A PARTIAL RECORD
OF THE EXPERIENCES OF
P. A. YOUNG
AS A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER
IN THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES

I am one of nine children--two brothers and six sisters. Four years previous to the war we children were left fatherless, my father dying May 5, 1857.

Four years after this sad event, that never-to-be-forgotten event, the issuing of that proclamation by President Lincoln, calling on North Carolina for her quota of troops to help subjugate the South, fired every Southern heart with indignation. My elder brother, Watson G. Young, enlisted at once in the "Rough and Ready Guards."

My impulse to go into the war was so strong that when I looked on that company as it marched out of Asheville, led by the beloved J. B. Vance, tears chased each other down my cheeks. That was the last time I saw that brother. He fell at Malvern Hill, July 1, 1862.

My mother being a widow, with five daughters still at home, it seemed important for me to refrain from offering my services, especially that my younger brother was almost a physical wreck.

The following year Mr. Montraval Patton, who had the contract for the mail route from Asheville to Murphy, procured a detail from the Secretary of War of the Confederacy, for me to carry mail for him, which I did. This contract ended June 30, 1863. I then went home and made hurried preparations to go to the front.

I was enrolled, with many others on September 1oth (or 17th), 1863. We were sent to Camp Vance, about four miles east of Morganton, to drill, or to training camps, as now called. At the end of three weeks we were sent to Camp Malett. After remaining at the latter camp a week, about fifty of us, who had requested to be attached to Kansom's brigade, were placed in charge of a Lieutenant with instructions that he take us there. When the train on which we were conveyed reached Weldon I noticed that our Lieutenant made no move toward taking us off. I approached him and said, "Lieutenant, the brigade to which we were assigned is near here; why are we not getting off the cars?" His reply was: "Well, but you'll have to go to Richmond first."

"To Richmond first?" said I. "That's what you'll have to do," said he. He then seemed somewhat irritated.
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I asked one more question, at the risk of being called a peripatetic question mark: "Will we be returned at once to Weldon so that we can join our command?" With an impatient expression on his face he said, "Ye-eas, I reck'n, and turned his back toward me.

The train soon conveyed us to Richmond, Virginia, where we were housed till the next morning. We were then hurriedly put on the cars and conveyed to Gordonsville, Virginia. There we were housed in tents, without any commander, drew rations each day for six days. Then an officer called and led us to the station, with orders for us to go to Orange, C. H. After remaining there three weeks, we were started on the back track toward the command to which we were assigned, at Weldon, N. Co., but alas! on arriving at Richmond we were put in a large building where a large crowd of deserters and rough necks were under guard. We spent seventeen bitter days there.

From time to time I would question officers why we were kept from our destination, but none of them could, or would tell.

At last an officer came into the building about sunset, called our names and put us in charge of an officer who almost double quizzed us to the station. After about two hours the train pulled out and landed us at Petersburg. We were then conducted to the Provost Marshall's office and our roll turned over to the marshal.

After glancing over our roll, he called our names. We all answered promptly. He then turned to an officer and said: "It seems that these men will have to go the guard house till tomorrow." We all shuddered. He then cast his eyes up and down that line--about half of us were smooth-faced boys, the others from forty to forty-five--and then with an earnest, but kind expression on his face, said, "Gentlemen! where have you been and how does it happen that you are here?"

The other boys, having made me "spokesman" for all previous events, I answered in about five minutes talk, giving a detailed account of how we had been tossed about from "post to pillar," and made an earnest--if not eloquent--appeal that we were loyal, patriotic and had an intense desire to reach our command, etc. The Marshal's eyes were swimming with tears by the time I was through. Turning to an officer he said, "These gentlemen shall not go for a moment to that guard house. A passenger train leaves the station within a half hour. Take some of your boys with you and escort them to the train and treat them nicely!"
And they did.

About midnight we started, and reached Ransom's brigade about sunrise the following morning.

I have written this episode, because it was a part of my experience as a soldier. I never have understood why we were not taken at once to our brigade.

Of that crowd of recruits, eight men, four of the older, and four of us boys, joined Company I of the 25th W. C. Volunteers. To-day I am the sole survivor of the eight, the last one, Thomas E. Green, died Saturday, August 10, 1921 and was buried on Sunday, 14, August 1921.

The 25th was camped in winter quarters about equal distance from Weldon and Greensburg.

We spent the winter in camp, drilling occasionally. In March we went on a raid to Newbern, but did not assault the town. We returned to our former camp.

Early in April, '64, our brigade, Ranson's, and Hoke's were ordered to go down the Roanoke River and captured Plymouth. The iron-clad Albermarle, which had just been completed on the river below Weldon, was to be an auxiliary.

When the two brigades arrived at a point near Plymouth the 12th of April the Albermarle had not arrived, being delayed by the Yankees having obstructed the river. Furthermore, there was a stream between us and the town which our engineers had to span with a pontoon bridge or we could make the assault.

Just before midnight of the 15th, the Albermarle came down the river, silently cruised by the forts, with their big guns and soon demolished the Federal wooden boats.

Before day, on the morning of the 14th, our brigade was ordered to cross the stream on the pontoon to assault from the rear, while Hoke's Brigade would make a feint from the front.

Accordingly our brigade formed in line in the rear. Just at twilight the signal gun fired. The boom of Hoke's cannon and the rattle of musketry on the opposite were heard. Simultaneous with this our brigade was ordered forward.
We started in double quick, but soon found ourselves in a marsh which was so treacherous that some of us sank almost to our waist. When we emerged from that marsh, we were in the condition which a man once said his hogs were, "One in a gang and two by themselves." However, we soon rallied to the flag. Up to this time few balls had passed our ranks. We were then ordered forward again. We rushed forward like an avalanche, and soon had the enemy driven into his last stronghold. In a short time a white flag ran up, and General Weitzell and his brigade were prisoners in our hands.

Beside the prisoners and their arms we captured about two million dollars' worth of government stores.

Company I of the 29th was very fortunate. Our casualties were one flesh wound through the thigh, and one slight wound by a spent ball.

After a few days we were ordered to evacuate Plymouth and make all speed to Drewry's Bluff. When we arrived the "Beast" Butler had rushed in, and torn up some railroad between Richmond and Petersburg. General Beauregard was in command of the Confederate forces there, and when reinforced by these two brigades, we soon had Butler bottled and the cork driven in.

About this time General Grant, after saying "I will right it out on this line if it takes me all summer," changed his mind, and swinging his army around by City Point, and was approaching Petersburg. On the 16th of June we were ordered from Chaffins Bluff to Petersburg, which we reached, after an all-night's forced march, and found only one brigade and the militia of Petersburg the only force between Grant's whole army and the city. We had some fighting that day, April 15, without any loss in Company I. That evening and night Company I was on the picket line all night; one man, J. N. Rice, was shot through the thigh.

On the morning of the 17th we fell back a short distance to straighten our line which gave a better position, keeping the enemy bluffed by our pickets. Our company had two men slightly wounded that day while we were fortifying. At night, about ten o'clock we moved to the left in connection with some other troops, and captured some of a trench that a force on our left had lost that morning. The loss of Company I on going over the top was two wounded.

We held this position till about two o'clock, A. M., on the 18th of June.

We then fell back about a half mile and began to "dig in" and throw out pickets to keep the enemy bluffed while we worked.

Here was a situation that was enough to take heart out of any set of men on earth except those having southern blood pulsating through their arteries. The force which had gathered here to meet Grant, at a conservative estimate, was from fifteen to twenty thousand,
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to face Grant's one hundred thousand! Company I, as well as one company of each regiment in the brigade had not slept one wink in three days and nights. Nothing daunted, however, we worked like beavers.

Sometime in the forenoon a dispatch was read to every company as follows: "General Longstreet will arrive with his corps about three P. M.: be of good cheer!" Glory, glory! I remarked to some of the boys, "it's too good to be true."

We worked with renewed vigor, and our fortifications went up like magic, and, sure enough, almost on time, here came Longstreet's corpse marching with quick step indicating they were spoiling for a right. They marched out to the right of our line, and "left in front," entered the trenches, relieving us.

The enemy saw us as we fell back, and I suppose, thought we were all absconding, and they rushed their arm forward, driving in our pickets. When our pickets all got in, the enemy was so close on their heels that the boys in the trenches could see the whites of their eyes. Then the men in the trenches were ordered to fire, and the first volley resulted in cutting the line of blue to pieces. They rallied, repeatedly to the charge 'till late that night in that first battle of the siege of Petersburg. This was the same trench that we held for nine months and two weeks.

We'll go back to the relieved soldiers. When we reached a safe position in the rear, the order "Rest" was given. I got a "chunk" for a pillow, lay down on my blanket and slept by note (?) from that time, about four P. M., till sunrise the next morning. We rested all that day, the 19th. The next morning as we were there on the open ground we were exposed to a falling fire from a mortar battery and from sharp shooters. One mortar shell killed three of Company I. One was killed by a sharp shooter, and one other severely wounded.

A day or two later another of Company I was killed in a skirmish. Then we went into the trenches for the rest of the siege.

About the 15th of July, I was slightly wounded by a "stray" ball from a sharp shooter. The wound was so slight that I never asked to be excused from ranks. I carry the scar today. About the 20th of July, '64, I was sent to Winder Hospital with a severe case of Typhoid fever. While there I cast my first vote and it was for Z. B. Vance to be continued as our War Governor. Soon after I reached the hospital the battle of the Crater (The Blow up) was fought.

The 11th of August I received a sick furlow. While I was
at home the battle of Ream's Station on the Weldon R. R. was fought, in September.

Having convalesced enough that I felt able for duty several days before I was due to return, I became restless, and went back to the trenches in October.

Nothing of moment occurred 'till March 25th, '65, when the memorable assault on Mt. Stedman was made. In that charge I was painfully wounded in the left arm, a shrapnel from a shell struck my arm just below the elbow and ranged downward as far as the heel of my hand; but, fortunately escaped capture. After reaching the place where first aid was given, the ball was extracted and I was conveyed to a temporary hospital where I remained 'till next morning, then to Richmond to Winder Hospital, and was there, nursing that wound when Richmond and Petersburg were evacuated, and also when that sad day, the 9th of April came. After more than fifty-six years have rolled by, I remember how heart-broken I felt when I listened to the roar of the cannon as the Federals fired a salute of a thousand rounds to celebrate Lee's surrender. I told some of the other patients there that I did not believe I would ever smile again. But I will say, parenthetically, that I have smiled several times since, and sometimes audibly.

I was too badly wounded to be sent to a northern prison when I became a prisoner. By the time my wound had improved enough for me to be removed, Confederates were getting paroles from northern prisons. By the 10th of June, Tho' my arm was still in bad condition I managed to get a parole and after several adventures which I will not record, I arrived home.

In September, '65, Dr. Holt, then of Asheville, performed an operation, without which my arm, in all probability, would have been discharging pus till this day. It finally healed up in October of the same year.

Asheville, N. C., August 17, 1931.