

## **J. F. McKenrick and William H Connell, Two Ebensburg Citizens Who met on Bloody Field, Renew Acquaintance Thirty Years After.**

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This is the story of how two young men met first on the bloody battlefield of Gettysburg, one as a Yankee soldier, the other as a volunteer helper in the Confederate ambulance corps, greeted each other again in Ebensburg thirty years after, having been in total ignorance of each other's whereabouts in the meantime.

The "Yank" was William H Connell long a resident of this place and at present one of the Jury Commissioners of the county. The other was J. F. McKenrick, Esq., a prominent member of the Cambria County Bar, also for some time a prominent resident of this place.

The battle of Gettysburg was the turning point in the great Civil War. The most advanced position of the Confederate Army was upon that field. It has gone down in history as the "high-water mark of the Rebellion."

### **Pickett's Daring Charge**

Pickett's charge will always rank as the most daring, heroic, and disastrous achievement of soldiers upon a battlefield, and will never be duplicated in war, owing to modern arms and tactics adopted in warfare.

Those who witnessed the charge and repulse of Pickett at Gettysburg know what war actually means. The historian, the poet, and the painter have described in words, rhyme, and color the event - heroism of the soldier and the realistic scene of carnage.

Any detail of the minute incidents of the battle of Gettysburg from eyewitnesses will always be of interest to the student of history.

It is forty-two years since the flower of the youth and the chivalry of the Nation contested in mortal combat upon the battlefield for principles which to the men of South were held equally sacred.

The armies of Meade and Lee were alike imbued with deeds of valor, and exhibited a courage that won the admiration of the world.

The issues which then divided our country into two warlike armies were settled forever by the arbitrament of the sword, and the estrangement of the two sections of this Nation have been transformed into a friendship never to be broken.

### **Seen from Both Sides**

Your correspondent has obtained from Mr. McKenrick an account of his observations while serving in the ambulance corps of Kemper's Brigade of Pickett's Division at Gettysburg, and from W H Connell his experience as a member of Company B, One Hundred and Forty-ninth Pennsylvania Volunteers, known as the "Buck tails", Gen. Roy stone's Brigade, Doubleday's Division of Reynold's Corps, he having enlisted from Clearfield County and participated in the first day's battle where he was wounded and taken prisoner.

The battle opened on the Cashtown road between Heth's Confederate Division and Buford's cavalry on the morning of July 1<sup>st</sup>. Reynolds hurried up stone's brigade and posted it to meet the advancing Confederates. The brigade, after doublequicking for several miles, reached the Chambersburg pike and were ordered to lie down. General stone walked along the line and cautioned every soldier to keep close to the ground. Archer's and Pender's brigades of Heth's division were rapidly advancing through a wood. Sharpshooters were concealed in every convenient cover.

Reynolds had been shot. Stone informed the men of the fact and asked them to avenge his death. The Confederates came within range of their rifles and stone gave the command to fire. The brigade then rose up and charged the advancing enemies, driving it back. At the same time stone's brigade was attacked in the rear, and quickly facing about, executed a gallant charge to the rear, a feat seldom executed and one that only well-disciplined soldiers can perform.

#### **A Bucktail Wounded and Captured**

In this charge stone's brigade came to the old railroad cut, which was so concealed that its charging line fell into the cut, and this position were attacked on the flank by a strong force. Many of the Bucktails were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner in this cut. It was here that Mr. Connell was wounded and taken prisoner. He was conveyed to a Confederate hospital at the Schriver farm on the Mummasburg road in charge of Dr. Hayes, whose magnanimity to the wounded foes was shown by his directing an attendant named Lee to "give the wounded Bucktail water every hour or as often as he asked for it." Mr. Connell says this man Lee treated him with every degree of attention, and during the four days of confinement at the hospital he became much attached to Surgeon Hayes and his nurse Lee.

On his way to the hospital he met the forces of Ewell coming into action, and never saw a finer array of soldiers. During all of the second day's battle he could hear the guns, the shouts of the soldiers, and as the wounded of both sides were brought in, each gave his own version of the battle that was raging just across the ridge from this hospital.

On Friday, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, great accessions from both armies arrived, and there seemed to be no preference shown by the surgeons and nurses.

Mr. Connell describes his meeting of J F McKenrick here. On the afternoon of Friday a group composed of a wounded Confederate, Mr. Connell and another wounded Union soldier were twitting each other. The "Reb" was shot in the back. Connell had taken five

bullets through his clothes, a wound in the leg, and the other a wound in the instep. This soldier accused the "Reb" of running when shot. In return he was accused of running before he was shot, because his wound could not have been received if he had been facing the enemy.

### **A Question Happily Settled**

During this discussion a big boy, looking more like a farmer than a "Reb" came up and was asked to decide which theory was correct. His reply was, "Come over to the shade of that tree, and we will decide it. Connell and the "Reb" followed, and the three sat down. "The big boy took out a bottle of whiskey and two large slices of bread, spread with butter, and handed one to each of us", relates Mr. Connell; "also gave each a drink from the flask. Only old soldiers who have not seen homemade bread and fresh butter or tasted good whiskey for a long time, can appreciate the appetizing effect of such a lunch."

It is needless to say that the umpire has never to this day rendered the promised decision.

This boy afterward proved to be no other than J F McKenrick Esq., although for more than thirty years his name was unknown to Mr. Connell. During a few minutes of conversation McKenrick learned that Connell was a Bucktail, having noticed a few hairs protruding from his blouse pocket where he had concealed his "bucktail plume". He asked, "Are you a Bucktail?" When informed that he was, and a member of Company B. One Hundred and Fortyninth P. V. R., and that company was raised in Clearfield County, he said, "You better put your plume away or some 'Johnny' will carry it back to Virginia as a trophy." Connell took care to conceal it further down in his pocket.

McKenrick then asked Connell to go with him to a dying comrade, over whose form he had placed a blanket to protect him from the hot sun. They found that the soldier had just expired, and that some vandal had cut off the finger to take a gold ring. They then went to a wounded Louisiana Tiger, who was delirious from a great wound in the head, could not be kept clothed or bandaged, and was confined in a pen of rails. In his delirium he imagined himself in battle, and would shout commands and give the famed Rebel yell. He was a terrible sight to look upon. Going to the porch was found another wounded, an Adjutant with his right leg amputated above the knee, his left arm at the shoulder, a bullet through his left breast, and one through the left thigh.

During this time the famous artillery duel was raging, and when it ceased the ambulance corps were hurried to the field and the big boy disappeared, though the circumstances mentioned were often called to Mr. Connell's mind.

### **One Estimate of the Yanks**

After the repulse of Pickett a surgeon came galloping up from the front and ordered Dr. Hays to send out and gather all the farm wagons he could find, load them with ~he wounded, and start them toward Cashtown, saying at the same time, "The Yanks have

got into the rocks, and you might as well try to drive a team through hell as to try to drive them out or get at them.”

Soon teams of all descriptions, hitched to hay wagons, began to arrive. The wounded were placed on these wagons, with hay or straw for cushions, and started rapidly toward the Chambersburg road. During Friday night and Saturday the Confederate cavalry were passing from the direction of Hanover and Littleton, moving toward the Chambersburg road.

On Saturday, cavalry came up and began to parole the wounded. Dr. Hays told the officer in command that he still had between 400 and 500 wounded who could not be removed. When asked how his supplies of medicines were, he said he had no chloroform or morphine, but was supplied with others. He was directed to send to the “Cemetery”, where all needful could be obtained.

In the evening Mr. Connell was removed to the Catholic Church in Gettysburg where he found his Colonel, John Irwin, Orderly-Sergeant Oscar Welsh, and many wounded of his brigade. The Sisters of Charity from Emmitsburg and McShirleytown were in charge and here they were held until the general hospital was reestablished.

### **Lived Near Scene of Carnage**

J F McKenrick lived in Adams County , near the main route of Lee’s invading army, and from June 17 till July 5, 1863, his neighborhood was constantly occupied by Confederate troops, all communications with the Union Army being cut off until after Lee’s retreat from Gettysburg .

The first gun fired at the battle was stationed near Cashtown and its report distinctly heard at Mr. McKenrick’s home. Attracted by curiosity and love of adventure, he started for the scene of action, and on his arrival at Cashtown, a few miles in the rear the wounded began to arrive and reinforcements to hurry to the front.

Dr. W. C. Stem, the family physician, lived there, and his house was made a hospital. Major-Gen. Heth, whose division opened the fighting, was wounded and brought to this place, where Dr. Stem treated him.

As their numbers increased, every house became a hospital and every person seemed ready to render aid to the wounded Confederate soldiers. The reports that thousands of Union and Confederate wounded at the front needed attention brought ready and willing hands to go at once to their relief.

Mr. McKenrick was among the first to reach the line of the first day’s battle, and, finding the wounded lying where they fell, without food or water, joined in ministering to their needs and remained until late in the night of “July 2<sup>nd</sup>”.

From a large cherry tree he had a good view of the two lines of battle, and watched Johnston Division assaulting the Union right on Culp's Hill, and the artillery firing from both sides until nearly midnight.

On returning toward Cashtown he came into the camp of Kemper's Brigade of Pickett's Division that had arrived late that evening from Chambersburg and gone into camp at the stone bridge over Marsh Creek.

Learning that this division would march to Gettysburg that night, he remained in camp until the early morning, and then accompanied Kemper's Brigade to the line of battle, where it was assigned a position with the brigades of Garnett and Armistead, under cover of Seminary Ridge, forming the right of Pickett's charging column.

Mr. McKenrick left the ranks and going to the face of Seminary Ridge, he found many wounded Union soldiers who had lain from the first day's fight. Their thirst was so great that he at once gathered all the canteens he could carry and proceeded to find water. Going to a large spring at the Cobean farm he found a guard a member of the Rockridge Artillery, C S A, who informed him that the spring was reserved for hospital purposes. The guard consented to his taking water, however, and for several hours he carried it and supplied hundreds of the wounded along the face of Seminary Ridge. The house and barn were crowded with wounded of both armies, and the Confederate hospital flag floated over them.

From early in the morning the Confederate artillery had been moving from the extreme left along Rock Creek to be massed on the center along Seminary Ridge, preparatory to the great artillery duel that began about 1 o'clock that afternoon.

The route traversed was by a road running back of the Cobean barn and one in front of the house. This movement drew a heavy artillery fire from the Union center and left a number of shells striking the house and barn and killing a number of the wounded, also killing several horses in front of the house, carrying away the gate post, and one shell passing through the door over the spring and lodging between two timbers just over the spring.

Mr. McKenrick had just stepped away from the spring when this shell struck and the guard remarked that he had served in the Rockbridge Artillery from the beginning of the War and this was the first instance in which a battery had been trained upon buildings covered by a hospital flag.

### **One Gun's Great Work**

Afterward the act was discussed with much acrimony on both sides of the ocean. The excuse given by the Union side was that the Confederates had masked a battery of long-range guns behind these buildings, which was not true, in fact, but afterward it was learned that a single Whirtworth gun of great accuracy and long range was posted on the Mummasburg road, where it was so completely concealed from view that it was

worked from Thursday until late on Friday without attracting a shot from the Union batteries. The fire was supposed to come from behind the Cobean barn.

The gun was fired at regular intervals, had a peculiar clear rifle report, and its bolts carried with precision for a distance of five miles. Mr. McKenrick saw this gun in action on Friday forenoon, and when on a visit to the battlefield in July last accompanied a guide to the place where the gun was stationed.

The effect of this gun upon the Union artillery from the center at the "Bloody Angle" to the crest of Little Roundtop was so destructive as to disable several batteries. Captain Cowan had two of his reserve guns placed in position to resist Pickett's advance at the "Bloody Angle" dismounted by a single shot from it, and, discovering that it was a solid "Whitworth bolt" was anxious to learn where it came from. On his last visit to Gettysburg he informed the guide of the circumstance, and it was his request that the place was pointed out.

### **Wounded Placed Behind Rocks**

The artillery fire caused shells to explode along the face of the ridge where the wounded were lying, and Mr. McKenrick, after supplying them with water, moved many behind rocks and trees to shield them from the shells.

Returning to the ridge south of Lee's headquarters, the ambulance force was sent to the ground to be covered by Pickett's charge, and when the artillery duel was about to open were ordered off the field. It was during this time that Mr. McKenrick met Mr. Connell, as described by him. Returning to the field, Pickett's line was forming and emerged from the woods, where it had been in position since his leaving in the morning.

The smoke from the 300 guns that for two hours had been firing rapidly from both sides had settled upon the plain over which Pickett was ordered to charge. When his line emerged from cover Kemper's brigade was in advance and assumed the right of his charging column. Garnett following, and Armistead in the rear; Wright, Wilcox, and Perry's brigades forming on the right flank, and Heth's Division, then under Pettigrew, with three brigades on the left flank. These were to support Pickett.

The distance from the point where Pickett emerged from the woods to the clump of trees, his objective point, is two-thirds of a mile. The ground is undulating, raising in places to round elevations, at others slight depressions. It was then covered with grass and grain ready for the sickle, and the fences were mostly of posts and rails. About half the distance was protected from our guns on account of its slightly elevated topography. From there it descended slightly until the Emmitsburg road was reached. Along this road was a high post and rail fence to be crossed. Then it was broken into slight depressions and several small ravines until within 100 yards of the stone wall, now known as the "Bloody Angle"; then slightly elevated until the clump of trees was reached. The buildings on the Codorl farm were also to be passed by opening the ranks, and again closing beyond them.

## **Pickett's Thrilling Charge**

Over this distance of almost a mile Pickett was to charge, with about 4,800 men who had not tasted water from early in the day, and who had marched thirty-two miles across the South Mountain from Chambersburg the previous day. The sun was hot, the air extremely sultry, not enough breeze to carry away the smoke, and the sulfurous air of the battlefield almost depressing. Certainly it was a feat of physical endurance unparalleled, and its very nature beyond the endurance of soldiers.

As if in dress parade, every man in alignment, each officer in position, Pickett, with his staff, rode forward the very embodiment of Southern chivalry, not a word except of command spoken, not a shot fired until the crest of the ground near the Emmitsburg road was reached. Here the line emerged from the smoke which had hung densely over the field. It was then discovered that his course had been too far to the right, that he would strike Doubleday's divisions five lines deep and far to the right of the clump of trees. Wilcox and Perry his right flank supporters, has also been crowded too far to the right. On reaching the rail fence at the Emmitsburg road, Pickett changed his course by an oblique movement to the left. This caused a gap between his right and his flank supports.

Hancock ordered Stannard's Brigade to strike Pickett's flank, which almost annihilated two of his regiments. Perry and Wilcox were also attacked and driven back. At the same time the batteries of the Union line began to pour shell, grape, and canister into Pickett's front and flanks.

Kemper and Garnett were advancing in line, with Armistead close to the rear. When, within 150 yards of the first line, Garnett was killed. Kemper led the charge and was severely wounded and carried off the field. Armistead's horse was shot, and on foot, with his hat fixed upon his uplifted sword, he led the remnant of the three brigades up and across the stone wall, captured Cushing's guns, then the reserve battery, and planted the Stars and Bars at a point seventy-five yards within the line of defense held by Hancock, where Armistead fell, mortally wounded, and Pickett's brave men were almost annihilated, having lost three Brigadier Generals. Out of twelve Colonels who led their regiments, seven were killed and five wounded; of the six Lieutenant Colonels, three were killed and three wounded and captured; only one field officer, Major Latrobe of the fifteen regiments composing the three brigades escaped unhurt.

## **Out of 4,800 Only 1,100**

On July 5<sup>th</sup>, when the Division began to retreat only 1,100 of the 4,800 were in ranks, having lost 3,700 men in that brilliant, though fruitless charge that is inseparably associated with the Battle of Gettysburg, and has immortalized Pickett and his Brigade in the annals of war.

The retreat of the survivors was not a rout, single and in squads they came back. Many bearing their wounded comrades, others, on crutches improvised of rifles, some officers carrying their saddles. Pickett and his staff were still mounted, and as fast as the soldiers reached a position where they could be reformed, they rallied to meet the expected countercharge of Meade's army.

Longstreet and Lee had rallied several brigades and stationed all the available artillery along the crest of Seminary Ridge in readiness to meet any advance or countercharge that might follow.

While the Federal commanders had repelled Pickett's assault, yet they were too severely punished to follow up the victory by any forward movement.

### **Work for the Ambulance Corps**

As soon as the field was clear the entire ambulance force were ordered forward. The wounded lay thick as sheaves upon a field of grain. At every clump of grass depression, or spring run wherever shade or water was found, the wounded had gathered to slake their thirst.

From that time until late in the night ambulances and stretchers carried by lines of men bore the wounded to the rear. The cries of wounded were heard in all directions, and the ambulance corps, under cover of the night searched out the wounded up almost to the Federal lines.

### **Wounded Were Drowned**

A heavy rain during the night caused the rivulets and gullies to become flooded. Many of the wounded were drowned, and the ambulance men, worn out and prevented by the rain from searching further, lay down to await the return of daylight.

The morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July found the field covered with a heavy fog. Bodies of infantry were being moved from one point to the other, in reforming lines, and the Confederates were throwing up entrenchments to retard any advance from Meade's army.

Desultory infantry firing and occasional shelling made the work upon the field dangerous. One instance serves to show. While Mr. McKenrick was assisting a wounded Captain to an ambulance a bullet struck a fence stake, passing through and striking the officer in the breast. Luckily his rubber blanket, rolled over his shoulders, caught the force of the bullet, which he picked out and kept as a relic of his escape, though he had passed through three days of the hottest part of the battle.

All day Saturday the wounded were being loaded into wagons and ambulances. Farm wagons covered with hay, and drawn by decrepit old horses, left by the raiders of both armies, and driven by the citizens wended their way back toward the hills beyond Fairfield. Dismounted guns, arms, ammunition stores, and hospital supplies were hastily loaded into wagons and with artillery began the retreat.

## **Enemies, but Brothers**

When, late on Saturday night, the men were withdrawn from the entrenchments, all of Lee's Army had withdrawn, except the rear composed of cavalry; and the bloody field of Gettysburg was left as a legacy to Meade's army and the citizens of Adams County who rallied as a host of mercy to relieve the unfortunate soldiers maimed beyond hope of recovery and deserted by their comrades on the enemy's soil.

The unbiased devotion of the surgeons and hospital aids, also the men, women and children at Gettysburg, to the suffering soldiers left in their charge after the retreat and advance, showed conclusively that, though the soldiers of Lee were enemies in battle, they were still members of one family, kindred of one blood, and fellow citizens of one great, though disrupted, country.

It rebounds to the credit of the people of the border counties that, after sending to the front more than their quota of regiments to protect the National capital, and when their homes were threatened with invasion, both the State and Nation, left them without adequate protection; after being pillaged by the invaders, their crops destroyed, their cattle and horses taken, many families reduced to penury-under, all affliction their charity was unbounded and their patriotism untarnished.

## **Where Uncle Sam Fails**

It may be said, on the other hand, that the National Government has failed to respond to every instinct of honesty by its persistent refusal and tardiness to compensate the citizens of York, Adams, Cumberland, and Franklin counties for actual losses sustained by the incapacity of the Government to afford even the semblance of protection from the raids and spoliation by a weaker foe.

Thirty years after Gettysburg, J F McKenrick, Esq., came to Ebensburg. On day he sent for W H Connell to come to the Mountain House. Both had grown older. Appearances had changed. Both had forgotten many of the incidents which served to recall their meeting at Gettysburg .

The following dialogue took place in the Mountain House office.

## **An Interesting Dialogue**

Mr. McKenrick – “Are you the W H Connell who was a member of Company B, One Hundred and Forty-ninth Pennsylvania Bucktails that was wounded and a prisoner at Gettysburg ”?

Mr. Connell – “Yes, I was a member of the Pennsylvania Bucktails; was wounded and taken prisoner at Gettysburg . What do you want to know about that”?

Mr. McKenrick – “Do you recall meeting a boy at the hospital who told you to hide your ‘bucktail plume’, or some Johnny would take it as a trophy? And who gave you and a little “Reb” a slice of bread and a drink of whiskey under a persimmon tree; then showed you where a comrade was dying; and saw the Louisiana Tiger in the pen of rails”?

Mr. Connell – “Yes, it seems to me I do recall some of those incidents. But what do you want to know about me”?

Mr. McKenrick – “Well, you are that Bucktail, and I am that boy, and I have wanted to meet you for thirty years”.

Mr. Connell afterward explained that he thought at that Mr. McKenrick was a Pension Department detective, then again thought that he was the Rebel nurse Lee, who had such good care of him when at Surgeon Hays’ hospital.

The incidents were afterward more fully discussed. Both gentlemen are neighbors and close friends. Their children are also friends, and the incidents of their first meeting afford them many pleasant hours of conversation.

*End*