



## *PATRIOTIC RECOLLECTIONS*



Just a Little Bit of History:

Interview with Phillip Riter, Company G, 2nd Virginia Cavalry, USA <sup>(a)</sup>

Seeing Phillip Riter seated on a rustic bench puffing away at his favorite pipe and watching blue curling wreaths as they ascended, seemingly contented with all the world-now I thought was a good time for a 'narrow escape. He met with a pleasant laugh and said he had several but could not just now recall them. A fellow workman spoke up and said, *Tell that one you gave us the other day, it was a good one. Well, I'll let you have that as nearly correct as I can give it.*

I belonged to Company G, 2nd Virginia Cavalry. It was August of (18)'63. We were stationed at Martinsburg. The main street in that place passed through the center of the town, meeting the river at right angles on one side and a creek running along the base of a hill on the other. This creek was full of the finest fish, and we spent much time seining and taking them by hand. A short distance above the creek was a very fine spring of clear, cold water, and we frequently gathered round it for a talk and a drink. We had been on picket duty and were gathered here on that day, when we received word that our regiment was leaving their position on the opposite side of town.

*We were not relieved at the proper time but stayed till about 12 o'clock when the sergeant ordered us into line and we moved off the knoll where we were, down a slope to some level ground at a short distance from the spring. Here we all get ready for a rest. The boys suspected nothing wrong and we all got ready for a jolly time. Horses were unsaddled and fed, lunch was washed down with the cool spring water we had in our canteens and all scattered themselves over the ground, laughing, chatting and some sleeping. I could not rest easy as something had been troubling me all morning. I knew everything was not all right and as soon as my horse was done eating, I started to saddle him. My saber, I had not taken off as the other had. Seeing what I was doing, Coon Waits said, "Jake, what are you doing that for; are you afraid the rebs will take you?" At this, I did not put the bit in the horse's mouth, but slipped the bridle over his head. A little while after this, I saw a big dust up by the spring and heard the tramping of horses. I yelled, "Look out boys, the rebs are coming." I wish you might have seen them bouncing and yelling around getting saddles and bridles on. Some left their blankets, arms and everything by horse and bridle.*

*August Warneke, and I were the best of friends and as luck would have it, he could not get the "nose bag" off his horse's head (A nosebag was a canvas sack with a leather bottom and straps to buckle over the horse's nose. The grain was put into this bag which was strapped over the horse's head. When the horse wanted to eat, he touched the sack on the ground, which brought the grain within the*

horse's reach, on raising the head, the bag would drop far enough to give room for chewing - Reporter). *There he was trembling, pulling and jerking away while I was holding the horse. The Johnnies opened fire and the bullets began buzzing all around us.*

*"Hurry up; get on without any bridle, I can't stand this any longer." "For God's sake, don't leave me," said he. I told him again to get on without a bridle; that I would rather have my neck broke than be shot or captured by a reb. He put his foot in the stirrup and I let loose the reins. Away went the horse, Gus with one foot in the stirrup and clinging to the saddle with both hands. I turned around and opened fire to check them until Gus got started. They stopped for a little while and then they came on like a lot of devils. How the bullets whistled past my head. I was scared, but when I looked ahead and saw Warneke going down the road with that nose bag swinging from side to side on his horse's head and he was trying to hold on with a bridle; his cap gone, his hair standing on end and his coat tail sailing in the breeze, I forgot all about the hereafter and had a hearty laugh. Away on the left we could see our boys going as if the whole rebel army was after them. As we rounded the corner by the hospital, I turned and fired a couple of shots at the leader, a powerful man on a very swift horse. Just then some Union officers at the hospital yelled "Run Yanks, they are going to cut you off at the ford." Sure enough, there, coming down a road that struck Main Street in such a way as to cut us completely off, were about twenty rebels. I wheeled my horse and dashed down through the town with Gus far ahead of me, clinging to the horse's mane with both hands. We dashed across the ford and up the hill on the upper side. When the Johnny's saw the rest of our boys, they gave up on the chase.*

*I have had many a good laugh over this when I think of it. I would have enjoyed it much better then if the rebs had done less shooting. We thanked him for his kindness and left thinking of the old friends and comrades of the war.*

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(a) Having been a camp Patriotic Instructor, I know how hard it is to find interesting topics for camp meetings. Over the past year I have compiled 200 stories/bios of Civil War Veterans from Ohio. The first series is from the 1886 Ironton, Ohio REGISTER and is re-printed with the permission of Martha Kounse and Sharon M. Kouns, webowners of lawrencecountyohio.com website. The REGISTER produced 91 articles under the heading of Narrow Escapes, (one a week for 91 weeks) by interviewing Civil War Veterans from their area. This article appeared July 21, 1887.

Submitted by:  
Donald E. Darby  
National Patriotic Instructor  
Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War  
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