



PATRIOTIC RECOLLECTIONS



Just a Little Bit of History:

Interview with J.O. Bingham, Company A, 56th Ohio, USA^(a)

J.O. Bingham was a member of the 56th Ohio, first of Company D and after when veteranised, of Company A. He was in the service 4 years and 7 months, which was as long as a fellow could get in. Colonel Kinney first commanded the regiment, and afterwards the noted Colonel Raynor. The REGISTER scribe scouted Mr. Bingham as he was sailing up Center Street, one day last week, and asked him to fish up a 'Narrow Escape' from his long experience in the army. *Well, said he, about the most interesting experience I had in the war took place during Bank's ill fated Red River expedition. I had just veteranised, and was promised a good long furlough home, when the expedition started, and as they ordered our regiment on the expedition, of course all the vets went; they didn't like to go home just as things getting romantic; so they joined in and kept themselves happy by thinking of the furlough they'd get when they returned. I'll not tell of the Bank's demonstration- you can read that in the history; only speak of our return from Alexandra on the Red River to New Orleans. Our regiment, 300 of us, started on the transport, John Warner, down river. Banks was falling back, and we were preceding him. There were with us, also, two little musketo gunboats. The rebs were thick along the river. When we got to Snaggy Point and were going around the bend, a masked battery opened on us and swept our boat badly-tore off the pilot house, severed pipes, mashed wheels; in fact, completely disabled us, so that we were swinging with the current. The rebs were on the right side of the river. They kept the fire hot on us with artillery and muskets. Colonel Raynor ordered a man to swim with a rope to the left shore, and the man succeeded in doing it. This brought our boat on the opposite side of the rebels.*

While we were thus swinging around, a shell smashed through our boat, went under the floor, taking off the soles of one mans shoes, and the feet of the man next to him. The former was Thomas Cox and the latter, Sergeant Woods of Gallipolis (Ohio). Woods fell into the hands of the rebs and died a week after. When the shell exploded it wounded Jas. O'Dell and Esra Arther, and as I was standing right next to them But got off with a mere scratch.

Our company got behind some cotton bales on the right side of the boat, and so, when Colonel Raynor ordered the men from the craft, we didn't hear the order, and he got the rest of the regiment up the bank and into the woods before he missed us. Then he came back for us and while getting us off, was himself badly wounded in the leg; so in addition to getting ourselves out, we had to carry him up the bank, and we were under fire all the time, both cannon and musketry. However, we got out of that without further loss; and laid in the woods while the reb battery plugged at our little protecting gunboats. These soon

were disabled too, and ran up the white flag and surrendered. After we got Raynor from the transport, he was taken back to one of the gunboats, thinking they would protect themselves, and when they surrendered they took him too. That was the second time he was made prisoner. The REGISTER some weeks ago told of the first time.

Well, when the rebs had taken the gunboats, and our regiment of 300 had to look out for themselves, Colonel Henry Jones, who had succeeded to the command, started down the river to Fort De Russe, about 30 miles away. He left the three wounded men whom we had, in the woods in care of myself and another man, scary for us, for we hadn't had a bit to eat, nothing to drink with or cook with, and very hungry and sleepy to begin with. I thought at first to surrender. We could hear the rebs on our boats, and at one time I crept through the woods to the edge of the bank intending to surrender, but when I got a good view of them, they looked so revengeful, that I concluded to sneak back; when I returned, I told the boys I couldn't muster up courage to surrender; so we would have to get out of there. Two of the wounded could be along well, but the other man, my associate, and I had to take turns in carrying; and thus, we started on our weary march through the woods and swamps toward Fort De Russe. You had better believe it was bitter work, going as we did without food or rest, and half the time carrying a man. We suffered very much for water, as we did not dare go to the bank of the river, for the rebs were all along the other side. We had no cups of canteens, and but one hat that would hold water. After we had been on the go two or three hours when it was about noon I took the hat to get some water for the wounded boys I crept through the underbrush at the edge of the riverbank and then made a rush to the water, but as bad luck would have it, just as I started, my foot caught on a rope and I tripped and went sprawling toward the water and couldn't stop until I went into the river headfirst. I got a good drink, and you had better believe, but by this time some musket balls started whizzing around so I got a hat full of water and skipped out of there.

Well, about the middle of the afternoon, we ran into a Frenchman living in the woods. He was a Union man and was hiding from the rebels, for fear of being conscripted. He was very kind to us, and warned us to be very quiet, for just then the rebs had a picket post right opposite them, on the other side of the Red River. We were very quiet and stayed there until dark and for a good reason too. The rebs at the picket post had a canoe, tied at the water's edge opposite us, and the Frenchman said he'd swim across after dark, steal the canoe, bring it over to us and in that and the cover of night we could float down the river to Fort De Russe. Now wasn't that a grand scheme? And the Frenchman carried out the program precisely. He swam the river, got the canoe, brought it over to us, and at 9 o'clock at night, we started down the river, it could only hold four. I got in there with the three wounded men because I was an expert at paddling; and my associate walked along the bank. Thus we proceeded during the long, weary, toilsome night, and at daybreak we caught site of the Union flag floating over Fort De Russe. Never in my life did I see such a glorious sight, and never was my heart so light as I paddled that canoe under the fort, and never has my body been so heavy. Tired was no name for it. I dragged myself to the fort; laid down under a cannon and went to sleep, and didn't wake till the middle of the afternoon, though the boys declared that the cannon fired four times while I was sleeping under it.

Well, that is the end of my narrow escape, or rather the succession of narrow escapes. The next day I went to New Orleans, got my furlough and my visit home was happier because of the marked contrast between some scenes and that awful Red River trip.

(a) Having been a camp Patriotic Instructor, I know how hard it is to find interesting topics for camp meetings. Over the past year I have compiled 200 stories/bios of Civil War Veterans from Ohio. The first series is from the 1886 Ironton, Ohio REGISTER and is re-printed with the permission of Martha Kounse and Sharon M. Kouns, webowners of lawrencountyohio.com website. The REGISTER produced 91 articles under the heading of Narrow Escapes, (one a week for 91 weeks) by interviewing Civil War Veterans from their area. This article appeared January 19, 1888.

Submitted by:
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Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War
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