

A MAN A MINUTE
THAT IS THE KILLING RECORD OF
MISSISSIPPI SHARPSHOOTER

(The Exponent is indebted to Mr. B. F. Nalle, a Confederate veteran, for the copy of the Richmond Dispatch of July 7, 1896, from which the following interesting article is taken. The Confederate reunion of 1896 was held in Richmond.)

Among the veterans in Richmond today is one of the most unique characters in the history of the Confederacy. He is Lamar Fontaine, of Lyon, Coahoma County, Miss., who in his day and generation was perhaps the most destructive and sanguinary warrior, single handed, that the world ever saw, and who in his declining years devoted himself to the muses and from time to time contributed to the daily and periodical press literary articles of such merit as no one would credit to a man who carries the scars of 67 bullets and has slain so many fellow-creatures that he cannot make even an approximate estimate of the number thereof.

The Marquis of Lothian, in his history of the war of secession, published several years ago, being conversant with many incidents in the life of Fontaine, says in effect that in none of the historical or traditional heroes of the chivalric Middle Ages, no soldier the world has ever known whose deeds of valor have come down in story, songs or fable, can hold a place alongside this man in the qualities of bravery, perseverance, or devotion to duty; and the Marquis laments that the Confederate States produced no poet or biographer capable of embalming the memory of this nineteenth century warrior.

WAS JACKSON'S SCOUT

Stated briefly, Fountaine's war record was this: He began as scout and courier for General Stonewall Jackson. He also served in the same capacity with Generals Stuart and Johnson, and briefly with Lee. He took part in twenty-seven pitched battles, fifty-seven skirmishes, and over a hundred individual skirmishes, in which blood was shed. Although he was but a private in the ranks, he was once entrusted with a carte blanche order on the Treasury of the Confederate States. He was known in all branches of Confederate service as the best marksman with rifle or revolver in either army. He was wounded sixty-seven times, and thirteen times his lungs were pierced. Five times in the course of the war he was reported in the dispatches as dead. On two occasions he was able, with the aid of mirrors, to look into apertures in his flesh, and watch the beatings of his own heart. These statements might appear fabulous and altogether incredible, but for the fact that the man is well known by all the veterans in these parts, who fully vouch for all these details, and even further for if Fountaine were not so modest his own recital of his career would seem even more remarkable.

GOOD SOUTHERN STOCK

Lamar Fontaine is of the same family as Senator and Associate Justice Lamar, who died a few years ago, while occupying a seat on the Supreme Bench. He is also a kinsman of Commodore Mathew Fontaine Maury who mapped the pathway of the ocean and gave the world the grandest work of the century - "The Physical Geography of the Sea."

He is also one of the nearest descendants of the immortal Patrick Henry now living, and also of the Winstons, the Dabneys, the Lewises, the Spotwoods, the Dandridges, and many more of the best families of Virginia, who have aided in making her name great in the annals of our country.

He is with us now attending the sixth annual reunion of the Confederate veterans in this city, and it was the fortune of a Dispatch reporter to meet him while in our midst. He is of average stature, wears a soft felt white hat, a dark gray Prince Albert coat, and has a gentle, kindly expression, and a clear, gray eye, under heavy overhanging brows.

RELATES HIS EXPERIENCE

In a conversation with him, the reporter remarked that I have seen a letter in the Scimitar, of Memphis, Tenn., in which it said that you had killed sixty men in an

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hour. Will you relate to me something about this - how, when, where it occurred?

He good-humouredly replied: "It occurred at Waterloo Bridge, just above Warrenton Springs in Virginia, in August 1862, just as Sonewall Jackson was flanking Pope prior to the second battle of Manassas. I had been sent across the river early in the morning to ascertain, if possible, what Yankee corps was in front of us. I captured a member of Purnell's Maryland Legion, a part of the Yankee Provost Guard and released a member of the First Maryland Regiment, Confederate States army, who was a prisoner. I recrossed the river with my prisoners, and delivered them to our Provost Guard, and from the prisoners General Jackson got the desired information. Quite heavy firing was going on at the bridge.

"There was a long frame house, with a cellar under it, and our sharpshooters had possession of it, and the "Yanks" were pouring a heavy fire into it from the opposite side of the river, just below the bridge. While this fire was going on General Jackson sent me with a dispatch to General A.P.Hill. When I returned I found the General sitting near a large fallen brick column of an old residence that had been destroyed by fire prior to the opening of the war.

"There were several columns still standing, and I got down and stood near one. While standing near this spot a battery on the opposite side of the river opened upon our men, who were in the valley near the bridge.

"I watched several shots, and asked the General if I could try my hand at them. He said he had no objection. I shot from the column near where I was standing, resting my rifle on the top of my crutches, which I leaned against the column.

"Many of the officers stood by, and watched the shots. I would call No. 1 at gun No. 1, then No. 1 at gun No. 2, and so on, until I had fired about twenty rounds, hitting my man every time. When General Lee rode up, and I quit shooting, General Jackson told Lee that they were just watching my skill with the rifle, and that I had fired about twenty shots without a miss.

"General Lee glance at his watch and expressed a desire to witness it himself. I was then introduced to him, and again opened fire on the battery, and continued to exhibit the same skill. After I had exhausted the last round of sixty that I began with I told them that I would have to quit, as I was out of ammunition. The General looked at his watch and remarked "that this is wonderful." "Sixty shots without a miss and not over an hour in doing it. He then asked me if my conscience did not trouble me..I asked, 'For what, General?' He replied, 'For shooting so many of those people.' I asked if he had ever killed a rattlesnake. He said, 'Yes.' I then asked if his conscience hurt him when he did so. 'I cannot say it did,' he replied. I then said, 'General, I shoot at Yankees from the same principle that you would at a snake. I enlisted for that purpose, and I do it from a sense of duty.' He then pulled out his dispatch book, and wrote what I thought was a dispatch, but, not folding it, he handed what he had written to me. As I took the paper, I asked, 'Who will I show it to, General?' With that soft, gentle look, half-smiling, he said, 'Show it to posterity.' I folded the paper carefully, and from that day it has been a sacred keepsake, and was never exhibited to any one save the members of my own family; and the fact of my having it was not known until it was brought out in the Hamilton and Gaubril trial at Brandon, Miss., in 1886, when I had to show it."

A SPY IN DISGUISE

Beyond doubt, the most remarkable feat accomplished by Fontaine from the point of view of the historian was the carrying of dispatches and caps into the city of Vicksburg, when that city was invested by the Federals. At that time, Memphis was in the hands of the enemy, and Fontaine, acting as a spy and under disguise, had been in that city for a month or so, picking up what information he could for the benefit of General Joseph E. Johnson, who had his headquarters at Jackson, Miss.. One day there came a summons for him to report to General Johnston at once. Simultaneously the Federals in that city got knowledge of Fontaine's orders and of his presence

there. The desire to capture such a dangerous spy and redoubtable Confederate sharpshooter became so intense that a reward of \$20,000. was offered for him, dead or alive, and all troops were dispatched to cover all the roads leading southward to intercept his progress. But he avoided them and reported on time to his general at Jackson for orders. The orders were that he was to carry dispatches and 40,000 musket-caps through the Federal line and into the city of Vicksburg.

The appalling difficulty of this undertaking may be judged from the fact that Vicksburg was beleaguered by 75,000 Federals under General Ulysses S. Grant, all the approaches to that city were controlled and guarded by the Federals, and there was a reward of \$20,000. out for the head of Fontaine.

But this courier understood the uses of discretion, as well as the necessity for valor. He set out on his journey. He avoided all thoroughfares. In complete disguise and under cover of darkness, he passed through the Federal lines, in a small canoe, or "dug-out," and delivered his caps and dispatches to General Pemberton; and, after spending a few days in that city, he returned with dispatches to General Johnston's headquarters, at Jackson, Miss., and delivered his dispatches, and General Pemberton's receipt for the caps and dispatches delivered to him.

AN EXCITING ADVENTURE

It was while coming out of Vicksburg that he met with his most exciting adventure, and his relation of it sounds marvelous. He floated down the river at night to a point some eighteen miles below Vicksburg, and, landing, he procured a horse, and, riding in the direction of Jackson, he had to cross the Big Black River. Every ford and ferry on the same was closely guarded by the Federals, and he rode into the guard at one of these ferries, and they ambuscaded him; and as he rode into their midst he was confronted by a circle of 150 Yankees, who vied a volley at him, the farthest shot being not more than forty yards.

He killed the first Yank that halted him, and, though hit in twenty-seven places, his right arm and right leg both shattered, he charged through this cordon of men, killing two, who caught at this bridle-reins, and shooting another close by. He made his escape, and for several hundred yards his horse dashed on with him, then he fell upon him, pinning him to the earth, and it took a fearful struggle in his wounded condition to free himself.

The Federals, thinking from the way he rode off and the movements of his horse, that he had escaped without hurt, did not follow him. A full description of this adventure given at the time, and handed down through history, has long been common property, and the Marquis of Lothian, in his work called "The Confederate Secession," written at the time, speaks thus of the adventure, (chapter viii, pages 190-191):

Of deeds of individual heroism, like Lamar Fontaine's expedition to Vicksburg and back, I think that, if one were to select a single instance of a valiant deed as a representation of the Confederate exploits during this war, this that I have here mentioned would be the one.

It was in the course of his mission to Vicksburg that Fontaine was honored with unlimited credit upon the Treasury of the Confederacy. It was in the shape of an order, signed by T. O. Mims, the Chief Quartermaster of the War Department, and was worded thus: "The Confederate States Treasurer will honor any draft presented him signed by Lamar Fontaine."

Unparalleled as has been this man's accomplishments in deeds of daring, he has not failed to win laurels in the fairer fields of literature. He is a popular writer of war sketches, and a recent burlesque article on the Venezuelan controversy, in which he undertook to express the patriotism of the Confederate veteran towards the Stars and Stripes, evoked a half-column editorial from the London Times. But as a writer, he is more widely known by the poem, "Quiet Along the Potomac."