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THE FIGHTING TWENTY-SIXTH

Col. Olds Writes Interestingly of
State's Most Famous Regiment



IN A CASE in the North Carolina "Hall of History" are relics of this state's most famous regiment in the Confederate service, the "Fighting Twenty-sixth," which, composed of companies from the mountain, piedmont and middle sections of the state, including three companies very largely Scotch, under its three colonels made a record which goes down in history. The regiment was mobilized at the great camp of instruction about three miles out of Raleigh in 1861, the companies having been organized before they left home. The commandant of this camp of instruction was Major Harry King Burgwyn, who in May of that year, at the age of nineteen, had graduated at the Virginia Military Institute. Most of the companies were from counties which had bitterly opposed secession until the proclamation of President Lincoln, April 15, 1861, calling upon Governor Ellis of North Carolina to furnish this state's quota of 75,000 volunteers for the United States service. The company officers of the Twenty-Sixth elected Capt. Zebulon B. Vance colonel, who had raised and who commanded the company from Buncombe County, choosing Burgwyn as lieutenant-colonel. The sergeant-major was Leonidas L. Polk, who in later years became the first president of the "Farmers Alliance," which played so great a part in politics in North Carolina and other states. The regiment's first duty was the defense of Fort Macon, near Beaufort, N. C., and there an epidemic of measles and fever killed many from the up-country, who were not used to the seaside.

Early in February, 1862, Roanoke Island was captured by the Federal forces and General Burnside threatened Newbern, where on the 14th of March, 1862, a battle was fought in which Colonel Vance was put in charge of one wing of the defenses, the right of the line in his front being four Massachusetts regiments, one New Jersey and one Pennsylvania regiment. There were thirteen Federal against six Confederate regiments, and the latter were forced to retreat, and in thirty-six hours marched fifty miles to the town of Kinston, Colonel Vance narrowly escaping death by drowning in a swollen stream. William A. Graham, now Commissioner of Agriculture, was a lieutenant in one of the cavalry regiments in this action, in which the Confederates lost 488 men and the Federals 465. Burnside well won his promotion to be major-general by this victory, while the Twenty-Sixth on the other side made so fine a record that recruits flocked to it, and Colonel Vance asked and got permission to recruit it to a "legion," but gave up this plan, finding some opposition.

The regiment reorganized and Vance and Burgwyn received the unanimous vote for colonel and lieutenant-colonel. Two young men appeared to be enlisted, hav-

ing come from one of the counties at the foot of the mountains and giving their names as L. M. Blalock and Samuel Blalock, having been recruited by one of the men of the regiment named Woods, who had been told by L. M. Blalock, in strict confidence, that Samuel was his wife and that he would only enlist upon condition that she be allowed to enlist with him. This the recruiting officer agreed to, and the enlistment was made. The disguise was never penetrated, and the young and handsome woman did all the duties of a soldier, and was notably adept at drill. Some months later her husband fell sick and was discharged, whereupon the woman-soldier told Col. Vance of her sex, to his utter astonishment, and she was discharged and allowed to go home with her husband. Then a singular thing happened, for the two Blalocks, the woman's name being Melinda, at once joined the Fourth North Carolina Regiment of Union Troops, commanded by Colonel Kirk, this command being composed largely of deserters and men known as "bushwhackers" and operating mainly along the border between Tennessee and North Carolina.

The Blalocks were in service with this regiment in the early spring of 1864, and while Woods, the man who had enlisted them in the Twenty-Sixth Regiment, was at his home in Caldwell county, in the mountain region, recovering from a wound, a number of Kirk's men attacked the house and wounded several persons. In the fight Melinda was dangerously wounded and her husband was shot in the head and one eye put out.

Colonel Vance was elected governor in August 1862. He was an extremely witty man and no commander was more beloved by his men. On one occasion, while his regiment was in line of battle awaiting an order to charge, it was subjected to a furious shelling, and at that moment a rabbit leaped and ran, which caused the men to shout as it passed down the line. Colonel Vance joined in the shout, saying: "Go it, cotton-tail! If I had no more reputation to lose than you have I would run too!" Colonel Vance in his farewell address to his regiment urged them to fight until the end and said plainly that all that could be expected was war. Burgwyn became colonel and the regiment was transferred to Pettigrew's brigade, destined to become so famous at Gettysburg, it being composed of the Eleventh, Twenty-Sixth, Forty-Fourth, Forty-Seventh and Fifty-Second North Carolina regiments.

The regiment was engaged in March, 1863, with the entire brigade in a desperate attempt to recapture Newbern, where the Federals had established what they termed the capital of North Carolina, Edward R. Stanley, formerly of North Carolina, but more recently of California, having been appointed military governor by President Lincoln and having nominal authority in about fifteen counties. In this attack the Twenty-Sixth marched in seven days one hundred and twenty-seven miles, through no end of swamps and in