1862 Great War Leaders 1902

FORTY YEARS AGO - - - WITH GRANT

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FORTY years ago the public ceremonies of Memorial day had not been inaugurated. The hard fighting of the war began in the spring of 1862. At Shiloh, Miss., in April, and on the Virginia peninsula and in the Shenandoah valley, in May, great armies wrestled in heroic combat. Only a handful of the leaders of that early period survived to greet the fortieth anniversary of their maiden battles.

Among the survivors who battled under the banner of Grant, Lieutenant General Nelson A. Miles has long stood conspicuous by reason of his exalted rank, won by brilliant deeds on the field of battle. It was a favorite saying of Napoleon's after he became a great war lord that he dated from Rivoli, one of his early victories. General Miles dates from 1862, more particularly Fair Oaks, Va.

From a wartime photo.
MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE B. M'CLELLAN.

When the battle of Fair Oaks was sprung upon the Army of the Potomac by a sudden and surprising onslaught, Miles was an aid-de-camp on the staff of General O. O. Howard. It was an irregular affair, like all surprises. Most of the troops were new and the officers untrained in fighting. Howard's brigade was in the heat of the fight, and he had an arm shot away. As he was leaving the field he called Miles to him, then a lieutenant in rank, and told him to rally a certain regiment whose colonel had fallen and lead it into battle. This trying duty young Miles performed with gallantry and was rewarded with promotion to the rank of a field officer in a regiment, which he soon commanded. A good colonel is sure to go higher, and Miles went to the top.

General George B. McClellan, or "Little Mac," as the soldiers called him, was the ideal war leader of forty years ago. He was young, chivalric and enthusiastic. His men believed in him, and throughout the month of May, 1862, he led the army from Yorktown to the gates of Richmond. On the 1st of June he retrieved the disaster of May 31 at Fair Oaks, and the campaign entered on a new phase by the coming to the front of Robert E. Lee, at the head of the Army of Northern Virginia.

At the battle of Fair Oaks the skill of the leaders and the valor of the troops were tested by an attack which came without warning. The Army of the Potomac lay with the two wings separated by the Chickahominy river. A sudden storm raised the river over its banks and destroyed the bridges behind the left wing, which was closest to Richmond. Taking advantage of the storm and flood, the Confederates fell upon the isolated wing. The fight raged all day, but McClellan crossed troops and guns on a partly submerged bridge and on the morning of June 1 made a desperate counter attack, recovering the lost ground.

From a wartime photo.

LIEUTENANT NELSON A. MILES WINNING HIS SPURS, MAY 31, 1862.

Fair Oaks was a field of heroism. The troops which crossed the floating bridge were led on by "Old Bull" Sumner, father of General Sumner, who was distinguished in the Spanish-American war. "Fighting Joe" Hooker's division was among the fiercest fighters of the day. Hooker dated from Fair Oaks, too, although his division had borne the brunt of the fighting at Williamsburg May 5, only three weeks before Fair Oaks.

The brilliant General Kearny, who flashed across the war horizon at Fair Oaks and went down in gloom a few weeks later, was one of the popular leaders of the day. He had lost an arm in Mexico, and when he saw Howard's plight after the surgeon had fixed him up he said cheerfully, "Howard, you and I can buy our gloves together after this."

Kearny was in his element at Fair Oaks. It was a field of rushing charges, individual exploits and hairbreadth escapes. The colonel of a belated regiment reported to Kearny in the heat of battle and asked to be instructed where to take his regiment in. "Oh, anywhere, anywhere, colonel," said the impetuous soldier. "You'll find lovely fighting along the whole line."

Custer cannot be put down among the fighting heroes of Fair Oaks, although he was in it and figured in one of the sensational war pictures of the day, taken "on the spot" by a camera. Kodaks hadn't been discovered in 1862, but the camera man was on hand wherever it was safe for his head and profitable for his pocket. Custer was a staff officer and in riding over the field met a staff officer in gray riding along with his negro boy servant. It was a surprise all around, for neither supposed that an enemy could be in that quarter. The Confederate had, in fact, lost his way and was far inside the Federal lines. He surrendered, and Custer took him to headquarters. While waiting for the general to come up Custer and the Johnny, who was Lieutenant J. B. Washington, a "sure enough" F. F. V., for he belonged to the great Washington line, sat down on a log in front of the general's tent. The negro lad crouched at the feet of his master, and in that pose the camera man caught the group and passed it on for newspaper illustration.

From a wartime photo.

GENERAL PHILIP KEARNY ON THE FIRING LINE, MAY 31, 1862.

While the eyes of the country were on McClellan and his army before Richmond in May forty years ago, they were also fixed upon the Army of the West, where Grant had suddenly flashed into prominence. His sweeping victory at Donelson in February, 1862, raised very high hopes at first; then he fell under a cloud, and it seemed as though Donelson was a piece of isolated blind luck and might never be repeated. The battle of Shiloh in April, bloody beyond all precedent in American history and won finally by stubborn valor, lifted the commander of the Army of the Tennessee to the front rank of heroes.

After Shiloh, and as a result of that victory, Corinth, the key to the Mississippi valley, fell into the hands of the north, and, although Halleck was the nominal chief, he saw no fighting, and Grant was the real leader. With Grant stood Sherman, the right arm of his commander and soon to take his place as leader of the Army of the Tennessee.

From the Shiloh campaign in April, 1862, dated also the Army of the Ohio, with McCook, Crittenden, Nelson, Rousseau and Hazen as brilliant battle leaders. That army afterward lost its identity in the Army of the Cumberland, which, under the lead of Thomas, a victory winner of the early days of 1862, shared with the Army of the Tennessee the dangers and glories of the warfare in the west.

General J. A. McClernand was a conspicuous leader at Shiloh, while John A. Logan was a very subordinate one.

From a wartime photo.

HANCOCK "THE SUPERB" LEADING A BAYONET CHARGE, MAY 5, 1862.

McPherson, who afterward led the Army of the Tennessee to victory, served as a colonel on Grant's staff at Shiloh, and Sheridan had not yet emerged from the obscurity of the quartermaster's department. Don Carlos Buell, leader of the Army of the Ohio, almost shared with Grant the honors of Donelson, but the fortunes of war eclipsed his star, as it did that of McClernand, and both lingered on the stage nearly forty years as quite forgotten heroes.

A simple line in McClellan's dispatches to Washington announcing the battle at Williamsburg May 5 made glorious a name which was one to charm with on the battlefield so long as the Army of the Potomac lifted its banners in the air. He wrote, "Hancock was superb today." Lincoln used to say that he could make a general with a stroke of the pen. "Hancock the Superb" was a clever stroke of phrasing, but the soldier who bore that title through three years of fighting was not a pen made hero. He looked the part and lived up to it.

Williamsburg soon ceased to be counted among battles after what followed in front of Richmond. But for the men who fought it the technical name didn't signify. It was a matter of life and death to several thousand men for a day and a night. The advance guard of the Army of the Potomac was held up on the road from Yorktown to Richmond by the rear divisions of the Confederates, who were executing the difficult task of getting away from Yorktown and covering Richmond from the enemy's attacks in the meantime.

The Confederates blocked the road with felled trees to baffle the pursuit and barricaded the swampy and wooded borders of the road in the same way. By the roadside at the little hamlet of Williamsburg they had a fort of earth and logs, and when they found the Yankees at their heels they put some guns in the work and stood fight. A cold rain was falling, and it was a death trap, almost an ambush, for the boys in blue, who thought the enemy was demoralized by retreat. The more the Yankees forged ahead the more the Johnnies turned to give them a bloody welcome. Finally they charged bayonets upon a battery which was shelling their little fort.

From a wartime photo.

MAJOR GENERAL U. S. GRANT.

Hancock saw the danger if that battery should be captured and turned on its own line. Cold steel must meet cold steel, and, giving the word to a New York regiment at his back, he led it on a charge against the advancing Confederates. Hancock's charge saved the day, a superb deed at the decisive moment.

HUBERT NORTHEN

FORTY YEARS AGO - - - WITH LEE

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AMONG the war leaders who wore the gray in 1862 General Joe Wheeler survived to tell the story of the conflict after two-score years had softened the retrospect and former foes again united to serve the common country. Like General Nelson A. Miles, Wheeler dates from 1862. He was a West Point soldier trained for the cavalry and as a leader of squadrons won fame in the west.

At Shiloh Wheeler made his debut as a leader. He had recruited a regiment for one of the Alabama brigades, and the fortunes of the battle placed him at the head of the brigade at the close of the fight. After a day of stubborn resistance, giving ground step by step and inch by inch, the southern army withdrew behind the ridge at Shiloh church and began to march back to Corinth in the face of exulting foes. With his brigade Wheeler covered the first stage of the retreat, making a gallant stand at the church around a few cannon planted by the side of the Corinth road, the single open route through the swampy thicket. Showing himself a soldier of energy and resource, he was soon afterward placed at the head of a corps of mounted men. What veteran of those days, especially those of the north, but has lively recollections of the wild rides and wilder raids of Wheeler's cavalry?

From a wartime photo.

COLONEL JOSEPH WHEELER, C. S. A., AT SHILOH CHURCH, APRIL 7, 1862.

Robert E. Lee's sudden rise to the top as a leader of armies in 1862 was a surprise on both sides the line. He had fought against McClellan in West Virginia in the early summer of 1861 and retired without laurels. He was not at Bull Run and appeared to the army to be on the shelf in Richmond as counselor, not a fighter. Already his beard was tinged with gray, for he was fifty-five years old. On the 31st of May, at Fair Oaks, the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, General Joseph E. Johnston, was disabled by a wound. Then Lee again took up the role of active fighter. Salvation for the south lay in the salvation of Richmond, and the enemy was already at the gates.

Lee reorganized the army defending Richmond and the James. There was chaos in the Confederate camps about the same as in that of the north on the upper Potomac and in the Shenandoah valley. One army had fallen back before the enemy at Yorktown, another lay in the trenches at Richmond, still another watched the James below the city, and one was at Petersburg. Still farther away and guarding a side door was Stonewall Jackson at Staunton, in the valley. Lee gathered up the fighting brigades, with their fighting brigadiers, called to him Jackson and Early and Ewell, brought up the Carolinians of Ransom, stationed Holmes as a watchdog down the river and formed his battle front with Longstreet, the two Hills, Anderson and Magruder. Lee touched the pride of the horsemen of Virginia when he took Jeb Stuart's troopers into confidence as "the eyes" of his army. Stuart dogged the enemy at every turn—at the river landings

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CHILL WINDS

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