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Civil War Reminiscences of Mr. E. F. Shotwell



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WAR REMINISCENCES OF MR. E.F. SHOTWELL¹

E.F. Shotwell

Well, I entered the Army in my sixteenth year, and was a member of Stationary Battery, No. 1, at Manassas; Captain I. C. Davis was commander of the battery. I was in the battery as a gunner at that fight. A few days after the fight my Battery was discharged and they had no further use for me at that time so they put me out of the Army.

I again entered in the spring of 1863, in Company F, 7th Virginia Infantry. We were sent on the advance to release General Magruder. Was in the battle at Williamsburg; was engaged in a seven days' fight around Richmond. Was exchanged six weeks afterwards, being one of the first prisoners exchanged during the war.

Afterwards, I enlisted in Company E, 2nd Virginia Cavalry; Captain Whitehead being in command. I was

¹EDITOR'S NOTE- We cannot confirm all the material in this article. It is probable for instance, that several of the dates are inexact. It remains the remarkable memory of an old soldier who was there. Ellis Franklin Shotwell was the son of Minor Shotwell, whose farm journal is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

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then detailed as orderly for Major G. B. Rives, Cavalry Corps. Was placed by him with Robert E. Lee as orderly near Orange Courthouse. Was sent by him as a scout to look up the enemy, who was a short distance away. I found, after going through a piece of woods, a body of Federal Cavalry on a hill preparing to mount and ride off. I went a hundred yards further and struck the edge of a field; looking over the fence I saw a brigade of Federal Infantry about twenty steps from me who stacked arms and were kindling a fire to cook breakfast. I at once whirled my horse and went back to General Robert E. Lee to report the fact. On meeting General Lee I told him what I had discovered about the enemy. He remarked "Yes, I have just seen those fellows on horse-back; they came very near catching me. I had a near escape of being captured."

I was then assigned as a courier to General J.E. Stuart. General Stuart was camped near Orange Courthouse and learned that the enemy was advancing on

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the Sperryville Turnpike near Culpeper Courthouse. He started out on a raid through Madison Courthouse and on reaching James City he found a store. We met up with the enemy, which was Cavalry. Stuart halted his command near James City and saw the enemy in possession at Brown's Store. While looking after them with his spy glass, they opened on us with the artillery. I was lying on the ground holding Major McClellan and General Stuart's horses. I saw a blue streak coming towards me in a curved line. It was a shot from one of the cannons, and Stuart, who was in front of me looking through his spy glass at the enemy, said, "look out," but I had already looked and turned over a time or two. The shot struck where I had turned from and dug a hole big enough to bury me in. The next shot was leveled high and burst in the woods where our cavalry was. Stuart ordered the cavalry to move to the rear from under the fire of the artillery, and ordered Captain Adams to cross the ford at the mill and charge the battery and he would

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support him in front. This was quickly done, but before Stuart could make the charge, the enemy abandoned their position and moved rapidly towards Culpeper Courthouse.

Stuart then with his command took the road to the left and sent only one Company to follow the turnpike. There we ran into a brigade of Federal Infantry. Stuart issued orders to charge. We charged; the enemy was scattered about over the field when we made the charge and the order was given to form a square. This was quickly done. They fired and fell into us at close range and sent back several empty shells. They then moved off quickly. We followed them along but soon found them strong. They were moving very rapidly. It wound up in a big fight at Brandy Station that evening.

I was next placed with Stuart near the Potomac, when General Robert E. Lee crossed over on his way to Gettysburg. Stuart's cavalry was left behind to guard the mountain pass and to cross over the river when the

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enemy had left the Virginia side. After the enemy had halted across the river, General Stuart moved down the river and crossed it between Washington and Gettysburg. We were two or three days on the road through Pennsylvania and Maryland, often meeting up with small squads of Federal Cavalry. On the morning of the fight at Gettysburg, we were twenty miles away and found ourselves in possession of a large wagon train and a big lot of mules. The wagons were loaded with provisions and ammunition. This Stuart undertook to carry away but found he could not do so. Then we undertook to destroy the wagons, etc., and carry away the mules. This consumed considerable time. We reached the rear of Gettysburg about sundown. There we learned that General Robert E. Lee had been defeated and was on the retreat, and Stuart was ordered to cover the retreat.

Having a little time, and being near a barn which was used as a hospital, I thought I would go in and see some of the wounded. I went into this barn where

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the surgeons were operating upon the wounded and someone called my attention to look out the window. I stepped to the window of the barn and looked over and I beheld a heap of arms and legs which had been amputated from the wounded, and appeared to me to be about six feet high where they had been thrown out of the window. During the night we moved off towards the Potomac. I happened to be about the last who crossed the river in the morning. As we were crossing, the enemy rushed upon us from the hills and fired very rapidly at us. We passed over on the other side to exchange a few shots. They did not seem to be in a very big hurry to follow us any further. We moved upon the hill on this side and rested during the day in sight of the enemy who was occupying the hills on the opposite side of us.

I remained with General Stuart for several weeks. On the morning of the fight at Yellow Tavern, 20 miles from Richmond, I was with him and Lieutenant Hagen. General Lee took his position between General

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Fitzhugh Lee and General Lomac about sunup. General Stuart took his seat on an old well near a farmhouse. The old well was prepared to draw water from an old iron sweep. I drew a bucket of water and set it out on the platform. At that time an elderly lady came to the door of the log house. General Stuart looked up and saw her in the door and turned to me and requested that I see her and get some breakfast for him. This I did. On addressing the elderly lady, I told her my commission. She said she had but little to eat but she could give the General a piece of bacon and corn hoe cake and a little rye coffee. This in due time was prepared and given to me on a plate which I brought to General Stuart. She had no sugar but I had some in my haversack and gave it to General Stuart. He commenced eating his breakfast and seemed to be enjoying it when General Fitzhugh Lee and several of his officers came galloping up and spoke to General Stuart. Addressing him with "Good morning, General, we have the enemy cut off." General Stuart hung his head

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and said, "Yes, Fitzhugh, I am afraid you have cut off all we have to eat." They had a little conversation, I don't remember the sum and substance of it. While they were talking, a battery that was stationed on a corner of the woods commanded by Fitzhugh Lee opened fire on the enemy; the fire being rapid. General Fitzhugh Lee whirled on his horse and turned back to the firing battery. There was a general firing of small arms from both armies about the same time. Fitzhugh Lee turned to the right and did not go to the battery. The enemy charged the battery and took possession of it, our artillery men turning to the woods. There was a charge on horseback also. The field and road was filled with blue coats who resembled a great gang of black birds at a distance. The Army was driven hard-- decoy skirmishes right and left. These skirmishes took place a short distance from where we were at the farmhouse. General Stuart mounted his horse and Lieutenant Hagen and myself followed him in the direction of General Lomac'

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command, which was on the left of us facing the Yellow Tavern road, northwest, I think was the position. The enemy fired upon us rapidly. When General Stuart reached General Lomac his command was going slowly to the rear. General Lomac remarked to General Stuart, "I ordered a charge but my men refused to go." One of the men spoke (he seemed to be a private), and said, "General, that is too hot a place in there for us." General Stuart remarked, "Well, boys, all I ask of you is to follow me." I was dispatched on business; left General Stuart standing talking with General Lomac at the head of his cavalry. There was a heavy firing commenced in the rear of General Lomac as the enemy were passing. I learned in a short time afterwards that General Stuart was wounded out on the skirmish line. He was placed in an ambulance and went forward to Richmond. I never saw him any more but learned of his death shortly afterwards.

I was then placed as a courier to General Wade Hampton, who took command in General Stuart's place.

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I was courier for him at the fight at the Visions, near Louisa Courthouse. When General Hampton reached Louisa Courthouse with his command he was met by a scout and told that the enemy was just ahead of him to the right of Louisa Courthouse. The General moved his command forward to the left of the rear road going towards Gordonsville, dismounted a portion of his command and sent them forward to the line in battle to a piece of woods to the right of Louisa Courthouse. While there, a courier came and told him the enemy was in the rear and had possession of his wagon train. He at once ordered the command to face about and advance in line of battle. We made a charge, cut the column in two, and 300 or more men came towards Keswick Depot. The rest were turned back during the day and we gained possession of our wagons and also the factory. Hampton's command soon afterwards crossed over the James River and moved beyond Petersburg, near Stonely Creek Station. While in that section, the Federals made a raid in the rear near Columbia.

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General Hampton met them near Stonely Creek Station and kept them back all night under a heavy fire. The next morning they moved out in the direction of Petersburg. I was then sent out as a scout with Sergeant Shadburn, one of Hampton's main scouts with five other men, seven in all. After going half a mile to our left in a road which was only wide enough for one vehicle to travel, we met the enemy in front of us in a piece of pines where the road made a curve like a rainbow.

We were only 20 paces apart. Shadburn ordered them to surrender. They appeared a little slow. Most of the scouts were armed with double barrel guns and at once pointed them in their faces. They said they would surrender. We dashed upon them at once and ordered them to throw down their arms and move out quickly. I was ordered by Shadburn to bring up the rear. This I did. In reaching the rear I was confronted by a general with his command only a few steps ahead of me. I at once ordered him to halt, and

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demanded his surrender. He whirled back at once very quickly and gave no answer, and all this time the column was moving off rapidly. We followed it on to within one mile of General Hampton to let him know the enemy was coming on that road. We carried our prisoners out on the side of the road in the direction which Hampton was moving.

Hampton's corps at once turned and charged and cut off several hundred of the enemy. The number that seven of us captured was 83, advance guard of the Federal Cavalry. A short time afterwards we took a scout below Ream Station. There was found the enemy's infantry in large numbers in camp. General Hampton ordered Colonel Young to take about 100 men and take position in a piece of woods in front of us. Then the enemy soon made its appearance on the top of the hill and formed a hollow square, I suppose they were perhaps forming for the cavalry which was about to make a charge upon them. Then they straightened out in line of battle and commenced to advance, apparently

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to capture the men in the woods under the command of Colonel Young. At this moment General Hampton ordered me to go to the piece of woods and tell Colonel Young to about face and retreat in good order; if he did not he would be captured. In complying with this order I had to pass within a few hundred yards of the advancing line. The skirmish line fired upon me several times. I reached the woods and found Colonel Young and gave the order. I found them lying down in line of battle as the order was given to about face, retreat in good order. The enemy was near enough to fire a volley into us wounding several of his men, and as I was on horseback the leaves almost covered me and my horse as they were shot down from above me. We quickly left that place and crossed the creek and formed another line of battle which we held until night and then we returned to Dinwiddie Courthouse. About this time Richmond had fallen and Petersburg had been evacuated, and the enemy had been on the retreat in the direction of Appomattox Courthouse. When

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reaching Appomattox Courthouse, General Hampton was ordered to South Carolina and I was placed with General William Henry Lee; and on the night of April 8, 1865, I was called on by Major Mason to go with him and a scout by the name of Lightfoot. I was told by Major Mason that he had a dispatch from Robert E. Lee to General Grant and wanted me to scout in advance of him 50 feet, with a white flag. This was in the night about ten o'clock. On asking Major Mason if he had the white flag he said, "No." He said, "Here is a white handkerchief. Get a switch and tie it around you." This I did and proceeded to advance towards the enemy's line. We advanced several miles before we saw the enemy, perhaps five miles. On coming near, we could hear them digging and chopping and making a noise as if they were in camp. On nearing the picket line, as I supposed, I thought it best to make myself known by whistling. This I did and after advancing to about 20 steps of the picket, I was ordered to halt. I halted, then I was ordered to dismount. I

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dismounted, then I was ordered to advance. This I did and faced the bayonet of a sentinel. In doing this I told him my commission, with Major Mason with the dispatch from Lee to Grant. I said, "You had better call your night officer." He yelled out "Corporal of the Guard, No. 1." This order was passed along the line as far as I could hear. Soon the corporal jumped up with a few men in the rear of the picket line and seemed to be very much excited, and the order was given by the sentinel whose bayonet I was standing in front of, as Major Mason and the scout were advancing. The corporal yelled out, "Let them have it; let them have it," meaning to fire upon them. We yelled, "Do not shoot, a flag of truce." The corporal came up very much excited. I called to Major Mason to stay where he was awhile. This he did. Then came dashing up the officer of the night. He was Colonel Williams of the Federal Army. I told him my business; that Major. Mason was in the rear with dispatches from Lee to Grant. He said, "Major Mason? Yes, I know him

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well." He galloped up to the rear, and he know him well as Colonel Williams said. I was left in the line and Mason went to his quarters. He returned with Colonel Williams; this happened about 18 o'clock in the night and we went back to Lee's headquarters at Courthouse (sic) about sundown or after. During the day I thought I would ride along a little after taking some rest. I went to where General Gordon was stationed, who had charge of the line in front of the enemy. On our left was a heavy firing going on with small arms as we faced the enemy. While I was standing there a flag of truce made its appearance in a piece of woods about half a mile away. With this flag was also a flag of colors, that is, The Stars and Stripes, appeared at the same time with about half a dozen men, appearing to be officers, at a distance.

As they were being so heavily fired upon they turned back taking the white flag with them. General

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Grant,² seeing this, turned to me and said, "Shotwell, I wish you would go down on the firing line and tell them to cease firing, that it is a flag of truce they are firing upon." I went up to the firing line and called to the officer of the day, when an officer straightened up from the bushes and spoke to me. I gave the order. It was quickly passed up the line and the firing was quickly stopped. The flag again came in sight; I passed through the line and advanced to the flag of truce in the enemy's lines. On meeting the man who had the flag I discovered that they were mostly officers and saluted the officer in front and told him my commission; that I was sent over to bring in the flag of truce by General Grant. He introduced himself to me as General Custis. He looked and favored General Fitzhugh Lee very much. He asked why they were firing on a flag of truce. I told him I

² Editor's note: Apparently Shotwell is referring to a Confederate "Grant" that the reader should not confuse with references to the Union general.

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did not know. I told him I did not think they were firing upon the flag of truce but the colors which he then had flying in the rear. He said, "Oh, yes," and turned back to the flag bearer and said "Take that flag to the rear." I then asked General Custis where he wished to place me. He said just where I was. We quickly came through our lines. The firing was still keeping very heavy to our right. I carried him to the hill where General Grant was stationed and introduced him to General Grant. They then had some conversation and he asked General Grant why all that firing was going on to the right, that he had received orders from General Grant that General Lee had surrendered his army. General Grant replied he reckoned it was on. He said, "I have done my best, General, to stop the firing. They are all South Carolina men and they will not surrender. Then General Custis turned to one of his men and said, "You go back and tell my men to cease firing and fall back a reasonable distance and hold their position." This in due time was done and

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the firing at once ceased. While General Custis and General Grant were in conversation several of our artillery men came up to General Grant and said, "General, the Yankees have turned on us." General Custis whirled his horse and asked where they were. They were shown by the artillery men where they were, He reached the place which they were on, drew his sword and demanded of them to know what they were doing in there. They made some reply they thought Lee had surrendered and they had a right to come in. General Custis ordered them to get back to the command and stay there and gave the Confederates orders to shoot the last one of them if they did not keep there. About 4 o'clock on the evening of April 9, 1865, I heard a band playing as if they were advancing on the road which I had carried the flag of truce through on the night before. I concluded I would ride out and see what it meant. On nearing the road I saw that it was the Federal band and a portion of the army marching through our camp playing "Dixie." This was

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the wind-up of the war except I was paroled next day
and allowed to go home with my horse and private arms.