

A NARRATIVE  
OF HIS  
*Capture and Imprisonment*

During  
*The War Between The States*

By  
Private Thomas Battle Turley, C.S.A.

With An Introduction

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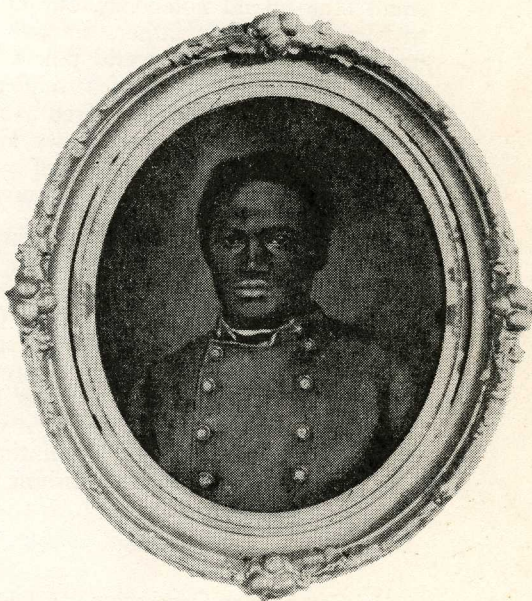
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Private Thomas Battle Turley



and  
His Body Servant Ed

## INTRODUCTION

On April 28, 1961, Mrs. John M. Trenholm and her daughter, Mrs. McGhee Moore of Memphis presented to the Burrow Library a small blue bound notebook, four by six inches, which had belonged to Mrs. Trenholm's father, the late Senator Thomas B. Turley. His name is inscribed in several places on the inside covers along with boyish tracings in pencil of a small pair of scissors, both opened and closed. A few dates are scattered at random on the covers—1858 and 1862 predominate—and since we know that Thomas Battle Turley was born on April 5, 1845—from a perusal of its contents we recognize that this little notebook was used by him during his school days.

Its contents fall into three distinct sections, which to judge by the handwriting were written at various intervals. The first seventy-eight pages show that as a boy, Turley took quite an interest in history, for it contains a "Chronology from Quackenbos on the United States by T. B. Turley."<sup>1</sup> The first entry starts with 600 B.C. "In the reign of Pharaoh Necho a party of explorers sailed around Africa." He then jumps to the Christian era, gives key dates on early explorations, Viking, Spanish, and English, then proceeds to a detailed chronology of the colonial period, the Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812. The account ends, with a flourishing "Finis," in 1814.

1. George Payn Quackenbos (1826-81) was a prolific writer of school texts on a variety of subjects during the mid-nineteenth century. Though he wrote several histories, the one which would coincide with the time of this abstract would be *Illustrated School History of the United States and Adjacent Parts of America, from the Earliest Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York, 1857).

The second portion of the notebook, nine pages in length, starts with the caption, "Thomas B. Turley's table of books lent (scratched through) and borrowed by himself," but on the next page this is changed to "Books lent out by T. B. Turley." Whereupon he lists titles of books, to whom lent, and usually the notation, "returned." Thus he seems to have established a kind of lending library for his friends. The books listed were mainly the novels of Sir Walter Scott, but among them are also Biron's (*sic*) works, Carlyle's Frederick the Great, the Life of Marion, and Gil Blas.

The third section, written in ink and in a more mature hand (filling twenty-one pages of the little book) is the narrative of his captivity after the ill-fated battle of Franklin-Nashville in December 1864. This is the section which is here reproduced. There is no indication of when it was written, and one can only speculate about it. It is obviously not a diary, but must have been written while the events of captivity were still fresh in mind. The fact that it ends while he is still at Camp Chase might indicate it was written there; if so, why in this schoolboy notebook which he would hardly have had with him? On the other hand, if he picked the little book up after he got home in order to jot down impressions, why did he not give an account of his release and of his return home? The reader must decide.

An account of the life of the author of this narrative may be found in Senator McKellar's *Tennessee Senators*.<sup>2</sup>

2. Kenneth McKellar, *Tennessee Senators As Seen by One of Their Successors*. (Kingsport, 1942) 441-461, and more briefly in J. H. Mathes *The Old Guard in Grey* (Memphis, 1897) 208.

Thomas Battle Turley was born, as noted above, on April 5, 1845, and attended schools in Memphis until the outbreak of the Civil War. When little more than fifteen he enlisted in the 154th Infantry, and remained with it as a private throughout the war.<sup>3</sup> He was "small and weak for his age" and when his regiment was first assigned to the brigade of General George H. Maney, McKellar tells how the General's attention was caught "by two small boys scarcely as tall as their guns, and scarcely as heavy as the heavy accoutrements under the weight of which they struggled. The General laughed to his Adjutant that there would soon be applications from their parents for the discharge of the boys, and that they should be granted at once, as they were too young and too weak for the man's work they were about to assume; but he knew neither the boys nor their mothers."

Turley fought through the war. He was twice wounded at Shiloh and at Peachtree Creek, and was with Captain Wynne Gamon's Company I (Cheatham's division) when it was cut off and surrounded by A. Smith's XVI Corps on the second day of the battle of Nashville (December 14, 1864), when General Thomas destroyed Hood's desperate attempt to regain middle Tennessee.

3. In J. B. Lindsley, *Military Annals of Tennessee. Confederate*. 1st Series (Philadelphia, 1886) there are brief regimental histories. The account of the 154th was written by Turley (596-98). From this we learn that the 154th was organized in Memphis several years before the war. When war was declared, the regiment was reorganized and enlisted in the Confederacy. It was originally composed of ten companies: from Memphis (1) The Light Guards, (2) The Bluff City Greys, (3) The Hickory Rifles, (4) The Southern Guards, (5) The Memphis Zouaves, (6) The Jackson Guards, (7) The Crockett Rangers; from West Tennessee came (8) The Henry Guards (Paris), (9) The McNairy Guards, and (10) The Sons of Liberty (Hardeman County).

According to Mr. Turley, the 154th "participated in all the campaigns and battles of the Army of Tennessee with credit to itself and honor to the state." He says, "It was in the campaign in South-east Missouri under General Pillow. It was at Belmont; at Shiloh; at Richmond, Ky., where it lost a host of gallant men; at Perryville; at Murfreesboro, or Stone's River; at Chickamauga, in the attack on Missionary Ridge; in the fights around Dalton and Rocky Face; at Resaca; at Adairsville; at the crossing of the Etowah and Kingston; at Lost Mountain and New Hope Church; on the Kennesaw line, in front of Marietta; . . . at the crossing of the Chattahoochee; at Peach-tree Creek; with Hardee on the 22d of July, 1864; in the defense of Atlanta; at Jonesboro; at Lovejoy's; at the capture of Dalton; at Columbia and Spring Hill; in the bloody battle of Franklin, where Cheatham's division lost five Generals; . . . at Nashville; in the retreat from Tennessee; and at Bentonville, N. C., the last battle of the war." Turley was with them from the beginning till almost the end. He says, "The regiment entered the war eleven hundred strong. It came out of its last fight a mere handful of veterans, less than a hundred in number." Four officers from the regiment became Confederate Generals: W. H. Carroll, Preston Smith, Marcus J. Wright, and John D. Martin.

McKellar tells that he had some gold sewed in the lining of his clothes which he divided with his Captain, and which enabled "both to fare better in captivity than was the usual lot of Confederates in the days after the cancellation of all exchange agreements for prisoners." This statement is hardly borne out by his own account, for officers were at once separated from privates, and while he admits having \$12.50 with him at the time of capture, he also tells how guards on the train discovered and extracted \$5.00 which would leave hardly enough for effective bribery. He was freed from Camp Chase in May 1865.

After the war he attended the University of Virginia where he studied law, graduating in 1866. He first practiced with the firm of Harris, McKissick and Turley in an office where the First National Bank now stands. This firm dissolved in 1877 when Isham Harris became Senator and McKissick moved away. In 1885 he and General Luke Wright formed a partnership—the second of three generations of Wrights and Turleys to be thus associated—which lasted until 1897. In that year Wright was appointed to the Philippine Commission, and Turley was appointed U. S. Senator by Governor Bob Taylor. The appointment was confirmed by a legislative election in 1898. He served in the Senate until 1901, but refused to run again.

In 1871 Turley married Miss Irene Rayner, daughter of Col. Eli Rayner, a planter from Fayette County who moved to Memphis in the 1850s. The Turleys had five children, and today in Memphis there are many descendants of the Turley and Rayner families. The senator's portrait, reproduced in McKellar's book, shows us a very distinguished looking gentleman, and the family has kindly supplied us with pictures of the young hero and his body servant about to set off for the wars.<sup>4</sup> McKellar, who knew him well, remarks that Turley had "as fine a face as I have ever seen . . . what I have always called an affidavit face." In another place he says, "He had a fine discriminating mind, a well-trained mind, a legal mind, a philosophical mind." He also had two endearing idiosyncracies; he hated automobiles and would never ride in one, and he hated to discuss his Civil War experiences. He died one of Memphis' most distinguished, beloved and respected citizens on July 1, 1910.

4. According to Mrs. Trenholm, the body servant Ed, a slave who was known as Ed Turley, became an army cook. After the war he returned to Memphis and cooked for Senator Turley and his family for the rest of his life. The portraits were painted from photographs by a cousin of Senator Turley. It is interesting to note that the senator is shown in his private's uniform, while Ed appears with a general's star.

## THE NARRATIVE

Dec. 10th 1864 was captured at the Battle in front of Nashville, Tenn. about 5 o'clock P.M. by the 16th U.S. Army Corps. All of my company, that were engaged, with the exception of Bruce Rogers killed, were captured at the same time. Let me here give their names. Capt. W. G. Cannon, 1st Lt J. M. Lawler, Seargt Bart Vacarro, Privates G. W. Cook, Ed. Capterville, Tony Orlonly, J. B. Jones, Thad Vaden Wilson, John Murray, Jack Loyd, Ed Cunney, Dave Sheeler, Jas Leach, Wm. Butterfield, Josh Turnage, Jas. Phirl. Besides these there were about twenty of our Regt. The causes of our reverse at Nashville are too well known to need notice here; So we will follow the fortunes of my own co. through three months of suffering that will ever be an honor to those who endured them & a disgrace to the government that inflicted them.

Immediately after being captured we were marched into Nashville—five miles distant—all along the road we were met with jibes & curses from soldiers & civilians. As is ever the case the camp followers who had taken no part in the dangerous toils of the campaign, made up for their lack of courage with an extra amount of gasconade & abuse while the man (sic) who fought and captured us, with few exceptions treated us as gentlemen and soldiers. The Brave are ever generous while cowards only are tyrants. We reached Nashville after dark & were halted in front of the penitentiary; here Capt. Cannon & J. B. Jones were seperated from us to be sent to Johnson Island, the prison for officers. We were then marched into an open lot nearby & herded for the night. We were so crowded that there was not room to lie down, so we had to stand & sit for the rest of the night. In a short time a federal officer rode up & promised us that we should be treated as leniently as possible & that next morning he would make us quite comfortable. On the morning of the 17th the As't Pro. Mar. visited us—He told us that we should have breakfast in abundance & to make the dividing of rations easier we were formed into columns & marched by the seargents who issued the rations. Instead of the abundance of Provisions as was promised we rec'd about 6 ounces of light Baker's bread apiece. Our disappointment can easily be imagined by any one who has fasted for twenty four hours.



We were fed in the same manner & with the same food all the time that we stayed in Nashville—As soon as the bread was distributed, we rec'd no meat this day & never more than 4 to 6 ounces on any day afterwards. The same officers ordered us to get ready to move to better quarters where we would find nice rooms, with "brussel carpets on the floor." We expected from this promise that we would at least be put under shelter—but our magnificent quarters turned out to be an old rock quarry, one from which the rock for the State house had (been) excavated. We were confined in this place for 8 days without fire to warm our freezing bodies or shelter to protect us from the fierce blasts of December. Many froze to death every night, & many others were so badly frost bitten that amputation had to be resorted to.

I can safely say that men never endured greater sufferings since the world began. The Black Hole of Calcutta & the galleys of France were scarcely equal to it. In future history "The Rock Quarry" of Nashville (will be) remembered and spoken off (with the same feelings as—scratched through) as the darkest blot on the escutcheon of America.

While we were confined to this place one Thousand of our prisoners were sent on to Camp Douglass. I tried very hard to get in this no. but failed & had cause afterwards to rejoice at my failure. Jas. Phirl & several of the Regt. left in this squad.

The mortality among us became so frightful from our exposed condition that the Federals themselves at length began to fear that we would all die on their hands & to remedy the matter we were placed in the Penitentiary & a delightful place it seemed to most of us. Here we had fire & shelter, but our rations were as scarce as ever. The Convicts were turned loose among us every day & among them we found Charley Wells from Memphis who was sentenced for twenty years for the murder of Mr. Hornsby, his uncle. Our guards, the 28 Michigan Infantry, were very kind to us & upon the whole we got along pretty well while we staid in the Penitentiary. I had a pretty good dinner on Christmas day given me by Jas. Stovall who recd it from some of his relations in the city. The next day Mr. Gregory came in & brought me clothing & provisions. Never did gift arrive in more opportune time. I shall ever remember him with feelings of gratitude for this act of kindness.

The citizens of Nashville sent us tobacco, clothing & all the comforts that the Feds would allow us to receive.

About the 27th of Dec we started for Louisville. We were three nights & two days making a journey of twenty four hours. We were confined in box cars & each man had to remain in his place either standing or sitting, for we had not room to lie down during the whole time. The weather was dreadfully cold & the fact of our being crowded one upon the other was the only thing that kept us from freezing to death.

The usual slices of bread with a little salt beef was given us when we started to last thirty six hours, not enough food for half (a) meal.

We arrived in Louisville about 9 o'clock P.M. the 29th & were confined in the Military Prison at that place. Here our guards changed; the 6th (?) Indiana Cav. taking the place of the 28th Michigan. These men proved to be a set of Hypocritical robbers, stealing everything from us that they could lay their hands on & at the same time telling us how they sympathized with us & what a disgrace it was to their government to inflict such sufferings on prisoners of war. We remained in Louisville until the evening of the 30th when we were marched down to the river & carried across to Jefferson Indiana to take the cars to Indianapolis & thence to Camp Chase Ohio. The citizens of Louis(ville) manifested the greatest sympathy for us, many of the ladies shedding tears as we passed through the streets. Crowds of them collected on every corner, pitching socks, money & clothing over the heads of the guards into our midst, although it was against orders for the citizens of any place through which prisoners might pass to give them any countenance or aid.

We fared pretty well on the route from Louisville to Camp Chase; with one exception, our very gentlemanly guards robbed (us) of everything that we could not conceal from them. Parties would go from one end of the train to the other searching every prisoner on board. I had twelve & a half Dollars in gold and silver, five were taken from me, the balance I hid in my sock & thus saved it. We arrived at Camp Chase on the 3d of January 1865 & were admitted into the pen on the morning of the 4th after another diligent search. All knives & every article that could in any way aid us to escape were taken from us.

Camp Chase was used as a camp of instruction for their new levies as well as a military prison. Its walls enclosed about forty acres of ground—about six or seven of these forty were surrounded with palisades & divided into three different pens for the use of the rebels. Two for privates & one for officers. The largest prison was filled with five thousands rebs & covered three acres. The other two had about 4 thousand making a total of nine thousand men. The prisoners were quartered in long barracks about two hundred & fifty men to each barrack.

These barracks were warmed with three stoves, & as we generally had wood enough, they were kept warm and comfortable. The sleeping accomodations consisted of a row of bunks down each side of the house three tiers high leaving a passage in the center.

Our food consisted of Baker's bread or hard tack, about 10 ounces each day, & about six ounces of beef, pickled & fresh alternately. Attached to each barrack was a kitchen in which detailed cooks prepared the food for the different messes. We had no guards inside the prison but they were posted on a platform extending around the Pallisades which enclosed the pens. Each sentinel was armed with a colts six shooting repeater besides his musket.

Two seargeants called the roll every day—two others called out the letters—these with officers in command & their orderlies were the only persons admitted in the prison. The Commissary Seargeant & Doctor were Rebs. Each Barrack was regulated by a rebel seargeant, & each mess by one of (our) no (number) elected to the office—besides there was a Kitchen Sgt. who watched over the cooks & saw that the men received all that was issued to them.

Our Co was quartered in Barrack 18, Prison 3. We had members enough by taking all of our Regt to make a mess, Mike Lawler being elected head of (our) mess. We found a good many acquaintances among the men (?) Bob Hope and Billy (?).