

GEN. PHIL KEARNY'S BUGLER

STORY OF GUS SCHÜRMAN'S EVOLUTION
FROM BOOTBLACK TO PRESIDENT'S
SON'S COMPANION

BY A SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

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BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The pride of the First Division, Third Army Corps, was a drummer boy, named Gus Schurman. He is believed to be the youngest enlisted soldier of the Union Army alive to-day. Wherever veterans of the famous Red Diamond Patch foregather this boy—now a thoughtful, gray-haired man of fifty—is met with a wondrous cheering and accorded the seat of honor.

The story of Gus Schurman's evolution from a New York boot-black to companion of President Lincoln's son Tad in the White House is a bewitching gem of war narrative—the more interesting because of its historic accuracy. It is vouched for by documents in Mr. Schurman's possession, by the testimony of the surviving members of the Fortieth New York Regiment and by that of well-known veterans such as Gen. Daniel E. Sickles, who visited the White House at the period in question and was instrumental in having the drummer boy sent there. Mr. Schurman is now employed at the Custom House in New York, and is prominent in Grand Army Affairs.

In the early part of '61 Gus Schurman was drumming recruits in Chatham Square, to which honor he had arrived after vigorous training for two years at the Turnverein Hall in Orchard Street. His family being poor, Gus had left school and began to earn his living by working in a saw mill on Center Street, the boss there being Mr. Block, now proprietor of the Congressional Hotel at Washington. When work was slack Gus took his station at City Hall Park with box and brush and competed with the bootblack brigade at three cents a shine. In the Turnverein Hall he learned to drum so well that when war broke out he was taken into the Forty-second New York (Tammany Regiment). Being ill-treated there,

he applied to the Fortieth, of which his father was a member, and over which Mr. Gilder, father of Richard Watson Gilder, was chaplain.

"Couldn't think of it," said Col. Riley. "You're too young!" Schurman was only eleven then. When the colonel said "no," he relates, "I began to cry and turned away from the tent, but my father went and spoke to Col. Riley, when he called me back and made me take a drum. All the men began to laugh because the drum was nearly as big as myself, but nevertheless the colonel said I would do, and I guess in all the world at that moment there was no one as happy as I."

The Fortieth, known as Mozart, left Yonkers for Washington on July 4. Though they did not get to Bull Run, they witnessed the retreat, and through the battles at Seven Pines, Malvern Hill and all the skirmishes of that disastrous peninsular campaign, the Fortieth braves bore an important part until finally the Northerners' retreat turned into mad flight.

Fighting Phil's Boy Orderly.

Schurman's chance to distinguish himself came sooner than he expected, however, and in a most unusual way. It was at Harrison's Landing and Gen. McClellan had set a day to review the army. Gen. Phil Kearny, commanding the First Division, called for a drummer boy to act as his orderly for the occasion, and Corp. Brown, staff clerk, picked out Gus. This in itself was an honor, for Fighting Phil Kearny was the idol of the army. Mounted on his powerful gray charger Moscow, seated firm as a Centaur, holding the reins in the stump of his right arm (a memento of the Mexican War), this true type of chivalric hero carried everything before him in a charge, and inspired his troops with irresistible enthusiasm. He was one of whom it was truly said: "He would rather fight than eat," and the Union Army knew no such other one of reckless valor and indomitable aggression. So strong that at Florence, Italy, he danced through a masque ball clad in eighty pounds of chain armor, he knew no pity for himself physically, and had little sympathy for signs of weakness in others.

This was the man to whom the twelve-year-old drummer boy presented himself and received in turn a kindly word, silver bugle and an immense white horse called Babe, over whose back the lad could scarcely stretch his legs. His previous riding practice had been derived from taking the sutler's horse to water.

Stories of Gen. Kearny.

In the course of the day's maneuvers the staff galloped over a rough field broken by an ugly ravine. Gen. Kearny, being a superb horseman, took this with a mighty bound and looked around to see if his aides were following. Dismayed at the jump, they had all skirted about the ends, all but one. Mounted on the white horse Babe, a stable mate to Kearny's own horse, the mite of a drummer boy might as well have tugged at a railroad train. On and on the great charger came, ears back, nostrils all wide and eyes like coals of fire, to the edge of the precipice, and there rose on her powerful haunches and shot into the air as though to leave earth forever, landing the new orderly pale and almost senseless.

"I slid clear up on Babe's neck," relates Mr. Schurman, "and holding on to one of the charger's ears with a grip that I did not loosen until Gen. Kearny looked at me and smiled grimly. I guess he knew that I would have given half my life to have stopped that brute on the other side, but he said nothing, only when the others rode up, the hairs of his moustache stiffened like the bristles on a cat's tail, which was peculiar to him when angered or disgusted.

"In the evening I reported myself to him so as to return to my regiment, but he said brusquely: 'Go and bring your baggage to my headquarters and consider yourself my orderly in the future.' The jump on Babe seemed to have made me popular with him, and from that day to the day of his death I was ever at his side. My task was not an easy one. In battle Gen. Kearny used my back for a writing desk, scribbling off dispatches and cursing me roundly if I trembled. At the second battle of Bull Run he was writing orders on my knees, I steadying them the while. Minie balls and shells fell all around us, and finally a piece of railroad iron, aimed directly at the general, struck right at his feet and threw dirt in our faces. It made me shake in my boots, but not nearly so much as when he turned and demanded savagely what was the matter. 'Oh, nothing, sir,' I replied, with a gasp, 'only a little frightened, that's all.'

"'Never get frightened—never get frightened at anything,' he growled, as the bristles in his moustache began to rise heavenward."

The tragic death of Fighting Phil at Chantilly was felt by no one more than "Kearny's little bugler," as he was now known throughout the division, and the men made more of a pet of him than ever. The cook of a Maine regiment, camped near by, felt it

his religious duty to feed the lad pancakes every evening for supper and see that his knapsack was ever bloated with crullers. "Many a poor wounded chap," says Mr. Schurman, "I have cheered up with Maine crullers."

Meeting the Lincolns.

Kearny's little bugler served in succession for Gens. Birney, Stoneman and Sickles. He was present at Gettysburg when the latter lost his leg from a solid shot, and it was while with Gen. Sickles at Bell Plains that he fell in with the Lincolns. The President, Mrs. Lincoln and Tad, then ten years old, came down to pay the commanding general a visit and noticed the young orderly strolling about headquarters.

"Who is that child?" asked Mrs. Lincoln of Gen. H. E. Tremaine, chief of staff. "Oh, that's Gus, Kearny's bugle boy," replied the officer, who, at Mrs. Lincoln's request, presented the lad.

"Don't you think it's a shame to have such children in the army, Mr. President?" asked Mrs. Lincoln, with some feeling, but Gen. Sickles interposed. "Why, that boy is a great fighter," he laughed, telling of an incident when the bugler had been nearly shot down by a Union soldier, while aiding Gen. Stillman to rally a Pennsylvania regiment at Antietam. "He was Phil Kearny's boy. You know what that means!"

At that moment Tad Lincoln ran up and the two youngsters were soon chumming it boylike, calling each other "Gus" and "Tad." "As I look back now," says Mr. Schurman, "I can see that I must have been a subject of envy to Tad, for by that time I had become an accomplished horseman, could blow a bugle, beat a drum and swagger in true soldier style. The men had presented me with a roan mustang called Pompey, that had formerly been ridden by Gen. Mosby, the guerilla, and on this I cavorted around until Tad could stand it no longer and persuaded a cavalryman to lend him his mount for a ride. The horse had a sore mouth, however, and in a few moments was galloping wildly with Tad bouncing on its back. When on the point of being thrown I overtook the runaway and saved Tad from a fall. When we returned he told his mother of it, and she said to Gen. Sickles: 'Now you must let him come,' and Mr. Lincoln added, 'Yes, general, we ask it as a favor.'



From an old photograph.

GUSTAV A. SCHÜRMANN.



From an old photograph.

THOMAS LINCOLN.

At the White House.

"My first night at the White House I shall never forget. We kept up our racket until Mrs. Lincoln called us and said that Mr. Lincoln was tired and wanted to rest. As she opened the door of the bed chamber where the President, Mrs. Lincoln and Tad slept, I saw the great gaunt head of 'Abe' Lincoln peeking out from a long white night cap. The President was lying on his back, his hands crossed over his breast, and the picture made an impression on my mind that can never be erased.

"Tad slept in a crib alongside his parents' bed, and after he and I had 'tagged' each other good night, Mrs. Lincoln showed me into the guest chamber. The contrast of this splendor with my humble lodgings of the last year when I had slept for the most part on the soft side of a hard board 'neath a water-soaked tent, was so overwhelming that even now the thought of the guest chamber awes me."

The President's Mild Temper.

Tad was a generous, sweet-tempered but inventive youngster. At times his budding genius took a distinctive turn, particularly on a certain Sunday afternoon when the rain prevented him going outdoors, and Tad killed time by hacking at various pieces of furniture and finally sawed the banisters of the main stairway. When this was reported to President Lincoln he did not even scold, but took the boys into his room and entertained them by displaying his swords.

"I recall once when Mr. Seward, Mr. Stanton and a number of gentlemen in uniform were discussing something of great importance with the President, and as we let out an exceptional vigorous 'whoop' some one said, 'Mr. Lincoln, don't those boys annoy you?' But he, with a kindly smile, said, 'Oh, never mind, it's a diversion.'

"At the public receptions we were usually frolicking about Mr. Lincoln's chair, and I remember stumbling against the Grand Duke Alexis, who was paying the President a state visit. Great personages, however, were of little consequence to me at that time. I was interested only in army doings and my one desire was to become a West Pointer. So when a well-dressed young man handed the President a letter one day and said something about West Point, I was 'at attention.'

"I remember thinking it odd that, after presenting a letter of introduction and shaking hands with the President, the stranger should say in humble tones: 'Your Excellency, may I have the honor to address you?' Afterward I observed that Mr. Lincoln's bearing awed his most impulsive visitors. 'What can I do for you?' he asked the other.

" 'Mr. President,' said the young man, 'I want to go to West Point. I have set my heart on it. But as I have no position or influence I see no way of realizing my ambition.'

" 'I am sorry, young man,' the President told him. 'Your ambition is commendable, but I cannot help you. Each Congressman, you know, has the right to one appointee, but the Senators have no such privilege. I appoint ten cadets each year, but I must first look after the sons of fallen Generals and Senators.'

This conversation caused a lump to rise in the young bugler's throat, for he saw his own ambitions dashed to the ground. He wept salt tears and could not conceal his disappointment from his playmate, so at dinner Tad asked his father if Gus was not going to West Point. "It is my intention to send him there," said Mr. Lincoln, "as soon as he is old enough."

One of the most dramatic incidents in Gus Schurman's visit to the Lincolns was his meeting with Wilkes Booth, the man who was afterward to murder President Lincoln. Both Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln were fond of the theater and at table with the two boys often discussed stage doings, for Tad and Gus were also well informed. Hardly a night passed that they did not attend a play, and this was a great treat to the poor bootblack, whose theater experience had been confined to occasional attendances of Bowery melodrama.

"We were known at every playhouse," tells Mr. Schurman, "and only had to show our faces to be ushered to the best seats in the theater, a box if any were vacant. During the performance the stage manager invariably invited us back of the scenes and there I met from time to time the well-known stage folk of the day. Among them I recall Lucille Weston and Susan Dennen. Many a time we sat in the identical box in which Mr. Lincoln met his death.

"One night the play at the Washington Theater or Grove's, I am not certain which, was a stirring drama called the 'Marble Heart,' in which a dark, handsome man with brilliant black eyes took the leading part. Spellbound with his acting, Tad and I looked up his name in the programme. 'I'd like to meet that man,' said Tad. 'He makes you thrill.' So after the second act we went

back and were taken to Mr. Booth's dressing room. 'This is President Lincoln's son,' said the stage manager, and the actor gave us each a hand with a very sweet smile. He continued with his make-up, asking us how we liked the play, and we telling him the parts we most admired. On leaving he handed us each a rose from a bunch that had been presented him over the footlights."

Gus Schurman's life at the White House ended as abruptly as it began. With the aid of Mrs. Lincoln the two boys arranged an entertainment for the benefit of the hospitals. The audience consisted mostly of soldiers from a Pennsylvania Bucktail regiment, who were guarding the Capitol building. The price of admission was ten cents. Just as Mr. Lincoln entered the room a mud-stained courier arrived telling of Lee's advance north, and in a moment all was confusion. Among the messages which now came in every few moments, was one from Gen. Sickles ordering his bugler to the front immediately, and before midnight struck Gus Schurman, once more back in regimentals, was hurrying on to Gettysburg.

ALLEN SANGREE.



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