THE COLUMBIAN,

COLUMBIA DEMOCRAT, STAR OF THE NORTH AND COLUMBIAN CONSOLIDATED.)

Issued weekly, every Friday morning, at BLOOMSBURG, COLUMBIA COUNTY, PA.

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The Columbian.

C. B. BROCKWAY, G. E. ELWELL, } Editors and Proprietors.

BLOOMSBURG, PA., FRIDAY, JULY 5, 1878.

THE COLUMBIAN, VOL. XII, NO. 26
COLUMBIA DEMOCRAT, VOL. XLII, NO. 44

Columbia County Official Directory.

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Bloomsburg Official Directory.

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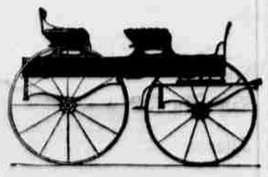

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Select Story.

BULLET MARKS.

A WIMBLEDON STORY.

We were sitting round our tent one evening last year, at Wimbledon—the "we" being, our major, the captain and sub of our company, his covering sergeant, Corporal Williams, and a certain sapper, to wit myself. We were drinking pale ale and smoking, as was everyone else in the hundred tents around us.

'Here's my last bull's eye,' and the sergeant produced from his cap-pouch a flattened bullet, turned inside out as nearly as possible.

'What's the cause of all that, I wonder, said the corporal.

'You see,' said the captain—being an engineer, he was bound to know—'when the point of the bullet strikes the target, part of the lead is melted by the development of heat caused by the sudden arrest of the bullet's motion, and goes off in the splash, the rest of the bullet is softened by the heat; and inasmuch as the parts must stop in their order of succession, the edge of the cup of the bullet is driven in level with the base of the cup. Is that so major?'

'Yes, quite right; but if you like, I can spin you a yarn about these said bullets, that may just cast out these weeds.'

'Well, let's have it.'

I had a sort of a second cousin, Gerald Ashton, who had been brought up with myself and my sister, my father being his guardian.

We had all been like brothers and sister when one day he woke up to find he could not live without a nearer relationship to her. He spoke to the old gentleman, and there was a little family fracas.

He had only a hundred a year, and my father did not think that was enough, though Gerald did; there was no objection at all in other respects—let him earn some more and they would see—wait a little—you know the kind of thing an old gentleman would say. Well, it was of no use. He said he felt himself a burden; there was no scope for his energies, and he would go—and go he did.

He disappeared, and in six months after we heard he was with, say the Fortieth Dragoons, in India.

We wrote, and offered to buy his discharge but he 'wouldn't have none of us.' He liked it very well; was already corporal; expected the three stripes soon; and was a 'Gentleman Jack' with his comrades.

Some six months after this I was sent out to India with a company, and as my sister was getting thin and showing other signs of the desirability of a sea voyage, and of a warm climate, it was agreed I should take her over.

We reached Calcutta, and in a few weeks settled down.

There was war going on, and I was placed in charge of one of the chief depots for small-arms and ammunition, besides having my regular duties with the company.

One day I was down at the store when my sister arrived, pale and breathless.

"Look, Charles, poor Gerald's in dreadful trouble."

I put her into an office chair, and took the newspaper and read:

'Yesterday evening as an officer of the Fortieth Dragoon Guards was returning to camp he was fired at from behind a clump of bushes; the bullet struck him in the thigh and lodged in the saddle. Although wounded so severely he had the presence of mind to ride straight to the bushes, and there found one of his own men, a corporal of the troops, nicknamed 'Gentleman Jack' by his comrades, whose rifle was still smoking from the discharge. Fortunately, at this moment the guard arrived, and the man was once at arrested. A court-martial will of course be held at once, and although the man had previously borne a good character and is reported to be respectably connected, it is to be hoped he will receive the proper reward for so abominable a crime.'

'Oh,' I said, 'this is all nonsense. Gerald's no murderer, or else he's very much changed. I'll see what they say at headquarters.'

'Do for God's sake go. If anything happens to Gerald I should never forgive myself, for if I had run away with him when papa was so cruel, he never would have enlisted at all.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Meggie, but go home and I'll come with the telegraph news.'

I went to headquarters; they gave me permission to use the telegraph for a question or two. The report was not encouraging.

It was our Gerald—the officer had seen the flash and heard the report—an extremely loud report, as if there had been two charges of powder in the carbine.

The bullet was found in the saddle, and one cartridge was missing from his twenty rounds. The court-martial had declared him guilty, and the general's confirmation of the sentence had just arrived. Fifty lashes in the camp square and four years' imprisonment in the civil jail. Sentence to be carried out on the 12th. Everybody was sorry, but quite convinced he had tried to murder his superior officer. No one could understand with what motive.

His statement in defense was that he had just been returning from guard, when he remembered that he had forgotten to bring in a book one of the officers had asked him to bring in from the town, some three miles distant. Without stopping to think he walked off at once, got the book, and was within half a mile of the camp, when he fancied he saw a tiger. He got behind the bushes to watch, and saw one making for the distant camp. Anxious to secure the prize, he incautiously broke open one of the packages, and loaded to have a shot at it. He had covered the beast, and was firing at the tiger, when he heard another report simultaneously with that of his carbine. He saw the tiger roll right over as if shot, and then bound away. In another instant the officer came round the top bleeding, and ordered him into arrest. He was quite sure that he hit the tiger, and equally sure that another rifle was fired as the same moment that he pulled the trigger.

Of course such a lame statement had no effect, and he was sentenced.

I could not help thinking that there was a flaw in the evidence. How was it if there was, as agreed, a loud report—which meant a full charge of powder—that the bullet stopped at the saddle instead of going through both saddle and horse. That was a great discrepancy—a full charge would have made a loud report, and sent it right through anything at a distance of 200 yards. I felt there was something wrong, and made up my mind to go on the spot. I had but six days to go in, but much might be done. Margaret insisted on going with me in spite of all I could do to keep her away.

'Have I not done all you wished me to do since we have been out here? Do, for Heaven's sake, let me have my way in this.'

So we went up the country in post haste.

I was, of course, as one of the staff, admitted to see Gerald, whom I found terribly cut up.

'I don't mind the imprisonment; it's the disgrace! The lashes! My God! I shall kill myself directly I get loose after it, I know I shall.'

'No, no,' said Meggie; 'don't, for my sake. Oh, Gerald! if you knew how I have suffered for weeks past, you would live for my sake, I do not care about the brand of lashes. I know you are innocent, and that there has been some horrible blunder committed in this matter. Oh, Willie, dear, do think of something to save him.'

'Oh, do, there's a good fellow! get me some stuff that will make an end of me.'

'Don't talk like that Gerald; there's some infernal mistake in it. Don't despair yet. Let's go over the ground again step by step,' and I made him tell the whole story over again.

'It seems to me, Gerald, we want not a few things to show you are not guilty. We want the tiger you shot at, and that we shan't get; and we want the clue to the mystery of the other rifle.'

'Oh, I've thought of it all till I'm sick. I don't care what happens now. I'll wait till the day before it's to come off, and then break my head against the walls.'

'Don't be a fool, Gerald! I'm sure you are innocent. So is Margaret.'

'Yes; so are a hundred others; but it's all no use. In three days I am disgraced for life, if I live.'

'Well, I must leave you now, and see what I can do.'

'Let me have five minutes with Meggie, will you?'

I then left them alone for some ten minutes, and then told Meggie she must go home with me.

I was beaten; I could not see how I could get any fresh evidence, and without that a reprieve—a postponement—was impossible.

I went to the wounded officer, the captain of his own company, and got him to tell his own story; it was just the same thing over again, always the exceedingly loud report, and the fouled and still smoking carbine.

'I would,' said the captain, 'have given the price of my commission rather than have it happen. He's as fine a fellow as ever sat on a horse, brave, kind and as thorough a gentleman as the colonel himself; I always made him my orderly when I could, so as to have company. I declare to you that I did my best at the court-martial for him, and got into disgrace with the general presiding for coloring my statements—that was his expression—so as to favor the prisoner. I almost sniveled when I heard the sentence as if he had been my brother. The men are mad about it; there has not been a lash or punishment of any kind in the regiment for the last twenty five years.'

I hardly knew how to pass time; I tried to think, but my ideas only traveled in the same old grooves again.

I invited the assistant surgeon to come up to my quarters, and introduced him to my sister. He was quite a young fellow, and seemed quite flattered by my simple attention, for in the army they have not made up their minds whether a medical officer should be treated as a gentleman; but the strangest thing I ever saw in my life was my sister's conduct. Of course, speaking to you fellows I shan't be misunderstood, and some of you have seen her. She laid herself out to please him to an extent I never should have thought my dear grave Meggie capable of; sang to him; and made eyes at him till I thought her brain was turned. She said she should so like to see his quarters, asked him to ask us to lunch, and shut me up like a rat-trap when I ventured to hint that it might not be convenient.

Well, he went away at last as mad as she, I spoke to her after he was gone, and she fell into my arms, sobbing as if her heart was breaking, and then, without a word of explanation, ran out of the room.

Next day we went to his quarters, and nothing would satisfy her but that he should mix up some medicine for her out of the bottles of his traveling case. There she was handling and sniffling, and tasting everything, like a child or ten rather than a girl of eighteen. She sent him about the room; made him bring books from the opposite side of it so that she might read about the proprietors of the drugs; and, in short, behaved so like a lunatic that I thought the trouble about Gerald must have affected her mind. I got her away at last, and intended to insist on her remaining in the house and putting some ice to her head. It was quite unnecessary, the minute we left the surgery she was calm and silent as a nun.

Well, the days passed in some sort of dreary fashion till the evening of the 11th. I had been asked during the day to go down with the officers to some rifle practice, at some temporary marks, and I went down.

It was rather late when I rode up to the firing point, and they were just leaving off, and one of them came up and said:

'I say, captain, tell us the cause of these new bullets turning inside out?' and he handed me a bullet reversed—just such another as Williams has in his hand.

I took it, just to explain the matter to him, when a thought struck my mind like a flash of lightning.

'Saved, by God!' I exclaimed. 'Who's got the bullet out of the saddle?'

'What bullet?'

'Gerald's—my cousin's.'

'Oh, 'Gentleman Jack's' affair. The doctor got it.'

'Where is he?'

'Don't know—quarters I think.'

'No, he's come into the town; I saw him on the road as we came by.

I sped into the town, leaving them to think what they pleased, and spent more than two hours finding the doctor. At last I caught him.

In another minute we were riding full gallop to his head quarters.

He had the bullet—a little bruised and singularly flattened, and blunted, at the point—it must have been just spent when it struck.

I then went to the sergeant who had charge of the nineteen rounds of ammunition that were found in Gerald's pouch. About midnight I contrived to find him, and after some little delay I got possession of them.

I then returned to the doctor, and we compared the nineteen bullets with the one found in the saddle. I then ran to the telegraph clerk, roused him out of bed, and told him to telegraph to the headquarters of Calcutta, to my lieutenant in charge of the magazines.

After an hour's waiting, ringing at the bell, an answer came that the night watchman would fetch the lieutenant. I then sent message No. 1:

'Examine the books and see the date on which the last ammunition was sent for the use of the Fortieth Dragoons; find the same parcel, and carefully remove one cartridge from each of twenty packets, selected at random; take out bullets and remove plugs, and send No. in base of cup of bullets.''

The answer came back that he understood, and would rouse up the people to do it.

After an hour and a half the answer came back:

'All the bullets are numbered with a dot on the right.'

I then sent message No. 2:

'Examine what cartridges bear the No. 2 with a dot on the left, and report to whom issued, and when; report quickly—a man's life depends on the speed.'

Again I waited another hour. No answer came.

It was getting late—half past two; at four the parade would take place; I urged more speed.

The reply came:

'We have ten men breaking open barrels and searching. No No. 2 yet found.''

At last it came:

'One barrel No. 2 in store; the rest of the same shipment was damaged and useless, and sold in bulk to native dealers for value as old metal at one of the clearance sales some time ago.'

I had learned all I could. I spurred back to camp with the bullets, from which I have never parted in my pouch. I shall never forget the scene.

In the middle of the camp the men were drawn up in three sides of a square; in the centre of the square were the triangles, with Gerald lashed to them. I saw them as I came down the hill take off his jacket and lash his wrists. I sped on. I could see the old colonel with the paper in his hand, standing alone, and then I saw nothing more, for a dip in the road concealed them; as I rose again to the crest at less than a quarter of a mile, I saw a woman rush in from between the ranks toward the triangles, holding something in her hand. I darted on, and rushed into the square, but just in time to see the farrier's arm as the lash was descending, and to see that the woman was my sister, and that she was being led away between two sergeants.

'Stop, colonel, for the love of God!' I cried, with my hand still grasping the farrier's arm; 'I have evidence to prove the man not guilty.'

I then showed the colonel the bullet that had come from the saddle and the others from the pouch, and pointed out to him that while one was marked No. 2, the others were all marked No. 5, with a dot. I assured him on my honor as an officer and a gentleman, that it was almost impossible that a No. 2 bullet could by any chance get into a packet of No. 5 bullets. He was only too glad to hear me, and agreed to postpone the execution of the sentene until further orders from the general of the division.

I've heard some shouts, and I've seen some displays of enthusiasm in my time, but I never shall forget the shout that rose the minute that the colonel had pronounced that the execution of the sentence on Corporal Ashton would be postponed until further orders.

The men had been standing at 'attention,' many of them with the tears rolling down their cheeks, but when they heard 'postponed,' they broke ranks, rushed up to the triangles, cut the lashing, broke the cat, screamed, shouted, and danced like madmen.

Three cheers for 'Gentlemen Jack,' and his wife! Again! again, boys!'

Officers and all joined in for a few minutes. There stood the old gray-headed colonel in the midst of a scene that out-bedlamed Bedlam.

As for me I was like a man in a dream; I felt a hundred hands grasping mine. I had my sister sobbing in my arms, and then I heard the colonel say to the bugler, 'Sound the assembly.'

What a change! In less than a minute I stood by the fallen triangles in the centre of the three lines of living statues. Not a sound; not a movement.

'Major Jackson, reform your column and break off your men,' said the colonel; and then walked away with myself and sister.

'But what did your sister do there?'

'Well, she had promised Gerald that he should not suffer the disgrace of the lash; and had, during the hour I thought she was fooling with the doctor, managed to get hold of his bottle of prussic acid, and had rushed out with half of it for him and half for herself; and her appearance had so thoroughly surprised every one that she had reached the triangles, and almost raised it to his lips, when the doctor recognized his own blue bottle, struck her hand a violent blow, and dashed it on the ground, besides disabling her from getting her own share.

'And how did the affair end? Was the general of the division satisfied?'

I don't think he would have been with that evidence alone, and so we went about to hunt for more. I begged that, as we had found so much, Gerald might be permitted to accompany a party of search, under a guard, to find the missing tiger.

We went there. Meggie insisted on joining us. All the officers off duty went, and about half the men.

Gerald then pointed out the spot where he had stood, and where he shot the tiger; and from that point we started, crossing and recrossing, till there could not have been anything as large as a half crown that could be hidden.

Meggie and I were riding in front of the line, when Meggie exclaimed:

'What a horrible smell comes from that copse.'

'Don't smell anything, Meg.'

'You've lived here so long that you've no sense of smell left.

Of course, as Meggie was with us, Blinkers was there, too. Blinkers advanced to the copse—paused—and rushed underneath the grass barking as if infuriated.

'There's something in there, Willie.'

Some of the others coming up, we pushed our way into the depths, guided by the frantic bark of Blinkers, and after being much scratched and torn, found ourselves in a trampled circle of jungle grass, with the half-devoured remains of a large tiger.

The doctor was sent for, and the wound discovered; the beast had evidently been lamed, the bullet breaking the fore leg. It was also evident that, wounded as it was, it had lingered on till it was mere skin and bone and had died within the last few days. Assisted by some of the natives, the good-natured doctor commenced the horrible task of searching for the bullet, and after half an hour's labor, the most disgusting he had ever undergone, it was found flattened against the large bone of the hind leg, and handed to me.

Never shall I forget the pleasure I felt when I saw on the rescued bullet the No. 5, with a dot as fresh and clear as if it had just come from the pressing machine.

Great was the rejoicing that night in the camp of the Fortieth. Blue fires were burnt, the band came and serenaded Meggie. The whole of the officers, including the old colonel, came as to a levee; but still I found there was one thing more to be found out. How did the No. 2 bullet get into the saddle?

At length I inquired whether any of the officers missed their ar