

W.E. Yeatman Notes

Election of Officers

Co. C - Capt. H.J. Cheney from Nashville

Co. D – Capt. Jas. Dennison, Bedford and Rutherford Counties

Co. E – Capt. Hunt from Memphis

Co. F – Capt. White from Rutherford County

Co. G – Capt. John Earthman from Davidson County

Co. H – Capt. Moore from Sumner County

Co. I – Capt. Jo Tyree from Gallatin

Co. K – Capt. Humphrey Bate from Sumner County

We elected Field officers Colonel Wm. B. Bate, Lt. Col. D.S. Goodall, Major J. Doak. Co. C. marched to the residence of Samuel D. Morgan, Summer Street, to receive a beautiful silk flag from Miss Matilda Cheney, a relative of our captain. The Flag was presented after a bright speech from the lovely young lady, which was heartily applauded by the company and the large audience assembled to witness the presentation. Capt. Cheney replied in his usual felicitous style, and until the time came for leaving we were all having “a jolly time”.

May 7, 1861 we were ordered to the Chattanooga R.R. Depot, and were assigned to a train of box freight cars, with orders to stop at Lynchburg, Va. At the depot Mothers, sisters, Sweethearts and all had come to say farewell. That was a scene that words would fail to describe, and is too holy a memory to give publicity to by describing any of its details. God bless them all! They were true to the last, Southern – heart and soul. Comrades, you and I know the inspiration of that truth, that in them, we ever had thoughtful, praying, loving friends. Again I say, May God forever bless them. Our first stop at any place of importance was at this city where we had several orations from some of your citizens, also from members of our command, at the depot. We reached Lynchburg without adventure, and went into camp in an apple orchard near town. There we received arms, viz., muskets – and this created much dissatisfaction. On our arrival at Richmond a week later we were favored with an exchange to Springfield Rifles and a few Enfields.

We camped at the Fair grounds in Richmond a few days only, then boarded the train for Fredericksburg. As we were the first of the Southern army to visit that city the citizens gave us a public reception. Major Lacey of that place welcomed us in a lengthy address, which was followed by the citizens presenting us a bountiful supply of substantials [sic] as well as delicacies. Of course we fell in love with Fredericksburg right away. The fact

is, we still refer to it as the place where we received the warmest welcome and kindest treatment during the whole four long years of war.

Our next move was across the Rappahannock towards the Potomac. We all remember that night, as that of the first false alarm. Next, to Brooks station near which we made our first regular camp, and received our first regular drill.

June 1st 1861 marched to the Potomac to witness the fight between the Acquia Creek Battery and the Federal gunboat Pawnee. We made too much display on the Bluff, and the Pawnee turned her guns on us. This may be termed our (sprinkling) Baptism of Fire. Immersion followed the next year. No damage resulted there to either side. My messmates were Geo. S. Litton, now a railroad agent at Nashville, Carey nicholas [sic], now a physician at New Orleans, Wm. Stratton, now a merchant at Nashville, Wat Weakley, now a county official of Davidson County, Olin Weakley, now a physician and farmer of Davidson County and John P. McFerrin now a minister of the Methodist church at Louisville, Ky. Of these seven, four received wounds in battle. Litton, Stratton, McFerrin and myself. A kind Providence still permits all of us to live. We are still seven.

While at this camp we were visited by Isaac Litton, Major A.F. Goff, and other prominent men of Nashville. To do honor to such friends we temporarily consolidated with our neighboring mess, who were better provided for company, they having a colored cook, (one eyed Charlie) who had accompanied John C. Ferris to the war.

[missing part of text] all night march in the rain from [cut off and illegible] Nicholas, captured that trip by Thomas enroute from Baltimore to Washington. Our next part in the plan was to conceal our force after boarding the St. Nicholas, steam up the Potomac under the Stars and Stripes, Hail the Pawnee, surprise, board and take her, and have no remaining obstruction to a trip to Washington. The Battery at Matthias Point disarranged the whole scheme. They were fired on by the Pawnee, returning her fire with such skill as to partially disable the gunboat; the latter retiring to Washington for immediate repairs.

Possibly had our plan matured to our getting in reach of the Pawnee's guns, she might have landed us at the bottom of the Potomac. Then again, we might have opened the way to Washington.

On our return to Fredericksburg, we again received an ovation, though all we had to show for our trip was Thomas capture, the St. Nicholas. Next came the march to Manassas. Our command along the Potomac had now been augmented by the arrival of Col. Fagan's First Arkansas, Carey's Virginia, and Peter Turneys [sic] First Tennessee, was a few miles north of us. All under the command of General Holmes, or as we dubbed him, "Granny" Holmes. On the march to Manassas we camped the first night at Dumfries. Bought, killed and cooked all the geese there and in a circuit of three miles of the place. Lindsay Walkers [sic] Battery accompanied the four regiments. Arriving at

Manassas we were assigned position on the right wing. Guns were loaded, and we were ready for battle. That night a lot of guns carelessly stacked fell over, one gun was discharged, and one poor fellow died while asleep.

Sunday July 21st, 1861 was a typical Virginia summer day. It was my 19th birthday anniversary, and we celebrated. You have read many accounts of that battle and will not expect a rehearsal. Our next part until the afternoon was an inactive one, then we were ordered to double quick to the Henry House. This we did under the hottest of July suns, I believe for five or more miles, and for some time under a brisk Artillery fire. About sunset reached the Henry house. Walker instantly opened fire, and we witnessed then as rapid artillery firing as at any time during the war. We supported Walker but were too late to do any execution with small arms. Shortly afterwards, General Beabeamegard [sic] rode up to salute us. I remember his queer salute to our Flag. Pointing to it – “that is a Goode [sic] Alg [sic] – Frenchy- but how we did yell! That night a false alarm on the right wing caused us another weary tramp. A few days later we returned to look after the Yanks on the Potomac, our old quarters.

Next we helped build the masked batteries at Evansport, and were well paid for our labor when we witnessed the unmasking, and the subsequent surrender of two of the three vessels that they opened fire on.

We built log cabins that winter in a pine forrest [sic] near the residence of Wm. Moncure and although [sic] there was much bad weather, cold and snow, we enjoyed our camp life and were comparatively comfortably housed until we left Virginia (Carlo Patti then a member of Co. B, gave us many musical evenings)

In February 1862 we were asked to reenlist for the war. The entire regiment reenlisted and were granted 60 days furlough and transportation home. I am informed that this was the first regiment to reenlist. The Sumner and Davidson county boys failed to get to the Home Welcome. I reached Nashville the day Buells [sic] advance arrived there. Walking up Church Street, just as I passed McKendree church met Dr. Seborth (Sebow) the pastor, who noticing my uniform stopped, and insisted on my immediate flight, saying the Federals would be in the city in a few minutes. I wanted to see them, and knew I could get away, so went on to the approach to the burnt suspension bridge, and had a good view of the men in blue on the opposite side of the Cumberland. My Mother was over there, and I could not get to see her. Then I walked back to Murfreesboro. Having nothing to do but try to enjoy the remainder of the furlough I went on by rail to Huntersville, Ala., stopping with several of my company at Norvel's Southern Hotel. Later we went on to Corinth, Miss. to be present at the reorganization of the regiment. There Capt. Cheney was reelected Capt. of Co. C.

[missing part of text] Yank in our front to put a ball through that silk, right then and there. [illegible] Arkansas regiment was then just to our left, and had the protection of a fallen tree as well as a slight ground elevation. We envied them their good luck This was late in the afternoon of the 7th and it seemed to me that we had been holding that place for

three mortal hours – repulsing every attack, getting out of ammunition again and again, and as often resupplied, holding on. We did not want to quit, but we did feel that we ought to have had more support. When Breckenridge did come in we imagined we were preparing for a final charge that we felt was to end in a perfect victory. Instead our order was to march at once to the rear, while Breckenridge held the ground we had fought for the whole afternoon. That night was one of horrors. The shrieks of the wounded as they were hauled past us in rough ambulances and even rougher wagons, will live in my memory while memory lasts. The storm of the night before was bad, but this, with its battle accompaniments, drivers swearing at balky teams, shrieks from the jolted, dying wounded, was as near a perfectly horrible scene as words can describe. On the weary night march, commands scattered. One would lay down in a fence corner and be followed at once by a dozen; a mile farther this would be repeated, and so on until a regiment at halting [illegible] would be as if deployed as skirmishers for miles. Allen and I stuck together and the last I remember of that night is sinking to sleep on a broad rail, the end elevated to make a slant for the rain to run off. Allen on another rail beside me, each propping the other from falling off between the two rails and our blankets jointly sheltering us from the driving rain. We slept as soundly as if at home and the sunshine awakened us in the morning. President Lincoln still having the advantage, as strange to say, neither of us had split our rail.

At Shiloh we first commenced our career as part of Pareick [sic] R. Cleburne's Brigade, and until near the close of the Georgia campaign he was our General, first, Brigadier, then our Major General. General Leonidas Polk commanding the Brigade after Cleburnes [sic] promotion to the command of the Division. In the first charge on the morning of the 6th at Shiloh Col Wm. B. Bate was severely wounded, Major Doak, Captain Tyre and Humphrey Pete killed.

After Shiloh our camp at Corinth proved very disagreeable and unhealthy, and the change to Tupelo, Miss. was heartily welcomed. Then came the trip by rail to Mobile, Montgomery, Atlanta and Chattanooga, ending at Knoxville. Here the Brigade camped but a few hours, then as a part of E. Kirby Smiths [sic] army we started for Kentucky. Crossed Cumberland mountains and blocked up Morgan in Cumberland Gap, then made rapid marches for central Kentucky, and the 29th of August we descended Big Hill and were soon in line of battle in the Blue Grass country beyond. That night we prepared a surprise for a Federal Cavalry Brigade; they failed to enter the trap, and retired towards Richmond after firing a few shots. Next day we were after them by daylight, and by sunrise we found them, as well as their Infantry and Artillery supports, Nelsons [sic] army. My company was then commanded by Capt. James Newson (Capt. Cheney having resigned to accept a staff appointment under General John C. Brown) We were ordered forward as skirmishers deploying to the left of the pike. I took a few men to a large brick residence on our right front, capt. [sic] Newson moving the rest of the Co. to the left under protection of a cornfield. At the house we had a clear clear [sic] view and found a full regiment of Infantry 200 yards in our front. We popped away at them for an hour, while the battle was getting warm in the woods across the pike to our

right. Capt. Newson ordered me to report to Col. Butler what we had seen from the house.

[missing part of text] here the center, our left came up in a few minutes attacking their right with a rush. The tall corn having concealed their approach. The Federal line broke at all points, then we had a race to Richmond.

Approaching that place our Brigade still held the center – we had a fine view of the Federal line a mile before we arrived in range, and were under fire long before we made any answer. Then with a yell we dashed at them. The ground was a slightly rolling blue grass field. When in 100 yards of their line we encountered a high rail fence – over it we mounted in the hottest kind of a fire, charging, and firing as we charged. Our supports were up in clockwork style, and again Nelson's army was in full retreat – this time a routed mob. In the last charge we lost our gallant Col. Richard Butler, an accomplished gentleman and a born soldier. No knightlier picture presents itself to my memory than that of Dick Butler waving his sword, mounted on his splendid black charger, rushing to his death at Richmond, Kentucky. No braver man died for Tennessee.

From Richmond we made rapid marches to Lexington, there joining in Lexington ovation to Gen. John H. Morgan and his command. Then to Paris, on on [sic] until we were in a few miles of Covington. From there we marched rapidly to Georgetown, Frankfort and Shelbyville. Returning to Frankfort, and leaving the day following [illegible] enjoyed his one days Governorship of Kentucky. Then to Harrocksburg [sic] where we met the army under Gen. Bragg. Our Gen. Cleburne wounded at Richmond had again joined us.

Oct 8th we met Buell at Perryville. Another battle like you see in pictures. For a mile we could see them, their splendid looking lines. Flags flying, bands playing, and cannons playing on us as we moved to attack them. They were splendidly posted in two lines, one at the foot the other on the open ridge. We had a full view of what we were expected to do. We moved up in two lines. In our front was a dry branch, on the opposite bank a breast-high rock fence, behind the fence their advance line. It was carried by our regiment and the 3rd Confederate Tennessee regiment where we attacked jointly after an almost hand to hand fight, and in the face of their fire from both lines.

As their line broke, we had them, and gave it to them in the back. It was a hot evening and the grass being dry, caught fire, the flames spreading to a barn just to our right. Rather than burn, out hustled a lot of blue coats to surrender, amongst them a negro who said he was a cook to Genl. Woolfolk. A great many Federal were killed here – more they ran up the hill, than at the rock wall.

This closed the fight as far as we knew in that part of the field. In a few minutes we were ordered to double quick to the right where Cheatham's [sic] division had met with a heavy loss, several of my schoolmates and friends amongst them, in Maney's [sic] 1st Tenn. regiment. Just at dark we had a brush with the enemy, they on one ridge and we on another. Our artillery opened briskly, after we had fired a few rounds with our rifles.

Their artillery replied, and we were ordered to the ravine between the lines. Not being discovered owing to the darkness, we had the novel experience of witnessing a grand artillery duel fought over our heads, while we were comparatively safe. Next day came the (as we thought) cowardly order – back to Tennessee. On that march we suffered hunger. My rations from Perryville to Knoxville were 8 small, very small, biscuits, and four onions – no meat. I don't believe anyone who went through the rest of the war can give a perfectly accurate account of it. It became too exciting and necessarily confusing to dates and localities.

Just before Murfreesboro I was elected Captain, while near Triune. Then I asked for 10 days leave, and slipped west in Nashville to see my dear old Mother and Father. I remember my mother decorated my felt hat with a lot of her old fashioned black Ostrich plumes, and the boys thought I was a General when I joined them.

[missing part of text] over. It was only a minnie [sic] through my left arm. However, [rest of line illegible] my career, for that fight.

Just here began my lifelong affection for our late comrade, Reuben S. Payne. As the bullet knocked me half around he noticed my sudden whirl, and immediately caught me from falling, and assisted me to the rear, tying a strong handkerchief [sic] around my arm as we walked off. Meeting Gen. Polk he gave permission for Reub [sic] to take me to the field hospital. There we were instructed to move on to Murfreesboro after having my arm bandaged. The next day we had leave to go on to a relative (Col. Andrew Ervin) near Wartrace. There we had a warm welcome, and as Gen. Hardee moved his headquarters to this residence, I had an easily granted furlough for Reub [sic] and I to stay together. I decided to go to Knoxville, and visit my relatives, Col. Wm. A. Sneed's family. I will never be able to show how much I appreciated the kind hospitality and unceasing kindness shown by them to Reuben and myself. It has never been forgotten and never will be.

Our next adventure was that of being on detached duty. After our return to camp at Tullahoma I was ordered with my company to guard the Fayetteville R.R. bridges, from Winchester to Elk River. We enjoyed that, but were badly treated. Bragg ran off to Chattanooga without [illegible] word for my "Department". Hearing of his flight from straggling cavalymen, I decided to inspect my forces, and ordered my transportation department (a railroad hand car) prepared for immediate service. I reached the vicinity of Winchester near dark, and learned that our army had gone the day previous, and that the Federals were at Dacherd. [sic] I did not believe Bragg intended to get along down South without Co. C., so decided to take matters into my own hands, and take my command to join him. To do this had to make a circuitous [sic] march by Fayetteville and Huntersville. At Huntsville Col Donegan had the citizens cook us rations to last us to Rome, Ga., where we found railroad transportation to Chattanooga. I never heard whether Bragg approved or disapproved the withdrawal of my forces.

September found us in front of Rosecrans at Chickamauga. Forging the river at a run, our division made a charge the evening before the main battle, in which with slight loss to us we were successful. That night my company stood picket, and took in a number of prisoners, amongst them a Lt. Col. of a Pennsylvania regiment. He, I noticed was one of the U.S. Army officers in charge of the Park during the recent Dedication ceremonies. I sent him to the rear with his horse, under guard of Private Frank Temple. On the next day we attacked their breastworks, and were repulsed, suffering a terrible loss. My company went in at Chickamauga numbering 44. We lost 33 in killed and wounded. The regiment lost near the same proportion. I only had one knock, on the top of my head, the ball had hit a limb first. Our Colonel, T.D. Robinson was knocked flat by a minnie [sic] striking his sword belt buckle. He did not stay downed, but was up cheering his men in a moment. In the evening we made a grand charge and were successful, stopping beyond the main road, and lay down to sleep and rest, nearly worn out.

On awakening we found we had slept with dead Federals thick enough amongst us, some of our men actually sleeping with their heads resting on the dead. Then came the miserable time at Missionary ridge. The diet of the cush [sic] (moulded [sic] cornbread too hard to bite cold, softening by boiling in tin cans). The daily shelling from Chattanooga, etc. Cleburne with three of his brigades held the right in the Missionary ridge fight. Our brigade (Polks [sic]) in reserve at the two railroad bridges over Chickamauga. After the defeat, a large part of our army crossed on these bridges. After all had crossed I was ordered to take my company across and picket 200 yards in front of the bridges. Soon we found that arrangements were being made to burn the bridges. Nit until they were brightly blazing did we get any orders, then it was "Retire as quietly as possible". We were [rest is missing]

[missing part of text] at Kennesaw. At Atlanta the regiment was transferred to Major Gen. W.B. Bate's division and fought in three battles around that city. Bates [sic] division was massed in the skirmish pits on the extreme left and met Schofield who expected to run over a mere skirmish line. Gen. Bate thus ambushed Schofield's corp, [sic] and inflicted on them a heavy loss. I find no history giving Gen. Bate's proper credit for this. My regiment there faced the 8th Tenn. Federal infantry, and permit me to say here, we met gallant foemen. They stood with no protection save the few forest trees, like Tennesseans – in the face of a withering fire until they realized that to stay longer meant annihilation. Then they sullenly fell back firing on us as they retreated.

In our next battle, which if I mistake not – immediately to the right of the late Midway Plaisance at the Exposition, we witnessed the bravest Federal charge that I saw during the war. We were in rifle pits on the bluff, with a stream 50 yards in our front. The Federals raked us from the right and from the left with numerous batteries, and then came the infantry. In a sold line they sprang right into the water, waist deep, and climbing the bank rushed our pits. Then we had orders to quit. We left without an introduction and never knew who our visitors were. But we will always say they were the

best Federals we ever faced. The regiment lost more that day in capture than in any other engagement.

The day McPherson was killed we had a hot time – attacking the Federal line on his left. At Johnesborough [sic] we lost Major Driver, killed by a shell while eating breakfast with my company behind our breastworks. Here we left our works and charged theirs. We were promptly repulsed, as anyone could see we could not take works with one thin attacking line. By this time we were a “skeleton regiment”, and on the Tennessee campaign, I, although a junior captain, was in command of the regiment. Our losses had been heavy indeed. I fought with them in the rifle pits at Columbia, and then we witnessed the remarkable march of Schofields [sic] army past Spring Hill, and stood in line within rifle shot of that army as they marched in plain view on the pike – marching for their breastworks at Franklin to slaughter the flower of our poor mistreated army. We fought on the extreme left at Franklin, fought hard, but to no effect. After that we went towards Murfreesboro. My last fight was at Overall’s creek where we had a few rounds only, with a force sent out from Murfreesboro. We ran them in with slight loss on either side. I had always thought if I could just get to fight at Nashville, then Home and pride would certainly incite me to do my best. The battle of Nashville found me in bed sick and worn out. Seeing the result at Overton’s, Col. Hayward of Stevenson’s staff sent me his horse to try to get me out safely. With old Joe, uncles [sic] faithful darkey, [sic] to hold me on the horse, I mounted, forded Mill creek, and a few miles farther south was joined by Col. Hayward. He left me that night at the house of former neighbor, James C. Owen, and the next morning before daylight I was with our retreating army. But it was to be a brief southern trip for me. Within two miles of my starting point, we were surrounded by a yelling, shooting, mob of Federal Cavalry, and I had the mortification to know that my soldier life had ended. Next day with hundreds of other prisoners I was on a train bound for Louisville. Near Gallatin, Tenn. Col. Newsom of the cavalry, who was captured with me, jumped from the car and escaped. At Johnson Island I was assigned to Block 5. The winter was severe – mercury fell to 24 below zero. With only one blanket each, my bunkmate and I suffered from the cold. The house was little protection being a mere shell of upright planks. We also suffered from hunger but nightly revelled [sic] at most elaborate banquets (in our dreams)

[missing part of text] fight in the open field we made. That the most [illegible rest of line] when all found we had to quit – we quit. And then tried to build up the Union we had for four years tried to dissolve. Our pledge to do so was implied in our [illegible] and we have “Kept the Faith”.

When our Memorial Battle Abbey shall have been completed, and placed as we hope [illegible] our beautiful Capitol City, Nashville, and memorial tablets placed therein, [illegible] each of Tennessee’s Confederate organizations. On one, I would have inscribed [illegible] Bate’s Second Confederate Tennessee Infantry – The peers of any men living or dead “Facing certain defeat – they fought a good fight.”

W.E. Yeatman

Words of W.E. Yeatman

Of the numerous personal gallantries of the officers and men of this regiment [illegible] space do not allow me to record them – I would have to write a book [illegible] one, were I to attempt it. Bate, Butler, Robinson, Lt. Col. T.J. Hale, would all have a chapter and many Privates more than that. For instance Will White who in the face of a presentiment of certain death, which was divulged to his Captain, and who insisted on excusing White from the impending battle, refused to be excused and [illegible] to his death that day at Richmond, Ky., twenty feet in advance of the lines. [illegible] Payne, shot down at Richmond, and again at Chickamauga, and who lived to be Mayor of Knoxville, and a loved member of this camp. Of my fun loving friend, gallant [illegible] always ready for a fight or a frolic, hero of many skirmishes and battles [illegible] immune from harm, but reserved for instant death at Nashville almost in sight of home and loved ones. It was not blind chance that preserved my life, and yours, through so many thousands of perils. I ascribe it to the boundless mercies of a gracious and omnipotent God. He has permitted us to adopt the favorite maximum of our noble leader Robert E. Lee, “Do your Duty”, and to live to teach this to our children and to our children’s children.

Oct. 2nd, 1903

General W.B. Bate

Nashville, Tennessee

Dear Sir: In “The Slocomb’s Battery at Overalls Creek” letter of J.A. Chalaron, in the [illegible] of Oct 1st. He does the Second and 20th Tennessee Regiments injustice, and as such letters will go into the files of the future Historian, the errors should be corrected. Though but Junior Captain, it happened that it fell my lot to command the second Tennessee regiment at Franklin and at Overalls Creek; though but a remnant, they were never demoralized, nor did they retreat in the slightest in either of those engagements. At Overalls Creek we did not take the depression cover referred to by Lt. Chalaron, on the contrary we had no protection whatsoever, but stood in an open field, and gave battle until the enemy retreated.

Your friend

W.E. Yeatman