

In the Recollections of a Fruitful Volunteer in the Civil War.

By J. C. TAYLOR

At the earnest solicitation of my children, I undertake to describe for them some of the experiences which came to me as a soldier in the Civil war. This is not intended as a history,



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of campaigns, the army, or the regiment. It is merely what it purports to be—the recollections of personal experience and what a soldier thought about a life so different. In the obscurity of a time so long past many events of importance must be forgotten. More than half a century, the whole of an active lifetime, has passed since the events narrated took place. Most of the actors in this national tragedy, which nearly or remotely touched every home in the land, have vanished into the unknown world, where we, the little remnant of survivors, must soon follow leaving no living witness of the lurid scenes of the days when we marched and battled over so many of the rebellious states.

I can remember when as a boy who had not quite reached, or just barely touched his 'teens in his age progress, I was walking on the two miles stretch of road from my home in the little village of Garrettsville, in Ohio, to the home of my mother's parents, and reading as I walked the then thrilling pages of "Uncle Tom's

Cabin," an epochal book which did as much, perhaps, as any single cause to solidify sentiment and bring on the catastrophe of war—inevitable possibly in any event. With the vivid imagination of those early years I turned aside to cut down the dried mullen stalks by the roadside, the stick in my hand becoming a sword and the mullen stalks posturing as the terrible slave-holders in the glow of my feelings. It did not occur to me as possible that I would soon, or ever be engaged in a real war to settle this very question. That would have been a freak of imagination beyond what seemed as any possible event in my life. I remember that it seemed to me that there could never be a war which would involve generally the people of this country, or in which I could possibly take part. Why, war belonged to history, and had no place in common, hum-drum life. And yet, just as I was turning the corner into manhood the whole country was aflame with one of the most memorable conflicts of all time, a conflict of which I had some inside glimpses, and thus came to know war as the horrible monster which at last it is coming to be recognized.

I did not feel nearly so warlike, it is to be presumed, when it came to a show-down, as when fighting dead mullen stalks under the sentimental stimulus of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Anyway, a year had passed after the real fighting began, and the north had suffered rather the worst of it, before I was brought to the point of offering myself as a target for southern bullets. Additional calls for troops, for three years instead of three months, was notice that the struggle was no small nor brief affair, but was to be a test of the manhood and endurance of both sides. And it may be noted here that the final result was achieved

ched compactly along the country
and we met the counter current from
the field, an unending train of
laden ambulances and a steady file of
stricken soldiers not so badly wounded
as to prevent their walking.

In common parlance, with reference to the mood of the earth, it was "a fine day." The declining sun shone brightly from a cloudless sky; the hum of insects and the twitter of birds were in the air; there was the pleasant stir of a soft breeze, which made music in the trees; and yet this current of bloody carnage that flowed to meet our warm counter-current of fresh provender for the god of war was supplemented by the hospitals that were in every farmhouse, with operating tables often in the door-yards, and piles of dismembered legs and arms rising like gory monuments to mark the surgeons faithful attention to duty; and the glory of it all accented by the pulsations of the heavy guns in front and by the frequent clash of musketry that marked the crisis of a charge.

It would not seem that soldiers so nearly exhausted by fatigue, hunger, thirst and the sickness inseparable from the seasoning process would be in very good stomach for the fight, but as I remember, although these gory lines on either side would hardly be supposed to be bright, beckoning signs to lure sick boys on to glorious deeds, they did not seem to have any demoralizing effect on the column--we all strode grimly forward as best we could, having left so much behind perhaps slightly reckless as to what was before. As near as I can remember this baptism of fire did not include any real fighting; it consisted principally in lying down behind a battery. I believe we got up once or twice as though we were going to do something, but seemingly thought better of it, and returned to our recumbent position behind the guns. In these movements we had something like 20 men wounded, one of whom died. Colonel Stevens was one of the wounded, but I have an impression that the wound was slight, as were most of the others. That night the Confeds retired, and our army followed, but the enemy slipped through Cumberland Gap and made good their escape.

The day of the fight and hard march

we lost about the last remnant of the baggage necessary for night comfort, and we had a night chill to match the fever of the day. I think it was the next day that we took to doing some energetic stealing on our own account, and in this fine art we improved from day to day, developing in our ranks some real geniuses, who blossomed to our glory and future comfort.

And the next day, too, we saw some of the fruits of war--the harvest of death in the valley between the battery-crowned hills. Coming down from the hill of our first battle experience, we saw dead men thicker than I have ever seen them since, although we were afterwards in battles where the fighting was fiercer and the percentage of casualties much larger. In the little valley in front of our battery the bodies of the slain were almost like saw-logs in a boom--blue and butternut in hit-or-miss fashion. And in the rebel hospital on the opposite hill were sadder sights still, of men in the pain of mortal hurts to whom death had not yet brought relief.

The weary pursuit to Cumberland Gap, and the circuitous march to Bowling Green, where we rested two or three days and received much-needed supplies, and then marched to Nashville was a prolonged period of physical suffering that had no parallel in any subsequent campaign, although we afterwards made as long marches. The remnant of about 200 men that stacked arms at Nashville November 12 were a sorry looking lot. In the six weeks since we left Louisville, and exactly two months since we left Ionia, the tinsel and the pomp of glorious war were pretty well faded out. But the little bunch of men that stood it through were the nucleus of a body that was afterwards able to stand the strain of any sort of campaign. Many of those who dropped out rejoined from time to time and helped to swell the ranks to about ordinary veteran size.

In Camp at Nashville.

And now we settled down, near Nashville, to the comfort of camp life, with daily drills, guard mounting and all the usual soldier occupations and always with something to eat and drink. And we were no longer over-particular to what that something

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A Personal Introduction.

It was just after our introduction to army life through the terrible Kentucky march and we had just gone into camp at Edgefield, a suburb of Nashville, when I had my best (and only) personal introduction to General Sheridan. I introduced myself under circumstances that make me smile with self derision, softened by just a little self pity, to this day. Like all country boys, used mainly to small village life, I had an intense desire to look over the cities that we touched at long intervals on our way. So I asked for a pass to visit Nashville, which was readily granted by our colonel, but it had to be approved by both the brigade and division commanders. I was green and a little timid, of which fact I was perhaps too self-conscious, and after finding my way past brigade headquarters it seems I must have lost some time in locating division headquarters. I found them at last, but the tents seemed to be mostly vacant at the time. So I inquired for General Sheridan, proposing apparently to do business directly with him, and was directed to a tent in which I found him sitting alone. I feel quite certain that I knew enough to salute him properly, at least I intended and stated the object of my call, in stead of standing there all day long and giving me a few pointers as to the proper officers of his staff to whom to apply, he talked to me in a fatherly sort of way, saying that it was too late to visit the city that day, but advising that I return at an earlier hour the next day, when he would be glad to see me on my way with proper credentials.

Now, I never was called "a pretty boy," and when I reflect how I must have appeared at that time, with the haggard countenance due to illness and hardship, and to the breaking point, and the general untidy apparel soiled by the march, and the night sleeping on the ground, I can't think I would have been a very attractive person, though about the same age as the

whom we all so much admired, and in whose future career of glory we took so much interest and pride.

It was only another proof that a really great man can afford to be human. It is the little fellows unduly elevated to high position that will be found haughty and sternly insistent on the observance of all the rules of subservience to grandeur of position.

Murfreesboro Campaign.

This happy condition, in camp near Nashville, continued until the day after Christmas, when the army started once more on its move southward. Of course, our pleasant weather ended the very day we started to march, when the first of the winter rains set in, and continued with short intervals as long as we were on the move. It is to be noted that a number of the commissioned officers of the regiment had taken advantage of their power to resign, in order to get out of a mighty unpleasant situation. In most cases there was valid reason, as the Kentucky march had shown their physical inability to endure the kind of campaign we were making. In Company K we lost both Captain Baroth and Lieutenant Russell, leaving Lieutenant Burritt as the only commissioned officer in company. Colonel Stevens had also retired, and was later appointed colonel in the invalid corps on duty in Indianapolis, and Lieutenant-Colonel Whipple had also disappeared. And so it was that the regiment started out under the command of Colonel McCreery, appointed from the First Michigan Infantry which had seen a year's service in the Potomac army. McCreery's record was exceptionally good, he having risen from the ranks to be captain for gallantry in action, when he was three times wounded. The regiment took to him from the start. His very appearance produced confidence; he had the straight-cut mouth set in a determined countenance that betokens the fighter, such as he proved to be. He also had the feeling of comradeship and the social impulses of good fellowship, as especially dem-

The men stood the fatigues of the march much better than on their initial introduction, but as always there were some unpleasant incidents on the way. One of these that I recollect was being turned into a field that had been cropped during the season, and was then ankle deep in mud, with the rain still coming down, to make our camp for the night. There were no tents on the march, and when the ranks broke there was a hustling for rails; and the man who got three rails to keep him out of the mud was lucky. By covering with the woolen blankets over head and all, most of the rain would be shed; although a movement during sleep might send a stream inside.

We moved down toward Murfreesboro with more or less opposition by the rebel army under General Bragg, having two or three sharp skirmishes on the way. Finally on December 30 the regiment was moved into battle line, with the other troops, when it became apparent that Bragg had decided to make a stand to prevent our occupation of Murfreesboro. I was not on duty with the company at the time, having been detailed as clerk in the adjutant's office. It happened, therefore, that when Bragg attacked our part of the line with massed force early the next morning that I was not in company line and was caught in the moving mass that was hurled back by the shock; in this situation I came on Sergeant Potter of my own company, who was seriously wounded, and helped him back to hospital. As soon as possible I made my way back to company, when I learned that Lieutenant Burritt had been wounded and taken prisoner, and that O. C. Townsend a non-commissioned officer, had just naturally assumed command and most creditably acquitted himself. We lay in line, ready for attack or to make attack, according to orders or circumstances; but although both armies maintained their fighting positions, and there was more or less doing at some points on the line, there was no general engagement, and our section had no further part in the gun activities during the five days following the opening of the battle. Finally the Rebels gave it up and retired, leaving the way open to Murfreesboro, which the Union army immediately occupied.

In Camp at Murfreesboro.

Then followed a period of comparative inactivity. Being supplied by a single line of railroad, from the Ohio river line, it required a long time to outfit for a new campaign. Our time at Murfreesboro was spent much as usual, in drill, in outpost duty, and in foraging with wagon trains protected by a considerable force, usually a regiment, to be prepared for any wandering band of mounted guerrillas that might be hovering near.

But it was here, as near as I can remember, that I witnessed for the only time a military execution. And I am glad that this was the only incident of the kind that I even heard of in our army, for it was something fearful to see. One day a story went the rounds that such a thing was to come off in a neighboring division, and a number of our regiment went over informally to see it. When we arrived the troops were already formed on three sides of a square; and the procession soon started. This was headed by the band playing a dirge, followed by a wagon, on which the two condemned men were sitting on their coffins, the shooting detail following. This procession circled the square of formed troops, and the slow progress, the strains of solemn music, with all the show of the parade, was something horrible. The coffins and the condemned were unloaded on the open side of the square, and the men again seated on their coffins while the firing party took their places in the center of the square. Then came the slow commands: "Make ready — "Take aim" "Fire." And with the volley the men toppled over. I knew nothing about the history of the case; but I do know that hundreds of men were reported as absent without leave, some of them as deserters, and while this may have been true about some, it was an error with regard to others, and there were often extenuating circumstances that made such punishment out of all proportion to the actual offense, and that most of these met with only slight punishment or none at all. So I felt a thrill of sympathy for these men who it had been judged should suffer the extreme penalty, more as a warning to others possibly than as exactly fitting the offense. There is no question that the death penalty exactly fits the crime

deserting to the enemy. I think it was here, too, that the order was issued discarding all tents of the usual type. All records and everything not absolutely essential were also left behind. We had learned from our opponents that we must move stripped as closely as possible. The new order did away with all the company wagons leaving for the regiment only two wagons, thus greatly reducing our trains, always the greatest impediment in the movement of an army. The boys, however, were incensed to remonstrate about the substitution of what they called "pup tents" for the regular army tents. These pup tents were small pieces of common cotton cloth, about six feet by three in size, which could be buttoned together and spread over a stick for a ridge pole, would shelter in some degree two men. These tents were added to the men's personal luggage, each man carrying one piece. This is perhaps one reason why a "howl" went up on their first appearance. But the change was wise, as the men came to realize; and some who at first refused to carry them, deeming them not worth the trouble, found that on occasion they were of real use, and they very soon wiped out prejudice.

A "Greyback" Surprise - a Narrow Escape

I cannot remember where, nor the day when, this accident occurred. But the event itself is very clear in my memory. I feel quite sure, however, that it was in the summer of 1863, when we were encamped at Manassas. We were on a post duty, and the post where we were stationed was perhaps two miles out from our camp. To the best of my recollection there were three commissioned officers in our detachment who there were I can not recall, but all were of our regiment. Probably about 100 men were present at the post, and the entire company was absent. Along along

our tent with nothing on earth to do, all subjects of common interest exhausted, nothing to read, sick almost unto death with the absolute lack of anything to do, we were finally startled into action by the exclamation of one of the group, "I believe I have got 'greybacks.'" The name "cooties" had not then been invented

the pestiferous insects were then known as "greybacks," in compliment, perhaps, to our armed opponents who annoyed us occasionally in the actual fighting. It was not often that the little greybacks bothered us seriously, and we were not used to their nippy ways. The exclamation caused us all to partially strip - in the sudden excitement we had no thought of army regulations; and we were soon exploring the seams of our pantaloons. While in the midst of this exciting hunt, the sentinel pacing up and down in front of our tent suddenly called out, "Officer of the day, turn out the guard." Dismay seized us as we frantically grasped our garments and wildly endeavored to fasten them in their proper places. We would have failed miserably to do this in time had not the officer and his escort rode up on a gentle amble instead of the wild gallop that is the usual manner of approach; and so we managed to take our places in the receiving line in time to salute, but we did not look quite so trim as could rightly be expected. In all our experience we had never before known the inspecting officer to approach a post except at a gentle gallop, and that the only exception should be at this critical time was probably all that saved us from being reported and possibly court-martialed. It looked almost providential. Whether the officer had a kinder heart than is usually found in an inspecting officer, and suspicioning that we were not in quite correct shape for that kind of company, had purposely come up slow, we never knew. We were asking no questions. But the dullness that had seized our brains was gone for the moment.