

Reminiscences of a Mosby Raider

Henry M. Withers, Now a Member of the Kansas City Bar, Became One When but Fourteen Years of Age.

Are the Mosby men long lived? Henry M. Withers, a well known member of the Kansas City bar, one of them himself, says they are and he exhibits his own great frame to show that four years of the roughest sort of rough riding and the succeeding forty odd years have not weighed heavily upon him. General Mosby, himself, is alive and hearty in San Francisco, where he is counsel for the Southern Pacific railroad, at seventy-five years of age, spare in figure but alert as he was when he was capturing generals and keeping 12,000 federal troops busy trying to "clean him out" of the Shenandoah valley and the Loudoun country.

Withers ran away from school, stole a horse and sneaked out of his country in the night to John Mosby. He was just fourteen years of age and was the nineteenth "man" to join the command. When the company grew so big it had to be divided, young Withers was the first man chosen by the second captain, going into company B. Mosby had about 700 men under his orders, though he never went into a fight with more than 200. They were kept in their own district to harry the Union troops, which were constantly maneuvering over that part of the country. Mosby's business was to capture high officers for their exchange value, and to get quartermasters' trains and keep a sharp eye out for paymasters. The rangers kept what they got, one fight declaring a cash dividend of \$2200, according to history, but only \$1800 according to the memory of Private Withers. That was when the Mosby men captured a train on which was a Union army paymaster. He was found in the baggage coach, hiding under a rubber poncho, not for his own personal safety but for the safety of his treasure. The paymaster knew he would not be killed. There was found to be \$120,000 in his chest. This was divided among each ranger in the raid excepting General Mosby, who took nothing.

KEPT ALL THEY FOUND.

"We were permitted to keep everything we found and for a long time were under the black flag," said Mr. Withers in relating some of his experiences as a Mosby raider. "I went into the regiment on a mule but the third day, after my first fight, had a real good horse and an excellent pair of boots. We took everything in sight. Hoops were worn by the fashionable women in those days. I recollect coming back from one raid with the neck of every horse in the command wearing at least one set of hoops."

Mosby's men never fought as a regiment. Instead of being kept in quarters, the men lived around, alone or up to four of them, in the farm houses. Scouts would learn of the arrival of Federals and a call would be sent for the men to assemble at a certain place. There they organized and went on the trail. In the fight they fought each man for himself, without any regard whatever to fours right, right wheel, deploy or anything else. They had two orders. "Go ahead, boys," and "skedaddle." The skedaddle order was always obeyed as the Mosby men enlisted to fight, not to die.

Yet they did some hard fighting. General Sherman permitted a Captain Blazer to pick a regiment from 10,000 men especially to "clean out Mosby," and sent Blazer and his picked men into the Shenandoah valley. Blazer was from the Eighth Illinois cavalry, "and that regiment," said Mr. Withers, "was composed of the flower of fighting men of history. I never read of their superiors. If the war did nothing else, it developed in that Eighth Illinois cavalry a regiment of which the two armies ought to be proud."

On one raid Blazer killed ten out of fifteen of a Mosby picket and caught the other five. Several times he made them take the skedaddle order, and take it quick.

THE BLAZER FIGHT.

"One day," said Mr. Withers, "Mosby said to my captain, 'I want you to go over there into the valley and stay there till Blazer whips you or you whip Blazer,' and Major Richardson, my commander, took A and B companies over to the side of the mountains. We were not there many days till Blazer got wind of us and he caught two of our scouts, one named Puryear. He took Puryear off into the woods and turned him over to a Lieutenant Cole who hung him three times to make him tell our numbers, location and name of our commander. Puryear refused to the last, though he thought sure he was going to be hanged till dead. That night our battalion started

after Blazer and Blazer after us. We saw in the wet ground—it had been raining—that we were circling. Richardson decided to maneuver, and he turned out of the trail to give the idea that he had broken for the river to cross and get away. Instead of going as far as the river, he turned us into a bit of timber, skirted by a stake and rider fence, hid us in a swale and lay in wait for Blazer to come in front of us. Then we were to shoot into him. But Blazer was clever as he was brave and he had videttes out. They found us, and, instead of coming in front of us along the road, they came through the timber on our flank, and company A had to get out of that in short order. Major Richardson was afraid that Blazer, whose men were armed with long range rifles whereas we had but pistols, would get protection from the timber and kill the lot of us in that swale. So he ordered company A to take a new position, and company B to remain in the swale till A had formed again. Blazer saw us galloping out of the draw and up towards the top of the hill, and, thinking it was the entire command in flight, he got into the road and started down it at a fast trot, the better to get at company A. That was his fatal blunder. He did not know my company was still in the brush, and, just as he was abreast, we clapped spurs into the flanks of our horses and went at him. A company, hearing this, wheeled around and came back to where we were. For a minute they say, though it seemed to me an age, we fought, horse to horse, with pistols. The slaughter was fearful. We killed or captured every man in the command, including Blazer himself. We had to run him twelve miles to get him.

A MOSBY MAN'S REVENGE.

"The next day, in taking the prisoners to the rear, we came across a still. Almost every man helped himself freely, and it was 'three cheers for Major Richardson,' and the prisoners joined in, and 'now three for Captain Blazer,' and the Mosby men joined.

"There was a tragedy upon a tragedy in that Blazer fight, as the Mosby men classify that particular engagement. Puryear, the Mosby scout, who had been taken prisoner that morning, was with the Federals during the fight. When the Blazer command broke and ran, Puryear got hold of a revolver and joined his fellow rangers in the chase. He had but a single thought in

his head," continued Mr. Withers. "He had been strung up by Lieutenant Cole. In the chase Puryear rode past a dozen Federals, straight for Lieutenant Cole. Cole, seeing himself about to be captured, surrendered to me, and was handing me his revolver when Puryear rode up and killed him."

There is a scar on the back of Mr. Withers' head, a souvenir of a dance at Foster's house. Mosby took a detachment to a dance there to capture a number of Federal officers. Wearing Federal overcoats, the Mosby men got through the lines all right, and into the house where the dance was being given. Being armed and prepared, they found no trouble in making prisoners. On coming out of the house they found a division of Federal troops passing in front of the house. They remounted, put their prisoners on their own horses, which had been picketed at a fence, and rode through the lines between two regiments without their identity being discovered. One of the prisoners proved to be on the staff of General Meade. He had on him orders for three days' movements of the troops. General Lee got these within two hours.

CAPTURING FEDERAL OFFICERS.

"We knew every foot of road in the country, and there were so many detachments moving around that it was not surprising for one regiment not to know, nor to care much, about what a company or a squad or a lone man might be," Mr. Withers explained. "That accounts for General Mosby taking a lot of us right into the middle of 15,000 Federals, right into a hotel where General Stouton was, and right into his bedroom. Each of us picked out an officer's bedroom, went in, woke him, told him that to utter a murmur meant instant death, and marched him out of his own lines to our own. General Stouton could have touched his own guns as he rode past them. We were saluted time and again on that march."

"Were you not afraid?" was a natural question.

"It was too funny. Nobody could be afraid in a raid of that kind. It was all we could do to keep from laughing as we would look at General Stouton and realize where we were and what we were doing. One day a commander rode in front of his lines to reconnoiter. Two of our men, in blue, rode up to him, showed their revolvers at their hips, and told him and his aide to go on with them or be killed on the spot. Then, pointing with their own hands as though showing the commander a new road, they compelled the prisoners to accompany them to Mosby's camp."

"We traveled at night mostly. We could do that, as we knew the roads. We learned that a man in a strange land, at night, surprised, is scared. So we fought at night. Night would let us get up to the enemy without harm, frighten him and then get away without his being able to follow us, for while we knew where we were going, he did not. Then, too, we left in squads so there was nobody to follow, always knowing where to rendezvous. General Hunter came through there and burned everything burnable. Mosby sent a famous letter to him saying he would hold Hunter personally responsible and kill every one of Hunter's command if he burned another house. In two days Hunter left the district. No more houses were burned. I remember one of Blazer's men, a spy, being caught and ordered shot. He was turned over to a comrade of mine

to be shot, but instead he was given 'five steps start' and then shot at. Nobody ever asked too closely if the shot hit or missed, but I never saw the corpse of a spy. The spy had a tough time of it, anyway."

THE SCHOOL-CHILD UP TO DATE.

Make haste to school, my little child,
Or else you will be late;
Your books are all aseptic now,
And here's your sterile slate,
Your pencil has been boiled an hour—
'Tis germless, now, I hope;
And don't forget to wash your desk
With this carbolic soap.
And lest about the schoolroom floor
Some unseen microbes lurk,
Just sprinkle formaline around
Before you set to work.
You'd better put, for safety's sake,
Bichloride in the ink;
And water that has not been boiled
You must not dare to drink.
Of course, when recess comes around,
Some food you'll want to munch;
So in this disinfected box
Is predigested lunch.
And since 'tis said that in a kiss
Bacteria may dwell,
I may not give you, as I'd like,
A mother's fond farewell.—Puck.

THE TRUTH ALWAYS.

"When you are in doubt tell the truth." It was an experienced old diplomat who said this to a beginner in the work. It may pass in some things, but not in business. Fraud and deception are often profitable so long as concealed; yet detection is certain sooner or later; then comes the smash-up and the punishment. The best and safest way is to tell the truth all the time. Thus you make friends that stick by you, and a reputation that is always worth twenty shillings to the pound everywhere your goods are offered for sale. We are able modestly to affirm, that it is on this basis that the world-wide popularity of WAMPOLE'S PREPARATION

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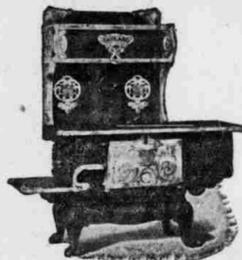
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