

THE DAHLGREN RAID.

A Paper read by request before R. E. Lee Camp, No. 1, C. V., March 9th, 1906.

By Comrade RICHARD G. CROUCH, M. D., who is also a Member and Surgeon of Geo. E. Pickett Camp, C. V.

[Our valued friend, from days ante-bellum, is a highly esteemed citizen and successful practitioner of this city. Being a gentleman of means, he delights in benefactions to the needy and those in distress. Upon intimation to him of such wants, relief is immediately extended. His quiet charities, unknown to the public, have been to a multitude of grateful recipients.

Company H (originally called "Lee's Rangers") 9th Virginia Cavalry, in which he served gallantly, had as its first Captain, Wm. H. F. Lee, subsequently Major-General, and familiarly known as "Rooney Lee."

A brother of the editor, H. C. Brock, a member of the faculty of Hampden-Sidney College, who was severely wounded at Stony Creek, Dinwiddie County, in 1864, with many valued friends, served also in this noted Company.--ED.]

Commander, Comrades, Friends:

This raid has been written up so often, that I am reduced to a small margin from which to draw. Perhaps no incidental narrative of the war between the States created so great a stir as the Dahlgren Raid.

On the 4th of February, 1906, Reverend John Pollard, D. D., spoke in deserved praise of Lieutenant James Pollard, our officer and friend, which gave me great pleasure; not only on this occasion, but all others, when he led us into battle, proved himself a perfect Paladin of courage and ability.

The spring of 1864 was a time of terror and a season of agony to the 30,000 unfortunate men, women and children who were forced to remain in the Confederate capital awaiting the issue of the greatest civil conflict ever known in the history of the Anglo-Saxon race.

The battle of Gettysburg had been fought, and Lee had been

forced back into Virginia with a depleted army and a discouraged heart; the Confederate forces had recently been overpowered in Tennessee and defeated by sheer weight of numbers and excellence of the equipment of the enemy in many other parts of the South; immense Union armies, splendidly equipped and fully rationed, getting reinforcements daily, and preparing for aggressive war, occupied a large portion of Northern Virginia, and were slowly advancing

southward, holding in covert the wasted, yet valiant Army of Northern Virginia.

Richmond at this time was uneasy; even the most sanguine could see through a haze of bitterness and almost of despair one certain end in sight--the ultimate downfall of the Confederacy. Yet brave ones kept their hearts with diligence, and soldiers with half rations and bloody, shoeless feet, paced nightly in their sentinel duties around the beloved city on the James, ready to give their lives at any moment for the protection of the dear ones who were in an agony of terror within the city's streets.

It was known that exaggerated reports as to the condition of the prisoners of war held in Richmond, had gone abroad, and that public feeling throughout the North, bitter and hostile all the time, had been unduly excited under the pressure of a false and misstated condition of the Confederate prisons. It was known to the Confederate government and the citizens of Richmond, that an expedition might at any time be undertaken with the avowed purpose of liberating the Northern prisoners in Richmond and turning them loose in the streets of the city to an orgy and carnival of crime. Indeed, it had been known that in January of 1864, an expedition had been sent out from Fortress Monroe to accomplish this purpose. Another had been sent from the Army of the Potomac, but both had, in some way, miscarried. Reports, some false, some only too true, concerning advancing lines of the enemy, were read in the Confederate newspapers every day. Tales of wholesale destruction and military carnage were the usual reports of the newspapers. The Richmond people were expectant to hear the details any hour of some harrowing wholesale tragedy; and, fearful of the worst of all evils, the women and the helpless of the city waited complacent in their bitterness, knowing not what a day might bring forth.

Late in February, it was learned that the Federal General Custer, with 1500 horse, had crossed the Rapidan on a feint to the west of the Confederate Army, while Kilpatrick, starting a day later, moved

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down on its opposite flank, with the ostensible purpose of entering Richmond to liberate the prisoners there. For some time some of the more adventurous of the Northern officers had been petitioning for leave to undertake this perilous feat. Kilpatrick, a daring brigadier general of the cavalry, had been one who asked for such a privilege. He had, no doubt, been more or less incited to this by Ulric Dahlgren, a young Colonel, who was rising to considerable prominence in the Army of the Potomac. So Major-General Pleasanton, on the 26th of February, sent confidential orders to Kilpatrick, directing him to increase his command to 4000 picked men, to take with him Colonel Ulric Dahlgren and his regiment, and to proceed by such routes and to make such disposition as from time to time he might find necessary for the accomplishment of the object of the expedition. Thus was formed one for the most daring, and in some respects, one of the most hazardous, attempts to take the Confederate capital and to liberate the Northern prisoners of war--numbering eight to ten thousand.

So on Sunday evening, February 28th, Kilpatrick left his camp at Stevensburg, near Culpeper Courthouse, in Northern Virginia, having 3,582 men, Colonel Ulric Dahlgren, with 460 picked and excellently mounted cavalymen, leading the advance. The presence of Dahlgren, with his

regiment, must have lent inspiration to the daring undertaking, and must have added a kind of an adventurous charm to the entire spirit of this bold and questioning raid. For Dahlgren was no ordinary man. At this time he lacked but a month of being twenty-two years of age, but he was a seasoned veteran, and knew thoroughly the art of warfare. He was born near Philadelphia, April 3, 1842, the second son for Rear-Admiral John Adolph Dahlgren, the noted naval officer, author and scholar. He was educated in Washington, entered the war in 1861 as a captain, and had distinguished himself time after time for bravery in action. In 1862 he fought gallantly at Fredericksburg; and had made a desperate charge at Chancellorsville; at second Bull Run he had gained the admiration of all his fellow-officers, and had lost a leg in a desperate charge at Gettysburg. For his absolute fearlessness and bravery he had been promoted over the immediate grades to Colonel, the commission having been personally brought to his bedside by Secretary Stanton. Now, in the spring of 1864, having recovered from his loss of limb, he was again at the front,

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willing to sacrifice his life and the lives of his men to accomplish the purpose of his expedition.

At 11 o'clock on the evening of February 28th, Kilpatrick and Dahlgren reached Ely's Ford on the Rapidan River, and there captured two of our officers and fourteen men. At this point Kilpatrick divided his forces, sending Dahlgren with 500 men to hasten by one route to Richmond, while he took another. The plan was to send Dahlgren by way of Spotsylvania Courthouse to Frederick's Hall on the Virginia Central, now the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, and thence immediately south to a point above Goochland Courthouse on the James River; here he was to cross the river, move down the opposite bank, about twenty miles, and, if possible, seize the main bridge that led to the city at 10 o'clock on Tuesday morning, March 1st. Kilpatrick himself was to proceed with about 3000 men by way of Spotsylvania Courthouse, thence southeastward to Richmond, the defences of which he was to attack west and northwest of the Book turnpike on Tuesday morning, while Dahlgren attacked it from the south.

This undertaking on the part of Kilpatrick and Dahlgren is one of the most interesting events of the Civil War, and it has never been adequately treated by either Southern or Northern historians. It is the purpose of the writer to record not a full history in connection with the Dahlgren raid, but only a few facts which came under his immediate observation, and with which he was more or less intimately associated.

At the time of the Dahlgren raid the writer of this article was a member of Company H, 9th Virginia Cavalry, a company of seasoned veterans--men who had passed through battles until they gloried in the smell of smoke. Nearly every man in the company was a crack shot, and some were expert marksmen. Lieutenant Pollard, who at this time had charge of the company, was one of the bravest and truest of men. As a soldier, I think he was unexcelled. He was a man who could be relied upon to do the right thing at the right time--a Virginia gentleman of gravity and of character.

Early in December, 1863, our Division, under Fitz Lee, in order to be more accessible to supplies, camped near Charlottesville. Information reached General Stuart that General Averill,

with a large force, had started on a raid in Northwestern Virginia. Stuart ordered Fitz lee to break camp at once and proceed against him.

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Accordingly, on the 10th of December, 1863, we left Charlottesville and started in pursuit of Averill. Lee's command, of which my regiment constituted a part, was occupied in this expedition for at least a month, and when we returned to Charlottesville on or about January 10th, 1864, the men were so used up and the horses so entirely broken down that it was thought best by our General that furloughs be issued and the men with their horses be temporarily dispersed to various localities to recuperate. A number of men belonging to my company were from King William county, and hither Lieutenant Pollard, accompanied by some twenty men, the writer being among the number, proceeded. Thus it happened that this little band of sharpshooters were in a position to take part in the subsequent attack on the Dahlgren raiders.

Colonel Beale, of the 9th Virginia, had fixed his headquarters in Essex County, about 60 miles northeast of Richmond, and Company H had been ordered to establish a line of pickets across King William County, from the Mattapony to the Pamunkey River. This had been carefully, yet expeditiously done, and our company late in February was quartered in King William County Courthouse, about thirty-five miles northeast of Richmond.

The life of a soldier is a life of anxiety and of uncertainty. One must be prepared for any surprise at any time. But there are some surprises which astonish even a soldier. Such a surprise was in store for our company, when, on the 2nd day of March, it was announced to us that the enemy were attacking the city of Richmond. Of course we did not know what it all meant then, but we afterwards learned all the many events of the daring Dahlgren raid, some of those in the incipency of which I have given above.

It seemed that the original plans of Kilpatrick and Dahlgren had miscarried. Dahlgren had proceeded from Ely's Ford as he had been ordered, to Spotsylvania Courthouse, which he had reached at early dawn on the 29th of February; he had marched thence to Frederick's Hall, in Louisa County, where he surprised and captured some artillerymen, had crossed the South Anna River and made a hurried march directly toward James River, which he hoped to cross about twenty miles west of Richmond. Before reaching the river, he had engaged a negro guide to direct him to a place where the river could be forded or swum by horses. The negro guide conducted Dahlgren to the river, but it was found that there was

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no possibility of crossing it, as it was muddy and swollen beyond its inner banks.

It is said Colonel Dahlgren became so inflamed at what he believed to be the negro's treachery, that he took a rein from his own bridle and had his men hang the negro to a tree on the river bank. A few hours later, Captain Mitchell, of the 2nd New York Regiment, who with his company had been separated from Dahlgren in order that he might destroy the mills and ferry boats on the north bank of the river, found the negro hanging to the tree, and incorporated the

incident in the report of his movements, which he afterwards submitted to his superior officers.

This unfortunate negro was named Martin Robinson. For a considerable time prior to his murder by Dahlgren, he had been a freedman. He was a bricklayer by profession, and was employed by citizens in doing work of that character. Robinson formerly belonged to the late Mr. David Mimms, who lived about the Courthouse some twelve miles or more from Contention, where the ford crossed James River. This ford was impassable in freshets, such as was prevailing at the time. In ordinary conditions, low stages of water, etc., was easily fordable, and was the route taken by Mr. Samuel A. Guy, and other gentlemen in going across from Contention, in Goochland, to Centre Hill, in Powhatan County. The writer, prior to the war, lived for a number of years in this vicinity, and is familiar with the above mentioned facts.

It has always seemed to the writer that Richmond was saved from destruction at the hands of Dahlgren's men by the freshet in James River at that time. If Dahlgren could have crossed the river, as he might have done had the water been lower, he would, no doubt, have been able to enter the city through Manchester, while Kilpatrick was storming the trenches in the city's guards on the north. His first act would have been to set the prisoners on Belle Isle at liberty, and then, no doubt, there would have occurred the greatest carnival of rapine, murder and crime ever known in the history of civilization. Men who had long been in imprisonment, with a plenty of liquor, which they would have been able to obtain, and with no officers, would be about as irrepressible as wild beasts of the field. We can hardly estimate, even at this late day, the providential blessing to the women of Richmond of the flood that prevented Dahlgren from crossing James River from Goochland into Powhatan on the 1st day of March, 1864.

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But Dahlgren, though thwarted in his purposes, did not turn back, as he might have done, but continued on his way to Richmond. When within five or six miles of the city, he heard the booming of Kilpatrick's signal guns, which were stationed on the northern suburbs, near Yellow Tavern, and on each side of the Brook turnpike, not far from what is now the splendid plant of the Union Theological Seminary.

Dahlgren led his men on to the forks of the Carry Street road, where he attacked a body of men commanded by Captain Ellery, of the Tredegar Battalion, and lost about 14 men--and Captain Ellery was killed. The inner defences proved too strong, and he retired in the darkness, becoming separated from the larger body of his men, who were commanded by Captain Mitchell, of the 2nd New York. with about 100 or 125 men, he proceeded northeastward, barely missing Kilpatrick, who intended to escape, if possible, from the snare in which he so suddenly found himself. His intention was to go northeastward, cross the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi, and pass thence southeastward along the peninsula to Gloucester Point, whence he could escape in Federal gunboats.

It was on the morning of the 2nd of March that our company got information that the enemy were crossing the Pamunkey at Aylett's, about six miles below Hanover Courthouse. Kilpatrick had retired from his attack and had passed down the peninsula to White House. Our baggage wagons were sent to a safe place, our boats were carefully concealed, and we hurried in pursuit

of the raiders; whose numbers we vaguely knew. We soon got upon their trail, and followed them up. We found they had murderously shot two lads, one a young son of Dr. Fleet, and the other, young William Taliaferro, and this act of barbarity incited us the more determinedly to follow them and fight to death.

We awaited the enemy at Dunkirk while they crossed the river, swimming their horses and proceeding themselves in small boats. They thus got the start of us by perhaps half an hour, but we rode rapidly forward and overtook them at Bruington lane, in King and Queen County. The fight which we had there will ever remain vividly in the memory of the writer of these reminiscences. war is a terrible thing, looking at it in any of its aspects; but hand to hand and horse to horse fighting, where enemies are singled out and shot or thrust through with the bayonet or the sabre, is still more awful. Every man's life then is in his own hands and the protection

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of Providence. One must be wary, one must be strenuous, or he will untimely perish. But predominantly one must have a loftier care than personal preservation at such a time; he must have the cause of his home and his loved ones and his country animating his heart, and he must be willing to sacrifice his heart's blood to protect all that makes life worth living for him from the desecrations and despoliations of a ruthless foe. there was a feeling of wild patriotism in our little company of cavalry that morning when we rode against Dahlgren and his men.

When we came in sight of the enemy Captain Pollard, one of the bravest and worthiest soldiers who ever bestrode a horse, ordered two for the sharpshooters down. The enemy halted, got upon the defensive, and forced our company to a stand. Firing began in a desultory way, and continued in a rain of bullets on both sides. The writer had hurriedly dismounted, and he and First Sergeant Fleming Meredith were standing by Captain Pollard's horse when bullets began to sing round us as though we were singled out by marksmen. One of the rear guard of the enemy was killed. One of our company searched the man's pockets and found a fifty dollar bill there, which subsequently proved to be a two dollar bill with the number "50" pasted over the figure two. A heavy silver fork marked "J. W. A." was also found in his pockets and a pistol and silver watch.

We followed up the enemy, pursuing them closely, charging from rear to front, barely escaping being shot to death in an ambush set for the enemy by Captain Magruder, who had hurried to join us. His company of thirty men joined us, and Captain Pollard resorted to strategy, ending a bare half-dozen bold riders to pursue the fleeing enemy while the rest of the men set out along another road to intercept the flying enemy. We hurried along the road to Stevensville, a small village not many miles distant from King and Queen C. H. At dark we were awaiting the enemy with carbines sprung. Two men were sent out to reconnoitre, and they returned, reporting that the enemy had gone into camp a mile or two away from us. It was night, but we lost not a moment to get into ambush. They were attempting to find a way of escape. It was half past eleven o'clock at night. Upon the noise made by some of our men in ambush we hard a demand of "Surrender, or I will shoot," in a loud voice. At the same time he who called out attempted to fire his revolver at us, but it failed to fire.

This action drew a terrific fire upon himself. He fell from his horse dead, pierced by five balls. The man proved to be Ulric Dahlgren.

The enemy stampeded, and the next morning at daybreak Sergeant Meredith was ordered by Captain Cox, who had joined us, to find out where the enemy were. He went forward with an attendant and found the enemy in a field dismounted and in confusion.

We captured there about 107 or 108 men, and some officers, with about 40 negroes additional, who had joined them. We also captured somewhat more than 100 horses.

That night William Littlepage, a boy thirteen years of age, who had followed us from Stevensville with his teacher, Mr. Hallaback, took from the body of Colonel Dahlgren the books and papers which contained his address and orders which excited such intense indignation among the Confederate people. The papers were given by Mr. Hallaback to Captain Pollard, and they passed through him and Col. Beale to the War Office in Richmond. The day following General Fitzhugh Lee gave orders to Captain Pollard to disinter the body of Dahlgren, which had been buried, and bring it to Richmond "for the purpose of identification." The body was taken to Richmond on the 6th of March by Lieut. Pollard's Company, was buried in Oakwood Cemetery, and was afterwards taken up and carried to Miss E. H. Van Lew's house on Church Hill. From her house the body of Colonel Dahlgren was first carried to Chelsea Hill, where it remained several days, after which the original resurrectionists (two white men--one of them being the late erratic Martin Meredith Lipscomb, whose proclaimed motto was "to strike high even if you lose your hatchet"--and a negro), placed the body on a wagon covered with young fruit trees and carried it through the picket lines and buried it near Hungary Station, R. F. & P. R. R. After the war it was taken up, carried North and again interred with kindred and friends.

The papers which were found upon Colonel Dahlgren's person were the subject of immediate controversy. Throughout the North there were those who claimed that they were forgeries. This was due to the fact that there were orders included therein which were so barbarous as to have no place in modern warfare.

Colonel Dahlgren's leading address to the officers and men of his command was written on a sheet of paper, having in printed letters on the upper corner "Headquarters Third Cavalry Corps, 1864." This address was patriotic and reverent in some parts, but contained a sentence which was particularly offensive to the Southern people. "We hope to release the prisoners from Belle Isle first, and having seen them fairly started, we will cross the James River into Richmond, destroying the bridges after us, and exhorting the released prisoners to destroyed and burn the hateful city; and do not allow the rebel leader, Davis, nor his traitorous crew, to escape."

Another striking sentence in this address was this: "Many of you may fall, but if there is any man here not willing to sacrifice his life in such a great and glorious undertaking, or who does not feel capable of meeting the enemy in such a desperate fight as will follow, let him step out and go tot

the arms of his sweetheart and read of the braves who swept through the city of Richmond."

Other special orders were written to detached slips. These related mainly to the details of the approach toward the city and the entrance into Richmond over the bridge across James River.

These papers caused a storm of protest throughout the South. The Richmond newspapers argued therefrom that every captured man of Dahlgren's regiment should be executed, but this was not done. [There was, at one time, as announced in the Southern Historical Society Papers, photographic copies of the orders in the archives of the Southern Historical Society, but they have never been found, though diligently sought for by the present Secretary.]

The Richmond Daily Examiner for March 7th, 1864, contained a striking article on Dahlgren's raid. They got the information for the article largely from Captain Dement, of our forces, who had been captured by Dahlgren in Goochland County, and forced by him to accompany him throughout his raid and act as his guide. It was to Captain Dement that the straggling members of Dahlgren's command surrendered on the morning after their leader had been shot. This officer afterwards came into Richmond and gave an accurate account for the entire raid. Captain Dement and Mr. Mountcastle (who was also a captive of Dahlgren's) gave a full description of Dahlgren's personality to the Richmond people. Judge Henry E. Blair, a nestor of the law, was another of Dahlgren's

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captives. The Daily Examiner had the following paragraph upon the subject: "Both Captain Dement and Mr. Mountcastle described Dahlgren as a most agreeable and charming villain. He was very agreeable to his prisoners, shared his food with Captain Dement, and on several occasions, invited him to a nip of whiskey with him. He was a fair haired, very young-looking man, and his manners were as soft as a cat's."

In 1872, Admiral J. A. Dahlgren, father of Ulric Dahlgren, wrote a comprehensive memoir of his son's life and career. In this memoir the following paragraph occurs: "The document alleged to have been found upon the person of Colonel Dahlgren, is utterly discredited by the fact that the signature attached it is not his name--a letter is misplaced, and the real name "Dahlgren"; hence it is undeniable that the paper is not only spurious, but a forgery. * * * It is entirely certain that no such orders were ever issued by Colonel Dahlgren." Memoir of Ulric Dahlgren, pp. 233-234.

Captain Martin E. Hogan, of Company C, 3rd Iowa Cavalry, on detached service at General Meade's Headquarters, was with Colonel Dahlgren. He stated that he knew nothing of the papers found on the dead body of Colonel Dahlgren. This statement was made on the King William side of the Mattaponi River at Walkerton ferry, while the prisoners were being conveyed to Tunstall's Station, on York River Railroad, on to Richmond to be imprisoned.

Among the captured spoils taken from the enemy was much silverware, comprising coffee and tea pots, sugar dishes, salvers, spoons and forks and other pieces, which by General Lee's orders were returned to the rightful owners.

But a blessed era of peace has succeeded the period of trial and suffering. The future is bright for

our happily re-united States. Memories of our gigantic struggle should only tend to make us more liberal, more gentle, more considerate of the feelings of those who fought against us, and be the better enabled to meet the social and economic battles that confront us now in the twentieth century.

Overwhelmed by hireling cohorts drawn from the world at large, the starving Army of Northern Virginia, its last able man in the field--having almost literally "robbed the cradle and the grave"--

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with its recruits of boys of tender years and feeble old men, laid down its arms at Appomattox Courthouse, April 9th, 1865.

Crushed to the earth, the righteousness of the cause for which they fought so grandly, remains undimmed, their achievements increasingly command the admiration of the world. Their fate invests only with incense their heroism and sublime sacrifices. May the blood of these martyrs be as that of those of the Cross who died at the stake for conscience sake, and may it be as the seed of life and noble endeavor, with just patriotic fruitage, to my comrades of this Camp.