

A Soldier With General Forrest in the Civil War

By Adolphus Wiley Montague

As Told to Lizzie Ripley, Tennessee, November 3, 1912

A Soldier's Life For Me

In December 1859, I left my home near Mason, Tennessee and went to Texas. At the beginning of the Civil War in 1861 I tried to join the Confederate Army there but could not, as it was then thought that the war would last such a short time that Texas Troops would not be needed. After being refused there I started on horseback with four other men from Sandy Point, Texas, which is forty miles southwest of Galveston, back to my home in Tennessee in order that I might be a soldier in the Southern Cause.

I went on to Columbus, Kentucky and enlisted there on the 5th of October 1861, having been on the road from Sandy Point five weeks. I was sworn in by Colonel Bradford in General Gideon J. Pillow's office as a member of what was then known as the Logwood Battalion but it was later made a regiment under the command of Colonel W. H. Jackson. I was in Company B. of the 7th Tennessee Cavalry. The captain of my company was J. B. Russell and the lieutenants were H. T. Sales, Ike Stinson and Pete Wynn. H. T. Sales was one of the men who had come with me from Texas.

Just one month after I enlisted the battle of Belmont, Missouri was fought. Belmont is just across the river from Columbus, Kentucky, and while my company was not among those who were taken across to engage in the battle, I saw it all. General Grant came down from Cairo, Illinois but troops enough were taken across the river from Columbus by General Pillow and General Polk to send him hurrying back to his gunboats at Cairo.

Soon after this we went to Moscow, Kentucky, built houses and went into winter quarters. Except for a few scouting expeditions around Paducah there was nothing of interest until the next Spring when my regiment went to Trenton, Tennessee, was reorganized and we re-enlisted for the war. We went to Union City, and made preparations to go at once to take the Federals who were on the Mississippi River at Hickman, Kentucky. However, the next morning while many of us were yet in bed, the Federals surprised us by firing their cannon at us when only about a quarter of a mile away.

Our regiment was scattered but we managed some way to frighten the Federals who hurried back to Hickman, losing a number of pieces of artillery on the way. As soon as we could get the regiment together again we returned to Trenton.

Following this was the great battle of Shiloh: the Confederates had to evacuate Corinth: Island No. 10 was besieged three weeks and finally taken by the Federals, and Fort Pillow was also evacuated.

We moved south across the Tallahatchie River in Mississippi, and soon

after I was taken sick and came home, while the regiment moved farther south to Canton, Mississippi. My company at this time was escort for General Loring.

The Year at Home

I was able to ride about some but in no condition for army service. I would have been in bed most of the time but was endangered more while at home this year than at any time during the war, as the Federals were raiding the country frequently coming to our house and keeping me continually on the jump. The following stories are some of the experiences I had in keeping out of their way.

Early one morning a boy living ten miles away at Mason, Tennessee came to my home riding a "calico" horse. He said that the Federals had camped around his home the night before and that he had sneaked out early that morning to save his precious horse. At Oakland the road crossed with the Memphis road and here the boy had looked back toward Mason and had seen that the Federals were swiftly following him. Unless they had taken the Memphis road, at the rate they were coming they would soon be at our home. Four other soldiers and myself made rapid preparations for getting out of their way.

We had only a few minutes to wait before we saw them about a half a mile from us. Two of the soldiers had gone on but one who boasted of having as many as three shirts ran back to put them all on to keep from carrying a bundle, and I stayed behind to hurry my brother, Ed, as he was almost blind and would never hurry a horse on any occasion. He had not joined the army and so was slow about getting away from the Federals, but I thought if I were behind his horse I could whip it enough to make him keep up with us. He was soon captured, however, for I had to leave him behind as he hindered my progress by holding my horse back. I kept out of their way and went on a distance of about fourteen miles and tried to get a band of guerillas to go after these Federals who were then having breakfast at my father's home. After the breakfast was over they met the guerillas and had a skirmish with them. During their breakfast Colonel Prince, commander of this band of soldiers, asked my father if he were in sympathy with the United States Government, to which father replied, "I am no milk and cider man but am in full sympathy with the South." On hearing this Colonel Prince took a two-dollar bill out of his pocket and presented it to father saying, "Here, take this, you are the first man who has told me the truth since I have been on this raid." On many occasions after this I have seen father display this bill, and ask his friends if they had ever been so rewarded for their honesty.

There was in McNary County, about twenty miles from homes, a band of Federal soldiers known as "Home-made Yankees" because it was composed of the roughest most good-for-nothing men who would not join the Confederates but waited for an opportunity to join the Federals in order that they might stay near home and pilfer the houses in the community as well as settle their grudges by attacking their personal enemies.

I heard that these soldiers were near us and, with a hope of finding them, seven other soldiers and myself went to Galloway and there decided to send out scouts to try to locate their camp. While we were discussing our plans we saw, coming on the other side of the creek, just about one hundred of the very band we were hunting.

Naturally enough the eight of us protected ourselves by riding away from there as fast as we could, and in my haste my hat blew off and about three hundred yards away from me. I handed my gum to the soldier riding with me, intending to circle through the woods and secure my hat. (Hats then were scarce and mine was no ordinary wool hat but one I had traded with a preacher from Memphis.)

I threw my bridle over a stump and made for my hat, but just as I reached it the Yankee fired, stirring up the dust around me and frightening away my horse so that he broke loose. I seemed to be at their mercy with no gun and no horse, but my horse had jumped into a slough near by and I ran to him. As I mounted him I broke the pommel of my saddle and fractured one of my ribs. I lay flat on my horse and dodged the Yankees' firing for about a half a mile away when I joined my comrades again. This band of roughians was in hot pursuit, but we all managed to dodge them, and after they had passed we slipped behind them to find their camp which was located within a mile and a half of my home.

One Sunday afternoon I went with an Englishman to see a neighbor who lived about three miles away; there I learned that both Confederates and Federals were near us. Returning home that evening I ran into the Confederate pickets and was held. I went to the colonel of the Company and explained to him that on account of sickness I would like to be released and get home before night, but the Colonel, who was Colonel Richardson, said he would have to hold me until after dark anyway. The lieutenant colonel was named Green and had been captain of the company in which I had first enlisted. When he found me here, he asked me if I would go with them on a scouting expedition that night, as I knew the country well. I consented to go and we found the Federal camp about three miles away. Lieutenant Colonel Green sent me back to report to Colonel Richardson while he stayed near and watched their camp.

After reporting, I went to a home about a mile and a half away to spend the night. I went to sleep soon after retiring but was awakened by a noise, which I recognized as soldiers walking around in the adjoining room. I then heard some girls talking upstairs and understood one of them to say, "Well, Dolph ought to know it." At this I slipped out the back door with my boots in my hand and went around to the front door. By looking under the door I saw a wounded man lying on the floor. While I was looking under the door, the man of the house opened it and invited me in. On entering I found the man to be Colonel Richardson who had been wounded in a fight they had during the night. After his wounds were dressed, I took him to a house about fifteen miles away where he was hidden until he was well again.

In the battle which occurred that night the Confederates slipped upon the sleeping Federals filling most of them full of buckshot but losing their own major in the fight.

One night when I felt I could stand this dodging no longer, Sister Helen and I undertook to write for me a discharge from the army, as my health was not improving any. We were busily engaged with the task but only about half through when Sister Helen looked up and saw the Federals at the front gate and screamed, "Run, Dolphus Run!"

The Federals, of courses heard this but I darted thorough the back door to a top-stack where I hid until the excitement had subsided. Then I made my way to a back field where my horse was hid out and there found several of our neighbors who were hiding their stock from the Federals. We all went across the creek together but I sent Old Henry, my father's Negro, back home to find out what the Federals were doing and report to me that night. Old Henry failed to return but when I came home next morning, he said the reason he did not come back to me was that the Federals put him to throwing out fodder, and he was so tired after the last bundle was thrown out that he thought it was too late anyway to come then.

One day while visiting an old school mate living near, it was proposed that we and two girls there go fishing down at the mill a half a mile away. I told them I did not like to go as I believed the Federal soldiers were near and I would not feel safe down there, but my friend assured me that a Federal soldier had never been on his place, but that he had been warned of his approach while he was yet several miles away.

Before going however I thought I ought to take the precaution of hiding my horse for I expected to hide somewhere about the mill if necessary. I hunted in vain for a ditch or thicket for the horse and at last slipped the bridle off and left him saddled in the stable.

While walking toward the mill with the girls, I heard a Negro coughing to attract attention. When I looked at him, he nodded backward and I turned and saw some Federal soldiers coming over a hill about a half a mile away. Without alarming the girls I left then and started for my horse, I supposed that this was the advance guard and that I had plenty of time, but it proved to be the rear guard, the advance guard having passed before we came out.

As I started riding down the very road the advance guard had taken just ahead of me, I came face to face with a soldier who commanded me to halt, but at this I spurred my horse and bounded past him. The soldier then fired at me just as I passed the girls. I was making for the bridge as hard as I could, but five or six soldiers dashed across the field right after me. I turned and got into the woods and hoped to have time to fix my saddle blanket, which was slipping off, but glancing back under the timber I could see their horses feet in rapid pursuit.

They gave me a hard chase for three miles and the doctor said that these very Yankees cured me of my trouble. My enlarged spleen had

adhered to my side and this hard riding must have broken it loose, as I never suffered with it again and soon after went back to the army.

With the Command Again

About three weeks after the Yankees had given me this chase I felt well enough to again join the army and started to Granada, Mississippi, where I understood the army was at this time. After going one hundred and twenty miles into Mississippi, I met some soldiers. One of them belonged to my regiment who said the command had gone back to Tennessee. On hearing this I returned to Trenton and learned that the command had divided - one part going to Union City and the other part to Paducah. I followed the Paducah division and when within ten miles of Paducah I could hear the cannonading.

General Forrest was in Paducah and held the city. One of his colonels, Colonel Thomas, whose home was here, was killed right in sight of his father's house. I lost my horse, saddlebags, etc. the first evening and took a gray mule I found saddled in a field. The next morning, however, I found another soldier on my horse and got it back again by leaving him my mule.

My regiment was ordered from Paducah to Randolph, Tennessee. General Forrest with part of the command took Fort Pillow. From Fort Pillow we went back again to Mississippi. The Federals were then in Okalona, Mississippi, and my regiment was ordered to meet them and skirmish with them until we could again join the regular army. We met them and had a skirmish at Ripley, Mississippi, there losing our orderly sergeant.

The regiment joined Forrest again at Baldwin, Mississippi. We were there only one day, but on this day two soldiers were shot for desertions.

The next day, June 10th, when only a few miles out of Baldwin, Forrest with 2,500 men met this same command of Federals under General Grerson. There were 8,000 men in the command. The battle opened about ten o'clock and lasted until six in the evening. The Federals were routed; in their flight the cavalry ran over the infantry. Forrest followed then all night, chasing them about sixty miles, and when they got into Memphis he had killed and captured of their 8,000 men all but 1,000. This was the battle of Brice's Cross Roads or Tissue Mingo Creek.

All the next day we ran into Federal Soldiers, sometimes fifty in a bunch, who had been scattered during the battle. My regiment camped the next night at Salem, Mississippi.

The next morning after being Sunday, three other soldiers and myself decided to go home, as we were only about forty miles away. We started, and on the way at noon, stopping at a farmhouse for dinner, we found a Confederate officer there already, who had stationed a Negro on the road to watch for Yankees while he ate his dinner.

Just as we were seated at the table the Negro yelled that two Yankees had passed, and as they were going the same road that we were, we chased them about a mile and ran them right into a Confederate regiment. Here the two soldiers surrendered and I claimed one of their saddles. It was a new kind and just suited for army service, so I had a hard time in getting it and only succeeded by taking the matter up with the colonel.

From here we went to Wolf River and finding the river very wide, went into a cabin nearby to inquire where we could cross it. The woman, for the sum of two dollars, let her ten-year-old boy show us where we could ford the river. We carried our saddles and bridles across on a log and made the horses swim by placing them on the bank, running behind them and hitting them until they jumped into the water. We then beat them back with poles to make them swim over to the other bank.

While we were saddling our horses after crossing the river, a few more Federal soldiers came down on the opposite side. They were a part of the regiment that the colonel, to whom the two soldiers we had chased had surrendered, had gone after and scattered since we left him. We fired several shots at them but soon stopped as one man with us had not yet bridled his horse, and the shooting frightened it so that he could not control it.

And so it was all the way home; we would run into and scatter with a few shots some Federals who had been routed in the battle of Brice's Cross Roads. I was out all night but reached home next day.

After spending about three weeks at home, I heard that the Federals had started out of Memphis into Mississippi under General Smith, and I started again with some comrades to join my regiment before the two armies met.

On the Fighting Line

We went by the way of Somerville to get around the Federals but when about three miles beyond Somerville we heard that the Federals were behind us and we went back to Somerville to find if this were true. Here we learned that their main command was before us, but found two soldiers who had left the command and were going north. We decided to follow them and did so until they went to sleep in a field at midnight. We sat by the gate until it was light enough for us to see where they lay and then I took a pistol from under one's head while he yet slept rolled up in his blanket.

We left the two soldiers in the field but took their horses and started on toward the Confederate army. When we reached the regiment the battle of Harrisburg, Mississippi had been fought two days before.

After resting several weeks from the Harrisburg fight, our command was ordered to middle Tennessee to tear up the railroads behind

General Sherman who was then on his way south.

We forded the Tennessee River at Mussell Shoals, and went to Florence, Alabama and from there to Athens, Alabama. At Athens the Federals had fortifications and a blockhouse. We surrounded the town and my regiment formed a line across an old field. A car of ammunition had been set on fire; the noise of it, which we supposed to be the noise of battle, continued all night.

The next morning we were ordered to cross the railroad and get nearer the fortifications. While crossing the tracks the empty cars, which had been loaded with Federal soldiers sent from Decatur, Alabama, to reinforce their troops here, passed us but the soldiers had gotten off at a wood yard below us. We kept this reinforcement cut off until the fort had surrendered and then started up the ravine after them with a yell but were ordered to take the blockhouse.

This was the most dangerous place as those within could turn their guns on us from all directions, while they were protected by huge timbers in the house and the dirt thrown up against it. After attacking it for some time we sent a flag of truce up and demanded that they surrender or we would take it by assault. They said they would surrender if the fort had, and after giving them the necessary evidence to that fact, we gained the blockhouse too. This ended the fight at Athens and we camped that night a few miles away.

The next morning while at breakfast we heard the firing at Sulphur Trestle. This was a very high trestle with a railroad on it and was protected by another blockhouse and fort. We hurried there and were divided into groups of ten, I being in the ten who were sent out in advance to skirmish with them and find out where the main army was located. We had very little trouble here as the fort and blockhouse soon surrendered. The soldiers were mostly Negroes, and as they reached out two by two it looked like a black line about a half-mile long. From here General Buford was sent back with the prisoners over the route we had just come. I went on with Forrest who had only about 500 well-mounted men, the main command being with Buford. We went then to Spring Creek, Columbia and Pulaski, tearing up the railroad all the way. After this General Ransom with five or six thousand men was in pursuit of General Forrest who turned again to the Tennessee River. Ransom had plenty of men to completely demolish Forrest's five hundred, but he knew that Forrest's command was divided and he feared that he was in between the two divisions.

We camped one night about six miles from the Tennessee River and the next morning my company was ordered to get all the cattle in the slaughter-pen and take them to the river, but on reaching the pen we found that Company B of the Mississippi regiment had already started with the cattle, and we followed them on to the river. The river was greatly swollen and we had to cross in a dugout, four men and four horses crossing at a time. The main command was scattered at the river, as they had to cross the best way they could and many of them at night, but all finally crossed in a few days and were then out of Ransom's way.

After resting a short time the command went on up the river and at Big Sandy captured a number of gunboats. They were called ironclad boats but the Confederates called them tin-clad, as the iron on them was not heavy enough to protect them against a cannon.

Our men were placed along the banks of the river and by firing on the boats we could keep the pilots away from the pilothouses; then the boats would drift and we could capture them.

Rations were scarce among the Confederates, and we took all we could find from these boats. Pat Tobin and I got a sack of flour and a sack of sugar which we took to a farm house nearby and asked the lady of the house to make us some biscuits, dividing our sugar with her in return for some of her lard.

She made all the biscuits she could with the small amount of lard she had, and then I suggested that we use sugar in the place of lard and make more biscuits. Pat was so pleased with the idea that he offered to make them himself as he had previously been a cook on a boat and knew something of the culinary art.

The biscuits he made were such a success that we ate all of them before we touched the ones made with lard.

After capturing the boats at Big Sandy, the next raid was on Johnsville, Tennessee. The Confederates camped just across the river from Johnsville and at night dug pits and placed the cannon in them with only the mouths left out toward Johnsville. The next morning we opened fire on the town and on thirteen gunboats and twenty-four barges then in the river. The gunboats turned on the Confederates but only shelled them as the boats were at the disadvantage of being low in the river and having to fire so high above them to reach our soldiers on the bank of the river; most of their shells reached the tree tops. The Confederates, without the loss of a man, destroyed about one million dollars worth of government supplies and property beside setting fire to all the boats and barges. From Johnsville Forrest's Command went to Perryville and was ordered to cross the Tennessee River again to join Hood who now had charge of the army and was on his way to raid Nashville. My horse was sick and I knew if I took him across the river in this condition I would not be able to go any further with the command, and I decided to go home from there and rest the horse for a few days. I started with a friend that night before the army crossed the river, but after riding through the woods for about three miles the path we took led us back to a little corncrib where we had stopped early in the afternoon.

We tried this two or three times and each time came back to the corncrib. By this time they were placing picketts and I was inside of the pickett line. However, the officer placing the picketts was a former schoolmate of mine and he passed me through at once. Before I had gone very far, I met Captain Lola and explained to him where and why I was going. He then told me that he and the seven or eight men with him were on their way to Brownsville, Tennessee, where his soldiers then were, and invited me to go with them that far as one of his men. So in this way I reached home again.

Hood and Forrest while enroute to Nashville fought the battle of Franklin, Tennessee, losing in this one battle, five Confederate Generals. The battle of Nashville was fought, and Hood, after being badly beaten by General Thomas, started south again. This was in December, 1864, and January, 1865 that some of the bloodiest battles were fought in Tennessee, and during this time I was at home, but in February several other soldiers in the neighborhood and myself joined the command as it started south from Nashville.

The End of the War

Soon after we were with the command again while encamped at Verona, Mississippi, we were all marched into the town of Verona to hear General William H. Jackson and Senator V. C. Whitthorn speak. Their intention in these speeches seemed to be to encourage the soldiers and try to prepare them for the evacuation of Richmond, which they now saw, was inevitable. In the course of their speeches, they told us that if Lee should have to evacuate Richmond, he intended to come west of the Mississippi and fight through eternity.

In going back to camp that evening, I told some of my comrades that the speakers had given the whole thing away; that they had just the same as admitted that we were defeated, and I felt sure that the war would not last but a few months longer. I knew that if Lee had been overpowered in Richmond, there were not enough of us left scattered west of the Mississippi to defeat the Federal army there even if Lee's army joined us. From Verona, Mississippi, our command was ordered to Selma, Alabama to check the advance of General Wilson, who was marching in that direction with a strong force of cavalry. On the route to Selma, at Shipy Bridge about fifteen miles from Columbus, Mississippi, Forrest met two men who were deserting the army. Without any trial, Forrest ordered them marched out and shot. Their bodies were placed under a tree on which a paper was fastened giving the names of each soldier and underneath their names was written, "Shot for Desertion." He left soldiers to guard their bodies for three days so that all stragglers might see and be warned of the fate of a deserter. The effect of this deed, however, was just the opposite to what Forrest intended it should be, for each night a few soldiers would slip out and make their way back home. The number of the command was greatly reduced in this way before we reached Selma.

At Selma Forrest reinforced General Dick Taylor who was holding the fortification with about three thousand men. Forrest and Taylor together did not have men enough to hold out against Wilson's strong army, who marched in and took the fortification with very little fighting.

Forrest went from here to Demopolis, Alabama, and camped for several days. The horses generally were in a worn out condition and unfit for any kind of service. I was sent with about eight other soldiers farther down in Alabama to visit all the farms, and take the best horses we could find in exchange for these we had that were too poor

for our use. This was called "pressing horses.'" We were out several days and in most instances had to take mules, as horses all through the south were scarce.

We had many experiences on these trips, frequently we found no white man on the plantation, save, perhaps an overseer. If he happened to be away from home we had to get our information concerning the stock from the Negroes whom, in most cases, had been warned by their masters against talking to soldiers about anything. One experience, in particular, happened one Sunday when we stopped at a large old home and found the overseer gone. We could not find a horse on the place and called a Negro to get what information we could from him. In answer to our questions concerning a neighbor whose home was in sight at a distance of about a half a mile away, the Negro gave us the neighbor's name but said he knew nothing concerning the farm or the stock on it. I told the other soldiers that I thought we had better take this Negro out and settle with him as I did not believe he could be so ignorant of an adjoining farm and a neighbor so near. The Negro assured us, however, that what he had told us was all he knew as he was never allowed to leave his master's plantation; at nine in the evening the bell tapped and the Negroes were all sent to bed to stay until it tapped again at five in the morning. They were then sent to work as soon as they received their rations.

On Sunday they were allowed to stay around their cabins but if one went over to the neighbor's plantation, the overseer there would whip him severely and when he reached home their own overseer would whip him again. I left this place with a different view of slavery. The only slaves I had ever known were treated as the most treasured servants, and aside from a human standpoint, a good strong Negro was valuable property, worth a thousand dollars at any time, and his value would decrease if he were abused and not kept in a proper condition.

On our return to Demopolis we met Captain Seay, who was paymaster in the navy. He also was a cousin to one of the soldiers with us, and it was through this Captain Seay that we first heard of Lee's surrender, which we could hardly believe. Later, when we told it in camp, we were warned to hush, as we would certainly be arrested if any such talk reached the officers.

Forrest moved from Demopolis to Gainesville, Alabama, where on the 11th of May, 1865 (the same day on which Jefferson Davis was taken prisoner in Georgia) the soldiers in our command were paroled. My discharge was signed by General C. R. S. Camby, who some ten years later was sent to the west to a peace conference with the Indians and was murdered by Moddock Jack.

We journeyed home with any soldiers who happened to live near us or were going our way, and at Columbus, Mississippi, drew enough rations to last us until we were again at home.

Near Holly Springs, Mississippi we met a company of Federal soldiers on their way to Memphis and our company fell in line with them. We met a man out of Memphis who was known as a "blockade runner," as he

had brought a barrel of whiskey out of Memphis. One of the Federal soldiers rode up to the barrel, and taking a twenty dollar gold piece out of his pocket, told us all to fill our canteens, as the treat was on him. All the soldiers took advantage of his liberal offer and passed on, but I waited to see the finish. As the last soldier rode away with his canteen of whiskey, the Federal soldier dropped his twenty dollar gold piece back in his own pocket, and galloped after him, leaving the "blockade runner" standing penniless by his empty barrel. I had heard of a "Yankee trick" for many years but never knew exactly what it meant until then. I reached home the latter part of May without any further experience of interest, and so ended my career as a soldier in the Confederate Army. Since then I have remained a loyal citizen of my native state but have always had a tender feeling and a keen interest for all things connected with the Lost Cause.

(Signed)

Adolphus Wiley Montague