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THE REGISTER OF THE KENTUCKY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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G. GLENN CLIFT, Editor

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Reelfoot Lake, Tennessee, the result of earth movements that occurred during the New Madrid earthquake of 1811-1812. It occupies a shallow basin about 20 miles long, 4 or 5 miles wide, and is 15 to 20 feet in depth. See pages 191-196.

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CAMPAIGN OF 1813 ON THE OHIO RIVER

SORTIE AT FORT MEIGS, MAY, 1813

By THOMAS CHRISTIAN

THIS SIMPLE NARRATIVE was prepared for the old soldiers who met at Paris yesterday but I think it worth preserving, and therefore enclose it to you. I have no doubt of its accuracy, for the writer is a very respectable farmer, and I *witnessed* the principal events myself. In the battle of 5th May, '13, under Dudley, I was a (boy) Captain, commanded two spy companies and a few friendly Indians in advance, was badly wounded, taken prisoner, forced to run the Indian gauntlet, and saved by Tecumseh as stated. Yours, truly,
LESLIE COMBS.¹

Fellow-soldiers and fellow-sufferers in a short but bloody war, long since passed but ever to be remembered, it would afford me more pleasure to be with you to-day, or upon any other occasion when assembled, than I dare attempt to describe; but great as that pleasure would be of seeing you face to face and conversing with you, old age and feeble health deny to me its enjoyment. And were it not for the kindness of our ever-generous friend, fellow-soldier and fellow-sufferer, General Leslie Combs, I would not even enjoy this second best of pleasures. Being thus remembered by you, giving you my best wishes for this life's enjoyments, and most fervent prayers for your eternal happiness in the great, unbounded and eternal camping-grounds, where peace ever reigns and Jesus commands, where no savage *war-whoop* excites the passions

¹ Letter from Leslie Combs, Lexington, Ky., June 20, 1870, to A. T. Goodman, Secretary of the Western Reserve and Northern Ohio Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio. Goodman published the address in the October, 1874, issue of the Society's official magazine, from which this reprinting was made.

of strife, where no uplifted tomahawk or scalping-knife intimidates or arouses, where there is no surrendering to a relentless foe, or running the gauntlet or submitting to savage massacre, but where instead is heard the voice of eternal love and praise, and we are led, willing captives, into salvation's impregnable fortress.

But let me be brief; we are all *old* now and easily fatigued, and our object is to entertain one another, with as little tax upon time and patience as possible. And as our generous fellow-soldier, Gen. Combs, has persuaded me that a short narrative of the little service I rendered our country in 1813 would not be unpleasant to you, considering the impossibility of my being with you in person, I have consented to give it in as brief method as I can master. But in attempting to do so strange indeed are my feelings, fellow-soldiers, as I about-face to review the past.

I again hear the tap of the drum that sounded in the little village of Athens, Fayette county, for volunteers in the winter of 1813, just upon the excitement of Winchester's defeat. I again hear the voice of my Captain, Archibald Morrison, and see the faces of my fellow-volunteers as they fall in line. Salutations are being received upon every side and the din of innumerable familiar voices are heard; alas! only in the imagination, for those voices were long since hushed and those faces we will see no more this side of the grave. My father's "Good-bye, my boy," my mother's blessings and tears, all pass in review before me now.

Soon my loose warm jeans roundabout seems to be my most protecting friend, as our rendezvous at Lexington has been far in the rear, and we are upon a forced march across the swampy marshes of Ohio, rendered almost impassable by incessant spring rains, to the relief of General Harrison at Fort Meigs. One shower after another, and each one seemingly colder than its predecessor, is pelting us day and night. Upon brush-piles cut for the occasion, we are compelled to sleep to keep above water. Our brave, kind-hearted and generous Colonel Dudley is busy encouraging his men and aided by the other officers doing all that can be done to lessen our sufferings; but continual wading in water is beginning to tell

and the skin is peeling from our weary legs, from the knee down; the well-clothed and well-protected camp-followers, with their wagons of luxuries and drinkables, are extorting more and more as we leave civilization farther behind, and now a drink of their cider-oil is out of reach of two-thirds the command, and they have lost their popularity with both men and officers; consequently another fatiguing day's march, with the prospect of another night, twin-sister to the rest, plays havoc with the hucksters; the cider-oil wagons are upset, barrels are being rolled hither and thither. No orders to that effect have been issued, and without any one seemingly to know who were doing these things or why they were being done, *presto* the drinkables have disappeared and every soldier in camp suddenly forgets his fatigue and becomes Lieutenant General commanding innumerable hosts of invincible veterans.

Commands of officers in the heat of terrible battle are heard in every direction, innumerable game cocks are loudly crowing and all manner of songs and singing, concord and discord all around. This last jollification of our little command. Oh! how soon after we hushed forever on earth the joyful voices of almost every messmate and friend I *there* had, and *then* so gay.

But a very few nights after, amid darkness and pelting rain, we are cautiously and as rapid as practicable descending the Maumee, to surprise Proctor, whip the Indians, raise the siege, and relieve Fort Meigs, but ere we reach the Fort many of my companions' guns are full of water, as the pouring from their muzzles plainly indicates when they are brought from a perpendicular to a horizontal position, preparatory to the bloody action soon to commence.

Some faint signs of coming day and many indications of the immediate presence of our savage foe, left no doubt in the mind of any one just then of a terrible conflict just commencing.

The morning of the memorable 5th of May was dawning. Officers and men were hurrying from boats, and the quick flashes and the keen reports of many guns pronounced the battle commenced. Many were being wounded around me. My captain, Archibald Morrison, had formed in good marching

order and was under way when the brave Captain John Morrison was shot through the head, both eye-balls bursting clean from their sockets. Dying, but undaunted, he orders his men forward to a post of honor, where they could do their country good service, and not waste their precious time with a dying man.

Officers and men then bounded forward, soon dispersing the besiegers and capturing the guns we were ordered to capture. And now flushed with victory, and maddened by the sight of fallen, bleeding and dying comrades our brave Colonel Dudley and men could not resist the desire of following the retreating enemy and wreaking vengeance upon them for the loss of near relatives and friends.

So without taking time to roll the captured guns into the river after them, we went, and had it not been for the dense forest and undergrowth we would have made short work of them.

But, alas! that aid to the enemy was death for us. They formed an ambush, and securely hid from view, had every advantage. Our futile attempts to dislodge them gave that portion of the enemy upon the opposite side of the river ample time to cross over in our rear, completely hemming us in upon every side. Our case was then hopeless. **Our ranks scattered,** our brave Colonel slain, and most of the other officers mortally wounded, seems sufficient to have unnerved the bravest hero, but even then many heroic deeds of personal valor were enacted and I still occasionally heard the loud, shrill game cock crowing of one brave spirit who seemed determined to die game and cheer his comrades to the last. What became of him who knows? Louder and louder, nearer and nearer came the savage yells of the blood-thirsty foe from every quarter and fainter grew the resistance offered by our thinned and dispirited ranks, until bursting forth in our very midst, the deafening, demoniac yells drowned all other sounds save the coarse, broad command, "*ground your arms, surrender,*" pronounced by British officers banishing all hope of successful resistance.

Captured, brave Dudley is defeated and we are prisoners in savage hands, were the thoughts that then rushed to my

mind, causing me to forget upon the instant to throw down my arms; but just then that same broad command, this time to me personally, "Damn your eyes, ground your arms, or you will be slain," brought me hastily to my senses. Down went gun, off came knapsack, etc., to hastily disappear beneath the mud and water, then ankle deep where I stood, and with my full weight I aided their exit from further service, pressing them as deeply into the mud as possible; then stepping towards where the prisoners were being collected, the first man I met with whom I was acquainted was old Mr. Bradburn, but he could give me no information as to the whereabouts of any of our messmates, as I was then the only acquaintance he had met since the surrender. The sad fact was that but few of our particular mess were left to meet again upon earth, and soon, very soon, even his blood and brains were destined to bespatter me and others as the enraged savages tomahawked him in our midst.

Now too late, we saw the error of surrendering to such a foe, and every soldier keenly felt the difference between dying in the heat of battle, contending for right, and the cold-blooded massacre that now plainly awaited him. For the few British who were with the Indians had no power to control them, being in almost as bad a situation as ourselves, the savages threatening to exterminate them if they offered any resistance to their inhuman desire to butcher the prisoners, and did kill one of them in my presence for begging the life of one prisoner, who had thrown himself under his protection.

Consequently the British aided by some of the Indians hurried us on as rapidly as they could down the river to an old deserted fort where they assured us that we could and should be protected. But the bloody tomahawk was busy along the whole route, leaving behind us a path of blood and scalped comrades.

Matters growing worse and worse at every step, the savages becoming more and more enraged and bloodthirsty as we neared the fort, shortly before reaching which I was halted by some Indians and a sprightly stripling of some sixteen summers hastily proceeded to search my pockets; feeling much resentment, I suppose I must have exhibited some, for instantly

two paint-be-daubed warriors, with uplifted tomahawks made a rush towards me, and would, perhaps, have instantly buried them deep in my brain, but just then their attention was arrested by the glittering appearance of a brass inkstand the young savage had extracted from my pocket, where in marching it had rubbed to a glittering brightness equal to gold. The few silver dollars I had left soon shared the same fate of the inkstand, and amid the forward pressure I soon passed out of sight of my Indian boy and his captured goods which it seemed put him and his companions wild with delight.

But getting rid of them could afford no joy or feeling of relief; for lifting my eyes, there stood a few hundred yards off the old deserted fort, with thick lines of savages extending from either side of its entrance to the very spot where I stood, clubbing and tomahawking all they could of the terror-stricken prisoners as they made their wild, panic-race for its entrance, where they foolishly hoped to find protection and safety. Each one as he reached the head of the savage lines comprehended at a glance the nature of his situation. To hesitate was instant death, and without further orders each made his individual dash for life through the yelling savage lines with super-human speed and agility.

Many who were knocked down gained the entrance upon all fours with astonishing speed. The prisoner in front of me received a deep gash in the shoulder as he ran, but succeeded in entering the fort.

And now it was my time. The way was slippery with human blood and blocked in places by the slain. No time for thought or preparation. The loose, warm jean roundabout which I before mentioned and which had done me so much good service through the long, cold, wet marches, was buttoned to the throat, and with a strength and speed that astonished me I made a bolt, but ere I had reached the prized entry, I felt a sudden jerk at the back of my head, saw a button strike the ground some feet in front, my arms were forcibly jerked back, and the precious gift of my dear old mother was lost forever without my having time to say, good-bye, dear old friend roundabout. A few more bounds landed me in the fort, or rather slaughter-pen; and here we seemed to be in, if

possible, a worse situation than ever; for the savages rudely shoved the British sentinels aside, and with unearthly yells poured in upon us, killing and scalping as fast as their own crowded ranks would admit, while we, like terror-stricken sheep hemmed in by dogs, or a parcel of hogs in a butcher's pen, were piled one upon another in one corner. Those at the bottom were being smothered while those upon the top were being drenched with blood and brains.

Just then, suddenly as the lightning's flash, the yelling ceased, the uplifted war clubs descended harmlessly by the side of the now shamed warriors, and above the groans of the dying, and the prayers of the living, is heard the brave Tecumseh putting a stop to the massacre, shaming his warriors for behaving like squaws. The few now left are saved from death, but the little band or remnant of the once proud regiment of 800 brave Kentuckians are still destined to undergo much suffering for nakedness, cold, hunger and death still waited upon and thinned their ranks; and the exposure while being taken prisoners down the Maumee to the lakes or place of exchange, proved too great for almost all of us, and many perished from it before reaching home, while the most of us were a long time in recovering.

The cold was intense upon the water in open boats, and for three days and nights we had nothing to eat save a mess of horse-beef that we much relished and wished for more. At the mouth of Huron river we were turned loose without sufficient clothing to keep us warm, without money, and nothing to eat save one ration sent to us by General Harrison. He would have done more for us, but it was out of his power.

From that point we had to find our way home as best we could through an almost friendless country, traveling a very circuitous route to avoid falling in the hands of Indians, each little party of friends taking a different way, agreeing to assist one another, for there were many sick, and some of the sick had to accompany each party.

Our little party homeward bound was composed of Robert Simpson, Daniel Carter, George Sherwin and Joseph Franklin. On account of my sickness we had to travel very slowly; in fact, all of us were unable to stand much fatigue. I was so

weak much of the time that it was impossible for me to get up, but when lifted upon my feet could manage to walk for several hours by occasionally leaning against something to rest, living much of the time upon slippery elm bark, and begging our way as we slowly advanced towards the Ohio river. We were sometimes refused anything to eat, but as we neared the river we fared better and the sick got occasional chances to ride.

Meeting a chance to ride a led horse belonging to a gentleman who was coming several miles in the direction of the river put me so far in advance of my friends that they never overhauled me again before reaching home. After this I found other opportunities of getting short rides which soon brought me to the banks of the river opposite Maysville then called Limestone. Here a gentleman let me stay all night and finding an opportunity of crossing to the opposite bank early next morning, I met with a strange coincidence, for just as I landed upon the Kentucky shore, I saw my father standing near the water's edge, and looking intently up the stream at a boat descending. He had just arrived and something persuaded him that I was near, perhaps in the boat. So intent was his gaze that he did not see me until I spoke. We were astonished at the strange meeting, both having arrived upon the spot almost simultaneously.

I soon arrived home amid the welcoming of many friends, and in much improved health, but so lean that all declared that I had grown at least two inches taller. The girls treated me to cakes and strawberries, the young men introduced me to their sweethearts, and the old gave me much praise, so I got along swimmingly for a few months, when serious notions of returning upon the war path disturbed my dreams for a few weeks. Finding my services were not needed I joyfully gave up the idea, went resolutely to work, and with God's aid have succeeded in making a good provision for my family, and I trust *peace* with my Maker.

Fellow-soldiers, reiterating with most fervent prayer my greatest desire that God's choicest blessings may descend upon each of you, I bid you a most affectionate good-bye. We may

meet again upon earth, but probably our next meeting will be "beyond the river resting in the shade." Good-bye.

This paper was contributed by E. Everett Elsey, of Lexington, Kentucky, a great grandson of the writer. Thomas Christian was born in Fayette County on January 10, 1791, and died there in the old family home, in which Mr. Elsey now lives, on January 10, 1876. He enlisted as a Private in Captain Archibald Morrison's Company of Infantry of the Kentucky Militia, Detached, Lt. Col. William Dudley commanding, from March 2 until September 2, 1813. He married Harriett Washington Berryman, a daughter of Gilson Berryman and Ann Washington, in Fayette County on October 31, 1820.—*Editor.*

N. B. - Interlineations made before signing: Page 1st, line 19, after the word to read, be; page 4, line 3 after the word his, read Benjamin Hopkins; page 4, line 10, after the word be, read gave; page 7, bottom line after the word which, read has; page 10, line 8, after the word my, read Death.

Signed and sealed in the presence of:

Charles Magill

Thos. H. Miller,

Arch. Clark, J.I. C.C.C.

John Floyd (L.S.)

GEORGIA, CAMDEN COUNTY:

Appeared Archibald Clark, who being duly sworn, deposeth and saith, that he was present and did not see the testator, John Floyd, sign, seal and as his act deliver the foregoing instrument of writing as and for his last Will and Testament, and for the purposes therein expressed, and that Charles Magill and Thos. H. Miller, with the deponent in the presence of the testator, and in the presence of each other, subscribed their names as witnesses to the same, and the said John Floyd was of sound mind and memory.

Sworn in open Court this 5th August, 1839.

N. P. Burton, J.I. C.C.C.

N. J. Patterson, J.I. C.C.C.

J. T. Goodbread, J.I. C.C.C.

Arch. Clark.

Recorded and examined this 8th day of August, 1839, and I do hereby certify that Charles R. Floyd and Richard T. Floyd were duly qualified as Executors of the above and foregoing Will of John Floyd.

By Robert Brown, Clerk.

GEORGIA, CAMDEN COUNTY

Clark's Office, Court of Ordinary.

I certify that this Will of Gen. John Floyd is a true copy of his Will from the book containing the records of Wills. In witness whereof, I subscribe my name and seal of office, this 2nd April, 1840.

T. Percival Cohen, Clerk.