

The Civil War Experiences of Charles Sylvester Boarman, Jr. (the son of Dr. Charles S. Boarman)

This is a copy of an article taken from the magazine "CONFEDERATE VETERAN" Sept.-Oct. issue, 1932 about Charles Sylvester Boarman, Jr.

A BRAVE MISSOURI BOY by James E. Payne, Dallas, Texas

Two hours before all avenues of approach to Vicksburg, Miss., had been closed by the Union army in 1863, two cases of gun caps, which on a hurry call, had been forwarded by Capt. John M. Payne, Ordnance Officer at Wilmington, N.C., reached that city. But even that supply in Pemberton's vigorous defense became inadequate, and additional supplies became a serious sine qua non.

By some method unknown to the writer, who at the time, was languishing in hospital No. 2, with a mangled right hand, the pressing need for more gun caps was communicated to Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, who was in the neighborhood of Canton. This officer entrusted the task of getting the caps delivered to Pemberton to Brigadier General Bob McCullough of the 2nd Missouri Cavalry Brigade, then operating in territory in rear of Sherman's Corps along the Yazoo River, which emptied into the Mississippi about three miles below where the Federal gunboats lay at anchor. The peril of the undertaking lay in the fact that both shores of the Yazoo near its adit were guarded, while vigilant patrol boats kept watch over its placid surface.

Fortunately, the spring rise in the Mississippi had subsided, the water of the Yazoo was well within its' banks and had a current of about two and one-half miles per hour. It was easy, therefore, to figure out by time and speed the hour at which time the bearer must pass guards and patrols to escape detection, and death or capture.

The big requirement, however, was the man to carry out this perilous plan. To settle this, volunteers were called for. The first to step out was Charley Boarman of Boonville, Mo. McCullough knew his man and readily accepted him.

With a detail of commands, young Boarman proceeded to the bank of the Yazoo, and soon preparations were completed for the venture. Timing the start so as to reach and pass the Union sentinels during the darkest hour of the night, he let himself down between two floats set so low in the water that visibility was lost in less than fifty yards, and, answering the "God bless you's " and "Good luck," of his comrades with a wave of his hand, was on his way. Night soon came, and the firmament glittered with stellar glories. A crescent moon obtained a few glimpses through interstices of leaf and bough, then sank from sight. Wondering owls screamed out their fright at sight of a human head floating 'neath their

perches, and an occasional "cotton-mouth", that most dreaded of all moccasins, came weaving in graceful convolutions, to be driven away by a stroke of the convenient cudgel, his only method of defense.

Haynes Bluff is passed, then, where the saffron hued waters of the Sunflower are emptied into the Yazoo. The mouth of Deer Creek, drainer of Mississippi's vast delta, is left behind, and the intrepid young hero knows he is drawing near where vigilant soldiers in blue are on guard. Increasing darkness warns him that it is the last hour before dawn. Shoreward he sees flickering lights of smoldering campfires, on the flat surface of the river beacon lights of a trolling scow. He is almost at his journey's end and at the apex of danger. Lying flat on his back and allowing only his face above water, he drifts with the river's silent current. He feels that the fate of the beleaguered city is in his hands, and he thrills with pride that it is so. On, still on, and yet unseen by Grant's keen-eyed watchers, the turgid waters bear him, and just as Aurora paints with pearly finger the coming dawn, he swings into shore, where "Whistling Dick", that brave old cannon, stands guard over the broad Father of Waters. Eager hands pull him to land, relieve him of his precious burden of caps, divest him of his water-soaked vestments, clothe him with a dry uniform, and an ambulance is summoned to take him to General Pemberton's Headquarters.

The story that a man had floated down the Yazoo River and landed with a hundred and fifty thousand caps tied around his body went the rounds, then was dismissed the name of the man did not come to my ears. Had it done so, I would easily have recognized it as that of an old-time boy friend.

I returned to my home in Kansas City in 1866. At a Christmas Festival that year given in honor of returned Confederate soldiers, I met a sister of Charles Boarman and asked about him.

"Poor brother Charley," she said, with a quiver in her lips, while tears welled up in her beautiful eyes, "is almost blind. You may not know it, but he is the soldier who took a lot of guncaps into Vicksburg during the siege, by floating down the Yazoo River, passing the Federal pickets at night. The exposure affected his eyes. The doctors give us no hope that they can ever be cured."

This is an article taken from the Missouri Historical Review, Vol. 22, page 379 and refers to Charles S. Boarman, Jr. and his sister, Mrs. Richard H. Keith nee Mary Lee Boarman.

While there are some errors in this write-up, here it is, as written:

"The heroism of a 15-year-old Missouri school boy in the subjugation of Mississippi river forts by a fleet of gunboats commanded by Admiral David C. Farragut in the second year of the Civil War, was recalled today by yellowed

letters and papers found in the belongings of Mrs. Richard H. Keith, who passed away December 26," says the Kansas City Post of January 4, 1928. Charles S. Boarman, a Boonville boy was a member of the 2d regiment of Missouri cavalry volunteered to carry a message to Fort Donaldson which was endangered by Farragut's approach. A swim of three miles at night was necessary to reach the fort, but in spite of the difficulty and danger young Boarman succeeded. Exposure as a result of his swim and a wound received in an earlier engagement aggravated an eye ailment with which he was afflicted and he was discharged from the army in November, 1862. Boarman died in New Orleans in 1883.

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