



H.R.A. McCORKLE
The Civil War Diary of a C.S.A. Private
William W. Chester

Following years of Protestant persecution by Roman Catholics in North Ireland, many people—chiefly Presbyterians, left the country for a new life in America. In 1729, there were over six thousand Presbyterian Irish that came to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. From Pennsylvania (Lancaster County), many of these people migrated to the Valley of Virginia and settled in Augusta and Rockbridge Counties. Later some of these people moved to Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Among these families whose names appear in the records of Augusta (erected from Orange County), and Rockbridge (erected from Augusta) are McCorkle, Morrison, McBride, Montgomery, McNutt, McClung, McGavock, Houston and Priestley. The Presbyterian cemetery in Lexington, Rockbridge County, Virginia is well represented by grave markers bearing the name McCorkle and many other Scotch-Irish names.

Records indicate that Alexander McCorkle, born 1722, came from the mother country and married Nancy Agner Montgomery of Harris Ferry, Pennsylvania, in 1745. He also rendered valiant service in the Revolutionary War and as a recompense was given a grant of land by the State of North Carolina. (Alexander

McCorkle moved from Rockbridge County, Virginia, to near Salisbury, North Carolina.) This grant bears the date of July 10, 1784, and was situated on Stone's River, Rutherford County, Tennessee. However, the grant was lost through litigation, and a similar one was given in Dyer County to the sons of Alexander McCorkle.

In 1827, Robert McCorkle, son of Alexander McCorkle, moved his family to the then wilderness of Dyer County to carve out a new home. Edwin Archibald McCorkle was a son of Robert McCorkle, and Edwin married Jane Maxwell Thomas in 1791. Hiram Robert Andrew McCorkle, son of Edwin McCorkle, was born on November 6, 1827, in Stewart County, Tennessee. Thus begins the life of the author of the diary.

H.R.A. McCorkle, who lived four miles northeast of Newbern, Tennessee, began his diary in 1848, when he was twenty-one years old and continued it persistently until July 1, 1907, when another person inscribed simply, "H.R.A. McCorkle died last night at 12 1/4 o'clock, aged 79 years." He was buried at City Cemetery in Newbern, Tennessee.

The diary is composed of several musty volumes. Some volumes are difficult to read and others end abruptly. The writer analyzed only that part of the diary pertinent to the Civil War record of H.R.A. McCorkle. The original diary is in the possession of Mrs. Charles Caldwell of Newbern, Tennessee, a great-granddaughter of H.R.A. McCorkle.

Between 1861 and 1863, Dyer County supplied many men to the Confederate service. For example, volunteers left Yorkville under Captain Wilkins, and others left Dyersburg under Captain Latta. However, after Shiloh, many Dyer County men were listed as killed in action or having died of disease. Among those brave men were Captain Wilkins, W.F. Cowan, J.F. Haskins, Robert Goodloe, and H.H. Roach.

By 1863, H.R.A. McCorkle was thirty-six years of age and a well-established landowner and successful farmer. However, the South needed men, and during the latter part of 1863, the Confederates were conscripting men in Newbern, Tennessee. Therefore, H.R.A. McCorkle saw service the latter part of 1863, but his first entry in the diary concerning the war was made on January 31, 1864.

After consolidation with the Twenty-second Tennessee Infantry in 1862, Colonel R.M. Russell, Commander of the Twentieth Tennessee Infantry, returned home to Trenton, Tennessee, for the purpose of recruiting and organizing a regiment of cavalry. Federals occupied the territory, and all new recruits were compelled to escape in squads and later organize in Alabama or Mississippi. The Twentieth Tennessee Cavalry Regiment, organized from a number of companies raised in West Tennessee during the Fall of 1863, came under the command of Colonel R. M. Russell at Oxford, Mississippi.

Within the regiment, Captain J.R. Hibbitt commanded Company G. This company was composed of men from Dyer County, including H.R.A. McCorkle and his brothers Finas A. McCorkle and Anderson J. McCorkle. Most of the men enlisted at Newbern, Tennessee, on December 1, 1863, for three years. Many of these men were with General Nathan B. Forrest when he surrendered at Gainsville, Alabama [sic].

The Diary

- January 31, 1864-We left Camp Hunt for Oxford. Passed the Tallahatchee at Panola on a pontoon bridge. Considerable rain that night.
- February 1, 1864-We arrived at Oxford and camped there until the 8th near Rev. Burney's.
- February 8, 1864-We went to Belmont near Panola and stayed there until the 11th.
- February 11, 1864-We started back to Oxford about an hour before sundown and travelled until about 3 hours before day when we went into camp.
- February 12, 1864-Moved about 10 miles.
- February 13, 1864-Started out to hunt Yankees and returned to the old camps after riding hard all day.
- February 14, 1864-Started South. I stayed in Coffeerville with W.B. Thomas and mother. C.W. Hall, J.M. Hall, W.M. Hall, J.T. Everett, G. Dickey, Mad Dickey, Silas Prichard, Sol Cook, John Carr, H.H. Hadden, O. Laniers, and Hornberger all deserted in the night and left their horses, and John Hogan in the day.
- February 15, 1864-J.A. Strawn, L.C. White, Jesse Minton, and Ery deserted. We camped at Grenada.
- February 16, 1864-We crossed the yallabushey and travelled in a round about way to Columbus, arriving there the 19th. Crossed the river in the night.
- Between February 16, 1864, and March 14, 1864, Pvt. H.R.A. McCorkle did not make an entry in the diary. He could have been ill or on detached duty. However, during this time-February 22, 1864-the Battle of Okolona was fought, and the 20th Regiment was actively engaged.
- March 14, 1864-We left for Paducah, nothing of importance transpired on the way. I got to Trenton, Tennessee on the 22nd and stayed at William Goodloe's until the 23rd about dark. After we left Trenton we traveled day and night except a few hours just to feed and rest a little just before day until we got to Paducah.
- March 25, 1864-Attacked the Yankees in Paducah by surprise, drove them into the fort and kept them there all day. We got a great many goods and some horses. We camped in a few miles of the town all night.
- March 26, 1864-We moved back toward Trenton, nothing of note happening, I arrived at home on the 29th day of March. I stayed at home till the 7th of April when I went into camp at Eaton. The brigade left Eaton the 10th for Fort Pillow, I and Lewis Ridley were sent to Trenton with William and Abner Greer. Abner got away from us. Fort Pillow was taken the 12th. I and Ridley arrived there in a short time after the fort was taken. Camped near the fort until the 13th when we left. Camped at Brownsville the 14th.
- April 15, 1864-I and Capt. Hibbitts stayed all night with Mr. Taylor between Brownsville and Somerville.
- April 16, 1864-We camped at LaGrange.
- April 17, 1864-Camped at Holly Springs, Mississippi.
- April 18, 1864-Camped at LaGrange. I stayed at Mr. Falls.
- April 19, 1864-At Somerville.
- April 20, 1864-Near Somerville.
- April 21, 1864-At Lanfield.

April 22, 1864-At Dyersburg until the 29th. The brigade then moved near Trenton.

April 30, 1864-I left home and followed on to Spring Creek and stayed at Esq. Johnson's.

May 1, 1864-I caught up with the Brigade near Jackson. We went through Jackson and took up our line of march through Dixie. We camped in Corinth the 3rd of May. In Rienza the 4th, Baldwin the 5th and until the 16th of May.

May 16, 1864-Left Harrisburg for Tupelo and Corinth arriving at Corinth the 17th and camped there until the 23rd, the day the infantry soldiers were dismounted. We then started south again and 24th arrived at Tupelo and camped in town one night then moved out to Mathisis (about 3 miles), stayed there until the 1st of June.

June 1, 1864-We started to Middle Tennessee and moved up into Alabama between Big and Little Bear Creeks when we countermarched and arrived again at Tupelo the 4th and stayed there until the 7th.

June 7, 1864-We started out to hunt Yanks again, camped near Baldwin.

June 8, 1864-Camped part of the night near Booneville and part at Blackland.

June 9, 1864-Moved up to Rienza

June 10, 1864-Battle at Brice's Cross Roads. Capt. J.R. Hibbitts, H.C. McCorkle and T. Everett killed.

June 11, 1864-Ran the Feds all day. I was in sight of Salem when I met Col. Bell coming back.

June 12, 1864-Returned to camp on the battlefield and remained there the 13th.

June 14, 1864-Moved to Guntown on M & O R.R.

June 19, 1864-Moved to Saultillo Station.

June 21, 1864-To Tupelo and remained there until the 8th of July and moved to Ellistown.

July 9, 1864-Left Ellistown about dark and travelled all night in the direction of Pontotoc. Stopped at daylight about 10 miles from Pontotoc, slept 1 1/2 hours and started towards Okolona-warm day.

July 10, 1864-Travelled all day and stopped at Okolona about midnight.

July 11, 1864-Moved two miles south of Okolona.

July 12, 1864-Left camp about 4 o'clock p.m. and travelled nearly all night, stopped awhile in an old field and slept a little.

July 13, 1864-Started on and got in a few miles of Pontotoc and then turned toward Tupelo, met with and fought with the enemy in five miles of Tupelo. We fell back and camped until morning.

July 14, 1864-Battle at Harrisburg-we were repulsed with heavy loss.

July 15, 1864-Still skirmishing with the enemy until noon when it was ascertained certainly the enemy was retreating. They retreated 4 miles and ambushed our command and drove them back in confusion.

July 16, 1864-The enemy still falling back towards Memphis. Our brigade went into camp near Tupelo until the 18th.

July 18, 1864-We moved to Shannon Station. Then to Pikeville the 19th.

July 20, 1864-We moved 4 miles west of Pikeville to McIntosh and Bowers farms.

July 28, 1864-To Shannon Station again until the 7th of August then went over to Oxford.

August 13, 1864-Battle of Hurrricane Creek fought. We were repulsed. We stayed around Oxford until the 18th of August, and left for Memphis.

August 18, 1864-Travelled nearly all night, stopped at Panola. Crossed the river on the 19th and stopped at Senatobia late in the night.

August 20, 1864-Built two pontoon bridges, finished the one on Coldwater and got across about one hour before sundown. We then had 32 miles to travel to get to Memphis which we did before day.

August 21, 1864-We captured 25 prisoners and a good many horses. We only lost a few men killed, captured and missing. Then we moved back 20 miles and camped.

August 22, 1864-Moved to Panola and started to Springdale the 24th. Stayed there 2 days and 3 nights and moved on to Oxford for a few days, and moved over to Verona Station on the M & O R.R. and remained there until the 16th of September.

September 16, 1864-We started for Middle Tennessee. Passed through North Alabama and struck the M & C R.R. at Cherokee Station. Left Cherokee the 21st and forded the Tennessee River at Colbert Shoals the same day and camped near Florence, Alabama.

September 23, 1864-Attacked Athens, Alabama just at night, took a few prisoners and skirmished with the enemy occasionally at night. It rained on us in the night.

September 24, 1864-We had a general engagement with the enemy in and around the fort. The fort surrendered 700 prisoners and just about that time 800 reinforcements came up and we had them to fight pretty heavily before they would surrender, but they had to succumb to Bedford (Forest) at last. Capt. Parker and W.C. Pace wounded.

September 25, 1864-Moved on to Sulphur Trussel and captured the fort with 800 prisoners.

September 26, 1864-Moved up towards Pulaski, Tennessee, took several little block houses with a few prisoners.

September 27, 1864-Met and fought the Feds 6 miles from Pulaski. Drove them back to fortifications. We stayed around until dark, then moved towards Fayetteville.

September 28, 1864-Arrived at Fayetteville at dark.

September 29, 1864-Left Fayetteville and moved about half the day as if we were going to Tullahoma, then turned towards Lewisburg and travelled about half the night through the hilliest country I ever saw, but I did not see that for it was the darkest night I ever felt or smelt.

October 1, 1864-We struck the Tennessee and Alabama R.R. near Spring Hill, captured four block houses and 120 prisoners. Burned a steam mill and tore up and burned the R.R. considerably.

October 2, 1864-We went to Columbia and made the Yanks all run into their den and then we moved over near Mt. Pleasant and camped.

October 3, 1864-We moved off in the direction of the Tennessee River.

October 4, 1864-We moved along leisurely.

October 5, 1864-Camped in 6 miles of Florence, Alabama. Were roused up about 11 o'clock and moved up to Florence. This is the first time we have been called up out of bed to move in the night since starting on this raid.

October 6, 1864-Arrived at Tennessee River and began to cross the ferry boats

and skiffs at Newport. I believe it is also called Cheatham's Landing or Ferry.

October 7, 1864-Still crossing the river.

October 8, 1864-The enemy is pressing our men that are on the Middle Tennessee side of the river and have scattered them considerably but they are still crossing. Our brigade moved to Cherokee. Cols. Barteau and Wilson have not crossed yet. They are cut off with about 200 men. The Yanks captured a few of our men today.

October 9, 1864-We remained at Cherokee.

October 10, 1864-We left Cherokee just after dark and moved to Luka. Col. Kelly ran the Yanks off from three pieces of artillery on the south side of the river and captured a few prisoners and horses.

October 11, 1864-We moved to Corinth and camped until the 16th.

October 15, 1864-Cols. Barteau and Wilson came in today without much loss.

October 16, 1864-Left Corinth for West Tennessee. William Givins, A.J. McCorkle and I.

October 17, 1864-We arrived in Jackson, Tennessee, at daylight and took dinner at H.W. Reeve's got to Dr. Givins about an hour after dark.

October 18, 1864-Landed at home at 10 o'clock p.m.

October 25, 1864-Left home for Huntingdon stopped at Mrs. Barrett's.

October 26, 1864-Joined the command at Huntingdon.

October 27, 1864-Bell's brigade started for the Tennessee River. Camped at Paris, Tennessee.

October 28, 1864-Arrived at Paris Landing.

October 29, 1864-Captured the Steamer Mazeppa loaded with Q.M. and C.S. stores.

October 30, 1864-We captured two transports and one gunboat.

October 31, 1864-All quiet on the Tennessee at Fort Hineman where we moved yesterday.

November 1, 1864-Started home, stopped near Calidonia at a Mr. Ward's I believe.

November 2, 1864-The Command left Hineman for Johnsonville.

November 3, 1864-I got home all right.

November 4, 1864-Shelled Johnsonville. Burned and sank twelve transports, four gunboats and twelve barges.

November 5, 1864-Started for Lexington, Tennessee.

November 6, 1864-Stopped at William E. Reeves'.

November 7, 1864-Went 11 miles beyond Spring Creek.

November 8, 1864-Passed Lexington. Met Col. Russell. Turned back, put up at Clark Harmon's. Waited for the brigade until the 10th when it came up and moved on to Jack's Creek.

November 11, 1864-Camped near Purdy.

November 12, 1864-At Farmington, Mississippi.

November 13, 1864-At Luka until the 16th. Moved to Cherokee.

November 17, 1864-Passed through Tuscumbia and camped in two miles of the river.

November 18, 1864-Crossed the Tennessee River at Florence on a pontoon bridge. Saw J.G. Moore and various other infantry boys.

November 19, 1864-Skirmished with the Yanks on Butler's Creek.

November 20, 1864-Lay up all day on Butler's Creek.

November 21, 1864-Moved in the direction of Lawrenceburg. Very cold and some snow.

November 22, 1864-Skirmished with the enemy at Lawrenceburg.

November 23, 1864-Moved 6 miles from Lawrenceburg toward Mt. Pleasant.

November 24, 1864-Moved toward the R.R. and fought the enemy near Camelville.

November 25, 1864-Passed by Lynville to Columbia. Camped in 3 miles of town.

November 26, 1864-Skirmished all day and night.

November 27, 1864-Still skirmishing. Col. Russell left for home to join his regiment.

November 28, 1864-Moved toward Lewisburg, struck the Lewisburg and Franklin Pike at Berlin near Duck River, skirmished with the enemy on the river until dark. We camped near the river and Mr. Yank left.

November 29, 1864-Crossed the river without any opposition except muddy banks and deep water, went on to Spring Hill and fit them again.

November 30, 1864-We started at daylight in pursuit, skirmished with them to Franklin, captured some prisoners. General engagement at Franklin the evening and night. Generals Strahl and Cleburne killed.

December 1, 1864-Moved on towards Nashville, our brigade captured 31 prisoners and battle flags. Camped in 9 miles of the city.

December 2, 1864-Moved out on the N & C R.R. and shelled two blockhouses, camped at the Asylum.

December 3, 1864-I went out to Tolbert Fanning's Sunday.

December 4, 1864-I spent the day with Fanning.

December 5, 1864-We moved up to Murfreesboro but stopped long enough at Lavergne to take in 115 Yanks, then crossed Stones River and camped in 2 or 3 miles of town.

December 6, 1864-Skirmished all day on the north side of town. Col. Barteau wounded at dark.

December 7, 1864-We moved around and came in on the Woodbury Pike and drove the Yanks into town. Time about is fair play so they drove us out in a hurry. We had only one man killed. We then moved around on the same route we came in and camped 6 miles from town on the Nashville Pike (cold night).

December 8, 1864-We moved back near to Murfreesboro and picketed the road.

December 9, 1864-Had a pickett fight. Capt. R.D. Clark wounded in the heel, snow enough to cover the ground.

December 10, 1864-Crossed Stones River again and are picketing on the Lebanon Pike. I am camped in an old Smith Shop. It is awful cold.

December 11, 1864-Colder, we moved the headquarters to Jack Beards one mile from the road.

December 12, 1864-Still at Bairds [note change in spelling].

December 13, 1864-Picket fight with a foraging party, drove them back, Col. Bell moved to the road again.

December 14, 1864-Headquarters at Dr. Black's. I went with Mrs. Muirhead to General Forrest Hd. Quarters. I stayed at Rev. M.B. Hill's.

December 15, 1864-General engagement at Nashville. Mr. Hood's part of the War. I stopped at Mrs. Bone's in Jefferson.

December 16, 1864-We left Murfreesboro at daylight, moved down near Nashville, and then turned towards Franklin, travelled nearly all night and stopped in five miles of Franklin. General Hood retreated from Nashville. Finis (McCorkle) sent off to hunt General Forrest but did not find him.

December 17, 1864-With the wagon train and marched on with it until the 20th.

This ended the story of the War Between the States by H.R.A. McCorkle who was, indeed, a remarkable man.

