

## A WAR EXPERIENCE FOR THE BOYS.

(By a Confederate Soldier in the Virginia Army.)

It's not a Georgia possum tale, but the actual experience of a boy 19 years old during the last ten days of the Confederacy. The men of middle age and the old selfish croakers will not believe it, but I don't care. I don't want them to even read it, it's for the boys, and when they see that it's not a Georgia tale they will believe every word of it. I will use the first person singular because I was the boy.

On the 31st of March, 1865, after four hours' sound sleep in the mud nine miles S. W. of Petersburg, eight thousand of us under Bushrod Johnson marched out in the pine thicket in front of the breastworks and formed in line of battle. Johnson gave the order, "forward, guide centre, double quick, march!" As we emerged from the thicket into an open field 90 yards wide we saw three solid lines of blue coats coming from the other side at a double quick, trail arms. Neither side fired 'till we were within 25 yards of them, then we gave them one volley. It sounded like as if you take a piece of cracking and tear it in one side to the other, only louder of course. There was nothing between us except a crop of young corn about knee high. Boys, that volley just covered the ground with men; it seemed like every shot found a victim. They just stampeded and never returned the fire 'till they rallied at their breastworks, and then came our time to run. I had just put down my fortieth and last cartridge and was putting a cap on my rifle when a shell from the enemy's guns struck my right foot and crushed it. Boys, you just ought to have seen me coming out of that—my gun under my arm for a crutch and my well foot on the other side. I came out in a lope, like a buzzard of a cold morning. That night they sent the wounded to an old winter camp in the pine woods close by a cane-break swamp, and left us there without surgeon or a nurse. They put five of us in a log hut 8 x 12 and next morning Jack Stewart, Bige Douglas and Henry Thomas were dead and left Jess Johnson and me alive, but not able to walk. During the night I went on my hands and knees to a well about 100 yards to get water for the dying men. Henry Thomas drank over two quarts of water at one draught and died in a few minutes. We had no candle or light of any kind. Boys, how do you like that for a night in the army?

all night in the rain and I found a whole plug of good navy tobacco, that some good Yankee had lost. I hadn't had a chew for over a week.

April 7th. Kept moving nearly all the time but had to keep away from the public roads. Went to an old man's house to try to get something to eat. I asked a negro wench where the proprietor was. He saw me and gave me a genteel cursing for speaking to a negro. He wouldn't give us a bite to eat but ordered us to leave his premises. I shed a few tears and left. Boys, inside of three hours I had fooled that old sinner out of three square meals of ash cake and middling for Jess and me both. I will tell you how it was done if you will ask me privately. It wouldn't look well on paper. I think he had as much of old Sa'an in him as any man I ever saw. That evening we came to a train of cars loaded with government plunder, steam up, headed for Lynchburg 80 miles ahead. We stored ourselves away among the other government stuff and went to sleep. Ten miles from there the cars stopped and I heard firing a few hundred yards ahead. I crawled off and took to the woods. A half hour after I left it that train was captured and burned. We travelled all night and next morning.

April 8th found me 40 mile from home with my foot so badly swollen that the skin had burst between my toes, and the blue coats in possession of every town and crossing between me and home, with bands of men scouting the whole country over. We kept away from the roads and kept moving. The day passed without incident. I traded a hatchet that I had carried through the war to a little negro for a quart of meal. Later on I gave a poor old woman a pint of green coffee for what buttermilk we could drink. At 11 o'clock that night we came to Otter river at old Charley Anthony's. The bridge was burned; it was 80 yards wide and 12 feet deep. On the hill the other side of the river was a negro cabin, a bright light was shining in the cabin; we guessed that old Randal was giving a negro hoedown. Jess could imitate the negro voice exactly. He gave four or five big negro yells and then called out "Ran!" as loud as he could bawl, and said, "come and help me over!" Old Ran thought it was another negro coming to his hoedown. Soon we heard the noise of his canoe. I hid close to the water's edge and Jess stood out on the bank talking negro talk to him. When his canoe struck the sand, I caught hold of the chain and told him to hold up. Old Ran was fooled but we made him set us over. We went four miles along a trail up the mountain and laid down and slept 'till sun-up.

April 9th, we went to George White's. There I washed my face and combed my head for the first time in 12 days. At noon I got home. When I left I was the rag-tag of the family. I had seen nearly four years of actual service and had made a record that even the neighbors were proud of.

Boys, this was my actual experience during that time. If you enjoy it tell me so, and I'll tell you another. I don't care whether the old men believe it or not; it's the truth all the way through all the same.

Your friend,

C. DEBO.

April 1st two negroes came in a wagon and took the dead away. After noon I heard a feeble voice calling me from the other side of the camp; it said, "if you can get here, come to me." I crawled over there, and there lay poor old Jerry Overstreet on a plank, shot through the lungs. The ball went in the right breast and came out below the shoulder blade. He wanted to send a dying message to his wife and seven children; he never got off that plank.

April 2nd. Lay on my plank nearly all day pouring cold water on my crushed foot and not a bite of anything to eat for two days.

April 3rd. Found out that our army had gone and left us to the mercy of the enemy. About 8 o'clock I looked and saw some of the blue coats coming up the hill. I got a stick I could use for a crutch and pulled out to the cane-brake. That night I heard a mule eating corn in a box. He let me have an ear of corn and I thanked the mule, took my corn to the thicket and ate the first meal I had had for three days. (My teeth were better then than now.)

April 4th. Kept hid mostly 'till night, but every chance I got I'd move up a mile or so in the direction of home. Just before night found a corn hoe cake lying in the trail; didn't try to find out how it came there, but took it to the creek and had a square meal; travelled nearly all night.

April 5th. Met up with another wounded Reb., went to the mansion of an old planter to get some grub; he had no sympathy for the Rebs. and wouldn't let us have anything. We traded him a gold ring for \$2.50 worth of provisions. That ring was made out of a brass bomb screw. We met five other wounded Rebs. and all had a square meal from that home-made brass ring. I took Jess Johnson and we two pulled out toward the setting sun and travelled all night mostly.

April 6th. We found a brigade of our men in line of battle waiting for Sheridan to come up from the way we came. They gave us a rousing cheer and we moved on feeling that we were among our friends. Pretty soon we fell in with General Gordon's wagon train. We thought to stay with that and we would have protection; but in less than two hours I heard a great commotion ahead of us and the noise of battle. A band of Sheridan's cavalry had made a dash on the train and were killing the mules and setting fire to the wagons as they came to them. I took to the thicket of scrubby pines and briars and hid in a deep gully about thirty yards from the road and went to sleep. When I woke all was quiet. I crept out on a high place to see if the way was clear, and from there I saw over three miles of solid wagon train on fire at one time. I saw a big fine mansion about a mile off the road and went over there to try to get something to eat. There was a big yellow flag waving over the house and a little negro girl met us at the door and said, "Master says don't come inside, 'cause him and all de rest is got de small pox." I sent him word I was not afraid of small pox but would like to get something to eat. He sent us two cups of tea, two slices of baked ham and two of light bread. I thanked him and asked him if he couldn't give us something more solid. He then sent us a bountiful supply of boiled middling, ash cake and butter milk with the request to get away from the house to eat it; of course we gladly obliged him. That night we travelled nearly

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