

General Nathan Bedford Forrest
"The Wizard of the Saddle"

SOME PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF
David B. Freeman
Who Lays Claim to Being the Youngest Confederate Soldier

TWO CIVIL WAR SKETCHES

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GENERAL FORREST

A short Memoriam Address on the Life and Career,
both Civil and Military; of Lieutenant General Nathan
Bedford Forrest, by request of Camp 159, U.C.V., June
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By COLONEL GEO. W. WELLS

Commander and Comrades:

I shall not attempt to deliver a eulogy on the life of Gen. Forrest. The greatest eulogy that can be passed upon him will be a plain statement of the facts and circumstances which led to the development of the career of this most wonderful man. The great Napoleon said that circumstances make the man, but with due deference to the superior wisdom of this renowned man, I claim that circumstances simply develop the inherent powers of greatness planted in man by nature. The Civil war developed two great leaders, each of whom was in a separate and distinct class to himself with none to compare with either—Lieutenant General Stonewall Jackson, commander of the infantry, and Lieutenant General Forrest, commander of the cavalry.

General Forrest was born in Middle Tennessee, but while yet a lad, with his father, moved to north Mississippi, where he grew to manhood, and like thousands of other boys of that time, grew up without an education, owing to lack of schools in many country districts. About the time he grew to manhood, the Mexican war broke out and he enlisted in the American army as a private soldier. After the close of the war he returned home and resumed his occupation as a farmer and in the course of the year, or perhaps two years, he was married to Miss Mary Montgomery, a beautiful and refined lady—indeed, as I remember her, a veritable queen among the womanhood of the south. Which was the most splendid the world has or ever will produce, but, like her distinguished husband, she had but a few advantages in the way of an education, and the General told me that if all the worldly goods that he and his wife together

possessed had been put up and sold they would not have brought ten dollars and that he plowed barefooted all the summer after he was married. But, notwithstanding his poverty, he seems to have impressed his sterling qualities of manhood upon the community in which he lived so forcibly that a wealthy gentleman who owned a large plantation in the community employed him to take charge of his plantation and slaves and manage it for him and he seemed to so inspire his employer with confidence in his judgment and integrity that the latter having some property which he wanted to dispose of, he placed it in the hands of General Forrest who made such a success in its disposition that his employer gave him assistance and he began business on his own account and at once began to accumulate money. In the meantime he located in Memphis, Tenn., and while accumulating money he educated a boy brother. The accumulation was so rapid that he established a bank and placed this young brother in charge of it. He told me that from Christmas, 1859, to Christmas, 1869, in the one item of buying and selling commercial exchange his bank cleared one hundred thousand dollars and during the ten years he had been in business on his own account up to the beginning of the war he had accumulated one million dollars. When the war broke out and the Confederate government was organized it was in great need of money with which to equip the armies and General Forrest loaned the government six hundred and fifty thousand dollars in gold.

To illustrate the impression which General Forrest's presence made upon those with whom he came in contact I will relate a circumstance which occurred in the city of Memphis. A professional gambler killed a man and a mob at once gathered and was in the act of hanging him and the police seemed unable to rescue the man from the mob. General Forrest appeared on the scene, pressed his way through the mob, which gave way before him, and turned him over to the authorities. This circumstance occurred two or three years before the Civil war.

When the war began in 1861 General Forrest raised a company of cavalry and joined the army which was then in Kentucky and at once began his active military career. His first

contact with the enemy was while on scout duty with his company. He met a battalion of Yankees in the public road and at once charged and routed them. The Major commanding the federal battalion was a West Pointer and was well drilled in the use of the sword, and seeing that General Forrest was leading the charge, decided to drop behind his battalion and engage him in a sword duel, but Forrest, without halting in his headlong run, ran his sword through him and tumbled off his horse. This circumstance at once gave him notoriety and was the beginning of his wonderful military career. From this time on he was constantly engaged in annoying the enemy and by the close of the year '61 he had organized a regiment of cavalry and was able to give the enemy much trouble.

In the early part of 1862 the army in Kentucky was forced to fall back to west Tennessee and north Mississippi. General Forrest was then assigned to duty at Fort Donaldson, on the Cumberland river. This fort was soon besieged by General Grant with a very heavy force, but owing to heavy rains the river had flooded all the lowlands, both fields and woods, so that the enemy could not reach the river. After the siege had lasted, General Buckner commanding the fort, decided to surrender, but General Forrest decided not to be surrendered and with his regiment plunged into this overflowed section and continued his march in the water until he was safely beyond the lines of the enemy. This feat added to his growing reputation. General Forrest then joined the main army under General Albert Sidney Johnston in north Mississippi, who soon fought the noted battle of Shiloh, where he was killed on the eve of a complete victory. After this battle the army fell back to Corinth, Miss., where it remained for a considerable time. General Forrest all this time was active fighting the enemy's cavalry wherever he met them and always succeeded. The army finally left Corinth and retired to Tupelo, Miss., where it was reorganized, and the Kentucky campaign having been planned, the main portion of the army was moved to Chattanooga, Tenn., under the command of General Bragg, and one corps to Knoxville, Tenn., under General Kirby Smith.

In the meantime, General Forrest had been made Brigadier General. General Smith moved promptly into eastern Kentucky, but Bragg hesitated for some time, owing to the fact that there was a strong garrison at Murfreesboro which he feared would fall upon his rear and cut his communications and capture Chattanooga, but just at this juncture General Forrest was on hand and attacked and captured this garrison at Murfreesboro and set General Bragg free to move.

After the events of this campaign General Forrest seemed to become guardian of west Tennessee, north Alabama and north Mississippi against raids of the enemy's cavalry, always seeming to be at the right place at the right time. He seemed never to rest, winter nor summer, always in the saddle. To give an account of all the smaller engagements which General Forrest fought would take up too much of your time, therefore, I will only mention the most important.

In 1863 General Rosecrans moved from Nashville with a heavy force, compelling General Bragg to evacuate Chattanooga, and the Yankee cavalry in heavy force came as far as Ringgold, Ga. General Forrest with his escort went up near to Ringgold to reconnoiter. The enemy attacked him with such heavy force that he was forced to beat a hasty retreat, but only one regiment followed him as far as Tunnel Hill, where the General had taken a position at the foot of the mountain, near the tunnel, and where this regiment came in striking distance he charged them and routed them and drove them in turn to back to Ringgold.

Just here permit me to relate a little incident the recollection of which seemed to amuse General Forrest very much. When he and his escort were retreating before the enemy an old country woman, mounted on an old sergggy gray horse, with her sun bonnet in her hand, met them and at once began to denounce them as cowards and wound up saying "You cowards, if old Forrest was here you would not dare to be running." The General said, about this time the enemy came in sight and the last he saw of the old lady, the old gray horse was going at top speed.

When the armies of Bragg and Rosecrans were concentrating for the great battle of Chickamauga the Yankees threw forward a very heavy force of cavalry on Peavine creek, near Pealer's mill. General Forrest not having force enough to confront their entire line, came to the commander of the division to which I belonged and asked for an infantry support and I was given a sufficient force and assigned the task, but the first charge General Forrest made he routed all in his front and the whole line fled and he drove the whole force to the protection of their infantry. After this great battle had been fought and the enemy entirely routed General Forrest followed and harassed them even down into the city of Chattanooga.

In the meantime General Forrest had been made a Major General. After General Bragg had settled down to the siege of Chattanooga he ordered Forrest to go to middle Tennessee on a raid, subject to the orders of another General. This order Forrest refused to obey; then General Bragg relieved him of his command. He then returned to Mississippi and organized another division of cavalry and continued heading off raids in Mississippi, north Alabama and west Tennessee.

There was a vast quantity of government corn stored at different points on the Mississippi and Ohio railroad and the Yankee General, Grierson, made a raid with a view of burning it, but General Forrest met his heavy force of cavalry and defeated it and saved this vast amount of corn, which was so necessary for the support of the army at that time.

After this event the federal General Strait set out with about two thousand cavalry through north Alabama with the expectation of capturing the city of Rome, Ga. General Forrest, with a small force of six hundred men, got in his front and fought him as best he could with his small force until he reached the Coosa river, but here the Yankees spread out and got possession of all the known fords on the river, and thus had General Forrest surrounded on three sides with no apparent chance of escape, but just at this juncture he met a heroic country girl who knew of a private ford and volunteered to pilot him across the river, which offer was gladly accepted, and she mounted up behind the General and piloted him and his little

command safely across the river. This young lady was Miss Sansom, whose heroism was rewarded after the war by the Alabama legislature by a splendid gift. After this escape General Forrest continued in front of the enemy until he reached a favorable position when he halted and confronted General Strait and demanded his surrender. By a piece of clever strategy he convinced the Yankee General that he had a very heavy force in front of him. When General Forrest went to parley with the Yankees for his surrender he had concealed his little force behind a wooded hill with orders to continue to march around this hill, as there was but one place the Yankees could see the column, thus making the impression that he had a very heavy force and the Yankee General agreed to surrender. By this piece of strategy the city of Rome escaped capture.

General Forrest also attacked the city of Memphis, routed the garrison and drove them entirely out of the city, but could not hold it on account of the gunboat in the river in front of the city, as they doubtless would have bombarded and burned the city.

The next great move of General Forrest was his attack and capture of Fort Pillow, in west Tennessee, on the Mississippi river. This strong fort was on a high hill rising directly up the bank of the river and had a strong garrison. General Forrest surrounded the fort on three sides and demanded the surrender of the commander, stating in his demand that if he had to sacrifice his men in taking the fort he would not be responsible for anything that might happen. This demand for surrender was refused. General Forrest dismounted his men, attacked and captured the fort, and all the garrison who could fled down the hill and plunged into the Mississippi river, hoping to swim to the gunboats, but were pursued by the confederates, few escaped their bullets, and thus the entire garrison was destroyed.

One of the greatest battles fought by General Forrest and one of the greatest victories ever gained by a cavalry commander was the battle of Okalona, Miss. The Yankee General, Sturgis, had thirty thousand infantry and a strong force of General Forrest met him with ten thousand cavalry, routed his

entire force and drove them back to Memphis, one hundred and fifty miles.

The last engagement General Forrest had with the enemy was at Selma, Ala., in the closing days of the war. The federal General, Wilson, advanced with a large force and General Forrest met him with his command, which was reduced to a mere skeleton and was overpowered. The General himself was attacked by a squad of the enemy and his right arm which he was defending himself became useless from the heavy blows of the enemy, and he saw that his only chance of escape was to force his horse to leap over a wagon standing in the street near him and he gave his powerful horse the spurs and he leaped over the wagon, and thus he made his escape. This I had from the General himself.

In conclusion, I challenge the history of the wars of the world to produce the name of a commander of cavalry who performed such great military feats as General Forrest.

GEO. W. WELLS,
Lieutenant Colonel C. S. A.

SOME PERSONAL WAR EXPERIENCES OF DAVID B. FREEMAN

Mr. Commander, Comrades:

It is with due appreciation of the privilege of so doing that I present here a sketch of my war experience and if it proves of interest for no other reason I trust it may be from the uniqueness of that experience, or it's being out of the unusual. For fear of fatiguing you with too much detail I will only touch in the high places, so to speak.

Comrades, we have all had our war experiences and those of many of us are very much alike but I have never read or listened to one that I did not enjoy. Not even so common a thing as a dog fight can be witnessed by two people and told of exactly alike. Our impressions come from the angle at which our understanding compasses an event and we generally like to know how the other fellow viewed what we saw. To me one of the most interesting stories of the war was a paper covered book with the title, "Company Aitch." It was the experiences of a Tennessee private for the full four years of the war with his company in the western army.

Now, to be fair with you, I never regarded as of much importance what some have been liberal enough to regard as a distinction, that of being the youngest Confederate soldier, a claim I feel safe in saying with due modesty but with candor I have established without any question. Though I know it was very much of a reality, the war seems as a dream to me, a separate part of my life, at least, and I lay no claim to patriotism, for I hadn't lost any war and wasn't hunting any, that I should go to it, but it rather came to me through circumstances not of my ordering.

I had a brother, crippled from white swelling, but from having been a member of the Fulton Blues previous to the development of the disease he possessed the military spirit. He went into his native county, Gilmer, and was the main spirit in the raising of a cavalry company, of which he was elected first lieutenant. Though hopeful, he was uncertain as to whether he could stand the service. He asked our mother to let me go with

him into camp if need be to be of help to him. Astride a nick tailed blaze face bay pony I hied into Camp Felton, near Cartersville. There was organized Smith's Legion, composed of an infantry battalion and one of cavalry. Infantry needed a drummer boy, cavalry a marker. The latter place was offered me, and there, by my mother's and my brother's consent I enlisted. This was in April, and I lacked one month being eleven years old. It was understood that I was to be allowed to return home any time the Colonel saw fit after drilling days were over; but alas! as we shall hereafter see.

After an itinerary characterized by no more exciting features than drill practices of the evolution of cavalry tactics, including the leaping of fences, picking up handkerchiefs while riding at full speed, etc., in which I got my share of falls, the fag end of summer found us going into Kentucky over the Cumberland mountains after a brush with Clift's men at Big Creek Gap.

As the panorama of the magnificent Blue Grass region unfolded itself to our vision from the mountain tops I thought this must be Paradise. As we went through the towns of Monticello, Crab Orchard and Danville the populace welcomed us with joy, at every front gate stood ladies and children waving at us and as we would leave a town every horse had waving from its bridle a tiny Confederate flag. By the diminutive size of myself and my steed I attracted much attention. Some would give me presents, such as home knit socks, mitts, neck scarfs and comforters, and some would observe that I ought to be at home with my mother.

At Monticello we came to the camp of General John H. Morgan and his men. I thought General Morgan was the finest looking soldier I had seen, and he was. Robust, erect; well fitting uniform; cavalry boots with spurs with immense rowels; white wide brimmed hat, held up at the side with a star; dark hair and beard—all this, with his coal black saddle mare, made him a picturesque figure.

At Mill Spring we were shown the spot where General Zollicoffer was killed. We halted at Camp Dick Robinson, at

Bryantville, and were put to guarding stores captured from the Federals at the battle of Richmond.

There was a drought and the streams all dried up and as the citizens had cisterns for their own use and no water to spare us, we suffered greatly for water. I saw men take their canteens and wave away the green scum and sink them to be filled in the puddles.

Coming away from Camp Dick Robinson the scene was one I will never forget. Acres of ground were covered with pickled pork in barrels. There was a large building filled with captured clothing and equipments. All this was set on fire. The heavens were lit up with the flames. Everything was on the retreat. Infantry had been passing in the day; the artillery and wagons were moving at night. The demoniacal blaze, the stench from burning meat and clothing, the braying of mules, the cursing of teamsters, all made up a fiendish medley for the vision, the hearing and the olfactories.

Every soldier had carried away a huge chunk of pickled pork stuck on the end of his bayonet.

My brother, coming in from a detachment service, with two comrades, called me up at ten o'clock at night in a private home, where I had been allowed to stay until his return—right in the midst of this awful hubbub and confusion. The legion had gone on hours before. My pony had been stolen from the orchard. I jumped up behind my brother. We braved the pike in the jam amid the rattling and clanking of wheels, when a terrible rain began falling, and at the first town we rode into an old blacksmith shop, tied the horses to some rings, spread our wet blankets on the hard work benches and stayed—not rested—till morning.

The seemingly unending line of artillery and wagons jamming the pike, we decided to try the by roads, which was a perilous proceeding, going through mountains full of bushwhackers.

We took our sleeps in the woods well away from the roads and were four days on our way. We were fired on several times and narrowly escaped being captured or killed. At Cumberland Gap we were halted by guards, to whom we told our story of special

service, but as we had no official papers they would not let us pass. We moved back well out of sight and awaited some wagons we knew. Those of Colonel Maddox's regiment came along. We were allowed to hide, each, in a wagon, with horse tied behind, and thus we evaded the guards, finding our command over the mountain.

I saw my pony (I had gotten another one by this time,) a boneyard sujeet, turned out on the barren commons fronting an infantry command, too poor and weak for rescue. Some "webfoot" had had a good ride out.

At the gap—it was in October—a snow fell three feet deep. We built great log fires and laid down at night with our feet to the fire. I took sick from the exposure and was carried to a farm house, where I was placed on a pallet with my feet to the fire. My feet cracked open and ran blood.

So much for the kindergarten. I don't reckon I would have counted my service if it had ended here, and I was allowed to go home. So were most all, for the infantry and cavalry must separate in the legion, to be recruited into two regiments and everybody must induce recruits. These regiments were the 6th Georgia Cavalry and the 65th Georgia Infantry.

The first great engagement we took part in after I rejoined the command was at Chickamauga. In the battle there I will leave it to a comrade, John W. Minnich, to narrate the scene after the 6th and other cavalry had held the enemy back, as follows:

"Just as we saw coming across the open field a long line of gray, at a quick step, with the stars and bars and St. Andrews cross floating grandly in the breeze—the line almost as correct as if on dress parade. It was Lidell, of Walker's division. It was the long waited for and earnestly prayed for infantry relief. With the exception of a few stray shots from our friends in the bush, they had almost ceased firing, but we prayed there was still some life on the ridge. Then we gave a yell when the infantry came in sight. We threw our dusty hats into the air and danced about and shouted out the relief we felt. Our friends in the bush no doubt knew the meaning of those exultant shouts. Lidell entered the edge of the wood and when about sixty yards in advance of our

line and about a hundred and fifty to our left there rose in front of him and us a double line of blue, and instantly we heard to our left front the command 'Fire!' The line of gray stopped still like a man who received a staggering blow in the face. Hundreds went down under the scathing fire. Then we heard the commands, 'Steady, men! steady!' "close up!' 'fire!' Only twice did they deliver their fire; and then again we heard the order, "Forward!' The enemy poured in a murderous fire, but that line of gray was not to be checked. Bleeding at every step, it moved as one man in the face of a melting fire. It reached a point forty yards from the line of blue, and then above the infernal din we heard in clearest tones the order to charge. With a wild yell the boys in gray again leaped forward and the line of blue melted away. In less than two minutes the blue and gray were out of sight in the wood. All this did not take fifteen minutes of time."

After Chickamauga our regiment took what we called the long night ride. It was from McFarland Spring, Ga., to Powder Spring, in east Tennessee, a distance of sixty miles. We were involved in a fight with Yankee cavalry at Philadelphia, Tenn., and were with the Longstreet forces in his fall and winter campaign '63-'64 in east Tennessee. The Georgia brigade of cavalry had been formed, composed of the 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, and 6th regiments. We were attached to General Will T. Martin's division, of Joe Wheeler's corps. For privations and peril I am satisfied there was no more trying service in the war. It seems to me we never had a whole night's sleep, the sharp notes of the bugle bringing us to saddle at all hours from dark to dawn. The weather was severe, with snow on the ground most all the time and the streams which we had to ford times and times again, which included the Holston, the Clinch and the French Broad rivers, were filled with mush ice, dangerous, always, throwing a horse violently from its footing.

We fought at Mossy Creek, Lenoirs Station, Dandridge, Russellville, Concord, Bean's Station and other places, at some times dismounted and side by side with infantry. It would make this sketch too long to go into details reading these engagements, which were exciting enough, but I wish to make especial mention of one.

At Bean's Station we had been feeling for the enemy all day and found him just before night. The videttes were run in. We dismounted. From my position with the led horses on the side of the road I could see the movements in the field to our left. Our men charged, and just before entering a wood and simultaneous with a broadside which sent shells and grape among our horses to panic them a musket volley was poured into them from part of a line said to be a corps of infantry, their position concealed in the wood. Seeing the odds they were against, our men went to horses and made their way back up the Holston, and on the night ride we slept in our saddles. After Longstreet left for Virginia, heads were turned to Georgia, our cavalry making its way around through North Carolina. From Dalton to Atlanta our company was escort for General Joseph E. Johnston.

At Resaca I saw the troops sling their knapsacks to be picked up by the wagons and on double quick, to enter the battle, and I never will forget the serious expression each man wore on his face as he pushed himself on to what he knew was danger, and perhaps death. Each countenance was as rigid as a stone. The same Yankee batteries that were sending shells thick as hail around the headquarters wagon where we were eating breakfast just across the river sent several shells and cannon balls crashing through the Jim Hill house, where General Johnston had his headquarters.

At Cassville, riding beside the headquarters wagon, as we halted in the public square, I could see the forces forming their lines of battle on the hills above the town. Soon the shells fell thick where we were.

At Kennesaw mountain General Johnston would sit on a camp stool and watch the signal corps on the mountain top. The Yankees, with field mortars, would try to dislodge the signal corps and the balls would fall thick and regular all about the headquarters camp. I thought I would like to move away from there every time a ball fell dangerously near, but the General was paying no attention to them. There is no greater test on one's sticking courage than in the suspense of inaction in or near the

source of danger, as I have heard men say who were put to supporting a battery.

After Johnston's removal our company was put in charge of beef cattle for the army. We turned cow boys. Now I will end this sketch with a narration of facts per but little known and never, as I have seen, put in print. A small bunch of ex-confederates called on General A. P. Stewart, who succeeded Polk, when he visited my old home town. General Stewart told us Johnston had fully planned to give Sherman fight at Chattahoochee river and his three corps Generals had understood and agreed to it. The plan was to await Sherman's start to cross the stream, as he would do, in three places, then from breastworks attack him in midstream. The evening before the planned battle a telegram came from the war department to General Hood that he was put in command of the army. Before General Johnston knew of this Stewart and Hardee, who did, went to Hood and asked that the war department be telegraphed to hold up the order till after the intended battle. Hood agreed. The answer came back, "The order is irrevocable. General Hood is in command."