

RECORD OF
ROBERT M. MITCHELL

IN THE CIVIL WAR
1861-1865

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Among the many military Companies which were formed during the uncertain period following the John Brown Raid upon Harper's Ferry, was the Lynchburg "Rifle Grays". And though in 1861 a member of the Senior class at Lynchburg Military College and an officer of the Cadet Corps, Robert M. Mitchell had at its organization enlisted with the "grays"; and on the 17th of April, then in his 17th year, he left Lynchburg with that Company for Richmond where the Virginia forces were assembling. Made 2nd Lieutenant, he was engaged several weeks at the Old Hermitage Fair Grounds in drilling the assembled troops in Company and Battalion evolutions. Here was formed the Eleventh Virginia Infantry Regiment of which the Lynchburg Rifle Grays was designated "A" Company and the new battalion was soon ordered to report to its Brigadier, Longstreet, at Manassas Junction - As part of A.P. Hill's brigade - after Kemper's and Terry's, Pickett's division Longstreet's Corps, Army Northern Va. this Regiment engaged in nearly every battle and march of that Army, and

besides in the Siege of Suffolk and two North Carolina Campaigns. — At Manassas, the regiment entered upon Camp duty and the daily practice in Hilder's Tactics, Mitchell, now 1st Lieutenant, instructing in Battalion movements and his Company as Skirmishers and in the Bayonet Exercise. Camp routine here was only interrupted by an "armed reconnoissance" towards Accotink, notable alone because of the Regiment's tortuous march equipped with knapsacks, which from this date were permanently discarded for the rolled blanket. Ordered forward to Bull Run to meet the advance of the Army of the Potomac, the brigade occupied a position covering Blackburn's Ford, where several nights a strict lookout was kept, Mitchell sleeping on the outpost line between the feet of the pickets. At 5 A. M., July 18th, he was thrown forward with his Company as videttes beyond the Run and, from the trees crowning the bluffs, noted and reported the advance of the Union army. Early in the morning bands were heard playing "Dixie", the strains of the Southern melody coming nearer and nearer, yet no Confederate forces were in that direction. The Union bands had ^{soon} mastered the Southern refrain, but all the powers of the Union were destined to contend for years to master the Southern armies. About 9 o'clock A. M. a Federal officer blundered into the Confederate picket line and inquired for Genl. McDowell's headquarters. He was told he would be shown General Johnston's. Discovering his mistake, he wheeled

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his horse to escape and, when at full speed, was shot by several of Company A's pickets. His horse and papers, the latter proving important, were sent to Gen. Johnston and, as they divulged that the Federal infantry masses were close in front, the vidette Company was withdrawn and joined its brigade. This perhaps was the first man killed on either side since Ellsworth's death at Alexandria. With little delay came the attack at Blackburn's Ford, which was repulsed by three Companies of the Eleventh under Major Carter Harrison, who was killed. While not heavily engaged in this action nor in the battle of the 21st of July, Mitchell and his Company were at different times under fire. He and his Command did outpost duty during the winter and spring at Fall's Church and at Mason's and at Munson's hills, from whose crests the Federal Capital was in easy view and only five miles distant. These periodic visits to the Fall's Church line were enlivened by ~~combats~~ and duels between pickets and ^{companies} ~~fighting~~, bloodless and otherwise, over possession of the peach orchard, in which Mitchell engaged with zeal, and at one time by a night foray, he and two other volunteers for the special service fought and captured a reserve picket force of thirty men. The surprise was complete, and, unusual under such circumstances, successful, tho' the enemy numbered ten to one. While in winter quarters at Centreville, the Eleventh and four other regiments, under Gen. J. E. B. Stuart, went on a foraging expedition into Loudon

County, resulting in the battle of Dranesville. Mitchell, with his Company acting as Skirmishers, found the Enemy - the Pleasant Bunchtail Rifles, three brigades strong, and brought on the Engagement. On this expedition, he and his Company marched thirty odd miles, fought a battle and returned to Camp within twenty four hours. He marched with his regiment from Fairfax, C. H. through Richmond to Yorktown, where he lived in the trenches and was Engaged in the many ^{of the} small conflicts that kept McClellan's vast army for over a month from advancing, notably the repulse at Waukegan. He took part also in the exciting sport of hunting wild swine and Cattle upon the "debatable ground" between the army lines frequently exposed to the fire of grape shot and musketry from the Federal works. He was elected Captain while in the trenches here. Retiring with his brigade, then under A. P. Hill, to Williamsburg, he was wounded in the battle there, and as well to recuperate of this injury as to recover from the debilitating effects of living in the malarious swamps, without application he was given a furlough by Genl. Hill. He returned to his Command the day after the battle of Frazer's Farm, where his Elder brother, John Fitzgibbon Mitchell, then Orderly Sergeant, had been killed in storming a twenty gun battery; when found on the field his left hand was shot through and bandaged and a Canister shot had pierced his breast. Evidently he had received the wound in the hand, bound it with his handkerchief and

Continued to advance until shot the second time. Sending his body home for burial, Mitchell remained with his Company, and a few days afterwards was engaged in the great assault at Malvern hill and under fire from the gunboats as well as infantry and artillery. Marched with his division to Cuespepper, Ct. and through Thoroughfare Gap to aid Jackson, whom with his Corps was facing overwhelming numbers beyond the mountains. At 2nd Manassas ~~battle~~ charged with his brigade, which captured a twelve gun battery, broke the Union line and ended the battle. Pope retreated. Marched with the army into Maryland, going as far north as Frederick City. Was in the battle of South Mountain - the Boonsboro Gap repulse of McClellan's advance from Washington to throw his Columns in rear of Lee; and was also engaged in the battle of Sharpsburg, where his depleted brigade, aided by Toombs' Georgians, drove back at Stone Bridge several thousand Federal troops headed by the Hawkins' Louisiana. On return of the army to Virginia, he was on Court Martial duty. Completing this detail service, he rejoined his regiment at Fredericksburg. In December, when Burnside crossed the Rappahannock, was with his brigade in the advance in line of battle over Marye's hill to the stone wall encircling its base; and was with the brigade in rear of the wall when fifty seven regiments successively debouched from the streets

of Fredericksburg and assaulted the position. Repulsed here, Burnside that night withdrew. Next morning were found ^{all} along the outside base of the wall musket balls in small pyramids, which had struck the stone and rebounded, indicating the stupendous number fired by ^{the} assaulting battalions, but while hundreds of the defenders were wounded, protected by the rock rampart, the loss in killed was proportionately very light. The defense of Mary's hill occasioned many furloughs. After Chancellorsville victory, Mitchell marched with his brigade in the Pennsylvania Campaign, and was engaged with his division (Pickett's) in the Charge at Cemetery Ridge, where, first wounded in the arm, was struck a second time and fell over the stone fence, yet supported upon his feet by two comrades, after waiting in vain for promised reinforcements, brought out of the battle the remnant of the Eleventh Regiment. Served with his command in the North Carolina Campaign - at Goldsboro and Smithport - mouth of Cape Fear river, where volunteering with his Company to board a stranded blockade runner and protect it overnight, repulsed a boat attack from the blockading Squadron and saved the ship with its valuable munitions and arms. Was in the advance upon New Berne and at the Capture of Little Washington, N.C. By instructions from Genl. James Dearing, under flag, he demanded the surrender of the fort at Warrenton Neck, which demand being refused, with four Companies he crossed the swamp and assaulted the fortress, remaining all night in

h. ditch surrounding it. The besieged could not depress their guns to harm their assailants and, during the night, resorted to throwing upon them over the parapet hand grenades, which created consternation for a time, but they proved merely annoying when the cooped up Confederates became accustomed to the unusual weapon and discerned its harmlessness. Upon the appearance next morning of the Confederate Ram Albemarle, the fort and the town of Washington capitulated with seventeen hundred prisoners and vast quantities of commissary and sutlers stores and arms. With his regiment Mitchell conveyed the captives to Kingston, where the brigade remained in camp until ordered to Petersburg to assist in repelling Butler's attack from Bermuda Hundreds. At the battle of Drewry's Bluff which resulted from Butler's advance, Mitchell was wounded by a particle of an explosive ball that killed a Sargeant standing near him. Ordered four days afterward to join Gen Lee in the Wilderness, portions of the brigade went by train as far as Milford Station where, finding the enemy in front, they took position behind the North Anna river. Here a large force was reported at Bowling Green, three miles distant, and to prevent the cutting of the railroad, the only rail connection between the Army of Northern Va and Richmond, Mitchell proposed with five hundred men to occupy a hill near Milford and fight the advancing raiders. Reaching

the crest of the hill there was discovered an excavation some three feet deep and about sixty feet square with a ditch or ravine leading from two sides, which offered an excellent defensive position. This pit and the ditches indicated that some Virginian had here commenced the construction of an ice house, and to his need of a receptacle for the great summer luxury, may be ascribed the ability of so small a force, veterans, as they were, to hold at bay the entire left wing of Grant's vast army until the arrival of the advance divisions of Gen. Lee. Advancing a skirmish line beyond the hill top, a sharp action occurred on its declivity with both dismounted Cavalry and infantry, and dense masses of the latter were seen in front and to the left and right. Realizing that he opposed an army instead of a mere Cavalry raid, Mitchell called in his skirmishers and placed his whole command in double file in the pit and ditches. Encouraged, as it seemed, by the hasty withdrawal of all outposts, a full Cavalry regiment at once charged at a gallop, seeking to ride over the improvised breastworks and its occupants. It was met with a withering fire and repulsed, with immense loss, men and horses going down before the volleys by Companies and Squadrons. But opening his batteries and bringing forward his infantry, the enemy nearly surrounded the Confederate position, causing its occupants, now massed in the

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pit alone, to fire upon foes in three directions. Four hours the unequal combat continued, becoming a succession of separate assaults from three sides, often from two sides simultaneously, and their repulse. Each attack reduced the numbers of the defenders, who could expect no aid, but tho' losing five to one, the attacking masses were so frequently reinforced they ^{steadily} increased instead of diminishing. And to the front and left thousands of blue infantry were observed erecting breastworks as if fronted by Lee and all his legions. Then it dawned upon the defenders of the pit that by the wonderful foresight of "Uncle Robert" they had been thrown forward here to hold in check Grant's left flank movement and that they were expected to fight a lingering battle to afford time for the army marching from the Wilderness thickets to occupy the new position - the North Anna line. An announcement that Gen Lee expected the post held at all hazards, was met with a ringing cheer and "Will hold it," from every man there. But out of such a situation but one ending could result. Every one comprehended there could be no victory gained here. And then after four hours, suddenly the end came. - His head bound around with a bloody cloth covering the injury received four days before at Drewry's Bluff, Mitchell, directing the defense from a small mound, was observed to reel and fall, blood gushing copiously from his neck and face. A rifle ball aimed

by "some rifleman hid in the tucklet," had pierced his chin, fractured the bone and cut veins of his neck, and he was supposed mortally hurt. His comrades closed around him to prevent his capture as they had done before on another field, the ambulance squad came forward at a run, and thro' a rain of balls he was borne from the pit, down the hill, across a field, and thro' the North Anna bridge, then burning, to the South side. Here he found the advance divisions of the Army of Northern Va. taking their places along the North Anna, and he was informed by Genl. Heith that the stubborn resistance made upon the hill had so delayed Grant's movements Genl. Lee was enabled to front him again. In this respect the action fought there was a success. But with Mitchell's fall came the rush of the long restrained Federals upon the pit, a quick melee in which bayonets and clubbed muskets were in evidence, and only about twenty five of his comrades escaped capture. Considering the number of Confederates engaged, the Milford affair is remembered as the bloodiest episode of the war.

Recovering from his injuries, Mitchell rejoined his division, then recuperating upon the Howlett Line, below Richmond, and assumed command of the regiment as senior officer present. Remained in winter quarters here, under fire of the heavy batteries at Dutch Gap and engaged in several actions along the line, one of which was the capture

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of a hundred pickets by a night attack, which included,
by boats down the James river; and he was also division
officer of the day when Gen. Pickett directed the clearing of
negro troops as pickets from his front, and he conducted the
preparations and the bombardment that resulted in keeping colored
soldiers from afterwards facing the division as outposts. He
marched with his division into Dinwiddie County, commanding
the division skirmish line that drove the enemy's skirmishers
five miles to Five Forks. At that battle he again commanded
the skirmishers in front of our breastworks, and when
forced to retire his thin line before a heavy line of battle,
heavily supported, with little loss regained our works, and
took charge of his regiment. To resist a left flank
movement that had broken our line, he formed the
regiment at right angle to our position to find that he
was opposed by two Federal divisions. This superior force,
with its batteries, was held until dark, when Gen. Pickett
personally ordered a retreat. Having suffered heavily in
killed and wounded the effort to retire at night with
a crowding enemy at ^(short) close quarters resulted in the capture
of nearly half the regiment. Keeping the remnant intact it
joined other parts of the depleted division and, on the retreat
up the Appomattox river, was engaged in guarding the
wagon train until arrival at Sailor's Creek, near Farmville.

Here an assault was made by an overwhelming force of infantry and cavalry upon the wagon train, which being repulsed, a counter charge was attempted by the feeble divisions present, when the enemy surrounded and captured the six hundred soldiers then comprising Pickett's division, only about a score of the Eleventh escaping. Bushrod Johnson's command joined to Pickett's & stormed forward into the dense masses of the Federals and disappeared as if by magic. Mitchell, knocked from his horse a few moments before the disappearance, arose to find himself in company of twenty men alone. Mounting these upon horses discovered running wild he that day assisted Gen. Dearing in the ^{upon the} charge & capture of about twelve hundred dismounted Cavalry, near Farmville. In this affair Dearing was mortally wounded and the opposing brigade Commander, killed. x With his twenty odd mounted men and fifteen or so regimental cooks whom he had armed from the ordnance wagon at Farmville, Mitchell, on the morning of April 8th, 1865, reported to Gen. Wm. R. Terry, brigade chief, and asked for orders. He was instructed by him to proceed to Lynchburg that night, and, on arrival, to place all soldiers and convalescents of his brigade in the trenches there. In penetrating thro' the Cavalry cordon which was by midnight drawn tightly around the army, Mitchell had a sharp action with a picket post just beyond Appomattox, but cut his way thro' safely, and early

next morning (Sunday) began carrying out his instructions. All that day and night he was engaged in this duty and had collected together some two hundred men, whom he took to the trenches. But mid day Monday it was rumored that the Army had surrendered, which confirmed by dark, Mitchell organized such men into a Cavalry Corps, all well mounted and armed with Carbines, pistols and Sabres, and Tuesday afternoon started to join Gen. Johnston's army in North Carolina, intending to offer service as a Partisan Company. Passing thro' Bedford and Hoyal Counties and into Allegheny County N.C. he met no opposition until his arrival at the Yadkin river where a Union Cavalry force, said to be Pleasanton's, was found picketing the stream, as it appeared, from its source to the sea. Endeavoring in vain at several points to cross the river, at last at Ox Ford, with the stream between, he skirmished all an afternoon to effect a crossing, without success. It was discovered that at least a brigade held this ford, and learning that the renegade Tennessee, Kerke, was marching with a superior force down the north bank of the river to capture numerous bands of Confederate soldiers whom, finding the other side guarded by Federals, had halted there, it was determined to return to Lynchburg. Here, after an absence of two weeks, he and his men were paroled under a cartel not to engage against the United

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States until exchanged. He is still a paroled soldier of the Confederate States.

Georgia, 2
Fulton County 3

I certify that above is a true account of my services in the Confederate Army.

Robert M. Mitchel.

Copy
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Senate Reading Room

Washington July 14. 1905.

My dear Captain:

You were Captain of Co. A. 11th Va Regt Infantry,
Kemper's - after Terry's, brigade, Longstreet's Corps, Army
Northern Va. You succeeded Woodville Latham and was
elected Captain in the trenches at Yorktown & being
selected Lieutenant at the same time. The records here
in the War Dept show the facts. I certify to it, and
there is no doubt whatever about it.

You served throughout the war.

Very truly your friend,
Jno H. Daniel