his enlistment, as the diary begins with this important affirmation of the basis of Davenport's belief: "A dreadful war having sprung up between the North and South, the North having martialled their thousands to invade and lay waste our beautiful land, subjugate the people and rule with a rod of iron. After mature deliberation and much prayer, I felt it to be my duty to give my assistance to the country where I had been nurtured and where the bones of my ancestors reposed. I felt that I had no right to enjoy the blessing purchased by others... I could not enjoy the comforts of home while my brothers were toiling for me... I would be unworthy the mother who bore me and taught me lessons of honor and patriotism... unworthy the ancestors who fought and bled for liberty did I remain at

home... It cost me a severe struggle, I was young in the ministry, had but fairly started and I foresaw that my studies must be given up and perhaps the best of my life lost... I had a pleasant station, warm friends, these I must leave for the hardships of camp and field. I have always been small and weak (Davenport weighed 95 pounds at the time); could I endure the toil and exposure? Friends said, 'You cannot; it is useless to attempt it.' Duty said, 'Go and try it, if you cannot, come back.' I had ever been timid, when a child... afraid to meet strange children, could enjoy the society of the gentle. Consequently, it was a cross to become a soldier. Even to this day I give myself no credit for bravery, for in reality I am a coward. Nothing but a high regard of honor and the opinion of the world would make me a soldier... could I pass the corruptions of camp and return... unspoiled? With what anxiety I paced my office from dawn to dark. Everything seemed to have lost its charms. I could think of nothing but the war..."

In September of 1861, Davenport left Pulaski and journeyed to Bowling Green, Kentucky, where he was inducted into the 3rd Tennessee Infantry Regiment of the Confederate Army.

In the morning of the same day of his enlistment, "... there came an order for two hundred and fifty of the regiment... to prepare five days ration and be ready to march at a moments warning. Fifty were to go from Captain C. H. Walker's company. I had gone to join that company and asked to be permitted to be one of that number. He hesitated. I was pale... at length he consented and carried me to the surgeon (Dr. Stout). He examined me, said perhaps I would do. Colonel Brown was called, looked at me, said I was very delicate but perhaps would make a soldier... and gave me a gun, knapsack, haversack and canteen. Thus I was fully equipped for the war. My comrades all laughed at the idea of my going on a tramp... we marched eleven miles... the last three or four miles in the rain. I was very much weary but said nothing... at length, the command was given, 'Halt... unsling knapsacks and go to bed' in the rain, no tent... no supper... I never slept more soundly."

Then follows a record of the following days events, the first real indications of soldiering given the author:

"We had built our fires, and had commenced preparing supper when the alarm was given... in a few minutes the Colonel (Helm) came round, told us that we would in all probability be attacked before day by superior numbers, that we must sleep in line... gun by our side, all lights must be extinguished... thus passed my second night in camp."

The anticipated collision with Union troops was not consummated, however, and Davenport was presented with his first taste of field duty, which he records in his Diary: "... cooked several days rations. Here was my first experience in the culinary art in camp. It was an art. Cake about six inches in diameter and about one and a half (inches) thick, no salt or grease, and made of flour. In addition to all that, it was burnt black..."

"We camped by a field of corn in full roasting ear. We had marched all day without eating and the rations were far behind, so we charged the field and ate the last ear. The night was cold and we burnt all the rails, we also ate a potato patch..."

It is interesting to note that the minister, firmly resolved to serve the C. S. A. as would an impassioned career soldier, never speaks of his new-found hardships as an infantryman with the disdain and affected coolness of the unwilling; his seeming detachment, as reflected by his writings, resulted from genuine fatigue and not from uncaring disinterest: "All day we trudged... over hill and valley. Dark came and... we stopped... having walked over thirty miles."

What becomes apparent in reading the Diary is that the minister regarded himself with pride as a field soldier: "On this march a hundred broke down... but I went through to the astonishment of my comrades."

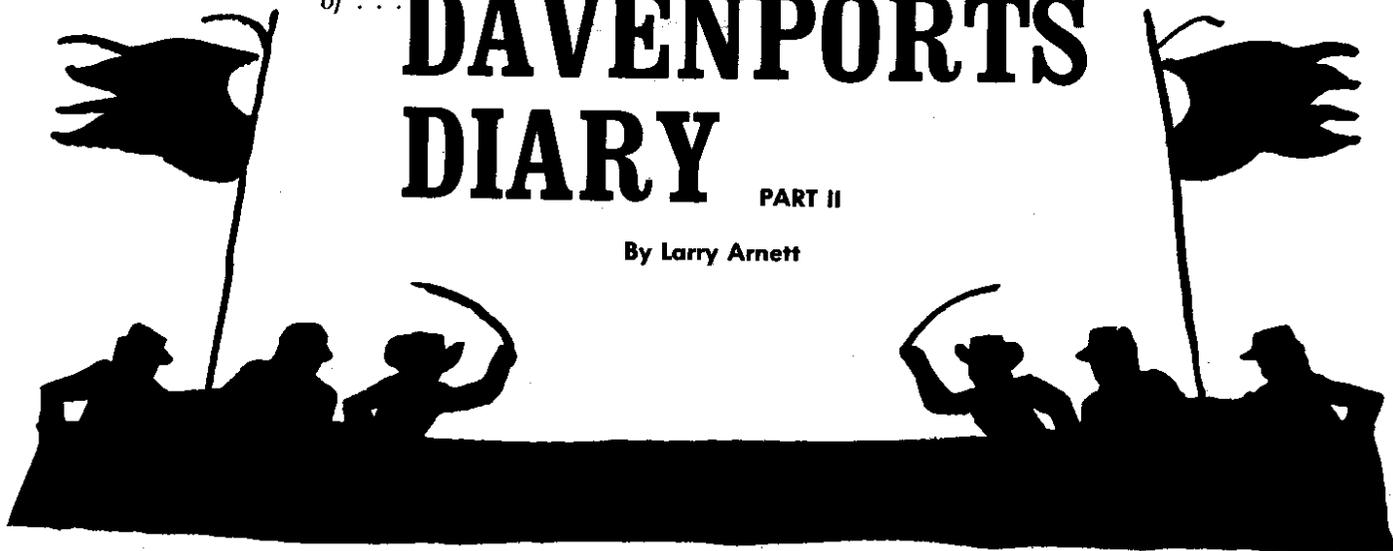
Davenport's capacity to bear physical hardship is essential to our understanding of the man, and yet his ability to poke fun at the herculean efforts of his comrades reveals even more to us about him than do his descriptive passages of the unit's collective exertions: "We worked a heap, drilled much and stood guard not little... there came orders to strike tents and be ready to move. It was mid-winter... so we packed up and went to Russellville, Kentucky. We remained there... long enough to build chimneys to our tents..."

(Next month:
Captives and Escapes)

Continuing the true story of the little Confederate
Chaplain from Tennessee, as taken from the pages

of . . . **DAVENPORTS
DIARY** PART II

By Larry Arnett



After standing picket in the rain for more than twenty-six hours, Davenport's generally familiar military experiences soon give way to other, more serious aspects of soldiering and we pass on with the minister to scenes of action vividly recalled in the journal: "January seventh... about midnight we left for Clarksville, Tennessee...exchanged the cars for boats and went to Fort Donelson. We landed about dark Saturday and laid down on the frozen ground to sleep. Sunday the ninth...skirmishing with cavalry and infantry... early the morning of the thirteenth the battle opened on the right... artillery and small arms through the day...the gunboats opened on the fort. Night came and we had repulsed the enemy... a heavy snow fell... on our left was heavy firing.

The next morning was dreadful cold, but no time to stand around the fires. The enemy repulsed the previous day brought up fresh troops and reopened the fight which was kept up through the day... at night we again worked on the fortification...the enemy had received heavy reinforcements. When the battle began they had forty-five thousand...they now had seventy-five thousand... we went at the appointed time and fighting commenced just after daylight... we were ordered out of our rifle pits to charge a battery... a half mile from us. We went and fought a long time but did not take the battery. The order was given to fall back to the pits... we had scarcely gained the pits when

a battery began to shell us at a furious rate. I heard someone behind... and on turning around saw Colonel J. C. Brown...jump from his horse, wave his sword over his head and cry: "Men of the 3rd Tennessee! Come out of the pits!" The men heard their brave commander... and at once obeyed... we moved... by divisions across the pits... till we came in front of a heavy battery which opened on us with a heavy shower of grape shot...all day the battle raged.

Late in the evening we were ordered back...found that the enemy had taken possession of our rifle pits... we pitched into them and drove them back. The enemy had now been repulsed... firing ceased and we all lay down, the weary to rest and the wounded to die...about midnight, Major Chairs came around and ordered us to rise and be ready for action. All of us supposed we were going back there to fight. We marched about half a mile and were halted in the cold near two hours when we saw a white flag pass which caused us to think that all was not well... about daylight, saw the white flag floating where the "Ronnie Blue" (a banner presented the unit by ladies of Giles and Maury counties) had waved and heard the bugle sound a truce. The fort had surrendered.

Following the surrender of Fort Donelson, Davenport, along with his fellow rebels, was marched to Dover, where the captives stacked arms and were herded aboard ship. They were transported to Alton, Illinois, and

later moved by rail to Chicago.

After seven months of imprisonment, Davenport escaped and made his way back to his own lines.

Further investigation into the battered diary reveals the minister's sense of duty and purpose: "Should I fall, let me die at my post, and let my brethren of the Memphis conference know that I fell there, that I died for humanity."

However, Davenport was not so consciously prideful of his role as soldier as to allow these beliefs in duty to overshadow his compassion for his fellow man: "Today I witnessed a sight. I saw fourteen men shot for desertion. I visited them twice yesterday and attended them to the place of execution. I saw them wash and dress themselves for the grave. They were tied to the stake... there were the coffins ready to receive them. I think they were objects of pity, poor and had families dependent upon them. War is a cruel thing."

The strife increased in tempo; nevertheless, the little minister retained his given ability to see the more hilarious aspects of warfare, even in the midst of the shooting: "Bullets are making music about my ears... nothing but continual skirmishing. This is certainly the roughest place I ever saw and the rockiest. Rocks are continually rolling down to the amusement of those highest up and the annoyance of those lower down." Obviously, there was not a thing that could depress Davenport's character.

In certain passages, it is left for the reader to determine whether the reverend considered the line activity in which he was engaged a matter of tactics and strategy or merely an unending series of snafu situations:

June 8th—Moved six miles to the right; fortified.

June 9th—Moved to the right, moved back. Moved to the right and rear.

June 10th—Rained all day and night.

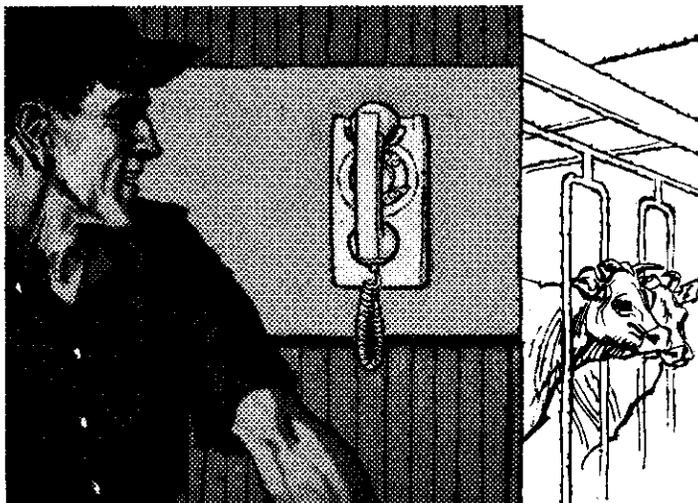
June 11th—Moved back to the left. Rained.

June 12th—Rained, rained, rained.

Davenport seized every opportunity to hold tent meetings, returning to battle the minute he had delivered his sermon: "Again and again the ranks were thinned by the enemy's guns, but still the column moved on till within fifty yards of the enemy's line...having no support, the brigade...was ordered to halt...our loss was very heavy...two hundred and seventy killed and wounded."

Davenport's journal is not a new form of literature and yet it is not precisely like any other autobiographical account. It was written by a man of definite religious convictions, and in his last reflections, this innate religiousness ascends to the fore as he finally concludes: "Oh, God, how long will this cruel war last?"

Thomas Hopkins Davenport was—about 100 years premature—the epitome of the articles of today's U.S. Armed Forces Code of Conduct. 'If I am captured' reads article 3, 'I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.' Although these words are not found written precisely this way upon the pages of Davenport's journal, we get the feeling that the statement sounds like something he might have written or said. And he would have practiced what he preached!



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