

My Experience in the Civil War

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My dear Children:

After the lapse of more than fifty years, I will at your urgent request try to recount some of the experiences and trials as well as the joys and sorrows I had during the War Between the States, or as we term it, the "Civil War". It should be called the "Un-Civil War".

As I look backward to the days of my girlhood and remember the stirring times of the period just before the tocsin of war sounded over our beloved land, it seems like the panorama of some historic scenes was passing in review. For ten years or more there were rumors of discontent and discord in our national capitol but I was either too young or too much occupied with my pleasure and studies to give them a moment's thought. My dear father often talked about political affairs but was by no means a politician. He predicted that the fierce struggle was approaching and feared the consequences. I, with the hope of youth, was sanguine and felt that all would be well.

He was right and I have thanked God many times that he was called away before our land was the scene of strife and bloodshed.

The presidential campaign was a hot one. Politicians and fanatics on both sides sought to influence the people and rouse their passions. When Lincoln was elected, hope died as the South knew she could expect no mercy from those who desired her downfall and humiliation through envy and malice, unless she surrendered her rights.

Party spirit was rampant. Secession was talked at first with bated breath, but after a little we became bolder and declared, "Secede is what we must do!". South Carolina led the way. Fort Sumter fell and "To Arms" sounded the length and breadth of our Southland. Conventions were called in all Southern states and secession won. Enthusiasm ran high and nothing was thought of or talked of but war. Troops were mobilized. Recruits were mustered in and drilled daily. Camps were hastily equipped and martial music was heard in every town. In our little town of Hampton, Virginia, on account of the nearness to Fortress Monroe, everyone anxiously awaited the move of the North. Yorktown was used as a camp. Old Point was being reinforced with fresh troops, so the citizens who were still in Hampton could not decide whether to stay and as Unionists protect their property, or be true to the South and leave for a safer place. Those who had valuable furniture, among whom was my step-mother, sent as much as possible to the country and stored it in a vacant house. Word was sent by someone to the Commandant of the Fort, who immediately sent soldiers to burn the house where the furniture was

stored. Quite a noble deed. He should have been decorated with the Cross of Honor.

Dr. Banks, my uncle, who had four sons in the Confederate Army, was obliged to leave so he moved to Richmond and was made a surgeon in one of the many hospitals. He left an old colored man (Frank Diggs), who for many years had been his butler, to care for his property as long as he could. When he found that everything moveable would be destroyed or stolen, he buried his master's silver, which the Yankees could never either by threats or bribes induce him to give up. He kept it until the war was over and returned it unhurt to my uncle, and it was all he had to provide for his family until he could find some way to support them.

My step-mother remained with a cousin in Hampton as long as it was habitable, then was at the Fort or in Baltimore until peace was declared.

In April 1861, Col. Ridley, for whom I was teaching at the time, with his wife, daughter, and myself, went to Petersburg, Va. from Southampton, to do some shopping, as was their custom every spring. We thought the war would last only a few months and we would need some pretty clothes. It was well that we laid in a good supply, for it was many, many days before we had the opportunity to shop again except now and then when someone ran the blockade, and we could make a few additions to our fast depleting wardrobe.

It was in Petersburg we had a glimpse of what was going on in the war center of the Confederacy. How eager we were to see the soldiers going to the front. How we cheered them as they passed through the city. Thousands went in a few days. The city was gay with gold laced officers, bands playing, flags flying, and soldiers drilling. Everything pulsed with martial ardor. We remained nearly a week and returned home with enthusiasm enough to last a lifetime. In a few weeks I attended a military ball in Jerusalem, given in honor of the soldiers about to leave for camp.

My youngest brother, Dick, had enlisted in the 1st Va. Regiment in Richmond, Col. Skinner in command. The regiment was ordered to Manassas during the summer of 1861, and put in Kemper's Brigade, Longstreet's Division.

On the 18th of July was fought the Battle of Bull Run in which the regiment took an active part. I was greatly relieved in mind when I learned he was safe. On the 21st of July, the memorable Battle of Manassas was fought and a great victory won, which had it been followed by the City of Washington being seized (and it was said that it could have been done easily as the Northern Army was totally demoralized) the result would have been so different. Instead, our army elated with victory, came back to camp and too late regretted it's mistake. Again, my heart was filled with anxiety for Brother Dick's safety,

until I heard from him again that God had spared his life.

About the same time, my home was burned. Not by the Federals but by the citizens of Hampton, who were in the Dragoons at Yorktown. They preferred having their homes burned to having them occupied by Northern soldiers and negroes. They asked permission of Gen. Magruder to allow them to go to Hampton and set fire to their homes. He consented and each man applied the torch to his own home. Strange to say, only one house was spared.

Old St. John's, our dear old church, for the third time was burned. British soldiers sacked and burned it in the Revolutionary War and during the War of 1812. In 1873, I visited Hampton and found it rebuilt in such a way that it looked nothing like the old town.

Although I did not see my brother in months, he was not neglected for shirts, socks, and everything to make him comfortable. These I sent him. In December following he was quite sick with measles and was sent to a hospital in Richmond, as soon as he was able to be moved. Of course, I hastened to see him and found him much better than I had expected. I saw him daily at my uncle's.

Richmond, although not the capital then, was very gay. I met many officers, among whom was one I shall never forget by reason of great kindness and attention, Col. Morrison of the 13th Alabama Infantry. After spending a week with my relatives, I returned to my school but there was such a spirit of unrest and uneasiness everywhere that nothing seemed real or settled. Raids by the Federals were being constantly made on the railroads near us. In February 1862, one such raid was made on the Seaboard and Gaston and fearing communication would be cut off from Dick and me, I hastened again to Richmond, although Col. Ridley offered me the same salary for his two children as I had for the whole school and the same protection he would give his own family. The offer was sincere and very flattering but I could not accept it as I considered it my sacred duty to look after Dick. I felt that God had given him to me to be my charge, and believing that I was doing right, I left, trusting in God's guidance. I think I acted wisely for his presence went with me and sustained and protected me in all my trials and dangers during the war.

I reached Richmond on Feb. 22nd, the day President Davis was inaugurated, but too late to witness the ceremony. The city was in gala attire, and an atmosphere of excitement was evident. I remained at my uncle's for several weeks. During the time, the Naval battle in Hampton Roads was fought and won. It encouraged our people much but the news of fall of Vicksburg was very depressing. I attended early service at St. Paul's every day as it was Lent and saw Pres. Davis, who with his family, was always there. I shall always remember how nervous and careworn he appeared.

In April, I accepted a position with Mrs. Anne Coles to finish the school term. In May, Richmond was threatened and Gen. Longstreet's Division was ordered there at once. On the 7th, the Battle of Seven Pines was fought. Dick was wounded in the fight. When I saw his name in the list of wounded, I left the same day as Miss Sallie Coles took charge of the school. After reaching Richmond I visited every hospital in the city but failed to find him. My uncle had left the hospital in which he was surgeon and had moved to a farm a mile or two out of the city as his health had failed. Not a conveyance could be obtained at any price. All were pressed into service to go to the battle fields or to use at the burial of some poor soldier who had given his life for his country. Before I would give up my search I determined to walk to my uncle's. Some may call it accidental but I call it providential that on my way back I met two friends from Hampton who at once said, "We know you are looking for Dick." and directed me to his boarding house. I hurried to the place and found him with a hole in his thigh caused by a ball going through it, only a flesh wound but painful. Dick was delighted to see me although he had written me not to come but knew that I would. I remained with him until he could be moved, when I took him to Albemarle, as Mrs. Coles and other friends insisted on my bringing him. Of course I appreciated their kindness and no kinder people ever lived than those dear friends who did all they could for his comfort. I took him to Mrs. Coles where I was teaching, and she and family were as kind as though he had been a near relative. Her son, Dr. Coles, was at home on parole, having been made a prisoner at Roanoke Island and waiting to be exchanged. He took Dick in his own room and nursed him like a brother. In July of the same year Dick and I went to Lexington, Va. to spend our vacation with our sister, Mrs. H.G. Davidson. Her husband was a surgeon in the army in Mississippi. At my sister's and at other houses we met many people of culture (many officers, also professors at the Virginia Military Institute). Everyone spoke lovingly of our beloved General Jackson.

Although I was resting and enjoying myself I knew that as soon as Dick was well enough he would return to his regiment, which he did. Brother Stafford was with Gen. Forrest in Tennessee seeing active service all summer. I only heard from him occasionally and was always anxious about him. He followed Gen. Forrest during the war in all his raids, and was in many battles and skirmishes. He was captured once and treated as a "bush whacker" but nothing being proved against him was allowed to return home. He again joined Gen. Forrest and was made Assistant Quartermaster. Brother Stafford knew Gen. Forrest intimately and held him in high esteem. He never tired of telling of his exploits, of his untiring energy and his great valor. As long as he lived he loved his memory.

During the summer, I secured the position as teacher with Mrs. Robt. Carter near Charlottesville and in September took charge of the school. Dick was visiting Mrs. Coles' family and came several times to see me. He left for his command the 1st of Oct. How I dreaded his leaving; still I would not have had him shirk his

duty or been unwilling to fight for his country.

The campaign of that fall and winter was very active and dangerous. The two battles of Fredericksburg were fought. He was in both but came out unhurt. Then came the Battles of the Wilderness and Chancellorsville and again God spared him. Our beloved Stonewall Jackson was killed by his own soldiers through mistake. His death caused great grief and depression throughout the whole South. Gloom and anxiety overspread the land. The question was asked hourly, "Who will take his place?" It was a year long to be remembered. Federals were making raids in every direction. In May, Albemarle was threatened. Cobb's legion from Georgia and Hampton's from South Carolina came to our assistance. Col. Carter had many soldiers as well as officers to partake of his unbounded hospitality. Among the number was Col. Harry Gilmore from Indiana who had just been exchanged, having been imprisoned in Fort McHenry. He, with another officer, were in the same cell next to the magazine. Daily they expected to be told they were either to be shot or hanged. They determined not to be sacrificed to the hatred of their foes or to give them the pleasure. They loosened one of the bricks between their cell and the magazine and concealed it by throwing some old clothes over it. They caught two rats, pretended they had them for pets, saved some butter, which the jailor most generously gave them. They were preparing, in the event of their being condemned to die, they would smear the rats, remove the brick, set fire to them, put them through the hole into the magazine and await the consequences which would have been to blow up the building and they and the other personnel perish. Was it well or selfish? I have always thought it selfish to sacrifice many for a few.

But to return to my subject. All of one day we watched for the foe and school was suspended. I as well as my pupils were stationed at various places to watch and give the alarm should the Yankees appear, but none came as they were met and defeated and made to return more hastily than they came.

In July, we met our foes at Gettysburg. All know the fate of our army. Overwhelmed by numbers our brave men rallied again and again in the vain effort to stem the tide. What might have been if one general had obeyed orders. It might have been a victory had Gen Longstreet reinforced Pickett's Division whose charge outshone that of "Balaclava" and won the verdict for the greatest bravery on the worlds roll of fame. It matters little which division went the farthest but which did the bravest deeds. The loss in Pickett's Division was terrible. The 1st Va. Regiment went into action with over a handful of men and came out with thirteen. Dick was wounded by a spent ball but was able to meet me in Richmond soon after. He went with me to Scotland Neck where I married Mr. Stamper. Dick returned to his regiment where he went through another hard winter.

On my way to sister's I stopped in Richmond long enough to buy some necessary mourning before going on to Lexington. I saw Dr. Davidson who had returned from Shiloh and who was very kind to me. Before leaving North Carolina, I had promised to teach for

Mr. Joe Bryant, beginning the 1st of Feb., 1864. In Lexington, I met with every kindness and attention. I dined with Gen. Imboden and several officers who were there a few hours to check Gen. Hunter a Yankee raider, who was with fire and sword devastating the lovely valley of Virginia. Gen Fitzhugh Lee was in town and was unable to dine with us. I spent Christmas with sister and shortly after, came back to begin my school duties.

In April, Kemper's Brigade was ordered to North Carolina and the 1st Va. Regiment was camped near Tarboro. I was anxious to see Dick so Mr. Bryant offered to send me. His daughter, my cousin, and Mr. Applewhite, whom I afterwards married, accompanied me. We enjoyed the day very much. Shortly afterwards, the brigade was ordered to the front. I remained at Mr. Bryant's until Christmas when I spent the holidays at Col. Ridley's where I found a hearty welcome and had a pleasant visit. Dick came while I was there and as he had furlough of only a few days, we came at once to Enfield and then to Scotland Neck. Hopes were lessening every day that our cause would win. Defeat so often had discouraged our soldiers. Desertions were frequent and clothing was scarce.

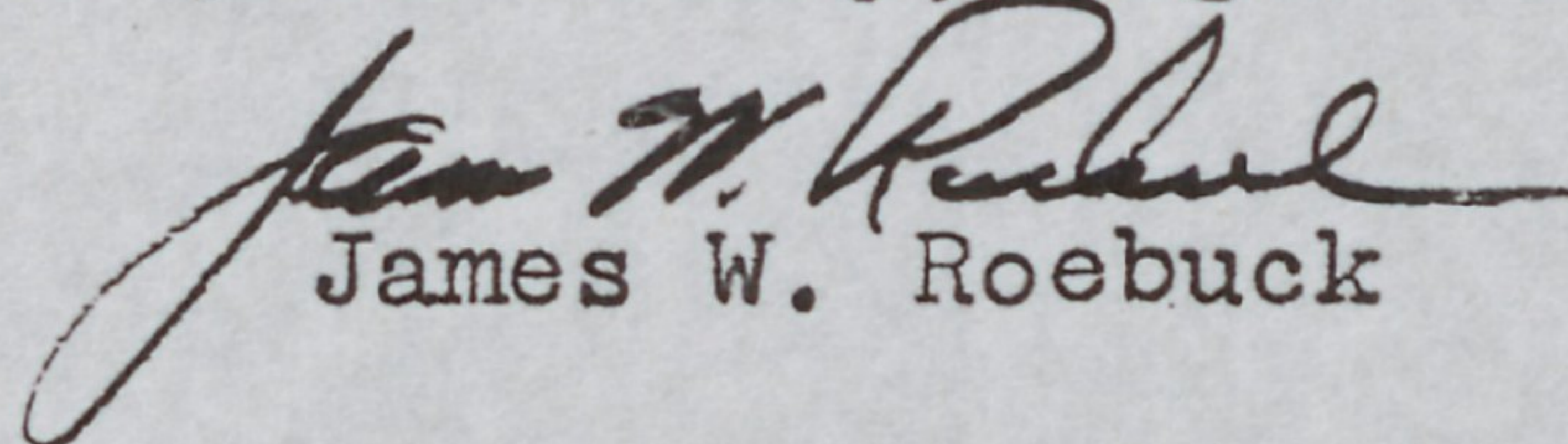
In April 1865, General Grant was near Petersburg and was pressing General Lee harder every day. At last came the tragedy of Appomattox as a thunderbolt to the South. It was almost impossible to believe that Lee had surrendered. After a few days the report was confirmed. Richmond was taken by the Federals and Pres. Davis had escaped. He was soon after taken and imprisoned at Fortress Monroe.

I did not hear from my brothers in some time. Dick was prisoner at Point Lookout but he had relatives and friends in Baltimore and stayed at Uncle Robert Banks' until April, 1866, when he visited me and in July went to Tennessee to Brother Stafford's, who had gone to his home when Gen. Forrest's command was disbanded. Brother Stafford saw hard service but as I heard from him only occasionally, I cannot write about his hardships and sufferings. I only know he fared like other soldiers and did his duty faithfully. War was terrible but Reconstruction was worse. The South suffered untold miseries but thank God, though defeated, she was not conquered. Her women did their duty during the war and since have, side by side with those who were spared, striven to educate, elevate, and make her once more our "Beautiful Southland".

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This is an accurate copy of a document provided by Mrs. George H. Roebuck (Laurie Jordan White-Roebuck), daughter of Mrs. Charles F. White (Lucy Dudley Applewhite-White), and grand-daughter of Mrs. John T. Applewhite (Laura Augusta Jordan-Applewhite), prepared

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James W. Roebuck