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The Wilderness and Spottsylvania May 4-12, 1864

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THE WILDERNESS AND SPOTTSYLVANIA,
MAY 4-12, 1864

The diary, which is here reproduced, was found among the effects of my father, the late James Walter Roberts (Co. L. 6th Alabama Infantry, Confederate States Army), after his death in Jacksonville, Florida, on January 13th, 1912. It records incidents that I frequently heard him mention in his life time.

My father was born near Hamilton, Georgia, October 17th, 1839; reared near Notasulga, Alabama; removed to Florida in 1868, and was thereafter a resident of this State. For twenty-five years he was an orange grower at Orange Bend, Florida; for several years thereafter he was engaged in phosphate mining in Marion and Citrus counties. His later years were spent principally in St. Petersburg, Tampa, and Tallahassee. He died shortly after making Jacksonville his home. He was married at Leesburg 1880 to Elizabeth Bell Hubbard, a native of Eutaw, Alabama, who followed him into eternal life March 14th, 1912.

I am content that my father's narrative shall bear its own witness to his character as a soldier and as a man. Such would be his wish.

ALBERT HUBBARD ROBERTS

Tallahassee.

[On a fly-leaf :] J. W. ROBERTS
Co. "L." 6th Ala. Regt.
May 24th 1864

Wednesday, May 4th/64

Left winter quarters this morning for our position on the Rapidan to meet a supposed attack on that portion of the line. The day was extremely warm and the march fatiguing. Arrived at Raccoon Ford about 11 a.m.-halted and rested some two hours-then commenced the march for Mine Run-distant about ten miles-The sun continued to favour us with

his scorching rays-and not a few of the "Hardy Veterans" of Lee were compelled to stop and seek rest beneath the tempting shades of the forest trees along the line of march-We reached the fortifications at the Run about four o'clock p. m. remaining near two hours- We then received orders to move forward and marched for Locust Grove some four miles distant in the direction of Germanna Ford. Reached this place about dark and camped for the night-Cooked rations and prepared ourselves for the next days, severe operations

Thursday, May 5th 1864

Rec'd. marching orders this morning about 8 o'clock & started off, but the intentions of the enemy not being precisely ascertained-they were countermanded-made several other attempts to leave but were finally left to remain quietly-were again ordered to prepare for the march & were soon in motion-proceeding in the direction of Wilderness Post Office- We advanced carefully - cautiously, & quite slowly-and met the enemy in force in a few miles of the old Wilderness battlefield-about 1 o'clock p.m. Johnston's Divn. had gone in advance and by this time two of his Brigades, Jones' Virginia Brig. on the left of the road and Stafford's La. Brig. on the right-They had not been long engaged-the Yankees assuming quite a hostile air, and bringing on the engagement-when Rodes was ordered to throw forward his supporting column-Battle's Brig. was positioned on the left of the Road-supporting Jones. Dole's on the right supporting Stafford-We pressed forward and soon came to Jones' men lying in line and firing into the Yankee column as it advanced-The contending forces were about eighty yards apart and the contest becoming warmer each minute-On getting to Jones' line, ours became unsteady-each man appearing as

if halting between two opinions-No one seemed for a moment to know whether to halt or go on-It was no time for such indecision-The Enemy's Bullets were flying too thick to consider long what should be done. I looked with a searching eye and sad heart for a Commander for no one could have failed just then to have seen the necessity for one- It was not long, however, before-looking down the lines to the right-I saw the brave Col. Lightfoot, walking up the line, his sword above his head-uttering in loud accents the command "Forward"-we pressed on with a shout and the 61st being next regt. on our left followed suit-we were soon in forty paces of the Yankees who we found standing erect and firing deliberately enough but the woods were fortunately very thick and they had not discovered our true position and there being a gradual ascent to them their shots were mostly directed too high-passing over our heads- They appeared at once amazed, as soon as we commenced pouring into their ranks our well directed storm of lead- It was more than they could stand and in less than three minutes their line broke. * * * *
 Some say that the cause of the momentary confusion throughout the brigade, when we first came to Jones' line was an order * * * to the brig. to retreat * * * *
 One thing is certain, that the 6th and 61st did not get the order, but went "Forward" broke the Yankee's lines, routed them, took a section of artillery from them, both regts. fighting as hard as men ever fought, loosing, together only 20 men killed dead on the field, and killing at least 150, captured as many wounded prisoners as we lost wounded in the fight. After driving this routed column of "Regulars" and N. York Zouaves for more than a half mile-we heard a heavy firing on the right of the road, and directly in our rear - Here Doles was fighting and had failed to drive them as we had, and soon Col. Lightfoot learned that a flanking column was about to cut us off - I was near

him and saw from his troubled countenance that there was something wrong- We were ordered quietly to fall back and it was with no little reluctance that we obeyed-None liked the idea of being thus compelled to give up the ground which had been so hardly won-Here everything bore quite the appearance of a "Battlefield"-Every sapling and every twig were-some many times-pierced with balls-The dead & wounded Yankees and those who had thrown down their arms, with the intention of surrendering lay thick upon the ground. The extreme cowardice of one poor fellow I think I can never forget-As I passed him where he lay hugging the ground and shaking as if he had upon him a **half dozen** agues, he requested, "Mister" in a most pitiful manner to take him "away." I informed him that I didn't have time, and asked him if he was wounded. He said he was not, but a prisoner-I pointed the course for him to take and told him in plain terms to "strike a trot." He sprang to his feet & I am sure a **race-horse** could not have overtaken him- On getting back to the top of the hill-to the astonishment of most of us-we were nearly cut off, and the only means of escape was by a very cautious flank movement to the right-The thickness of the woods again favored us, and in a few minutes by careful management had succeeded in getting out of the "scrape" formed our lines parallel with the woods and at right angles with the Yankee lines whose right rested on the road-We then pressed forward-falling so heavily upon his right wing as to cause the entire of that portion of the line to break away in confusion-Here we captured quite a number of prisoners, flocking to us with hats and handkerchiefs in their hands as if eager to fight us no more. Joining in with Doles we pressed them so closely as not to give them time to reform their lines and they were most unmercifully dealt with in their retreat-we ran them over a portion of the same ground over which

we had fought them not more than an hour previous- and pursued them with safety much further-but there was a stopping place even, for "Victorious Rebels," and at the far extremity of the very large field over which we had just seen them rush so wildly, concealed in the edge of the woods, lay their supports-"still as Death." We were now advancing in considerable disorder, and not once thinking of the extreme danger just ahead-On approaching within about sixty yards of the woods, we were met by a shower of whistling "minnies" which all who escaped them will be very apt to remember. We had orders to "lie down" and as they were not only expected but very agreeable we all layed down-We were not strong enough, and were not in proper order for "a charge"-We fired on them, a few rounds, but to what effect I do not know-It seemed to me that we only made them the madder. Maybe, I was "skeered." I can't tell-It was here that a ball gave me a glancing stroke on the shoulder-not a gentle one by any means-and I soon made up my mind that I had "got a furlough" I threw down my gun and "got" back to a little branch about thirty paces behind me, and hugged its bottom as if I was not at all afraid of being made sick-Here I remained quite an hour I think in this uncomfortable position-the banks of the branch scarcely affording "protection" for my already "wounded" body I imagined that bullets never flew any thicker or made more hideous music-After a while the firing ceased and I looked up and around to see what had become of the "Rebels" and to my surprise they had all disappeared, when or where I did not know-And there I lay within eighty yards of the Yankee lines, and not a friend in sight-If I ran off in the open field I would be shot, if I remained til night in order to effect my escape they would advance & capture me-a nice dilemma for a wounded man to be in- I concluded to "run the gauntlet" if they shot

me, So throwing off a full-stuffed haversack which I had captured, & to which I felt very much attached on account of the quantities of "beef" and "hard tack" which I had reason to suppose it contained, I struck off at the speed of 2.40 until I got beyond gun-shot range from them, and strange to tell, there was not a shot fired at me, if so, I don't know it - I soon found the Regt. & on examining my "wound" found to my great astonishment that the skin was not even broken and after all that I was much "worse scared than hurt," But my shoulder was very sore, for all this, and I was excused that night from the duty of building the fortifications - and **plundering** the Battle-field, which I very much regretted-I found that but few of the boys were wounded-or missing-and after talking over the mighty events of the day-and eating a small snack of coffee and crackers went to bed-leaving the rest to finish the breast works-not however until I had shown them a bullet hole in my hat-one in my knapsack one through my haversack, which had passed through my sugar-dish and "spilt" my sugar all of which I boasted as though they were "marks" of "honor"- Gen. Gordon visited and complimented us after the Battle-

Friday, May 6th

The Enemys Pickets are in sight but they show no signs of a desire to renew the fight-I take a stroll over the Battlefield of yesterday to see what damage we did the enemy and what had been received at his hands-and to look up if possible a couple of the missing Co. "L." I was still more completely astonished at, and struck with the difference between the losses of the contending two Armies. The Battlefield showed for itself-and their dead were without exaggeration at least ten to our one. We remain all day behind the

breastworks of last nights erection improving them by additional strength wherever needed -& are troubled not a little with the close whizzing of an occasional Yankee Bullet. The Enemy shows no disposition to advance against our position, for it is a splendid ridge, fortified and bristling with cannon-in front of which is a broad field of near one hundred acres-No troops in the world * * * could be brought to a successful Assault upon such a line during daylight-If they charge in here, they may all "say their prayers" before hand - They are willing to make a "child's bargain" and agree to "let us alone." A quarter of a mile to our left the works leave the field, turning a little backward and placing in its front, thence, a body of heavy-timbered woods. This woods was in front of Gen. Gordon and it was against him they threw their heavy masses, in several unsuccessful attempts to break the lines at that point, throughout the latter part of the evening. Every gun could be heard where we were, and we well knew that somebody was getting "hurt"-Gordon is not the man to let them off with a "lick & promise." At the same time a very heavy engagement is progressing on Gen. Hill's front. Considerably to our Right-and we dont know at what times Rodes will have to show his "colors" but they are disgracefully beaten on both flanks and cease their vain endeavor to scare the "Rebels." Gordon sends for Gen. Lee, after the fight & desires him to ride over the ground "If he wished to see a Battlefield"-Today we hear of the death of Gen. Jones-killed yesterday-and that Gen. Stafford was mortally wounded-One of the Co. wounded by a stray shot from the Enemy's pickets - Col _____ of the artillery on our portion of the line killed-Several of the regt. killed- It is quite dangerous to go after a drink of water-So constant is the firing kept up by them.