

WHEN BOYS WERE MEN

By JOHN HABBERTON,
Author of "Helen's Babies," "George Washington," Etc.

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(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER VI. AT LAST.

ONE night as we were falling asleep just after taps the first sergeant came to our tent and said:

"All men turn out to draw revolvers and ammunition. The whole regiment starts on scout right after breakfast in the morning. The horses will reach camp tonight."

And that glorious, soul thrilling order was delivered in as careless tones as if the sergeant had merely come in for a man to carry wood for the cook. I made up my mind that the sergeant was not the man for his place and that the captain showed himself unfit for his business by appointing such a man.

Nevertheless I hurried to the sergeant's tent, and my soul thrilled with patriotic joy as I saw the great wooden box full of revolvers of the heaviest caliber. I knew something about revolvers, my father having invented one and allowed me to help him in some of his experiments. I mentally made the calculation right there that if each man in the regiment fired only one shot at close quarters, which is all the revolver is fit for in war, there would be about 1,000 fewer effective men in the Confederate army by the time we returned.

Besides the revolver each man received a holster, to be worn at the belt, a cartridge box and a box for percussion caps, for this was before the days of metallic cartridges. When the sergeant began to issue ammunition, however, his language suddenly became unfit for publication, for the department quartermaster, who was 30 or 40 miles away, had by mistake sent carbine cartridges, which, of course, were far too large for revolvers.

The sergeant reported the fact to the captain, while big Pat Callahan, of whom I had seen as little as possible, recalled old times by saying it was "all the gov'ment's fault, an' if the gov'ment's brains was turned into gunpowder there wouldn't be enough to blow it to"—perdition. The captain used language which proved that he was not a member of the church, but suddenly he dived into the big box in which the pistols had come and drew forth a bullet mold.

"Does any one here know how to load revolvers with loose ammunition?" he asked.

"Aye, aye, sir," said Cloyne, touching his hat.

"I, too," said I.

"And I," said Hamilton.

"Good!" said the captain. "You three break up carbine cartridges, make a fire, reload the bullets and load all the pistols. Six shots apiece will be better than none. Sergeant, collect the revolvers."

Then the men returned to their tents, more than half of them joining big Pat Callahan in cursing the government. Hamilton and I began breaking cartridges, while Cloyne started a fire near the cookhouse and looked for something in which to melt the lead. After much searching he settled on one of the cook's frying pans. Then he had to boil the bullets in water to get the grease from them, so an hour passed before we had any new bullets.

That job of loading pistols hung on amazingly. Some of the cylinders did not work well, so we had to "nurse" them, for it would never do for any man to be without a pistol in the face of the enemy. I became so sleepy that I had to pinch myself to keep awake. Once in awhile Cloyne did not close

the mold tightly before pouring the lead, so the balls would be a little too



Down beside me came Mick McTwyny.

large to fit the cylinders, and we tried to make them smaller by scraping the sides with our pocketknives. Daylight began to dawn, and still 20 or more revolvers remained unloaded. Revellie blew, the captain came to look on, spoke impatiently and then said we were doing very well. Breakfast call sounded, and the men got not only their breakfast, but three days' rations to pack in their haversacks. Still we had some unloaded pistols. Then one man after another came up and told about the horses and made me almost wild with anticipation and fear, the latter because they said each man was allowed to select his horse, so what would be left for us but the poorest nags of the hundred?

Finally the last revolver was charged. I went at a double quick pace to the cookhouse for my breakfast and rations. The latter consisted of hard tack and a great piece of pork. How was I to put that lump of fat into my haversack? I had not even a bit of paper, much less a saucer or box. I settled the matter by throwing it away. Fat pork was disgusting stuff anyhow. Then, eating as I ran, I hurried to the stable.

The stable orderly looked at me, grinned most offensively and pointed to the only horse that remained. I went into the stall to look at him, but got out again just in time to save myself from a kick. There was no time to be lost, for most of the men had already mounted and were being cursed into some sort of line in the company street.

"Fall in on the extreme left!" roared the captain. I obeyed orders, being near there already. A mounted sergeant was already there, but he was not there a moment later. He went to the hospital with a compound fracture of the lower leg, caused by the hoofs of my horse, and he never saw active service again.

As we sat there and were again brought to some semblance of line, the captain remembered that he had not yet appointed his full complement of noncommissioned officers. The company was entitled to eight sergeants and eight corporals, of whom only five sergeants had been designated, and one of these had been sent to the rear by my horse. Of corporals we had none.

"Who loaded those pistols?" asked the captain.

"Cloyne, Hamilton and Frost," replied the first sergeant.

"And Brainard," said I from the left.

"Cloyne," said the captain, "you will act as sergeant; Hamilton, sergeant—and commissary; Frost!"

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How did my jacket buttons succeed in holding in my heart during that glorious second of anticipation? I forgot every annoyance and disappointment of the past. Military ability, even if only displayed in loading revolvers, was to be recognized and rewarded. The captain was a splendid fellow. I wanted to order three cheers for him at once, but just then a familiar grating voice rose from the center of the line.

"I was promised to be sarjint meself. Didn't I recruit sixteen min?"

"So you did, McTwyny," said the captain, looking at the ruffian a moment before he spoke. "Well, you shall be the remaining sergeant. Frost, first corporal; Brainard, second corporal."

The captain continued through the list of corporals, and my heart sank. "I was better to be corporal than private, but to have had my expected honor snatched from me by some one else, and that somebody Mick McTwyny—to have Mick for my official superior! Oh, it put my spirits to flight, and some of my patriotism tried to go with them."

"Sergeant McTwyny to his post!" shouted the captain.

Down beside me came Mick McTwyny. Oh, if he had but been there when I first arrived and his leg instead of the other sergeant's had been broken by my horse! Still he was there now, and so was my horse. I could hope.

From the parade ground, where the colonel and adjutant sat mounted, a bugle blew the "assembly," the signal for forming line.

"Attention!" the captain roared. "Sergeant Cloyne, front! You will command the third platoon. From the right count fours."

"One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four," ran down the line in rapid succession.

"Forward!" blew the colonel's bugler. "Fours right, march!" shouted the captain. "To the left, march!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

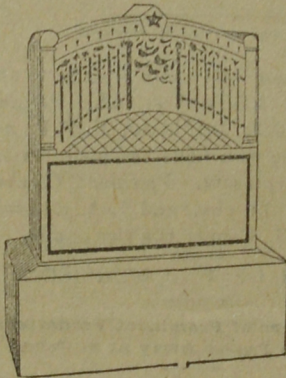
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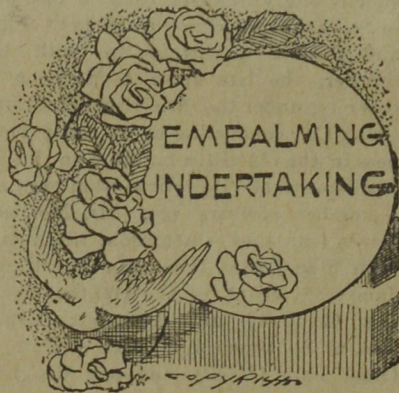
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