

PERSONAL NARRATIVES
OF EVENTS IN THE
WAR OF THE REBELLION,
BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE
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RECOLLECTIONS OF MONOCACY

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RECOLLECTIONS OF MONOCACY.

[Read before the Society, October 21, 1884.]



Place and time—Baltimore, Md., July 8, 1864. Some time in the forenoon, probably between eight and nine o'clock. Scene—A freight train, loaded with Union soldiers, moving away from the dock upon the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Into the open car door, a private has thrown his gun, while several comrades, having seized him by the collar of his blouse and such parts of his person as they can grasp, are tugging with might and main to pull him in. Private jumps and climbs, for there are no steps to assist him in his entrance. Had his garments or friends been less strong, he would have been left behind, and possibly would not have had a part in the battle of Monocacy. If so, your reader would be

unable to describe, as an eye witness, what he saw in that engagement.

A portion of the Sixth Army Corps, including the Ninth New York Heavy Artillery, to which I belonged, had just arrived from City Point, Virginia. Morning's dawn had found us moored at a dock, and near at hand were many steeples and monuments; but that the city was Baltimore, we had only our inferences to conclude from. None, save the managers of the expedition, knew its destination. However, the place was Baltimore, and after our frugal repast we boarded a train of freight cars bound for some western place; but where, no one of us had the least idea. But there were many backings and fillings. The morn was wearing away Always hungry, the proximity of food, other than salt pork and hard tack, roused our appetites to a famishing pitch, and at last, with Captain Hyde's consent, I set off up a steep bank to see what a hospitable looking house might afford. Imagine the melancholy look I wore when I modestly asked for a drink of water. The water was readily given by a pleasant-faced woman who was busy frying apple fritters. The air

fairly reeked with the appetizing odor, and if ever a boy looked a request, I am sure I did. At any rate, the good woman speedily transferred two of the crisp cakes to my hands, and, before I could express my thanks, she had plentifully covered them with molasses. Shades of Epicurus! Ne'er had gourmand such a tempting morsel. As I remember the moment it seems as though never, before nor since, have I tasted such toothsome food. Thanks! I looked, spake and acted thanks. I never knew whether she was Union or Confederate. I didn't care. She was more. She was a woman in form and heart, and she knew a hungry boy by his looks.

But all of this took time, and with food in hand I started from the house. Molasses trickled through my fingers, but not a crumb of the precious fritters did I lose. My starting place, or point where the train could be seen, was on a high bank, a hundred feet or more above the railroad. The train was moving, and soon also was I, rapidly. Down that bank I dashed. My accoutrements flapped about me like loose casements in the wind; my steps were fashioned after those of Jack the Giant Killer when he

put on his long-stepping boots. As good or ill luck would have it, I didn't fall, I didn't drop anything, and by the aid of my comrades I was soon in the car with them. My good luck was evident in that I was with my company, and bore no appearance of trying to shirk the work that was probably before us. My ill luck was apparent the day afterward, when, through my presence at Monocacy, I fell into the hands of the rebels.

Of our ride through the fertile acres of Maryland, covered with luxuriant vegetation, so different from the sandy, dreary wastes of Petersburg, whose vicinity we had recently left, it is unnecessary to say more than that we enjoyed every rod of it. It was something to see thrifty people and well kept houses again; and the "Star Spangled Banner" floating from many a farm-house, told us that we were in God's land once more. The people themselves actually seemed glad to see us. The rank and file were still in ignorance of our end and aim. At the Relay House we took the main line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, so we knew that we were not *en route* for Washington. Nature wore her very loveliest

garb when we made this trip. Wheat, cut and bound, was standing in sheaf on hundreds of acres, and one, at least, of our party hoped that if we must make war, it might be where every prospect pleased. A stray copy of a newspaper had told us that Early had made a northward movement, and when we reached Monocacy Junction we began to think that possibly our journey was to have an Early termination, especially when we were switched off upon the Frederick City branch. In one way or another, nearly the whole day was consumed in our trip of scarcely more than sixty miles. The hour of our arrival at the city which Whittier has immortalized, I cannot give ; but I know that twilight settled down upon us shortly after we marched through the town and formed in line of battle west of the city

Flags were numerous as we proceeded through the streets, but we saw nothing of Barbara Frietchie and her "silken scarf." A few hours afterwards rebel banners were as common as were now Union flags ; at least so some of the picket line, who were taken prisoners, stated. It would seem that the good citizens had learned wisdom and were prepared to

placate either army. Though not so often occupied by rival forces as Winchester, Virginia, the city saw much, during the war, of both Federal and Confederate troops. It may have been a mile west of Frederick that we filed into a field of corn more than breast high, and, in line, awaited further developments. The sun was fast hastening to his setting over the hills to the westward. We were told that the line of elevated land was Catochin Mountains. The scene was a beautiful one. At sundry points were great clouds of dust, which indicated the march of rebel soldiers. Now and then we saw what seemed to be batteries of artillery. A line of pickets was thrown out which, intentionally or otherwise, was not called in when we retreated, and so fell a prey in most instances to the advancing foe.

Soldiers are always hungry, and the fertile surroundings roused in the minds of many of the men visions of what the fine houses might contain. My friends, Foster and Searls, prevailed upon me to take care of their guns while they slipped out to see if something better than usual soldier's fare might be found. Unfortunately for me, while they were

away, we were about-faced, and I carried my own equipments and two extra guns not only back to Frederick, but through the city, and, I verily thought, half way to Baltimore, before they overtook the company and resumed their arms. A good drink of fresh milk to some extent compensated me for my heavy duties of the evening.

What a march that was! We had tramped over many miles of Virginia sand and mud, and thought we knew what marching was, but the hard, unyielding Baltimore turnpike blistered, terribly, the feet of every man who participated in that protracted journey. I have always thought that the officers in charge of the expedition hardly knew where they were, or what they wanted to do. At any rate, after marching till midnight towards Baltimore, we turned to the right, and though our new road was not so hard and straight as the famous "pike," it certainly was easier for our lacerated feet. The only episode of the night was the overturning of one of the guns of the battery that accompanied us. A squad of men, of whom I was one, was detailed to right the cannon, and again we went on till about two o'clock

in the morning, when, much to our relief, we were permitted to halt and lie down. Our long night march had made us extremely tired, and we were no sooner down than we were asleep. There were no beds to be made. We were entirely unconventional, and found a knapsack or cartridge-box an excellent rest for the head, and the starry canopy a sufficient covering.

Soon the dawn of morning showed us that our night wanderings had served only to bring us back to the point where we had left the main line of the railroad for Frederick. That is, a march of a few minutes brought us to an elevated place whence we could see the iron bridge across the Monocacy, the depot buildings, an old stone mill, and beyond it a fine farm-house with ample surroundings. Between us and the house was a large field containing many shocks of wheat, which, at that early hour, men were hurriedly gathering into the large barns belonging to the house just named. Before night another crop lay thick upon that field. About me were men replete with life and strength, who ate their soldier's fare and commented upon the beauty of the scene

spread out before them. Ere the sun, just rising, had passed to his westward setting, many of these comrades would lie stark and cold upon that stubble field. They were to be the grain, and Death the harvester.

Our breakfast had extra relish from the milk we drank in our coffee, said lacteal fluid remaining from the excursion of Comrades Foster and Searls the evening previous. Soon after we "fell in," marched over the railroad, passed the mill and took a position in a public road crossing the river.

Of the principal items concerning the battle of Monocacy, fought July 9, 1864, between forces under command of the rebel General, Jubal Early, and the Union troops commanded by General Lew Wallace, it is unnecessary for me to write. Every history of the rebellion contains them. I am to state briefly only what I saw. The road in which we were standing had, towards the west, a steep bank surmounted by a high rail fence, *i. e.*, rails mortised into posts, not laid in the zigzag manner ycleped Virginia. This we speedily destroyed by lifting posts and all from the ground. The battery that accom-

panied us had crossed the river and taken a position on the other side, commanding the entrance to the bridge. We advanced a little way into the field beyond the fence, the field whose crop of wheat had been taken off earlier in the morning. Here, just over the brow of a slight rise of land, we halted and remained in line till late in the afternoon. In an open wheat field one could not expect very much shade. We had not the least covering of any kind.

General Lew Wallace commanded on this day, at least so history states, and so it was reported among us ; but few, if any, of us had ocular evidence of his presence. There was considerably more lying than fighting in this day's record. I have heard that General Wallace was repeatedly requested to give consent to the constructing of a small earthwork in front of our line, but he was unwilling that this should be done. At any rate, all the defense that any of us had was what we could make with bayonet and cup or spoon, scarcely more than a potato hill. As we lay in line there were not many casualties among us. There was a lively hum of bullets over our heads ; now and then a shell would go shrieking

past. One exploded just above us, killing a man at my left.

While waiting here, rations were brought up and distributed, and, for the first and last time in my army experience, I saw sugar a drug in the market. Coffee, too, was in greater abundance than I had been accustomed to see. We first took our regular rations, then we went again and helped ourselves. The cause of this extraordinary profusion was evident in the large number of dead-beats who could be seen in the edge of a wood, a fourth of a mile away, who seldom performed any duty, save that of ration-drawing. We saw them looking with longing eyes at us as we filled up with the good things; but no one volunteered to carry them their share, and they were afraid to come after it. Consequently what we didn't take formed a slight repast for Johnny Reb some hours afterward. To more than a hundred men of my regiment this was the last ration-drawing for many months. Lest it might be thought that we had more than our share of camp followers and non-combatants, I would state that our regiment was recruited to its maximum number as heavy artil-

lery, its twelve companies having each more than two hundred men. The regiment was larger than some brigades.

The only thing that reconciled me to my own capture was the finding among the prisoners some of the fellows who, I knew, had, from their leafy cover, watched the distribution of rations on the day of the fight. They were men who carried camp kettles, had been detailed to assist the company and regimental officers, or in some way (there were numerous devices) had managed to beg off from regular duty. To-day such of them as survive are the men who tell the longest and most thrilling stories of what they did in the war. They sit on barrel heads around country grocery stores and astonish the rising generation with detailed accounts of their prowess. However, some of them didn't start early enough on their retreat from Monocacy, and the rebels "gobbled" them, thus giving them the one opportunity of their lives to honestly say that they suffered for their country. They are, doubtless, pension beggars already, telling in harrowing language the sacrifices they made for the cause.

At our right, across the river, our battery pounded away till it was deemed inexpedient to remain longer, when it withdrew, burning the bridge, as it and the men supporting it crossed. Regiment after regiment, including one battalion of our own, passed us at the left, moving out to the yard of the farm-house, and to a wheat field at its left. Surely no one ever had a better chance to see others fight than we had as we lay on the ground and saw the "fun" go on. The yard was surrounded by a thick hedge, along which our men stationed themselves, and thus, partially hidden, had an excellent opportunity to take certain aim at the rebels approaching, while the latter could return the fire only in general terms. In the wheat field at the left, the shocks were still standing, and behind these our skirmishers sheltered their bodies while they rained a destructive fire on the foe.

However, our time came at last. So long had we been idle spectators of the fray that any change was a relief. Ours was the color company, a fact that Captain Hyde repeatedly impressed upon us as we advanced. Colonel Seward, a son of the great Sec-

retary of State, is entitled to great credit for the soldierly way in which he led us up. I could but contrast his upright, manly bearing with the skillful dodging performed by some of the officers. What could be more ridiculous than a mounted officer trying to screen his own head behind that of his horse ! We advanced under a galling fire, both in front and flank, till we reached the border of our field. Here we were separated by a fence from a field of corn in tassel. The rebels were in there, for we could hear them, and their bullets were humming in a lively manner about us. We thrust our guns through the fence and fired, hit or miss, till ordered to fall back. I well remember the wounding of a sergeant near me and his going back, taking his gun with him. The chief cause of my recollection is his unwillingness to exchange guns with me, his being much better than mine, and I thought a poor gun would be good enough for him to throw away. But the enemy had thousands of men where we had hundreds, and to remain longer would have simply insured the capture of us all. The command soon came to fall back. Colonel Seward had been injured by a fall

from his horse, and was supported by two men on our retreat. On reaching the point held by us all through the day, the colors were planted and the Colonel shouted, "Rally around your flag, men." Instinctively I fell to humming the words of the song which everybody in those days sang :

"Rally 'round the flag, boys."

Again we moved forward a little way, but the rebels had climbed the fence and were bearing down upon us in great numbers. In our first retreat I had noticed many guns upon the ground, any one of them much better than mine, and my comrade Wheeler's gun was even worse than mine, not having a tube for the hammer to strike upon, so I gave my gun into his keeping while I ran forward and took my pick of weapons. Perhaps I ought to state that up to this time we had been armed with Harper's Ferry muskets. They were smooth bore, and carried one immense bullet and three smaller ones. I have since learned that the enemy claimed that there must have been several Gatling guns in front of them. Of course, then, to get weapons in which our car-

tridges could be used I must take those thrown away by our own men. This I had no difficulty in doing, and soon I was following the colors, having found good muskets for both Wheeler and myself.

Quite unskilled in the ethics of war, I had, however, long known that if I remained near the colors I couldn't be far amiss. "Elevate your pieces, men," was the direction given by a field officer as we moved confusedly back. The rebels were advancing regularly, and having everything their own way. Then came a command, from what source I never knew, to look out for ourselves, and this we did. The color sergeant of the Ninth was a German, and in broken English, with now and then a "damn" interpolated, he proclaimed the uselessness of staying there any longer. True to my ideas of the colors, I stuck by the sergeant till we had reached a sort of waste water running from the mill mentioned some pages back. Here I lost sight of him and the flag. I think he must have been a more rapid walker than myself.

To tell the truth, I didn't realize that we were whipped effectually. I knew that things were

mixed, but I confidently expected to find an orderly line somewhere which would stem the tide of retreat. Had I known then, as I afterward learned, that our general officers had for some time been making their way towards Baltimore, using for their trip the train standing on the track, I think I should have taken much longer steps. Wheeler and myself kept together till we reached a little branch of the Monocacy, through which he went regardless of depth, but I, not thinking the exigency sufficient for such carelessness, endeavored to encounter as little moisture as possible. Once across, I shouted my comrade's name, and even ran up and down the stream for a little way, hoping to see him, but without avail. Lee had surrendered before I saw him again. On I went over the railroad, following the greater number; but where it was to end, I hadn't the remotest notion. All this time, shot of assorted sizes was falling about us. The rebel artillery was giving us canister as fast as possible, and every few seconds some poor fellow would throw up his hands and go down, but the puffs of dust all about me, indicating the fall of a shot, told me that only one

missile in many score hurt any one. As I struck a wooded road, I saw before me a poor fellow staggering like a drunken man. His path could be traced by the blood streaming from his wound. Coming up with him, I found that one side of his face had been shot away, giving me a clear insight into his mouth. He appeared to be dazed or bewildered, and well he might be; but he still clung to all his equipments. "Why don't you throw away some of your things?" I at once asked. Apparently the idea had not occurred to him before, for he speedily dropped his gun, and, with my aid, was soon free from all his impedimenta. Straightening up, he shot ahead at a wonderful rate, completely distancing me. There were so many men all about me that the idea of running had not once entered my head. In fact, running from a field of battle did not comport with the dignified manner with which I thought troops ought to withdraw from a situation where they had been whipped. Another time I should have known better; but one must have experience in war as well as in anything else. By the roadside I passed my friends Foster and Searls; the latter badly wounded,

and Foster trying to help him. I never expected to see Searls again in this world, and so bade him "good-by." These two men were the ones whose guns I had carried the night before. It didn't take many hours in war times to make transformation scenes. Searls, however, did recover and live for about ten years, dying at last from his wounds. Foster was a fellow prisoner with me for some months.

My bump of curiosity, coupled with an acquisitive faculty, was the cause of my ruin or capture; it's all the same thing. Anything lying around loose was, in those days, accounted legitimate plunder. An exceedingly plethoric knapsack lying by the roadside tempted me beyond resistance. Had I realized the nearness of the foe, I would have thrown away my own burdens and have made haste from that locality. But all this is hindsight; what I lacked then was foresight.

The knapsack was a rich one. It must have been the property of one of the hundred day men who made up a part of the defending force, for no man who had had any experience in marching would have tolerated for an hour such a load. The owner, too,

was a Dutchman. This I knew from the German Bible and other literature in it. He also chewed tobacco, as I inferred from the large plug of "Navy" which it contained. I helped myself to an excellent pair of stockings and to the tobacco, already wondering with what one of the boys I would trade that, and for what, when my investigations and meditations were rudely interrupted with, "Look here, Yank!" Looking upward, I found myself gazing into the mouth of a six-shooter, held in the hand of a stalwart cavalryman. Resistance was out of the question, at least so it seemed to me. In fact, I was too much surprised for anything else than unconditional surrender.

A prisoner! One-half the meaning of that word I had never imagined, much less realized. "Let's have your money; damned quick, too," were the greeting words of my captor. At this I produced an old weather-beaten purse that a man belonging to an Ohio regiment had thrown away some weeks before. Its contents were just thirty-five cents in scrip. The disgust depicted on the cavalryman's face at this exposition was most intense.

"Is that all you've got?"

"Every cent," was my reply.

"Well, keep it then. It isn't worth taking."

Small though the amount was, I was nothing loath to do this; for with us, at the front, considering the infrequency of pay-day, money was money. This small remnant was some remaining from enlistment; for no paymaster had ventured near us. In fact, I never saw any of Uncle Sam's wages between January, '64, and March, '65, and then it came in the way of commutation for rations not eaten while in the hands of the rebels. However, I had no watch, nor other valuables, so I did not net my captor very much.

By this time the rebel battle line was close upon us, and throwing down my gun the line passed and I was behind instead of in front of the Confederates. Since the day itself, I have thought of a dozen ways in which I might have made my escape, or have avoided capture in the first place; but forethought is seldom so good as afterthought. Were the events of that day to be gone over again, with the lessons then learned, not only would privates do differently,

but even general officers might profit. A line of earthworks, such as we might have thrown up during the idle hours of that long forenoon, would have held in check our foe for many an hour, if we had not repelled him altogether

The next item of interest to me was a prisoner begging for his life from two rebel officers who, obviously, were trying to scare him; but it didn't seem so to him. He was an abject sight, but he survived his fright and traded a pair of shoes, too small for himself, with me for the plug of tobacco which I had abstracted from the Dutchman's knapsack, and which had not, during my dialogue with my captor and in the following moments, been out of my hand. This was a very fortunate move for me. I don't believe appropriating other's possessions ever turned out better than in this case. My boots, then on my feet, were dilapidated enough, but those shoes bore me comfortably over many miles of weary travel, and, with the purloined stockings, kept my feet warm during the cold days of the following winter

At the railroad station there had been quite a quantity of military stores, including some clothing. This

had been seized most quickly by the rebels, and even as they advanced they were substituting Union blue for their own dirty covering. They didn't hate the Union outfit, if they did its wearers. Some of my fellow captives didn't fare so well as myself, for they were stripped at once of every stitch of apparel, and were left to cover their nakedness as best they could. I well remember one poor fellow who looked as badly as the shabbiest rebel I ever saw; in fact, I supposed he was a rebel condemned to march with us for some reason. His rig was beyond description. Had not the rough usage to which he was subjected somewhat dazed his mind, I think he might have escaped. No one would have ever suspected him of the least affiliation with the Union cause. He was one of the first to succumb to the rigors of prison life.

In the freight house at the station, lying on a pile of loose, ground feed, I found Ed. Ryder, of my company, bleeding from a wound which proved to be fatal. I did my best to staunch the flow of blood, but no mortal power could help him more than to relieve passing distress. I brought him a cup of water, and I can never forget the look that followed

me as I went out of the building ; I to my long march and imprisonment, and he, soon, to the presence of the King of Kings.

Of course, I had many opportunities to chaffer away my effects, and, in my innocence, I gave away nearly all the coffee with which I had bountifully stored my haversack a few hours before, not caring for the tobacco, which was almost the only item that our captors had to offer in return. Besides, I didn't know how far they would respect the usages of Christian warfare and allow me to retain what was mine, the advantage in the matter of force being entirely with them.

Very soon we were directed to fall in, and having been divested of cartridge boxes and bayonet sheaths, we were marched back to the field whence we had retreated an hour or so before. Traces of the rout were visible on every hand. The ground was strewn with guns, bayonets, knapsacks, and, in fact, everything by throwing away which a man could facilitate his running. So back we marched, and finally halted in the yard of the homestead that had formed the centre-piece of our forenoon's observations.

Here were many prisoners already, and one of the first to grasp my hand was a sergeant of my company, and, probably, my most intimate friend therein. He had been taken on the field itself, as I soon learned in our mutual exchange of information. Soon after reaching this yard, an officer of the enemy came among us and said that if we desired to write brief letters to our friends, he would see to mailing them as we passed through Leesburg. Writing appliances were immediately in requisition, and the word sent from that yard at Monocacy was the last to greet many a northern home for long and dreary months, and, in some cases, the last forever.

At nightfall we moved out to the bank of the small stream running from the mill repeatedly referred to. Very little food was eaten that night. Thought had well-nigh driven all bodily cravings away. Twilight deepened into darkness, and as its shades gathered about us, I could see the guard steadily pacing his beat before us, making evident, more than ever, that we were prisoners. What a situation is that of confinement! The "I can't get out" of Sterne's Starling just expresses it. Put a man in a room filled

with all the luxuries that tongue can speak, pen describe, or mind fancy, and lock his means of egress, and you lock out happiness also. "I can't get out" overlaps every other consideration. It is this horror of barriers that has prompted men to endure privations worse than those they sought to escape, that they might, at least, breathe free air. However, all things yield to sleep, and, gradually, the subdued voices of those about me lapsed into silence, and finally I, too, was enfolded by the drowsy god in his restoring embrace. The pleasures of oblivion! In my sleep I could wander away from the scenes about me, and delight, even, in the pleasures of home.

At early dawn we were awakened by heavy cannonading, and our first thought was that a rescue was at hand; but it proved to be only an effort of the enemy to destroy the iron railroad bridges, in which attempt I have learned he was partially successful. The number of the captured appeared in its full magnitude when we were all brought together in and about a barn-yard near by. Misery likes company; but knowing the smallness of the force that had been sent to oppose the rebels, it easily seemed to me that

few could have escaped—save, perhaps, the officers who had taken the train.

A captured man's feelings are hard to describe. For myself, at the time, the predominant one was that of shame. I was constantly saying to myself, "If I had done thus and thus," but no amount of regret nor of retrospect softened the prospect before me. Near me were the bodies of men slain the day before. Some I recognized, and I had permission to look about among the dead to find, if possible, bodies of friends.

The day was Sunday ; but there was little of home observance of its sanctity as we filed out and began our first march under rebel direction. As we started southward, I took a farewell glance at the scene of the previous day's fighting. On every hand were lying the bodies of those who had fallen. From these, in most cases, the clothing had been stripped, and the stubble having taken fire, the flame was scorching the unconscious remains. Those sad, upturned faces ! How imploringly they seemed to look ! Boys there were who thus suddenly "saw life's morn decline." The bullet had sought alike

the young and the old, and here they were lying,
soon to be

“In one red burial blent.”

One last look I took at these sights, and an inter-
vening hill shut them out forever.

Vale Monocacy

