10-Year-Old Girl Who Crawled Past Sherman's Lines Sees The Civil War Again -- This Time In A Safer Way.

By Thad G. Stem, Jr.

Oxford, May 4. Seventy-five years ago, a 10-year-old girl crawled through Sherman's vast lines at Bentonsville, (N.C.) in quest of an attendant for her stricken brother. She wormed her way undauntedly through the mud and mire by crusty, bewhiskered sentinels and under the bellies of the very horses that Sherman's men rhode. In indian fashion she wiggled her way through all the blue-clad host. It was truly an epochal trip this little girl made. And just this week she made another trip which she ranks of equal eventfulness. The little girl was Dora Hood, and now, 75 years later, as Mrs. Dora Hood Kirkman, a little old lady in lace and satin, she made a trip to Oxford to see "Gone With the Wind." After all these years, she saw through movie counter-parts, the characters she knew so vividly in '65.

Mrs. Kirkman witnessed and participated in the last battle of the war of Johnstons, Lees, Shermans, Rhetts, and Scarlettes. She declares that the war scenes which the movie depicts are so startling and vividly real that she thought she was actually at Bentonsville again. The picture opened the floodgates of her fertile and retentive mind and she takes one back through the long corridor of time to Bentonsville, the hub around which the last major battle of the war was fought.

Her experiences coincide perfectly with those which confronted the O'Haras. First she remembers of hearing that the Yankees were coming, and she tells you of the mad scramble to hide all valuables.

Meat Hidden in Ceiling

She said that in her father's house there was an unceiled room. So her father placed his entire store of meat in that in that enclosure and then had it sealed. The weather was warm, and every time the Yankees came, the Hoods were terrified lest the meat should get too hot and the grease would drop through the ceiling. The silver was buried in the woods and what few valuables the Negroes possessed were cached away with them. The Hoods decided that if the Negroes' possession were stored with the family's the Negroes would not be so easily tempted to disclose the hiding place.

Mr. Hood the father of our 10-year-old scout, was a prosperous carriage manufacturer, and rich slave owners from all over the state came to Bentonsville to purchase his wares. And the first column of Sherman's invading army fired the carriage factory and it was quickly razed by the flames. Mr. Hood was the owner of many fine horses, and he hurried them away to the woods in a vain effort to save them. This explains his absence from home at the time his little daughter had to make her precarious trek through the enemy army.

All in all there were some 120,000 soldiers in and around Bentonsville. Sherman's entire force, just completing its devastating swing up from Georgia, was on side of Bentonsville, and

Johnston's army a mere regiment, stood on the opposite side of the village. "Johnston's scarecrows," they were aptly called and those who weren't bald and were beardless. Skirmishes from the two armies met before the Hood house, and little Dora, peeping through the curtain, crack watched the initial encounter. The gray army felt back, dug in like moles, and threw up breastworks. The lines were so arranged that the Hood house and the other dwellings in the village were directly in the line of fire. The Hood darkies dug a deep hole under the house, placed mattresses there, and the family moved in. It was then that Dora Hood's brother became deathly ill. As we have mentioned. Mr. Hood was away attempting to hide his horses. By this time the streets of Bentonsville had become the apex of the battle, and the Union army by a succession of movements extended its line up into the streets of the village. The neighbor whom Dora sought lived at the opposite end of town, and Sherman's advance line interspersed her and the little girl. But she slipped through the lines successfully only to learn the neighbor whom she sought had relinquished her home and fled. Half way back home Dora was spotted and picked up by a Federal cavalryman. He ascertained her mission, placed her in the saddle with him and carried her home. He examined the stricken brother and called in a Union surgeon to attend him.

Hospital Scene

But the Good Samaritan and all his breed were soon transformed into a body of fighting men, and the interlude of mercy was soon erased by the booming of cannon, a cloud of smoke, and the clash of steel against steel. Do you remember the scenes in "Gone With the Wind?" Mrs. Kirkman says they are so reminiscence of what she saw that she had to rub her eyes, shake her head, and look around at the other patrons before she remembered that she was witnessing a photo-play, not the real thing all over again.

After the battle began, the Hood lawn was immediately converted into an improvised hospital, to which the Confederate wounded were brought. Their terrible cries of pain resounded through the country side. So heart-rending and soul disturbing were they that Mrs. Hood still hears the piercing moans through the haze of 75 years. There were no nurses and only a handful of doctors. There was no anesthetic, and an attendant would hold the wounded soldier while the doctor amputated an arm or leg. And the nasty and crudety severed members were thrown into a huge pile on the Hoods lawn. Dora Hood s mother made a huge pot of soup, and this was fed into the mutilated men by little Dora herself. Her mother found some old magazines and Dora read from these to those soldiers who requested it.

For the major part, the battle was a dogfall, the Hood house and the village of Bentonsville lying between the paws of the two belligerents. There was considerable yoyoing of the battle lines, but always the Hood house was in the line of fire. One night during the scrap a rider came up to the house was assisted from his horse by two soldiers and came slowly into the living room. His face and his form were covered with dirt and dust, and his boots were saturated with mud and clay of Johnston county. His

face was gaunt with worry and anxiety and his lips were pressed into a grimace of pain. He favored an old wound, and it was a repercussion of this, coupled with fatigue, which sent him to the Hood house for rest and care. He was Joseph E. Johnston, the Confederate chieftain who commanded what was known as the Army of the West.

He had virtually fought Sherman from Tennessee to Georgia and up through the Carolinas. He had contested his adversary every step of the way. Now his line was thinning rapidly and was soon to run out, spent under its own efforts, at the Bennet place. Never did a little girl receive a visitor more proudly or serve him more industrously than Dora Hood did General Johnston.

Slaves Saved House

Finally Johnston fell back, and as the Blue army surged through Bentonsville the Hoods resumed their underground habitation. The plunderers set to work and looted, sacked and burned all the houses in the village. That is, they burned all save one down to the ground. Mrs. Kirkman tells you with a quiver that some Yankees rhode up to her house, and ordered the family to vacate the underground quarters saying that the house would be fired. And fired it was, but when one side was set the Negroes would extinguish it. Then the soldiers would start on the other side, but by the time they moved the darkeys would have put out the fire and were ready for the other one. And so it was through the zeal and diligence of the family, slaves that the Hood house was saved. The house was saved but all of the furniture and furnishings were carried away. The meat was never found, miracle of the miracles, since the grease did not run through the ceiling. But we will bet it was a crisp brown, what with the warm weather and the fire toasting it.

If you add 75 to 10 you get 85. And though Dora is not quite a little girl now, she retains the youthful zest and vitality she knew when she stealthily deployed through Bill Sherman's lines. It is only occasionally that her alert mind lets the present go and drifts back to the "sixties." She is one with the present, and thinks as optimistically of the future as a political candidate.

Of the two eras, she thinks this is better. And unlike most of her fellows octogenarians she is much more concerned over what Hitler is going to do than she is over what So and so did three quarters of a century ago. The light of respect is but one of the many candles in her mind. True it burnt brightly but the shadows of its fame does not pass over the radiant glow of the light which brightens the present and the future.

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