

# DONALDSONVILLE

## CANNONIERS.

### Recollections of a Command Famous in the Civil War.

### Memorable Last Days of the Army of Northern Virginia.

### Retreat of the Harried Confederate Columns from Petersburg.

### Scenes Preceding the Surrender at Appomattox—Anxiety of the Men for General Lee's Safety.

I conclude the extracts from my journal with the record of the terrible scenes leading to the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse of the peerless Army of Northern Virginia.

April 8, 1865—Oh, ever memorable day of horror! The long agony is over; after an heroic struggle for ten long months, Lee's army has been forced to leave the lines in front of Petersburg and Richmond and fall back towards Lynchburg. Every inch of that thirty-five miles of earthworks had become hallowed ground, steeped in the blood of martyrs to the holy cause of southern independence. How sacred now, after the lapse of thirty-seven years, are the memories evoked by this act of recording those scenes wherein the noblest impulses of man's nature were displayed.

Joe Moulton came up on the train, bearing most harrowing details of the final struggle on the extreme left of the line, wherein our beloved corps commander, the intrepid A. P. Hill, laid down his life. Overpowered at every point, the remnant of the three army corps has crossed the Appomattox to follow the standard of Lee with blind faith until the end cometh. All is bustle and excitement at camp in anticipation of marching orders, while the most intense anxiety prevails about the fate of our comrades of the battery who had so faithfully defended the River salient during the entire siege. A night of watchful anxiety followed, full of rumors of disaster that seemed to burden the very air that we breathed.

Tuesday—Whiting, of the Norfolk Blues, reached camp with news that all the guns in the first line in front of Petersburg had been abandoned to the enemy; we are heart-sick with despair. Preparations being made to retreat to Farmville on the arrival of artillery horses.

Wednesday, 5th—At 3 o'clock a. m. the two guns without caissons and one wagon started from Camp Paradise, en route to Farmville. Before leaving, we blew up the magazine of Battery No. 3, and disabled the guns and caissons, which we were forced to abandon for lack of horses. Then we marched with heavy hearts through the thick gloom of the early morning away from those scenes of so much pleasure. The heavens wept for us, and amid these depressing surroundings we tramped sturdily through the mud alongside of our guns, passing through town at dawn and taking the road to Prince Edward Courthouse.

At 7 o'clock we halted at Mrs. Venable's farm, and an hour later were ordered back to Farmville. Thence our route lay in the direction of Lynchburg, and we went into park a short distance from town. Even here our good friends of the vicinity found us, and sent lots of good food to cheer us in the dark hour of adversity. Here we remained until next morning, when cavalry scouts galloped up furiously with the information that the Yankees were coming. The bugle sounded "hoops and saddle," and in a short time the two guns were dashing through town as rapidly as our miserable horses could trot. The ladies crowded the sidewalks, crying and waving their handkerchiefs in encouragement.

With Booker's Regiment as a support, we gained the heights a mile west of town and went into battery, firing a couple of rounds at the approaching Yankee cavalry, and drove them out of sight. Brisk skirmishing ensued, and in half an hour the enemy had retired in the direction of High Bridge. This action took place on Longwood plantation, the birthplace of General Joseph E. Johnston, now occupied by Dr. Carrington's family. These patriotic folks insisted on entertaining a large party of the officers and soldiers at dinner—a superb banquet, washed down with fine old sherry wine. Miss Mildred Carrington, a remarkably beautiful woman, did the honors of the table.

The advance guard of the army is now streaming up the road, ragged and actually starving, as the rations that were to have been distributed at Amelia Courthouse never materialized. So the townspeople fed hundreds of the veterans as they marched past. General Breckenridge stopped at the hotel, and was the observed of all observers by reason of his noble appearance. After dark an interminable crowd of wagons and ambulances passed along the Lynchburg road.

Friday, 7th—News came that our artillery battalion was nearing town, so we went to work preparing food for friends and comrades. Orders arrived for our two guns to report to Colonel McIntosh, and we stayed not on the order of our going. Captain Landry is in command of the section of artillery, having arrived, after a journey from Richmond on foot; he happened to be absent from Petersburg on leave on that memorable morning when the lines were broken.

Our section of artillery moved down the road towards Cumberland Courthouse amid a confused mass of infantry, cannon, wagons and starving stragglers; the latter had not strength enough to "tote" their muskets. Near the wagon bridge over the Appomattox, General Lee and staff formed a group on horseback, viewing critically the motley procession of the remnants of brigades of infantry and battalions of artillery. As we saluted the distinguished leader, on whom all our hopes were fixed, we noted in his mild gray eye a mixed expression of pride and anxiety. In the midst of the dire confusion attending the retreat, the dearest thought of the veteran is for Lee; the very cause for which we have fought during these four years seems now to have become a minor consideration compared with the intense desire for the safety and happiness of our beloved commander.

Now the guns begin to growl again and rattle of musketry is plainly heard on all sides as the enemy, in overpowering numbers, swoops down on the staggering ranks of veterans who know not what defeat means. Mixed in with the main wagon train, we moved slowly along until, having reached a point of vantage, we went swiftly into battery to repel cavalry. Before and behind us were high conflagrations, the bodies of wagons cut out by the active and persistent pursuers thrown into piles and set on fire. Skirmishing was the game all that day, turning back with sharp sallies of resistance every mile of the road; and thus the relics of the army hastened along in that terrible race for life.

No food was to be had, the commissary department is no more; the more provident of the men munching parched corn to keep body and soul together. Too weak to carry their muskets, thousands of gaunt men threw away their arms and floundered through the weeds until nature gave way. The poor horses and mules were in worse plight than the men as to the food supply, and it did seem like the refinement of cruelty to urge the poor beasts on with whip and spur. The long line of men and teams moved like a huge wounded serpent, writhing, when the enemy dashed across the line, carrying death and destruction in his track. Not in the hours of its most assured success, when the laurels crowned their brows at Manassas, Cold Harbor, Wilderness, Fredericksburg and on a hundred other battle fields, did the soldiers of the lost cause fight more heroically than on that desperate retreat. Now and again, when teams would lay down in the mud to die, we plundered our own wagons and had a rapid distribution of rations to all in the vicinity. During this day we made less than six miles, and added three miles more to the score by 10:30 o'clock at night, when we parked on the Johns farm. The time until midnight was devoted to cooking provisions looted from our disabled wagons. I slept until dawn under the gun.

Saturday, the 8th—The sad procession moved soon after daylight to the music of Yankee cavalry rifles near-by. The day was bright and clear and, with the sun, our spirits rose. We felt that while Lee lived we had a fighting chance of getting to the mountains beyond Lynchburg, where a guerrilla warfare might

be waged until the southern Confederacy was recognized. But we reckoned without our host, for those ubiquitous cavalrymen continued to slash our wagon trains and capture guns as they had done since the morning that the army left Petersburg. As the day waned, these mounted fiends became more fierce in their onslaughts, until the route of our army for miles was marked by blazing pyres of wagons.

By dark our section parked at the base of the hill on which is situated the pretty village of Appomattox Courthouse. No camp fires allowed, as they might draw the fire of the foe, so we munched raw provisions until, from sheer exhaustion, sleep overcame us. It was understood, however, that we were to cut our way through Grant's army on the morrow, and we felt reasonably certain that move was almost an accomplished fact. The Yankees regarded us by burning the Appomattox railroad depot to-night.

Sunday, April 9th—Soon after dawn that familiar sound, the rebel yell, refreshed our souls as the remnant of Gordon's Division charged the enemy. Even the famished artillery horses pricked up their ears at the sound, like unto the war horses described in the Bible. Suddenly all noise of battle ceased, and a courier notified Captain Landry that a flag of truce had been sent to the enemy's picket line by our commander. We felt that this act was the beginning of the end, and in a short time the news of the conference between Lee and Grant, and of the arrangement of terms of surrender, came to us on the thousand tongues of rumor. The last act in this most terrible of tragedies was over. The old lion, full of scars of honorable actions, harried to death by ravening wolves, faint with hunger and fatigue, was forced to succumb.

The feeling of mortification at the surrender of all our dearly-cherished hopes was tempered by a sad sort of joy—the sense of relief that the end had come. The Yankees cheered loud and long, and their cry of jubilation swept over the graceful Virginia hills as a hundred thousand throats gave tidings that the battle flags of the Army of Northern Virginia had been furled forever. Then the men in gray and the men in blue sat down together, sharing their rations and talking of home and the home-coming. But in the midst of this peaceful scene, again our thoughts turned to our idolized commander, and we wondered how he was provided for in the terms of surrender. When we learned later of the liberal and magnanimous conditions of the official agreement between Lee and Grant, we felt that in his death agony the Army of Northern Virginia had compelled the chivalrous generosity of its old opponent, the Army of the Potomac.

As General Lee, accompanied by his faithful adjutant, Colonel W. H. Taylor, rode through the ranks of his army to say farewell to the men he loved so well, the big tears rolled down his cheeks. The veterans, choking with emotion, pressed forward to touch his hand and take a last fond, lingering look at their friend, the great commander. When the golden orb of day declined below the hill-tops, every man then felt that the sun of the Confederacy had set.

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