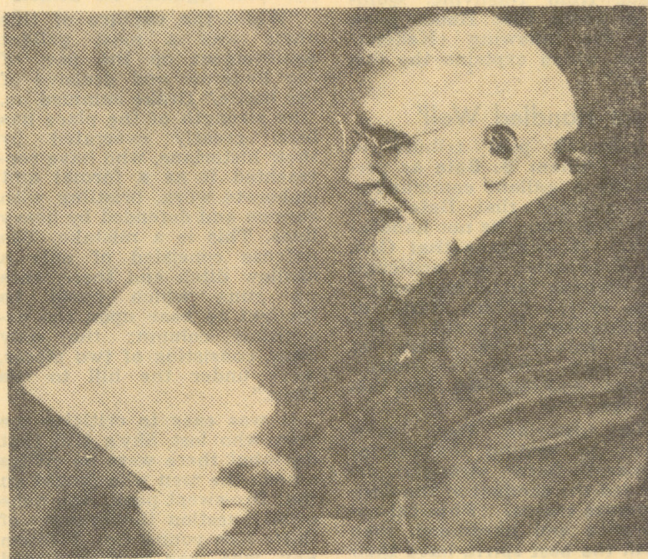


# McNeilly's 'Swallowed a Rat' Kept Confederates Laughing

AS a chaplain who stuck to the firing line, lived with the soldiers and shared their hardships with never a mark of rank on his collar, perhaps none ever excelled Dr. James

Hugh McNeilly. He was best known in Nashville as pastor of the Glen Leven Presbyterian Church.



Dr. James Hugh McNeilly

In 1860 young McNeilly, who had attended theological school, at Danville, Va., was licensed to preach at Shelbyville by the Nashville Presbytery. His biography, published by Glen Leven in 1904, says that in 1861 he was at Fort Donelson "on staff duty" and preaching to the soldiers.

### 'On Leave'

McNeilly's status in the Confederate army was not quite certain during the early months of the war. He was in Louisiana as a civilian minister when Fort Donelson fell, and he remained there as pastor of the Pecan Grove church. While there, he wrote, he resisted a Confederate conscript officer, refusing to report for duty with the army. "I am a minister of the Gospel," he told the officer, "and besides I am only temporarily on leave from the army."

McNeilly's church biography says that in the fall of 1862 "his regiment was exchanged at Vicksburg, and he was enrolled as a private in the 49th Tennessee Infantry Regiment, usually known as Quarles' Regiment. He was for a time "detailed" as a chaplain and later commissioned as a chaplain with the rank of captain in the Confederate army.

Serving with the Army of Tennessee, McNeilly was in all the engagements of the Atlanta and Tennessee campaigns, being present for the battles of Franklin and Nashville. He was paroled at Tuscaloosa, Ala. late in May, 1865.

### A Sanded Letter

Late in life McNeilly wrote a series of articles on his service as a Confederate chaplain, and some of them showed a lively sense of humor which probably made life a little more bearable during the dark days in the trenches.

During the Atlanta campaign the chaplain was writing a letter to his sweetheart when a shell struck near the trench, throwing dirt and sand over his letter.

"When the same thing happened to Junot, Napoleon's favorite marshal," he noted, "he said, 'Saves me the trouble of sanding my letter,' — and he got credit for courage — but no one noticed me."

### Swallowed a Rat

McNeilly told the story of a young Confederate officer who was rather "dudish" and very well dressed. He also sported a large moustache, waxed and pointed.

As the officer walked in front of a silent line of soldiers, one of the men said: "Swallowed a rat. See his tail sticking out?"

And every man in line repeated the statement, "Swallowed a rat."

The officer demanded an apology, the colonel lectured the men, and the moustached officer walked down the line again. And this time every man said:

"He did not swallow a rat. No, he did not swallow a rat." The officer finally fled the field.

During the last days of the war, McNeilly wrote that he met a friend and neighbor, Rev. H. B. Boude, of Gallatin, in Iuka, Mississippi. Boude and his family were in dire straits, and McNeilly was temporarily rich — in Confederate money. He divided his fortune with Boude, who declined to take U.S. greenbacks. "The war is over," said Boude, "and you will need the money to get home on."

McNeilly was a hard working chaplain who liked nothing



Yankee shells interrupt McNeilly's letter writing.

ing better than to be with his regiment. He was a great admirer of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest. During the retreat from Nashville McNeilly quoted Forrest's battle orders during an engagement at Sugar Creek, north of the Tennessee River:

• "Tell Walthall to come down from the hill and form

his line so that the end of it will reach this road."

• "Tell Morton to take his guns up that hill and put them so they will swipe down this road."

• "Tell Jackson to go back to the creek and begin fighting them fellows like the very devil."

McNeilly commented that these orders were easily understood and carried out to the letter.

### His Uniform

Charles F. Pitts in his "Chaplain in Gray" quotes McNeilly's description of his "uniform" which appeared in the Confederate Veteran for October, 1893:

"My hat was of brown jeans, quilted; my jacket of gray, with wooden buttons, had suffered sadly in the battle (of Franklin). I had thrown it off so as to help a wounded comrade. As it lay on the ground a shell burst over us, and a spark fell on the middle of the back and gradually burned out a round in the cotton fabric. My shirt of checked Osaberg would not button at the collar. My pantaloons were scorched from standing too close to our fires, and were in strings from the knees down. My semi-stockinged feet were encased in a pair of brogans that let in air and mud through the gaping chinks."

After the war McNeilly served churches at Trenton and Humboldt, and later was called to Nashville, where he served various churches until his death. These included Woodland Street, Moore Memorial and the last, Glen Leven. The building of this last church still stands on Franklin Road.

### Fervent Preaching

McNeilly is remembered in Nashville as a builder and organizer of churches, a tireless and dedicated minister of his church. One who remembers his preaching says his sermons were sometimes long and a little dry. He had a short beard, she remembers, and as a child she thought he must have looked like the Apostle Paul, his beard mov-

ing up and down with the fervency of his preaching.

McNeilly lived to use electric lights and telephones, and ride in automobiles that were over the horizon for the boys who fought at Franklin and Nashville. His service as a chaplain was only a brief part of a long and dedicated life. Perhaps he never had a finer compliment than that paid him by his brigade commander, Gen. William A. Quarles, after the Battle of Atlanta.

"I cannot refrain," Quarles wrote, "from mentioning the conduct of the Rev. J. H. McNeilly, chaplain of the 49th Tennessee Regiment. At all times a consistent and faithful follower of his Master, on this occasion he exhibited the qualities of the Christian soldier. Following the blood-stained path of his regiment, he was everywhere to be seen ministering to the physical and spiritual comfort of the dying and the wounded."

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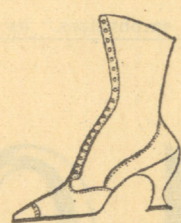
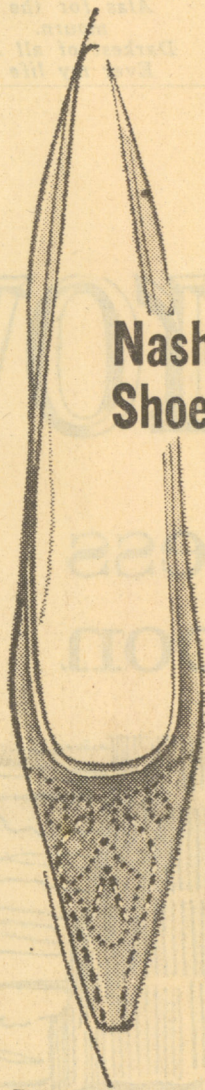
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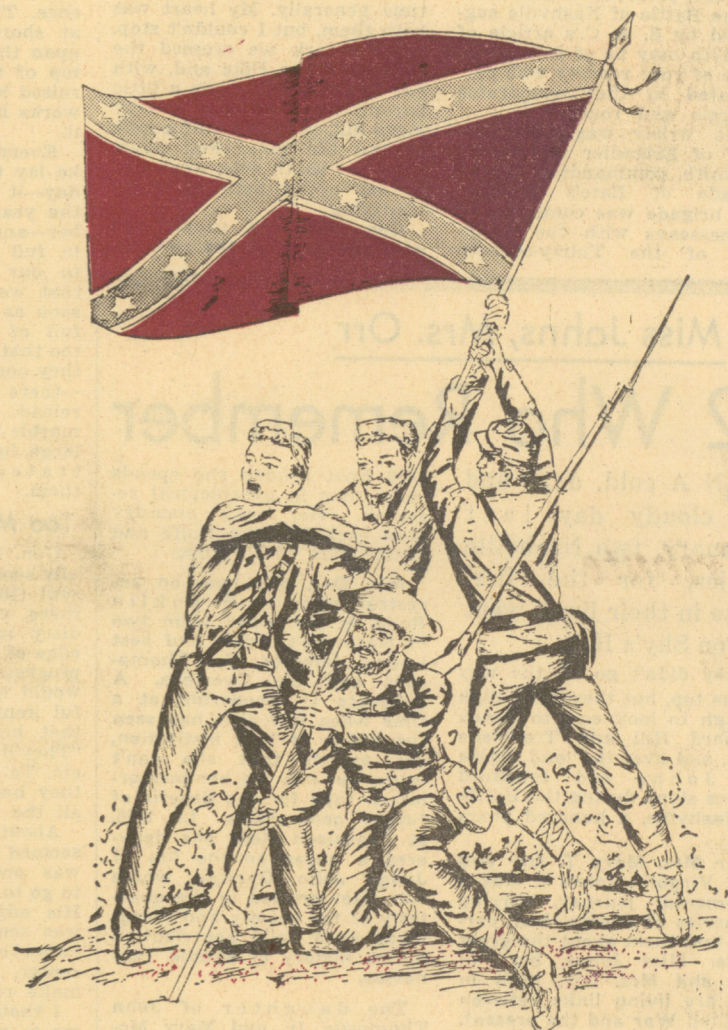
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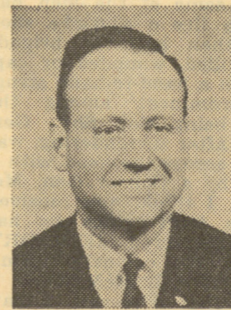
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