

MEMORIES OF THE CONFEDERACY

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OCTAVIUS A. WIGGINS.

The following interesting war story is from a sketch published in "Carolina and the Southern Cross" which was formerly the official organ of the North Carolina Daughters of the Confederacy, which chronicled so much of the valuable life sketches and history of the state:

Octavius A. Wiggins was the eighth son of Mason Lee and Elizabeth Slade Wiggins of Halifax county, North Carolina. He was born at the family plantation, Woodlawn, on April 9th, 1845.

When the war clouds began to gather in 1861 and his brother Thomas, who was a few years older, went to the state university at Chapel Hill, and Eugene, the brother just a little younger, was at a preparatory school at Scotland Neck, the little book which my father wrote for his children some ten years before his death—a record of his four years service as a soldier—he speaks of this time thus: "As soon as the spring session opened in January, 1861, it was evident that most of the students thought more of the disturbed condition of the country than they did of their books. Secession and union meetings were held, also joint meetings where prolonged and bitter debates would take place. This was kept up from January until April when war was declared. Then all at once everything became excitement and confusion."

Octave was not carried away with the idea of leaving college and tried to persuade his brother to wait until the end of the session, but to no purpose. Tom left immediately for home, and a little later joined the Scotland Neck cavalry. Finally, unable to study, Octave left too, and upon reaching home begged to be allowed to join the same company. But his father would not consent to this, as he was only sixteen, and after much persuasion he was prevailed upon to return to college.

But he could not get into his studies again. As a boy Napoleon had been the idol of his enthusiastic young heart; he had read of his campaigns and conquests until he knew them almost by heart. Now they rose before him from the pages of his text books, between his big dark eyes and the lessons he should have been learning. His terror was that the war might end before he could get into it, that he might miss his chance of real battle.

Finally Mr. Wiggins saw the uselessness of it all; the boy was wasting his time and growing thin with longing. Permission was given for him to come home, and then to join the army. As proud as a peacock and as handsome in his yellow trimmed grey uniform, shining pistols and long sabre, he rode away to join the Scotland Neck cavalry, which was encamped on the coast near Wilmington.

"Our camp life around Wilmington was the most enjoyable and easy one" he writes. "Almost every man in the company had his body servant to attend to his personal wants and his horse, his trunk full of fine clothes from home; and the city offered many attractions to be beaux rather than soldiers."

But before very long his ardent spirit began to long for action. When he heard of the battles around Richmond and that Eugene—who had run away from school and joined a South Carolina company, knowing permission would be refused if asked for—and returned home a wounded hero of fifteen—he could wait no longer. Opportunity came in the offer of a lieutenantcy in Co. E 37th regiment, which he instantly accepted. Before his departure his brother's farewell, he set out for Virginia, arriving there just in time to get his baptism of fire at the first battle of Fredericksburg. "And it was half so pleasant or dramatic as I had thought it would be" he used to say afterwards.

From there on the pages of the little book of recollections are all filled with the things of war; with marching and maneuvering, shriek of shell and boom of cannon, orders of officers and blind obedience of men. All the battles fought by the army of Northern Virginia after he joined it are described, but on some of them he dwells at length, and it seems to me in looking back along the years, that it was Chancellorsville that he spoke of most frequently. Always he spoke of the fighting there as "the fastest I ever witnessed." Vividly he tells of the happenings of that fatal second of May, ending with the wounding of Jackson, and at the bottom of the page adds his short but fervent opinion: "I shall die in the belief that history would

have been changed had Jackson been spared to his country just two short hours more. But that was not to be—the god of battles decreed otherwise." Then he takes up the fighting on the next day, and he believes it will be of interest to all who love and honor those men who followed Lee, and thrill and glow at the memory of their deeds, I give here a page of that little book just as he wrote it. It comes from one who knew where he was.

"The sun rose on that memorable Sunday morning May 3rd, 1863 as bright as possible, and with it rose the old Light division from behind the works and crossed over. The left of our regiment (the 37th N. C.) rested upon the plank road in its stand on the opposite side, and the gallant old 7th on our right. This was all I could see of our command. There was no good place on that battle ground, but there was one which must be regarded as better than all others as will be proved by the casualties in the 37th, which held it. It confronted the hill upon which "Chancellorsville house" was situated. As soon as the opening was made pieces of artillery. At the command this noble brigade of Lane's moved forward as if on parade, and the bloody work commenced. Inch by inch and foot by foot we pressed forward. Line after line we met and forced back. Nothing is heard but the roar of cannon and the crackling of rifles. Our line would halt, squat down and fire until a way was cleared, then rise and press forward. Amid the smoke and noise we must have obliterated a little to the left, for we crossed the plank road and took possession of works the enemy had thrown up during the night. They were very poor, hardly sufficient to shelter a man, but when Lane's men got possession of them they held on with a bulldog tenacity I never saw before or afterwards. Line after line was brought upon them to be driven back in confusion. It was there the "red breeches Zouaves" were brought upon us, only to share the fate of others who at least did not present so frightful an appearance. When ammunition grew short cartridge boxes were cut from the dead and wounded of friend and foe. I remember distinctly emptying the contents of several such boxes upon the ground by my company, in order that the men might be satisfied in their loading. Here behind these little works our loss greatest. The troops on our right were driven back first, and the enemy pressing on were about to flank us. We were then ordered to fall back. While we were doing so I received a painful wound on my knee from a piece of shell. Being unable to get out or render any assistance to my command, I crawled behind a large tree, and from there I witnessed the beautiful fighting of Ransom's brigade, which came up and relieved us. What was left of a grand brigade only a short time before, was reformed, cartridge boxes replenished, and was taken back upon the field to confront no more fighting during that battle. The Six Hundred at Balaklava, the Old Guard at Waterloo deserves no higher place upon the roll of honor nor in the hearts of their countrymen than does Lane's brigade for its heroism at Chancellorsville."

The days that followed Chancellorsville were the saddest of all the war for him. His wound was not a serious one, but it kept him in the hospital for some time; he had lost many noble friends in the battle; and the last of May he learned of the death of a dearly beloved brother, Doctor Alfred Slade Wiggins, who had been killed at the head of his company in a cavalry charge near Suffolk, Va. And Jackson was dead. Often and often I have heard of the scene when the message of general Lee, announcing the great chief's death, was read to the assembled troops; how the soldiers walked restlessly about from one to another, clasped hands, gazed into each other's eyes in sorrow, even wonder and disbelief that such a thing could happen, and then in their ragged grey packets, often with no handkerchiefs to catch the tears that would race down their brown scarred faces, sought secluded spots among the trees or along the banks of the river, to indulge in their grief.

A little further on in the little book comes Gettysburg with all its horror and disappointments; then a brief account of the retreat "that retreat which is known in its horror only to the line of the army of General Lee. It was intensely dark, rain fell continuously, the only illumination came from occasional flashes of lightning. Men who had worn nothing but kid boots made to order, trudging uncomplainingly along in ankle deep mud, shod in brogans, rags or no shoes at all; stumbled and fell in the darkness, and rose to match on."

At Falling Waters Lieutenant Wiggins saw General Pettigrew carried off the field on a stretcher and heard a surgeon say his wound was mortal. "I felt that North Carolina's brightest star was passing into eclipse" he laments. But it is not the bravery of North Carolinians alone that the little book records; others are often mentioned and praised. A charge made by Gregg's Tigers at the Wilderness is commented on thus: "We're the boys what eats men alive" they flung back as they passed us a splendid looking body of men. Another moment with a yell they rushed forward upon the enemy, to 'do or die.' Ah, that Rebel yell! Immemorable by no other troops upon the face of the globe, it rose instinctively to the lips of Confederates when making a charge, striking terror into the hearts of the adversary. A few days later when we passed that spot on our way to Spottsylvania, the young trees lay flat upon the ground as though hewn instead of cut down by minnie balls, and on a huge oak, from which the bark had been stripped away, there was cut in large black letters the words "Texas Dead." Brave fellows planted side by side like potato ridges, far from home and kindred, it required a hard heart indeed to pass you by with dry eyes."

It was at Spottsylvania court house that Lieutenant Wiggins made himself known for personal bravery. There is but slight mention of it in his recollections, but as a tiny child, sitting upon that brave man's knee, I heard it from the lips of General Lane himself. "During that fearful period of the battle when the troops of the contending armies fought hand to hand with bayonets and swords, and guns as clubs, Lieutenant Wiggins captured a major and several prisoners and started to the rear with them. On the way he was joined by General Lane. When they had gone but a short way they ran into a squad of about twenty of the enemy, who rose up suddenly out of the bushes and demanded the surrender of the Confederates."

bering that "a good run is better than a bad stand" both officers took to their heels, the Lieutenant losing of course his prisoners. But a little further on he ran into another squad, a smaller one of but four, carrying the flag of the 51st Pennsylvania regiment, and this time, resorting to a game of "bluff" and behaving as though he had at his back a goodly company of his own uniform, Lieutenant Wiggins made them surrender, and a little later marched into the works with a handsome stand of colors, and four prisoners, one of them an officer. General Lane must have given the quieting affair the attention of the "powers that be," for the next day the regiments of his brigade had a communication read to them from General Lee, in which he thanked Lieutenant Wiggins and three others who had captured flags, calling each one by name and commending them for their bravery. In our family scrap book we have a couple of newspaper clippings telling of the incident, one of them quoting from General Lane's official report of the battle, and adding as the paper's comment "that this very flag Gen. Mahone tried to claim as a part of the spoils which his men did not gather." And upon the wall of our home hangs a beautiful sword that once belonged to the 51st Pennsylvania regiment.

Lieutenant Wiggins was wounded very severely toward the close of this battle, his leg being almost shot off while standing on the breastworks. This wound put him on crutches for many weeks, and earned for him a good stay at home. It was September before he joined the army again, but from then on until the battle around Petersburg he did steady service. In that battle he received a wound in the head, was left for dead upon the field, and so taken prisoner. With many others, many of them friends, he was sent to Washington, confined there in the Old Capitol until the 9th of April, and on that date started by train for the Johnson Island prison.

"I had never been a prisoner before" he writes "and the very thought of it was maddening. Together with another officer I planned an escape. We were to jump from the window of the saloon of the moving train when night came on. When the time came, the other man backed out preferring the ill he had rather than those unknown. 'It's death if you go on—a slower, more lingering one' I replied. I then made my will, leaving my oil cloth to one friend, my haversack to another. My blanket had been taken from me in Washington, being a captured one with U. C. on it. After it had become quite dark, I got up and made for my point of escape. Without a moment's hesitation I raised the window, thrust my feet out, sitting as straight in the window as I could, and jumped, reaching a short prayer to God as I did so. Down, down I fell, first heels over head and then heard over heels, till at last I landed on a sand embankment, and found to my relief that I had sustained only a cut forehead and a sprained ankle, the latter by no means sufficient to keep me from travelling." That night, stiff, and sore, but relieved of heart, he slept on the seat of an old carriage in a dilapidated stable belonging to the farms along the road, and the next day began to beat his way back to Baltimore. The details of that journey read like a story book; he was wook cutter, hostile, man working and guest wall of our home, and at different stages of his wandering. At last he reached Baltimore, but before doing so had heard of General Lee's surrender, and the assassination of President Lincoln. From Baltimore he happily ran across his old Commander, General Lane, who assisted him in getting his parole and an old suit of the familiar grey in which to make the journey home. The way he made his escape, he had left behind him in Pennsylvania, finding a suit of common store bought clothes safer while in alien territory."

From Richmond to Petersburg; from Petersburg—home. What would he find there—and whom? How much of the old plantation was there left? How many of the loved ones? With questions such as these within his soul he started off following the railroad track that led to Halifax. You who may read this little inadequate sketch must picture for yourselves what happened when he reached there—when he started off almost to exhaustion, gaunt, jaded, he walked slowly up the long avenue of oaks that led to the house at Woodlawn, where news had been carried of his death by those who had seen him fall at Petersburg. Mason and Elizabeth Wiggins had seven generations of their children to the Confederacy—seven sons had been sent forth in the strength and beauty of their young manhood—and this was the sixth that had been returned to them.

London, Nov. 11.—(Correspondence of the Associated Press.)—A vast chorus of siren whistles from a thousand fighting ships split the air when the British grand fleet received the news of the signing of the armistice. First, the 30-mile line of vessels sprang into light. Then, suddenly, the great fleet of battleships, cruisers, midget destroyers, mine-layers and patrol boats united in one huge, synchronized diapason that startled the hearers for a radius of a hundred miles. The tremendous war re-echoed among the hills on both shores, awesome in its intensity. A hundred searchlights, which for four years had resolutely watched the skies, or peered steadfastly along dark waters for enemy craft, merrily crisscrossed about the sky. Flares went lit, star shells fired, and here and there some of the greater ships were fortunate in a fireworks display. For 60 minutes the fleet threw off all reserve and let itself go. At 9 o'clock the sirens suddenly silenced, the lights snapped out and the grand fleet was again waiting and watching and ready, and scarcely had the last sounds died away than from the admirals' ships there were winged the mastheads the orders for further duty.

HOW GRAND FLEET CELEBRATED NEWS OF THE END OF THE WAR

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In Jiffy-Jell you get a fruit-juice essence sealed in glass. You get a wealth of the fresh-fruit flavor. You get the fresh-fruit healthfulness. It is like using the fruit itself.

This is the new-day gelatine dainty. It has brought to millions, already a new idea of gelatine desserts. Now we urge you to enjoy it.

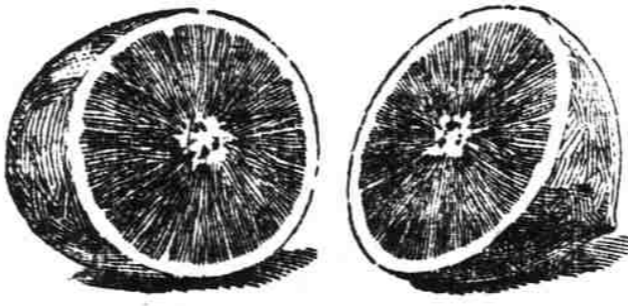
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Lime Flavor, Green Salad Jelly.

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For Desserts and Salads



Mint—For Garnish Jelly

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