

Separation of the Rodgers Boys

"In 1860 the Rodgers boys separated, each going to a State of his own choice. Brother James and myself came to Arkansas in the fall of 1860 and settled in Ashley County in the Southern part of the State. It was understood that the Administrator of our father's estate was to sell all the real and personal property so as to be able to close the estate and adjust our claims. The heirs were to return in the fall of 1861 and make an adjustment of all property claims, but before that time came hostilities between the North and the South had commenced and my brothers had already enlisted from their respective States which made it impossible for us to get together. We never met again.

"The war opened with flattering prospects for the South, but as each succeeding year came and went during that awful period it brought only the evils consequent upon war.

"Brother James enlisted in the 26th Arkansas Regiment, Company "B" and was killed at the battle of Prairie Grove in Arkansas. Answering to the strenuous call for troops in 1863, I enlisted in the same Regiment and Company. Then a youth only 17 years of age I entered the Confederate service, and was in the famous Red River Campaign.

Generals Banks and Steele, Federals

"In the fall of 1863, the enemy had planned to invade the entire Trans-Mississippi Dept. and in order to accomplish this it was understood for Gen. Banks to ascend the Mississippi river in gun boats and transports from New Orleans thence up the Red river and land a force of fifty thousand troops while General Steele was to move from Little Rock with twelve thousand troops to co-operate with this advance and join their great armies at Shreveport, Louisiana, and invade Texas.

Confederates—Generals Kirby Smith and Richard Taylor

"General Smith's noble services at the battles of Manassas and Richmond, Kentucky, had won the confidence of President Davis and in 1863 he was made the leading General of the Trans-Mississippi-Department.

General Smith foreseeing the danger which his country was about to undergo, and believing that prompt action to repel the invasion of the enemy, ordered Gen. Richard Taylor then in Louisiana with his Texas troops, to hold the enemy in check as much as possible until he with the Arkansas and Missouri troops could reach him

and gave him the necessary aid. Hardly a day passed without a battle between the Texas troops and the enemy. Banks' army advanced all the while Taylor's falling back.

This maneuvering and continuous fighting was kept up from day to day from the 10th of March until the 10th of April following. Gen. Taylor made a firm heroic stand at Mansfield, Louisiana, on the 8th of April at which time and place we were enabled to reach those brave Texas troops and give them the much needed relief. Around noon of the 8th of April, for the first time we heard the sound of musketry in the distance. This gave an impulse for a more rapid marching. On our army marched with as much speed as possible and late in the afternoon we arrived on the battle field. It was certainly a critical moment. The arrival of the Arkansas and Missouri troops inspired new courage which resulted in an overwhelming victory for our forces. General Taylor with his cavalry had been fighting continuously from day to day the superior numbers of the enemy—ten to one of the Confederate troops and falling back, but now came a renewed determination on the part of his brave Officers and men and with the assurances that the Arkansas and Missouri troops were now on the field a thrill of courage and admiration ran along the entire Confederate line, and at this particular crisis, Walker's division, the Texas troops, gave a raking cross-fire and the victory was won. The enemy seemed to be overawed, broke lines in the most glaring confusion, and fled in the night, abandoning a large amount of arms, knapsacks, baggage and supplies. The enemy was routed with considerable loss. The ground was strewn with those killed for several miles. Prisoners were taken. Pursuit was kept up the next day until the enemy being reinforced with ten thousand troops now made a bold stand at Pleasant Hill.

Battle of Pleasant Hill

"About one o'clock on the afternoon of April 9th, the engagement at Pleasant Hill took place. The enemy had posted themselves just after they had crossed an extensive old field. This made it necessary for the greater part of our army to charge across this open field to bring on the attack and to fight it out in the open. In order to get our respective positions before bringing on the attack, the Arkansas troops were ordered to move along a road leading to the right, in double quick, and to advance on the right wing while the Texas troops were to advance in the center, and the Missouri troops on the left and supported by the Texas

cavalry along the entire line. Our artillery was stationed so as to play heavily upon the enemy. The enemy's artillery gave us all the shells possible. The battle opened suddenly with heavy cannonading from both sides. Then out of the opposite woods swept the entire Confederate army in battle line across this open field. The infantry and cavalry charged in solid line while the enemy's cannon poured shot and shell into our advancing columns.

Fighting was continued with tremendous cannonading from both sides all during that dreadful engagement of sixty thousand men in open field. Infantry volleys smote the enemy's artillery. Late in the evening the enemy's battle line was broken. No human endurance could stand that terrible fire and whole companies rushed as prisoners into the Confederate lines. The battle raged dreadfully until night fall when the enemy fled from the field. Gen. Green with his bold Texas Cavalry went thundering upon their heels, capturing many prisoners. The Union army now being dissolved into a rabble of demoralized fugitives who escaped as rapidly as possible to the cover of their gunboats.

The loss to the enemy in this campaign, was approximately 6000 captured, 8000 killed and wounded, eighteen cannons and a large amount of munitions of war.

We learned from the Federal prisoners that Gen. Banks made a speech to his troops just before they commenced that memorable march to invade the Lone Star State. I would presume that Gen. Banks' speech was something after the manner of Hannibal when he undertook the invasion of Italy. It may be that their speeches were somewhat alike but their success in making an invasion was without doubt quite different. General Banks' invasion was an utter failure. His brush fights he alluded to in his speech, and which he afterwards engaged, doubtless gave him a distast for such a mode of fighting. The army which had started from New Orleans on a proud march through the country only a month previous to this, now hastened back to New Orleans totally disorganized.

"Too high praise could not be conferred upon the Confederate troops for their gallantry. All of the honor of victory was due to the bravery of the Confederate soldier. Soldiers' battle and soldiers' victories.

"Soon as it was known that we were no longer needed to drive the enemy back to New Orleans, we were ordered back to Arkansas to re-inforce Gen. Price who was falling back against the superior numbers of the enemy, as Gen. Richard Taylor had been forced to do in Louisiana. Before we could make this move and join our forces, detachments of the enemy had been defeated and prisoners had been taken at Marks Mill and Poison Springs.

"To cooperate with Gen. Price it required much hard marching on the part of the Arkansas, Missouri and Texas infantry. From the 1st of March to the 30th of April no time was to be lost in making this memorable march of three hundred miles. First from Arkansas into Louisiana then from Louisiana back into Arkansas.

"On Sunday evening April 24th, we met our old Commander, Gen. Sterling Price, just as we were making a feint attack upon Camden. As the enemy approached the city from the North side, Gen Price fell back South of the city, and in making this move, we came up with him and his army. After throwing some six pounders into the enemy's outpost, we moved South about 8 miles into camp. It was thought this move was made to draw the enemy South of the City but, sometime in the night, the enemy stretched their pontoons, crossed the river and took up a hurried march for Little Rock. It was reported that Gen. Steele before leaving the city (Camden) made a speech to his troops in which he stated that there were eighty thousand rebels around the city and that no prisoners would be taken and furthermore advised his troops that when they had to fight to do so to the bitter end. General Steele had managed to increase his force with the negroes who voluntarily offered to join his army. It was certainly a motly crowd of soldiers claiming to be a part of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Let us see what success this band of motly blue bellied troops had. It was noon Monday before it was definitely known to us that the enemy had passed out on the North side. We were ordered to prepare three days rations, and then take up a line of march in pursuit.

Our army arrived at Camden about night on Monday, and then commenced the tedious task of constructing a pontoon of plank. This was done during the night. It required all the next day for our army to cross the river. Wednesday morning we took up our line of march. On Thursday our rations gave out with

most of our men. Friday heavy rains set in and it was with great difficulty that we could march. The heavy rains continued to pour down all that night of the 29th of April.

Our army continued to march that awful stormy night. The heavy rains, the vast trains of artillery and the ordnance trains that moved along just ahead made it extremely difficult for the infantry to follow.

Our march was continued until about daylight Saturday morning April 30th. We had by this time reached a hill where there was a small house about two miles from Jenkins Ferry. This is now known as the Giles farm.

At this place we were ordered to stack arms. We began to think our night's march was all in vain. It was not long, however, before our doubts were removed as the picket guns were soon heard firing in the distance. We were then ordered into a line of battle and wait for our command. We remained in this line twenty minutes, or more. This gave an opportunity for reflection. My thoughts went back to my childhood. Nothing could be plainer to my memory than the days of my childhood when father and mother, brothers and sisters, could convene in a family circle and enjoy the sweet association of home, where peace and prosperity reigned. When those thoughts passed through my mind, I then thought of my present condition. A poor soldier boy worn out by the fatigue of hard marching through the heavy rain, mud and water without a moments rest, suffering from hunger, now standing in battle rank, waiting for orders to move into a dreadful battle. Tears came streaming down my cheeks. I could restrain my feeling no longer. Just as we were about to move forward, I took a small piece of old moldy bread—the only leavings of my haversack—for my breakfast and marched down into that dreadful conflict.

The Battle of Jenkins Ferry, April 30th, 1864

"The enemy had taken position just North of a small field along Cox's creek, behind logs and the timber in the river bottom, in such a way that it was extremely difficult for our forces in making the attack to march without considerable exposure to a cross-fire. We expected Gen. Fagan's command to attack the enemy in front while our forces advanced in the rear. This, no doubt, would have resulted in the capture of the entire Federal army had Gen. Fagan appeared North of the river. As it happened a battle had to be fought by the

wearied Confederate troops in mud and water from shoe-mouth deep to half-leg deep at a shameful disadvantage.

The Arkansas troops advanced on the right wing, the Texas troops in the center and the Missouri troops on the left, with the entire line covered by Gen. Price's Cavalry. Afterwards finding that our location was extremely hazardous to our forces we managed to strike alternately as the artillery could not be used to any advantage, a battle of heavy musketry fighting with a cannon shot occasionally raged dreadfully from early morning 6:30 to 1:30 in the afternoon. The Negro troops were stationed along Cox's creek in isolated places and as soon as our men could locate them, heavy musketry were poured into their ranks killing them by the scores. In the meantime the enemy drawn up in lines at obtuse angles, and sheltered behind logs and the timber continuously poured a heavy cross-fire into our lines, cutting our men down rapidly.

At this crisis, one section of the Missouri battery was captured by the Negroes, only at the expense of the lives of all the men who commanded this artillery.

As soon as time and opportunity afforded the battery was retaken and there followed what might be termed, Negro killing. This battle fought by the Confederate troops at such a terrible disadvantage, showed the greatest bravery on the part of the Southern soldier and proved to the enemy that they could no longer remain ravaging the country of a brave, patriotic and enlightened people.

The enemy after cutting down their wagon trains, spiking their cannons and throwing them into the river, retreated across the river leaving their dead and wounded on the field and a vast amount of baggage trains, cannons and munitions of war. We had no pontoon to enable us to cross the river, so the enemy made good their escape. The Federal loss in this engagement was about 1000 killed and wounded, beside the loss of cannons, baggage trains, and a vast amount of war material. It was not so easy to concentrate their forces at Shreveport as was expected by the enemy. Another army sent back hurriedly to its place of rendezvous totally demolished."

"I was numbered among the unfortunates. Wounded in my left arm about 9:00 o'clock on the morning of April 30th when the battle seemed to reach its highest pitch. I was powder burned and my face smoked so black my comrades could scarcely recognize me. While I was attempting to get off the field, I met my Regi-

mental surgeon who called "Is that you Rodgers?" By that time my wound was very painful, and the blood was flowing freely down my side and around my waist. My Surgeon secured the necessary help and I was taken back to a line of vehicles that stood just behind the battle ranks. My old comrade, Grizzell and I were soon placed in one and conveyed at once to the hospital ground where many poor wounded soldiers were being rapidly collected. Grizzell was beside me and was wounded at the same time I was. I remember very well the expression on his face at the time my gun was shot from my hand. I thought he was killed, but it so happened that he had received a severe wound from which he finally recovered."

At The Hospital

"We remained on the battle field for three days after which we were removed to the hospital at Tulip. The serious condition that soldiers may be placed can hardly be described, imagination only can picture. Our baggage train had been sent to Texas and of course we were without a change of clothing, and we were forced to remain in our blood-stained clothes for nine or ten days. The enemy had over run the country which made it almost impossible for the patriotic citizens to give aid to the wounded. However, with sympathizing hearts and ready hands they did everything they could to give relief to the wounded soldiers. I had become despondent by this time. My clothes saturated with blood for so long had become very offensive and flies were bad, creeping things as large as wheat grains had now infested my body round about my blood-stained clothes. This was the condition of many of my wounded comrades.

My first nurse was very slothful and unconcerned, and on account of his unfaithfulness he was discharged and ordered to report to the command without delay. My second nurse was a good man and was exceedingly careful with me.

It was about two weeks after the battle that I seemed to be getting weaker very rapidly and I thought I must be dying. It was late in the afternoon of that day, it came my time to get a little bed, a clean shirt and a pair of trousers. I remember my nurse called me and asked if I could bear for them to lift me, and hold me up until they could change my clothes and place me on a small bed. I consented to this although I was so very weak. While all this was taking place, I could see some wounded comrades in another part of the room,

dying. I knew nothing more for some time; and when I came to myself I was lying on a little bed with clean clothes on, with my right hand and arm laid across my breast. Nature had changed. I soon fell into a deep sleep and enjoyed a good nights rest for the first time since my misfortune.

When I awoke the next morning, I did not feel so weak, and from that time forward I began to improve. Two weeks later I was able to take leave of my wounded comrades that were still at the hospital. I left in company with my Division Surgeon who amputated my arm at the battlefield, and who now dressed my stub every morning on our way to Camden. At Camden I bade adieu to my beloved Surgeon and started on my way home in Ashley County."

A few weeks later I learned the sad news that my beloved brother, George, one just older than myself, had been killed in the battle of the "Wilderness" on May 5th, only a few days after my misfortune. A sudden burst of grief came over me and I wept bitterly. The war was still going on. I took to the cover of some partisan traders who were certainly giving the enemy all the trouble that was in their power. It was their mode of fighting that kept the enemy from preying upon the country West of Vicksburg. However, the unhealthy region did not agree with me. I was forced on account of my health to come back into Arkansas where I remained until the close of the war.

In January of 1865, a soldier friend who was then at home on furlough, employed me to go back with him to his command and bring his mules home as he did not wish to trust any of his negroes.

We started on our journey at the appointed time and made our way down the country into Louisiana by way of Bastrop, Monroe and Columbia and after traveling many miles down the Ouachita and Red rivers, we reached our friend's command. It required six days hard riding to make this route owing to the bad condition of the roads.

After spending a day in camp with my friend, I began to prepare for my trip back home. An officer in the command learning that I was to go through the city of Monroe, his father's home, contracted with me to take a negro boy, his servant, sixteen years old, back to his father. Said he didn't need the boy and wanted him home. So after a day's rest, I started for home with the negro boy. The weather was very bad. Streams everywhere were already full from much rain. Rain set in again that morning and as well as I remember,