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PREFACE.

The author of this little tribute has no apology to offer for what he has herein written in praise of his friend and old comrade, Dr. Wm. A. COLLINS, for his record during the time he was associated with the soldiers of the Sixth Indiana regiment is indelibly written in the hearts of every one of them. In looking about for a subject for a military character sketch, our mind was irresistibly drawn to him, and how well we have succeeded in portraying the main points in his military career we leave to those who peruse these pages.

THE AUTHOR.

## THE BOY SURGEON.

### A MILITARY CHARACTER SKETCH.

The first regiment the great war Governor, Oliver P. Morton, sent to the front at the breaking out of the Rebellion was the Sixth Infantry, commanded by Col. T. T. Crittenden, and it was throughout the war a noted organization, as it was always in the battle front, never having enjoyed the soft and easy place of post or other duty, consequently the soldiers in that regiment saw about as much real war as any command in the army.

Among the most prominent characters of the Sixth regiment was the subject of this sketch,

DR. WILLIAM ANDREW COLLINS, of this city. Enlisting as Hospital Steward when a mere youth, being only 19 years old, he soon won for himself the respect and regard of the entire command that was phenomenal. On account of the advanced age and ill health of Surgeon Charles

Schussler, and the irregularity with which the regiment was supplied with Assistant Surgeons of any worth, a large share of the sick, wounded and other medical duties soon fell upon young Collins; and in the early part of the service it was no uncommon thing to hear the officers and soldiers say, "I wouldn't let that boy give me a dose of salts." He surely did have a youthful appearance, and was a stranger to almost the entire command.

The Doctor's lot for the first few months was not an easy or enviable one by any means; but a strict and fearless discharge of duty soon wrought the change that was inevitable, and the beardless stripling soon bloomed into one of the most trusted and warmly regarded officers of his regiment.

The writer has often heard officers and men speak in terms of admiration of "young Collins." Capt. Wm. E. McLeland, the popular Regimental Quartermaster, probably expressed the universal sentiment when he said

to the writer that "Collins was so devoted to the welfare of the soldiers, so good and kind to all, that no one could help loving him."

#### AT THE BATTLE OF SHILOH.

Dr. Collins' conduct at the battle of Shiloh, in which the writer participated, is a fair illustration of his future career. How well we remember his appearance when Col. Crittenden ordered him to remain at Savannah while his regiment was embarking on the steamer for Pittsburg Landing, nine miles away.

Shiloh was our first battle, and all day long Sunday, April 6th, 1862, the first of the fight, we could hear the booming of Grant's and Johnston's guns, as we marched to join them, reminding the boys that there was warm work in store for them. None of us had ever smelled hostile gunpowder, and each one supposed this to be the only opportunity of their lives. Just as the brigade was getting on the boat to go to the field the order was issued that Hospital Steward Collins and Quartermaster

Sergeant Frank P. Strader should remain behind in charge of their respective trains. This was a dampener to the two that were to be left, and, holding a council of war of "two," it was unanimously resolved that the trains were in no danger on the north side of the Tennessee river and so the two officers acted in disobedience of orders—went to the field of Shiloh and did good service and got only a mild reproof from Col. Crittenden. This was the first place Dr. Collins had an opportunity to indulge his surgical taste, and surely any one who was on that field will never forget the terrible amount of wounded of both armies left for our Surgeons to care for. Great heaps of legs and arms from both the blue and the gray were taken off in the old log house at the landing. Ambulances filled with the wounded awaited their turn as men wait their turn at a barber-shop. It was pitiful to hear the groans and shrieks of the poor fellows. Collins was here commended by all for his untiring services for the relief of his suffering comrades.

**THE DOCTOR RECEIVES HIS REWARD.**

Continuous duty, well and faithfully done, at the siege of Corinth and during the long summer of 1862, the marches through Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee to Stevenson, the fearful amount of sickness at the latter place and Crow Creek, and the long and tiresome chase after Gen. Bragg and his Confederate hordes, ending at Louisville, Ky., brought to young Collins his tardy reward, for on the arrival of the Sixth regiment at Louisville he received his merited commission as Assistant Surgeon; and thence forward for the next two years, until the final discharge, the care of the sick and wounded of the regiment devolved almost entirely upon him.

**AT THE BATTLE OF STONE RIVER**

the Doctor rendered conspicuous services in addition to his surgical duties, as Aid de Camp in placing Col. Baldwin's brigade in position. He was also instrumental in saving one of the rifle guns of Capt. Simonson's battery, which had but two horses to pull it,

the others being killed. The horses stalled in the retreat, and the Doctor at once seeing the situation called some of the boys of the Sixth regiment, and, along with himself, laid hold and brought the gun onto good ground and took it off safely toward Nashville.

Remember, this was done during a general stampede, when all was confusion, and none but the coolest and most self-possessed would have tarried when the enemy was at their heels with a bayonet. The Doctor narrowly escaped capture by getting out, while other officers remained, taking refuge in a cotton shed, and were captured.

During the four days of the Stone River fight he rendered great service, which can never be repaid by the Government or individual soldiers to whom he gave relief in various ways. Day and night he remained with the suffering wounded, never closing his eyes or shirking the humane duty he felt in his utmost heart he had to perform for his comrades who would

have died on the field but for his untiring attention.

#### AT LIBERTY GAP.

In the advance on Tullahoma, at Liberty Gap, Dr. Collins' action was characteristic. In the skirmish at that place word was sent to him that one of the men—Mr. Jacob Sheets, of this city, an excellent soldier—was badly wounded on the skirmish line. Always ready to answer such calls, the Doctor riding up to the head of the regiment, was told that it was almost certain death to attempt to reach Sheets until the rebel line was driven back, as he lay in an open wheat field. Stopping only long enough to ascertain the exact location of the wounded man, he galloped his horse rapidly to the place, and just as he was dismounting a Minie ball passed through his saddle, which had he been a second slower in dismounting, would have ended his days; yet he brought Sheets safely off the field, stopped his bleeding, and thus saved him from almost certain death. Mr. Sheets is still a resident of this city.

#### AT CHICKAMAUGA, THE "RIVER OF DEATH."

Quickly followed the battle of Chickamauga—truly, as the Indian word implies, the "River of Death." Dr. Collins, after working with the wounded all day Saturday, Sept. 19th, was ordered to the field-hospital—"Col. Cloud's" large frame residence, and that of "Hein's," but a short distance away. These houses were filled to their utmost capacity with our wounded. Any one, by referring to Gen. Henry M. Cist's "Army of the Cumberland," can find a map of the field-hospital referred to, and the Confederate and Union lines during the continuance of the battle. The Doctor was assigned to duty at Cloud's house as executive officer on Sunday morning, Sept. 20th. The wounded were gathered together in this house, and near by was a large spring. Finding the enemy was shelling the house, the Federals having fallen back past it leaving it between the two lines, the Doctor ran in and attempted to get out all who could walk, and just as he got in the hall a shell from the

Confederate lines entered the house near the floor killing Colonel Richard Rockingham, of the Sixth Kentucky, who lay on the floor with a shattered leg. The Colonel's large silver watch was driven entirely through his body, yet he lived long enough to give Dr. Collins his name and wishes, which were complied with.

Soon after the death of Col. Rockingham the Confederates who had been doing the shelling came up and halted. The commanding officer called the Doctor out, who immediately explained that it was a hospital and that he had killed Rockingham and endangered the lives of himself and all the wounded in his charge. The Confederate officer regretted his error, as he had mistaken the flag flying from the top of the house for a headquarters flag. The Doctor invited the officer in to see the dead Colonel, but he declined, saying he preferred not to see him and moved off with his command.

#### THE DOCTOR INSIDE THE REBEL LINES.

The field hospital soon fell into the

hands of the rebels, and as they came in most all the surgeons and attendants unceremoniously departed for more congenial parts, until at one time Dr. Collins was alone, with the exception of one attendant, Corporal John W. Allen, of Co. D, 6th Ind., (now the Rev. John W. Allen of North Madison,) and Sergeant May, of Co. C, same regiment.

#### A BOLD IRISH CONFEDERATE SERGEANT.

While the Doctor was attending a wounded man, extracting a ball, Corporal Allen called his attention to some men outside who wished to see him. On looking out he saw some ten or twelve rebels of General Longstreet's corps in charge of an Irish Sergeant, who, saluting quite politely, said:

"Doctor, is this a hospital?"

"Yes, sir," replied the Doctor.

"Well," said the Sergeant, "are ye our prisoners, or are we yees?"

"Sergeant," replied the Doctor, laughing, "this thing is so badly mixed I can't say."

"Doctor," said the Sergeant, "it

makes no difference I guess; but will ye dress the wound of one of our boys, who has his left elbow busted entirely."

"I will do it," says the Doctor, "if you will get your men to get water for the hundreds of wounded here who are begging for it."

#### GEN. GRANGER'S FEDERAL VISIT THE DOCTOR.

The bargain soon made was being carried out, when the rattle of musketry, shouts of the soldiers, and w-h-i-z of bullets commenced another deal. Calling to the men to lie down, the Doctor awaited the coming of the strangers, who proved to be the advance of General Gordon Granger's corps, which made the gallant Irish Sergeant and his command prisoners sure enough, and after disarming them, started them Northward. As the Sergeant departed he said to the Doctor:

"It's a smart trick you've played on us, while we were doing you a great kindness."

After an explanation, the Sergeant

laughed and said he fully understood the situation, and bade the Doctor good-bye.

#### THE DOCTOR AGAIN IN THE REBEL LINES.

Shortly the hospital was again taken by the rebels, and held by them until late in the afternoon, when Doctor Collins discovered coming from the South a body of Federal troops, and going to meet them found it to be Gen. Jos. J. Reynolds and the remnant of his once fine division. He only had a hundred or so men left, who, with the general had cut their way through the rebel lines, in the attempt which Gen. Thomas ordered Gen. Reynolds to make with his entire division to open up the road to Rossville.

Gen. Reynolds was the only mounted officer, and on enquiring of the Doctor the situation of affairs was told that he (the Doctor) had considered himself a prisoner of war for more than an hour; that he was surrounded by the rebel forces, and at the suggestion of the Doctor and urged by Col. Robinson the general permitted

the Doctor to cut off his stars to avoid being conspicuous and thus better enable him and his command to get out.

The Doctor then piloted Gen. Reynolds and his men into a secluded spot in the woods near by, where the General could await the coming of night to get out unseen.

ANOTHER CALLER—GEN. PHIL. SHERIDAN.

Just after dark Dr. Collins was called to the fence and out in the road was Gen. Phil. Sheridan at the head of the remnant of his division, on the same road that Gen. Reynolds came down but going exactly in the opposite direction.

Gen. Sheridan inquired of the Doctor the state of the mixed affairs, and was surprised to find that he was going right into the main body of the rebels, and could not believe it until the Doctor told him that he had Gen. Reynolds and his command in the woods waiting an opportunity to get away. Sheridan at once wished to communicate with Reynolds, and the Doctor piloted one of the General's aids to him. Reynolds had his pickets

out, who halted the two visitors, but was getting things in readiness to make his way through the rebel lines. Being informed that Gen. Sheridan was in close proximity and wished to communicate with him, he ordered his command to fall in and the two remnants of what was two grand divisions united and turned about and safely gained our lines at Mission Ridge.

DR. COLLINS' HOME RUN.

The next morning, Monday, Sept. 21st, our army having completely abandoned the field the Doctor, as executive officer, being in charge, called what few Surgeons and attendants that remained together and informed them that he was going to attempt to regain our lines, and advised all to do the same, but all, with the exception of Dr. Bowers, of the 93d Ohio, considered the attempt too hazardous and stayed and were soon made prisoners to spend ten or twelve months in rebel prisons.

Corporal (Rev.) John W. Allen intended starting with the party, but



was detained and was also made prisoner and enjoyed several months of Southern hospitality at Andersonville, Macon, etc.

#### THE SIEGE AT CHATTANOOGA.

During the long siege at Chattanooga, when nearly all the animals and many soldiers died from starvation, Dr. Collins was constantly with the regiment, and in

**THE CHARGE ON MISSION RIDGE,** which broke the rebel centre and ruined their army, the Doctor went out of our works and into and through the charge with the men.

Just before the charge the Doctor was sitting with Col. Jacob Glass, of the 32d Ind., and Capt. Frank P. Strader, of the 6th Ind., discussing the prospective result of the charge that was momentarily expected to be made. The conversation was interrupted by the signal for the charge, and the three separated never to meet again alive on this earth, the Doctor being the only one to reach the top of the Ridge—Glass and Strader both being killed.

#### THE CAMPAIGN IN EAST TENNESSEE.

During the campaign in East Tennessee, which followed in the winter of 1863-4, without any proper equipage for troops, Dr. Collins was with the command constantly, and by his kindness and cheerful disposition did much toward reviving his drooping and spiritless comrades. The suffering of the army was terrible, quite a number of the men being frozen to death, and it was only equalled by Washington's winter at Valley Forge.

#### THE ATLANTA CAMPAIGN.

In the Atlanta campaign, which commenced in May, 1864, at Tunnel Hill and ended with the fall of Atlanta in September, and which was four months of daily and nightly battle, the Doctor was constantly present.

#### THE BATTLE OF NEW HOPE CHURCH.

At the battle of New Hope Church, May 27th, there is an incident related of him that is characteristic. Among the first wounded was Mat Doyle, of Co. I, a bright, cheery fellow, who had his leg broken. The Doctor, after fixing Mat's leg, told him to rest quiet

and he would shortly have him removed. Soon our line was broken and our troops forced back, and the Doctor, after sending off to the rear all the wounded, as he thought, and all the attendants, started himself to leave, when Mat called to him and asked what was to be done with him. Realizing that if he was left he would soon be taken by the rebels, he got Mat on his back, and thus the wounded man was carried out of the fight in a shower of bullets. Mat wanted the Doctor to let him ride in front, as he said he was only a shield for the Doctor from the rebel bullets.

Ever after this event, in referring to Collins, Doyle would speak of him as "the Doctor he rode off of the battlefield." Poor Mat, the life of the camp and a most gallant soldier, lived to fully recover from his wound and make a good citizen after the war, but about five years after his discharge he married and on his wedding trip was thrown under the wheels of the car in which his bride sat and was killed instantly.

The Doctor could never find any excuse for skulking to the rear by officers or the men, and at this same fight at New Hope Church he left the wounded he was attending to drive to the front a Captain and some ten or twelve men who had skulked to the rear and hid in a ravine.

Those who saw this incident say it was really laughable to see the Doctor beating the Captain with a stick, saying, "Go back, you scoundrel, to your company and do your duty." It is needless to add the Doctor's orders were promptly obeyed, as he meant business all the time.

#### THE NIGHT RIDE ON THE TENNESSEE RIVER.

At Chattanooga, when Gen. Grant called for 1600 picked men under Gen. Wm. B. Hazen to float in open pontoons from Chattanooga to Brown's Ferry at night and under the rebel fire the entire way for nine miles, Dr. Collins was one of the first to volunteer to go on that hazardous trip and was in the third boat that landed and ascended the

bank along with Lieut. George B. Greene, who was killed before they had got twenty yards from the boat. Yet the gallant sixteen hundred held the ridge and opened the way for Gen. Joe Hooker's army to get to the river.

This night ride on the Tennessee river is now held by all Military writers to be one of the most daring, brilliant and successful feats of any war.

The Doctor's fearless action in all emergencies where indomitable pluck was required to accomplish an end, is characteristic of the Collins family. He comes by it honestly. It will be remembered that Commander Napoleon B. Collins, our hero's uncle, ran his vessel right under the guns of the Brazilian forts, bravely boarded the rebel privateer Florida, towed her out and scuttled her to prevent her from preying upon American merchant vessels, hundreds of which it had previously destroyed. The gallant Commander did this daring deed after mature deliberation, when he knew it

was in disobedience of orders and contrary to international law. Weighing the matter well, he took the responsibility and nobly accomplished the object for his country's good, thus winning for himself a famous and an honored name.

The Doctor stayed with the regiment constantly until its final discharge; and during the whole war the regiment was never fired upon that he was not with it to care for the wounded. His knowledge of the affairs of the regiment and the individual members of it was such that he knew everything connected with it—the name and individual history of every man—and for some years after the war was referred to in all doubtful matters regarding it, his memory and judgment being wonderfully correct. Few men who entered the army from Indiana can boast of such a brilliant record.

The Doctor, since the close of the war, has resided in this city, and has acquired an extensive practice in med-

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icine and surgery, in the latter branch  
standing at the head of his profes-  
sion.

A. J. G.

Madison, Ind., June 19, 1882.

