A Yankee Spy Claimed He Saved His Army

66SEVEN times during the war I was within the Confederate lines as a Federal spy -three times at Murfreesboro, twice at New Hope Church, once at Atlanta, and once, and the last time, at Spring Hill, Tennessee, No-vember 29, 1864."

With these words, written in 1913, J. D. Remington added a strange sequel to what was already the strangest chapter of the Civil War — the "affair" at Spring Hill.

Remington's article, appearing in the Confederate Veteran magazine, continued:

"Knowing that I am the only person living who knows the real cause of Hood's failure to capture and destroy the Federal army at Spring Hill, and that I will not live much longer, I feel it my duty to make known the cause of the failure of General Hood to fight at Spring Hill.

"If Hood and some of his generals had been of the same spirit of General Bragg in the Battle of Shiloh, when he was driving the Federals, after Gen. A. S. Johnston was killed, when ordered two or three times to halt his lines, he said, 'I will not obey this order unless someone personally known to me brings it,' the Federal army would have marched south as prisoners on the morning of November 30. The Confederate generals allowed themselves to be deceived by taking orders from two Federal spies.

The Real Cause

"I now give the real cause of the Confederate failure. Before proceeding with Remington's story, which caused a flare-up all over the South in its day, it might be well to review the strategic and tactical situation which led to the affair, and which for many years plagued the old Confederacy with an unanswered question: "What happened at

General John Bell Hood's Tennessee campaign, as most history books call it, is sometimes referred to as Hood's raid. It is described in considerable detail in "Hood's Tennessee Campaign" by T. R. Hay, published in 1929.

On the 27th of November, 1863, General Hood and his Confederate Army of Tennessee, 41,000 strong arrived at Columbia, Tennessee on the Duck River, Across the they were faced by 27,000 Federals including the Twentythird and Fourth Army Corps, commanded by Generals John M. Schofield and David S.

Hood's Maneuver

Upon arrival at Columbia Hood rested his army for day. On the night of the 28th he began laying pontoon bridges across the Duck at Davis' Ford, six miles above Columbia. His plan was to put a part of his army at Spring Hill, 12 miles north, and cut off the retreat of the Federals toward their base at Nashville. There Gen. George Thomas was busily collecting a Federal army to oppose Hood's ad-

Hood's cavalry under Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest crossed the river on the afternoon of the 28th, Federal cavalry under Gen. James Wilson being unable to stop him. Wilson advised Schofield of what was happening, and the race to Spring Hill began. Stanley, with two Federal

divisions, set out for Spring Hill at 8 a.m. on the 29th, the head of his column reaching there at 12:30, barely in time to occupy the village and beat off an attack by Forrest's cavalry. En route Stanley had posted Kimball's division on Rutherford Creek In the meantime, back at

Columbia, Gen. J. D. Cox's Federal division was left facing two Confederate divisions commanded by Gen. Stephen D. Lee, who had most of Hood's artillery.

On the March

Hood, meanwhile, with the bulk of his army, was following Forrest's cavalry into Spring Hill. Cheatham's corps led the advance, followed by Stewart's with Johnson's division of Lee's corps bringing up the rear.

As Hood came up, late in the afternoon, the Confederate commanders became confused by conflicting orders, and had some difficultly in taking their assigned positions around Spring Hill. At this time, Hay reported, Hood's troops and Wagner's division of Stanley's corps were all within a fivemile area.

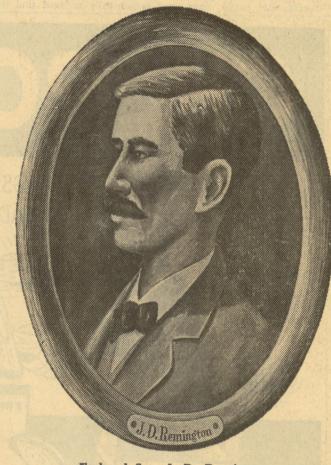
This meant, the historian commented, that Hood had 25,000 men present with which to strike Stanley's single division of 5,500 men. But there was no general attack.

The Confederates got up there, all right, and Schofield was apparently cut off. But the town was not taken, the road was, not blocked, and darkness fell. And from that day to this it was said that "Hood let the whole Yankee army march by him during the night at Spring Hill." Historian Stanley Horn called it "the greatest of all the lost opportunities of the Confederate Army.'

According to Hood he led his army to within sight of the turnpike, then ordered the attack. But Cheatham and other officers denied this.

Lacked Ammunition

Cleburne and Forrest did attack, however, the latter's troopers with but four rounds of ammunition per man. The attack was only partially successful — Hood said it was feeble — and a staff officer until further orders.



Federal Spy J. D. Remington He claimed he confused the Confederates

At about 5 o'clock Gen. two Federal spies, of which John C. Brown's division was Remington was one. ordered to attack. Brown said, however, that his line was not long enough, and the attack did not come off.

That ended the action for the day, and the Confederate divisions encamped for the night where they were. And in the darkness, Schofield's army marched past them, down the open road toward Nashville

That night, while asleep at the Thompson house, Hood got a report from a private soldier that "the enemy was marching along the road." Hood "sent anew" to Cheatham, he said, to try to stop the enemy, but nothing was done, and when morning came the opportunity had gone.

"The best move of my career as a soldier," Hood wrote, "I was thus destined to be-hold come to naught." There is a local tradition at Spring Hill that "Hood was drunk."
Horn comments that this charge cannot now be proved or disproved. Nobody who saw Hood that day said he was

But J. D. Remington had another explanation for the mysterious affair at Spring Hill. It was all his doing, he said -and his cousin's.

Amazing Story

Remington's amazing story —and that is not too strong a word—appeared in the Con-Veteran, published Nashville, in December, 1913, Its editor, Sumner A. Cunningham, made an investigation of Remington's char-acter and history before the story was printed. Remington wrote Cunningham that he was a "Presbyterian, a Christian and a truthful man." The editor noted that Remington "in all the correspondence shows a spirit of absolute sincerity."

Cunningham was a Confederate veteran who had been at Spring Hill himself, and had reported on the affair, His comment on Remington's "If true, it is not a reflec-

tion upon Confederate officers. It will put thousands to meditation."

So, half a century after the war, Remington, feeling he had not much longer to live, told his story. The Confederate officers at

Spring Hill, he contended, had allowed themselves to be de-

As a private soldier in the 73rd Regiment of Opdyke's brigade, Remington said he was called out of the skirmish line at Spring Hill on Nov. 29 and detailed as a spy by Col. Emerson Opdyke himself to "enter the Confederate lines, find out as near as possible how many Confederates were over there, and any other information I could obtain, and let him know."

Remington was supplied with a horse, revolver, saber and the uniform of a Confederate captain. Thus equipped, he rode in the direction of Hood's advancing army.

In a short time he came upon Generals Hood, Cheatham and Cleburne and their staffs, riding at the head of a Confederate column of infantry, bound for Spring Hill. He

"General Hood, General Forrest directed me to inform you that he has left one regiment to annoy the enemy . . . and that he will go on to Franklin and destroy the bridges across the Harpeth."

At Face Value Hood apparently took this

at face value, and since the commander believed the spy, others followed suit. Remington rode with the head of the Confederate column toward Spring Hill.

Remington now became a "Confederate" courier for Hood. He was joined by a cousin, a Confederate officer who was really a Federal spy, and between them they man-aged to deliver a number of spurious orders to Confederate commanders as they took positions around Spring Hill. All of the orders forbade an attack "unless fired upon," and halted the men short of the road to Franklin. Remington persuaded Confederate Gen. O. F. Strahl that

he was outflanked and threatened by masked batteries, and the two of them took this information to General Brown. Brown sent two of his staff

with Remington to report the situation to Gen. Cheatham, the corps commander. The two of them went together to inform Hood of the situation. Remington told Hood there was a whole corps of Federals at Spring Hill-actually there was one division.

As he rode away from Hood's headquarters Remington ceived by taking orders from passed near the pike and gave a false order to each Confederate brigade commander:

"General Hood directs that you form your lines parallel with the pike, not nearer than 400 yards to it, and by no means allow your men to fire on the enemy unless they ad-vance and fire on you."

"I kept near the lines along the pike," Remington added "to keep any of the Confederates from crossing the pike if possible." Coming upon the Confederate division commanded by Gen. Edward C. Johnson, he delivered the same false order.

Full of Yankees

At midnight that night the ubiquitous Remington and his cousin, the latter wearing a false beard and wig, appeared at Hood's headquarters. There reported to Hood that Spring Hill was full of Yankees who were bedded down for the night. Their wagon

train was there, too.
"Gentlemen," said Hood,
"there may be a skirmish here in the morning, but there will be no battle. It will just be a surrender."

Remington then returned to his own Federal lines. He had, he believed, prevented a "Bat-tle of Spring Hill" which might have been disastrous for Schofield's retreating Federal army.

Remington's story created something of a sensation in its day, but has since been forgotten. At Franklin historian Park Marshall called it "the most important and interesting article relating to the War of the States that has appeared in 40 years." He then posed some questions, and plainly doubted that Remington was telling the truth.

"Could a strange captain ride along the Confederate line," he asked, "and give verbal orders to five or six general offi-

Less Polite

H. A. Graber of Dallas, Texas was less polite. He

"Remington's statement is the most extraordinary stretch of the imagination that ever emanated from a diseased brain. Does he expect intelli-gent people either North or South to believe his remarkable story? If it be true why did he not claim the credit of saving Schofield's army 48 years ago when the Federal government was awarding medals?"

But Remington stuck to his "If you cannot believe it." he

wrote, "pass it along. I am sorry that I did not give my account of the Spring Hill affair while some, if not most of the Confederate generals were still alive, for I feel confident that I could have proved my statements by some of them; but they have passed away, and I shall soon follow into the great beyond. Here is one thing no one can deny: Hood failed to do what he wanted to do at Spring Hill; and I ask one, only one, small word-why?' Was Remington's story an outright lie?

Now, after half a century, it still seems far-fetched. His Cousin Spy and the Confederate generals, like Sherlock Holmes' railway trains, were always due and arriving in 20 minutes, or less. He makes it all seem just too easy. On the other hand, as Cun-

ningham noted, the man's words had the ring of sincerity. His story seemed to fit the facts pretty well, and his critics shed more heat than light on the affair.

The historian Hay, writing 15 years after the story appeared, perhaps had never heard of Remington. But the chances are that he had. And the man never got a line in that history, or any other that rest spoke to him for a mom-ent, then broke forth.

the memorable "Spring Hill Affair" was Con-federate Gen. Nathan Forrest had three divisions to fling across this pike, I could ha' tuck the whole dof cavalry under his command as he led Hood's army to the shebang.'

village — too powerful a force for the Union cavalry to cope with. He was short of ammunition, however, and was unable to block the road to Franklin. Dr. James H. McNeilly of

Nashville, chaplain of the Forty Ninth Tennessee Infantry, wrote of an encounter with Forrest at Spring Hill. both armies to Franklin. McNeilly was a prominent Presbyterian minister in Nashville after the war, and the McNeilly Day Home is named for him. He wrote:

A Vignette of History

THE MOST colorful

I and very likely the

most able general on

either side involved in

Bedford Forrest.

'As we started in pursuit I saw General Forrest sitting on his horse by the roadside. As I had never been close to him I availed myself of my privilege as chaplain to march at will; so I went up to where he sat. I was in rags like the rest and never wore any mark of rank, and of course he never noticed me.

In a Rage

"He seemed to be in a rage. As I looked on his splendid physique and noticed his intense excitement, he seemed to me the must dangerous animal I ever saw. He was looking at the evidence of disorderly retreat.

"Just then General Walthall, our division commander, rode up. He was a great favorite of the great cavalryman. For-

"His face was livid, his eyes blazed. His voice was choked

between a sob and a curse,

Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest and Mrs. Jessie Peters, framed by the sunset at Spring Hill.

At Sunset Gen. Forrest Called

On Mrs. Peters at Spring Hill

and these were his exact words, for I wrote them down just as I heard them: "'General, O General, if they had given me just one of your brigades, just one of 'em

beg pardon for quoting cuss words, but these were his words as I took them down

The scene described by the chaplain evidently occurred on the morning of November 30, 1864, and the "pursuit" he referred to was the march of

At sunset on the evening before General Forrest had more than Yankees to occupy his mind. The inspector general of Buford's division was H. A. Tyler of Hickman, Kentucky. He wrote:

"With his two divisions of cavalry (Forrest had three -Chalmers', Buford's and Jackon's) Forrest moved on Spring Hill and struck the enemy at that place to cut them off; but they were too strong for us, and we were compelled to fall

In Line of Battle

"Late that evening, just as the sun was setting, Buford's division was in line of battle on their horses, about onefourth of a mile, as nearly as I can recall, southeast of Spring Hill, and about 400 yards east of the road along which the Federals were re-

Having painted this word

road, Tyler then dropped a bomb. He continued: "Seeing a woman standing

on the front porch of a neat cottage about 100 yards In front of our line, I rode out and stopped at the gate, when she came out and joined me. I was struck by her great beauty and began at once asking her about the roads and the lay of the land. After giving me the information she asked what troops those were. I told her Buford's division of Forrest's Cavalry.

"She at once asked if General Forrest was with us, and I pointed him out to her. She then said she would like to meet him and speak to him. I said, 'Who are you, madam?' and she replied, 'Mrs. Peters. General Forrest will know

Killed Van Dorn

Jessie Peters, the former Jessie McKissack, was the beautiful wife of Dr. George Peters of Spring Hill. In the spring of the previous year, 1863, Peters had murdered Forrest's superior officer, Confederate cavalry commander Earl Van Dorn. Mrs. Peters had been friendly with Van Dorn, and Peters said the cavalryman had "violated the sanctity of my home."

After killing, Van Dorn,
Peters had fled to the wel-

coming arms of the Federal army, and on this autumn day of 1864 he was still absent from his home. Had he been in the vicinity, it is not likely he would have shown himself to the Confederate cavalrymen. They well remembered the manner in which he had slipped around the unsuspect-

astride their horses near the in the back of the head. At any rate Mrs. Peters was still there, beautiful as ever.

Tyler continued his story: "I, of course, knew her too, and immediately galloped back and told General Forrest that Mrs. Peters wished to see

"I took him to her and left them talking, and then rode forward about 75 yards nearer the Federal line of retreat. "Soon thereafter General

on our horses for some time looking at the passing enemy. They moved back in a dense column across a valley in our

Another Blank "I shall never forget Gener-

al Forrest's expression. The longer he gazed on this moving column, the madder he seemed to get. Finally he threw up a clenched fist and said:
"'-- Hood! Had he sup-

ported me here as he promsed, that whole army would have been our prisoners.' We finally rode back to our position and remained far into the

There's little doubt that the blanks used by S. A. Cunning-ham, editor of the Confederate eteran, indicate that General Forrest used the word "damn" on these occasions. But there is another blank not so easily

What did the Confederate general and Jessie Peters talk about in their brief moments together, framed by the November sunset at Spring Hill? It is a small vignette of history, wreathed in gunsmoke and framed in the march of

the years. We may never

know the answer.

In 1923 Movie Cameras Filmed 'Battle of Franklin'

T-Models, bobbed hair, silk stockings and battery radios were going big, and people were dancing the Charleston.

Hollywood was going big and TV wasn't even around the corner. And that year Metro Pictures, later Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, decided to film a movie that would reenact the Battle of Franklin.

What was more, Metro decided to give the picture the flavor of authenticity by filming the battle where it actually happened, just south of the town of Franklin. Titled by Metro "The Human Mill," the movie was to be based on Nashvillian John Trotwood Moore's novel of the old South, "The Bishop of Cotton-

In High Boots

Allen Hulobar, a top Metro director, arrived in Nashville on Sept. 19, complete with pipe, wide-brimmed hat and high-topped boots. About the same time, Marshall Morgan reported in THE NASHVILLE TENNESSEAN in 1950, three carloads of movie properties were nosed into a rail siding at Union Station.

At a press conference Hulobar announced that leading roles would be played by Henry B. Walthall Jr., and Blanche Sweet. Walthall was the son of a Confederate veteran who had fought at Franklin, and he himself had played the part of the "Little Colonel" in "Birth of a Na-

Hulobar got on fine with Moore, but at Franklin he ran afoul of historian Park from Cheatham appeared with | Marshall, who said the field an order to cease the attack | chosen for the battle was in-

of the Columbia Pike. When and had no more to do with Hulobar stuck to his site, the project.

and had no more to do with the project.

The battlefield was prepared ting up "prop" houses and put-powder mines were placed



Metro director Allen Hulobar, right, pauses to | are Sam Cowan, Edward Buckner, Dr. L. G. inspect a Federal field piece during filming of the Brown, Owen Johnston, Stokes Buchanan and chosen for the battle was inaccurate, being too far west

second Battle of Franklin. The gun crew, from left, | Percy Jenette. All were combat veterans of WWI.

About noon, after some premature firing by the younger

under the soil to be exploded from an electrical control board, simulating the bursting Every effort was made to

make the "battle" as safe as

possible for the parcipitants, and Hulobar ordered that the dirt over every mine be sifted to avoid the danger of flying Hulobar recruited thousands of "troops" from Battle

Ground Academy, Branham and Hughes, Columbia Military Academy and Franklin High School. And through the American Legion he secured the services of a number of World War I veterans who knew what battles were supposed to look like.

Real Confederates

Two days before the battle Hulobar pulled what Morgan called a masterpiece of publicity by announcing that the battle would not be realistic without the presence of real Confederate veterans in the "After that," Morgan wrote,

"there could be no doubt about it. The ghostly lilt of Dixie would ride the winds." The big day was set for Sept.

27, and the weather was bright and clear, with fleecy clouds stacked over the Winstead Hills. The movie men had some trouble when all the soldiers wanted Confederate uniforms -nobody wanted to be a Federal-and the Confederate veterans present snorted at the very sight of blue. Various strategems worked howeverenough to outfit the Federal

12,000 Spectators

considerably more than the Quiet on the Western Front." number of troops engaged. About noon, after some prema- somewhere in a can?

troops, the battle got under-

Marshall Morgan wrote: "Hunderds of the attacking Confederates ran forward to kneel, fire, and advance again; others, crouching low, fired from the hip. Dashing wildly through the melee came rider-less horses, whipped into the scene from the sidelines. Federal gunners, stripped to the walst, sweated and cursed at their flaming field pieces. "Casualties had been desig-

their parts well. Some pitched headlong to lie still; others staggered forward, or crawled in simulated agony. "The dummy houses, now flaming, added their glare and

nated in advance, and played

smoke to the lurid pandemonium." Hand to hand fighting broke out at the parapets, and some were more real than movies

generally call for. After 500 feet of film had recorded the battle the bugle blew but the "troops" kept on fighting until the last round of blank ammunition had been fired. Nobody Killed

Nobody was killed or seri-

ously hurt, though one Confederate sat down "on a pile of dirt" and got blown into the air. There was one case of sunstroke (F. H. Johnston) and a real Confederate veteran got powder burns. And what of the movie? Sad to tell, it was never

made. Hulobar died sono after leaving Nashville, and Metro scrapped "The Human Mill." As far as we know, only Hulobar and his associates ever saw the re-enactment on film. And so the great battle film When the hour of battle was lost—and it was said to came a crowd of spectators had swollen to 10 or 12,000, a Nation." second only to "All