

Diary of a Tar Heal Soldier: Lesson 6

PREFACE

This diary was commenced for the fun of writing down my experience as a soldier from the Old North State. I never thought for a moment that I would put it in print; but now that I am getting old and have read so many histories written by our officers, but have never seen in print a history written by a private.

I know that my diary is truly the life of the man behind the gun, therefore I make bold to publish it. I am sure my experience was that of other privates, and a true history of my companies and regiments, as well as the Brigade, Division, and even Corp that I belonged to. I am certain that the men of '61 to '65 who read this will recall most vividly the camping, marching, fighting and suffering they endured in those never-to-be-forgotten days of long ago. And to the younger generation of Southern-born it will show how we endured and suffered, but still fought on for the cause we know was right.

April 25, 1861 - I belong to the Charlotte Grays, Company C, First North Carolina Regiment. We left home for Raleigh. Our company is commanded by Capt. Egbert Ross. We are all boys between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. We offered our services to Governor Ellis, but were afraid he would not take us, as we are so young; but before we were called out our company was ordered to go to the United States Mint in our town and take same. We marched down to it, and it was surrendered to us. We guarded it several days, when we were ordered to Raleigh, and left on the above date.

Our trip was full of joy and pleasure, for at every station where our train stopped the ladies showered us with flowers and Godspeed. We marched to the Fair Grounds. The streets were lined with people, cheering us. When we got there our company was given quarters, and, lo and behold! horse stables with straw for bedding is what we got. I know we all thought it a disgrace for us to sleep in such places with our fine uniforms - not even a washstand, or any place to hang our clothes on. They didn't even give us a looking-glass.

Our company was put in the First North Carolina Regiment, commanded by Col. D. H. Hill, Lieut.-Col. C. C. Lee, and Maj. James H. Lane.

We enlisted for six months. Our State went out of the Union on May 20th, and we were sent to Richmond, Va., on the 21st. Stayed there several days, when we were

ordered to Yorktown, Va. Here they gave us tents to sleep in. This looked more like soldering, but we would have liked to have had some of that straw in Raleigh.

The day after we got here our company was sent out with spades and shovels to make breastworks - and to think of the indignity! We were expected to do the digging! Why, of course, I never thought that this was work for soldiers to do, but we had to do it. Gee! What hands I had after a few days' work. I know I never had a pick or a shovel in my hand to work with in my life.

A few days after that a squad of us were sent out to cut down trees, and, by George! they gave me an axe and told me to go to work. Well, I cut all over my tree until the lieutenant commanding, seeing how nice I was marking it, asked me what I had done before I became a soldier. I told him I was a clerk in a dry-goods store. He said he thought so from the way I was cutting timber. He relieved me - but what insults are put on us who came to fight the Yankees! Why, he gave me two buckets and told me to carry water to the men that could cut.

We changed camp several times, until about the 3d of June, when we marched fifteen miles and halted at Bethel Church, and again commenced making breastworks. Our rations did not suit us. We wanted a change of diet, but there were strict orders from Col. D. H. Hill that we should not go out foraging. Well, Bill Stone, Alie Todd and myself put on our knapsacks and went to the creek to wash our clothes, but when we got there we forgot to wash. We took a good long walk away from the camp, and saw several shoats. We ran one down, held it so it could not squeal, then killed it, cut it in small pieces, put it in our knapsacks, returned to the creek, and from there to camp, where we shared it with the boys. It tasted good.

Our comrade Ernheart did not fare so well. He went to a place where he knew he could get some honey. He got it all right, but he got the bees, also. His face and hands were a sight when he got the beehive to camp.

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