

# Confederate Veteran.

SEPTEMBER 1918

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CONFEDERATE CHAPLAIN.

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*Jelphair Modyson  
Chaplain C.S. Cavalry.*

A chaplain's proper place in the Confederate army was well defined in theory at least, but in fact each of us was a law unto himself and stayed wherever he liked. He belonged to the medical staff. But the medical staff in a campaign was divided. The surgeons occupied a position sufficiently in the rear of the main line to be free from the ordinary fire of the enemy, where they could perform the more serious surgical operations necessary before sending the wounded to the hospitals away off in the rear of the army. Their quarters were the field hospital or infirmary, and there were kept the supplies for immediate use—chloroform, whisky, morphine, bandages, etc.

The regulation place of the chaplain was with the surgeons. But in camp they were often in the mess of the regiment field officers—the colonel, lieutenant colonel, etc. The place of the assistant surgeon was with the men. He had to attend to immediate needs, to excuse a man from daily duty if he reported sick, to send him back to the field infirmary if necessary. In a battle he established himself as near the line as possible, where water was to be had. The wounded were brought by the litter corps to him for such treatment



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as would suffice until the ambulances could carry them to the surgeons at the field infirmary. The assistant carried a canteen of whisky, a bottle of morphine, a few rolls of bandages, and such surgical instruments as he might need for immediate use. Now, some of the chaplains went with the assistant surgeon into action.

I stayed with the assistants all of the time. And this was easier, inasmuch as I was for more than a year only a private soldier detailed as chaplain, and I never wore any mark of rank. Usually I selected the place as near the line as we could get water, to which the wounded were first brought for emergency treatment. There the assistant surgeons of the brigade gathered. I directed the litter bearers to the place. I carried the equipment I have mentioned for immediate use, for I became expert enough to stop bleeding and to establish reaction until the doctors could attend to the wounded man. Then if we got out of our needed supplies I got on the fastest horse of the doctors and went on a rush to the infirmary, carrying my empty canteens and getting whatever was needed.

Here let me bear testimony to the character of our medical staff. I was with them all the time, day and night, and, with rare exceptions, these surgeons and assistant surgeons were the bravest, most faithful, and most capable body of men I ever knew. I saw them again and again, with improvised and inadequate instruments, perform operations which would make the reputation of the surgeons of even this advanced time. And they studied the products of nature from field and forest, finding remedies which well supplied the place of those medicines which the Federal government, Christian and civilized, yet made contraband of war.

As a chaplain I never carried arms, except sometimes on the march to relieve some tired comrade. But some of our chaplains went into the charge with the men and marched in front, cheering them on.

The experiences I shall give of a day are not confined to any one day, but were actual occurrences in the campaign from Dalton to Atlanta in the spring and summer of 1864.

It is a rather quiet day on Kenesaw Mountain, and I am walking along with the rear of the lines toward the top of the mountain, where I can see a magnificent panorama of both armies. Just before reaching the top I am behind the 30th Louisiana, a regiment of French Creoles, who were in the same brigade with us in the campaign around Vicksburg a year before. Suddenly a big, fine-looking fellow in captain's uniform breaks out from the line and rushes to me, crying: "O, it is the Parson; it is the Parson! He save my life!" And, falling down before me, he grasped me about the waist and gave vent to his thanks in a mixture of French and English which I could not understand. I did not understand him. He at last said: "I am Captain Bojeson. At Jackson you hunt up Dr. Putong and bring him to me when the nurse leave me to die and don't care. You bring Dr. Putong—good old Dr. Putong—and he dress my wound, and you help him." Then another string of mixed language and mixed thanks to me and bitterness against the ones who neglected him. It seemed that in the battle of Jackson, Miss., after the fall of Vicksburg, this man was badly wounded. He was in the field infirmary. When I went to see the other wounded, before evacuating the place, I found Captain Bojeson suffering much and neglected by the attendant, who refused to do anything for him because I was only a private and had no right to order them. I hadn't much time, but I hurried to Dr. Paton, of Cockrill's Missouri Brigade, who was then acting division surgeon. He was a grand man, and when I told him his eyes flashed fire, and his usually quiet manner gave place to wrath. He went at once with me. He relieved the sufferer with quick skill, and then he put in



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charge of that ward a nurse that he could trust, while the other was sent to the front. And here is Captain Bojeson, well and strong and giving to the Parson the richest reward any man can give—the gratitude of a true man.

Again we have fallen back under dear "Old Joe." We all feel sure that it is right. We would follow him to the gulf. It is the 4th of July. Our lines of defense are laid out, and all begin to burrow into the ground and throw up breast-works. Dr. Napier and I notice a depression about twenty or thirty yards in front of the main works, where we can dig a safe den under the shade of a small but wide-spreading tree. We soon have a hole three or four feet deep and six feet by four, for the boys helped us. We covered the bottom with leaves and sedge grass and put pegs in the walls for steps. With our blankets spread on the leaves we felt literally "snug as bugs in rugs." One alarming report marred the pleasure of the boys. It was that the parson had been wounded, shot in a very dangerous place. It started from a joke of one of our helpers. Dr. Napier carried his rations in a little tin bucket, and I had secured a nice little basket of splits beautifully woven for my bacon and bread. We had hung these on a limb of the tree while we worked, and a stray bullet from a Yankee gun had gone through my basket. The helper reported that the parson was shot in his bread basket. Now, the stomach was often called the bread basket or grub bag. When one was very hungry his bread basket was empty. So the inference was that I had been shot in a mortal part of my anatomy, and I received many sympathetic inquiries as to my wound. How ready we all were to turn things into fun in the presence of death!

By the way, that night I had an illustration of cool courage by some of my religious men. There was a call for volunteers to go on a very dangerous scout between the lines, which were only a few hundred yards apart. The first men who stepped forward were several of the quietest men in the regiment who were sometimes gayed for their piety. Before the time to start on their perilous mission, it was found necessary to evacuate our positions. The magnificent Yankee bands were playing "Yankee Doodle" and "Hail, Columbia," and our rather cracked orchestra was replying with "Dixie" and the "Bonnie Blue Flag," and we "silently folded our tents and stole away" to a better position. But I have never yet got over my disappointment in having to leave before spending one night in that underground apartment. Memory looks back with fond regrets to that leaf-lined hole in the ground.

Let me transfer the scene to Atlanta and give an actual day there, rather more strenuous than usual. We have prepared comfortable quarters in the rear of the trenches on the slope of a little ravine, where we are protected from the enemy's bullets coming through the embrasures of a battery above us. Provided we don't stand up, we are safe. While we sit or lie down the bullets go over us; so we crawl to our sleeping places.

In the morning the assistant surgeon of our regiment goes to the trenches and passes down the line on the sick call to excuse any sick from duty. I go with him. There is one space over which we have to walk that is exposed to the enemy's sharpshooters. It is not more than fifteen or twenty yards. But the bullets are inconveniently frequent and knock up the dust before and behind us. It won't do to appear scared, but I must say we walked Spanish over that little space. We didn't run, but it was something between a walk and a trot. When we get back to our quarters we sit about and chat, and one of the ambulance drivers is a fine singer. He has a favorite song, "I've Wandered in the Village, Tom." Just in the midst of it the Yankee guns be-



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gin to fire on our battery. At once Jesse says: "Gentlemen, Mr. Sherman is tired of that song, and he orders me to get to my hole, and I always obey orders." And he drops on his hands and knees and crawls to his bunk.

After our dinner I am sitting in front of my little tent fly watching two young fellows, great cronies, walking together to a spring a little way up the ravine. They are not more than twenty years old and are carrying half a dozen canteens apiece. They are chattering away, playing pranks on each other, as boys will do, for they are in a rather sheltered place, when I hear the dull sound of a bullet striking a body, and one of the boys sinks down, shot by one of those stray balls coming through the embrasure of the battery on the hill. The ball strikes the middle of his back and passes through his heart, and he is dead when I get to him. It is dreadful thus to be snatched from the riotous fullness of joyous life in a moment into the pale stillness, the enduring silence of death. But then I did not feel it as I would now. I realized then the truth of a remark by Dr. John Brown in that best of dog stories, "Rab and His Friends." He is excusing the jollity of the young medical students while getting ready for a serious surgical operation by their professor. He says in effect: "Don't judge them too harshly, for in our profession frequent contact with suffering and death causes a deadening of pity as an emotion, but a quickening of pity as a motive."

I found it so. When I first saw men shot, my pity for their suffering was so intense an emotion that I didn't know what to do. After awhile I could see a man shot with little more emotion than if it had been a beast, but pity as a motive made me spring at once to his help. So in this case, the moment I saw the boy fall I ran to him, and when I found him dead I had his body cared for. That night the pity of it came over me, and I was moved to tears as I wrote the record to be sent to his loved ones at home whenever we got a chance.

That evening just about dusk I was getting ready to preach to the brigade. I take my place midway of the line, a few feet back of the trenches, so that those who remain there can hear and those who gather around me, from five hundred to a thousand, can spring back to their places at a moment's notice. We can't make a light, for it would attract the fire of the enemy. I have a great many earnest Christians, officers and men, to help me. The colonel is a Presbyterian elder, the lieutenant colonel a shouting Methodist. There is a gigantic fellow with a voice corresponding to his size who does my singing. He takes his place beside me. He weighs two hundred and fifty pounds; I not quite half so much. I have learned my Scripture lesson by heart, and he knows dozens of the good old hymns. While he is singing the gathering song and the men are coming out of the trenches the picket stops for a moment on the way out to the front. As they stand by me one of those stray bullets comes through the embrasure, strikes one in the temple, passes through his brain, and lodges in the breast of the man next to him. There is confusion for a few minutes. The dead man's body is cared for by his comrades. The wounded man is taken back to the infirmary. Quiet is restored, the song starts again, and I preach the sermon with a vivid illustration of the nearness of that mysterious, unseen world that lies so near us and claims some of us every day. I finish the sermon and ask any who wish to take Jesus Christ as a Saviour to rise up. Maybe two hundred rise. I can't distinguish them. But I have my helpers scattered through the crowd, and they take the names of the inquirers. The following day we talk to them personally. Let me remark in passing that



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we talk to them personally. Let me remark in passing that it was estimated that in all of the Southern armies one hundred thousand men made profession of religion.

This is the record, as I have said, of one day's actual experience.

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