





Major J. W. Ratchford  
Circa March 1872

SOME REMINISCENCES  
OF PERSONS AND  
INCIDENTS OF THE  
CIVIL WAR

by

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To Which is Appended  
THE CONFEDERATE SOLDIER  
IN THE RANKS

An Address by  
Major-General D. H. Hill, C. S. A.

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by James Wylie Ratchford

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Bethel Regiment



I shall begin these reminiscences with the statement (certainly true so far as I have been able to learn), that mine was the first blood shed in an open engagement in the late Civil War.

My connection with the Confederate Army began as lieutenant and drill master in the First Regiment North Carolina Volunteers, now historically known as “The Bethel Regiment,” on account of the signal service it rendered in the Bethel fight, the first pitched battle of the war.

This regiment was composed of the flower of the North Carolina troops, and for the service during its short career as a regiment, and the number and efficiency of the officers it furnished other regiments after its disbandment, it has no peer on the roll of gallant Southern regiments.

### The Organization of the Regiment

I was a cadet in the North Carolina Military Institute when in April, 1861, Governor Ellis, of North Carolina, invited D.H. Hill, then superintendent of the Military

Institute, to take charge of the Camp of Instruction, and drill the troops which were gathering at Raleigh. He accepted the invitation, and set out immediately for Raleigh, taking with him all his faculty and about one hundred cadets.

Troops from all over the State were pouring in and after several weeks of drilling the first regiment was organized. There were more than one hundred companies of fine men in camp, and all were anxious to be included in the first regiment sent out, for the opinion prevailed that the war would be a matter of only a few weeks, and were anxious to see some of the fighting before it should be over.

### The Personnel of the Regiment

The honor fell upon ten companies of picked troops. Historic Charlotte was represented by two companies, the Hornet's Nest Rifles, an organization which had come down from Revolutionary times, under Captain Owens, and the Charlotte Grays, a company made up and officered by boys under or near twenty-one years of age, under Captain Ross. There was a company from Buncombe county under Captain McDowell, one from Burke county, under Captain Avery — all fit men, averaging one hundred and sixty-five pounds each — one company from Tarborough, commanded by Captain Bridges, one from Orange, under Captain Ashe, two companies from Fayetteville, under Captains Hunt and —, and one from Lincoln, under Captain Hoke. These, officers and privates, were above the average in intelligence, ability, and worth of character as is shown by their records throughout the war.

The Charlotte companies, coming as they did, from

the "Hornet's Nest" of Revolutionary heroes, inherited the spirit as well as the blood of those same heroes. The greater part of these were of old Presbyterian families whose faith had come pure from the highlands of Scotland, and they were men whose religion was so inseparable from the details of their lives as to enable them to remain calm and deliberate in the midst of flying bullets and shells whose course was directed by an all-wise God.

But the glory of the regiment was Colonel D.H. Hill (afterwards lieutenant-general). A scholarly gentleman and gallant soldier, he possessed in a high degree the qualities of leadership which inspired the utmost confidence and loyalty in his soldiers and made him the idol of the Carolinas.

He graduated from West Point in the class with Longstreet, Rosecrans, and other distinguished officers in both armies. Upon his graduation, he was assigned to the artillery of the United States Army, and served with such distinction in the Mexican War, that he was twice brevetted on the field of battle for gallant and meritorious conduct, and the Legislature of South Carolina voted him a sword.

Some fifteen years before the outbreak of sectional hostilities, he resigned his commission in the United States Army, and engaged in educational work. For six years he filled with distinguished ability the chair of Mathematics in Washington College (now Washington and Lee University), Virginia. It was through his influence that Stonewall Jackson was elected to the faculty of the Virginia Military Institute. For six years more he filled the chair of Mathematics in Davidson College, North Carolina, and then two years superintendent of the North Carolina Military Institute at Charlotte.

He was the author of several scholarly books, one of them being a work on Algebra, which for years was used as a text-book in institutions throughout the South.

He was a brother-in-law of Stonewall Jackson, who repeatedly declared in my hearing that there was not in a man in the Southern Army superior in military genius to D.H. Hill, and emphatically expressed his disgust at the politics and bickerings that prevented the repeated gallantry of Hill and the brilliant services rendered by him from being officially recognized and rewarded. I remember General Hill's reply to such a speech on one occasion, and I give it as truly typical of his pure patriotism and unselfish willingness to sacrifice his own glory to the service of his country. With a tinge of reproach in his manner he said, "I am not fighting Mr. Davis' battles, and if I am not permitted to serve my country as a general officer, I will as a private."

There can be made no better commentary on the greatness of the two men than their mutual admiration and love. Hill respected and loved Jackson for the nobility and beauty of character which he recognized under a rather uncouth exterior, while Jackson's admiration of Hill and his gratitude for his many services was unbounded.

Though the taciturnity and uncommunicativeness of Jackson in regard to his military plans has passed into a proverb, whenever the opportunity offered itself he sought counsel of Hill as of his own mind.

In their deeply religious natures, these two men had a kinship closer than that of marriage. Jackson's faith and habits of prayer were not more widely known and respected among the troops than those of Hill. Though he was unobtrusive in his views, his faith was so much a part

of himself as to be felt by those about him, just as much as his keen humor, which was the delight of the army circles and which often came out even in his official reports. Few are the narratives written by his brother officers, which are without one or more of the half-affectionate jokes of his piety, which was current among the soldiers.

Our lieutenant-colonel was the gallant C. C. Lee, who as colonel of another regiment, was killed in the fight at Hanover Court House. He was the son of the old North Carolina Colonel S. D. Lee, another illustrious kinsman of the Virginia Lees. He had been the first honor man of his class at West Point, but had left the army, and at the time of his election was professor in the North Carolina Military Institute.

Our major too, was one of the old institute professors, James H. Lane, first honor man from the Virginia Military Institute, and later brigadier-general. Though he was still under thirty years of age, he was exceedingly bald. Once, on being chaffed on this score he made a reply which passed into a classic among the cadets. It was to the effect that he dwelt on a higher plane than his more hirsute friends, there being not a hair between him and heaven.

### Moved to Seat of War

About the first of May, 1861, we were ordered by Governor Ellis to the seat of war, and left the Camp of Instruction, the envy of the companies left behind. At Richmond we were received with great demonstrations of honor and welcome, being visited in camp by crowds of ladies bringing flowers and delicacies.

We went from Richmond to West Point by rail and from there to Yorktown by boat. It was on this voy-

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age that Lieutenant Poteat's horse indulged a most peculiar whim. Falling overboard as we were crossing the neck of the sea, he swam steadily outward until he seemed to be only the merest speck, and then turned around and swam directly back to the boat where he was picked up.

### I Make the Acquaintance of Colonel Magruder

Upon our arrival at Yorktown, we reported to Colonel Magruder who was in charge of the Department of the Peninsula.

I was sent by Colonel Hill to report our arrival to Colonel Magruder, and set out on my errand with fear and trembling, for I had all of a boy's awe for those in high places. It was not at all reassuring to be halted by a sentinel when I reached the gate of the house where the commander was making his headquarters. I got past him only to fall into the clutches of an orderly at the door, for Colonel Magruder having a natural bent towards pomposity, rigidly kept up all the ceremony to which he had been accustomed in the old army. I had no time to compose my nerves after this interview before I found myself in the presence of the commander himself. Nor was his dignified and rather pompous military bearing such as to inspire confidence and self-possession in a lieutenant not yet accustomed to his own rank.

I remember distinctly, his smoking jacket with its great lapels turning back, and showing the rich crimson lining. I had never considered a smoking jacket an awe-inspiring sight, but that gorgeous garment gave me much the same impression as if it had been a robe of state. Yet his manner was courteously kind, and by the time my message was delivered, I was so far at ease with him as to accept with pleasure the invitation to have a julep with him.