



PATRIOTIC RECOLLECTIONS



Just a Little Bit of History:

Interview with Henry Woodfin, 4th U.S. Cavalry^(a)

Were you in the war? asked the reporter, as he leaned back in one of the cozy chairs of Henry Woodfin's parlor and addressed the proprietor himself. *Indeed I was,* said Henry, *I was in the Fourth U.S. Cavalry, and did my share at the front to sustain the stars and stripes. I fought through the unpleasantness and now enjoy some of the fruits of it.*

Were you ever in the way of a ball, Henry? I asked. *Yes, sir; that was at the battle near Jackson, Mississippi. A bullet caught me in the calf of the leg, but it didn't much more than make it's mark. I got out of the scrape pretty well; only a flesh wound, and I am kind of glad I got that much. It is sort of a token that I was there or thereabouts. But I came near getting in a much worse snap once." Ah, and when was that?* asked the reporter.

Well, you recollect when Sherman's army made a big commotion down in Mississippi in 1863? My regiment was with him, and did some pretty hard service all the time, being kept to the front to poke out the rebs. Now that kind of experience is always dangerous, for you never know what kind of a trap you are likely to fall into. In their own country the rebs know all about you and you know very little about them until you find out for yourself; and that is the kind of work the cavalry is expected to do. So, a fellow on a horse out in front, has to keep his hindsight and foresight busy all the time, in order to preserve his own personal liberty, you know, or to keep his body safe from stray minnie balls.

But as I was going to tell you. Our column was directed toward Meriden, Mississippi and our regiment was in front preparing the way. At one place we came to where the road forked in three directions, and I was one of the squad of seven men who were sent out on the left prong to see if there was anything out there we were looking for. I expect we had gone about three miles when we began to observe indications that our visit was not in vain. A straggling reb or two appeared in our front, and they fell back as we exchanged a pop or two, until pretty soon they seemed to grow thicker and it was not long before we concluded not to venture any further. In fact, we made up our mind that we had found the enemy, and had better go back and tell the Colonel; so we turned our horses' heads to the rear and started back; but we had not gone more than 600 yards before we ran into a rebel force behind us. I then began to think the jig was up; but there was one thing in our favor - it began growing dusk, and it was possible to sneak out of the trap.

But the rebs pressed us closely, front and rear, so we struck out sideways, and tried to get past them, but

they opposed our designs as quick as we started to execute them. In thus dodging about to try to get past them, we got into a deep hollow or gully, which quite hid us from view, where we waited with long drawn breaths, expecting the rebs would, at any minute, come swooping over the hill, and take us in; but we also hoped that darkness would come before the rebs, and let us out. While thus in doubt and jeopardy, we saw the rebs ride past us, and go into camp not far from us. In fact, their picket line was within gun shot of us. Then we made a rush for the road, and oh how we did gallop, and how the reb bullets did skip about us; but not one of our boys was struck. Once on the road, we galloped back at a furious rate. It was now dark and we ran into our own pickets sooner than we expected; and there was another close call, for our forces thought there was a reb dash on hand, and they rallied under great excitement, so that we had to get out of there and come up with more deliberation. The whole affair was the most exciting event I was in during the war and I was mighty thankful to get out of it.

(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 lawrencecountyohio.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 5, 1888.

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December 2000