



## *PATRIOTIC RECOLLECTIONS*



### THE DRUMMER BOY OF SHILOH

The city of Newark, Licking County, Ohio takes pride in her reputation of having supplied the youngest and smallest recruit to the Union Army. His full name was John Winston Clem, but the family spelled the name Klem not Clem. While many stories have been told of Johnnie this is a story as related by his sister Lizzie Clem Adams:

It being Sunday, May 24, 1864, and the great rebellion in progress. Johnnie said at the dinner table, *Father, I'd like might well to be a drummer boy. Can't I go into the Union army? Tut what nonsense, boy!* replied father; *you are not ten years old.* Yet when he had disappeared it is strange we had no thoughts that he had gone into the service.

When dinner was over Johnnie took charge of us. I being seven years old and our brother, Lewis, five years, and we started for Francis de Sales Sunday school. As it was early he left us at the church door, saying, *I will go take a swim and be back in time.* He was a fine swimmer. That was the last time we saw him for two years.

The distress of our father and step-mother at Johnnie's was beyond measure. Our own mother had met with a shocking death the year before; had been run over by a yard engine as she was crossing the track to avoid another train. No own mother could be more kind to us than our step-mother. Father, thinking Johnnie must have drowned, had the water drawn from the head of the canal. Mother traveled hither and yon to find him. It was all in vain. Several weeks elapsed when we heard of him as having been in Mount Vernon; and then two years nothing more was heard and we mourned him as dead, not even dreaming that he could be in the army, he was so very small, nothing but a child.

It seems he went up on the train to Mount Vernon and appeared next day at the house of Mrs. Dennis Cochrane, an old neighbor of ours. He told her that his father had sent him there to peddle vegetables, which were to come up from Newark. None arriving, Mrs. Cochrane surmised the truth and at the end of the week, fearful he would escape, fastened him a dog chain and put him in charge of a Newark railroad conducted to deliver to his home, which he could readily do as it was near the depot. On his arrival here he worked on the sympathies of the conductor to let him go free, saying his father would whip him dreadfully if he was delivered to him. This father wouldn't have done - he would have been but too glad to have got him.

The train carried him to Columbus, where he enlisted as a drummer boy in the 24th Ohio. Finding an

uncle in that organization he left it and went as a drummer boy in the 22nd Michigan. He was an expert drummer, and being a bright, cheery child, soon made his way into the affections of officers and soldiers.

He was in many battles: at Shiloh, Perrysville, Murfreesboro, Chattanooga, Chickamauga, Nashville, Kenesaw and others in which he army of the Cumberland was engaged. He was at one time taken prisoner down in Georgia. The rebels stripped him of everything, his clothes, his shoes, his little gun - an ordinary musket. I suppose, cut short, and his little cap. He said he did not care about anything but his cap. He did want to save that, and it hurt him solely to part with it, for it had three bullet holes through it.

When he was exchanged as a prisoner he came home for a week. He was wasted to a skeleton. He had been starved almost to death. I was but a little thing then, but I shall never forget his dreadful corpse-like aspect when the carriage, which brought him, stopped at our door. He seemed like as if he was done up in a mass of rags. There were no soldier clothes small enough to fit him, and he was so small and wan and not much larger than a babe, about thirty inches high and couldn't have weighed over sixty pounds.

He returned to the army and served on the staff of General Thomas until the close of the war. After it he studied at West Point, but could not regularly enter as a cadet on account of his diminutive size. General Grant, however, commissioned him as a Lieutenant. He is now (1886) Captain of the 24th U.S. Infantry, and is stationed at Fort McHenry, Md. He is still small: height only five feet, and weight, 105 pounds. He married, May 24, 1875, Annita, daughter of the late General William H. French, U.S.A. Like her husband, she is under size, short and delicate; can't weight over seventy pounds. They have had six children, only one of whom is living.

I have told you of the dreadful death of our mother, run over by a yard engine. My brother, Louis, five years old on that noted Sunday, also came to a shocking end. I think my father will never get over mourning for him. He grew to be vey tall, full six feet, but of slender frame and feeble health. He was off West on a furlough for his health when he went with Custer, as a guest, on his last ill-fated expedition, and was with the others massacred by the Sioux, under Sitting Bull, in the battle of Little Big Horn, in Montana, June 25, 1876.

To this narrative the following information is added: When he joined the 22nd Michigan, being too young to be mustered in, he went with the regiment as a volunteer, until at length he was beating the long roll in front of Shiloh. His drum was smashed by a piece of shell, which occurrence won him the appellation of *Johnie Shiloh*, as a title of distinction for his bravery. He was afterwards regularly mustered in and served also as a marker, and with his little musket so served on the battlefield of Chattanooga. At the close of that bloody day, the brigade in which he was partly surrounded by rebels and was retreating, when he, being unable to fall back as fast as the rest of the line, was singled out by a rebel colonel, who rode up to him with the summons, scoundrel, *Halt! Surrender you \_\_\_\_\_ little Yankee!* By the way of order Johnnie halted, brought his piece to the position of charge bayonet, thus throwing the colonel off his guard. In another moment the piece cocked, fired, and the colonel fell dead from his horse. Simultaneously with this the regiment was fired into, when Johnnie fell as though he had been shot, and laid there until darkness closed in, when he arose and made his way toward Chattanooga after the rest of the army. A few days later he was taken prisoner with others whilst detailed to bring up the supply trains from Bridgeport.

When he returned to service, General Thomas was in command of the army of the Cumberland. He received him with the warmest enthusiasm, made him an orderly sergeant and attached him to his staff. At Chickamauga he was struck with a fragment of a shell in the hip, and at Atlanta, while he was in the act of delivering a dispatch from General Thomas to General Logan, when a ball struck his pony obliquely near the top of his head, killing him and wounding his fearless little atom of a rider in the right ear.

**For his heroic conduct he was made a sergeant by Rosecrans, who placed him upon the Roll of Honor, and attached him to the headquarters of the army of the Cumberland, while a daughter of Chief Justice Chase presented him with a silver medal inscribed, *Sergeant Johnnie Clem, Twenty-second Michigan Volunteer Infantry, from N.M.C.*" which he worthily wears as a priceless badge of honor with his Grand Army medal. Now (1890) Captain Clem is holding the important positions of Depot Quartermaster, Depot Commissary, Ordnance, Columbus, Ohio.**

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**Source: Howe, Henry. 1896. Howes Historical Collections of Ohio. Laning Publishing Co., Norwalk, Ohio.**

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**Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War**

**November 2000**