

An Old Soldier, a Little Girl, a \$10 Bill

"WHEN I was a little girl," said Miss Virginia Johns, "Gen. Thomas Benton Smith gave me a ten dollar bill."

She still had it, she added, around somewhere, and one of these days she'd find it and show it to us. And in the meantime, we asked ourselves a question which only Miss Virginia could answer. Would it be a U.S. or Confederate ten dollar bill?

In Nashville, Thomas Benton Smith is a name not to be forgotten. His was a tragic but colorful story, unwinding over the long years that followed the Civil War.

Young Inventor

Smith was born at Mechanicsville, Tennessee, in Rutherford County, in 1838. Living up to the name of his home town, he patented a locomotive "cow catcher" when he was 15 years old. At 16 he was sent to the military college of the University of Nashville, then headed by Bushrod Johnson, who also was destined to become a general in the Confederate Army of Tennessee. After graduating from this school Smith spent a year at the United States Military Academy. He then got a job in the shops of the Nashville & Decatur railroad.

Early in 1861 Smith helped organize Company B of the 20th Tennessee Infantry Regiment. After the Battle of Shiloh, on the reorganization of the Twentieth, Tom Benton Smith was elected colonel of the regiment. At the time he was just 22 years old.

Severely wounded at the Battle of Stone's River, Smith recovered to take command of



In 1930 Confederate vets J. D. Dowling of Ringgold, Ga. and Thomas L. Eaton of Nashville swap stories of the war.

war the seriously wounded young general was a prisoner of the Yankees. He later returned home, but he had not recovered from his injury, and gradually lost his reason. He was confined to Central State Hospital, where he lived for 38 long years after the war, dying in 1923.

General Smith, during his later years, was at times perfectly sane, and could be released from the institution for short periods. An 1889 newspaper article relates that he attended a reunion of the regiment held that summer at Glendale Park, and that for a little while he "drilled" the veterans in the hot summer sun. If their steps were a little slow and awkward, a reporter wrote, they did put up a solid front at the dinner table.

Years Roll By

Tall, handsome, unmarried, the general lived out his days—sometimes in the sunlight of reason, and again in the darkness of insanity. His hair grew white, as the years went by, and he was a familiar figure around the hospital.

One day a young man was hunting in the vicinity when he met the bearded, erect old man, strolling near the hospital grounds. "Let me see your gun," said General Smith.

The hunter, seeing nothing wrong with the distinguished old gentleman, complied. Smith broke the gun, snapped it shut again and said:

"You have done a foolish thing. You have put a loaded gun in my hands. I live over here (pointing to the asylum) and I'm crazy—at times. I might shoot you. Don't ever give your gun to a stranger."

With that he handed the gun back to the hunter, who took his departure, along with good advice.

The photograph of General Smith which appears with this sketch is from the collection of Stanley Horn. It was made either during the war,

or soon afterward, and shows him wearing his colonel's uniform.

To get back to that ten dollar bill Gen. Smith gave Miss Johns.

"I was a little girl," she said. "It was the last one the general had. He just reached into his pocket and gave it to me. I never spent it."

There were reasons other than sentimental for the bill not being spent. As she produced it, neatly folded in a little box, we concealed our curiosity while she opened it up.

She handed it to us. As we examined the bill there was a sudden lump in the throat, and a stinging in the eyes as we thought of the young brigadier who lived so long in the valley of the shadow.

The general had no Federal greenbacks to give a little girl. It was a Confederate ten dollar bill.



Gen. Thomas B. Smith Wounded at Nashville

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Gen. W. E. Bate's old brigade after the Battle of Missionary Ridge. Before Atlanta he was



Miss Virginia Johns' Ten Dollar Bill The old general gave her his last one

commissioned as a brigadier general—the second youngest in the Confederate army.

In the Battle of Nashville General Smith's brigade—by then a skeleton command—held the crest of Shy's Hill on the second day, and was overrun by the Federal charge late in the afternoon. Smith was captured, and taken behind Federal lines under a guard of three soldiers. Then, 160 yards behind the lines, Smith was accosted by a saber-carrying Federal officer.

In a fit of rage the officer struck the unarmed, unresisting prisoner on the head three times with his saber, knocking him to his knees and breaking his skull. This officer, identified as Col. William L. McMillen, a brigade commander in McArthur's division, Smith's corps, claimed no other justification for his act than that he was upset over losses in his brigade, caused by volleys fired from the Confederate line.

For the remainder of the

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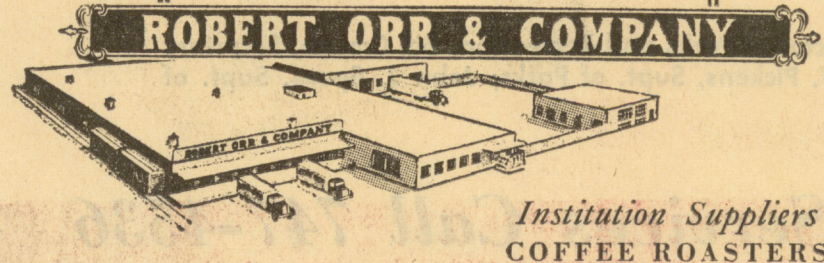
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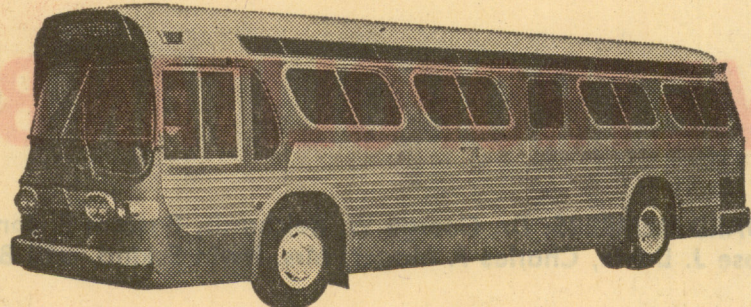
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