

Omaha Man's Romance of the Civil War

Living quietly in Omaha, at 2123 Wirt street, is a hero of one of the peculiar romances that mark the civil war—a man who treasures as a tribute to his deed of daring a handsome medal struck in his honor by order of congress more than a quarter of a century afterwards.

This man is Andrew J. Traynor, general baggage agent of the Union Pacific road. Unassuming and mild of manner, the Andrew Traynor of today gives little evidence of the fierce fighter he must have been back in the '60s. Although Mr. Traynor has had his medal more than two years his modesty has kept him from giving the full details of the episode by which he won it to the public. As told by him it is as follows:

"In 1864 I was a corporal in Company D, First Michigan cavalry of volunteers, stationed at Fort Albany, Va. On March 16 of that year I was sent on a number of scouting expeditions with Thomas Donahue, another soldier attached to the same station. A short distance from Fort Albany, in the vicinity of Mason's Hill, we were surprised by a detachment of guerrillas and the two of us thrown into an improvised prison where five other union soldiers were captives. Of course I was not inclined to remain in prison any longer than I had to and at once set about trying to devise some plan to escape, not only for myself, but also for my comrades.

Some Desperate Fighting.

"We hurriedly conferred together, some of them expressing the fear that they might be killed should they make the attempt, but we did not give them time enough to consider the danger. We made a charge upon the guerrillas who were standing guard, took their arms from them after a fearful struggle in which two of their number were killed. It was a question of killing them or being killed ourselves and naturally we preferred to protect our own lives.

"One of the slain was John Lee, a nephew of General Robert E. Lee, at the head of the confederate army, and the other John Sterritt, known as one of the most reckless and daring guerrillas who followed the rebel flag. Lee was the first to fall, a bullet having pierced his neck. He made a desperate fight, but was outclassed. Sterritt offered the same kind of resistance, but in spite of the odds he had to give way.

"We were now no longer prisoners, but the question was how to get back to Fort Albany and report to my commander. I started back at once, traveling in a round-about way to avoid being captured by pursuers whom I knew would be on my trail at short notice and would expect me to take the road back to the fort. My companion, Donahue, and the other prisoners who had been freed by our encounter, did not accompany me, but each man looked out for his own safety.

An Adventurous Ride.

"The road was rough, and dashing through the scrubby woods on a spirited horse with one of my eyes badly hurt by a blow received from one of the rebels, left me in a rather disfigured condition. It became necessary for me to get a drink of water and sighting in the distance an old southern homestead I resolved to take my chances and made direct for it. It proved to be the mansion of a family named Shreves at Aspen Hollow, a little place only a short distance from Fort Albany.

"While stationed at that post I had made the acquaintance of the daughter of the household, Mattie Shreves, whose father and mother were old-time southerners and naturally kept their child in sympathy with the southern cause. Her father, however, had taken the oath of allegiance, which in a measure reassured me. With my horse foaming I arrived at the Shreves place and was quickly recognized by the young woman.

"'What's the matter?' excitedly exclaimed the young girl.

"'Nothing,' I replied, 'only I must have a drink of water.'

"Miss Mattie brought me a glass of milk instead of water and then anxiously inquired whether she could render any further assistance. Her father emerged from the house and joined his daughter with equal curiosity. They could see by my injured eye and lacerated face that I had been in some kind of an encounter, but before I could give an explanation I sighted a party of southern pursuers who had struck my trail coming straight for us.

"That is what is the matter, Mr. Shreves,' I said, pointing to these desperate followers, which explained everything without a word.

Bears a Successful Retreat.

"After a hasty conference I asked Shreves to get a gun and help drive them off. I insisted that I would stand my ground and fight. Miss Mattie realized the danger. 'Go,' she said. Her father stood silent, motioning in the only direction which offered an escape. I took the hint, wheeled my horse, dashed over the fences and was soon out of sight.

"My pursuers hurried to the Shreves home as quickly as they could, where Mr. Shreves hailed them and held them in consultation while I kept right on and reached the fort in safety. Miss Mattie and her father seemed to have influenced the rebels to abandon the pursuit. Upon reaching the fort I reported what had happened. My superior officers expressed unbounded sur-

prise and went to see for themselves the results of the fight.

"After a brief rest I set out again with a detachment for an escort detailed to go with me to the place where the prison had been kept. We reached the scene of the fight without special incident and found the two dead guerrillas still unburied. We dug trenches for them and gave them a hasty burial. I was personally complimented by the commanding officer for what I had accomplished in saving myself and comrades. I never expected nor sought any recognition,

encased in the silk-lined box that carried it to him. It is a heavy piece of solid gold, with a Grand Army of the Republic design upon it. The inscription is as follows:

THE CONGRESS
to
CORPORAL ANDREW TRAYNOR,
Company D,
First Michigan Cavalry,
For Gallantry Near Mason's
Hill, Va., March 16, 1864.

Corporal Traynor might have had the medal many years earlier had he been inclined to press his claim.

thought of the brave corporal on account of his individual worth, the fire in her southern blood could not permit her to entirely forget the stars and bars. Among Mr. Traynor's war relics is a note received from Mattie in the June following the date of the guerrilla killing. A copy follows:

ANDREW: While it may be true that there are two of God's noblemen less, the stars and bars still wave. God bless them.
MATTIE.

The war ended and Andrew Traynor turned to pursuits of peace and business. In both he has met with gratifying success. Entering railroad work, he has reached a good

he only grinned, exposing to view two rows of betel-stained teeth of assorted sizes. The sergeant asked him again, and Pedro answered him, 'No sabby.' The sergeant was not up on Spanish and took the expression for the name. So the pass was filled out. 'Pedro Nosaby, wash gentleman.' It became a fixture, that name did, in the barracks of the Fourth cavalry at Passay, as did also the native.

"The guards had strict orders to allow no natives or vendors on the grounds. But Pedro was an exception. Pedro did washing for the soldiers, and he did it on the 'jaw-bone' plan. That's the credit plan. And then the first sergeant had given Pedro a pass, ostensibly as a favor to Pedro, in reality to insure the return of his clean khakis. What Pedro's former vocation had been no one knew, or cared, for that matter; but one thing was certain—Pedro as a laundryman was a flat failure. Clothes invariably returned minus several buttons. No one would ever suspect that they had been treated to a bath were it not for the fact that they were scrupulously folded and ironed when delivered. There was a sense of importance and an air of superiority about this swarthy individual that seemed to defy criticism, and a severe reprimand was usually followed by an apology. Perhaps the hearts of the men were touched at the sight of the wan, pinched faces and tooth-pick legs of the large assortment of pickaninnies who trailed at Papa Pedro's shirt tails and struggled to balance big bundles of clothes on their wet heads. Pedro never carried bundles. Besides, he wore a derby hat of the German comedian variety, and it was suspected that he wore it for the sole purpose of dodging the 'carry' act.

"Sometimes the bundles would be returned to their respective owners in the course of a few days. But more often a week or ten days would slip by, and the trooper, reduced to his last clean garment, would loudly threaten Pedro with immediate and barbarous punishment. Pedro would smile blandly and gather up the remainder of the trooper's wearing apparel in utter disregard of the fact that the trooper would then be reduced to the clothing he had on his back.

"Saturday and muster day came. Pedro had been missing for a week, and with him almost every dress khaki suit in the troop. At 9 o'clock there was an inspection. The inspecting officer was known to be a strict disciplinarian. The guns and equipments were slick as pins and the troop barber had been busy with the faces of the men since early in the morning. At 8:45 the bugle sounded assembly. At 8:45 Pedro was still missing. The air was blue with titles affixed to Pedro's name. The sergeant appeared in a canvas fatigue blouse and white trousers and ordered the men to fall in. Just as the inspecting officer arrived the troop lined up clad in the most astonishing costumes ever witnessed on inspection day. Combinations of pajamas and ponchos were conspicuous. One fellow who had waited too long appeared in a cotton shirt and one legging.

"'Sergeant,' roared the inspecting officer, 'what do you mean by turning out the troop in this manner? Do you think it's a joke? If you do I'll change your mind in short order.'

"'Sir,' said the sergeant, 'it's all Pedro's fault. He—'

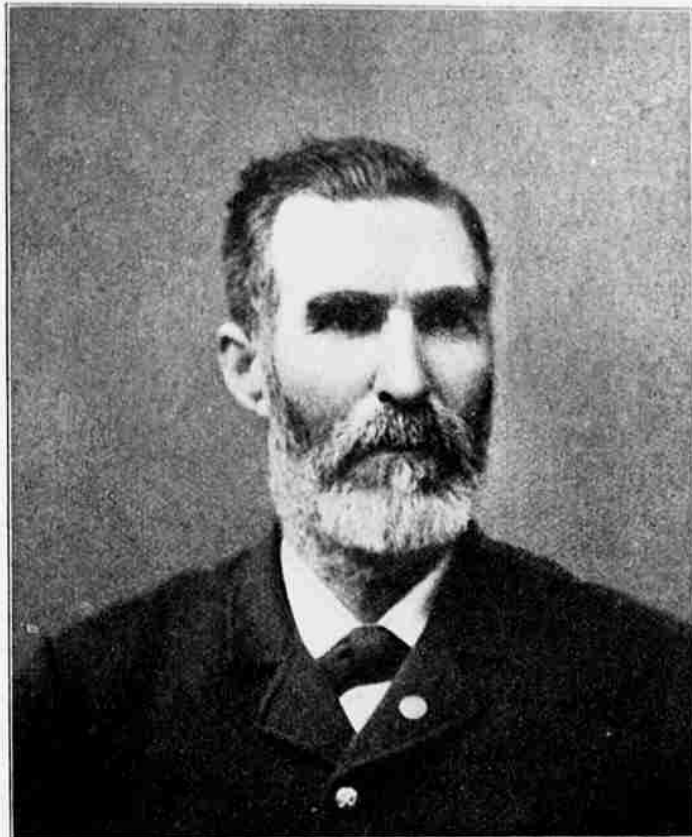
"'Who's Pedro? What's he got to do with it?'

"'He's the wash lady—I mean laundryman, sir. You see he's vamoosed and he's got all our clothes and—'

"'Dismiss the troop and report to me at my quarters,' growled the inspecting officer. Just how the sergeant smoothed it over no one ever knew.

"Late that afternoon Pedro, minus his derby hat, his clothes soiled and an expression of disgust and indignation written on his dusky face, appeared on the scene. It took the combined knowledge of the whole troop to understand what he had to say, because he talked in Spanish. Pedro had decided to extend his business beyond the south lines. With that object in view he had applied at headquarters in Manila for a general pass through the lines. The clerk who issues these passes, being versed in Spanish, had no trouble in getting Pedro's surname and filled in the pass accordingly. Pedro had some friends who lived beyond the south lines and he decided to take a holiday and visit them. Having two passes he was assured that he could go unmolested by the sentries. Guarding this line was a regiment that had recently arrived from America, whose efficiency in catching smugglers was the pride of the officers connected with that organization.

"Pedro boldly presented the general pass and was promptly passed through the lines. When Pedro returned late that afternoon his step was unsteady. Under his belt he carried a large-sized 'beno' jag. When he approached the outpost he was at peace with himself and the world and was loudly singing 'Viva Americano!' 'Viva Agoncillo!' The sentry halted him and Pedro presented his barrack pass by mistake. The sentry remembering him by his derby hat immediately discovered that the pass was not 'regular.' Not being good beyond that line, he knew that it was not the one on which Pedro had been admitted. Pedro saw his error and found his regular pass and the sentry compared them. The names were different. Pedro was arrested and hustled to the guardhouse. Seven days later an orderly from the cavalry guards chanced to ride to the south line and saw Pedro working on the road with the other prisoners. The orderly explained the circumstances and that afternoon Pedro delivered the missing clothes."



THOMAS DONAHUE, NOW OF BAY CITY, MICH.—A PARTICIPANT IN THE MASON HILL ADVENTURE.



CORPORAL ANDREW J. TRAYNOR OF OMAHA—RECIPIENT OF GOVERNMENT MEDAL OF HONOR.

but two years ago I received this letter which you see framed on the wall:"

The letter reads:
WASHINGTON, D. C., Sept. 20.—Andrew Traynor, Esq., General Baggage Agent Union Pacific Railroad, Omaha, Neb.—Sir: You are hereby notified that by direction of the president, and under provisions of the act of congress approved March 3, 1863, providing for the presentation of medals of honor to such officers and privates as have most distinguished themselves in action, a congressional medal of honor has this day been presented to you for most distinguished gallantry in action, the following being a statement of the particular service: "Near Mason's Hill, Va., March 16, 1864, this soldier, then a corporal in Company D, First Michigan cavalry, with one companion, having been sent out on a scout from Fort Albany, Va., was surprised and captured by a detachment of four guerrillas, whose prisoners numbered seven in all. While two of the enemy were absent Corporal Traynor and other prisoners seized the arms of the two guerrillas on guard and killed the other two when they returned and the whole party escaped. For this act of gallant and soldierly conduct the corporal was at the time thanked by the department commander." The medal will be forwarded to you by registered mail as soon as it shall have been engraved. Respectfully,
R. A. ALGER,
Secretary of War.

A Medal of Honor.

Mr. Traynor keeps the medal at his home

The letter from Secretary Alger informing Mr. Traynor of the medal is a neatly typewritten document on the official linen stationery used by the War department. It covers a regular letter-size sheet and the frame that surrounds it is costly, but plain. But of all the relics incident to the Mason's Hill episode, one stands out in prominent relief above all others—it is the pistol with which Corporal Traynor shot and killed Lee and Sterritt.

The weapon is an old-fashioned army cap and ball pistol, ancient in appearance, but well-preserved.

"There it is," said Mr. Traynor, as he pointed to a corner of his library. He keeps the pistol encased in a scabbard, the same one that was originally made for it.

Thomas Donahue, who accompanied Corporal Traynor on that memorable scouting junket, is still alive, a resident of Bay City, Mich. There are also numerous other survivors who are familiar with the circumstances. Among them are: S. L. Brass, a well-known attorney of Juniata, Neb.; J. W. Smith of Owosso, Mich.; Joseph Cross, E. T. Weale and Bradley Bennett, each of Ovid, Mich.; W. A. Linman of Elsie, Mich., and Colonel H. H. Wells of Washington City, all of whom were members of Mr. Traynor's company. The father of W. L. Park, the Union Pacific superintendent at North Platte, Neb., was the captain of the company.

But She Was a Rebel Still.

However much Mattie Shreves may have

position. For years he has been a respected citizen of Omaha. He is a companionable gentleman, still on the sunny side of life despite the vicissitudes he has encountered.

Mattie Shreves is no longer a girl in Virginia. She developed into a cultured woman, becoming the wife of a man who is connected with the Postoffice department at Washington City. She is now Mrs. Mattie Donaldson, the matron of a happy home in Georgetown, almost within sight of the national capital.

Mr. Traynor was in Washington on a business trip about seven years ago. He called at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Donaldson and there was a happy reunion in which the tragedy of Mason's Hill was reviewed amid the peaceful environments that characterize the re-united north and south.

Laundry Work in the Philippines

Here in the Philippines are new difficulties in connection with the laundry problem, relates a correspondent of the Chicago Record. And to illustrate this assertion an incident that happened to a troop of the Fourth cavalry is told. It is told as the soldier told it—with certain parts eliminated.

"The laundryman?" the trooper queried. "Oh, his name was Pedro. On the first day when the top sergeant asked him his name



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