

Thomas Jefferson Shipman's Civil War Reminiscences

60th North Carolina

"CIVIL WAR REMINISCENCES OF THIMAS JEFFERSON SHIPMAN"
(Dictated in his ninety second year) (1922)

When the war between the North and South broke out in the Spring of 1861, I was twenty years old and was working and living in Asheville, N.C. Even before Governor Ellis called for volunteers to fight for our rights, a group of young fellows had enlisted for a period of six months. So, under the command of Captain W.W. McDowell we set out for our state capitol, walking as far as Morganton, which was then our nearest railroad, and here boarding the train for Raleigh. On our arrival there we were put into the First North Carolina regiment under the command of Colonel Daniel H. Hill. After a few weeks training we were sent by train to Richmond, Virginia, and thence to the Peninsula of Yorktown. Here was stationed also two infantry and three cavalry companies of Virginia. We had been encamped here only a short time, however, before some of our men got into a skirmish with some of the Federal General Benjamin F. Butler's men, capturing a corporal and killing several of his guards. This made Butler's men furious, and they swore that they would get revenge within forty-eight hours, saying "we might have some fear of the Louisiana Zuaves [sic], but we can whip the 'Tar Heels' with corn stalks." However, the following Monday morning, June the 10th, showed them that the First North Carolina regiment was more to be feared than the "Louisiana Zuaves" [sic] for when General Butler's men attacked us at Big Bethel, they were repulsed, their Lieutenant Colonel Winthrop killed, a great many wounded, and thirty-five left dead on the field. Thus the First North Carolina regiment, together with the five Virginia companies, completely routed five thousand men, while it lost only one man, Henry Wyatt of Edgecombe County, North Carolina, who was the first Southern soldier to lose his life in the war, and whose statue now stands in Capitol Square in Raleigh. His death occurred in this way: between the two opposing lines of battle stood an old house, behind which the federal soldiers would protect their cannons and themselves, so Wyatt volunteered to burn it. He made his way safely to the house, set it on fire, and was returning to our lines when he was shot. He died in the ambulance as he was taken to the hospital in Richmond.

A few weeks after this battle Colonel Hill was promoted to a Brigadier General and remained with the army in Virginia, while our regiment was disbanded and we returned to North Carolina and our homes.

I remained at home until the Spring of 1862 when Company D was formed in Hendersonville with Charlie Fletcher, Captain, Rufus Banning, First Lieutenant, James Brittain, Second Lieutenant, and I, Third Lieutenant. We were soon ordered to go to

Warm Springs, in Madison County, where we were put into the 60th North Carolina regiment, which was made up of nine companies from the counties of Buncombe, Henderson, Polk, and Madison, and one company from East Tennessee. We were encamped on an island near Warm Springs, where we drilled for two months. Our regiment, under command of Colonel Joe McDowell, was about eleven hundred strong, composed mostly of middle aged men who had left their families to fight for them and their beloved Southland, and knew very little about warfare. However, there were ten or more of us younger men who had been in service in the First North Carolina regiment, and we were made drill masters for the regiment. After these two months of intensive training we were ordered to Greenville, Tennessee, where we remained for awhile before being sent to join the forces of General Braxton Bragg, near Murfreesboro, Tennessee. On December 30th, we were attacked by the Federal forces under General Rosecrans. My regiment belonged to J.C. Breckenridge's division, and Preston's brigade, and was near the center of the army. Two days of fighting occurred before our brigade was engaged. During this time many of our men were restless and eager to get into the fight, and would say, "My, I wish I could kill a few Yanks!", while others with some experience of war would say, "Never mind, boys, you will get enough of it soon." On the third day we doubled quick to the left, waded Stone [sic] River, and formed on the Westbank in a long cotton field. Here many of our men looked at each other in silence, as here the ground was strewn with dead Yankees, a part of our corps under Hardee having fought here the day before. We advanced in solid fronts until we had passed over two-thirds of the field, when without any notice, our whole front which was skirted by woods, was a blaze of cannon and musketry. The enemies' bullets came thick as hail. Men were falling right and left. We were ordered to lie down, but what was the use, since the ground was being ploughed by lead and steel, and the cotton was flying in every direction. Our men stood bravely, but on our left a brigade gave way which necessitated our brigade being ordered back. We were moved to the left about a quarter of a mile to a cedar thicket. This thicket was a horrible and sickening sight to look upon, this ground also having been fought upon by Hardee's corp [sic] the day before, and was covered in places by the dead enemy, as well as by many of our own soldiers. In the stampede of the Federals the day before, it was impossible for them to pull their heavy artillery through the thicket, therefore, a number of their cannons were left, each of which had six or eight big horses attached, lying with their throats cut, to prevent their falling into our hands. Our men now began to know something of the horrors of war. The night which followed was terrible. We lay on our arms on the frozen ground expecting to be attacked every hour. Yet it was daylight before the batteries opened on us with grape, which mowed down the bittle [sic] cedars with such terrible crashes that made one think each moment would be his last. After remaining under this severe shelling for a short time, we were moved to the right and re-crossed the river we had forded the day before. A short distance from the river we came to a large plantation where we were rapidly formed into line for a fight. Here occurred the famous charge of Breckinridge's division to which our regiment belonged. We charged up the hill, routed the enemy, killing great numbers, and took the hill; but in so doing we came in range of

the Federal batteries across the stream. These opened up such a murderous fire that two thousand of our men fell in twenty minutes. Then Bragg's entire army fell back and we began our retreat. Bragg abandoned all thought of victory and sought only to save his army, having lost nearly twelve thousand men in this one bloody battle. However, not one man in Company D was killed, although several were wounded. The Federals lost thirteen thousand men, which so crippled their army that Rosecrans was unable to follow up his victory, and we retreated unmolested to Chattanooga.

After the battle of Murfreesboro, Captain Fletcher, and Lieutenants Banning and Brittain resigned their commissions and returned home, and I was left "acting" Captain of Company D until my capture some months later. Our army spent the rest of the winter near Chattanooga, during which time I was ill with typhoid fever. But I recovered in time to go early in May with my regiment, under the command of General Joseph E. Johnston into Mississippi, where we were defeated by Grant, at Jackson, Mississippi. Our regiment was then sent back to Chattanooga, where we rejoined Bragg's army, and with whom we remained until our capture at the Battle of Missionary Ridge, November 25, 1863. Different divisions of General Bragg's army had just met defeat at Chickamauga, and Lookout Mountain, and now we were making our last desperate stand. The entire Union army centered its attention upon this last Confederate stronghold in Tennessee and forces under Hooker, Sherman, Grant, Thomas and Sheridan, came to the aid of their army at Missionary Ridge, so that our brave, but poorly clad, and half starving army had not a chance of victory. We fought desperately for some hours and held our position, but finally Thomas' corp [sic] of twenty five thousand men charged up the ridge and we had to give up. Our Company was captured, but General Bragg and a remnant of his army escaped and went into Northern Georgia.

I, together, with the rest of the commissioned officers captured, was taken to Johnston's Island in Lake Erie and kept there for nineteen months, or until June 1865.