

Civil War Firearms by Joseph G. Bilby

One of the most singular and remarkable instances of random shooting we remember to have heard, occurred during Farragut's run of the blockade. Just as his flagship, the Hartford, reached the river midway opposite the city, a shell struck one of her guns which was being loaded, fair in the muzzle, and, passing into it, exploded, and exploding the charge, burst the gun and killed the gunners.

I had shot my gun so often (and wiped it but once) that when I had rammed down one Minie ball and nine buckshot I thought I would put in some more. I put in nine more buckshot and some paper. In ramming down the extra charge the ramrod stuck fast. I could not move it up or down. Augustine said: "If you fire your gun in that condition, it will burst. Turn it up and drive the ramrod down on that rock." I did so, but as the enemy were about to charge I had to leave the ramrod in. Thinking the gun might kick me over, I knelt down so I wouldn't have far to fall. It was well I did.

When the enemy came out of the woods, moving straight toward us, I said to my cousin: "Watch that Yankee on the dark sorrel horse." Well, when the shot went off, I fell one way and the gun another, the horse had no rider, and a gap was cut through their lines. That ramrod, the eighteen buckshot, and the Minie ball did the work. My captain said: "See here, young man, where did you get that piece of artillery?" I replied that it was a gift from General Jackson. "Well now," said he meditatively, "General Jackson should have had it mounted on wheels, so it wouldn't kick you over."

Confederate Veteran Pvt. William W. Patteson

During the battle of South Mountain, the Rebels held a very strong position. They were posted in a mountain pass, and had infantry on the heights on every side. Our men were compelled to carry the place by storm. The position seemed impregnable.

A band of Rebels occupied a ledge on the extreme right, as the Colonel approached with a few of his men. The unseen force poured upon them a volley. Col. Hugh McNeil, on the instant, gave the command: "Pour your fire upon those rocks!"

The Bucktails hesitated, it was not an order they were accustomed to receive; they had always picked their men. "Fire!" thundered the Colonel; "I tell you to fire on those rocks!" The men obeyed. For some time an irregular fire was kept up, the Bucktails sheltering themselves, as best they could, behind trees and rocks. On a sudden McNeil caught sight of two rebels peering through an opening in the works to get aim. The eyes of the men followed their commander, and half a dozen rifles were leveled in that direction.

"Wait a minute," said the Colonel; "I will try my hand. There is nothing like killing two birds with one stone." The two rebels were not in line, but one stood a little distance back of the other, while just in front of the foremost was a slanting rock. Col. McNeil seized a rifle, raised it, glanced a moment along the polished barrel; a report followed,

and both the rebels disappeared. At that moment a loud cheer a little distance beyond rent the air. "All is right now," cried the Colonel; "charge the rascals."

The men sprang up among the rocks in an instant. The affrighted rebels turned to run, but encountered another body of the Bucktails and were obliged to surrender. Not a man of them escaped. Every one saw the object of the Colonel's order to fire at random among the rocks. He had sent a party around to the rear, and meant thus to attract their attention. It was a perfect success. The two rebels by the opening in the ledge were found lying there stiff and cold. Col. McNeil's bullet had struck the slanting rock in front of them, glanced, and passed through both their heads. There it lay beside them, flattened. The Colonel picked it up, and put it in his pocket.

Anecdotes, Poetry and Incidents of the War: North and South, 1860-1865 Frank Moore, editor

NOTE: Col. Hugh W. McNeil commanded the 13th Pennsylvania Reserves (1st Rifles) at the Battle of South Mountain. Col. McNeil was killed days later at Antietam.

I had a Sergeant Driscoll, a brave man, and one of the best shots in the brigade. When charging at Malvern Hill (July 1, 1862) a company was posted in a clump of trees, who kept up a fierce fire on us, and actually charged out at our advance. Their officer seemed to be a daring, reckless boy, and I said to Driscoll, "If that officer is not taken down, many of us will fall before we pass that clump."

"Leave that to me," said Driscoll; so he raised his rifle, and the moment the officer exposed himself again bang went Driscoll, and over went the officer, his company at once breaking away.

As we passed the place I said, "Driscoll, see if that officer is dead, he was a brave fellow." I stood looking on, Driscoll turned him over on his back. He opened his eyes for a moment, and faintly murmured "Father", and then closed them forever. I will forever recollect the frantic grief of Driscoll; it was harrowing to witness. He was his son, who had gone south before the war. And what became of Driscoll afterwards?

Well, we were ordered to charge, and I left him there; but, as we were closing with the enemy, he rushed up, with his coat off, and, clutching his musket, charged right up at the enemy, calling on the men to follow. He soon fell, but jumped up again. We knew he was wounded. On he dashed, but he soon rolled over like a top. When we came up he was dead, riddled with bullets.