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A Dispatch

A Story For Memorial Day

By Captain ARTHUR TRASK

"Grandpa," said a miss of sixteen, "I wish this year you would make the story of the war you tell us on Memorial day one about a Confederate. To us young ones the war is a matter of history, and we don't realize that those beside whom we are now living as friends were then our enemies. Now, tell us a story about a nice, brave Confederate."

"I understand just what you mean, my dear," replied the septuagenarian vet, "and appreciate it. Indeed, I rejoice at it. Since we are now one people it is fitting that we, especially you of the third generation of those born after the war, should feel no bitterness for a people who were our enemies half a century ago. And I am not surprised that you like to hear about them as well as about those who fought for the Union."

"Of course I must give you my own experience. There is one I had with a Confederate which is especially



HE CLASPED HER IN HIS ARMS.

adapted to Memorial day, for it is sad, and Memorial day, you know, is sad in itself. It recalls those who perished in that gigantic struggle.

"My story is laid in the very beginning of the war. Fighting of a desultory kind was going on in western Virginia, then a part of the Old Dominion, but now a state which in that period of secession seceded from a state. The Allegheny mountains divide Virginia from West Virginia, and it was in these mountains that we were fighting. I was in the cavalry and did a good deal of scouting among these heights, from which I enjoyed some very beautiful views.

"The general who opposed us was a very active man. Indeed, he subsequently became one of the great leaders of the war, and many military men consider him to have been the one general of both sides who had in him the Napoleonic genius for war. If quick movement indicates such genius he certainly was in a smaller field the equal of Napoleon, for even the little Corsican could not have moved more rapidly, more unexpectedly or been in more places at the same time than Stonewall Jackson.

"Well, one day our general sent for me and told me he wanted me to find out where General Jackson was. He was reported to be at Romney, at Springfield and at Pawpaw. He couldn't very well be at all of them at the same time, and the general wanted to know where he was and if possible where he would be next.

"There was a mountain ridge running north and south directly to the west of these places, and, ascending it, I rode northeastward, with Romney and the other two places mentioned below me in the valley. Of course I couldn't see everywhere down there, and troops might be concealed by the trees and intervening heights. Near Springfield I concluded to descend with a view to getting a little closer to what might be going on. The mountain side was not to be passed over, especially on horseback, without going by a trail; but, having had a good deal of experience in mountaineering, I knew a trail when I saw it and, finding one, followed it.

"Reaching the valley, I struck a road. I knew it wasn't safe for me to remain on it for any length of time, so I chose an eminence near and a lit-

tle above it where I could see and not be seen. There I dismounted behind a clump of low trees tied my horse to one of them and waited.

"There was but one house in view, and that was a few hundred feet from the road and approached by a line. I watched this house for evidence of something alive, for the place was lonely and I craved the sight of a human being. It was midsummer and everything was green. There were flower beds about the house, and presently I saw a young girl come out and begin picking some of the flowers. A girl in a flower garden has always been a pretty sight to me, and I watched this young woman with very

pleasant sensations. I was tempted to go down and make her acquaintance, but this might interfere with my object, so I contented myself with looking at her, admiring her graceful carriage and the comfort her flowers appeared to give her. They seemed to be talking to her and she to be listening at what they said.

"While enjoying the sight I heard a clatter of horse's hoofs coming up the valley, and presently a horseman in gray uniform appeared. As soon as he reached the lane that led down to the house he turned into it. Catching sight of the girl, he took off his hat and waved it, and she threw kisses to him. Dismounting beside her, he clasped her in his arms.

"Now, I had compunctions at spying upon two lovers who had evidently met after an absence. But here comes in the difference between peace and war and more especially between peace and spying, and you must prepare yourselves for the horrid part of my story which I am now going to tell you. Not considering it the part of a soldier or even a spy—for that's what I was—to look upon such a sight, I determined to turn away from the couple, but as I was about to do so the young soldier unbuttoned his coat, took out a folded paper, evidently a letter, opened it and read it to the girl. Then he said something to her in an earnest way, whereupon she gave him her hand, saying something to him, and it struck me that she was making him a promise.

"An explanation of this scene flashed upon me. He was carrying an important dispatch, had informed her of its contents and she had promised him that if anything occurred to prevent his delivering it she would go to the commander for whom it was intended and deliver it verbally. This was my interpretation of the matter; but, of course, it was only a guess.

"The young soldier remained only a few minutes with the girl. After having taken her in his arms again he tried to disengage himself from her, but she clung to him, and it was quite awhile before he could get away from her.

"This parting affected me very much, for I was resolved to possess myself of the dispatch or whatever it was he carried. This could hardly be done without one of us killing the other, and it was likely that he would fall, for he was unaware of my purpose, while I could follow him and if necessary shoot him in the back.

"You may think, my dears, that to harbor such intentions was very horrid of me, but you must remember that his life or mine was a mere bagatelle compared with the lives of men composing two armies. Besides, there was the cause each represented.

"The young man having torn himself from the girl, whom he left standing peering after him, I mounted my own horse and, screened by the trees, rode down the incline in the direction he had taken. We had not gone a mile from the house before I overtook him.

"Hearing the clatter of horse's hoofs behind him, he drew rein and turned. He saw me with a carbine leveled at him and heard me calling on him to surrender.

"He must have known that to refuse was certain death to him, for he must depend on a revolver, and he was out of range, while I could shoot him down before he could come near enough to me to render his weapon effective.

"You asked me to tell you of a brave Confederate, and I assure you this one was not only a brave but a noble man, for rather than be captured with the dispatch on him he chose death. He made a dash at me, but before he had come twenty paces I shot him, and he fell from his horse, which went tearing back in the direction from which he had come.

"The young soldier was dying when I dismounted and stood beside him. I wished that the war was a thing of the past, as it is for you youngsters, and I was in my own home in the north engaged in peaceful avocations. I waited till he was still in death, then opened his coat, took out the paper and read it.

"I saw that it was an order for the general commanding a detached portion of General Jackson's forces to form a junction with him that night and be ready to surprise us at dawn the next morning.

"Then I forgot everything but the carrier of the dispatch I had cap-

tured to my general as soon as possible. Putting my foot in the stirrup, I swung myself into the saddle and rode southward. So intent was I on the importance of what I was doing that I did not think of the girl at the house below. As I approached it I saw her holding her lover's horse with its empty saddle and weeping hysterically with her arms about its neck.

"I could not bear to pass her. Turning up the mountain side, I struck the trail by which I had descended and, reaching the crest, rode into camp about 10 o'clock the same night, delivering the captured dispatch to the general. When I told him the story I have told you he said:

"Thanks to you, we have nothing to fear tomorrow. We will turn in and sleep soundly."

"The year that the first Memorial was celebrated I went south, found the grave of the young Confederate I had killed and placed flowers upon it. I was no longer in war, but amenable to the generous, loving influences of peace. I was standing bare headed over the grave when the girl I had seen some years before approached with her arms full of flowers. I withdrew without saying a word to her.

"What could I have said to her? Had I not caused the death of the man she mourned? She could not have realized that the act was a war duty."

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