

# "The Blue Season Rangers"

(Wilson Mirror)

One of the most vivid memories of the elder folks of this section, who remember the trying times immediately following the Civil war, is that of "The Blue Season Rangers."

This was an organization of men for the protection of their loved ones. Their deeds of daring and bravery make colorful local history, and The Mirror is fortunate in having secured for publication a first hand account of the formation and some of the work of this band of men, as told by the leader, Dr. B. T. Person, to the Daughters of the Confederacy, John W. Durham chapter, many years ago. Here is the leader's story:

Mrs. F. L. Woodard, the members of the John W. Durham chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy, the ladies of Wilson town and county, my dear friends:

In addition to a paper read in a former meeting of your camp, I want to add a few lines relative to the causes and conditions that led to the organization of a band of Rangers at Fremont, N. C., known among themselves as "Blue Season Rangers." The desideratum of whose efforts was to defend the defenseless, and aid the country of the perpetrators of the outrages that were being committed on the people of our homes and our country.

When we returned from the Confederate army, we were tired of war, and anxious for peace. We accepted in good faith, the terms of surrender entered into by Lee and Grant; we came prepared to take our positions as law-abiding citizens, and so far as a limited competency would sustain us, to perpetuate the obligations entered into by Lee and Grant, and as they, and we thought, looking to the restoration of peace to the entire country, and to the protection of person and property in the Confederate States. But, instead of finding any evidence of the existence of such conditions, we found the loved ones of our homes, the authors of our being, and the friends of our childhood, enjoy-

ing the peace the hawk gives the dove, the wolf gives the lamb, the Modoc Indian gives the white man, and death gives its victim.

The tribunals established for the protection of person and property, were presided over by men who would steal fire out of the hottest place mentioned from the first of Genesis to the last of Revelation, in August, when everybody is living on canned goods, to remove or obviate the necessity of making a fire for cooking purposes.

The country was infested by uncompromising out-throats and camp followers, who were committing all manner of outrages on the unprotected and defenseless people of the country. The big book of the gang was a fellow named Andrew Wilson, a deserter from the Federal army, but, after Sherman and Schofield met at Goldsboro, he returned to them, and, judging by the manner in which he was received and protected, he soon became a favorite among them, notwithstanding he was committing all kinds of infamous outrages on the helpless people. The commander of the post in Goldsboro sent him out, from time to time, with written authority to do his devilment. To that aspect of affairs is ascribable the organization of the "Blue Season Rangers." We had an eminent regard for the laws of our country; we revered the precepts of our holy religion; we were sick of the shedding of human blood; and practiced moderation and forbearance to avoid so dreadful a calamity; but we had been driven to the point where degradation and disgrace begins. That was our condition; we had no remedy, and we met and resolved to oppose it, regardless of odds and opposition, as long as we had hearts to feel or hands to strike. We knew the infamous deeds of the desperado Wilson were approved and sustained by

the garrison in Goldsboro for he died with orders in his pocket—his last words being, "I won't do it. I am setting under orders; call out the troops!"

I was in the position to know 'these were his dying words, and as a rule, a man's dying words are regarded as true. We knew he and his gang were protected by the federal authorities, and, in the interest of our poor unfortunate people, we felt called upon to apply our own remedy, and we did it.

Very naturally the question has arisen, "Why did Tom Person feel called upon to take the initiative?" In reply to that, I want to say: I didn't do it; the leadership was given me by acclamation by the crowd that had assembled at Coley's, to pursue the gang that shot Peacock. It was known to us all that Wilson was a fearless desperado, and that he was accompanied by a detachment of federal soldiers, under orders from the commander of the garrison, in Goldsboro, to oppose the carrying out of those orders, which, of course, meant the antagonizing of the whole federal army, and if that had been the only outrage committed upon our people, perhaps we would not have pursued the course, or applied the remedy as we did, but similar, and even worse, deeds by the same gang, were of frequent occurrence.

Elisba Applewhite, a grandson of old man Bartlett Deans, and a first cousin to Allen and Pat Deans of our county, a man who was held in high esteem by all the better class of people in Wayne county, was called to his door, at a late hour at night, and, upon hesitating, was told that Jack Coley and Dr. John Person wanted to see him, thereby deceiving him; and when he opened the door, he was shot to death in the presence of his wife and little children, two of three of the infamous scoundrels firing on him at the same time. We knew of nothing contained in the obligations entered into by Lee and Grant at Appomattox requiring us to unreluctantly submit to such conditions; in that we recognized no authority on earth to bind us to any such proposition. As I said before, I was given the initiative by acclamation, and accepted under the following conditions, in regard to Peacock, who was shot through with a minie ball. I had a man to bring out and saddle "Quaker," a magnificent horse, but whose name was not in keeping with the services he was called on to render. I told the crowd I would follow any man who would obligate to neither ask, nor give, any quarters, or I would lead under the same obligation, whereupon, they, unhesitatingly, and unanimously, put me in the lead. After mounting, I said to them: "All I ask of you is to keep closed up and follow me, and when the proper time comes, to the mark, and do not allow me to fall in the hands of that mob unsupported." The proposition was cheerfully accepted by all, and kept in good faith by some, but it was a long chase; the roads were bad, and some of them couldn't keep up. Some of them were opposed to shooting the gang, if we caught them. I told them with that aspect of the case, they had better go back. After being assigned to lead and hearing a few timid suggestions in regard to the pursuit, I was assured, I drew up my reins, touched "Quaker" with my spurs, and gave the command to "Forward," where-

upon, we sprang out on a fifteen mile chase. I was continually interrupted by Jack Coley to make remarks in regard to the propriety of firing on him. He finally stopped me at the railroad crossing, at the Wayne county poor-house, and protested against my shooting them, saying: "It would get me in trouble." I told him that, for years, trouble had been my normal condition, and the means by which I proposed to get out of it, was my favorite amusement. I then said to him: "Now, Jack, I want to notify you here and now, for the last time, if you don't want to see Wilson shot, don't keep up with me; and so far as trouble is concerned, I will trust to 'Quaker' and 'Liza Jane,' my navy pistol to bring me out," and they did it to my entire satisfaction.

Wet Blanket. Coley's objection, and my reply seemed to throw a wet blanket on some of the more timid members of Goldsboro, I have no idea the number of times I gave the command to "close up." I was satisfied, however, there were three or four who were determined to be there and take a hand in the "round up." After the Wilson raid and round-up, I was by common consent and approval, expected to take the initiative, and I did it for no other motive but an honest conception of duty.

Soon after the Wilson raid, and while his friends in Goldsboro, I mean the federal troops, were camping on my trail, I had occasion to travel the Snow-Hill and Goldsboro road for a few miles. I had gone but a short distance when I met a man, who had deserted a Wayne county company, went to New Bern, and returned with Schofield, and piloted a detachment of Yankee troops through the country, plundering, threatening to kick defenseless women out of their homes, heaping all manner of abuse on them, and in fact, doing all manner of meanness. He had been pointed out, and his rascality told me a few days before. To be sure of my man, I asked him his name, which he told me, "Threeson." I dismounted and gave him a hundred lashes, over the head, face, and back. He was furious, and went immediately to report me to the commander of the garrison, H. P. Dortch, and a close friend of mine, happened to hear his report and the officer's reply. The officer told the deserter that he could do nothing for him, "for," said he, "we want him for coming here in town and shooting one of our own men in open daylight, but we can't get him, therefore you will have to apply your own remedy." But instead of acting upon that suggestion, the fellow decided to change his range, and as soon as he could arrange his affairs, he acted accordingly.

Smoke Blows Over. After the smoke from the Wilson raid had blown over, and the excitement incident thereto had subsided, the case was transferred to the Wayne county Superior court, through the professional influence and management of W. T. Dortch and George V. Strong, who had volunteered to appear for us. Ex-Governor Tom Bragg also sent me word by Colonel Tom Kennedy, if they made out a case against me, he would appear for me willingly and without charge. The transfer of the case, together with the professional backing given us, relieved the situation considerably.

Jack Coley and Bill Lewis had given their bond for the sum of \$5,000 for my appearance at court, and I returned to Fremont to practice medicine. There were still numerous cases in the country, whose symptoms very urgently indicated, and required the "regulation" treatment, one of which, I will relate, but there were others, the details of which were too revolting for the refined eye of the

public press. It is sufficient to say of them, they received "special treatment" and were entirely satisfied with the result.

Wife of Jeff Jenkins. The case I now propose to relate was that of the wife of Jeff Jenkins, who was a native of Oxford, Granville county, who came to Wayne before the war and married one of the finest girls in the county, Carrie Seals, daughter of Dr. Seals, who in the general acceptance of the term, was one of the most prominent and all-around best citizens of the county. Mrs. Jenkins was sister to Lawrence Seals, a schoolmate and close friend of mine. Destiny had thrown us together a good deal. Before the war, he was associated with the old Rountree company in Wilson, while Dan Summers and I were clerking for Gilly Myers across Tarboro street. His father was held in very high esteem by the people of his county, and was sent by them, for a number of years, to represent the legislature of the state. His family were friends of my boyhood, and I regarded their wrongs as my wrongs, and while sitting in my office one afternoon, Mr. Jenkins came in and related a very aggravated case, committed by a company of Yankees, while on a terrorizing raid of spoliation and tyranny, piloted by Demps James, the fellow, I had now-hid at a few days before, and a fellow named Stephen Cotton, who had also deserted a Wayne county company, and returned with Schofield as a pilot. Steve was very active in the service, he rendered his Yankee friends; treated Mrs. Jenkins shamefully, plundering the private recesses for valuables, and threatened to kick her out of the house. The story as related to me would make the blood run cold in the veins of a Modoc Indian. Of course, all who knew me and my organization, knew what that meant: Steve Cotton, and with a few exceptions, I told Jeff we would be at his house at early nightfall "prepared to treat the case," which we did, and while eating a fine supper prepared by her, with tremulous voice, and with tears in her eyes, she, Mrs. Jenkins, related her grievances. I saw at once that Dick Mary was terribly enraged and I learned afterwards it was the fact that the fact that I had deserted Dick's company, and it was very difficult to prevent his carrying the treatment to a fatal termination.

I want to here and now say we never did that if we could avoid it. Some of the boys, however, were pretty thoroughly identified with the black flag persuasion, which being interpreted, means neither to seek nor give any quarters. I never favored it in but one or two cases, and they were not susceptible to other treatment.

We gave Steve the "regulation" treatment, and suggested the propriety of his changing his range at once, and notwithstanding that his wings were pretty badly clipped, he flew the coop and has never been seen in that country since.

Other Wrongs. The cases I have related are only a few, and certainly not more aggravated than numerous other wrongs, that were done our people without restraint or hindrance from those who were supposed to protect them in person and property. There may be those who are inclined to unfriendly comment and who feel disposed to criticize us on our acts, and, in some instances, we perhaps exceeded the bounds of just retribution, but I don't think so.

Now I want to say, this is a statement of facts on the part of the offenders and the organization that punished them, and that was being committed in the country, even characterizing the desperado Wilson as one of our men. With that aspect of affairs we could not for a moment entertain any proposition looking to the trial of any case against us by a Yankee court marshal, our judiciary and executive officials were distinguished for their zealous devotion to right and uncompromising opposition to wrong, and administering even-handed justice to all.

Never Doubted Their Acts. No man ever doubted the acts of E. J. Warren on the bench, or the service of Col. Tom Kennedy as sheriff, or of Mrs. Wood and Frank Aycock as deputies. If he questioned the official acts of either, he kept it to himself, for if he hadn't either of them would have resigned his position and required him to toe the mark for who should live the longest.

Those people and their class were my friends, whom I love to remember, as such, and the consolation of my that age in the cabin homes of that class were pillars of clouds to me by day and their cabin lights were pillars of fire to me by night. We, in common with all others, perhaps, had our faults, but if we had any distinguishing characteristics, they were unanimity of purpose, promptness and concert of action, in all cases, all conditions and under all circumstances involving the rights, the interests and the institutions of our homes and our country.

I have one consoling reflection. We never, under any circumstances, harmed an innocent man. It is also equally gratifying to me to remember, that we never turned our backs on, or failed to act promptly in, any case involving the rights, or necessities, I want to say, "a tear from the ladies' eyes," and I don't desire any defenseless woman or child. That was the highest aspiration we had to gratify, and we gratified it in a degree that was entirely satisfactory to ourselves, and to the absolute relief of the country.

Final Summing Up. Now, upon a final summing up, and last analysis of the stormy career, of swirling scenes, and stirring events, through which we passed, I want to assure you, I have given the causes and conditions that gave rise to the organization of the "Blue Season Rangers" and that I do not exaggerate, and as the only living charter member of the same, I want to say, I have nothing whatever to offer in extenuation of their deeds. At 81 I was prepared to stand by their record until my right arm ached pained from its socket, and at 81 I am prepared to do the same should it become necessary, and, in the language of the Confucius I want to say, "a tear from the ladies' eyes," and I don't desire any of my country is all I ask for the Ranger's grave.

Very sincerely, yours to be forgotten, (Signed) E. T. PERSON.

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Joy  
and  
Happiness  
For You and For Yours

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Our promise for the New Year is to continue the standard, and improve if possible, set during the year just closed. We take this method of expressing our appreciation for the business accorded us and desire to thank our friends and customers for their splendid patronage.

We wish them a most prosperous and happy New Year.

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In the true old-fashioned way,  
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