

Captain Valentine Merriweather M'Gehee Papers

(By Howard M, Ingram, Rector St. John's Episcopal Church, Camden, Arkansas.)

Background Information

General Joseph A. Reeves of Camden, Arkansas, says: I knew Capt. McGehee quite well. He was a young man about 22 to 25 years of age. He was well educated, active and bright, about 5 feet or 5 feet 9 inches tall and weighed about 165 to 175 pounds. He was a handsome, fine looking gentleman. His father was Madison Tate McGehee, a wealthy farmer on the Arkansas River. His mother was Lucy Merriweather. An elder brother fell at Shiloh, but in another regiment from the one in which Valentine served.

"A station and junction point on the Iron Mountain R. R. in Desha County is named after Capt. McGehee."

McGehee enlisted in Co. "G," Second Arkansas Infantry which was raised by Col. Thos. Hindman of Helena. Six companies of this regiment were raised in Eastern Arkansas. Co. "G" was organized by Captain Ben. B. Talaiferro and mustered into service June 3, 1861, at Pine Bluff, with Capt. Talaiferro in command and young McGehee as first lieutenant. In Nov. 1862, Capt. Talaiferro died of pneumonia. McGehee succeeded to the command of the company and continued in that position until the war ended.

The position of first lieutenant vacated by McGehee's promotion was filled by J. M. Hudson who now lives at Pine Bluff. Capt. McGehee was in the battle of Shiloh and saw service in all the encounters of his company.

[footnote: Note: - Rev. Howard M. Ingham was born in Keene, New Hampshire; was graduated from Bexley Theological Seminary, Kenyon College. He founded and served St. Luke's Church, Cleveland, Ohio 1885 – 1890. From 1892 to 1896 he was rector of St. Paul's, East Cleveland, Ohio, and likewise Trinity Church at Jefferson, Ohio, from 1897 – 1901. In 1902 he removed to Arkansas and became member of St. John's Church at Camden.

The Rev. Mr. Ingham, is the author of several articles or monographs on church and religious affairs.]

He was three times wounded. On July 20, 1864, he received a wound in the face which for a time disabled him. In Sept., 1864 he was severely wounded in the right hip which necessitated his removal to the Kingston Hospital at Booneville, Ga. On the way to the hospital the train was wrecked and many were killed. Capt. McGehee escaped death, and was seriously bruised and his shoulder blade fractured. He recovered, however, and served at the head of his company till the end of the war.

After the conflict closed he removed his home from Warren, Arkansas to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, where he practiced law until his death, Nov. 14, 1876.

J. H. Hudson of Pine Bluff, who was McGehee's first lieutenant, writes, "Both Capt. McGehee and myself were three times wounded. I never knew a braver man. After the war he and I married sisters, the daughters of John H. Marks of Mark's Mill. Then he died leaving a wife and four children. I looked after them till Mrs. McGehee died and the children were grown and caring for themselves.

The children are: Madison Tate McGehee of Pine Bluff, Mrs. Barbara Russell of Pine Bluff, Mrs. Noble, Star City, Ark., and Mrs. R. M. Atchley, Dalark, Arkansas.

INTRODUCTIONS TO CAPT. M'GEHEE'S DIARY.

BY GENERAL JOSEPH A. REEVES, CAMDEN, ARKANSAS

Arkansas Brigade.

2nd.; 5th.; 6th.; 7th.; 8th. Regiment 3rd. Confederate.

We returned from trip with Gen. Bragg into Kentucky, reaching Knoxville in November, rested a day or two at Holstein river,[sic] near Knoxville to wash up our clothes. We took cars for Tulahoma, [sic] Tenn.; left cars and marched two days, went into winter quarters about Dec. 1, 1862.

It snowed on us the first day. We cleared the ground of snow, cut limbs from bushes and trees to spread out blankets on to keep us off the cold, wet ground. We stopped at a place called College Hill; made the best tents and camps for the winter.

The enemy moved down from Nashville to Stone river [sic] near Murfreesboro. We left our winter quarters about the 20th of December; began to make ready for battle of Murfreesboro. After maneuvering for several days we chose a position in front of the enemy about five miles north of Murfreesboro on the 29th of December.

Our line was about two miles long; Gen. Polk's corps on left; Hardee's on right, with Breckenridge in reserve. On the morning of the 30th, Gen. Bragg learned from cavalry that the enemy was forming on our left to menace Gen. Polk. Hardee was ordered to change his position to Polk's left. We marched all day and until near 12 o'clock at night before we could form any line. About twelve we were ordered to make no noise, all go to rest. The commissary came along and gave each man a small drink of whiskey.

The line now was probably three miles long. Breckenridge on right; Polk in center; Hardee on left. At daylight we were up in line, made a forward move, drove the enemy from their first and second line, many men left their guns, coats and ran; some few shots came to us from second line, but all fled. Many prisoners were taken while cooking their breakfast.

On and on we moved, but soon met a terrible line of men behind a fence, we halted, lay down and began to return the fire. We soon charged them out and moved on, captured four 12-pound cannon. After going about a half mile, I looked just ahead, saw a full line of the enemy behind a fence. I ordered a charge and we all gave the Rebel Yell in force, to scare the enemy before they should fire, for there was nothing to hinder them from taking deliberate aim and killing all of us. To our great delight they never fired a gun, but broke and ran away. We fired at them as they ran; covered the ground with the dead and wounded. On we went, but found ourselves clear ahead of the army to our right and endways to the enemy. Our brigade commended by Gen. L. Liddell had to fall back on line.

[Earlier pages unfortunately lost]:

ordered a charge, which was responded to, in a most glorious way, the enemy were driven in confusion from this stronghold. We took a battery of six pieces of artillery at this place; but we did not stop to lord over our prize; we pursued the enemy nearly a mile, pouring into his flying and demoralized columns a most deadly fire. The Federal officers were entirely unable to rally their cowardly and defeated soldiers. Gen. Liddell, finding that he was pursuing too fast, halted us to rest, and allow the slower moving Tennesseans, who were on our right, to catch up. All being in readiness, we moved forward for about a half mile, where we found the enemy in greatly superior numbers and in a strong position. We encountered him and the most deadly conflict ensued for about three quarters of an hour I ever witnessed. We succeeded in driving the enemy for about a half mile, where they met reinforcements and were formed to give us battle again. We assailed them without hesitation and drove them before us. At the last encounter, I think we fought at least eight to one. We got nearer to them here than ever before. We were whipping two regiments back, when we suddenly came up to a regiment of Yankees, ambushed behind a fence. We were in 20 yards of them before we were conscious of their whereabouts. It seems to me only a providential occurrence that kept them from killing every man in our regiment. As soon as they were discovered, we charged them and routed them entirely. We advanced about three-quarters of a mile further, but we met with little more opposition, for I have never before seen men so easily whipped as these Yankees were. Our supplies of ammunition having been exhausted, we were ordered to fall back. We fell back about a quarter of a mile and were halted. Here we were supplied with ammunition and were in readiness to move forward when Gen. Bragg ordered the pursuit stopped. It was then about 3 o'clock p. m. and we had driven the enemy about three miles and a half. He was in perfect consternation and the worst whipped army I have ever seen. Why Gen. Bragg did not follow up the victory by vigorous pursuit I never expect to know. We lay where we had been stopped during the remainder of the evening. At night we were withdrawn about a quarter of a mile, back behind a hill, where we could build fires without attracting the fire from the enemy's batteries. We slept as soundly as if lying in a feather bed at home.

The next morning, our brigade was ordered forward to develop the enemy's position and plans. Nothing satisfactory resulted. Only a little artillery duel ensued. About 12 o'clock, m. [sic] we were ordered to the position we occupied in the morning. The enemy kept up a continual bombardment, which rendered rest impossible. Our fight was on Wednesday and the whole line remained perfectly dormant until Friday evening, when Gen. Breckenridge, whose division occupied the center, was ordered forward, drove the enemy about half a mile, and charged a strongly fortified place, defended by nearly one hundred pieces of artillery and four times Gen. Breckenridge's infantry. Of course, Gen. Breckenridge was repulsed. The incentive that prompted this move, I am not general enough to see, unless Gen. Bragg ordered it on purpose to be defeated at this point in order to have an excuse for evacuating Murfreesboro. If our victory on Wednesday had been followed by a vigorous pursuit, we would have gained the most signal victory that ever was won by Southern arms. Twice Gen. Bragg has had the independence of the Confederacy and a glorious peace in his grasp, but both times, by bad management, he has opened his hands and let the prize fly.

On Friday night, we were ordered to the right. I have never seen a more gloomy night in my life. Our soldiers were worn out, wet and sleepy, for it had been raining slowly for 24 hours. A march of six or seven miles placed us in the position we had first occupied after reaching Murfreesboro. The rain fell in torrents the remainder of the night and all the next day. Saturday night we begun our retreat from Murfreesboro. I thought, when we started that it would be impossible for me to march more than five miles, for it had been three days and two nights since I had slept a wink. We marched all night and I frequently found myself walking along asleep, indeed I was so sleepy, that next morning I did not know half the events that happened during our night's march. At day-break, we were halted and allowed to rest for one hour. When the bugle sounded for us to start, I felt that I would little rather have heard Gabriel's trumpet. I had been quite unwell during the fight, had not been able to eat anything for several days, for my stomach rejected everything I swallowed. Only excitement kept me up during the fight. The regiment started and I kept up for about five miles when I felt that it was impossible to go any farther. I was hit by a spent ball during the fight, which left a considerable bruise on my thigh. This had swollen considerably, and was very painful. After resting for an hour or two and having slept a little, I felt some better, and determined to go as far as possible, by resting every mile, for a half hour. I continued on my slow journey all day. At night on inquiring, I learned that I had traveled about 12 miles and that the regiment was encamped about 5 miles ahead. I found a blanket that some weary soldier had left and just spread myself on the ground for the night when a clever cavalryman offered me his horse to ride to camp. I accepted this kind offer and reached the regiment about 10 o'clock p. m. I had a very good sleep which refreshed me very much, but the next morning I was too weak to walk. The surgeon of the regiment placed me in a wagon and proceeded on our march to Manchester, which we reached about 12 o'clock m. [sic]

We rested for the evening and night. All seemed to be much refreshed and I felt nearly well. The next morning we started for Alsonia, about 15 miles, which we reached that

night. We were to rest here for several days. Here Mr. Brady met us and I got my valise. The next morning after arriving at Alisionia, I was taken quite sick. The second day, our brigade was ordered to Wartrace (its present place of rendezvous), and all the sick were ordered to the hospital at Chattanooga. I was sent to Chattanooga and remained in the hospital there for two or three days and was then ordered to the hospital in Atlanta. I went to Atlanta and remained there for two or three days and then I went to Palmetto and remained at Aunt Rebecca White's for three weeks. I had every attention bestowed on me. Uncle Tom was kind and clever, Aunt Rebecca treated me with as much affection as if I had been her own son. Cousin Sarah was all smiles, Cousin Lucie a perfect angel and Cousin Collie a piece of perfection. Palmetto proved to me a perfect elysium. Cousin Babbie is one of the best and smartest women I ever saw, and Mr. Arnold is extremely clever. He is a perfect gentleman. Aunt Rebecca made me a present of a suit of the finest jeans I ever saw. I was offered one hundred and fifty dollars for the coat and pants. While at Palmetto I met many pleasant young ladies which added much to my pleasure. After I entirely recovered I returned to camp—found our regiment at our present camp. Since I have been in camp, my health has been perfect. I am heavier now than I ever was in my life. I weigh 175 pounds. My flesh is really burdensome. I have applied for a furlough of 60 days for Jimmie Talaiferro on the plea of Uncle Zack taking his place. But I fear that it will be refused. Gen. Bragg has refused several in our brigade who have applied for furloughs in the same way. But I went to Gen. Liddell and got him to recommend it, therefore I have a little hope of the furlough being granted. I forwarded the application six days ago. It is about time that it was being returned. As it will be several days before I will have an opportunity of sending this letter home. I will defer finishing it, and will write a little every day until I have an opportunity of starting it. Goodbye for today.

March 25, 1863, -- I never in all my life experienced such a change in the weather as was last night; yesterday it was warm and pleasant; this morning it is snowing considerably, and is quite cold. Since the battle of Murfreesboro, I have given out all idea of ever quitting my company during the war. The conduct of my company in the battle was such as could not fail to make any captain proud of his company. My company was complimented by all who noticed them during the engagement. I have never seen demonstrations of more deliberate bravery and cool courage than was displayed by most members of my company. The most daring were Mat. Hudson, Billie Marks, Wm. Teague. John Pucket, Bedford Hall, Wm. R. Brewster, Pink Tolson, Wm. Matthews, and Jas. Morgan and Sam Scudder. All of these were complimented for their bravery. Wm. Matthews was highly complimented on the battlefield by Gen. Liddell. I had five wounded. Sam Scudder was wounded in the arm and side as soon as we engaged the enemy. John McLean was bruised by concussion of the bursting of a bomb in first engagement. Mat. Hudson and Wm. Furgerson were wounded about 12 o'clock m. [sic] and Billie Marks was wounded as we were falling back after getting out of ammunition. Mat. Hudson was shot through the thigh, has entirely recovered and is now on duty in the company as orderly sergeant. Sam Scudder's wounds have nearly healed but are very tender yet; he returned to camp from the hospital about a week ago, but I

have never had him put on duty yet, as his side is too tender to admit of his wearing a belt. All the wounded have returned to the company except Billie Marks, he is at Varnell's Station, Ga., with some friends of his. I received a letter from him three days ago. He wrote that his arm had entirely healed, but his wrist was perfectly stiff, and he could not use his fingers in the least. I hope his hand will finally become all right again. It is evident that the surgeons think so, as they refused to discharge him. My company is in better health than they have been in service; it has been two months since I have had a sick man in my company.

My entire company would be in fine soldierly condition if they all had shoes. This gives me a great deal of trouble, for it is impossible, in these hard times, to keep them well shod all the time. Five or six now almost entirely barefooted, but they do not seem to mind it, as I do not allow only those that have good shoes to go on duty. The quartermaster has promised to get shoes for all in a few days.

Tell Mr. Gunn that MacAdams' clothing did not reach the company. The bundle was lost by Mr. Brady. I have never been able to find out the way to draw a deceased soldier's dues. I have tried on several powers of attorney, but have failed on all. I have sent a power of attorney from J. H. Adams' father and the amount due his on to the War Department. When I hear from that I can advise Mrs. Santford the course to pursue relative to the dues of Mr. Santford. I know that the dues of no deceased can be paid by a disbursing officer, only by order of the War Department. I have found all the paymasters with whom I have conversed on the subject, entirely ignorant of this portion of their duty. As soon as I am advised from the War Department, I will inform Mrs. Santford.

Thursday, March 26, 1863 – The weather continues cold and blustery. We had a little snow this morning. I think, Father, that the future will prove that your prophesies relative to the war closing July next are incorrect. There has been a lull in the storm of war for three months, but it is the portentous calm that precedes the outburst of the tempest. Whatever hopes may have been transiently entertained for an easy and honorable peace on the basis of the independence of the Confederate States have been dissipated by the action of the Yankee Congress, and the weakness and dishonesty of the politicians north, such as John VanBuren, James T. Brady and others. The storm of opposition to Lincoln and his measures that we thought we saw rising in the northwest has vanished into thin air, since Congress had empowered Lincoln with the unlimited use of the purse and sword. It is true that a few men like Valiandigham, Voihees and others of that stamp will fight against the Federal administration, but it is vain for them to breast the storm. They will reel under it and finally be engulfed in their noble efforts to save the ship of State from wreck. Lincoln has the power to crush out all opposition and that he has the will, no one doubts. He is like Macbeth, he "has waded so deep in blood, that to return were as tedious as to go on." Intervention is a cheat and a snare and the time for the delusion has passed. We must fight and fight long and bravely. Our only hopes of peace are in the determined efforts and endurance of our noble and brave

soldiers. The lurid glare of war will soon break on the horizon and extend to the zenith in all the horrors of a civil war. I believe that great and mighty events are near at hand. But who fears to meet the issue. Between us stands the protecting arm of the God of right; let the issue come.

March 27, 1863. – Last night the weather cleared and this morning is pleasant. This is the day appointed by President Davis for fasting and prayer. It is being observed more than any Thanksgiving day I have seen in the army. I received a box of nice edibles from Cousin Lucie White yesterday and I assure you that it is a trial to fast with everything that is nice before me. Cousin Lucie is as near perfection as mortals can get. If it were not for the existing ties of consanguinity, she would have the offer to become Mrs. Meriweather McGehee, but the opinion of my father relative to first cousins marrying is remembered too distinctly to allow me to think of addressing a cousin. You need have no fear on that score. Our principal sport here is rabbit hunting. Sometimes our entire regiment makes a drive, the hunters are deployed like skirmishers. They surround a briar thicket and a few on horseback, with a dog or two go into the thicket and drive the rabbits out into the line of skirmishers, who kill them with sticks. Frequently we kill (when the regiment is all out) over a hundred in an hour. Pretty heavy rabbit killing, isn't it? Skirmishing for rabbits is much more pleasant than skirmishing with Yankees.

March 28, 1863. – I have never heard anything of Jammie Talaiferro's furlough yet. I fear that it will not be returned. I saw a man this morning that promised to take this letter across the Mississippi river for a dollar. He professes to be a regular mail carrier employed by McNair's Brigade. If Jammie Talaiferro's furlough returns approved, I will write him. Dr. John Pace was left at Murfreesboro with the wounded and was taken prisoner, but has been exchanged and is now with the regiment, acting in the capacity of hospital steward; he gives an awful account of the treatment he received while a prisoner. Pink Tolson was missing after we fell back when we got out of ammunitions and never has been heard from since. He fought with unsurpassed gallantry and was in front when we were ordered to the rear. I fear he was either killed or wounded, but he may have been taken.

April 1, 1863. – The man that I thought would carry this letter disappointed me. He went off without coming to my company. Jimmie Talaiferro's furlough has been returned disapproved by Gen. Bragg. I have sent up an application of a discharge for him, Zack Talaiferro having offered to take his place as a substitute, but I fear that it will be disapproved. All remain well, I will not write any more until I have an opportunity of sending this across the Mississippi.

April 11, 1863. – I have just learned that a man would start from the 8th Arkansas regiment for home, this evening and unless disappointed again, I will send this by him. The application of Jimmie Talaiferro's discharge has not been returned. I fear it will not be acted on at all. Bill Marks returned to camp the day before yesterday, his arm has entirely healed, but is stiff at the wrist. He has no use of his fingers, but I hope he will

recover the use of his hand eventually. The surgeons have refused to give him a discharge. They think that he is not permanently disabled. I have succeeded, at last, in getting shoes for my company. They are now well shod and in better condition for soldiering than they have been since we have been in service. It is reported that Gen. Bragg is ordered to Richmond and that Gen. Joe. E. Johnston will take immediate command of this army. I hope it is true, but have my doubts of its truth. I think we have an active campaign before us this summer and it is generally believed that we will make another trip into Kentucky. Everything seems to indicate active operations soon. Provisions is very scarce in this portion of the Confederacy. I have more fears from this than anything else. The army seems to have plenty at present, but the subject is creating considerable agitation among the people and the press. I hope for the best, for if our army ever gets out of provision

we are ruined, for it is impossible to keep an army subordination without provision. Mutiny is easier created by hunger than anything else to which an army heir. I sometimes fear that the administration is expecting too much of the army of Tennessee. We are now facing the enemy in numerical strength three times our superior and the best troops that the Federal have is in the service. It has been frequently reported that we were being reinforced by a portion of the Virginia army, but this is entirely untrue. I think the removal of Gen. Bragg from command would be the best reinforcement that could be sent to this army. I have recommended Mat, Hudson for promotion to second lieutenant in my company. I expect he will be assigned to duty during the next week.

Give my love to all relations and my respects to all inquiring friends. Excuse this dirty sheet of paper, it is all that I have. I received a letter from Cousin Lucie White about a week ago. She wrote that Cousin Babbie's oldest child, a very interesting girl of about seven years of age, died about two weeks ag. She wrote that all the other relatives were well.

(The above, thought written in the form of a diary, was sent to his mother whenever opportunity presented.)