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Personal Recollections of General George H. Thomas and Some Others by Geo O. Ward.

George H. Thomas is like some classic character of ancient history whose deeds and words have wonderfully moral mankind, but concerning whom little is known except those deeds and words.

I said to him yesterday at Chautauqua in a public lecture: "Robert E. Lee was a great General; he gave a race to all the commandere in the east from McClellan through Burnside, Hooker, Meade, Pope on to Grant, and was much trusted by his new Government and more so by the Confederates under his command. Stonewall Jackson, too, a strong Christian character was much beloved by his soldiers and by his fellow Officers, just so; but the Civil War did not furnish from Virginia a greater man or a better General than George H. Thomas. He was indeed from youth to manhood and from manhood to the end of his remarkable career a stately man, sans peur et
sans reproche, a virtuous chevalier of honor where the motto in his heart was evident to all who had to do with him, namely, noblesse oblige under all circumstances.

Here is an incident of his youth that will interest comrades of the war. "The notion came to me while I was thinking of mechanical constructions to make a saddle. Every day I went to the saddle shop and watched the operatives. I saw how each part was cut out and prepared, and how the parts were put together. I then went home and experimented, in time succeeding in completing a saddle."

Another time closely observing a cabinet maker and trying his hand he acquired skill in that trade. Without being a professional he soon found that he had ability to make from leather, wood, and the various serviceable articles, but he thought himself that the best result from this practical work was what our old Professor Mahan used to call "common sense," to wit, a habit of close observation.
Everybody knew that Thomas graduated from West Point. What Ben Butter said of another officer, General Heitzel, an engineer officer, "He was a man whom West Point could not spoil," was eminently true of Thomas. His career before the war was distinguished and he was surely intended to be no cipher in the new chosen profession in pecuniary times; for the southern leaders, who of course did not know in the outset all the future. An Act of Congress added four new regiments to the army—one of cavalry. The Second Cavalry, as created by the law, had in the beginning a remarkable body of officers. Just think of it! For Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston; for Lieutenant-Colonel Robert E. Lee; for Schanen Major W. G. Hardee, and for junior Major George H. Thomas! The firm first went into the Confederacy so that it came to pass in a brief space of time that Thomas secured in his chin and in his breast by ugly wounds, became almost at the opening of the Civil War the Colonel of his regiment.

The last of June, 1861, the Second 1st Judge, the Hon. John Sherman, made a visit to a camp on the upper Stone.
and a graphic description of how he found his brother, Wm. Tecumseh, and George H. Thomas down on their knees studying the maps of the neighborhood on both sides of the Potomac. He studied everything that concerned his profession with thoroughness and avidity, and this made him remarkable for his positive judgment.

Sherman was quick to take in a map or a territory, but Thomas excelled in discerning all there was to know and particularly where his enemy was and what he was intending to do.

Singularly enough the 2d day of July, the date of the Battle of Falling Waters pitted these two Virginians against each other, namely Stonewall Jackson and George H. Thomas. They here received their first baptism of fire. Fire met fire—Thomas conscientiously fighting for his whole country and Jackson equally sincere, doing his best for an anticipated fragment thereof.

Naturally enough, Thomas' loyalty to the Union was suspected before that battle and even after that many tongues said bitter things—many on both sides.
General Robert Anderson, the hero of Fort Sumter, was to have a command on the Ohio. It was the army that finally grew into the Army of the Cumberland. After his name was mentioned he hastened to see Scott and Lincoln. He already had a promise of Sherman for a subordinate. "Grant me," he said, "a great favor. I want Thomas." Being asked by somebody in the presence of Lincoln if Thomas could be trusted, Anderson replied, "Yes, I will guarantee his loyalty with my life!"

So he went out to Kentucky in August 1861, a Brigadier General, and took charge of a great camp called "Jack Robinson." One might denominate it a bancher of armies. Think of the hundreds of regiments that went in to that camp to come out brigades and divisions. Fairly well instructed and supplied, ambitious Thomas did show a little spirit in his steady, strong, grim and deliberate work where he was bringing order out of confusion. He declined to put and down to be placed under the command of a junior, and Sherman managed generously to
send off all the great men who came from Washington to supersede him. Till Thomas had a field division already ready and mobilized.

Think of the good news that came to us the 19th of January, 1862, when things were dark and good tidings infrequent. It was the Battle of Mill Springs. A thing hard to do. Thomas concentrated his forces straight in front of his enemy, the famous General Crittenden who had about as many men as Thomas himself. Jollietoffner was the real field commander. The Battle was severe lasting two days. Thomas increasing in spirit and determination all the while. The Confederates were badly beaten. Jollietoffner slain and the entire opposing field in front of Thomas' position was broken up and driven across the Cumberland. The news was refreshing to the country but for some reason our loyal Virginian was not even mentioned in the War Department dispatches and received no thanks.

It takes time for jealmey, ambition and calumny to commit themselves; but time is long and justice never dies! The country knew George H. Thomas after that victory.
Thomas, influence on men gave a sort of magnetism. It was greater than could be explained. Some word to indicate Father was always applied to him. He was a father to his soldiers. He had some hobbies—one was order. I think he had eaten and digested this phrase in his Essay on Man: "Order is Heaven's first law." One hobby was that soldiers should ride their horses, except in a charge, or when on orderly duty at a fast walk. Sometimes he seemed to have more compassion for the horse and the mule than for many men.

Another hobby was to have arms and equipment complete and clean. Another was sufficiency of supply, thought out beforehand and ready for work. Then his tools were once in order; he was not reluctant nor slow, as some people said, to use them.

Thomas always showed steadiness in habit of life. He weighed some two hundred and thirty pounds and had frame enough to carry the weight. He planted his foot squarely on the ground. His gait, unmonkeyed, and in mental operations, his steadiness and firmness were characteristic. His lord deliberation and would have made just the kind of a man for the Supreme Court.
v. e. a solid judge. He would not hasten his decisions unless forced by the enemy to do so. As he belonged to the artillery he
enjoyed being near the cannon in action, and seemed to grow clear-headed and often animated when directing the part
that batteries were to play on a disputed field. He adhered to an principle, a principle,
his undertaking once begun, to an
opinion once formed or a decision once
made with wonderful infailing tenacity.
So, we found that the troops he trained
portray largely of his characteristics.
They had steadiness of movement, persisting
in march, firmness of stand and hence,
attained great reliability in battle.
It is one of the old stories that during
Thomas’s sleep after he had worked so nobly
and successfully in managing his part of
the force at Stone River, Hoke came awakened
him and put the imperious question “General
Thomas, will you protect the rear during
a rear retreat to O Dmitell’s Creek?” Thomas,
this half awake in a somberous voice,
with a little gravity I have no doubt, with
solid emphasis made a prompt answer.
"This army can't retreat." After that he fell asleep and the army did not retreat but the Confederates did. A few hours before that object he had brought his division out of such misleading field and as strongly established in a new and reliable line that he was determined both for himself and for his commander never to give up their position. This time Rosser and I ran him out from him. Thomas stand at Chickamauga near the Grandgrass Hill is too well known to have repetition. He did stand there. He did gather around him those who are sensible enough to remain with him and he really did, by his personal charm and influence, over his men, save the Army of the Cumberland from destruction or surrender. This is my judgment, therefore I do not wonder that he was called 'em after "The Rock Chickamauga.'

Van Horn gives eloquent on his beloved commander when he says: "To take command of half the army with no supporting cavalry, with exposed flanks and mounted lines to be supreme on the field by the demands of the situation rather than by the order..."
of a superior and under such circumstances to contend successfully against Bragg’s army... was an achievement that transcends the higher successes of generals.

The War Department began to wake up and the great War Secretary, Edwin M. Stanton, began to recognize Thomas’ merit and steadily grew more interested. Notice these notes to his assistant secretary at Nashville, pregnant with appreciation and recognition. “The merits of General Thomas and the debt of gratitude the Nation owes to his valor and skill are fully appreciated here; and I wish you to tell him so. It is not my fault that he was not in chief command months ago.”

The next month after that good dispatch on the 16th of October, 1863, Thomas was put in command of the Army of the Cumberland. Rosecrans was no cipher as his war history will show, but it was a wise move on the part of the Government for various reasons which we will leave it to the historian to trace out to change commanders as was done.
The situation at that time was by no means delightful, but with Thursday at Chattanooga and Grant set off on the three western armies so that the three could cooperate and be made when necessary to fight together daylight began to appear. And while hope of relief from the threatened disaster became unsolved, Grant telegraphed Thomas: "Hold Chattanooga." Thomas replied at once: "Will hold Chattanooga till we starve." The Army of the Cumberland thin in flesh, feeding on parched corn, and slender in waist charred Thomas' decision and strongly backed up his terse resolution to resist. It was not long before Grant himself with Thomas and their capital engineer, Baldy Smith were riding together from hill to hill about Chattanooga and on the Moccasin Point to catch a view of Brum's Ferry. The result of this conference and ride will now appear. It will show how starvation went out and abundance came in.

Grant ordered Hooker to push forward cope and Georgia division from Bridgeport twenty-eight miles forward to Rosert Valley. Thomas
sent two brigades from Chattanooga to meet 
Harker on the south side of Bridge Ferry near 
the foot of the same valley. The sudden 
right fight that came on at Manchester 
seemed and sealed the short head-line 
and Thomas' hungry soldiers were glad. 
For the plan of this movement Grant 
generally gave to Thomas the whole credit.
He telegraphed from Washington he complained 
he paid him; to wit, "Thomas' plan for 
securing the river and the South Side road 
hence to Bridgeport has proved eminently 
successful. Grant himself was always 
strong and fearless to strike the match 
whosoever had made it and he was always 
too just to take to himself the credit of 
another.

Our work among the Chattanooga hills 
was indeed well planned and quickly 
executed. General Thomas had the satisfaction 
to see his soldiers pass in double time 
from dismay to confidence, from maulers 
to strength, from a rough valley siege to 
ridge top and mountain victories. This 
was the sort after Grant and Thomas 
took in the situation where Bragg's lofty
flags and alarming cannon were in plain view. The battle of Missionary Ridge, the 23rd of December, followed by the march of Sherman and myself to Knoxville wound up the series of superintending fine shape for the Union cause. The part Thomas played in the business is part of our history. Mark his judgment in council, his help in refitting, his disposition of forces and his choice of re-enforcements, in brief his energetic support of our great commander was thorough and happy.

First, Braxton Bragg was defeated and fled. Next Knoxville was relieved. All the ground was cleared of the enemy as far as Dalton, Ga., so that the troops spent the months of 63 and 64 with safety, in comparative ease and contentment in the vicinity of Chattanooga.

Thomas was Sherman’s wheel horse when he advanced upon Dalton in May 64. He bore the brunt of the skirmishes, combats, and battles till we neared Atlanta and resisted with tremendous energy and succeed the first onslaught of Hood at Peach Tree Creek the 20th of July. Strongly, onward.
mycomplaining, Thomas had pounded for
Johnston's center so hard every day that he
enabled Schenfield or my Sherman to play
upon the Confederate flanks; first
one flank and then the other, and Johnston
was obliged to keep his center there in
force to be pounded.

The first of September at Jonesboro
General Thomas brought up his troops and
put them into action on the left of my
command. For a time the battle was so
exciting that Thomas' stout horse, which
hated to trot when laden with two
hundred and thirty pounds, actually
roused himself to a gallop, while his
master was furious at several stupid
officers who had failed to comprehend
the situation and secure a larger
mead. A victory.

Thomas went back to Nashville when
Sloven, Kilpatrick and myself under
Sherman's immediate eye set out for
the sea. It required Schenfield's fierce
battle near Franklin to check Hood and
give Thomas time to organize the scattered
fragments that were coming to him from.
I don't really know what to write. I'm feeling a little bit lost. I've been thinking a lot about my future, but I'm not sure what I want to do. I feel like I'm just going through the motions, going to school and doing my homework, but I don't feel like I'm really learning anything. I feel like I'm just existing, not living. I don't know why I feel this way, it's like a weight on my shoulders. I wish I could just figure things out, but I feel like I'm stuck in a rut.

I don't want to feel this way, but I don't know how to change it. I've tried talking to my friends, but they're doing well and I feel like a burden. I wish I could just be happy, but I can't seem to find the joy in anything. I feel like I'm just waiting for something to happen, but I don't know what it is.

I wish I could just figure things out, but I don't know how. I feel like I'm just existing, not living. I wish I could just be happy, but I can't seem to find the joy in anything. I feel like I'm just waiting for something to happen, but I don't know what it is.
the four winds. At last all was ready. Hood and Thomas were fairly well instructed. The cold and ice caused delay. Impatience of authorities delayed Thomas till his sensitive heart was bleeding, he would retire from his command. But he would not attack till his army and nature were ready. Then he did attack with a terrible vehemence. Hood’s army was scattered. It was in fragments. It was mucked against the Rock of Chickamanga.

There was no commander that was more acceptable to me than General Thomas. His smile of welcome was always pleasant and cordial. Then I went from him into battle his words of confidence remained in my memory and quickened my action. If I succeeded I received his commendation. If my attack was repulsed he quickly discerned the cause. Some commanders would blame a subordinate to shield themselves. This Thomas never did.

He was a great General, and much and much beloved.

August 20 1900

Oliver Otto Howard

Maj.-Gen. Recl.