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Strange Duel Between General Hunkins and Colonel Reckling.

(Original.)

Among the generals of the civil war there were those who had received a military education and those who won their promotion from a natural fitness for command and politicians. General Hunkins belonged to the latter class. From his point of view the war was a sort of preliminary political contest among certain men as to which should eventually return to their homes with sufficient éclat to be nominated for some fat office. Having during the early formation of the army been assigned the command of a division, he first turned his attention to keeping in due subjection all inferiors who might dim his own luster by distinguishing themselves. The man he most dreaded was young Colonel Reckling, who had entered the army from civil life, but a restless, pushing, dashing fellow and a born soldier.

Two armies were confronting each other. Hunkins' division was on the right, Colonel Reckling's brigade on the extreme tip. The enemy resolved to turn the Union right flank and hurled a whole division against Reckling's brigade. Reckling held his position long enough for Hunkins to send him reinforcements, but Hunkins did nothing of the kind. He watched the fighting from an eminence and saw the remnant of Reckling's brigade driven like dust before a hurricane. The Union army fell back to a stronger position. When quiet was restored Hunkins rode up to Reckling and reprimanded him for not holding his position, implying cowardice.

There is little or no redress in the army against such an imputation by a superior officer, certainly not in face of an enemy. One morning shortly after daylight Colonel Reckling rode up to his commander's headquarters and, rousing the general, said:

"I think the enemy is meditating an important move. If you will ride out with me to the picket line I'll show you what I mean."

Hunkins proposed to send his chief of staff, but Reckling insisted that he should see for himself. So the general called his escort, and the two officers rode to the picket line.

"We must go farther," said Reckling. "I would suggest that the escort remain here so as not to draw the fire."

"But"—said the general, showing extreme reluctance to go on.

"General!" exclaimed Reckling in feigned surprise.

The general dare not refuse with twenty cavalrymen looking on. He rode with his inferior a few hundred yards to a low fence, over which Reckling jumped his horse. Hunkins, knowing the eyes of the escort were upon him, dare not refuse to follow. He was about to protest against this approach to the enemy's rifles as unnecessary exposure when he noticed a curl on Reckling's lip. He saw the latter's design, but he must either follow or lose that respect of his men which was necessary to command. Trembling, he rode on.

A minie bullet sang between the two men. The general ducked. Another and another. The colonel pushed on, the general a few paces behind him. More straggling shots.

"I see no change in the situation," said the general. "Let us go back."

"Not here," said Reckling; "not here. Farther to their left. I think they are massing a force on our right, just as they did the other day. They can't get at us on our left for the river and the hill where we have thrown up the earthworks."

"But we are not going to our right. We're going straight toward their right center."

"We'll turn presently."

"How much farther have we to go?" asked the general in a few moments.

"We must ride along in front of their line till we reach that wood on our left."

"This is suicide," he protested.

"Come on," said the colonel.

Putting spurs to his horse, Reckling started straight toward the enemy's lines. At the same moment a storm of bullets whistled by the two men. Hunkins could not stand the test. He turned and rode back as fast as his horse could carry him.

Bravery wins respect even from an enemy. The Confederates, wondering, watched Reckling coming. Presently he turned and rode slowly along the front of their line. Not a shot was fired. It was an eighth of a mile to cover, and as the soldier passed over the distance and entered the wood a cheer went up from the Union soldiers and the Confederates, who were too admiring to shoot so gallant a man.

When the general joined his escort he knew that his military career had ended. But his aptitude for a different field saved him in that field. He sent home one of his henchmen, who was serving on his staff, with instructions to write up the general's remarkable service in the army and create a demand among the people that he return and run for congress. The henchman played his part well, and just as the singular duel between Hunkins and Reckling came to the ears of the general commanding the army corps in which the duellists served Hunkins forwarded his resignation. It was accepted, and Hunkins returned to the field for which he was best fitted and made an eminently successful campaign.

Reckling was made a brigadier general and placed in command of the division. He was soon promoted for gallantry to a higher rank and command. He ended his career, not in a political campaign, but supporting old "Pop" Thomas on the field of Chickamauga.

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