

A MEMORY OF THE WAR

Stanley Filhart

Mr. C. D. Reese, an old resident of Columbus, Ohio, was present when the leg of the gallant General Rice was amputated , upon the dark and bloody field of Kennesaw Mountain, and thus relates the occurrence of the time,

“There had been a fortnight’s fierce onslaughts upon the heights of Kennesaw Mountain. It was June of 1864 and Sherman was pushing on his triumphant march to the sea. But before Atlanta was reached the rebels had concentrated their forces near Dallas and about Lost Mountain and the heights of Kennesaw, endeavoring to their utmost to shut off the communication of Sherman’s troops with their base of supplies. To thwart this it was determined that the enemy’s position must be taken. All during the day from June 18th to the 27th there were repetitions of the fierce sallies and the terrible mowing down of our troops by the enfilading fire from Big Kennesaw, which was lined with rifle pits, while from Little Kennesaw the musketry added to the frightful slaughter.

“During one of those repeated charges, general A.V.Rice was shot, the ball striking the leg just below the knee.

“It would not have been a serious wound if the limb had been sound, but at Vicksburg, shortly before, another ball from an enemy’s musket had sped through the air and lodged in that fated limb. The wounds were very near each other. The Vicksburg wound had been received when the general with the intrepidity almost akin to rashness, had refused to enter a rifle pit, but sat crouched on the ground. The ball

struck the knee in front, penetrating both portions of the limb, bowed as it was, and lodged in the groin.

“Thus it was that Doctor Messenger, of Cleveland, when the brave general was brought at midnight from the battlefield of Kennesaw to his field hospital, decided that naught but amputation would suffice to save life. Dr J.B. Potter, of Canal Winchester, was brought in for consultation and agreed the mutilated member must be severed.

“There in that hospital tent which the blackness of midnight surrounded, amid the moans of the wounded and the shrieks of the dying, upon the rude improvised couch the heroic Rice lay, not a murmur of pain escaping his lips. Ever since the wound at Vicksburg he had limped about resting upon a sword or cane, and now the pain must have intensified beyond conception.

“When the decision of the surgeons was announced, without the moving of a muscle or the slightest remonstrance, the general signified his acquiescence and his immediate readiness for the terrible ordeal.

“Who will do it?” was asked and Dr Messenger agreed to perform the operation.

“The incision was quickly made and then the severance cut made with the steadiness and rapidity of a trained surgeon. The ligatures were fastened and everything bid fair for a perfectly successful operation. But hospital steward Luhrens, of the 116th Illinois, had first administered the anesthesia and kept the sponge and funnel close to the mouth until the critical moment of the effective use of the knife. Then, absorbed in watching the operation, he relaxed his care, the result being just as the ligatures were bound the unconscious general revived, and suddenly clapped his hand down upon the limb, breaking the sutures. Fears of loss of blood and death from exhaustion inspired a

dreadful anxiety, but the robust constitution overcame all draughts upon its vital forces.

Thus it was that General Rice became a “stumper.”

After the war he was a banker, congressman, appointed Pensions agent for Ohio and finally Purchasing Agent for the U.S. Census Bureau. He attended most of the reunions held by the 57th Ohio voluntary infantry.

One of the “boys in blue” in the 57th from November 1861 until the end of the war was Private David Filhart, the great grandfather of Stanley Filhart, one of our long time Roundtable members.