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SOUTH FROM APPOMATTOX:
THE DIARY OF ABNER R. COX

Edited by

ROYCE GORDON SHINGLETON *

At the end of the Civil War, Lieutenant Abner R. Cox commanded Company L of the Palmetto Sharpshooters¹ (described by Cox as the "PSS") of Bratton's brigade,² Field's division,³ First Corps, Army of Northern Virginia.⁴ Cox enlisted as a private on April 14, 1861 in Ander-

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¹ On April 21, 1862, the Confederate Congress had authorized battalions of sharpshooters which were to be armed with long-range muskets or rifles. *Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America, 1861-1865*, II, First session (Washington, 1904, 220-222). The Palmetto Sharpshooters (earlier the Palmetto Regiment or South Carolina Sharpshooters) evidently had been formed in early 1862. William F. Amann, *Personnel of the Civil War* (New York, 1961), I:114. At the time of surrender, Captain A. H. Foster commanded the Palmetto Sharpshooters. Clement A. Evans, ed., *Confederate Military History*, V (Atlanta, 1899), p. 552.

Sharpshooters were used in battle, but even when there was no battle, they usually continued to fire throughout the day. Tents were sometimes pitched over pits two or three feet deep to reduce the danger, but since the soldiers on both sides were accustomed to the sharpshooting routine, they were often careless in their movements about camp and six or more were killed daily. *Columbia Daily South Carolinian*, June 21, 1864, cited in J. Cutler Andrews, *The South Reports the Civil War* (Princeton, 1970), p. 403. Confederate sharpshooters were probably more effective, not because they were more expert marksmen, but because the English Enfield rifle musket was superior to the Springfield generally used by the Army of the Potomac. *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, September 8, 1864, cited in Andrews, *South Reports*, p. 415. Yet Union sharpshooting helped to destroy Lee's army. G. C. Eggleston, *A Rebel's Recollections* (New York, 1875), p. 176.

² General John "Old Reliable" Bratton began the war as a private; he was twice wounded and once a prisoner. At Appomattox his brigade was "the most completely manned and was the only one which left the field as an organized unit." Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography*, II (New York, 1943), 608.

³ General Charles William Field was constantly engaged in battle during the war, and at Appomattox his division was "the only thoroughly organized and effective body of troops in the Army of Northern Virginia". *DAB*, VI: 356-357.

⁴ The Army of Northern Virginia was composed of three army corps, nine divisions and approximately thirty-six brigades, exclusive of artillery and cavalry. To each brigade was attached a battalion of sharpshooters, composed of from two to four companies or 125 to 200 picked men. It is difficult to determine the battalion

Taylor embezzlement case. No Radical faction held a monopoly of the numerous incidents of misconduct in office throughout the 1870's and 1880's. The fusionists' attempt to defend their ticket as "tossing the rascals out" merely obscured the real issue of Northern interference in the local politics.

Hayes adoption of a Reconciliationist policy and variations of this policy by his successors marked the end of the black man's usefulness to the Republican cause. Whitefield J. McKinlay, a black collector of the Port of Washington, D. C., wrote that the "Republicans were too cowardly . . . to fight in cases which involve principles touching the black man."⁵⁷ In 1888 the *News and Courier* recognized that South Carolina blacks were being "taxed out of their boots by the Americo-Blaine Tariff. They want to vote for the GOP that freed them."⁵⁸ Following the adoption of the new Republican strategy that looked for Conservative support, Southern Radicals and Straight-outs were left to their own devices.

⁵⁷ Whitefield J. McKinlay to Robert Smalls (Washington, D. C., August 23, 1912), Carter Godwin Woodson Collection, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁵⁸ *News and Courier*, September 22, 1880.

son, South Carolina and on August 1, 1863 was elected Jr. Second Lieutenant; he was wounded on June 27, 1862 and again on October 7, 1864.⁵ The South Carolinian kept a diary⁶ during the last days of the war and continued daily entries until he reached his home county of Anderson. In the diary, part of which appears below as he wrote it, Cox described the surrender of the remnant of a once powerful and effective fighting force and revealed some plundering by Confederate soldiers after capitulation. The diary is of special interest, not only because of the detailed notations, but because it was written by an obviously disciplined soldier in the most Spartan brigade in Lee's army; therefore from a military point of view the diary reflects the best that was in the Army of Northern Virginia at the time of its surrender.

Although a subordinate officer, Cox was well aware that the Confederate army dissolved as it moved from Petersburg to Appomattox Courthouse. On April 1st, the day before Lee evacuated Richmond and Petersburg, General Pickett had about 9,500 men, but on April 9th, the day of Lee's surrender, he had only five hundred. General Johnson had 7,500 men on the 1st but on the 9th only about 300.⁷ Losses in some other units were described by Cox as equally high. Cox believed that Lee surrendered a total of about 23,000 men, and wrote that Grant

of sharpshooters with the most distinguished record during the war because battalion action has been mostly lost in the histories of larger units. W. S. Dunlop, *Lee's Sharpshooters* (Little Rock, 1899), pp. 486-487.

⁵ Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers in South Carolina Units in the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

⁶ Georgia Department of Archives and History, 190-75 (Microfilm), Atlanta. Edited and published with the permission of John H. Sutherland, great-grandson of Abner R. Cox.

⁷ As early as the third week in February, 1865 Lee wrote: "Hundreds of men are deserting nightly." Most of the deserters had fought well and left because of hunger and lack of pay. David D. Wallace, *The History of South Carolina*, III (New York, 1934), 217. From February 23 to March 8, 1865 Bratton's brigade led Field's division with sixty-three reported desertions; from March 9th to the 18th, seventeen deserted from the brigade, which was somewhat low for the division; but most soldiers who intended to leave had evidently deserted through that period because at Appomattox Bratton's brigade of 130 officers and 1,418 men (only two more than the figure set by Cox) had by far the highest number of personnel in a brigade. Field's division was also the most fully manned division with 4,953 officers and men. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, XLVI, Series 1, Part II (Washington, 1894), 1277-1278, 1296, 1332. J. F. J. Caldwell, an officer in the First Regiment of McGowan's brigade of the First Corps and the historian of his brigade, wrote that "one brigade in our corps numbered eight men." Caldwell, *The History of a Brigade of South Carolinians* (Philadelphia, 1866), p. 235.

claimed to have captured in the last weeks of the war about 43,000 Confederates. Grant's forces were given as 120,000 men. According to the diary, the Union general-in-chief complimented Lee on his march, commenting that it was a "disgrace to the U. S. forces with their superior numbers and transportation, that Lee was allowed to retreat so far."

The diary disclosed that on April 7th Field's and Mahone's divisions were engaged in the last heavy fighting in Virginia, and Cox noted that a Union major said Field's division would be the last exchanged "as it was the best in Lee's army, and had given them more trouble. Grant said when he wanted to penetrate Lee's lines, he avoided Mahone's and Field's Divisions." Cox continued to emphasize the merit of his division, writing that of all the Confederate infantry, 9,000 had arms and 9,000 "had thrown them away or bore none,"⁸ and of the 9,000 with arms, 4,000 were in Field's division. Furthermore, in Bratton's brigade of 1,416 men, 1,111 were armed, and of the 352 men which comprised the Palmetto Sharpshooters, 284 had weapons.⁹

* * * * *

On the 11th April, Gens. Longstreet [First Corps commander] and Lee wrote Col. Coward¹⁰ a letter expressing their appreciation of his gallant services, and pronouncing him to be one of the worthiest officers of the army (we all see and admit now, that the true secret of our disaster was a want of discipline) Pickett[s] Division left Petersburg with 10,000 muskets, and surrendered 150 muskets at Appomattox C. H.

On the morning 12th April, Gen. Lee, attended by an escort of cavalry, left us on parole and was loudly cheered by his men. Our Division then fell in, Bratton's Brigade in front, the Sharp-Shooters in front of it, and moved 3 miles to Appomattox C. H., Grant's Hd. Qrts., where a large force of Yankee infantry was drawn up on either side of the road, with flags flying and officers and men in full uniform. We marched up one line, (and in doing so saw the 16th Michigan that the P.S.S. almost annihilated at Gaines Mill) and our Regt. stacked arms in front of the 118th Pennsylv. The men were very civil and polite; said they had met us before, and hoped it would be a long time before they met

⁸ Cox's suggestion that the total infantry surrendered was 18,000 is probably low; the *Official Records* list 22,349 total infantry surrendered. XLVI, First series, Part I, 1278. However, many soldiers might have been counted as surrendered who had already begun the trek homeward.

⁹ According to the number of men listed by Cox who received mustering-out pay, L company consisted of 22 men (Cox received ten dollars and the enlisted men were paid from one to two dollars each).

¹⁰ Colonel A. Coward commanded the 5th Regiment, South Carolina Volunteers, a unit of Field's division. Evans, ed., *Confederate Military History*, V:552.

us again. We stacked arms in front of Warren's 5th Corps, now commanded by Gen. Griffin and then drilled [?] down the line of the 2nd and other Corps (on our march down we saw the Yankees cutting up the apple tree under which Genl. Lee was said to have surrendered). It was a sad sight to see our guns and Artillery that had done so much execution, handed over to the enemy; the men felt sad, and the march was as silent and solemn as a funeral procession. The most candid Yankee officers said that their infantry could not have done anything with us, if it had not been for their cavalry harrassing and stopping us.

April 13 Left the enemy lines and began the march homeward, having rained the night previous the roads were in bad condition and the march heavy.¹¹ Eat [sic] some Beef, parched corn, drank some coffee, and slept soundly having marched 24 miles.

14th Eat some coffee, beef, and corn, gave out the Parols, and marched to Campbell C. H. where we rested. A gentleman gave away near an acre of onions. Stopped and eat dinner; onions and potato soup which was only full and strengthening meal in four days. The citizens told us that for a week previous to the day of our surrender, thousands of our soldiers raped their houses with arms in their hands, deserting to their homes. Today, one of Pickett's men, who had fled his command, approached Col. Bowen and asked for a parole. Drew half cup of meal and flour each and after eating felt much strengthened. We camped at 3 o'clock P.M. having marched 15 miles. Saw with pain much depreddating upon gardens and barren lands.

April 15th Were aroused before day by rain. Rained until after 12 o'clock m, and our person and clothes got very wet. We crossed Staunton River at McIvers ferry, and moved out 2 miles and camped, having marched 12. Drew flour and beef.

Sunday 16th One week since we surrendered and it seems like an age. Slept soundly last night, and arose to greet the sun in a clear sky. Marched through a corner of Halifax Cy. and into Pittsylvania Cy. to within 7 miles of the C. H. where we camped for the night. Our route lay over pleasant roads, through strong lands and by noble residences eligibly situated. The landscape views were charming. The population sparse. Marched today 22 miles.

April 17th After eating heartily of a turkey stew with Lt. Hamilton, drew a small ration of bacon, went to bed, and slept soundly [evidently eve of 16th]. Awoke at daylight and walked on 7 miles to the C. H., on the way a man gave us peas and bacon for breakfast. Passed large tobacco plantations, splendid cottage residences, most pleasantly located.

¹¹ Between the 9th and 12th it rained heavily. Caldwell, *History*, p. 242.

The houses of the village are situated on an elevated ridge, mountain peaks in view; built on one street and of cottage style. Eat a dinner prepared for us by citizens, rested until 2½ o'clock P.M. and then walked 19 miles by 8½ P.M., making 26 miles for the day. Slept in the woods.

April 18th Col. Coward, who slept w/us, and who had secured for us last night, in Danville, 1300 rations and R.R. transportation, told us of the destruction of Govt. & Private property by a worthless mob of citizens and paroled soldiers, and said he knew us too well to believe that we would be guilty of any disorder. The Brigade marched through in perfect order,¹² and bivouaced 3 miles below the town. Danville is situated on the south bank of Dan River, on a ridge that recedes gently from its banks. The handsome private residences and grounds denote caste and wealth. Its location and a mountain range to the south, give it a picturesque appearance. Drew full rations of bacon, meal, salt, and molasses, and were kindly spoken of by the citizens. Marched down the P.R.R. 8 miles. Left Va., entered N.C. and at Pelham station took the train for Greensboro.

April 19th Slept all night in the cars; rode on the cars 28 miles, stopped for dinner; went to Greensboro.

April 20th Slept in a mill last night. Drew meal, bacon, salt, and beans. Gov. Vance, Beauregard, Hardee, S. D. Lee, Stuart, Breckinridge, are here, and Johnston was here. There is a truce between the armies, and it is said that negotiations for peace are pending. Johnston's army are dispirited, dozens have left, others will leave, and I think the remainder will surrender. Wheeler and Hampton's men say they will cut their way out. Johnston's force is estimated at 22,000 Infantry and artillery, and 15,000 cavalry. By a dispatch I have heard that Lincoln was killed at the theatre in Washington and his son Robt. and Seward wounded. Bob Lincoln was killed: a soldier heard Beauregard read the news from a Northern paper on yesterday; it was done by Guerillas.¹³ Johnston and his officers had been on a conference of several days at Sherman's Heads., and he announced in an order issued yesterday that

¹² Caldwell wrote that the men in McGowan's brigade marched through the Federal lines as a brigade and remained in brigade form for a day or two, then organization dissolved a great deal as men became irregular in march and the roads that led to the soldiers' homes diverged. There small squads formed as the march continued. Caldwell, *History*, p. 244. Cox, however, seems to have been traveling with a fairly large and organized group of men.

¹³ Seward was wounded, but the entry about Robert (Bob) Lincoln was an error which probably emanated from the newspaper account or from the soldier who related the news to Cox.

all hostilities would soon cease.¹⁴ Drew shoes, blankets, and clothes; marched 10 miles towards Saulsbury [Salisbury].

Friday 21st Marched 20 miles and slept in a piazza.

April 22nd Arose by day-light and marched 10 miles to breakfast; while waiting it saw some of Wheeler's Cavalry take the last meat that a poor man with large family had. We got a stewed chicken, some peas, milk, and molasses and made a good meal. Walked 12 miles to Saulsbury. Where we could draw no rations. Saw an Engineer from the G. and C.R.R., gave him a coat and vest pattern to let us ride on his engine: reached Charlotte, N.C. at 11 o'clock on the

23 April: Drew one ration: reported to Hospital: took some medicine: the ladies came around and we got a good dinner. Saw Genl. M. W. Gary,¹⁵ who escaped through the Yankee camps at Appomattox C. H. Spent the day at Charlotte.

April 24th Slept in a box car, took the train for Chester C. H., 30 miles; crossed the Catawba on a pontoon ferry boat; on arriving at Chester at 3:o'cl. P.M. found Majr. Barnett's 2nd Bat. State reserves: went to their camps and spent the night with them and saw Capt. Mac [?] Williams, Lt. Lewis, and other friends.

Tuesday, 25th Left Chester with the Battln at 11 o'cl. A.M. and marched 16 miles; camped at the widow Crosby's who is a daughter of Wm. Weintt. She baked some biscuit for us and sent us some ham meat. We rode some miles in the wagon of the Battalion and got our baggage hauled.

Wednesday 26th Slept well, arose at day break and walked to . . . in Newberry Dist., a distance of 16 miles, crossing Broad river at Ashford's ferry, saw our old friend . . . Tuaster [?]. Eat some milk and bread at the widow Osborne's, for which three of us paid \$5.00. Exchanged

¹⁴ Captain W. E. Stoney, in Joseph E. Johnston's army during the surrender in North Carolina, wrote that after Johnston's surrender "no right [is] acknowledged now except might, no property safe which is not defended with pistol and rifle." Stoney also described the march into South Carolina as he observed it: "The men straggled off at daylight and are scattered widely on both sides of our route seeking provisions. The wagons are all that mark the march during the day, and at night the men reassemble as they come up to where headquarters are made." Johnson Hagood, *Memoirs of the War of Secession* (Columbia, 1910), 372-373.

¹⁵ Martin W. Gary, the "bald eagle," led a cavalry brigade in Fitzhugh Lee's division. At Appomattox Gary had buried his sword and escaped through the enemy lines. He joined Jefferson Davis at Greensboro and escorted Davis to Cokesbury, South Carolina where the last Confederate cabinet meeting was held in the home of Gary's mother. Cox, *Diary*; DAB, VII:177.

some meat for milk for dinner; walked to within 3 miles of Newberry, which made 27 miles we marched this day. The last five miles I rode in the wagon.

Thursday 27th Arose at 1 o'cl A.M. and marched to Helena; got on the cars, and left with 1500 soldiers for home. Felt very joyous; reached Belton at 3½ o'cl. P.M. and went home with Lt. Lewis. Spent a pleasant time, eat well, and slept well.