



PATRIOTIC RECOLLECTIONS



Just a Little Bit of History:

Interview with Major McMahon, 2nd Virginia Cavalry USA^(a)

Hello Major McMahon, you are the person I want to absorb for a moment or two, said the REGISTER reporter when he met the old veteran enjoying the warmth of Mr. Walburn's office. What do you want me for? asked the Major. I am at peace with the world. Oh, that Narrow Escape that you had - give it to me quick, returned the reporter. Give me time to think one up; don't pounce on a fellow so sudden. There are lots of narrow escapes with a fellow who was out four years, but it is not easy to pick one out to tell. Tell him about that raid of the one hundred, interposed Charley Crawshaw.

That was nothing but a piece of cheek, replied the Major. We came out of that without the loss of a horse or man and didn't fire a gun. It was a piece of glaring impudence all through. It was in January 1863, that Gen. Crook sent 100 men on a raid to burn Newbern Bridge. They were made up of men picked from the companies of the Second Va. Cavalry. It was January, as I said, we started from Fayetteville, West Va. The entire regiment, Col. Powell in command, went to Lewisburg to attract the attention of the enemy, and at Meadow Bluff the 100 cavalrymen in command of Lieut. Col. Paxton took off southward. I was with the raiders and we left the main body of the cavalry at 10 o'clock at night, reaching Edgar's ford of Greenbrier River, at daylight.

Before we got there, however, I suggested to Colonel Paxton, that we should pull off all the brass on our uniform and cover ourselves with our gray blankets, for if we didn't, we wouldn't last two hours after we crossed the Greenbrier. The suggestion was at once adopted, and well it was, for across the ford we ran into a rebel camp, that was just hustling about getting an early breakfast. But we kept off to one side, within talking distance however, and some of our boys exchanged words with the confeds. They holloed, "What cavalry is that?" and one of our boys responded, "Clarkson's cavalry-been down about Gauley on a raid." They looked a little curious, and we could tell there was some doubt among them, but we appeared as indiffered and unconcerned as possible and managed to get along without any disturbance.

We had not gone far before we overtook Colonel McCauslin (Possibly General McCauseland), a very prominent rebel officer, in those parts. He rode with our command for some miles, Captain Arkrim keeping with him and entertaining him. Arkrim was an old Virginian himself and played it fine on McCauslin, but we never had any idea that the latter saw through the ruse; for he exhibited a disposition to part from his company, which he finally did, after a ride of four miles, with a kindly farewell and a perfect show of innocence. Of course, he struck out to rally his own forces, but Arkrim had mystified

him, so that he was not able afterward to catch us.

We passed through Centerville, Monroe County, while they were holding some sort of an election. The town was full of people and reb troops were in abundance. Our boys talked with the rebs as we rode along the streets, and the people talked back; at the same time I could see some dubious looks among the countenances. Soon after we left the town, we met a bunch of rebel cavalry coming up the road. At first sight of us, they stopped suddenly and looked with some alarm at us; but we didn't let on to notice them, so they came ahead and we passed each other with many a "how are you?" "Where are you going?" "What's the news?" Thus we met rebs all along. Indeed they came uncomfortably thick. Here we were, a hundred of us, going right among them and through their country, with only an old blanket between their vision and the federal blue.

We got to the mountains by night, and there we fed, at an old fellow's by the name of Colonel Symmes, and we gave him an order on the reb quartermaster at Newbern for his pay. We beguiled that old fellow nicely. He was very exact in measuring the corn, and when some of the boys were a little impatient and tried to feed before he had measured it, he shoved them aside, and insisted they wait. He wanted exact measure and exact pay. Near there we, also, encountered a reb paymaster, who had about \$100,000 of confed money, and was on his way to pay off the troops. We passed the time of day with him, and expressed a wish to get back to our command in time to draw our pay. We played it nice on him and he left us thinking we were Johnny Reb beyond surmise.

Our guides got mixed up at Peters Mountain, and were completely lost. There was snow on the ground and that helped bewilder them. They were unable to tell which way to go to get to Newbern Bridge. It was then after dark and we were 25 miles from Newbern Bridge, so we concluded to get out of there. We then started and rode all night, crossing New River above Blue Stone, and then to Raleigh, where we met two of our companies which had been sent out to look after us, and from there, it was an easy an safe ride to Fayetteville.

We had been gone four days, rode all the time night and day, right through the enemy's country, with no support, and with no intention to fight, but only to play it on the rebs by pretending to belong to that side. We met them everywhere, talked with them, and it is a perfect mystery that they didn't find us out in time to surround us and capture the whole business. This is no bloody tale, but I tell you that the four days of hard riding and harder anxiety was a good deal more powerful than a right smart skirmish would have been. As I remarked when you first spoke, that was no very narrow escape but a perfect specimen of Yankee brass.

Well Major, that is a good one, said the reporter. It gives variety to our narratives. I know your were in bloodier affairs, but this is just the kind of narrow escape we want this week. The boys in the war had variety and we want to tell it all.

(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 6, 1867.

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