

The 43rd NC Regiment During the War -

"Whiffs from My Old Camp Pipe"

by Leonidas L. Polk - November 1, 1876

The night was dark, and the signal light blazing above the city, and the glare from the burning dwelling of Blair, shone with peculiar strength and brightness. We turned our backs on the walls of the Federal Capitol with reluctance, for we felt that it could easily have been taken. We now had failed to capture it, but history will not censure Gen. Early for refraining from the attempt, for when we reflect that had made a forced march from Richmond to Lynchburg, and then to Salem, and then down the Valley to Harpers Ferry, and through the passes of South Mountains, and had met and routed the forces of Hunter, Sigel, and Wallace, and now with a greatly reduced force consisting of only about 8,000 muskets, the men wearied and worn, it will stand as one of the achievements in warfare that gives character and fame to the soldier. Everything considered, the rapidity and length of the march, under the cloudless sun of mid summer, has been rarely, if ever, excelled in the annals of War. We were on our feet during the whole of the night of the 12th and reached Rockville about 10am on the 13th and passed on westward thro the Village of Poolsville and stopped in the afternoon to rest. At sunset we again started on "our weary way" and marched all night.

On our Regiment and Brigade this was terribly trying and severe, for apart from the active duty in front of Washington, we had not slept for three nights. Men would actually sleep as they walked. It was frequently observed that the horses of the unconscious riders, would straggle off from their posts, while the worn out rider enjoyed his snooze in the saddle. The morning of the 14th found us on the North bank of the Potomac, with the hills of dear old Virginia in full view. Crossing at Whites Ford just above Leesburg, we found ourselves in Loudon County, having brought over all our prisoners and the large number of horses and beef cattle, and other captured supplies, in safety. Our rear guard were shelled from the North side as they crossed by an advance of the enemy's cavalry, but this was their only demonstration during the day. Never was a day's rest more needed, or more enjoyed, by an army.

And had our friends at home seen us, they would have laughed, or cried, or both, for a more ragged and dirty army of men were never seen on this continent. All our baggage was left at Staunton, and we had barely had sufficient time allowed us to cook our scanty rations, without an hour to devote to our linen. We remained quiet and rested until the morning of the 16th when we took the Winchester Pike and moved towards the Valley. About noon a force of the enemy's cavalry dashed on our train and burnt ten wagons - principally those containing Quartermasters captured stores, and to a soldier who was acquainted with the facility with which that class of officers could capture "stores" it is needless to attempt an enumeration of the great variety of articles it took to make a load for one of those wagons.

One of them had a bundle of ladies hoop skirts, and an endless variety of "yankee notions: and a five gallon demi-john of French Brandy - but it was all burned, and not many regrets were expressed in our ranks, for in those days quartermasters commanded but little sympathy in the ranks. Maj. Gen. Rhodes was riding just in the advance of the wagons that were fired, and being recognized by a daring cavalryman, as an officer of rank, he mad a bold dash at him and doubtless would have killed the General, but a timely shot from one of the teamsters, pierced his heart and he fell in a few feet of Gen. R - who was not aware of his danger until apprized by the report of the gun. Our Regiment was counter-marched and double quicked to the scene, but just too late to save the wagons, and just in time to catch a distant glimpse of the flying raiders. We reached Snickers Gap at sunset and passed through and slept on the western slope of the Blue Ridge, and along the banks of the beautiful Shenandoah.