

A Little Girl's Memories of War in Nashville

Melancholy Music, A Grim Cortège

By MAY WINSTON CALDWELL

THE FIRST thing that I remember about Nashville during the Civil War was the excitement when my eldest sister and one of our cousins came running home from church one Sunday morning in 1862 with the news that Fort Donelson had fallen and that the Federal gunboats were in possession of the Cumberland River.

I thought a Federal gunboat must be the most dreadful thing in the world and that the Yankees were horrible monsters, but we soon found that they were very considerate, especially the officers in charge.

My fright was soon lost sight of, however, in the rush of preparation for a journey. My father and mother planned to follow the Confederate army to a place of safety. The first stop would be at our farm about six miles south of Nashville.

In those days a journey was such an unusual thing for children that the prospect of actually going on a trip completely overshadowed the reasons for which my mother and the older members of the family were hastily assembling our belongings. . . . The plan was to get the women and children of the family to a place of safety, and it was to this end that hasty preparations were being made.

Mother's Patterns

They say that when we were packing to follow the Confederate army my mother suddenly remembered her dress patterns, which were very valuable in those days when clothing for the whole family was made at home, and she started packing some. . . . They were exchanged between friends and neighbors like choice recipes or cuttings from favorite flowers.

My mother's patterns were cut out from old newspapers, and so the story goes, when she started packing she became so interested in reading the articles on them that the Yankees overtook us before we could make our departure.

I was reminded of this old story not long ago by my cousin Lizzie Meriwether Gilmer, who is better known to you as Dorothy Dix. Our family remained in Nashville throughout the struggle.

I so often think of the tragedy and sad awakening of the young girls of that period in finding their young men friends overnight joining the army and marching away in their lovely uniforms to the strain of "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

Under the Spell

It is no wonder that, in their bereft state of mind, many fell under the spell and charm of the Union soldiers, and some gave their hearts and hands in marriage, hoping to find youth and happiness again. Life without romance is dull indeed.

I remember clearly the day and night that our troops were retreating from the city. My brother, a Confederate officer, was at home on a furlough, convalescing from typhoid. As his comrades left they came to tell him goodbye, and I could hear their footsteps and the clanking of their swords as they went to his room and out again into the darkness to join the other tramping feet I heard in the street.

When daylight came, we saw that in the retreat the wagons and horses had laid waste our garden. The fences were down, the flowers were broken and trampled by marching feet. To us children this was the greatest tragedy of the war.

Tales of the War

From March to November this garden was our outdoor sitting-room; all of our pleasures and interests were centered there; and to have it destroyed was sad indeed. The spirit of this garden was a much beloved brother who

was almost sixteen years of age. He was as much a part of it as flowers, birds, and butterflies. Whenever he was wanted, we knew he could be found there.

He was our fairy godfather, and his wonderful tales of the great war that was coming were more exciting to us than the tales of Robin Hood's adventures. We ran breathless to meet him when he came home from school, and he always had a new chapter about the war — of new companies that were forming every day and drilling all the time — of one company especially that he was going to join.

Our eldest brother was already a first lieutenant in the army, but we knew brother Eddie would surpass him or any other soldier. He cut a large heart on the tall pine tree in the garden and under it wrote his name, Edmund Pendleton Winston. He said when he went to war, whenever we saw that heart we would think of him. But when the spring came, when he, being 16, was called to arms, he was taken ill, and after a few short days, he was called to "join the choir invisible of those immortal dead whose lives are better by his presence."

From that day the pine tree became a shrine, and when we had any children to visit us, the first thing we did was to take them by the hand and lead them to the pine tree to see the heart that grew larger as the tree grew, and it shed a benediction over all that garden.

"But were another child-world my share I would be a little sister there."

The suffering of Confederate prisoners and the wounded in the hospitals was horrible. My father was a physician and was exempt from the army because of his age. He, however, spent his time in the hospitals administering to the



May Winston's mother fell to reading her dress patterns, while Federals came closer.

—Staff Artist Jim Young

sick and wounded of both armies.

A Heavy Toll

I remember that he remarked that such diseases as typhoid, smallpox, measles, mumps, and others which spread rapidly in the close, unsanitary quarters, took a heavier toll of life than the

cannon of the enemy. The truth of my father's words was deeply impressed upon me when, nearly 60 years later, I stood by the bedside of my beloved youngest son at Camp Taylor.

Here I saw the angel of death, in her black robes, hovering over that great encampment with its splendid array of Anglo-Saxon youth. Not satisfied with the havoc that was to be wrought by shot and shell, she brought the dread influenza.

After the War

After the war our property continued to be used as a barracks, and army prisoners were kept in a guard house nearby. One day I saw the earth move on our lawn. Then a man's head appeared, and then a man. He looked at me, and turned and ran away. He was a prisoner who had dug a tunnel under the wall of the guard house, and crawled through it to make his escape.

One reason that the Federal army kept such a heavy guard after the war was over was because of the disorder and lawlessness which terrorized the city. It was said that the soldiers from the barracks were the chief offenders. There was a band of robbers which entered the homes of Nashville citizens at will, and they apparently eluded the authorities.

One night some of these robbers entered the home of two of my little playmates and went through even the bedroom of these little girls. They snuggled together and made no sound until the intruders had gone. The same night the home of an aunt of these children was entered, and the aunt, frightened by the entrance of the robbers, ran to the bedroom of her brother, where she fell fainting on the floor. The entire city was infested by bands of men—whether soldiers or just groups

of lawless people, no one ever knew.

At Fort Negley

It was said that the headquarters of the robbers was in Fort Negley, in the cellar used to store ammunition; and that from this cellar they had dug a tunnel to the McNairy vault in the old City Cemetery near by.

Each Saturday afternoon it was the custom of my mother to take Uncle Paul, the gardener, to the cemetery to trim the grass and flowers around the family graves; and we children, untouched by the solemnity of the occasion, used to play on the road which forms a circle around an underground vault.

The McNairy vault also faced this circular road, and the rusty doors of the tomb stood ajar just enough to allow the body of a man to pass through. When any of us felt unusually brave we would creep up to this opening and then rush back to the others, shrieking that we had seen the robbers.

Perilous Nights

When anyone was sick and the services of my father were needed, two armed men came for him; and, after he had made his visit, accompanied him home. A lone figure walking the streets at night was in grave danger of being knocked down and robbed, or even killed, for the sport of it.

The thing that struck terror to us children more than the Battle of Nashville was the Ku Klux Klan that had its meetings in the then abandoned Fort Negley. When twilight came, or in the misty moonlight, these figures of ill-omen would sally forth.

The appearance of one of the Klan caused consternation; and after seeing one, it was days before we got back to normal. Each member of the Klan was required to provide himself with a costume. This was a white mask for the face, with openings for the eyes and mouth.

Cardboard Hat

A tall cardboard hat was so constructed as to make the wearer appear much taller than he was. A long robe concealed the entire person, and there was also a covering for the horses and some sort of muffling for their feet. Each member also carried a small whistle with which, by means of signals agreed upon, they communicated with each other.

Being near Fort Negley, where they held their midnight meetings, our street was a frequent rendezvous for these riders of the night. We now realize that this mysterious organization was a chivalrous knight whose task was to rescue our helpless people from the terrors of the carpetbaggers and the reconstruction regime from which we suffered for years after the war.

Mock Funeral

Another spectacle for the reconstruction days was the mock funeral for President Lincoln. As we children viewed this solemn and ominous procession, we little realized that it was in the honor of the passing of a man whose wise and sympathetic attitude would make him in years to come beloved and respected by all, and that his assassination made things more difficult for the hard pressed Southland.

I do not know just why Nashville was required to show this respect to the dead chief—perhaps it was because there was an army post stationed here. At any rate, we

May Winston was a little girl when the Civil War came to Nashville. She lived in a big plantation type house on Fifth Avenue, South, on the hill just north of the Old City Cemetery. Her mother was related to George Rogers Clark.

When she grew up, May was married to Nashville financier James E. Caldwell, and became the mistress of the mansion Longview, on Franklin Road. She became a leader in the activities of the DAR and other historical societies, and was the moving spirit in the restoration of Fort Negley and the erection of the Peace monument overlooking the battlefield at Nashville.

Mrs. Caldwell loved homes and gardens, and in 1911 she published "Beautiful and Historic Homes Around Nashville." In 1936, recalling her memories of the Civil War as a child, she published a little book for her children, "A Chapter From the Life of a Little Girl of the Confederacy." This story, just as she wrote it, is taken from the pages of that book.

beat of the drum as it kept time to the funeral dirge.

Fear and Dread

There was not the least danger of our jumping up and down or clapping our hands in carefree joyousness as our mother feared we might. Instead of this, we were chained to the spot with fear and dread as the drum beat with its "tum tum tum-tum-ily, tum-ily, tum" was ushering in something dreadful that we could not understand.

The first thing to catch our eyes was the soldiers on horseback with their trappings of war and their prancing steeds, then the band with its dirgelike music—so different from anything I ever heard before; even the flag, that always floated out on the breeze so joyously, was half-masted.

Then came the caisson or gun carriage, drawn by six horses, draped in black, and on their heads black plumes, looking very much like a drum major's plumes; and, as the horses moved slowly along, the plumes waved up and down very much as if they, too, were keeping time to that ominous and dirgelike music. Then came the infantry, marching two abreast with the officers in charge, leading the way—all looking warlike. I know it made not only our parents, but even us children, feel as if life and hope had passed away.

Just a Village

Nashville at that time was hardly more than a village compared to its present size. But it was a stronghold of the Union Army. After the fall of Fort Donelson in 1862, General Grant was from time to time stationed in Nashville, and while here he received his appointment as general of all the Federal forces. With him were General Rosecrans, General Buell, and General Thomas.

For business headquarters

they occupied the Cunningham home on High Street.

This building afterwards became the Hermitage Club. (Now occupied by Cross Keys restaurant). General Grant's sleeping quarters were located across the street in the Daniel F. Carter residence. In appreciation of the courtesy shown him in this home, General Grant when he left the city gave Mr. Carter a letter saying that he was not to be molested in any way by the Union Army. This letter saved the Carter home on several occasions.

Nashville suffered great damage during the occupation by these troops. The brick sidewalks were taken up to be used in making foundations for officers' tents; fences were torn down, buildings were often destroyed or mutilated by the rough usage they received, and the streets themselves were full of ruts where the great army trains had passed over them.

From the Ashes

The historian Parton, in his "Life of Andrew Jackson," published in 1859, speaks of Nashville as a southern Philadelphia with its brick walks and its antebellum homes nestled back from the streets which bore such quaint names as High, Vine, Spruce, and Summer. Now after having been despoiled by the ravages of war, it has arisen from its ashes and is known as the "Athens of the South."

Let us hope that the mists of tears caused by the sorrow and tragedies of war have been blown away by the winds of time and that we are, and will ever be, a united people.

"With one flag for all, or far and near,
One faith for all whate'er
betide,
Oh maple leaf, Oh cactus
spear,
One star-built banner,
built for all!"



This picture of serious-faced little May Winston was taken about the time of the Civil War, when she saw the "mock funeral" of Abe Lincoln.

Fast-Firing Repeaters Gave Feds Advantage

WILSON'S Union cavalry at the Battle of Nashville was armed with the Spencer magazine rifle, as were some of the men in Cox's infantry division of the Federal Twenty-third Corps.

This repeating rifle gave the Federals a great advantage in firepower over the Confederates, whose muzzle loading rifles had to be loaded from the business end, with a ramrod, could fire once and then had to be reloaded. The difference in firepower could have been the decisive factor in the battle.

If the United States Government had been alert to the development of new weapons, every soldier in the Federal army could have been armed with the repeater in the winter of 1864-65. The weapon had been available for well over a year.

Early in 1863, more than a year and a half before the Battle of Nashville, Col. John T. Wilder was commanding the First Brigade (Federal), of the Fourth Division, Fourteenth Corps, commanded by Gen. George H. Thomas after the Battle of Stone's River. At

his own expense, later repaid by the men themselves, Wilder armed his 2,000-man brigade of mounted infantry with the new Spencers.

"In a number of skirmishes with the cavalry of the enemy," Wilder wrote, "the men soon found themselves equal

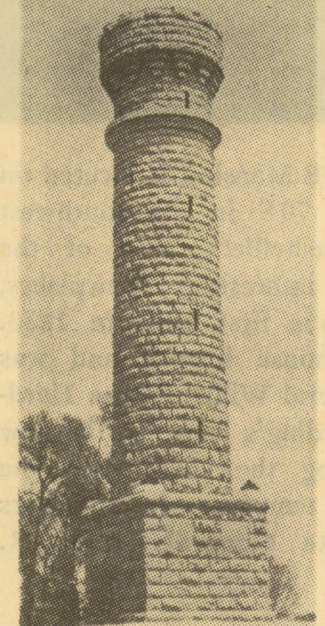
to at least twice or thrice their number of men armed with muzzle-loading guns."

A few breech-loading rifles were manufactured in the Confederacy during the war, but facilities and know-how for the manufacture of repeaters simply were not available. Confederate soldiers captured a number of Spencers from Federal troops, and toward the end of the war some fixed ammunition for these rifles was manufactured in the South.

The best rifles in the Southern army were telescope-equipped Whitworths imported from England. These were muzzle-loaders, although having fine range and accuracy, and were issued to the best shots, or "sharpshooters" in each company.

The Spencer could be fired as a single-shot weapon, in addition to which it carried seven cartridges in the magazine. It fired a one-ounce bullet of .52 caliber, held in a copper cartridge. Equipped with a bayonet and accurate up to half a mile, it was described by Wilder as a "most formidable weapon."

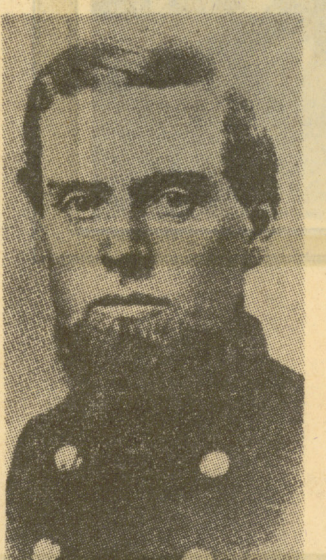
After the war a Federal officer remarked that the "Spencer rifle made the sweetest music that was heard during the war of the Union." He



Wilder Monument At Chickamauga

pointed out that its eight shots could be fired as rapidly as two shots could be discharged from a Springfield musket.

In addition to the Spencers used by the Union cavalry at Nashville, two companies of the 12th Kentucky regiment of Reilly's brigade, Cox's division, were armed with "revolving rifles." If these were made like revolvers, with a longer barrel, a revolving cylinder and a stock, they could be fired six times without reloading.



Gen. Wilder He bought repeaters

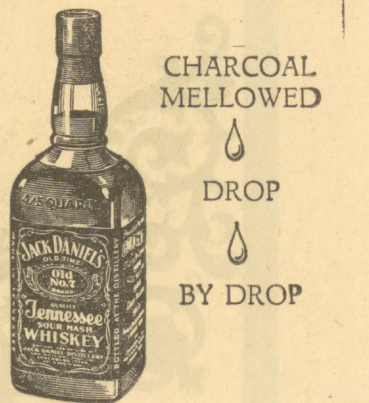


IF YOU LIKE STORIES ABOUT THE OLD DAYS, all you have to do is sit around Jack Daniel's sawmill at breaktime.



One of the stories you're bound to hear is about how Jack Daniel first made the charcoal he used to smooth out his sippin' whiskey. He sawed up the hard maple, ricked it, and burned it right up in the woods. Then later he built

a sawmill in the Hollow and did it all here, the way we do now. And the charcoal that results is exactly the same. You can count on our old-timers to make sure of that.



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