WAR REMINISCENCES

Having decided to write a sketch of the organization of Company F and of the First North Carolina Cavalry, and thinking over the many privations and sufferings we underwent, during the four years of war from hunger, thirst, cold, heat, disease, wounds and anxiety and the toils and sorrow which have been our lot to pass through since the war up to the present time, I hereby submit the following from memory. If you could have your choice to go through all this again or pass on, which would you take? I think the majority would say: let me pass on. North Carolina was slow to leave the Union, she being the last Southern State to secede. When Abraham Lincoln called upon our Governor for troops to force the seceding States back into the Union, she was forced to take sides with one cause or the other, and being a Southern State, naturally took her position in the ranks of the Southern Confederacy.

Company F, when first organized, was known as the Cabarrus Rangers, and was gotten up by Rufus Barringer in May and June, 1861. Fort Sumter had fallen and the battle of Bethel had been fought, and the old South was rallying to arms. There were three boys from J. C. Johnston's school at the Dillon school house in No. 5 township, joined the Barringer Company, their names being John Freeze, John Stizewalt and J. C. Neal. They met in Concord once a week and galloped around, and hunted a big time. About the middle of June we went one day to Mount Pleasant, and by that trip we gained many recruits for the company. We had a big time, the ladies serving us dinner. We frollicked around without drilling for the lack of a military instructor. Returning late in the evening to Concord, we spent the night. Concord treated us royally each time we met there. They presented the company with a nice silk flag, inscribed thereon "Cabarrus Rangers." The men of the town were also very hospitable. John Long, a lawyer and bachelor, took a squad of us into his room, near the old court house, and gave us a taste of good old peach brandy. While in the room we noticed he had each leg of a hog boiled in a little yellow bowl filled with water. We asked no questions, but supposed the idea was to keep visiting bedbugs from annoying him in his slumberers. On the 30th of June 1861, we passed our medical examination and were sworn into service for a term of two years. The officers of the company chosen on that day were Rufus Barringer, Captain; Jacob Fisher, 1st Lieutenant; Wiley Barringer, 2nd Lieutenant; and W. W. Johnston, 3rd Lieutenant. About the first of July we started for Asheville to organize a regiment.

We were transported by rail to three miles beyond Hickory, the end of the Western Railroad at that time. We marched the remainder of the way to Asheville. Many of us had never visited the mountains before and were much delighted at the towering mountains, crystal streams and green valleys. We crossed the Blue Ridge at Swannanoa Gap, and down the Swannanoa to Asheville. The Swannanoa was then a clear pebbled bottom stream, but now it shows the effect of the axe, the plow and the heavy rains, for the water is always muddy. We arrived in Asheville in about two and a half days and went into camp two miles north of the city. We had no horses, the time we stayed in Asheville, but drilled some on foot every day. We had a good time sight-seeing and swimming in the French Broad River. The weather was very hot and dry during all the time we remained there, which was five or six weeks. There were also three or four other mountain companies in camp there. About the middle of August we were ordered to Kittrell Springs, on the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad. We had a hard time on our march from Asheville to Hickory, It rained on us all the time after we crossed the Blue Ridge until we arrived at Hickory. On our return most of us stopped at our homes for a day or two. It
was not long after arriving at Ridgeway (for that was the name of the camp) until there were ten companies there and were soon all mounted and went to drilling right. We privates felt like all of our liberties were gone, when those West Point officers, while on dress parade, would come charging at us, using curse words, with sabers drawn, threatening to split our heads if we were a little out of line. We remained there under the strict military discipline and drilled hard every day, part of the time on foot and part mounted. We had sham charges, which were very exciting and dangerous some of our horses would run away with us through the woods and fields. We were well equipped except in guns and pistols, which were very inferior for good execution. We drew nice gray uniforms, our horses were in good condition; the regiment was a very handsome body of troops. About the last of October we started for the front in the Army of Northern Virginia. On our march to Virginia we often heard the question asked: "Where did all those soldiers come from?" Anyone not accustomed to seeing mounted troops, one thousand would be taken for twice that number. We crossed Roanoke river on the railroad bridge and stayed one night at Petersburg and one night at Richmond. The regiment was reviewed by Jefferson Davis before we left the city the next morning. He pronounced the regiment a fine body of troops. In two or three days we were a part of General Johnston's army and went into camp within less than a mile of the first Manassas battle ground. Our first night on picket, Company A and F, being the first squadron had to go on duty. The picket line was eight or ten miles beyond Centerville Heights toward Washington. There were some very amusing incidents took place that night. When a man was placed on post he was instructed, that if he heard any unusual noise, he must report it to the officer back at the reserve. One picket came galloping back and stated that he heard a curious noise in front of his post. A squad was sent to investigate, and they found an old horse grazing among the corn stalks in the field. One other picket came running back and reported that the Yankees were coming; that he heard them whetting their sabers. Winter soon set in and there was no fighting of any consequence. We suffered very much with cold doing picket duty. We had a little skirmish a time or two during the winter with the Yankee cavalry, but without any casualties. General Stuart went out to the front on a day with all his available teams and troops to get a lot of fine hay which was stacked between our line and that of the enemy, but when we reached the scene the Yankees were already there. After considerable skirmishing, Stuart had to return without the hay. This was the time that Jake Rove, our forage master, jumped fences with his wagon and teams. About the last of February General Mahlelland began concentrating his troops about Yorktown, and General Johnston began falling back towards Richmond. The First North Carolina Cavalry was ordered to North Carolina to recruit and watch the enemy about Kinston. They remained in North Carolina until the last of May, when they were ordered back to Richmond. We arrived in Richmond the last day of the seven days' fight. The regiment was sent the next day to find out the location of Mahlelland's army. We found the pickets changed them with our whole regiment and run right into the enemy's camp. Some of our front men rode around the battery of the enemy. We lost about thirty men, most of them being captured. Major March and Marshall White, of Company F, were killed. This looked like a bad military blunder, when a hundred men could have done the work that they took a thousand to do. General Mahlelland placed his army on the James River under the protection of the gun boat. Our regiment did picket duty in the Chickahominy swamp. We fought mosquitos and occasionally skirmished a little through the swamp.
In August General Lee began moving his troops towards Washington. General Hampton with his command remained around Harrison's Landing until all of McClellan's army had gone, and then we were rushed on after the army. We rode through the second Manassas battle field the next day after the battle. Our men had been buried, but the enemy's men both dead and wounded, were still on the ground. The wounded being cared for by our ambulance corps, but the dead lay on the ground as they had fallen. At some places they were lying in rows. We ran a long train of the enemy's ambulances coming to carry away their wounded and bury their dead, as such an arrangement had been made under a flag of truce with Generals Lee and Pope. We were marched right on in pursuit of the enemy on his retreat, and that night the First Regiment ran into an ambush, and if they had not shot too high they would have run into our grape and canister. John Pharr of Company F, was mortally wounded that night and died soon after.

The next move was that our whole force of cavalry was thrown between our army and the Potomac river to conceal Lee's movement from the enemy. We had skirmishes with the Yankee cavalry nearly every day. The next day after the surrender at Harper's Ferry, we passed through that place and saw General Miles with his eleven thousand men crossing the Potomac river, after being paroled. We then pressed down towards Washington on the Maryland side of the river as far as Urbana. It was not until the enemy came against us in great force, and it was light and full dark until we got to Sharpsburg, where Lee was placing his troops for the battle. Our cavalry protected Lee's left flank in the battle, but we were not engaged. After the battle Lee decided to fall back across the Potomac. Our cavalry crossed at an unmarked for at night, and very dark at that. Those that first crossed got along all right, but every man following would get a little lower down stream until we got entirely off the route. Our horses would sometime be swimming and sometimes on the top of rocks nearly out of the water. Men became separated from their horses, and lodged on the rock in the river, praying and trying for help. Many of the horses were run by being thrown over the sharp rocks. We went further up the river and crossed a second stream with the enemy all day; and again crossed back on the south side of the river at Williamsport. This ended one of the most trying campaigns we had during the war.

Our horses were run down, the men were hungry and worn out. All the time we were in Maryland we had very little to eat but green corn, both man and horse. We went up the Shenandoah into camp and did very little but picket the lines for sometime. About the middle of October in 1862 Stuart went on his famous raid into Pennsylvania, as far as Chambersburg. This was the hardest trip we had during the whole war. It is said that we rode 90 miles mostly in one night on our return. We crossed the Potomac in safety with a large lot of captured horses. The First North Carolina participated in all the engagements named above. Shortly after this raid General McClellan crossed the Potomac below Harper's Ferry and took up his march for Fredericksburg, his new base of operations. We had various engagements on this march with the Federal cavalry at Gaines' Cross Roads, Little Washington, Barbles Cross Roads and many other sharp actions. In the mean time we rode several raids in the rear of the enemy and made some valuable captures. After the battle at Fredericksburg the two armies were quiet until the battle of Chancellorsville. But in the winter and early spring our cavalry had several engagements at Fairfax Court House and Kelly's Ford. About the middle of March at Kellysville we had a big fight with the enemy's cavalry. It was here the brave Palm of Stuart's horse artillery, was killed. Our camp during the winter of 1862 and 1863 was in Culpepper county, north of the court house a few miles. We farei sumptuously in this camp, as our home folks sent us many nice boxes of rations. After the battle of Chancellorsville Stuart's cavalry and the enemy's cavalry concentrated their forces along the Rappahannock river, Stuart on the south and the enemy on the north side of the river. About the 8th of June,
In 1863, General Lee reviewed our cavalry near Brandy Station. We had probably eight or ten thousand cavalry at that time. It was a grand sight to see General Lee reviewing the troops on his favorite steed, Traveler. On the next day the greatest cavalry fight of the war took place. We were attacked in front by a strong force, while a part of the enemy forced our picket at Kelly's Ford and came up in our rear. It was here that they charged Captain Hart's battery from the rear, and it was said that the gunners knocked the Yankees off their horses with their revolvers. Here General (then) Captain Barzinger, was severely wounded, and Arch Leifer of Company F., was killed. The enemy was finally repulsed, and they fell back across the Rappahannock. There were probably twenty thousand horsemen engaged in this fight and had a person nothing to do but look, it would have been a grand sight, there being nothing to obstruct the view. General Lee at this time, had his army on the move for Gettysburg. It was fight every day during this move. We met the enemy at Middleburg, Upperville, Fairfax and other places south of the Potomac. About the 27th of June we crossed the Potomac in the rear of the enemy. Stuart captured a long wagon train, fought at Hanover, Pa., but our regiment was not engaged until we got around on General Lee's left late on the second day of July. Here we charged the cavalry of the enemy the same time as the famous Pickets Charge on the 3rd of July. On the 4th there was nothing doing, both armies being satisfied to remain quiet. The writer with others was detailed to go back in the country to get rations for the company. Two or three miles out we stopped at a farm and butchered two or three sheep, took possession of the kitchen and cooked bread and mutton until night. We filled our sacks with the bread and meat and started for camp. We arrived at camp without dark (or where the camp had been); we found little fires burning, but not a man to be seen. We thought then that we might run right into the enemy's army, but judging from the tracks we followed the way the command went and started up with them sometime in the night. The writer's horse being unable for active duty, he was ordered to go with the wagon train in the direction of the Potomac. When we were getting near Williamsport on the river, were ordered to fall in line as well as others to defend the wagon train. I was afraid to risk my horse in an engagement, so hitched him to a wagon and fell in line with a Virginia regiment of infantry, who was supporting a battery of ours. Soon the shells commenced flying. It was here I received the only wound I had during four year's service. Our army and wagons had to remain here for about one week. The river being swollen too much for us to cross. It was probably one month before my horse was sufficiently recovered for me to join the command in Culpeper county. The next fight of importance was at Brandy Station and at Jack's Shop. The writer having been detailed to come here after a fresh horse missed the fight at Jack's Shop. Company F had several men wounded and Paul Walters was killed in this fight. When our army was flanking General Meade which was known as the Braxton campaign, General Stuart was accidentally caught in a trap late in the evening of about the 5th of October, when he found that there was a column of the enemy marching on either side of his cavalry. He soon discovered that the enemy had not noticed his being so near, as we were ordered to remain quiet until very next morning, then charge through their lines. Colonel Ruffer of the First North Carolina Cavalry was killed and several of the regiment wounded.

One private soldier of the regiment came out with seven wounds. A few days after this we were engaged at Brand Run on the WARRENTON Pike, near Warrenton. In a few days the great cavalry fight came off, known as the Backland race as the enemy was completely routed. The next engagement was at Stevensburg, and other points as General Lee fell back from the Rappahannock across the Rapidan river. The next engagement of importance was at Raccoon Ford, which was about the first of December 1863. Our brigade went into winter
quarters and doing picket duty on the Rapidan. No important moves were made until about the first of March 1864. Kilpatrick made a raid on Richmond. Our command under Wade Hampton made a night attack on the raiders near Ailea's Station and completely routed them. Company B of First Cavalry had several men wounded in this fight.

About the 9th of May General Grant started out on his great campaign by sending General Sheridan with a force of about twelve thousand to capture Richmond. In pursuit of this raid we fought at Ground Squirrel Church and at Yellow Tavern. At the latter place Generals Stuart and Gordon were mortally wounded. Soon after the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House and Cold Harbor, the cavalry of the N.C. Brigade were engaged at Todd's Tavern, Hanover Court House and Ashland. All these places were thickly wooded and we had to fight mostly dismounted. We were now nearing the end of 1864. During the winter of 1864-65 we did picket duty and had several .s everals seventeen fights when Grant tried to force back Lee's right flank. In these engagements we had many men wounded and killed. About two weeks before General Lee commenced falling back from Petersburg and Richmond, the writer obtained a furlough to come home after a fresh horse and about the tenth of April 1865, while yet at home, we heard that Stoneman was coming to Salisbury. Several of our soldiers went to see and when we came in sight of Salisbury, found the town full of bluecoats. We stopped on a high hill south of town on the railroad and looked at them from 9 o'clock a.m. until 11 p.m. Then about 100 men started towards us. After they left town our view of them was shut off by trees, and as we saw they were galloping up the hill right on us, shouting as they came. We could do nothing but run. Over half of our crowd took to the bushes, but four or five of us remained in the road. The Yankees got near enough to shoot at us in a run of about six miles. This ended the soldier career of the writer. After passing through nearly all of the 150 engagements in which the first N.C. Cavalry took part.

J. C. Neel
War Reminiscences

By J. E. Neal

For Battle of Bentville Ch. U.S. C.

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