

DRUMMER BOYS of '63.



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Youthful Musicians

Heroic Lads of the Civil War

By Captain GEORGE L. KILMER, Late U. S. V.

When battle round each warfare band
And carnage loud her trumpet blew
Young Edwin left his native land
A drummer boy for Waterloo.

NOTWITHSTANDING the crudeness of the writer's art, the verses from which the above lines were taken immediately became a roadside classic. They were given to the public while Waterloo was fresh in mind as the greatest battle of modern times. All the civilized world was then interested in Waterloo. Just as the tactics and military practice of the French and English were copied by the regular soldiers of the United States, so the ideas and traditions clustering around some famous name, as of a Napoleon or Wellington, or a battle like Austerlitz or Waterloo, warmed the imagination of the American masses.

A dreaming boy of 1861 dreamed of Waterloo. If his age permitted he became a soldier to imitate the Old Guard of Napoleon or the Royal Scots of Wellington. His tender years could not hold him back from the recruiting camps, for, if not old enough to take up arms as a soldier, he could be a drummer perhaps. There had been drummer boys at Waterloo; why should not the drummers in the American camps also be boys?

If the recruiting sergeant did not think so and refused to enroll the lad



LEADING THE CHARGE

of ten or twelve, the boy could still follow the army to the front as a volunteer and trust to luck. The sergeant might relent when the boy showed the stuff that was in him by facing the battle as bravely as his seniors.

This is the way it happened that in the romance and poetry of the war may be found the sobriquets "The drummer boy of Chickamauga" and "The drummer boy of Chickamauga." They were the same boy, little Johnny Clem, who couldn't be a soldier because he was only eleven years of age. But he could drum, and the kind hearted soldiers humored his ambition and took him to the front, where he "made good," first at Shiloh and then at Chickamauga.

When the war broke out in 1861 the rule concerning musicians in the United States army was about the same as in the British army, after which it was modeled.

After the Crimean war England adopted the rule of enlisting the musicians as soldiers and then forming them into musical corps or bands. This became the practice of the regular army of the United States, and the volunteer army, of course, followed the same custom. The regulations were that there might be two mus-

icians enlisted for each company of infantry. Usually one was a fife and one a drummer.

If a boy could show himself very skillful at the rub-a-dub-dub or tootle-tootle he would be taken, even if he lacked a couple of years, a couple of inches and a score of pounds to bring him up to the regulation size, age and weight. This accounts for Willie Johnson, aged thirteen, who was awarded a medal of honor for some gallant act performed the second year of the war while he was a drummer in the Third Vermont; for the boy Munson of the Twenty-third Massachusetts, who was mortally wounded at the battle of Roanoke while only thirteen; of Gardner, the drummer of the Eighth Michigan, brought home to his anxious, waiting mother, dead from a wound received in battle when he was but little over thirteen.

Blue or gray, it made no difference. There were A. K. Clark, a drummer of the Fifth Georgia regiment, who went through the campaign weighing but ninety-five pounds, and little Giffen of Tennessee, the hero of a classic war lyric, who was nursed back to life from an awful wound only to go forth again to battle and never be heard from more.

The life and drum corps of an infantry regiment formed a unit in itself. The members were detached from the companies in which they had enlisted and attached to regimental headquarters, the same as the color guard. Under a chief they occupied separate quarters and were subject to the directions of the colonel's staff of officers. In battle the fifers and drummers, especially during the early days of the war, assisted the surgeons in the care of the wounded. Often they were with strangers, administering to the fallen, and errands of mercy called them to distant parts of the field.

In 1863 the Federal ambulance corps was organized, and the work of giving first aid and removing the wounded was done thereafter by ambulance attendants. This arrangement relieved the musicians of the duty of removing wounded in stretchers and left them free to roam the field in search of suffering victims.

Unlike the regimental band, the regimental fife and drum corps, which includes the regimental bugler, has a practical duty to perform in the routine of camp and march. The band is a luxury and an ornament. Congress discovered that early in 1862 and legislated hundreds of bands out of existence.

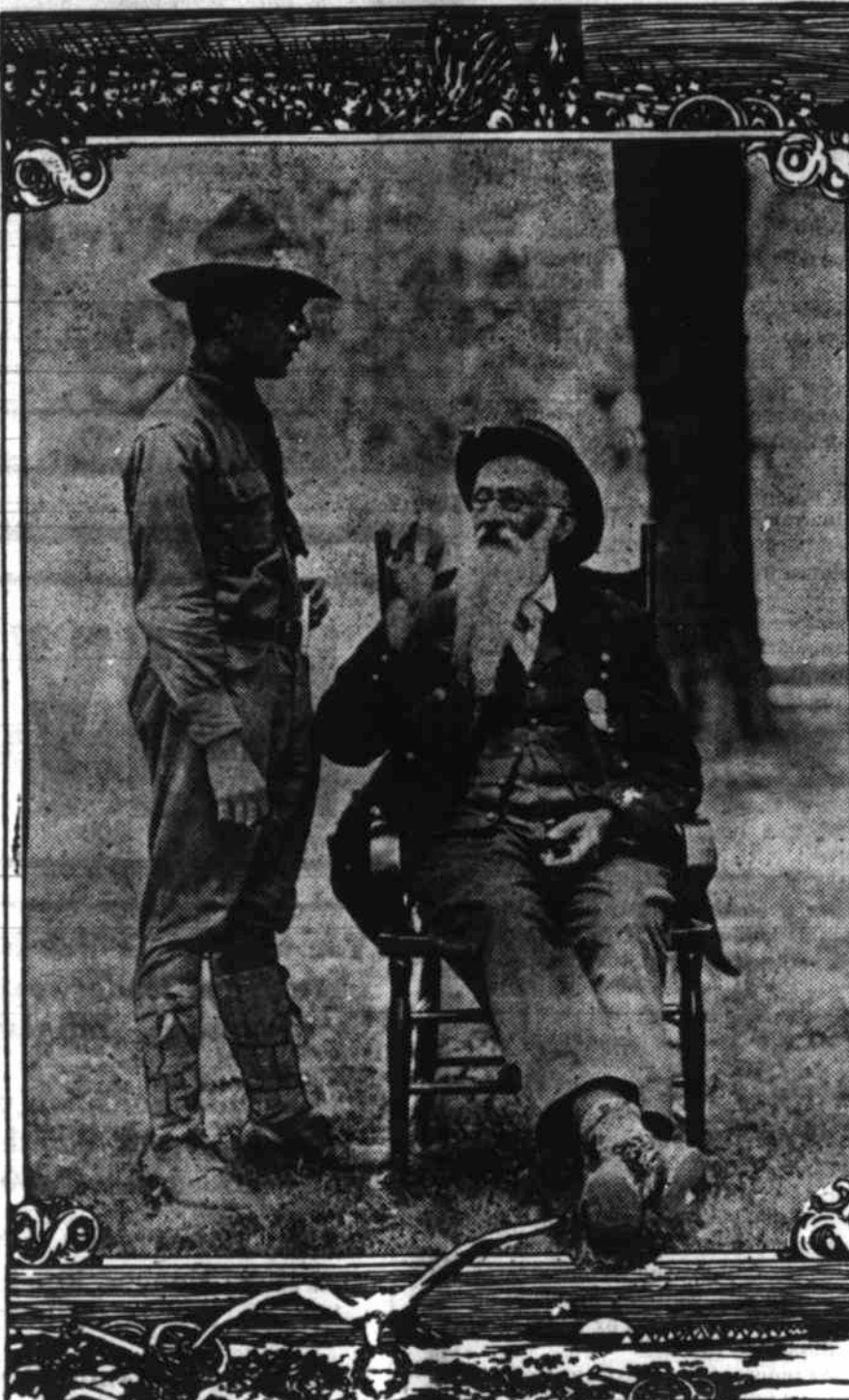
The 700 then in service employed 17,000 men and had already cost \$5,000,000 in addition to the pay of the men, their food and the expense of transporting them. It was plain at that date that the war was to be a long and costly one.

The musicians were regularly enlisted soldiers, who could not be forced to take up arms and fight unless they chose. The only way to abolish the bands was to muster them out of service. But music was not totally banished from the army camps. Brigade bands were formed, and some regiments or their officers or patrons at home paid the expenses and retained the music.

The bugle and the fife and drum are essential in an army to sound the various calls, which, as well as musically, signal the orders of the commander to the troops. These include the familiar ones of getting "em up in the mornin'" and "go to sleep, go to sleep, go to sleep," reveille and taps. In camp certain calls are sounded periodically day in and day out, but on a campaign many of them are signals to sudden change of action.

With the army strung out for miles, the bugle or drum at headquarters starts the signal rolling. The nearest drums or bugles repeat it, the notes often mingling in emergencies the first signal may be overtaken before it reaches the end of the line by another sent out to supersede it. The "long roll" beaten on the drum or the bugle calls "To arms!" and "To horse!" announce the sudden appearance of the enemy.

The armies of fifty years ago had no telephone or megaphone and only an imperfectly developed telegraph and flag signal system. Practically then the bugle or drum, even in the hands of a schoolboy, was an official mouthpiece which might order men "into the jaws of death," also recall them in nick of time "back from the mouth of hell."



WELL, lad, you have your uniform.
When I put on the blue
My heart was young, my hopes
were high.

I was a boy like you.
I thought that it was great to don
The bright and brave array,
But Uncle Sam's regalia then
Meant something more than play.

It meant long years from Bull Run's field,
Where raw troops felt the breath
Of leader storms, whose lightning flashed
And thunder spoke of death,
To Appomattox, where beneath
Her famous apple tree
The sun went down upon the hopes
Of those who fought with Lee.

It meant long marches and a bed
Upon the frozen ground,
The open sky our only tent,
The elements around.
It meant scant clothing, slimmer fare
And insect teeming dens.
It meant disease and fever camps
And southern prison pens.

It meant the fiercest fighting
This old world has ever seen
From fair Oaks to the Wilderness
And all the way between.
And this with brothers of the blood,
From common lineage sprung,
With the same sacred memories,
Their speech a common tongue.

All that is over now, my lad,
The passions have subsided.
We have one flag, one hope, one land,
And all our ways are peace.
Gone are the hatreds of the past,
The anguish and the tears.
The battle scars are buried 'neath
The snows of fifty years.

May you, my grandson, never know
Such fratricidal scenes,
But keep alive their memory,
To teach what freedom means.
Through them this land, as Lincoln said,
Saw liberty's new birth.
Through them she now has come to be
The leader of the earth.



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