

# WHEN BOYS WERE MEN

By JOHN HABBERTON

Author of "Helen's Babies," "George Washington," Etc.

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Really, when we halted about noon my hunger had made me mean spirited enough to go deliberately in search of my friendly enemy who owned the bacon and frying pan. Fortunately, my poor fellow, he was eating his last bit of food apparently, for his haversack was inside out and lying by the fire to dry. He recognized me, and as the guard allowed me to speak to him he said:

"It seems too bad to waste the little fat that's left in the skillet, don't it? Wonder of that ain't an ear of corn in that field that we could roast?"

"It's all too hard," said I, shaking my head sadly as I remembered my search of the day before.

"The answer's better," said he.

I never was more willing to be convinced. In a single minute I was back from the field with several ears. The Johnny selected the hardest, shelled it in his pan, shook it a little while before he put it over the fire, then parched it until it was a deep brown and poured it upon the top of his hat to cool. Not a bit of the bacon fat remained in the pan, but each grain of corn was as glossy as if varnished.

"That!" said he, after a moment or two, as he poured a full half of the corn into a hot hunk and passed it to me. "Just let it cool outside that an' see if you wasn't wrong thinkin' the corn too hard."

"Bless that rebel! I do believe that parched corn saved my life. I resolved never to go on a scout again without a little frying pan to parch the corn. It was a lot of help, and I had not had it ever before. But what was half an ear of corn to a raging hunger like mine? It was too late to parch more, for the call to mount had sounded. As I hurried down the road to rejoin my company I met a veteran of the first troop on which I had been billeted when first I reached the regimental camp, and he hailed me kindly with:

"Well, young fellow, how does scouting agree with you?"

"Well enough," I replied, "if I wasn't almost starving."

"It always strikes greenhorns that way," he replied. "Now, I ain't a bit sharp set. Say, maybe a piece of pork would help you out. Here."

He handed me what looked like a dirty wad of wet newspaper, in which I found about half a pound of pork. It was solid fat, with a little lean on one side, where the paper had lain closely against it, several advertisements had transferred themselves in reverse, with the general head "Help Wanted" at the top of them. The words were in my appropriate, and I didn't scrape them off, but ate pork, advertisements and all.

About the middle of the afternoon a general buzz of satisfaction ran along the column. We were passing one of our picket stations, which meant that we were within an hour or two of our camp. When finally the march was ended, my horse was so glad to get into his stall and be relieved of bridle, saddle and blanket that he gleefully kicked the empty air for several minutes. Several minutes later his owner, sitting on the floor of his tent, heard him plow on the rain soaked blanket, was slumbering as sweetly as if his couch were of down, and the ugly ejaculations of the weary men who struggled in one by one were so many loving lullabies.

CHAPTER X.  
WINTER QUARTERS.

OUR first scout did not differ much in duration, accidents and results from scores which followed it. Go on with an hour or two of our march, we were always sure to find the Johnnies doing business at the same old stand and unwilling to be interfered with. We always could reach them in a day's march, consume another day in passing along their entire front and still another in returning to camp. They seldom returned our attentions in force, probably because they had not a large enough force to feel safe when far from home. Besides, they could learn all they liked about our post and its camps, for every farmer and planter in the county was a source of information to them. We never got into a big engagement. It wasn't our business, except when we were accompanied by a large force of infantry and artillery, to worry the Confederacy by making believe that the "Potomac army" was to be made from our direction. When we went alone, the enemy did not worry much, for they had a broad, deep stream along their entire front. They could quickly take up the planking of the only bridge within ten miles, so they exchanged shot and shells with us across the river with the calm confidence of the card player who holds all the trumps.

Our colonel had been quite right in saying that the first scout was worth more to us than a month of drill. The men learned to sit in their saddles and not to be afraid of their horses, so we were able to begin mounted drill in good shape and progress rapidly. Man ranks lower than his horse in all good cavalry regiments, so it was not until we had completed the studies that our own winter quarters were begun. By this time, however, we learned, to our delight, that we were too valuable to consume our time in common labor. A number of the contractors (fugitive slaves) who had made our post a place of refuge were sent into the woods to cut trees and split shingles, and just before Christmas each company had a great log house, about 15 feet by 50, for its winter home. A small contribution from each soldier was collected and a stove, which tempered the winter air, and one new member, who had always lived in the tenement house district in New York, said he never before had known so comfortable a home.

"Killing time in the winter season was almost as hard as killing the enemy, for there was such an appalling lot of time ahead of us. Some men played cards all day, except while eating and sleeping; others read incessantly; still others did nothing but smoke. Some seemed to spend much of their time writing. I liked to observe these, for they had more heart in their faces for the time being, and as I knew some of the people to whom the letters were going I amused myself by imagining the scenes when the letters were received.

"Gosh!" were some of the expressions that went up around that fire while the men began their supper, some using spoons instead of knives and forks. Oftentimes heard, however, was, "This reminds me of home, or 'Doesn't it remind you of home?' Had I ever before been asked to name our national dish I would have hesitated between apple and pork and beans, but since that great evening I have believed that in a competitive contest the pancake would receive more votes than beans and pie combined, besides being pronounced the most nutritious of all the 'flat breads,' 'a touch of nature' and more of that sort of thing. As we ate these cakes everybody began to talk of home. Even big Pat Callahan became so absorbed in home reminiscences that he forgot to curse the government for not giving us butter to eat on our cakes.

But nobody, no matter how full of home memories, stopped eating that he might talk. The first issue disappeared from the plates in a minute, and the second issue was apparently hadn't any homes to think of returned so frequently for more that we agreed to form a circle, each man to receive a cake and some sugar as he passed the cook's table. It was an odd spectacle, apparently to men of other companies, that company of about 80 men marching slowly in a circle and eating as they walked. But we were not at all concerned about our appearance just then. We were having a private cake walk in which each and every man "took the cake." Our officers heard of it from their servants, and the captain came down to look on.

"Won't you try one, captain?" asked Hamilton, offering a clean plate and fork. The captain accepted, tasted, exclaimed "delicious!" and ate no more until he had finished the cake. Then he remarked as he stepped into a gap in the line:

"Just let me see how it feels to tramp around in a circle a little while."

He didn't stay to taste his plate and fork either, but twice took his turn, and cake-like the commonest of his men, believing, evidently, that the pancake, like love, levels all ranks. When he departed, it was with the colonel over to see the fun and also to see a company which was well fed. My place in the circle line brought me near enough to the two officers to hear the captain tell the colonel how admirably Phil managed the company commissariat. A minute or two later the couple passed through the line, and the captain astonished us by saying:

"Sergeant Hamilton, can you spare a sample cake for the colonel?"

"Any other man in the company would have felt awkward at coming face to face with his colonel and a cake turner in the other, but Hamilton succeeded in throwing his implements in one hand and in saluting; then, with another salute, he passed a plate to the colonel, and all the while he looked as manly and self possessed as if he were just entering one of Sumner's best parlors. I did wish my cousin May might see him just then. A moment later I was glad for Brainerd's sake that she couldn't. The colonel went through the motions of tasting the cakes. It would have been undignified for him to eat of it, though every man knew he was dying to. Then in his clearest dress parade voice he said:

"Sergeant Hamilton, I will make you lieutenant as soon as a vacancy occurs in my command. You know how the soldiers will have in him the stuff of which good officers are made."

Hamilton again saluted, but with the air of a man to whom lieutenantcies were offered daily. The remainder of the extreme advance consisted of ascending the ridge in single file, and carrying carbines or revolvers in their hands ready for instant use. About 50 yards behind rode a single trooper, called a messenger, to pass back any alarm or other information which the men ahead might wish to him. Five or six of our cavalry were mounted men, who also had a messenger within earshot, and within 50 yards of him rode the remainder of the platoon—8 or 12 men—about as far from the main body as from the man in front.

The spectators in the rear were commanded to watch the eyes, but whether they were too little or too great the main body was far enough in the rear to be out of point blank range of ordinary firearms, and most firearms of the enemy's cavalry were ordinary. Meantime the messenger and reserve had closed on the first set of four and begun firing if they saw anything to fire at. Should the advance halt, they began firing at once; if they turned to run, they parted and galloped down either side of the road, and the troop they unmasked could clear the road by firing or charging. (I never had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing the advance break to the rear.)

Whenever we found the enemy in line, even behind breastworks—for not all the men were cavalry—we would deploy as skirmishers in the woods or fields on either side of the road and advance at the gallop, firing rapidly as we rode. I don't believe carbine firing at the gallop at a mark 200 or 300 yards away ever did much damage, but the successive puffs of smoke made our horses difficult marks to hit. In such dashes the bugle generally sounded the recall before the skirmishers were upon the enemy's line. Even if it didn't, most of the horses turned suddenly and dashed back, leaving an occasional good rider with a horse under perfect control would get far enough within the line to estimate its strength and see if it had any artillery. Quite as often a poor rider with an ob-

nate horse would get within the line and his horse would be unable to return. The horse that knew him would know him no more forever, and the rider would take up his abode for an indefinite season at the Hotel Libby, Richmond, Va. A single man surrounded by enemies at short range was seldom killed or turned suddenly and dashed back, but the enemy had only muzzle loading weapons, which could not be reloaded and fired more than once during the forward rush of cavalry skirmishers, while the rapid fire of our breechload-

ers and revolvers had a disturbing effect upon a foot soldier's hand and eye. Our advantages and precautions being so many, we felt entirely secure in the seat of which I have begun to tell. Yet things did not turn out at all as we had expected. We struck the enemy's outpost during the middle of the afternoon and drove it in without any casualty on our side. We dismounted, took cover behind some trees and exchanged shots with skirmishers across a small river, and we had our horses far enough to the right and left to avoid the round shot or two that were fired down the road by a cannon which guarded the bridge. Then we remounted, retraced through the woods and fields until out of artillery range, after which we took the road for home, with the cheering hope that we would be out of camp only about half the customary time.

Just about sunset, as we were approaching a long bridge over one of the wide, high banks, but shallow creeks peculiar to the tide water region of Virginia, the word was passed back from the advance:

"Close up! Quick! Send the major up!"

The major commanding the battalion dashed toward the front, and the rest of us followed rapidly. As my company was the second in column we soon saw that was the matter, and it didn't please us much. A body of the enemy's cavalry was approaching the bridge from the other side.

This was something we had not counted upon. It was engaging. It was also ridiculous. We were between the Johnnies and their camp, the Johnnies were between us and our camp, and the bridge, which both parties agreed in wishing anywhere else at that particular moment, remained just where it was and looked as dark and threatening as if it meant to make no end of trouble. It would be foolish for either body to ford the stream, for those tide water creeks invariably have one bank which is too steep for horses to climb or descend, except through occasional tributary gullies.

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## D. L. & W. RAILROAD.

### TIME TABLE.

Corrected to May 1, 1901.

New York	AM	PM
Bareilly St. Ar.	7:30	10:00
Christopher St.	7:40	10:10
Hoboken	7:50	10:20
Scranton	8:00	10:30
Buffalo	8:10	10:40
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