

CIVIL WAR EXPERIENCES OF JESSE COX

[From an Interview on his ninetieth birthday, October 26, 1934 and reprinted in Mountain Grove Journal, June 1, 1939]

I was born in Blunt County, Tennessee, October 26, 1844 at which place I lived till eight years of age.

In 1852 my mother, sister and myself, father having died before I could remember, started to Missouri. We came by boat down the Tennessee River to the Ohio, down the Ohio to the Mississippi, up the Mississippi to the mouth of the Missouri, up the Missouri to the mouth of the Osage, up the Osage to the mouth of Lynn Creek---now the site of Camdenton. From this point we traveled in a wagon drawn by oxen to Hartville, where we remained a short time before coming to Dry Creek, now in Douglas county but which was then a part of Ozark.

My mother had by this time married again and my step-father had taken up a claim on Puncheon Camp. There were only trails for roads and our claim was uncleared. We cleared the land and made all the suitable timber into rails which were hauled on an ox-draw wooden sled to the place where they were to be used for building fence. The newly cleared ground was plowed with large wooden plows, some of which oftentimes required seven yoke of oxen and two drivers to get them through the rooty ground. Oxen also pulled whatever tools that might be used in the entire cultivation of the crop.

Money was very scarce and the little there was came largely from the lumber industry of the country. Logs were cut and hauled on an ox wagon to the most conveniently located mill where they were sawed on the shares. The mill owner usually took one-half the lumber as pay for the sawing and the other was given to the logger who loaded it on his ox wagon and hauled it to market---Springfield, Marshfield, or Bolivar.

Schools were almost unknown. The only ones I ever attended were subscription, being only three or four weeks in length and taught by poorly qualified teachers. Since the general farm work and the short terms of school failed to keep me busy the entire year, I had some time for other things. As hunting was great sport and almost a necessity in those days I quite naturally took it up very young. When a very small boy I had so extensively hunted through the woods that I very well knew the lay of the immediate country. Later when I was assigned scout duties in the army I found this knowledge of almost inestimable value.

When I was sixteen years of age the Civil War broke out and I joined the home

guards, summer of 1861, but these were driven out of the settlement in a short time. Some few weeks later two other boys and myself who were sick at the time the guards had been routed, were put on horses and taken by a friend to a point about ten miles away and set loose. Since each of us had a small bag of provisions it was possible for us to travel to Rolla a distance of one hundred ten miles without being seen often. We made the distance in good time but traveled both night and day. When we reached Rolla we found our old home guards and rejoined; however, they by this time had become a part of Phelps' Regiment and was training preparatory to joining Curtis who had been ordered to retake Springfield. Springfield had fallen into the hands of southern men after General Lyons had been killed and his army defeated in the battle of Wilson Creek, August 10, 1861.

Springfield was reached and Price (Southern General) put to such speedy flight that only with difficulty could the army of Curtis keep close enough to deal him any injury. Price continued his flight to a point near Van Buren on the south side of the Boston Mountains where he was reinforced by Van Dorn, McIntosh and McCullough. Reinforced, Price started north to meet Curtis who had followed him as far south as Cross Hollers but which by this time had fallen back to Elk Horn Tavern. With a considerable degree of strategy Price rounded Curtis's men and attacked them from the rear where most of the recruits were raw men. Here the Pea Ridge Battle waged stubbornly for two days, March 6-7, 1862, at the end of which the Price men fell back.

On July 9, 1862 I reenlisted in the Eighth Missouri Cavalry. We marched into Arkansas and our first engagement with the southern army was when we met Price at Prairie Grove. General Herndon, later joined by General Blunt, so hotly entertained Price that he left during the night.

After the above mentioned battle we were ordered by the way of Mountain Grove (then a railroadless town consisting of the Old Academy, a store, blacksmith shop and the Post Office) to a place twelve miles south of Rolla called Blue Springs. We were stationed here only a short time when we were ordered and forced Price to retreat across the St. Francis River at Chalk Bluff. We returned from there to our Blue Spring Camp and upon being issued new rifles were ordered to march out on South. We reached and crossed White River at Clarendon and marched out on Grand Prairie where we once more met General Price. We chased him to the vicinity of Brownsville and here in a muddy bottom near a miry crossing of Byometer Creek he made a desperate stand. After three days of scrimmage we had advanced only six miles. After finally dislodging Price we followed him on to a point on White River ten miles below Little Rock. Here as at the other river crossing he defied our crossing. This time so successfully that we were obliged to follow a guide who piloted us to another crossing and here we were able to cross after three hours of hard

fighting. Next morning after having camped just outside Little Rock we marched on into the place only to find that it had been evacuated and Price en route to Hot Springs. We followed him, the result of which was almost a continuous day's fighting between our advance and his rear guards.

We returned to Little Rock and was there ordered back to Brownsville to guard the railroad and supply station. While stationed here we spent most of our time scouting and patrolling the country to prevent a surprise attack and possible destruction of the supply base.

Later we were sent to Default's Bluff on White River to protect the supplies there from the southern General Shelby, who had laid plans to capture it, and then join Price who was now coming north to make his Missouri Raid. Shelby sank a gun boat but unable to do more joined Price and accompanied him on his "Raid Though Missouri." However Shelby later returned and attacked Ashley Station (Post Office Lone Oak) nearby. At this time we were assigned the task of capturing Camdenton but when we reached the place we found the fort blown up and evacuated. I remained in the army another year but nothing very different from the above described incidents happened.

On July 20, 1865 I was discharged in St. Louis with four years of Army service to my credit, three years of which I had been commissioned a corporal.

I am proud of my service in the army despite the fact that many times I found myself uncomfortably pressed by the enemy. Some of these circumstances were such that lightning swift speed seemed the only means of escape. I wish here to inform you that when one of these critical moments came, I have never been accused of being the hind-most man in the race.

In 1869 four years after I was discharged from the army I was married on January 31st to Martha Alsup, daughter of Captain M. L. Alsup. We raised a family of nine children, namely: Locke, Shelby, Johnny, Austin, Oscar and Argus Cox; Eliza Cox Irwin, Pearl Cox Rambo and Odessa Cox Nash. All the children were born in the Denlow vicinity with the exception of Austin, who was born in northwest Texas in a dugout.

This was written October 26, 1934 my ninetieth birthday. I am in good health and attribute this fact largely to the simple health habits which I have tried to follow throughout my life. I have never used any intoxicant, and have never used tobacco of any form. When circumstances would permit I went to bed and arose reasonable early. I avoid worry as much as possible and take plenty of exercise. I never take medicine unless extremely necessary. I enjoy reading and conversing with my friends. I lived on a farm all my life until the death of my wife, August 17, 1926, after

which time I have made my home with my children.

Converted to PDF format February 13, 2015