

Reminiscences of a School Girl during the War Between the States (ca. 1911)
By Adelia McEwen German

Adelia (Addie) McEwen (1848-1942), daughter of John B. and Cynthia Graham McEwen, married Dr. Daniel B. German in 1869 and they had five children: Alice Green, Dr. Daniel B. German, Jr., Dr. Richard Graham German, Horace German, and Graham German Webb.

... I was a pupil in the old Franklin Female Institute-the alma mater of so many brilliant women, the mothers and grandmothers of the present generation...The pupils numbered about 175, and as wide-awake set of Southern girls as could be found...

On an ever memorable day, the 30th of November, we assembled at school as usual. Our teachers' faces looked unusually serious that morning. The Federal couriers were dashing hither and thither. The officers were gathering in squads and the Cavalry, with swords and sabers clanking, were driving their spurs into their horses' flanks and galloping out to first one picket post and then another on the roads leading south and southwest of town. The bell called us in the chapel. We were told to take our books and go home, as there was every indication that we would be in the midst of a battle that day.

At four o'clock that afternoon I stood in our front door and heard musketry in the neighborhood of Col. Carter's on the Columbia pike. To this day I can recall the feeling of sickening dread that came over me. As the evening wore on, the firing became more frequent and nearer and louder; then the cannon began to roar from the fort.

My father [John B. McEwen] realizing that we were in range of the guns from both armies told us to run down into the cellar. We hastily threw a change of clothing into a bundle and obeyed at once. My mother [Cynthia Graham McEwen], who never knew what fear meant in her life, was a little reluctant to go and leave the upper part of the house to the tender mercies of soldiers, but she finally joined us in the basement. A few minutes later there was a crash and down came a deluge of dust and gravel. The usually placid face of our old black mammy, now thoroughly frightened, appeared on the scene. She said a cannon ball had torn a hole in the side of the meat house and broken her wash kettle to pieces. She left the supper on the stove and fled precipitately into the cellar.

After that, the only way we could get anything to eat was by sending a guard, who was in the yard, to the kitchen after it. The patter of bullets on the blinds was anything but soothing. The incessant booming of cannon and the rattle of the guns continued until midnight, then the firing gradually ceased; we, of course, were in ignorance of who was in possession of the place, but all the while hoping and praying that it might be our boys.

...In the afternoon, December 1, some of us went to the battlefield, to give water and wine to the wounded. All of us carried cups from which to refresh the thirsty. Horrors! What sights that met our girlish eyes! The dead and wounded lined the Columbia Pike for the distance of a mile. In Mrs. Syke's yard, Gen. Hood sat talking with some of his staff officers. I did not look upon him as a hero, because nothing had been accomplished that could benefit us.

As we approached Col. Carter's house, we could scarcely walk without stepping on dead or dying men. We could hear the cries of the wounded, of which Col. Carter's house was full to overflowing. As I entered the front door, I heard a poor fellow giving his sympathetic comrades a dying message for his loved ones at home. We went through the hall, and were shown into a little room where a soft light revealed all that was mortal of the gifted young genius, Theo Carter,

who under the pseudonym of "Mint Julep", wrote such delightful letters to the Chattanooga Rebel. Bending over him, begging for just one word of recognition, was his faithful and heartbroken sister. The night before the battle he had taken supper at Mr. Green Neely's (the father of our postmaster) and was in a perfect ecstasy of joy at the thought of seeing his family on the morrow, from whom he had been separated so long. But alas! When the morrow came, that active, brilliant brain had been pierced by one of the enemy's bullets; he was carried home and ministered to by those faithful sisters, and died, I think, without ever having spoken a word.

From this sad scene, we passed on to the locust thicket, and men in every conceivable position could be seen, some with their fingers on the triggers, and death struck them so suddenly they didn't move. Past the thicket we saw trenches dug to receive as many as ten bodies. On the left of the pike, around the old gin house, men and horses were lying so thick that we could not walk. Gen. Adam's horse was lying stark and stiff upon the breastworks. Ambulances were being filled with the wounded as fast as possible, and the whole town was turned into a hospital.

Instead of saying lessons at school the day after the battle, I watched the wounded men being carried in.

Our house was full as could be; from morning until night we made bandages and scraped linen lint with which to dress the wounds, besides making jellies and soups which would nourish them....

Source: Warwick, Rick. *Williamson County: The Civil War as Seen through the Female Experience*. Nashville: Panacea Press, 2008. Used with permission.