

RECOLLECTIONS OF ARMY LIFE

BY

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After a lapse of thirty-five years, I write down some of my recollections of army life. I write almost entirely from memory, having but few notes of events as they transpired.

On December 21, 1861, I joined Company K, Seventh Regiment, North Carolina Infantry, then in camp near Shepherdville, (now Newport), in Cartaret County. This is a few miles west of Morehead City. We built log cabins for winter quarters. We drilled and did guard duty throughout the winter.

Early in March the regiment went to New Bern and went into camp on the Fair Grounds. Early on the morning of March 13th the drummers beat the "long roll" and the men hustled into line as rapidly as possible. The report was that the Yankees were advancing on New Bern.

Boarding a train we went about six miles below New Bern where we spent the day and night watching and waiting.

Up to this time we had done nothing but drill and guard duty and submit to the strictest discipline. Our Regimental Commander, Col. Reuben Campbell of Statesville, was trained in the military school at West Point. He had served in the Mexican War and was a strict disciplinarian. Most of the inferior officers of the regiment tried to imitate and please him, so consequently there was but little sympathy between officers and private soldiers.

When we left New Bern armed and equipped for battle, leaving tents standing, we also left blankets, extra clothing, cooking utensils, provisions and everything else that would retard our move-

ments. Inexperienced as we were, we thought that when we whipped the Yankees we would come back and find everything as we were leaving it. But we never saw that camp or New Bern again.

Now we took our position near the center of the line of defense, our left resting on the old Beaufort road (Seventh Regiment.) The 37th and 27th North Carolina regiments were on our left, resting on the Neuse River. On our right was the 35th, then the militia, with the 26th on the extreme right in reserve. Brem's and Latham's batteries of artillery were placed along at intervals and General L. O'B. Branch was in command of the whole. In our immediate front the timber had been cut back three or four hundred yards, up and down the line.

On the morning of March 14, a body of infantry, headed by three or four horsemen supposed to be officers, appeared in our front on the old Beaufort road at the edge of the wood and halted. They were apparently taking a survey of our position. A small brass cannon located near me was ordered to "give those people a salute. After repeated efforts the gun fired. The weather was damp and cloudy and no wind was blowing. The smoke from the gun entirely obscured everything in our front. For some time silence reigned supreme. All eyes were trying to penetrate the gloomy field in front.

After a lapse of some minutes there suddenly flashed from the edge of the wood in our front a long line of fire. Then came the order - Attention! Fire by platoons!" But after the first firing every man loaded and fired at will. The battle continued until about noon, during which of most time the Yankees were not visible to us because of the smoke. After a while the order came to "Fire! Right Oblique!" Then we noted that the militia and

also the 35th Regiment, under Col. Sinclair, had fled, leaving the rest of the 7th exposed. The enemy soon took advantage of this. They crossed the works and poured their shots into our flanks, causing us to swing back, change front to right, charge and drive the enemy back, thus re-establishing our former lines. Outflanked a second time we were compelled to retreat. We hadn't enough men to fill the gap made by the retreat of the 35th and Militia. We crossed the Trent River above New Bern and marched to Kinston with but little rest and nothing to eat. We remained in the neighborhood of Kinston at various camps until about the fourth day of May.

As soon as heard of the battle of New Bern my father came to see me. Finding me without food or bedding he hastened home and soon brought me some of both. He remained with me a day or two.

On May 4 we left Kinston and traveled by rail via Goldsboro, Weldon, Petersburg and Richmond to Gordonsville. Marching from there towards the Valley of Virginia we were ordered to join the Stonewall Jackson forces. As we reached the vicinity of Jackson's command we were ordered to countermarch and join the armies around Richmond. On reaching Hanover Court House we struck the right of McClelland's army and one brigade alone fought the division of Gen. Fitz John Porter and part of Sedgewick's division. After a few hours fighting we slowly fell back to Ashland and later on to Brook Creek, within three or four miles of Richmond. (My regiment covered this retreat. We had a warm time for a little while). The 28th Regiment, commanded by Col. James H. Lane, captured, it was said, an entire battalion of Irish. In this engagement I saw a piece of shell strike Col. Campbell's horse, but he was not disabled.

We were now the left of Gen. Joseph E. Johnson's army defending Richmond. A. P. Hill's division, L. O'B. Branch's brigade now consisted of five regiments: 7th, Col. Campbell in command; 18th, Col. Ratcliff; 28th, Col. Lane; 33rd, Lt. Col. R. F. Hoke, (Col. Avery having been taken prisoner at New Bern), and 37th, Col. Barbour. We were in sight and hearing of the battle of Seven Pines on May 31 and June 1 but were not actually engaged.

On or about June 25 our brigade moved out, crossing the Chicahominy Creek. We were the first of Lee's army to cross, Johnson having been wounded at Seven Pines. Lee was now in command. We turned to the right, down the left bank of the stream which separated the two armies, drove in Pickett (Yankee division) and pressed McClelland's right back on Mechanicsville, thereby uncovering fords and bridges so that other divisions of Lee's army could cross the river.

On the evening of the 26th we attacked the enemy at Mechanicsville and after much loss drove them back, followed them up 'til after dark, then rested on arms until day. Dislodging them from their new stand and pursuing them on past their abandoned tents, provisions, cannon, ammunition, small arms, etc., we came up with them at Gaines Mill and Cold Harbor. The 7th deployed at once and advanced in line of battle order through the woods, coming in sight of them at the edge. On account of the dense undergrowth we couldn't tell whether they were Yankees or Confederates, so we lay down, concealing ourselves as much as possible. Col. Campbell and Adjutant Stockton went forward to reconnoiter, soon returned and gave the order for action.

We were in about fifty yards of the enemy. The battle was raging, many of our men were falling, when I was struck in the left shoulder by a musket ball. It passed entirely through my shoulder, breaking my collarbone and bladebone. My left arm gave way and I started to the rear. I met the 28th Regiment going to our support. They were then under fire but were marching in line of battle order as quietly and as well lined as if they were on dress parade, their ranks so well closed that they had to open a gap for me to pass through. Col. Lane was in front, on foot. Just a little further on I met the 33rd Regiment, Lt. Col. Hoke commanding. They also were advancing in line of battle under fire. After walking perhaps two hundred yards from where I was wounded I gave out from loss of blood and lay down. Here the litter bearers found me and carried me out from under fire. An ambulance carried me to the field hospital where I found hundreds of wounded men.

I was wounded on the 27th of June at about two o'clock in the afternoon. Sometime during the night the regimental surgeon, Dr. Campbell of Statesville, came along and dressed my wound. I lay on the ground suffering from the damp chill at night and the heat in the day time until Sunday, June 29, when I was put in a four horse wagon, along with other wounded men, to be taken to the General Hospital in Richmond. Not being able to sit up, lying on the bottom of the wagon bed, driven by a careless driver in a trot part of the time over a rough stone paved road, I endured the greatest suffering of my army life. (This was at Cold Harbor, eight miles below Richmond, June 27, 1862).

When I reached the hospital, my clothing covered with

blood and maggots was changed and I was cared for as well as could be expected.

It was about four weeks before I was able to walk and I was entirely helpless. About the end of the second week my father came and remained with me three weeks when I was given a furlough. We then went home reaching there about August 4.

In this battle (battle of Gaines Mill), Col. Campbell, Adj. Stookton, Captain Peebles, Lt. Miller, 1st Sgt. King and 2nd Sgt. Asbury, all of my company, were killed. The regiment was almost annihilated.

Sometime in April 1863 I returned to my regiment, then in camp near Guinea Station, Va., some few miles down the Rappahannock River below Fredericksburg. We were now in Jackson's Corps. The latter part of April it was reported the Yankees were crossing, or attempting to cross, the river at Fredericksburg. Ordered to Fredericksburg we formed a line to resist the crossing but after a short time we heard that they had crossed a long way above and were coming down on our rear. Then it was that Jackson faced about and marched off, the enemy believing him to be in full retreat. He swung back and came down on their flank and rear at Chancellorsville. This was the first day of May. In many places the enemy had felled trees and made breastworks of them. They lost heavily, being routed and driven back some distance. Jackson was mortally wounded that night. The moon was shining brightly and I saw an ambulance carry him out. Early the next morning the battle was renewed. My company lost heavily. The dead lay so thickly that one could have walked some distance without touching the ground. The enemy retreated across the river and went into camp.

About the middle of June there was another demonstration at Fredericksburg. When we were ordered to Fredericksburg we could see the enemy on the other side of the river. We did picket duty for a few days and then started for Pennsylvania, crossing the Potomac at Shepherdstown. We reached the vicinity of Gettysburg on July 1. There was tremendous fighting that evening, but my regiment was not under fire.

Early on the morning of July 2, I was on the skirmish line which we held until about eleven that night, when we were relieved by other troops. In the afternoon, desultory fighting having gone on during the entire time, we charged and drove back the skirmish line of the enemy several hundred yards, advancing ours to that extent. After dark the word was passed down the line "ceasefiring. Ramseur's brigade is passing in front". Presently we could hear the tramping and the slight noise of the troops passing. The night was very dark.

About noon of the 3rd our regiment was drawn up in the rear of our batteries. The batteries opened fire and the enemy replied. An artillery duel raged then for I do not know how long. It was awful. Trees were torn, shivered, cut down, cannon and wagons were knocked up and men were torn to pieces. The tension was terrible. The men lay flat on their faces during the cannonading, but a solid shot would sometimes plow one up. I saw a cannon ball strike a man on the head and plunge through the entire length of his body. I think his name was King, from Wake County, N.C.

After a while the order came "Attention! Fix Bayonets. Forward. March. Right shoulder. Shift arms." And the charge of Gettysburg began. On passed our batteries, which ceased firing

until we reached the foot of the hill, where they could fire over us. Here we came into an open field and we could see the enemy behind a rock fence on an eminence about three fourths of a mile away. The intervening space was an open plain interspersed with about four bar rail fences, nearly parallel with the lines of battle. When we emerged from the wood we saw two lines of battle in our front, so we formed the third line of the charging columns. (History says there were only two lines). Gen. Pender, our division commander, was killed on the second day of this charge, so Gen. Trimble commanded the division. He was the only man in all that broad field, either friend or foe, that I saw on horseback. As the first line of the charging columns neared the stone wall, it seemed to melt and entirely disappear, as the snow would in a summer sun. The second line also disappeared in the same way.

We traveled the entire distance of three-fourths of a mile in a walk, the shot and shell continually thinning our ranks. When we reached the lane and crossed the fence within about sixty yards of the rock fence or wall (the Yankee line) I suddenly discovered that of all that line there were only two men with me. One of them was Lt. Col. J. McLeod Turner, who was in command of the 7th Regiment. I think he and the other man were shot down there. About that time I discovered that the enemy had thrown out a line of skirmish and had cut off my retreat. Some of them within five steps of me were calling me to surrender, which I did without argument, for our cannon opened on them about that time. As I got just within the Yankee lines, one of our shells exploded and knocked a man about twenty feet high. He had just captured one of our flags. Several men leveled their guns at me and demanded that I "take off that cartridge box". I had left my gun where I surren-

We reached Fort Delaware during the night, two or three days after the battle. All money, pocket knives and everything of value, except what we succeeded in concealing, were taken from us. They failed to find a watch I had, which I afterwards sold to a Yankee for two dollars and a half. With the money, as long as it lasted, I bought pies, cakes, cheese, etc. When the rain water gave out we had to drink cistern water boated from the Brandywine River. We would steal provisions when we could and think it no harm as we were suffering for food.

In the month of October 1000 North Carolinians were transferred to Point Lookout. We were all crowded like cattle into a freight boat, and of all the seasickness and filth, we had it.

At fort Delaware we were quartered in barracks, but now at Point Lookout we were put in tents. If a man had more than one blanket they took it away from him. Nine men being assigned to each tent they slept together on the ground, thus having the use of three blankets each. In this way, without fire and with but little to eat, we spent the winter of 1863-64. Our fare, twice a day only, was in the forenoon, three to four crackers with a cup of weak coffee, and in the afternoon the same amount of crackers with a small slice of bacon and a cup of bean soup. This was not over one-third of what we needed, but we lived in this way until the last of April 1864.

In about three weeks after reaching Point Lookout I was stricken with smallpox, and while suffering with this loathsome disease I saw some of my comrades die with it, while others became insane, and some, apparently rational, committed suicide in order to escape not only the horrors of the disease but the prison treatment which they were receiving. I was carried out to the

smallpox hospital, placed in a small tent alone and with only one blanket. This was in the months of November and December, on that bleak shore. By late in December I had entirely recovered except my eyesight, which is impaired for life. I was then returned to the prison proper. (While here a piece of bone worked out of my wounded shoulder). At the smallpox hospital I learned to eat oysters, and while convalescent I would pick them up along the beach at low tide.

On the night of March 21, there was a snow storm, and when daylight came we were covered with snow. Then followed an immense tidal wave from the Chesapeake Bay, on which our camp was located, which flooded the tents and almost the entire prison enclosure. This enclosure, of perhaps six to ten acres, was surrounded by a stockade fence, similar to the one surrounding the penitentiary at Raleigh, and sentinels and armed guards placed all around it would occasionally shoot a prisoner. In the spring of 1864 the government took off all the white guards and filled their places with negroes. Thus the U.S. placed these ignorant savages (negroes) over the civilized Caucasian, and with bayonet, powder and shot they terrorized the helpless prisoners. They not only guarded as sentinels, but were ordered, or allowed, to patrol the prison camp at night, order white men to "stop dat talking", and shoot into tents while men were asleep. Such were the notions of the pious Northerners - Sumner, Garrett, Phillips, Beecher, Lincoln and others.

About March 23 I was taken sick with dysentery, followed by acute indigestion, from which I have never fully recovered. I continued sick, though able to walk about more or less, until the latter part of April, when Jack McIntosh came hurriedly into our

tent and told me the Yankees were getting up a "batch" of 500 sick and wounded prisoners to take to Richmond to exchange for a like number of their men. They were out near the hospital forming them in line so as to count out 500, no more, no less. He hurried me out, putting his hat on my head and a ring on my finger - a ring he had made of bone and sealing wax. (This ring has been broken, lost or stolen). I think I was the 477th man. The officer came along the line counting and when the 500 was reached the rest were ordered back. When we marched through the gate and the gate closed what sadness and gloom must have penetrated their beings. The horror of remaining there and meeting death by piece meals. That gate closed forever on many of those poor fellows, Jack McIntosh among them. Poor Jack - he saved my life perhaps but lost his own. Nor was it in my power to help him in any way to get away from that den of disease and death. Alas, I had bidden him goodbye forever. Brave and faithful to his country, true to his friends, and recognizing the Brotherhood of Man, he was ever ready to assist the weak. "A friend in need is a friend indeed".

The 500 marched aboard a boat on the Potomac River which sailed out late in the afternoon. About midnight our vessel collided with some other craft causing a jar and crash and there was hurrying to and fro by the crew who would tell us nothing. The night was so dark we could see nothing and were not allowed to go on deck, which added to our suspense. After a considerable time it was announced "no danger below the water line". Anchors were raised and we steamed on to the mouth of the James River, up the river to City Point, where we were met by a Confederate boat with the 500 Yankee prisoners. The boats were anchored side by side with two gangways connecting them and we were transferred by way of one

of them and the Yankees by the other, simultaneously.

The exchange finished, we steamed up the river to Richmond and were placed in the Chimborazo Hospital. After staying there a week or so I got a furlough home. I went by way of Danville and Greensboro to Graham, the nearest railway station to my home.

When I reached Greensboro I was so exhausted I had to stop two or three days at Wayside Hospital, in charge of Thomas B. Long, who treated me very well. (Here I saw an Alabama soldier broken out with smallpox, lying in an old log cornercrib). I went to Graham, walked a short distance and stayed all night at a farmer's home. Next morning the farmer carried me in his buggy to within two miles of Daniel Hackney's, at Love's Creek. He sent me on to Uncle Robert Marsh's who next day loaned me a horse to ride home, a distance of four miles.

I remained home about seven weeks, having gotten my furlough renewed, then started to join my command. Arriving in Raleigh I consulted a Medical Examining Board, which assigned me to a hospital for treatment. Remaining there for a few days I was allowed to proceed and join my regiment, then on the lines a few miles below Richmond.

It is now August 1864. My regiment is the extreme left of Lee's army, arranged in single line stretched out one man for every six feet. We thus held a considerable distance of line of battle in constant expectation of an attack which came when the enemy by coming up a ravine got close by and charged with two solid lines of battle, one of them composed of negroes. Our lines were pressed back until we met Gen. Lee, who said "Boys, there are only a few of those people. Let's drive them back." We did this with a whoop, capturing some prisoners.

Soon after this we were moved to the south of Petersburg, where on August 25 we had a battle at Reams Station, capturing many prisoners. Returning to the trenches near Petersburg (where I saw Gen. Beauregard for the first time), I acted as orderly for Col. Wm. Lee Davidson for a while, later serving as Ordnance Sergeant.

Early in the winter we marched through rain and sleet, thinly clad and without food, toward Weldon, to meet a flank movement by the enemy. There was not much fighting.

Around this time, on account of the wound I had received in 1862 from which I was partially disabled, I was assigned to light duty with the Brigade Quarter master Department, under command of Major Herndon, assisted by Capt. Caseaux. My work was to issue forage and corn for the horses of the brigade.

About March 1, 1865, my regiment and also a detachment from another regiment were selected by Gen. Lee (I understood because of the good record of the regiment), to go to North Carolina to protect citizens against the depredations of deserters and outlyers. Col. McAlister was in command of the detachment and Major Harris in command of the 7th Regiment. I made application for permission to join them, which was granted. We remained in North Carolina until about the first of April, when we started back to rejoin Lee's army, but when we got to Danville we found that Lee had surrendered. We started to Greensboro to join Beauregard's command but were delayed a while by Stoneman's Cavalry. Succeeding in escaping the enemy I reached Greensboro safely with dispatches from Col. McAlister, which I delivered to Gen. Beauregard, whose headquarters were about where the water tower is now, south of the depot. That was the last service I did for the Confederacy.

Col. McAlister and his command reached Greensboro later in the afternoon and we were attached to Johnson's Army, then in camp near High Point, and were surrendered with that army. I got my parole on May 1.

While in Greensboro I saw Jefferson Davis and also Gen. Joseph E. Johnson, for the first time. The three, Davis, Beauregard and Johnson, were together at the railroad crossing on South Elm St., apparently in consultation.

I reached home on May 4. I soon realized that the war was over and also that food and clothing were scarce. My people and I were almost helpless, without means or an opportunity to procure means, of support. I began the struggle for bread, almost for existence, a struggle second only to the horrors of war. After floating around for years on the uncertainty of circumstances, by hard manual labor and strict economy, I finally reached a more substantial basis.

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