

Thrilling Civil War Days

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

By Rev. L. M. Coffelt, D. D.

The Civil War broke out in my 12th year and it was with thrilling interest I trotted along beside the fifers and drummers as they beat time for the companies recruited in Bedford county when they marched through the streets to entrain for the seat of war, Lieutenant Barnsdollar, afterward Captain, with his Zouaves, beau ideal of a handsome officer, Captain Filler, later a Colonel and after the war, editor of the Philadelphia Record, Captain Saul Metzger and other officers passed in frequently recurring succession with companies composed of well known youths. Alas! Many of these older schoolmates who went forth with high hopes of glory soon were laid in too early graves, languished in hospitals or rotted in prison pens. The first regiment of troops from the vicinity spent their first three years enlistment in garrison duty on the coast of the Carolinas. When their term of enlistment expired, they returned and related what a picnic they had enjoyed and the regiment's quota of 1800 men for re-enlistment was overfilled. But on returning to the army they were ordered into active service under Grant in the Wilderness Campaign and at the battle of Cold Harbor into which they went near 2000 strong, they came out able to muster barely 200. Of a truth, Bedford county became a "Bochin," the place of weeping.

From the firing of Fort Sumpter, a shot that struck every northern heart, to the capitulation at Appomattox, I followed the course of the war with thrilling interest as it was published daily in the Philadelphia Public Ledger. Indeed, I think I could have written a history of the war from memory, being conversant with the movements of the troops of the several armies and even the losses sustained in every great battle from start to finish. With what a thrill did I read the long dispatches sent late at night from John Cessna's office to my father, depicting the phases of the first Bull Run battle, with what heart-sickness I read of the fearful disaster of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, in which 60,000 men were sacrificed by incompetent commanders. What elation over the victory of Antietam, how great the suspense over the fate of Gettysburg, the booming of whose guns I fancied I could hear on July 4. The taking of Donelson, Vicksburg, Shiloh and Chickamauga, the battle in the clouds at Chattanooga, Sherman marching through Georgia, the little Monitor at Hampton Roads, the heroism of Farragut at New Orleans, McClellan at Gaines Mills, Grant's final pounding the Confederacy to dust as with the Hammer of Thor and Sheridan breaking through Lee's lines on a Sunday—all were graven on my memory as with pen or iron forever. Just before the battle of Gettysburg, Lee, in invading Pennsylvania, surrounded General Milroy at Winchester, Va. I have seen and talked with the man, Colonel Glass, who lived about 5 miles west of Winchester, who guided Early's army around behind the hills until, without discovery, they had completely surrounded General Milroy's little force of 9000, thinking to make them an easy conquest. But braver than General Milroy never lived. For three days, he held out against a host. I have seen the swinging cradle perched at the top of a high telegraph pole on the heights of Winchester to which he mounted and with a glass observed the movements of the foe. On the night of the third day, he summoned his officers and informed them that his force could hold out no longer, and if they were willing, though he would coerce no man's will, he would at their head, make trial of escape. As for himself, he would never surrender. Five thousand of his men with Milroy at their head cut their way through and made their way to Everett, Pennsylvania, 8 miles from my home. General Milroy was reprimanded and relieved for not retiring in time when he should have been ordered for delaying Lee's army for three days, giving Meade time to come up with Lee at Gettysburg and secure the advantage of position. General Miles, at Harper's Ferry, not only did retire but surrendered 13,000 men without striking a blow.

On hearing of the arrival of Milroy's army at Everett, my brother, Charles and myself, then in my 14th year, determined without our parents knowledge to go afoot to the camp and satisfy our curiosity to see something of real soldier life. We were so young that we passed the sentinels without difficulty, but found, while it was easy to get into the lines, it was not easy to get out. We had to get a Provost Marshall's permit to make our progress. We delved pretty thoroughly into the mysteries of camp and before returning home we edged our way without stoppage into the very presence of General Shields, surrounded with his staff, on the hotel porch and listened eagerly to all that was going forward. But we experienced somewhat of a thrilling surprise when a courier, covered with dust, his horse afoam, flung himself from the saddle, rushed up the hotel steps to the general, saluted and shouted, "The Rebel Cavalry have arrived at McConnellsburg, 25 miles distant." The General turned to an orderly and said, "Take my horse to the Smith-man across the street and have him shot as quick as Hell can scorch a feather." His army, without artillery and many of his men even without guns which had been thrown away in their flight were in no condition to put up a fight and in 30 minutes the whole force resumed their retreat westward to camp next at my own county town of Bedford. My brother and myself made an orderly retreat

and with this taste of war's alarms were borne homewards in the general flight, with this impression, that no scene on earth is more terrible than a defeated army in a panicky retreat.

I would like to detain my gentle readers with just one other incident that happened in the pre-college period, when I was about 16 years old. My father and myself were driving two noble horses, 16 1/2 hands high, in a Germantown 2-seated carriage from Winchester to Everett, when we arrived at the Potomac river opposite Hancock, Maryland. A ferry of the flat-boat wire type, propelled across by the current of the river was in use but unfortunately the ferryman was absent from his post and would not return for several days. Not wishing to be delayed, we questioned his wife as to a possible fording of the stream which was at least one-half mile wide. She pointed to the ford which the farmers sometimes ventured in low water. We should not have attempted the unknown passage, indeed, my father strongly vetoed the venture but I overcame his objections with foolish presumption so far that he agreed, if I would drive. My fishing experience in home rivers helped me to diagnose the situation and avoiding the still waters I kept just above the riffle. But the great rocks in the bed caused the horses to flounder and the carriage to careen dangerously. When we arrived at the middle of the stream the water was flowing six inches deep in the carriage, one of the horses seemed as if he was trying to climb a house roof. At this moment the same horses' trace came off the single-tree and the stop necessary to put it on probably saved our lives. The horse seemed to have compressed his feet in a space no bigger than a bushel basket and stood tremblingly leaning upstream. I saw I could not put it on without dangerously disturbing his balance and debated whether I should jump in the river breast deep. Happily I decided to try putting it on while standing on the tongue and I will never forget the intelligence of that horse and how he cooperated in refraining from struggling while I reached over his back and got hold of the outside trace and with care re-fastened it to the singletree. Before getting into the carriage I said to my father, "I will take a survey of what is ahead," but the moment I looked I cried, "My God! Father, the rock our horse was scrambling up is as big as a house and the water ahead is full of boulders. I must have gotten too far upstream." Instead of getting in the carriage I got astride the near horse to better see what was ahead and turned the team abruptly downstream to shun the big rock. I can see that hickory tongue bend yet as the front wheel struck the rock and shifted the whole carriage down the river. But the tongue was good stuff and held and I can see and hear my father still as he sat in the back seat, now lifted to heaven and now plunged down into the depths, murmuring prayers, voicing his terror as we went floundering and plunging the remaining distance to the shore. I am not ashamed to confess that was one of the occasions I was somewhat religious and gave my heartfelt thanks to God for our safe deliverance.

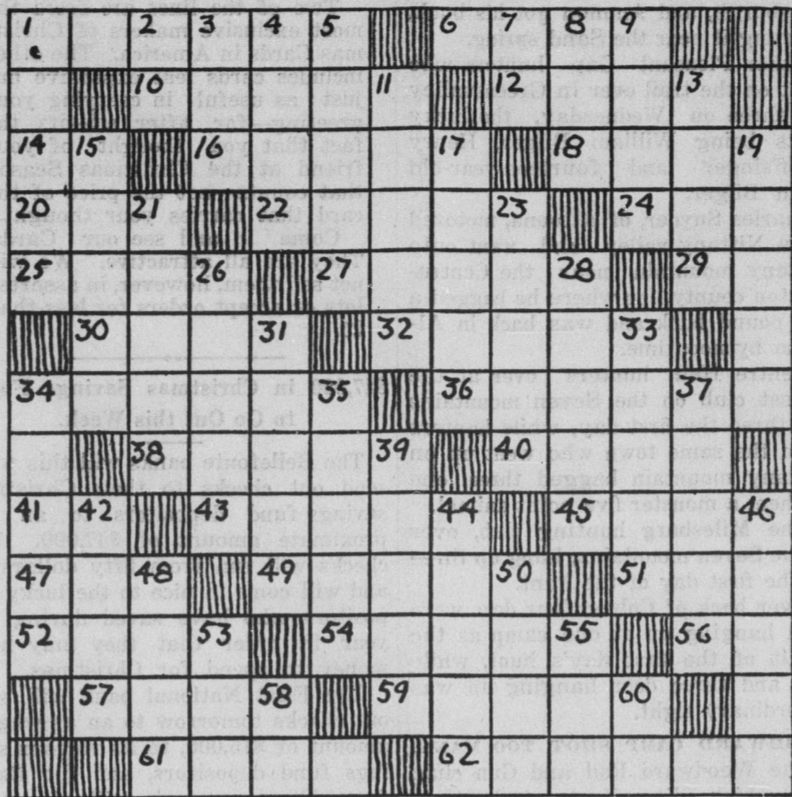
One autumn afternoon I was engaged carting apples from the orchard to the cellar for winter storage. On returning for a fresh load I thoughtlessly perched myself on an upturned flour barrel. Reins in hand while driving down a fairly steep roadway and going over a rough place, the barrel tilted and I was tumbled in a somersault, landing on my back on the ground with head to the cart and heels furthest away. I saw the great juggernaut cart coming and shut my eyes certain it would crush my head like an egg shell. Squirring backward as I did, the great wheel grazed my head and plastered my hair in the sand. My very high spirits of that day evaporated and it was a sobered lad who continued his task feeling with David that there had been not a "step" but a hairbreadth betwixt me and death and that only the sparing Providence of God had saved me from destruction.

Permit me to photograph at this point, a man, Abe Oylar by name, unique and original, who might well have figured in the pages of fiction. He lived on the mountains near my home in improvised shelters made with a small axe he always carried in his belt. With no companion but a small dog, he shunned all the labors and habits of men. He was a "mighty hunter" and an unrivaled shot. No animal could escape him and the grey squirrel vainly sought refuge in the holes in the highest trees for without gaffs to aid he could climb any tree and with axe cut the squirrel out from his haunt and cast him down to his dog. Often did I hear his whoop on the mountains announcing his success on the trail. It was better than a play to hear him describe how he was caught in his cabin on an island in Dunning's Creek which was subject to sudden and mighty freshets. How he awoke in the morning and on stepping from his hammock found himself in water up to his neck. Climbing to the roof, he awaited all day the abatement of the flood but it only rose higher. All he could do late in the afternoon was to make a swim for it. To the east, the stream was narrow but the current too swift and the down floating timbers made such an attempt fool hardy. He strapped his gun and clothes on his back and hung his shoes about his neck and started upon his perilous half mile battle with the water floods to reach the western shore. To his grief he found his impedimenta too much and he said his shoes especially, filling with water, dragged his head under, threatening to drown him and he had most reluctantly to abandon them. Great was the astonishment of the failers in Barnhart's barn, on gazing over the waste of waters, to see this strange, amphibian monster, his head bobbing up and down in his coonskin cap, finally emerge at the barnyard and reveal the familiar features of the well known Abe. When the Civil War broke out, Abe enlisted as a sharpshooter and was in

HOW TO SOLVE A CROSS-WORD PUZZLE

When the correct letters are placed in the white spaces this puzzle will spell words both vertically and horizontally. The first letter in each word is indicated by a number, which refers to the definition listed below the puzzle. Thus No. 1 under the column headed "horizontal" defines a word which will fill the white spaces up to the first black square to the right, and a number under "vertical" defines a word which will fill all the white squares to the next black one below. No letters go in the black spaces. All words used are dictionary words, except proper names. Abbreviations, slang, initials, technical terms and obsolete forms are indicated in the definitions.

CROSS-WORD PUZZLE No. 3.



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Horizontal.

- 1—Strand of false hair
- 6—To loiter, or be idle
- 10—Fatigues
- 12—To urge on
- 14—Preposition
- 16—Portico
- 18—Woody plant
- 20—Skill
- 22—Holes in skin
- 24—Free, or loose
- 25—Group of letters
- 27—Mixture of vegetables
- 29—Note of scale
- 30—Was attired in
- 32—Natives of Poland
- 34—Changes
- 38—Wise men
- 40—To father
- 41—Preposition
- 43—Support on a larger vessel for a smaller boat
- 45—Metal container
- 47—Piece of ground
- 49—Citrus fruit
- 51—Over there
- 52—God of love
- 54—Native of the capital of Italy
- 56—Sun god
- 59—At no time
- 62—To colonize

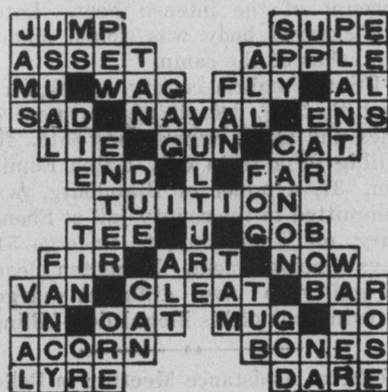
Vertical.

- 1—Indian's wife
- 2—That thing
- 3—Fee
- 4—Harvest of grain
- 5—Central figure in a romance (pl.)
- 7—Bone
- 8—Fitting
- 9—To roll up, as a flag
- 11—A fight
- 13—To bore out
- 15—To skulk
- 17—Lowest class of serf among ancient Spartans
- 19—Doors to the outside in a theater
- 21—Runs along, as a horse
- 23—Sellings
- 26—To fear
- 28—To resign from a Masonic lodge
- 31—Potential energy
- 33—Mist
- 35—To cut in two
- 37—Highest voice in a quartet
- 39—Famous youth who met a plemian
- 42—Arsenal
- 44—Volumes
- 46—The jack of a suit of cards
- 48—To work
- 50—Part of a church
- 53—Ocean
- 55—Washed material
- 58—Note of scale
- 60—Right (abbr.)

Solution will appear in next issue.

many a heavy fight. Finally in the Battle of the Wilderness under Grant, a shell struck him and shattered his leg from the knee down. He said this did not trouble him so much but when he dragged himself to a tree, another shell "smashed" his breast and one arm. He was carried from the field, taken to Fortress Monroe and his leg amputated. He came home but gangrene set in and his limb had to be re-amputated. I recall distinctly the night it occurred. The doctor was too intoxicated for the duty and a young novice, studying medicine, Nicodemus, by name, performed a successful operation. Abe was not born in the woods to be scared by an owl nor to be killed by shattering shells. On meeting Abe of a morning and asking him how he fared, he used to reply, "Fine! Only I have the rheumatiz bad in my wooden leg and I suffer every now and then with the blind sthaegers." There was something inimitable in the pronunciation of "Stagers." Indeed, his vocabulary was always enough in itself to keep you in constant laughter. After the war he became comparatively civilized, married, reared a family and in spite of his disabilities, split rails, rived shingles, mended shoes and died the death of a man who, without hope of reward, did his devoir bravely for his country and purchased its deliverance from slavery and disruption at a great price.

Solution of Cross-word puzzle No. 3.



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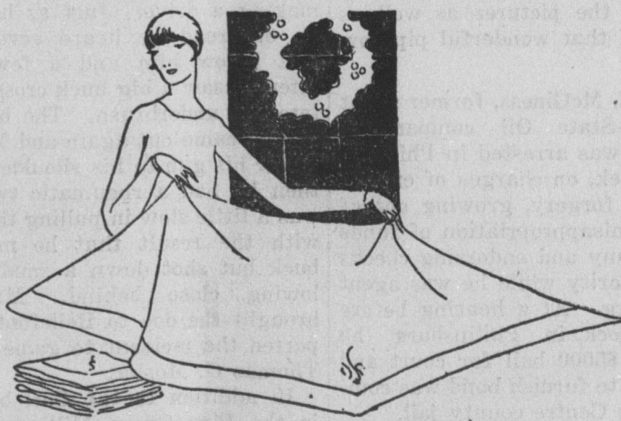
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