

Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War



PATRIOTIC RECOLLECTIONS



Just a Little Bit of History:

Interview with Henry Pancake, 5th Virginia Blazer's Scouts USA^(a)

Henry Pancake, the popular grocer on Center Street, belonged to the 5th Va., and was one of those daring spirits selected from various regiments of the Army of West Virginia to make up Blazer's Scouts, a mounted company under command of Capt. Dick Blazer, of the 91st, to keep an eye on Mosby's guerillas and counteract their warfare. It took a hardy, brave soldier to engage in this service and Blazer's Scouts were of that kind. So the REGISTER interviewer knew that Henry must have the recollection of a few narrow escapes and consequently tackled him for one.

Yes, said Henry, I had a few close calls, but I don't know if I can describe them as close as they were. I tell you I came near concluding several times that the jig was up.

I remember one little experience in particular, and I cannot now tell just when it happened, but sometime in the latter part of 1864. We had gone down on a scout from the neighborhood of Winchester into Luray valley. We had ridden two days and nights and were returning toward Winchester again. We had crossed the Shenandoah river, at Jackson's ford, about daylight, and rode into Cabletown, about a mile from the ford, and back on the Harper's Ferry road a short distance, where we stopped to cook a little breakfast. I was standing near Capt. Blazer and Lieutenant Coles, boiling some coffee, when a colored boy came up and said about 300 of Mosby's Guerillas had crossed the ford and taken position in the woods, half way between the ford and Cabletown, and were watching us. That was only a half mile or so from where we were. The darkey had been sent by a Union woman near the ford to apprise us. The Captain ordered Lieutenant Coles and myself to go to a little hill or mound, about halfway between us and them, and see how many there were and all about them.

We proceeded to the hill and got a good view of the rebs, and confirmed all the intelligence given by the colored boy. In the meantime, Capt. Blazer had formed his command and proceeded across the fields in the direction of the rebs, and we joined him when he had advanced some distance. We told him there were about 300 of them, that they were in a good position and it wouldn't do to attack them with our little force, amounting to about 65 men all told. But the Captain told us to fall in, and the way we went. Before we got into position to attack the rebs who were across the road, we had to let down two big rail fences. This we did and filed deep into the field which was skirted by the woods where the rebs were and in plain view of them, It was a desperately daring deed, and we hurried up the job, coming around into line like a whip cracker. Just as we got into line, here came the rebs down on us with a yell. We fired one volley, and

then they were on us, blazing away. To get through the gap in the fence and get out of the scrape, and into the road, was the aim of all. But the rebels were right with us, shooting our boys down and hacking our ranks to pieces. Every fellow was for himself, and when those got into the road who could get out flew in all directions, some across the fields, some up toward Cabletown and some toward the ford. Oh, it was a awful nasty fight! We stood no show at all. We had hardly got into line when every fellow was expected to save himself. I got into the road among the last, the rebels all around me and after me. I had on a rebel uniform and that's what saved my head, just then. Well, I took down toward Cabletown as fast as my horse could carry me. Lieutenant Coles was just ahead of me and Capt. Blazer was ahead of Coles. Another of our boys was just at my rear, and he was soon made prisoner. The balls whizzed all around me. Near the crossroads at Cabletown, Lieut. Coles fell his horse his head resting on his arm as I passed by. After I passed him, I looked back and the foremost reb, whom I recognized as one of the prisoners we had when we made the attack, stopped right over him, aimed his carbine and shot Lieut. Coles dead.

Only Capt. Blazer and myself were left on that road and there were about 30 or 40 of Mosby's men after us. I gained on Blazer and soon caught up with him. The Captain asked, "Where's the boys?" I replied, "All I know is one just behind and I guess they got him by this time." "I am going to surrender," he said. And I said, "I'm going to get out of this." The Captain halted and gave himself up. The rebels were not over 30 yards away from us and were peppering away. The surrender of the Captain stopped them a moment and I gained a little, but on came the rebels mighty soon again and chased me for two miles further. The pursuing party was reduced by ten, and then finally gave up the chase by sending a volley that whizzed all around me. When I looked back and saw they were not pursuing me, I never felt so happy in my life.

I rode on more leisurely after this, but had not proceeded more than a mile or so when I saw a man leading a horse along a road that lead into the road I was on. I soon observed he was one of our men. He had been wounded and escaped.

We went together until we came to our pickets near Winchester about dusk. There I was captured sure enough, because I had on the rebel uniform, and put in prison. I could not make the pickets or officers believe that I was a union soldier, and wore a rebel uniform because I was ordered to do so, but about 11 o'clock that night, my story was found to be true and I was released.

Now a little about that rebel uniform, and thereon hangs the point of my narrow escape. The chase was different from that after Capt. Blazer. He could surrender and live; I couldn't. I had to beat in that horse race or die, and as there were 40 horses on the track after me it looked every minute like dying. There were 16 of us in Blazer's company who wore rebel uniforms, and I was the only one who got out of that scrape alive. Of the entire number in the company, 65, only 13 escaped and five of these were wounded. That was the last of Blazer's scouts.

I went down next day to the scene of the fight. Twenty-two of our boys were buried near the road. The colored people buried them. Lieutenant Coles body was exhumed and sent home and now sleeps in Woodland Cemetery near Ironton. He was a brave fellow.

Yes said the reporter, I knew him well. We belonged to the same company. He was a daring young officer-generous, chivalrous, and patriotic. Tell me further about the rebel uniform.

You see, said Henry, we were organized to fight Mosby's Guerillas, and as we had to fight them as they fought us, and wearing each others uniform was part of the game. Why, I've got in with the rebels and rode for miles without their suspecting I was a union soldier. One time Mosby's men captured a mail wagon and some of us wearing rebel uniforms caught up with them and helped guard the wagon until our pursuing force came in sight. That's the way we had to fight Mosby, and it was part of the regulations that some of us wore gray.

Well then, suggested the reporter, to have been a Blazer Scout, was a sort of continuous narrow escape.

Yes, said Henry, I've only given you one of the incidents that was particularly interesting to me. That's what you asked for.

(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 lawrencecountyohipo.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 November 25, 1886.

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