

LAURENCE THOMSON DICKINSON, A LOWLY PRIVATE

Laurence Thomson Dickinson was born in June, 1843, in a place called Cumberland, Allegheny County, MD. He entered the Confederate service in Charlottesville, VA, on August 25th, 1862, as part of Ridgely Brown's company of Maryland Cavalry, and held the rank of private until the surrender. His Company was first attached to the 2nd Virginia Cavalry, Army of Northern Virginia, and they participated in the first Maryland campaign including the Battle of Sharpsburg, VA, also called Antietam.

After the first Maryland campaign, his company was reassigned and became Company A of the First Maryland Cavalry in General W.E. Jones's Brigade. Through the winter of '62 & all of '63 they were used continuously as scouts and raiders through all of western Virginia. In June of 1863 they were ordered to join the Brigade of Albert G. Jenkins for the Gettysburg campaign. When General J.E.B. Stuart took all his cavalry for a raid on Baltimore, these men were detailed to act as scouts and couriers for General Ewell.

During the Battle of Gettysburg, Dickinson served as a courier. He always held that his company was the last to leave the front at Gettysburg. At daylight on July the 5th the infantry, artillery, and everything had gone. Dickinson and his compatriots had sat on their horses throughout the night, firing as they thought they saw a yankee vidette move, and receiving return compliments.

They finally removed to join the rest of the cavalry, several miles ahead. Covering the rear of a retreating army is not a fun thing to do. They did it after Sharpsburg, and now they had to do it again. It was one continuous fight until they reached Hagerstown, MD - and even after that they skirmished every day until General Lee recrossed the Potomac.

After that adventure, they were sent east of the Blue Ridge. In October of '63, when General Lee drove Meade back on Washington they had desperate fighting along the rivers. On the 11th, Dickinson was slightly wounded in the hip at Morton's Ford on the Rapidan River. That same day, he was captured at Brandy Station with a number of others, fighting on foot.

The yankees put him in the Old Capitol Prison at Washington, D.C and then sent him to Point Lookout, Maryland, at the junction of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay, until February of 1864. He was in a prisoner exchange at Richmond, VA, and rejoined his command immediately.

Their first work was to attack Union General Kilpatrick, who was moving on Richmond. By vigorous and incessant harassing of his rear lines, they convinced him he was being attacked by a much larger force, causing him to change his advancing movements into a retreat from Richmond. General Wade Hampton, in his report of the action, gave the credit of saving Richmond to this little battalion.

After this, they fought from Beaver Dam to Yellow Tavern, where they lost the gallant Jeb Stuart. They had hard fighting almost daily throughout the campaign. On June 12th and 13th of '64, they were in the midst of that greatest of cavalry battles Trevillian's - in which General Wade Hampton defeated Sheridan.

July 3rd, 1864, they went in the advance of General Jubal Early's army into Maryland and were hotly engaged on approach to the Potomac. Crossing into Maryland, they had an every-day brush with the yankees. July 7th, before Frederick City, Dickinson was badly wounded in the right shoulder by a minie ball. His fellow soldiers put him into a private house, but he was captured again.

He became a prisoner in the West Building Hospital, Baltimore, MD, until October of 1864, when he was sent to Fort McHenry, and then to Point Lookout, again. From there he was sent with about 6,000 other sick, wounded and disabled to Savannah, GA, for exchange.

In December, he was sent to a hospital in Richmond, VA, and got moved around a bit for a wounded man. That minie ball was still inside him, and the shoulder would not heal. If it did, it was only temporary, and it would abscess and break out again. He was anxious to be back with his command anyhow, and joined them at Gordonsville. But the first night in camp gave him a setback and they put him in the Hospital there where he remained until General Lee's surrender. Eighteen months after the close of the war, he had that minie ball cut out by a prominent surgeon in Baltimore. That was just in time for his wedding.

He married Miss Nannie Tidball, of Winchester, VA, in October, 1867. They moved to Chattanooga in 1881. They finished raising a son and daughter here, who moved on to Newport, TN, and Keokuk, Iowa. Then they took in a young orphan girl and raised her. Dickinson served a good while on the Chattanooga School Board, some years as Chairman. He was adjutant of the United Confederate Veterans for many years. He sent out post cards to members, reminding them of meetings, and decorated them with humorous cartoons. These are true collectors items, now. His wife, Nan, was elected President of the Confederate Memorial Association in 1886. They were married for nearly 50 years. She was laid to rest here in 1916, in the shadow of this old arched gate that he designed. The arched gateway was dedicated in 1901. It's over a hundred years old. Laurence died on March 31, 1923.

