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## Philip Whitlock, "Richmond Grays"

*MP*  
"The Life of Philip Whitlock, Written by Himself", courtesy *Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives Trust*, Richmond, VA. Used with permission.

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*Photo*

The "Richmond Grays" at Harpers Ferry, December, 1859. Philip Whitlock is in the top row, on the extreme right. Photograph courtesy of The Valentine Museum. Used with permission.

It is not my intention to write history, for many others have done that, but merely want to mention such matters that I was directly connected with. John Brown was condemned to be hung in December by the court that met in the city of Charlestown, Jefferson County, now W. Va. There was a rumor that a party was organizing in the North to rescue John Brown; therefore, the Governor again called out the State Militia to go.

The 1st Regiment assembled on Broad St. near the depot, which was then on the corner of 8th where the old Bijou now stands--that was one Saturday night about the 1st of December, in the year 1859. Many of us were surprised to see John Wilkes Booth, who was then acting in the Marshall Theatre, in a Richmond Gray uniform. We afterwards were informed that he joined the Company in order to go along with us. He is the same John Wilkes Booth who shot Abe Lincoln just after the way. We got to Charlestown and there we met a great many soldiers from the whole State of Virginia. Among them were many who have made History

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since: General Lee, J.E.B. Stewart, and many others.

We staid there three weeks until he was hung, in which our company was present as a Body Guard, being about 30 feet from the gallows. John Wilkes Booth, being about the same height as I, was right next to me in rank. When the drop fell, I noticed that he got very pale, and I called his attention to it. He said that he felt very faint and that he would give anything for a good drink of whiskey. Of course, he did not get it then. We stayed in Charlestown about three weeks and then returned to Richmond.

Just about six months previous to this time I took out citizens papers. I then felt that I had accomplished something by becoming a citizen of this great and glorious country where a man is a man and where a man has the opportunity to elevate himself by helping himself by his own exertion which I tried my best to do in spending my leisure time in reading all the standard novels and books of information that I could procure and by visiting the Theatre where at that time they played very instructive plays. The Stock Company included some of the very best actors that our country has produced; for instance, Joseph Jefferson, Edwin Adams, George C. Boniface, and John Wilkes Booth were in that Company. The stars that played here were: Edwin Booth, Barney Williams, Maggie Mitchel, Charlotte Coleman, and many others. I was very fond of Shakespeare's plays which I rarely missed, and Hamlet was my favorite. This will appear to some that I was extravagant, but the cost was not so great as I did not go in the pitt which was 50¢ but in the gallery which only cost 25¢. The highest price seat was then 75¢.

That was about all the expense that I had except that sometimes and that was very seldom I would participate in a game of pool. I played not a single game of cards, for I had no time as I kept at my work and saved some money which was in the hands of my brother Herman who needed it in the business. I then had about \$500.00 and was contemplating in a year or so to go into the merchant tailoring business for myself or get a partnership with my brother.

[...]

We stayed at the camp the entire Winter, and it got to be very monotonous as several battles were fought in which we did not participate. Some of the boys were much dissatisfied and were continually murmuring. In fact, at one time a petition was circulated for signatures to have our Company transferred again to the 1st Va. Regiment who were then with General Lee's forces fighting the Union Army, but this was not successful. As far as I was concerned, I was not very anxious to go to the front, as they called it. While I realized that I was a soldier whose business it was to fight if that was his profession, I knew that that was not mine. Although I was willing to be a citizen, and was very proud of it and would no doubt fight as well as anyone, I was not one of those who were spoiling for a fight. Considering the circumstances I was willing to remain where we were until the War was over, for as I said before, the duties were light and we had some diversion as we very often went to Norfolk where we were very kindly received by the people we visited. I never went to Norfolk that I did not go to the Umstaters as they were very kind and hospitable. They generally had lots of company, especially at night. Several young ladies who were very

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good singers, and one young man named Charlie Myers, about 14 years old, who was a fine violin player. We often danced by their music, and played parlor games. (Charlie Myers is still living in Norfolk--1909).

Still, with all this, the life did not suit me, as I stated before that I was very ambitious, and I did not see any chance to improve my condition. The profession of soldier was not to my taste, for I never had any idea of even becoming an officer as there were so many that knew more about military than I did. So there was no chance for me. And, as in the way the matter looked to me there was no chance for the cause that we were contending for to succeed; for in the Spring of 1862 there were several battles fought which were disastrous, especially on the Mississippi River. New Orleans was captured and several other strongholds were taken by the United States forces. The Confederate cause was getting weaker and weaker day by day. I could see that there was no chance, as their force was getting stronger, for they had the whole world from which to recruit. Our money was depreciating, so that everything was getting very high: meat was selling at \$20.00 per lb.; flour, \$500.00 per barrel; sugar, \$50.00 per lb.; and coffee about \$30.00 per lb. The result was that I was thinking about getting out, honorably if possible. I wrote to brother to try and get me a substitute, for I knew there were several in our Company that got substitutes; but it seems that they were so high [priced] that I did not have money enough to get one.

We stayed in Norfolk until the middle of May, 1862, when the place had to be evacuated by our enemy, as the Union forces were drawing around us.

We packed up and were ordered to march to Suffolk, which we did; and it was a very hard one. From there we got to Petersburg that night by train, but that day knocked me out, and I was taken sick and laid out in camp that night outside of Petersburg. The next day I was sent to Richmond where I stayed for a few days. While in Richmond, my brother got me a discharge from General Winder who was then an authority in the Government, and I was advised to go to the country to recuperate. I stayed in the country for two weeks, and in the meantime the Seven Days battle, which is known as the battle of Seven Pines, took place. After this I received notice to return to the army, as the discharge I had was not good, and if I did not report at a certain time, I would be tried as a deserter from the army. Under these circumstances I returned home and reported to my Company which was then in the field in a camp about five miles from Richmond; but after being with them for a few days I was taken with some kind of a fever and sent to the hospital in camp. From there, through the activity and intercedence of my brother, Herman, and of my present brother-in-law, Ellis Abram, I was transferred to the Chimborazo Hospital in this city. Through the kindness of Dr. Smith, who had charge of the hospital, I was taken to my brother's house which was then on the North East corner of Broad and Nineteenth St.

Dr. Smith, who attended me in my sickness, gave me a recommendation to the Secretary of War for a detail in the Clothing Bureau or Quartermaster Department, which I obtained for 30 days. As soon as I got better, I reported for duty to the office on the corner of 14th and Cary. This detail I had renewed from time to time; but I had to report to the Doctor every

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thirty days, and I was liable to be sent to the front (as it was called) at any time. By being friendly with the Doctor, it was managed that I got an extension every time I reported and I was assigned to my work again. The duties were not so hard as I could go to work at about 9 o'clock in the morning and quit at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The pay was about three dollars per day which did not pay my expenses, but I did some speculating in merchandise by buying at Auction and selling again.

About March, 1863, I got a furlough for 30 days and, instead of going to the country, I and Ellis Abram, concluded to run the blockade North in order to get some goods that were very high and scarce here and so we could sell them at a large profit. With that intent we got some money that could be exchanged and started away from Richmond, expecting to return in 30 days. We got to a place on the Potomac River where we had to wait for sometime until we could get a boat to carry us across. We met several others who joined us and after considerable trouble we got a colored man who owned a row boat to take us across. This trip entailed a great risk of being captured as the River was picketed by Gun Boats. When we got about half way, we encountered one of these boats and the man who was rowing the boat got scared and wanted to return. One of our party drew a pistol and threatened to shoot him if he was persistent in his intent to return. We being six to one, the man then doubled his energy and got us across, but he did not land the boat on shore so we had to wade knee deep in the water to reach the shore. This was a very dangerous experience as there was quite a strong wind blowing that night and it was very dark. The oars which we used were muffled so that we could not be heard on the Gun Boat that we passed about 200 yards from. There were no search lights in those days. The boat we were in was half full of water before we got to shore and would have sunk if three of us had not been continually bailing the water out.

We landed on a bleak shore in Maryland about six miles from a place called Leonardtown. We walked for about a mile until we saw a light which we reached and found it to be a kitchen of a Farm House. The cook, a black one, was getting breakfast ready. We knocked at the door which scared the old cook, but we told her who we were. She said that we were very lucky not to have arrived a little sooner as the Yankee Cavalry had been there a little while ago and they would have captured us. The cook woke up the proprietor and he got his team ready which was a regular carriage. We all crowded into it and drove to Leonardtown where we arrived about day break. We went to the Hotel where we got breakfast and made arrangements to get a team to drive us to a R.R. Station about five miles from the place. From there we took a train to Washington D.C.

On that evening we went to the Metropolitan Hotel and registering under an assumed name we were assigned to a room. The Hotel was very crowded at that time and we found ourselves among the Union soldiers and officers. We could not get a room to ourselves, that is my brother-in-law Ellis Abram and myself. (The other four had left us as it was dangerous for so many to keep together). We were given a cot in a large room to sleep in which contained many more cots. The soldiers were coming in to sleep any hour of the night and talking very loud and cursing the "Dam Rebels" not knowing that there were two among

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them trying to get some sleep for the first time in 24 hours. However, we managed to get some sleep and left the next morning by train for New York.

I stayed in New York for nearly a week and bought such goods as we could carry along with us in handbags, as there was no way that we could carry a trunk. However, no matter what we bought, we could make a profit from the fact that all kinds of goods were very scarce and Confederate money was plentiful. So we bought such things as fine tooth combs, silk handkerchiefs, tobacco pipes, pins, needles, pencils, and a great many other things that I cannot enumerate now. After we spent all of our money, we started back, of course to Washington. There was no trouble as we got on the train in New Jersey and we were not molested. We arrived in Washington all right, but from there to cross the line came the rub. We had to keep very quiet and be very careful as we did not know anyone that we could confide in, as we had heard that the Government detectives were very active and that many who were engaged in the same business were caught and put in jail.

However, we some way found out how to go and hired a carriage to Surratsville (named after the same party that was accused later on in participating in the assassination of President Lincoln). We took our satchels and handbags, covered them over with our laprobes, and started away from Washington at about 10 o'clock in the morning. We drove about two miles, then got to a bridge which was guarded by a soldier who stopped us asking for passes which we did not have. The hack driver told the sentinel that he was taking us to Surratsville to attend a wedding and that we did not have time to get a pass. He called the corporal of the guard, and kept us waiting for some time with fear and anxiety. We were questioned by the officer when he came, and after a long parley in which we promised that we would return that night and after giving him our names, he let us proceed. We got to Surratsville about two o'clock and stopped at "Mrs. Surrat's" who kept a sort of tavern and barroom. Here we had dinner and sent the carriage back. We hired another team which was to take us to a place on the Potomac River called Chaptigo, and we were to start about 6 o'clock. In the meantime we amused ourselves shooting at a mark for drinks, in which joined a son of Mrs. Surrat (the same that was accused in being implicated in the murder of President Lincoln). That evening we left and got to our destination late in the night. We had the name of a man who lived there who was to see us through to the Potomac. When he met us, he was very excited owing to the fact that there were soldiers watching him who were on the lookout for such fellows as we were. He hurried us to a barn about 200 yards away from the house, way in the field, which was already occupied by several others that were blockade runners.

We spent the night in great fear of being captured. In the morning the man came to see us and brought us something to eat and said that the soldiers were still there and that we should not go outside of the barn. We stayed in the barn and made ourselves as comfortable as possible. the barn was stocked with corn and tobacco. We had one man among us who knew how to make cigars, which he did out of the tobacco. We ate and smoked day after day for about two weeks, until one day the soldiers left the neighborhood and we came out of the barn to the house. There were six of us. I don't recollect all their names, but one was Haas,

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who is now living in Atlanta and has been very successful in business.

In the course of time we hired an oxcart to carry our baggage and started on our way to cross the Potomac. We did this during one night and landed on the Virginia side somewhere near Milford on the R.F. & P. R.R. where we were arrested by a captain of the Confederate Army. We were taken to Headquarters and after being put through an examination, we were discharged. But when we got our satchels and handbags we found that the contents had been rifled and about one half of our goods was gone. Of course, we could not make any complaint, as it would have been useless and it would probably have gotten us into trouble.

However, we got home safe and sold the rest of the goods that we brought home. We just got out about even on the whole affair.

My brother-in-law, Ellis Abram, thought that he would try again by himself. He went over the lines again alone, but he was caught by the Federal forces and taken prisoner and sent to Washington where they kept him for nearly nine months. After they released him, he went West and did not return until the war was over.

I again assumed my position in the Quartermaster Department, but I had a hard time staying there, owing to the fact that the Government wanted every able-bodied man in the field. I had to report to the doctor nearly every month. But my Dr. was my friend for a certain reason, and because of this he invariably extended my detail. In that way, I managed to keep my place.

I often thought what desperate chances a young man would take which he would hardly undertake when at a mature age. For I consider that the incident of the trip or the running of the blockade was one of the most dangerous undertaking that I ever went into. Not alone that I risked my life in doing that, but as I was under military control, I was liable to be Court Marshalled for desertion; and I could have been arrested on the other side and treated as a Confederate spy. However, I was very lucky that my employer, Captain O.F. Wisiger, whom I informed when I returned, did not take any notice of that incident.

The following summer there were many battles fought with varying success. Many men were called to go to the front and it looked as if every one would have to go into the field. For that reason a great many who thought that the South could not win owing to the great hardship that the people suffered from the want of provisions and clothing: meat sold at \$25.00 per lb., flour at \$800.00 a barrel, coffee and sugar at \$50.00 per lb., and the other necessities of life in proportion; and those who could get away ran the blockade to the other side. My brother, Herman, made up his mind to leave and take his family with him. As his wife's sister, Eva, lived with him and I was waiting on her, he thought best that I should marry her before he left. So, this matter was settled and we got married on November 17th in the year 1863 at my brother's house on the corner of 19th and Broad; George Jacobs of the Congregation Beth Sholem officiating. We made our home with my brother for a little while.

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