Experiences of a West Ward Boy

By
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We have that very interesting paper, "Boyhood Memories of the Civil War—Invasion of Carlisle," written at the request of his friend, Jane Van Ness Smead, by James W. Sullivan who, when a boy, lived in Carlisle's East Ward, and which was read before the Hamilton Library Association in 1933.

This article is a brief account of a boy's experiences in Carlisle's West Ward during the war and the invasion. There was far more action around the Public Square and in Carlisle's eastern parts, than there was in its West Ward. Nevertheless, it may be worth relating some of the things the boys in Carlisle's western section saw and did.

When the Civil War began, it seemed to the people of Carlisle and the Cumberland Valley to be very far distant for the first two years, but this was not so in my father's family.

"My family and I had a deep and serious interest in the war," said my father, "because, on April 23, 1861, my brother, William Luther Beetem, at the age of 20, was the first Carlisle man to give his life in that war when on a tour of duty."

Before the valley was invaded, there were three false alarms that the Confederates were on their way to Carlisle. The first great battle of the Civil War was fought at Bull Run, July 21, 1861, but at one o'clock in the morning of Apr. 23, 1861, the people of Carlisle were scared out of their beds by what turned out to be the first false rumor that 5,000 Rebel soldiers were marching to Carlisle by way of Mt. Holly Springs and had passed Hanover.

The men of Capt. Robert McCartney's Company were all awakened, the company was formed, and marched to Mt. Holly Springs to take up positions in Mt. Holly Gap. However, they found everything quiet, and the rumor entirely false, and in the afternoon, they marched back to Carlisle.

"The day was hot," said my father, "and my brother, William, was assisting the men in laying their rifles into a wagon which had accompanied them. The cartridges were removed and the rifles were laid in the wagon with their stocks toward the driver. Some one of the Company—it was never learned who—failed to remove his cartridges. When the wagon rumbled over a rough part of the road, this rifle was discharged. William was walking directly behind the wagon. The bullet, to the consternation of all, pierced him in the heart. 'I am shot,' he exclaimed, and dropped dead on the turnpike. This was a hard blow to our family, especially to his recently widowed mother."

This affair was ironically termed the Battle of Papertown." James W. Sullivan refers to it in his "Boyhood Memoirs" and it was he who wrote the five-column article in THE SENTINEL, in 1910, explaining the entire matter and how William was killed. This article was reproduced in THE SENTINEL Bicentennial Supplement.

On Saturday morning, June 27, 1863, Gen. Albert Jenkins' cavalry of about 2,000 horses descended on Carlisle from the west, by way of the Walnut Bottom, Chambersburg, and Newville roads. They arrived about 11 a.m., and Gen. Richard Stoddert Ewell, with the infantry division of Gen. Robert Emmitt Rodes, reached Carlisle at 2:30 p.m. of the same day.

This was market day in Carlisle, and the entry of Jenkins' cavalry upset all business at the Market House. Soon it and a number of stores closed their doors. People deserted the streets, and hurried to get into their

homes. The town looked as if the day were a Sunday.

Gen. Ewell sent forward, by way of the Harrisburg Pike, Jenkins' cavalry, accompanied by his chief engineer, H. B. Richardson, to reconnoiter positions held by Union troops on the West Shore opposite Harrisburg. The farthest point they reached, however, was Eyster's Point, now Camp Hill.

General Rodes' division consisted of the following troops:

Rodes' Brigade—3rd, 5th, 12th, and 28th Alabama regiments.

Daniels' Brigade—32nd, 43rd, 45th, and 53rd North Carolina regiments.

Iversons' Brigade—5th, 12th, 20th, and 23rd North Carolina regiments.

Ramsieur's Brigade—2nd, 4th, 14th, and 30th North Carolina regiments.

Carter's Battalion of Artillery (18 pieces).

Doles' Brigade—4th, 12th, 21st, and 44th Georgia regiments.

Gen. Ewell sent Rodes' Brigade out the Mt. Holly Pike to do scouting and picket duty. Daniels', Iversons', and Ramsieur's brigades, with Carter's battery of artillery, occupied the Carlisle Barracks.

Brig. Gen. George Doles camped his brigade on the Dickinson College campus. It consisted of 1,404 officers and men, and their approach had interfered greatly with the commencement exercises for the graduating Class of 1863. Tents were set up all over the campus. A great noise and hubbub ensued. The campus was soon in a shabby condition, with lawns dug up in many places and trees felled here and there. Professors and students protested, and finally carried their complaints to Gen. Ewell. This officer, at one time, had been stationed at Carlisle Barracks, and a number of the most important people of Carlisle were his friends. He quickly restored order on the Dickinson campus.

I recall my father telling how greatly alarmed people became who were the first to hear the clatter of the horses' hoofs, the rattle of the long sabers, and the general noise produced as Gen. Jenkins' cavalry entered Carlisle. Edward C. Beetem was born and lived in what is now the second house on West Pomfret Street, at the southeast corner of West Pomfret and South West streets. A yard then attached to the property occupied the corner. His father, Jacob Beetem, built the house.

"Neither my mother nor any of us," said my father, "went down to the Market House that Saturday, nor did any of our near neighbors. I well remember mother calling us in from the yard, and drawing down the blinds on the front and west side of the house when a large detachment of Jenkins' cavalry was heard coming up West Street from off the Walnut Bottom Road. They turned at our corner, and dashed down Pomfret Street. My sisters and I got on our knees and peeped at them from beneath the blinds. They were a grim looking set of men, in their thirties and forties, and they and their horses were covered with dust. These troops carried their carbines in hand, the stocks resting on their legs in readiness if any one fired on them. There presently followed another detachment of this cavalry. It continued north on West Street, and went down High Street. I understood later that this cavalry passed on through Carlisle and went down the Harrisburg Pike."

There are, no doubt, exact figures obtainable of the number of Confederates that took over Carlisle. But if we estimate 1,000 troops to a brigade, there were, counting Carter's Battalion, more than 3,000 men who occupied Carlisle Barracks. And there were a thousand troops that bivouaced out the Carlisle-Baltimore Pike near Carlisle. Adding the thousand that tented on the Dickinson campus, there were at least 5,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry in the invasion of Carlisle.

There was a grove of locust

trees along what is now South Spring Garden Street, extended, which was known as Locust Grove; but the ground now occupied by our spacious Carlisle Hospital was originally filled with locust trees, and was also called Locust Grove. At this time there were no houses beyond South West Street. In fact, the west side of this street was built up only in the late 1880's. This west Locust Grove was considered to be well out of town. Parties of boys and girls went there to pick wild flowers and blackberries, and there were picnics. The tract lay unfenced and was a "breathing spot" for all who lived in Carlisle's southwest quarter.

The young boys in this section of the West Ward took a big interest in the Civil War from its start, and a year or more before Carlisle was invaded, they had organized themselves into a little military company. On Saturdays and holidays they would assemble in Locust Grove and practice scouting thereabouts, picketing, etc., and try to perform some of the Army maneuvers they would read about in the newspapers. When the father of one of the boys obtained an United States Army Drill Manual, a sergeant who had been wounded in one of the campaigns taught the boys to drill like regular soldiers. They made fires and cooked pork and beans, fried bacon, eggs, and potatoes, and, as they sat about their campfire listened to the sergeant, they learned many military words and expressions.

They drilled carrying sticks, which was most unsatisfactory, but this was soon corrected. The carpenter shop of my grandfather, Jacob Beetem, was in Pomfret Street, only a few doors west of West Street. The building and the lumber yard extended to Chapel Alley, and cut short the yards of the houses along West Street, known as "Beetem's Row." (And here, it can be noted, was founded the Beetem Lumber Company, the oldest manufacturing concern in Carlisle, if not in the county.) My father had them make wooden guns for all the boys, the exact length of those which were in use at the time in the regular army. These guns were given two coats of black paint. More boys joined the company until there were nearly thirty. Now, when they drilled, they felt like regular soldiers.

"One can imagine how excited we were," said my father, "when Doles' Brigade took over the college campus. At first we picketed all around it—at some distance—and watched what went on. There were a number of young fellows in the brigade. Many of the soldiers looked worn out and slept a good bit of the time. The pictures these troops presented on the campus, with their tents, stacked rifles, and baggage, was one which attracted us boys as much as any circus come to town, only it was so entirely different. Gradually we lost all fear of the Confederates, and would talk to those who were camped near High Street. We would strain our ears to listen to what they talked about, but as these troops were from Georgia, and as their expressions and the accent given their words were strange to us, we never gleaned any important information."

I regret that I can not name any of the boys who kept such a close watch on what was going on, and who belonged to the company that drilled at Locust Grove. They were boys of the ages of from 10 and 14 to 15 and 17 years. I suppose that in Mr. Charles H. Leed's "Old Home Week Letters" there would appear a number of their names. I judge these boys also got down to the Public Square and noted what went on there, but they surely missed nothing in connection with Doles' Regiment that occupied the college campus.

Just below the last lots which fronted on West South Street, and between South Pitt and South West streets, was George Cart's orchard. It was fenced and had

a north gate, and a south gate which opened onto the Walnut Bottom Road.

The boys presently learned that the men of Doles' Brigade had picked up some farmer's cow that had strayed onto the road, and had whipped and driven her for some miles, and had placed her in Cart's orchard. As the Doles' men apparently felt there would be no one daring enough to come down the Walnut Bottom Road for some time, they placed a sentry—a young fellow—to guard the orchard's north gate. Their commissary figured, of course, they would save this cow for fresh meat.

Consulting with each other, the boys decided that Doles' commissary was not to have this one. They planned they would chase her out of the orchard by the Walnut Bottom gate, and down an alley, and into one of the town's butcher shops.

In order to do this, two of the oldest boys were to get acquainted with the young sentry, and come along eating ham sandwiches, and carry a bag with several in it. They were to offer some to the sentry. Meanwhile, a number of the boys were to keep watch around the entire orchard, while two others were to go into the large orchard and chase out the cow.

"The plan worked fine," said my father. "The picket or sentry accepted gladly the bag containing several sandwiches, and sat down on a mound of turf with the two boys, all of their backs to the orchard. Two other boys got into the orchard and chased the cow onto the Walnut Bottom Road, and they, with several other of the boys who were watching along the road, then chased the cow into Hanover Street, and then into an alley. But they did not get her far up the alley until she dropped dead. I was one of the boys along the road and helped chase the cow into Hanover Street and the alley. We all felt badly about her, but she must have come from some distance up the country."

The foregoing incident, however, was as nothing compared with what this group of west-end boys did next.

As has been stated, the only Confederate troops occupying Carlisle's West Ward—which included everything west of Hanover Street—were those encamped on the campus The college authorities had an understanding with Gen. R. S. Ewell that these troops were to remain orderly and to commit no damage to any property. This agreement they kept intact, and even became friendly with those residing in the neighborhood. Many of these boys from the South, far away from home, were glad to have our townsfolk converse with them.

"Upon seeing how things stood," said my father, "we boys brought those soldiers who were camped along High Street, near College Street where large stacks of supplies were stored, fresh bread which we exchanged for hardtack. The Confederate boys enjoyed the bread immensely. They became very friendly and permitter us boys to go exploring about the campus. This, I believe, every boy in our troop did. It never crossed our minds what damage this camp of men could do to our end of town. We took note of their trappings, fittings, and supplies. There was nothing much that we missed observing."

At this time, the campus had a low wall covered with slanting boards, along West High Street. It was near the west end of this wall and College Street that the Confederates had laid and stacked lots of supplies.

"Of these supplies," said my father, "what we were especially interested in was tents. For a long time we had wanted a tent for our camp in which we could eat and go into when it rained. There were some bundles of tents among the supplies, packed tightly and each tent tied with ropes. How to get one of them became a topic of serious discussion among us. At last it was decided

that if we were going to get one tent, we might as well try to get two tents—the other tent to sleep in. Then we would have a real camp.

"To the younger boys was assigned the task of rolling around, and playfully kicking, and doing leapfrog, etc., with two of the bundles of tents, and working them as close to the wall along High Street as possible. This they readily accomplished. Then—it must have been on Monday, June 29, at about dusk—that four of our oldest boys brought two of the big, oblong clothes baskets of loaves of bread of all shapes and sizes, contributed by the parents of a lot of us and by neighbors. These were handed around to the soldiers whose tents were up near the piles of supplies, and, when they came into the campus, they gave the sentry standing at College Street corner, first choice out of one of the baskets. When the baskets were emptied, they handed them over the campus wall to four other boys who were waiting there.

"Darkness of course had fallen, and a number of the men were in their tents, when the four husky boys who had passed out the bread, quickly threw the two bundles of the Confederates' tents over the college wall, then jumped over it. A bundled tent was placed in each of the baskets, and the eight boys, without hurrying, got across High Street, and into the Murray coalyard. But when they got to the south end of its building and the alley, which cut down into Pomfret Street," continued my father, "all ran as fast as they could, and they dumped the bundles of tents into a shed in the alley belonging to Woodward and Schmidt. Then they went to their homes with the empty baskets.

"Now we had what we had long desired — a tent to eat in and a tent to sleep in, and we were all fixed to go into camp for the rest of our school vacation. The next day, when the last Johnnie Reb had left the campus, we recovered the tents."

In latter June, Gen. Robert E. Lee began concentrating his army at Gettysburg, tnd found it necessary to call off his further invasion of the Cumberland Valley. He ordered Gen. Ewell to move all of his corps to Gettysburg as speedily as possible and join his main army.

Rodes' Division began moving out of the barracks and off the campus at about 3 a.m., Tuesday morning, June 30. They marched down Sounth Hanover Street, and on south over the Carlisle-Baltimore Turnpike. It was high noon before all of this infantry got out of Carlisle.

"Along with some of the boys," said my father, "I hastened down to Hanover Street, and climbed up on the high, banked steps of the old Second Presbyterian Church, at the corner of Hanover and Pomfret streets, and watched the Confederates marching out of Carlisle. Although most of their regimental bands played the tune of "Dixie," their marching was nothing like what one sees in a parade. They just trod along, making no attempt to keep in line nor step. The Public Square and all of Hanover Street were filled with people watching their departure. The rougher element of the town hurled at them all sorts of remarks, — 'Well, you didn't get to Harrisburg'; 'Go on home and stay home'; 'The Union boys will fix you'; 'You better keep on marching South till you get home'; 'You'll never see the Cumberland Valley again', and so forth."

But it was hardly before the last company of Ewell's army had reached Mt. Holly Springs, and the town was considering itself free of the enemy when, about 3 p.m. a Confederate cavalry force of some 400 men entered the town from off the York Road.

This was a strong force, a detachment of General J. E. B. Stuart's cavalry command. They were part of Gen. Jenkins' Cavalry, and wildly rode about Carlisle, no doubt to learn if all troops and cavalry had left it.

Col. Cochran was their commander. They acted like cowboys. They yelled and flashed their sabers, and their conduct was such that the populace became greatly alarmed. They made a great stir and racket. Finally they made for the college campus and there set up their pup-tents and tethered their horses.

Col. Cochran was visited by a committee of citizens who asked him to restrain his men. He assured them that he would carry out Gen. Ewell's orders — that troops in Carlisle were to remain quiet and orderly. Upon Gen. Jenkins' return that night — Tuesday, June 30 — he quickly restored order, and the people retired in a much calmer state of mind.

However, during the night, both Jenkins' cavalry and Cochran's left Carlisle. Col. Cochran's wild troopers, yelling like Texas cattle-men, got no furher into the West Ward than the college campus, and did not disturb the inhabitants of the town's western parts.

It was indeed fortunate for the inhabitants of Carlisle that Gen. Robert E. Lee ordered all units of his army out of our town, or not any of us might be here today — nor the town itself. Gen. Fitzhugh Lee, with his cannon and horsemen, would have surely destroyed Carlisle on the night of Wednesday, July 1, 1863. It was toward evening of that day that Gen. J. E. B. Stuart, with Fitzhugh Lee's command, consisting of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th Virginia cavalry and Breathed's Battery, arrived over the York Road, at the east end of town.

William Ferrar "Baldy" Smith, with most of his 3,000 raw infantry, and Boyd's New York Cavalry, with Landis' Philadelphia Battery of six pieces and Miller's Philadelphia Howitzer Battery of four pieces, had arrived in Carlisle from the West Shore defenses of Harrisburg, in the afternoon of Wednesday, July 1; but although Smith had refused three times to surrender the town, he could have done nothing much to have saved it. Lee had the guns that would have done the deadly work.

My father stated: "I had gone down town that afternoon. My mother was at the Market House with other of the Carlisle ladies preparing food for the men of Boyd's New York Cavalry, which was the first to reach Carlisle, followed by Colonel Brisbane's Pennsylvania Brigade of 2,500 men. I was seated on the cellar door of Dr. John Sipe's drug store, in East High Street, slightly to the northeast of the Market House, talking to a drummer-boy who was eating sandwiches and jelly rolls and drinking coffee. It was in the late afternoon when three horsemen, one of whom was Henry Lee carrying the first flag of truce, came walking their horses up East High Street. When they got to the jail, the drummer-boy got up hastily, and running into the middle of the railroad tracks, rolled and rolled his drum. This was quickly answered by a bugler calling the men to arms. Immediately our soldiers on the north side of the Market House, who were enjoying the eatables provided by the ladies, unstacked their guns and lined up along the curb. I ran into my Uncle Bixler's hardware store as fast as my legs could carry me, and knowing what was going to happen, and all other boys scurried away."

It was the order which Gen. Fitzhugh Lee received that same night to come at once to Gettysburg, that saved Carlisle from destruction. By the dawn of Thursday, July 2, not one of the Confederates remained here. Thus ended Carlisle's invasion.

I recall meeting Gen. Fitzhugh Lee and Union General O. O. Howard at one of the Carlisle Indian School's graduation exercises, I think that of 1896. The two Campbell boys, whose father was disiplinarian at the school, and Johnnie Given, whose father was attached to the school, were good friends of mine. We all attended Metzger Seminary, and I frequently went to the Carlisle Barracks when a boy and a young man.