

ROCHESTER HISTORY

A Hard Road to Travel Out of Dixie

Part I

by W. H. Shelton



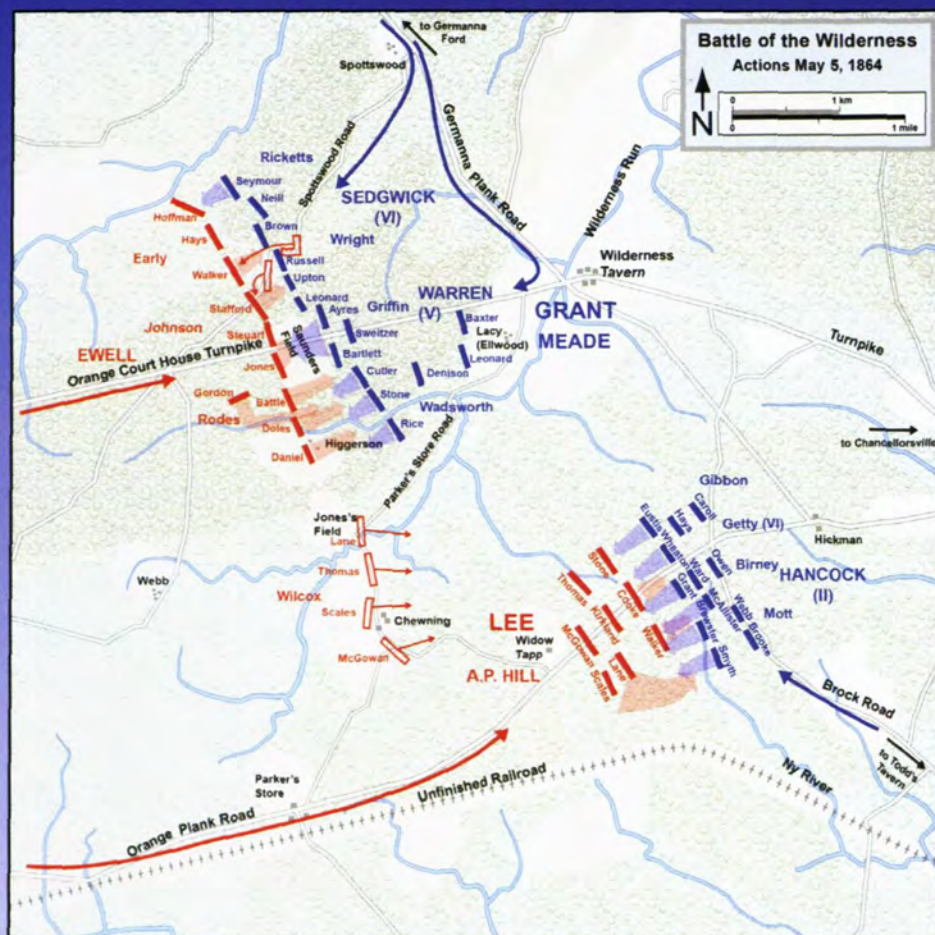
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Map of a portion of the Battle of the Wilderness of the American Civil War.

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Front cover: Author William H. Shelton. From the collection of the Military History Society of Rochester.

Background image on front & back covers: Battle of the Wilderness—Desperate fight on the Orange C.H. Plank Road, near Todd's Tavern, May 6th, 1864.

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ROCHESTER HISTORY

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Dear *Rochester History* Reader,

Many people believe history is just about facts, but I believe history is also about stories. One hundred and fifty years ago, the United States was in the early stages of war, a Civil War that would challenge the strength and endurance of a still relatively young country. History books can tell us the number of casualties at each battle or the routes that were traveled by troops, but this issue of *Rochester History* will give you a compelling look at the experience as lived by one man. This account would likely be forgotten if not for the efforts of a group of historians who recognize the importance of stories. A century and a half later, Rochester historians still value a good story and how it provides context for historical facts. This issue is a testament to the marriage of factual and anecdotal history as related by a Rochester resident.

Patricia Uttaro, Library Director

About *Rochester History*

Rochester History is a scholarly journal that provides informative and entertaining articles about the history and culture of Rochester, Monroe County, and the Genesee Valley. In January 1939, Assistant City Historian Blake McKelvey published the first quarterly edition of *Rochester History*. Subjects researched and written by him and other scholars were edited, published, and distributed by McKelvey with the goal of expanding the knowledge of local history. Studying local history as a microcosm of U.S. history has brought insight and understanding to scholars and researchers around the globe.

Today *Rochester History* is published biannually (spring and fall) by the Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County. The journal is funded in part by the Frances Kenyon Publication Fund, established in memory of Ms. Kenyon's sister, Florence Taber Kenyon, and her friend Thelma Jeffries.

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Introduction

The air was full of minié-balls, some whistling by like mad hornets, and others, partly spent, humming like big nails. One of the latter struck my knee with force enough to wound to the bone without penetrating the grained-leather boot-leg. In front of us the ground rose into the timber where our infantry was engaged. It was madness to continue firing here, for my shot must first plow through our own lines before reaching the enemy.

—William H. Shelton, “A Hard Road to Travel Out of Dixie” (1890)

On May 5, 1864, Civil War soldier Lt. William Henry Shelton found himself in an unenviable position. Ordered from what he believed was a defensible position to one that was not, he was soon shot in the leg. But more disturbing than the wound was the realization that his battery was firing into the back of fellow Rochesterians, soldiers from the 140th Volunteer Infantry. A short time later, Shelton was captured. He spent the next nine months in Confederate prison camps before escaping back to Union lines. Nearly 25 years later, Shelton recounted his capture, imprisonment, and escape in an article he wrote and illustrated for *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*. The Civil War veteran had parlayed his war experiences into a career as an artist and writer. He had come a long way.

Born near Allen’s Hill in the town of West Bloomfield in Ontario County on September 4, 1840, William Henry Shelton had been raised on a farm. He received his early education in a one-room schoolhouse and had advanced to Canandaigua Academy with the intention of going on to college.¹ However, with the outbreak of the Civil War and the Union defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run in July 1861, he felt it was his patriotic duty to enlist and fight for the cause. He was mustered into service on November 5, 1861, as one of the original members of the 1st New York Light Artillery, Battery “L,” popularly known as Reynolds’ Battery.²

Many of the members of Reynolds’ Battery, including its commander, Captain John Alfred Reynolds, had previously belonged to the Rochester Union Grays, an artillery unit in the 54th Regiment of the state militia that had been around since 1850.³ One of ten young men from his town to serve in Reynolds’ Battery, Shelton entered as a private and was eventually promoted up the ranks to first sergeant.⁴ As a soldier in this unit, he experienced some of the hardest fighting of the war. His regiment was in action, or in reserve, at Second Bull Run, South Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Mine Run.

At the end of his enlistment with Reynolds’ Battery, Shelton returned home to Rochester and served for a brief time as a recruiter before re-enlisting as a veteran. On May 3,

1864, he was mustered in as a second lieutenant in Battery "G," which, like Reynolds' Battery, was part of the 1st New York Light Artillery. Shelton soon found himself and his unit once again embroiled in hard fighting, this time in the bloody and chaotic Battle of the Wilderness.

Waged in Virginia's thickly overgrown Wilderness in Spotsylvania and Orange counties, the battle began on a warm spring day in early May 1864. The 140th New York Volunteer Infantry from Monroe County was attempting to cross Saunders Field, a clearing in the middle of the otherwise nearly impenetrable forest, when they came under fire from an unanticipated line of Confederate forces hidden in the underbrush on the opposite side. Thus engaged, the 140th had little choice but to forge ahead. Darting across the clearing, the soldiers met their enemy head-on in the dense woods at the far end of the field, where the opposing sides could barely see each other even though they sometimes stood a mere bayonet's length apart. As a result of this charge, half of the men in the 140th were killed, wounded, or missing.⁵

As the 140th found itself practically surrounded by the Confederate army, other Union troops in the area moved to support it. Shelton's unit was among these supporting forces. Wounded in the thick of the fight, Shelton realized with horror that his section had somehow come up behind the 140th and was actually firing at their comrades! In the confusing moments that followed, Shelton, slowed by his wound, was captured. While the Battle of the Wilderness ultimately raged on for two days of indecisive bloodshed, Shelton's involvement ended when he was taken prisoner. His wartime adventure, however, had only begun.

The pages that follow offer a gripping, firsthand account of Shelton's experience as a prisoner of war and of his ultimate success in escaping from his Confederate captors. Originally published by *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* in 1890, Shelton's story was written over two decades after the war and was typical of the many books and articles penned around the turn of the 20th century. As Civil War veterans aged, their desire to pass on accounts of their heroic service melded with emerging publishing technology, the emergence of mass media, and the veterans' perceived need to present a correct version of the events surrounding the "rebellion," as Union veterans often called it. Moreover, the leadership of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), to which the vast majority of Union veterans belonged by 1890, urged on what Stuart McConnell has called the "armies of penny-a-line journalists [who] specialized in 'tales of camp and battle' for general circulation magazines and newspapers."⁶ Grand Army of the Republic founder General John A. Logan told the 1885 National Encampment that each veteran should "read a history from his memory to every child he meets, that he may learn that patriotism which lives in the hearts of good and true and brave men." "My comrades," Logan told the men, "it is from you that the truthful history of the war will be written."⁷ Whatever

else may have been William Henry Shelton's purpose in writing his story, he certainly answered General Logan's call several times over.

Shelton's article appeared around the time that the GAR reached the height of its membership. A great wave of immigrants was swelling American ports of entry and old-stock Americans were fretting that an emerging generation might forget the debt that could never be repaid to the aging veterans who had saved the Union.⁸ Just two years later, Francis Bellamy, a Mt. Morris native and graduate of the University of Rochester (1876), wrote the Pledge of Allegiance.⁹ The bravery and determination of citizen-soldiers like William Henry Shelton had ensured the reality of Bellamy's phrase, "one nation, indivisible." In the interest of moving on from the past and reconciling the North and South as one great and unified nation, white Americans were willing to identify both sides as equally noble, downplaying the conflicting causes that had once pitted "brother against brother."

Eager to get on with the business of a new industrial nation emerging on the world stage, the country was turning away from "questions of causation and culpability and toward a focus on the war's military history."¹⁰ As historian Frances M. Clarke notes in her recent study, *War Stories: Suffering and Sacrifice in the Civil War North*, the publication of tales like Shelton's satisfied the veterans' need to justify their lives and service, secure their place in history, and inform a rising generation. They served a commercial purpose, as well; by the mid-1890s, *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* nearly doubled its circulation by publishing these stories.¹¹ As you read Shelton's account of the hard road he followed through the final years of the Civil War, the reasons for the popularity of such tales will become obvious. Shelton's story is truly unforgettable.

The challenges facing Rochester residents during the Civil War years went well beyond filling the ranks of new regiments summoned under successive calls from President Lincoln. This was a time of stress and change for the city and the Genesee region in general. New coal supplies had to be found; youth problems had to be addressed; there was a labor shortage and unrest among workmen; transportation problems plagued the city; and relief costs soared as soldiers' families suffered deprivation and the state made relief a local responsibility. Inflation, new currency, and the need for scrip to keep the wheels of commerce turning posed both problems and opportunities. New hospitals opened. There were even new business prospects born of wartime need.¹²

Despite these changes and challenges, Rochester, Monroe County, and indeed the entire region enthusiastically answered the president's calls for troops, providing soldiers to local regiments throughout the war. According to a statistical summary compiled by Civil War

bibliographer Charles Dornbusch in 1962, Rochester alone contributed men to 17 regiments of infantry, 11 regiments of cavalry, eight regiments of artillery, and three regiments of engineers.¹³ Indeed, William Henry Shelton's story is but one of many that might have been told by Rochesterians who lived through the tragedies and triumphs of the Civil War years. As Shelton's account reveals, this was truly an exciting, and terrifying, time. An astute observer with an obvious eye for detail and a keen memory, Shelton tells a tale of his engagement in the Wilderness, his capture, and his ultimate escape, providing modern readers with a broad yet intimate look at the varied experiences of the Civil War.

Contributors

Michelle Finn is the Deputy Historian for the City of Rochester. She received her Ph.D. in History from the University of Rochester in May 2012.

Preston E. Pierce is the Ontario County Historian and the Regional Archivist for the Documentary Heritage Program for the Rochester Regional Library Council.

Notes

1. "Magazine Articles of Local Interest," *Livonia Gazette*, February 21, 1919, 1; "Personal, Local, Social," *Lima Recorder*, January 16, 1919, 1. As correspondents for both newspapers noted, Shelton published a story about the hamlet of Allen's Hill ("Our Village") in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, December 1918, 260-271, available online at: <http://www.unz.org/Pub/Century-1918dec-00260> (accessed March 6, 2012).
2. Town Clerk, Town of West Bloomfield, "Complete Record, As Required by Chapter 690 of the Laws of 1865, Relating to Officers, Soldiers and Seamen..."; W[illiam] McIntosh, *History of Ontario County, NY, 1788-1876* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign and Everts, 1876), 223.
3. Blake McKelvey, *Rochester: The Flower City, 1855-1890* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 65-66; Wheeler Chapin Case, "Rochester's Citizen Soldiers," *Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series*, vol. 14 (Rochester, NY: Rochester Historical Society, 1936), 258. Case devoted several pages (258-260) of his article to a description of the Union Grays' first experience as an artillery battery in the militia. According to Case, the Rochester Union Grays were named for Col. Nathaniel Rochester, not the city. The best unit-by-unit summary of recruiting areas is Frederick Phisterer, *New York in the War of the Rebellion*, 6 vols. (Albany: J. B. Lyon Company, 1912). For the 1st New York Light Artillery see vol. 2, 1208-1210.
4. Phisterer, vol. 2, 1231-1232. Shelton's service summary indicates that he enlisted for three years in 1861, but was discharged to re-enlist as a veteran just two years later. This was most likely the result of his desire to take advantage of the bounty incentives available to "veteran volunteers," a distinct classification. A little more than four months later, Shelton received an officer's commission.
5. Robert Marcotte, *Where They Fell: Stories of Rochester Area Soldiers in the Civil War* (Franklin, VA: Q Publishing, 2002), 178-185.
6. Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1890* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 16.
7. *Ibid.*, 185-186; 273 n. 39.
8. *Ibid.*, 157-158.
9. Richard J. Ellis, *To the Flag: The Unlikely History of the Pledge of Allegiance* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 1-23. The GAR national encampment formally endorsed the display of flags at every schoolhouse in 1892, reflecting a goal that many of its posts set years earlier (McConnell, 228).
10. Frances M. Clarke, *War Stories: Suffering and Sacrifice in the Civil War North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 180.

11. Ibid.

12. McKelvey, 64-88, provides a comprehensive summary of the impact of the war on Rochester.

13. C. E. Dornbusch, comp., *The Communities of New York and the Civil War: The Recruiting Areas of New York Civil War Regiments* (New York: New York Public Library, 1962), 20. Dornbusch based his statistics on the more extensive compilation in Phisterer (1912). See also McKelvey, 61. In 1973, McKelvey described a “surge of patriotic unity” in *Rochester on the Genesee: The Growth of a City* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 80; Ruth Marsh, “A History of Rochester’s Part in the Civil War,” *Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series*, vol. 22 (Rochester, NY: Rochester Historical Society, 1944), 4-76. That volume, edited by Blake McKelvey, contains a wide variety of letters from soldiers in various Rochester regiments.



A Hard Road to Travel Out of Dixie¹

Part 1

by W. H. Shelton



IT was past noon of the first day of the bloody contest in the Wilderness. The guns of the Fifth Corps, led by Battery D of the 1st New York Artillery, were halted along the Orange Turnpike, by which we had made the fruitless campaign to Mine Run.² The continuous roar of musketry in front and to the left indicated that the infantry was desperately engaged while the great guns filling every wooded road leading up to the battlefield were silent. Our drivers were lounging about the horses, while the cannoneers lay on the green grass by the roadside or walked by the pieces. Down the line came an order for the center section, under my command, to advance and pass the right section, which lay in front of us. General [Gouverneur K.] Warren, surrounded by his staff, sat on a gray horse at the right of the road where the woods bordered an open field dipping between two wooded ridges. The position we were leaving was admirable, while the one to which we were ordered, on the opposite side of the narrow field, was wholly impracticable. The captain [George B. Winslow] had received his orders in person from General Warren, and joined my command as we passed.

We dashed down the road at a trot, the cannoneers running beside their pieces. At the center of the field we crossed by a wooden bridge over a deep, dry ditch, and came rapidly into position at the side of the turnpike and facing the thicket. As the cannoneers were not all up, the captain and I dismounted and lent a hand in swinging round the heavy trails. The air was full of minié-balls,³ some whistling by like mad hornets, and others, partly spent, humming like big nails. One of the latter struck my knee with force enough to wound to the bone without penetrating the grained-leather boot-leg. In front of us the ground rose into the timber where our infantry was engaged. It was madness to continue firing here, for my shot must first plow through our own lines before reaching the enemy. So after one discharge the captain ordered the limbers⁴ to the rear, and the section started back at a gallop. My horse was cut on the flanks, and his plunging, with my disabled knee, delayed me in mounting, and prevented my seeing why the carriages kept to the grass instead of getting upon the roadway. When I overtook the guns they had come to a forced halt at the dry ditch, now full of skulkers,⁵ an angle of which cut the way to the bridge. Brief as the interval had been, not a man of my command was in sight. The lead horse of the gun team at my side had been shot and was reeling in the harness. Slipping to the

ground, I untoggled one trace at the collar to release him, and had placed my hand on the other when I heard the demand "Surrender!" and turning found in my face two big pistols in the hands of an Alabama colonel. "Give me that sword," said he. I pressed the clasp and let it fall to the ground, where it remained. The colonel had taken me by the right arm, and as we turned towards the road I took in the whole situation at a glance. My chestnut horse and the captain's bald-faced brown were dashing frantically against the long, swaying gun teams. By the bridge stood a company of the 61st Alabama Infantry in butternut suits and slouch hats, shooting straggling and wounded Zouaves⁶ from a Pennsylvania brigade as they appeared in groups of two or three on the road in front. The colonel, as he handed me over to his men, ordered his troops to take what prisoners they could and to cease firing. The guns which we were forced to abandon were a bone of contention until they were secured by the enemy on the third day, at which time but one of the twenty-four team horses was living.

With a few other prisoners, I was led by a short detour through the woods. In ten minutes we had turned the flank of both armies and reached the same turnpike in the rear of our enemy. A line of ambulances was moving back on the road, all filled with wounded, and when we saw a vacant seat beside a driver I was hoisted up to the place. The boy driver was in a high state of excitement. He said that two shells had come flying down this same road and showed where the trace of the near mule had been cut by a piece of shell, for which I was directly responsible.

The field hospital of General Jubal Early's corps was near Locust Grove Tavern, [Virginia], where the wounded Yankees were in [the] charge of Surgeon [Edward] Donnelly of the Pennsylvania Reserves. No guard was established, as no one was supposed to be in condition to run away. At the end of a week, however, my leg had greatly improved, although I was still unable to use it. In our party was another lieutenant, an aide on the staff of General James C. Rice, whose horse had been shot under him while riding at full speed with despatches. Lieutenant [John Vestal] Hadley had returned to consciousness to find himself a prisoner in hospital, somewhat bruised, and robbed of his valuables, but not otherwise disabled.⁷ We two concluded to start for Washington by way of Kelly's Ford. I traded my penknife for a haversack⁸ of cornbread with one of the Confederate nurses, and a wounded officer, Colonel [Francis C.] Miller of a New York regiment, gave us a pocket compass. I provided myself with a stout pole, which I used with both hands in lieu of my left foot. At 9 p.m. we set out, passing during the night the narrow field and the dry ditch where I had left my guns. Only a pile of dead horses marked the spot.

On a grassy bank we captured a firefly and shut him in between the glass and the face of our pocket compass. With such a guide we shaped our course for the Rapidan [River].⁹

After traveling nearly all night we lay down exhausted upon a bluff within sound of the river and slept until sunrise. Hastening to our feet again, we hurried down to the ford. Just before reaching the river we heard shouts behind us and saw a man beckoning and running after us. Believing the man an enemy, we dashed into the shallow water, and after crossing safely hobbled away up the other side as fast as a man with one leg and a pole could travel. I afterwards met this man, himself a prisoner, at Macon, Georgia. He was the officer of our pickets,¹⁰ and would have conducted us into our lines if we had permitted him to come up with us. As it was, we found a snug hiding-place in a thicket of swamp growth, where we lay in concealment all day. After struggling on a few miles in a chilling rain my leg became so painful that it was impossible to go farther. A house was near by, and we threw ourselves on the mercy of the family. Good Mrs. Brandon had harbored the pickets of both armies again and again, and had luxuriated in real coffee and tea and priceless salt at the hands of our officers. She bore the Yankees only goodwill, and after dressing my wound we sat down to breakfast with herself and her daughters.

After breakfast we were conducted to the second half-story, which was one unfinished room. There was a bed in one corner where we were to sleep. Beyond the stairs was a pile of yellow ears of corn, and from the rafters and sills hung a variety of dried herbs and medicinal roots. Here our meals were served, and the girls brought us books and read aloud to pass away the long days. I was confined to the bed, and my companion never ventured below stairs except on one dark night, when at my earnest entreaty he set out for Kelly's Ford, but soon returned, unable to make his way in the darkness. One day we heard the door open at the foot of the stairs, a tread of heavy boots on the steps, and the clank, clank of something that



*Kelly's Ford on the Rappahannock River. Illustration by Edwin Forbes, 1864.
From the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-20625.*

sounded very much like a saber. Out of the floor rose a gray slouch hat with the yellow cord and tassel of a cavalryman, and in another moment there stood on the landing one of the most astonished troopers that ever was seen. "Coot" Brandon was one of [Confederate General James Ewel Brown] "Jeb" Stuart's rangers, and came every day for corn for his horse. Heretofore the corn had been brought down for him, and he was as ignorant of our presence as we were of his existence. On this day no pretext could keep him from coming up to help himself. His mother worked on his sympathies, and he departed promising her that he would leave us undisturbed. But the very next morning he turned up again, this time accompanied by another ranger of sterner mold. A parole was exacted from my able-bodied companion and we were left for another twenty-four hours, when I was considered in condition to be moved. Mrs. Brandon gave us each a new blue overcoat from a plentiful store of Uncle Sam's clothing she had on hand, and I opened my heart and gave her my last twenty-dollar greenback—and wished I had it back again every day for the next ten months.

I was mounted on a horse, and with Lieutenant Hadley on foot we were marched under guard all day until we arrived at a field hospital established in the rear of [Confederate General James] Longstreet's corps, my companion being sent on to some prison for officers.¹¹ Thence I was



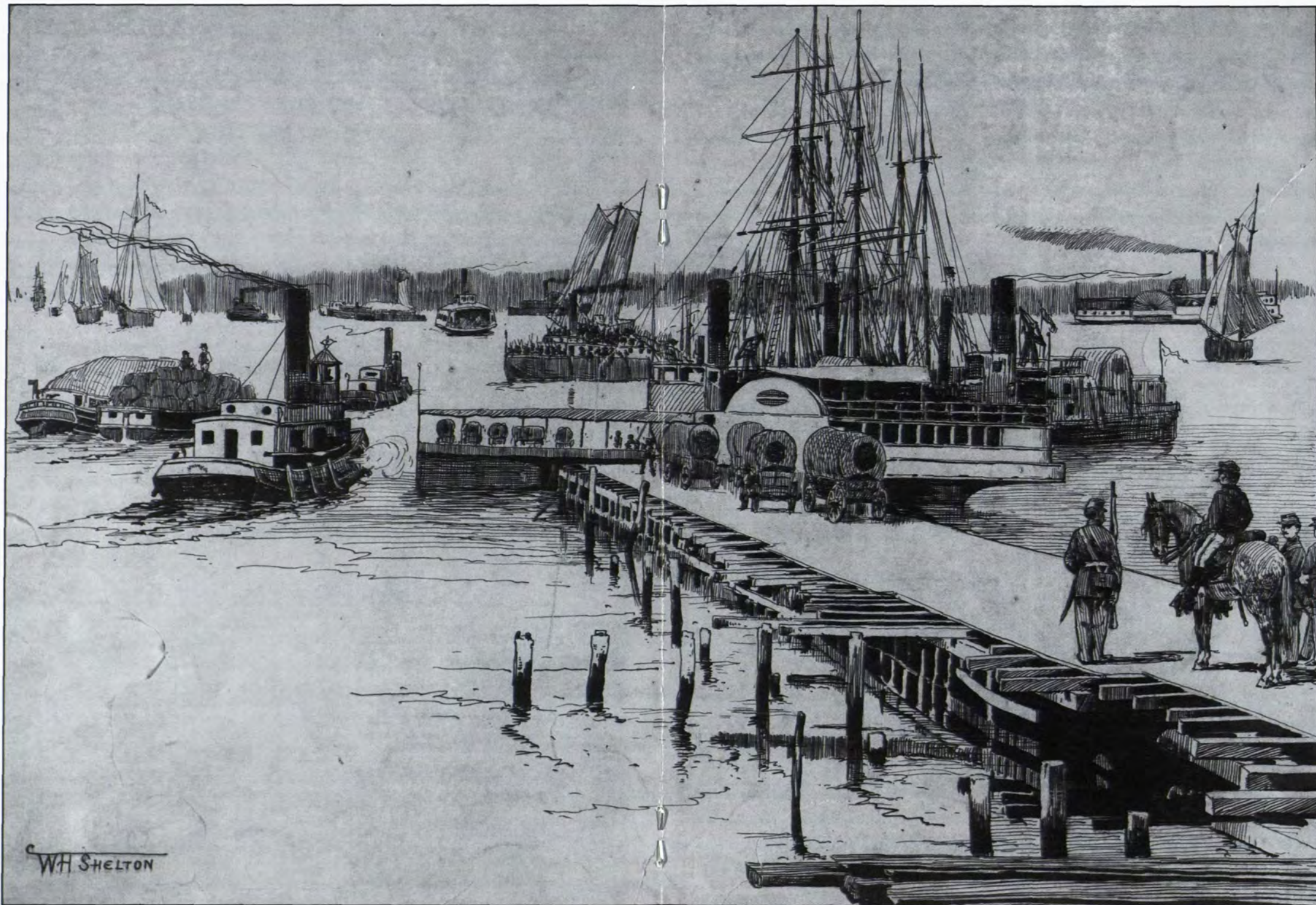
*North Anna River, Virginia. Federal troops occupying a line of breastworks on the north bank.
From the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-cwpb-01211.*

forwarded with a train-load of wounded to Lynchburg, on which [Union] General [David] Hunter was then marching, and we had good reason to hope for a speedy deliverance.

On more than one day we heard his guns to the north, where there was no force but a few citizens with bird guns to oppose the entrance of his command. The slaves were employed on a line of breastworks¹² which there was no adequate force to hold. It was our opinion that one well-disciplined regiment could have captured and held the town. It was several days before a portion of [Confederate] General [John C.] Breckinridge's command arrived for the defense of Lynchburg.¹³

I had clung to my clean bed in the hospital just as long as my rapidly healing wound would permit, but was soon transferred to a prison where at night the sleepers—Yankees, Confederate deserters, and negroes—were so crowded upon the floor that some lay under the feet of the guards in the doorways. The atmosphere was dreadful. I fell ill, and for three days lay with my head in the fireplace, more dead than alive.

A few days thereafter about three hundred prisoners were crowded into cattle cars bound for Andersonville [Prison].¹⁴ We must have been a week on this railroad journey when an Irish lieutenant of a Rochester regiment and I, who had been allowed to ride in the baggage car, were taken from the train at Macon, Georgia, where about sixteen hundred Union officers were confined at the Fair-Grounds. General Alexander Shaler, of [General John] Sedgwick's corps, also captured at the Wilderness, was the ranking officer, and to him was accorded a sort of interior command of the camp. Before passing through the gate we expected to see a crowd bearing some outward semblance of respectability. Instead, we were instantly surrounded by several hundred ragged, barefooted, frowzy-headed men shouting "Fresh fish!" at the top of their voices and eagerly asking for news. With rare exceptions all were shabbily dressed. There was, however, a little knot of naval officers, who had been captured in the windings of the narrow Rappahannock [River] by a force of cavalry, and who were the aristocrats of the camp. They were housed in a substantial fair-building in the center of the grounds, and by some special terms of surrender must have brought their complete wardrobes along. On hot days they appeared in spotless white duck,¹⁵ which they were permitted to send outside to be laundered. Their mess was abundantly supplied with the fruits and vegetables of the season. The ripe red tomatoes they were daily seen to peel were the envy of the camp. I well remember that to me, at this time, a favorite occupation was to lie on my back with closed eyes and imagine the dinner I would order if I were in a first-class hotel. It was no unusual thing to see a dignified colonel washing his lower clothes in a pail, clad only in his uniform dress-coat. Ladies sometimes appeared on the guard-walk outside the top of the stockade, on which occasions the cleanest and best-dressed men turned out to see and be seen. I was quite proud to appear in a clean gray shirt, spotless



On the Potomac Waterfront. Illustration by William H. Shelton.

white drawers, and moccasins made of blue overcoat cloth.

On the Fourth of July, after the regular morning count, we repaired to the big central building and held an informal celebration. One officer had brought into captivity, concealed on his person, a little silk national flag, which was carried up into the cross-beams of the building, and the sight of it created the wildest enthusiasm. We cheered the flag and applauded the patriotic speeches until a detachment of the guard succeeded in putting a stop to our proceedings. They tried to capture the flag, but in this they were not successful. We were informed that cannon were planted commanding the camp, and would be opened on us if we renewed our demonstrations.

Soon after this episode, the fall of Atlanta and the subsequent movements of [Union] General [William Tecumseh] Sherman led to the breaking up of the camp at Macon, and to the transfer of half of us to a camp at Charleston, [South Carolina], and half to Savannah, [Georgia].¹⁶ Late in September, by another transfer, we found ourselves together again at Columbia, [South Carolina]. We had no form of shelter, and there was no stockade around the camp, only a guard and a dead-line.¹⁷ During two hours of each morning an extra line of guards was stationed around an adjoining piece of pine woods, into which we were allowed to go and cut wood and timber to construct for ourselves huts for the approaching winter. Our ration at this time consisted of raw corn-meal and sorghum molasses, without salt or any provision of utensils for cooking. The camp took its name from our principal article of diet, and was by common consent known as "Camp Sorghum." A stream of clear water was accessible during the day by an extension of the guards, but at night the lines were so contracted as to leave the path leading to the water outside the guard. [Union] Lieutenant S[amuel] H. M. Byers, who had already written the well-known lyric "Sherman's March to the Sea," was sharing my tent, which consisted of a ragged blanket. We had been in the new camp but little more than a week when we determined to make an attempt at escape. Preparatory to starting we concealed two tin cups and two blankets in the pine woods to which we had access during the chopping hours, and here was to be our rendezvous in case we were separated in getting out. Covering my shoulders with an old gray blanket and providing myself with a stick from the woodpile about the size of a gun, I tried to smuggle myself into the relief guard when the line was contracted at six o'clock. Unfortunately an unexpected halt was called, and the soldier in front turned and discovered me. I was now more than ever determined on getting away. After a hurried conference with Lieutenant Byers, at which I promised to wait at our rendezvous in the woods until I heard the posting of the ten o'clock relief, I proceeded alone up the side of the camp to a point where a group of low cedars grew close to the dead-line. Concealing myself in their dark shadow, I could observe at

my leisure the movements of the sentinels. A full moon was just rising above the horizon to my left, and in the soft, misty light the guards were plainly visible for a long distance either way. An open field from which the small growth had been recently cut away lay beyond, and between the camp and the guard-line ran a broad road of soft sand—noiseless to cross, but so white in the moonlight that a leaf blown across it by the wind could scarcely escape a vigilant eye. The guards were bundled in their overcoats, and I soon observed that the two who met opposite to my place of concealment turned and walked their short beats without looking back. Waiting until they separated again, and regardless of the fact that I might with equal likelihood be seen by a dozen sentinels in either direction, I ran quickly across the soft sand road several yards into the open field, and threw myself down upon the uneven ground. First I dragged my body on my elbows for a few yards, then I crept on my knees, and so gradually gained in distance until I could rise to a standing position and get safely to the shelter of the trees. With some difficulty I found the cups and blankets we had concealed, and lay down to await the arrival of my companion. Soon I heard several shots which I understood too well; and, as I afterwards learned, two officers were shot dead for attempting the feat I had accomplished, and perhaps in emulation of my success. A third young officer, whom I knew, was also killed in camp by one of the shots fired at the others.

At ten o'clock, I set out alone and made my way across the fields to the bank of the Saluda [River], where a covered bridge crossed to Columbia. Hiding when it was light, wandering through fields and swamps by night, and venturing at last to seek food of negroes, I proceeded for thirteen days towards the sea.

In general, I had followed the Columbia Turnpike; at a quaint little chapel on the shore of Goose Creek, but a few miles out of Charleston, I turned to the north and bent my course for the coast above the city. About this time I learned that I should find no boats along the shore between Charleston and the mouth of the Santee [River], everything able to float having been destroyed to prevent the escape of the negroes and the desertion of the soldiers. I was ferried over the Broad River by a crusty old darky who came paddling across in response to my cries of "O-v-e-r," and who seemed so put out because I had no fare for him that I gave him my case-knife.¹⁸ The next evening I had the only taste of meat of this thirteen days' journey, which I got from an old negro whom I found alone in his cabin eating possum and rice.

I had never seen the open sea-coast beaten by the surf, and after being satisfied that I had no hope of escape in that direction it was in part my curiosity that led me on, and partly a vague idea that I would get Confederate transportation back to Columbia and take a fresh start westward bound. The tide was out, and in a little cove I found an abundance of oysters bedded

in the mud, some of which I cracked with stones and ate. After satisfying my hunger, and finding the sea rather unexpectedly tame inside the line of islands which marked the eastern horizon, I bent my steps towards a fire, where I found a detachment of Confederate coast-guards, to whom I offered myself as a guest as coolly as if my whole toilsome journey had been prosecuted to that end.

In the morning I was marched a few miles to Mount Pleasant, near Fort Moultrie, and taken thence in a sail-boat across the harbor to Charleston. At night I found myself again in the city jail, where with a large party of officers I had spent most of the month of August. My cell-mate was Lieutenant H. G. Dorr of the 4th Massachusetts Cavalry, with whom I journeyed by rail back to Columbia, arriving at "Camp Sorghum" about the 1st of November.

I rejoined the mess of Lieutenant Byers and introduced to the others Lieutenant Dorr, whose cool assurance was a prize that procured us all the blessings possible. He could borrow

frying-pans from the guards, money from his brother Masons at headquarters, and I believe if we had asked him to secure us a gun he would have charmed it out of the hand of a sentinel on duty.

Lieutenant Edward E. Sill, of General Daniel Butterfield's staff, whom I had met at Macon, during my absence had come to "Sorghum" from a fruitless trip to Macon for exchange, and I had promised to join him in an escape when he could secure a pair of shoes. On the 29th of November our mess had cut down a big pine tree and had rolled into camp a short section of the trunk, which a Tennessee officer was to split into shingles to complete our hut, a pretty good cabin with earthen fireplace. While we were resting from our exertion, Sill appeared with his friend Lieutenant A[ibert] T. Lamson of the 104th New York Infantry, and reminded me of my promise. The prisoners always



Lieutenants Edward E. Sill and A. T. Lamson. From a photograph taken on their arrival at Chattanooga.

respected their parole on wood-chopping expeditions, and went out and came in at the main entrance. The guards were a particularly verdant body of back country militia, and the confusion of the parole system enabled us to practice ruses. In our present difficulty we resorted to a new expedient and forged a parole. The next day all three of us were quietly walking down the guard-line on the outside. At the creek, where all the camp came for water, we found Dorr and Byers and West, and calling to one of them in the presence of the guard asked for blankets to bring in spruce boughs for beds. When the blankets came they contained certain haversacks, cups, and little indispensable articles for the road. Falling back into the woods, we secured a safe hiding-place until after dark. Just beyond the village of Lexington, we successfully evaded the first picket, being warned of its presence by the smoldering embers in the road. A few nights after this, having exposed ourselves and anticipating pursuit, we pushed on until we came to a stream crossing the road. Up this we waded for some distance and secured a hiding-place on a neighboring hill. In the morning we looked out upon mounted men and dogs, at the very point where we had entered the stream, searching for our lost trail. We spent two days during a severe storm of rain and sleet in a farm barn where the slaves were so drunk on applejack that they had forgotten us and left us with nothing to eat but raw turnips. One night, in our search for provisions, we met a party of negroes burning charcoal who took us to their camp and sent out for a supply of food. While waiting, a venerable "uncle" proposed to hold a prayer meeting. So under the tall trees and by the light of the smoldering coal-pits the old man prayed long and fervently to the "bressed Lord and Massa Lincoln," and hearty amens echoed through the woods. Besides a few small potatoes, one dried goat ham was all our zealous friends could procure. The next day, having made our camp in the secure depths of a dry swamp, we lighted the only fire we allowed ourselves between Columbia and the mountains. The ham, which was almost as light as cork, was riddled with worm holes, and as hard as a petrified sponge.

We avoided the towns, and after an endless variety of adventures approached the mountains, cold, hungry, ragged, and footsore. On the night of December 13 we were grouped about a guide-post, at a fork in the road, earnestly contending as to which way we should proceed. Lieutenant Sill was for the right, I was for the left, and no amount of persuasion could induce Lieutenant Lamson to decide the controversy. I yielded, and we turned to the right. After walking a mile in a state of general uncertainty we came to a low white farm-house standing very near to the road. It was now close upon midnight and the windows were all dark, but from a house of logs, partly behind the other, gleamed a bright light. Judging this to be servants' quarters, two of us remained back while Lieutenant Sill made a cautious approach. In due time a negro appeared, advancing stealthily, and, beckoning to my companion and me, conducted

us in the shadow of a hedge to a side window, through which we clambered into the cabin. We were made very comfortable in the glow of a bright wood fire. Sweet potatoes were already roasting in the ashes, and a tin pot of barley coffee was steaming on the coals. Rain and sleet had begun to fall, and it was decided that after having been warmed and refreshed we should be concealed in the barn until the following night. Accordingly we were conducted thither and put to bed upon a pile of corn-shucks high up under the roof. Secure as this retreat seemed, it was deemed advisable in the morning to burrow several feet down in the mow, so that the children, if by any chance they should climb so high, might romp unsuspecting over our heads. We could still look out through the cracks in the siding and get sufficient light whereby to study a map of the Southern States, which had been brought us with our breakfast. A luxurious repast was in preparation, to be eaten at the quarters before starting, but a frolic being in progress, and a certain negro present of questionable fidelity, the banquet was transferred to the barn. The great barn doors were set open, and the cloth was spread on the floor by the light of the moon. Certainly we had partaken of no such substantial fare within the Confederacy. The central dish was a pork pie, flanked by savory little patties of sausage. There were sweet potatoes, fleecy biscuits, a jug of sorghum, and a pitcher of sweet milk. Most delicious of all was a variety of corn-bread, having tiny bits of fresh pork baked in it, like plums in a pudding.ⁱ

Filling our haversacks with the fragments, we took grateful leave of our sable benefactors and resumed our journey, retracing our steps to the point of disagreement of the evening before. Long experience in night marching had taught us extreme caution. We had advanced along the new road but a short way when we were startled by the barking of a house dog. Apprehending that something was moving in front of us, we instantly withdrew into the woods. We had scarcely concealed ourselves when two cavalrymen passed along, driving before them a prisoner. Aware that it was high time to betake ourselves to the cross-roads and describe a wide circle around the military station at Pickensville, [South Carolina], we first sought information. A ray of light was visible from a hut in the woods, and believing from its humble appearance that it sheltered friends, my companions lay down in concealment while I advanced to reconnoiter. I gained the side of the house, and looking through a crack in the boards saw, to my horror, a

ⁱ [The following note appeared in Shelton's original text.] Major Sill contributes the following evidence of the impression our trio made upon one, at least, of the pickaninnies who looked on in the moonlight. The picture of Lieutenants Sill and Lamson, which appears on page [16], was enlarged from a small photograph taken on their arrival at Chattanooga, before divesting themselves of the rags worn throughout the long journey. Years afterwards Major Sill gave one of these pictures to Wallace Bruce of Florida, now United States consul at Glasgow. In the winter of 1888-89 Mr. Bruce, at his Florida home, was showing the photograph to his family when it caught the eye of a colored servant, who exclaimed, "O Massa Bruce, I know those gen'men. My father and mother hid 'em in Massa's barn at Pickensville and fed 'em; there was three of 'em; I saw 'em." This servant was a child scarcely ten years old in 1864, and could only have seen us while we were eating our supper in the barn door, and that in the uncertain moonlight. Yet more than twenty years thereafter he greeted the photograph of the ragged Yankee officers with a flash of recognition.

soldier lying on his back before the fire and playing with a dog. I stole back with redoubled care. Thoroughly alarmed by the dangers we had already encountered, we decided to abandon the roads. Near midnight of December 16 we passed through a wooden gate on a level road leading into the forest. Believing that the lateness of the hour would secure us from further dangers, we resolved to press on with all speed, when two figures with lighted torches came suddenly into view. Knowing that we were yet unseen, we turned into the woods and concealed ourselves behind separate trees at no great distance from the path. Soon the advancing lights revealed two hunters, mere lads, but having at their heels a pack of mongrel dogs, with which they had probably been pursuing the coon or the possum. The boys would have passed unaware of our presence, but the dogs, scurrying along with their noses in the leaves, soon struck our trail and were instantly yelping about us. We had possessed ourselves of the name of the commanding officer of the neighboring post at Pendleton, [South Carolina], and advanced boldly, representing ourselves to be his soldiers. "Then where did you get them blue pantaloons?" they demanded, exchanging glances, which showed they were not ignorant of our true character. We coolly faced them down and resumed our march leisurely, while the boys still lingered undecided. When out of sight we abandoned the road and fled at the top of our speed. We had covered a long distance through forest and field before we heard in our wake the faint yelping of the pack. Plunging into the first stream, we dashed for some distance along its bed. Emerging on the opposite bank, we sped on through marshy fields, skirting high hills and bounding down through dry watercourses, over shelving stones and accumulated barriers of driftwood, now panting up a steep ascent, and now resting for a moment to rub our shoes with the resinous needles of the pine; always within hearing of the dogs, whose fitful cries varied in volume in accordance with the broken conformation of the intervening country. Knowing that in speed and endurance we were no match for our four-footed pursuers, we trusted to our precautions for throwing them off the scent, mindful that they were but an ill-bred kennel and the more easily to be disposed of. Physically we were capable of prolonged exertion. Fainter and less frequent came the cry of the dogs, until, ceasing altogether, we were assured of our escape.

At Oconee, [South Carolina], on Sunday, December 18, we met a negro well acquainted with the roads and passes into North Carolina, who furnished us information by which we traveled for two nights, recognizing on the second objects which by his direction we avoided, like the house of Black Bill McKinney, and going directly to that of friendly old Tom Handcock. The first of these two nights we struggled up the foothills and outlying spurs of the mountains, through an uninhabited waste of rolling barrens, along an old stage road, long deserted, and in places impassable to a saddle mule. Lying down before morning, high

up on the side of the mountain, we fell asleep, to be awakened by thunder and lightning and to find torrents of hail and sleet beating upon our blankets. Chilled to the bone, we ventured to build a small fire in a secluded place. After dark, and before abandoning our camp, we gathered quantities of wood, stacking it upon the fire, which when we left it was a wild tower of flame lighting up the whole mountain side in the direction we had come, and seeming, in some sort, to atone for a long succession of shivering days in fireless bivouac.¹⁹ We followed the same stage road through the scattering settlement of Casher's Valley in Jackson County, North Carolina. A little farther on, two houses, of hewn logs, with verandas and green blinds, just fitted the description we had received of the home of old Tom Handcock. Knocking boldly at the door of the farther one, we were soon in the presence of the loyal mountaineer. He and his wife had been sleeping on a bed spread upon the floor before the fire. Drawing this to one side, they heaped the chimney with green wood and were soon listening with genuine delight to the story of our adventures.

After breakfast next day, Tom, with his rifle, led us by a back road to the house of "Squire Larkin C. Hooper," a leading loyalist, whom we met on the way, and together we proceeded to his house. Ragged and forlorn, we were eagerly welcomed at his home by Hooper's



Shelton's arrival at Headen's. Illustration by William H. Shelton.

invalid wife and daughters. For several days we enjoyed a hospitality given as freely to utter strangers as if we had been relatives of the family.

Here we learned of a party about to start through the mountains for East Tennessee, guided by Emanuel Headen, who lived on the crest of the Blue Ridge. Our friend Tom was to be one of the party, and other refugees were coming over the Georgia border, where Headen, better known in the settlement as "Man Heady," was mustering his party. It now being near Christmas, and the squire's family in daily expectation of a relative, who was a captain in the Confederate army, it was deemed prudent for us to go on to Headen's under the guidance of Tom. Setting out at sunset on the 23[r]d of December, it was late in the evening when we arrived at our destination, having walked nine miles up the mountain trails over a light carpeting of snow. Pausing in front of a diminutive cabin, through the chinks of whose stone fireplace and stick chimney the whole interior seemed to be red hot like a furnace, our guide demanded, "Is Man Heady to hum?" Receiving a sharp negative in reply, he continued, "Well, can Tom get to stay all night?" At this the door flew open and a skinny woman appeared, her homespun frock pendent with tow-headed urchins.

"In course you can," she cried, leading the way into the cabin. Never have I seen so unique a character as this voluble, hatchet-faced, tireless woman. Her skin was like yellow parchment, and I doubt if she knew by experience what it was to be sick or weary. She had built the stake-and-cap fences that divided the fields, and she boasted of the acres she had plowed. The cabin was very small. Two bedsteads, with a narrow alleyway-between, occupied half the interior. One was heaped with rubbish and in the other slept the whole family, consisting of father, mother, a daughter of sixteen, and two little boys. When I add that the room contained a massive timber loom, a table, a spinning wheel, and a variety of rude seats, it will be understood that we were crowded uncomfortably close to the fire. Shrinking back as far as possible from the blaze, we listened in amused wonder to the tongue of this seemingly untamed virago, who, nevertheless, proved to be the kindest-hearted of women. She cursed, in her high-pitched tones, for a pack of fools, the men who had brought on the war. [For] Roderic Norton, who lived down the mountain, she expressed a profane desire to "stomp through the turnpike" because at some time he had stolen one of her hogs, marked, as to the ear, with "two smooth craps an' a slit in the left." Once only she had journeyed into the low country, where she had seen those twin marvels, steam cars and brick chimneys. On this occasion she had driven a heifer to market, making a journey of forty miles, walking beside her horse and wagon, which she took along to bring back the cornmeal received in payment for the animal. Charged by her husband to bring back the heifer bell, and being denied that musical instrument by the purchaser, it immediately assumed more importance to her mind than horse, wagon, and corn-meal. Baffled at first, she proceeded

to the pasture in the gray of the morning, cornered the cow and cut off the bell, and, in her own picturesque language, "walked through the streets of Walhalla cuss-in'." Rising at midnight, she would fall to spinning with all her energy. To us, waked from sleep on the floor by the humming of the wheel, she seemed by the light of the low fire like a witch in a sun-bonnet, darting forward and back.

We remained there several days, sometimes at the cabin and sometimes at a cavern in the rocks such as abound throughout the mountains, and which are called by the natives "rock houses." Many of the men at that time were "outliers"—that is, they camped in the mountain fastnesses, receiving their food from some member of the family. Some of these men, as now, had their copper stills in the rock houses, while others, more wary of the recruiting sergeant, wandered from point to point, their only furniture a rifle and a bedquilt. On December 29, we were joined at the cavern by Lieutenant Knapp and Captain Smith, Federal officers, who had also made their way from Columbia, [South Carolina], and by three refugees from Georgia, whom I remember as Old Man Tigue and the two Vincent boys. During the night our party was to start across the mountains for Tennessee. Tom Hancock was momentarily expected to join us. Our guide was busy with preparations for the journey. The night coming on icy cold, and a cutting wind driving the smoke of the fire into our granite house, we abandoned it at nine o'clock and descended to the cabin. Headen and his wife had gone to the mill for a supply of corn-meal. Although it was time for their return, we were in no wise alarmed by their absence, and formed a jovial circle about the roaring chimney. About midnight came a rap on the door. Thinking it was Tom Hancock and some of his companions, I threw it open with an eager, "Come in, boys!"

To be continued in the next issue

Notes

1. This article first appeared in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 40, no. 6 (October 1890).
2. The Mine Run Campaign was a planned assault against Gen. Robert E. Lee's force that was aborted by Union troops in November 1863.
3. Minié balls, named for co-developer Claude Minié, are the soft lead bullets used in muzzle-loaded rifles.
4. A limber is a two-wheeled carriage carrying an ammunition chest. It would have been pulled by a team of six horses and often towed a gun or caisson, another two-wheeled carriage that also carried an ammunition chest and a spare wheel.
5. "Skulker" was a slang term used to describe soldiers who feigned illness, ran, or hid from battle, or otherwise shirked their duty.
6. Zouaves were volunteer units (mostly Union, but also some Confederate) that were known for their light infantry tactics and open-order formations, as well as for their distinctive uniforms of baggy pants, vests, short jackets, and fezzes (small tight-fitting hats) that were inspired by the like-named North African troops who served in the French Army in the 1830s.
7. Lt. John Vestal Hadley was captured at the Wilderness on May 5, 1864.
8. Haversacks were leather or linen bags used to carry food rations.
9. The Rapidan River, a tributary of the Rappahannock River, flows 88 miles across north-central Virginia.
10. A picket was a unit's advanced guard. It consisted of approximately 50 men who formed a scattered line in front of the army's main encampment. Service on a picket was among the most dangerous of assignments since it served as the first line of defense against attack.
11. Longstreet was a top Confederate officer who served directly under Robert E. Lee.
12. Breastworks were shallow trenches hidden by stacks of logs from behind which soldiers could fire at their enemy without exposing themselves.
13. Breckinridge was a Confederate officer and politician who had served as a United States Representative, Senator, and Vice President.
14. Camp Sumter, commonly referred to as Andersonville Prison, was one of the largest and deadliest Confederate prisons. Located in Sumter County, Georgia, the 26½-acre stockade housed more than 45,000 Union soldiers during its 15 months in operation (February 1864-April 1865), as many as 32,000 of them at one time. Almost 13,000 died from disease, malnutrition, and exposure resulting from overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions.
15. Duck, or duck cloth, is a plain-woven cotton fabric.

16. Sherman commanded the Union army and accepted the surrender of the Confederacy at the close of the Civil War. His March to the Sea, from Atlanta to Savannah, Georgia, struck a devastating physical and psychological blow to the Confederacy, giving the Union a decisive military advantage.

17. The dead-line was the point surrounding a military prison beyond which guards were authorized to shoot escaping prisoners.

18. A case-knife was a simple table knife (cutlery), so named because it was carried in a case, often a small wooden box.

19. A bivouac is a temporary shelter or camp.





Illustration by William H. Shelton.

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