

*Alexander Sterrett Paxton Diaries: Volume Two*

*September 13, 1861 – November 1, 1861*

*Transcribed Winter 2012*

\*Volume 2 is a small homemade leather bound memo book w/ clipped corners.

*Cover Reads:*

**Alex. S. Paxton's Book**

**Private**

**L.H.V.**

**Aug-24<sup>th</sup> 1861**

**Commencing Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> 1861**

*Inside Front Cover Reads:*

**Alex. S. Paxton**

**This book is strictly private to everyone.**

**A.S.P.**

**In tiny script (in faded pencil) at the bottom of the inside cover:**

Sept. 8<sup>th</sup> 1861.

Our old Captain J. J. White left this morning. A few days before this he made a short speech to the company he had taken so much interest in & loved so well. He advised us to keep up our organization, as well as preserve in unsullied purity the fair fame of our old alma mater. This morning he made no remarks whatever, but all he said was "Farewell" and gave us each a cordial grasp of the hand whilst tears

telling more than words filled his and our eyes. He was one of our best... [MS. illegible due to fading]

## **Pg. 1**

### **Chaptr One**

#### **Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> 1861**

Today the troops were reviewed by Gen Johnston i.e. Jackson's Brigade.<sup>1</sup> We marched and counter marched, quicked and double-quickd before the gallant old hero of Manassas. He seemed quite pleased with our maneuvering, drilling, etc...and remarked that he would put the troops of our brigade against any the fanatical North could send against us. Elected our new Capt. – H.R. Morrison also all our non-commissioned officers again.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Sept. 14<sup>th</sup> 1861**

I got leave of absence and went up to Centreville. This was the first time I had been outside of our line of ....[MS. illegible due to fading].

## **Pg. 2**

...from the camp at Bull Run. Near the battlefield coming back I took a circuit around through the country and got an excellent dinner at a nice house. 'Twas the first time I had sat at a table for over two months and so hardly knew how to use the knife, fork, etc., but understood readily how to use the good eatables on the well spread table. I felt like a bird out of a cage, as on that beautiful morning I walked with an elastic step over those rolling fields, away from the noise and bustle of camp. As I stood on a lofty hill above Centreville, and looking around, surveyed the numerous encampments which lay in quiet repose both near and far, it made me feel at once...

## **Pg. 3**

...proud and glad. For around me and within a distance of 3 miles there were encamped eight brigades. The whole face of the country bore the face of encampment.

**Sept. 15<sup>th</sup> 1861**

'Twas a beautiful day, just such as would make one feel glad and happy were he not surrounded by the turmoils and dangers of war. At 8 o'clock am we had an inspection of arms, accoutrements, etc...The reward given to the one who had the cleanest gun, etc. was exemption from his next tour of guard duty. I was fortunate enough to get the prize both this time as well as one the Sunday before. So counted myself as one of the fortunate.

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Should have said a few words about our new Capt., H.R. Morrison of Rockbridge Co. He is an alumnus of Washington College, graduated with 3<sup>rd</sup> honors of his class, a man of great coolness, calm thought, and sober judgement. He was the man picked out for our Capt. by our old Capt.. He had been promoted to orderly sergeant immediately after the battle of Manassas, in which he acted a gallant part. He was elected by a unanimous vote. He made a short address upon acceptance of his office. Told us he would throw himself on our sympathies and asked each one to aid him in performing the responsible duties of Capt. He bade us "be true to our gallant cause, true to our parents, true to our county (or country), and above all be true to our God, and old W – College \_\_\_\_\_ ne'er have cause to mantle her name with ignominy and shame but be more than proud of the heroic conduct of the L. H. V.'s, her own patriotic and adopted sons.

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The departure of Capt. White was to our company a source of deep regret. He had always taken great pride in our organization. From the classic halls of our old and much loved college. He had drilled with us shared with us all our dangers and hardships. He led our little band in the charge on the bloody field of Manassas and conducted himself nobly indeed. He helped us bury our dead comrades and beside open graves sent up on our behalf a petition to the throne of Heaven. He said it pained him to leave us, but it was the stern decree of necessity that called him to go. In him we lose a brave, kind, and gallant Capt.

## **Pg. 6**

*[Paxton notes that the next five pages were written on November 18, 1861. These are descriptive sketches of Generals Joseph Johnston, Gustavus W. Smith, P.T.G. Beauregard, and Majors Whiting, Milton, and Rhett.]*

General Johnston is about middle size, apparently about 45 yrs. old. Has keen piercing eyes before \_\_\_\_\_ few can stand and is quite military in his appearance. Is something stern in his appearance yet is mild but decisive in his commands. Is regular in his habits, rises early, etc...Presents a fine appearance on horseback. Hair slightly grey and a short moustache. His soldiers have the greatest confidence in his military capacity. 'Twas his genius that inaugurated the move from the Valley on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July resulting in that glorious victory. Much can be said in praise of this general who leads the army of the \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ on to victory.

## **Pg. 7**

Gen. Smith is a fine looking man with an open countenance, wears plain citizens clothes on ordinary occasions, with no pomp or extra display. Is said to be a good general but as yet hasn't had a chance to distinguish himself.

General Beauregard is a small man, spare made, black hair and eyes. Only wears a moustache. Is something about his looks and person that becomes more and more interesting every time you look at him. Is a splendid equestrian and quite military in his bearing. Has a good deal of show, etc. about him. Quite neat and fancy in his dress. Reminds one of that gallant bearing which ever characterizes the French. Is brave as well as gallant and chivalrous. On the field of Manassas, he galloped...

## **Pg. 8**

...along in front of our Regt. as it lay in support of the batteries on that fatal hill. And as he rode he waved his hat above his head and was saluted amid all that storm of balls and missiles of death, by three loud, long cheers and a smile played upon his features then, which I shall never forget. There was something so calm, so determined in it. It told of his heroism, his bravery, and his confidence in his soldiers to do their duty. He had his horse shot from under him just on the right of our regiment. He is universally beloved by all the troops. They have confidence in him. Whilst they revere Johnston, ad-

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-mire his skill and have the utmost confidence in his abilities, yet giving Beauregard all these qualities in \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat smaller estimate, they feel attached to him. Hr reminds me of my idea of the great Bonaparte ie, in his bearing towards his troops and the esteem in which he is held by them. He is destined yet to write his name higher on the pillar of military fame. He was a classmate and warm friend of McClellan, he calls him by the familiar name “Mac.” But could say much more if had the time and space. Adieu “\_\_\_\_\_”.

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Maj. Whiting, is Gen Smith’s Adjutant Gen of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps, Army of the Potomac. Is a graduate of West Point. Fine looking, spare made, long black hair. Is kind and pleasing in his manners. He had charge of our company when we were guarding Head Quarters in Centreville and took up a high regard for us. And for compliments paid us and favors granted by him we shall ever feel well disposed and thankful to him.

Maj. Milton is Asst. Adjt. Gen under Major Whiting. HE is a tall, slender made man. He stutter much in conversation. Don’t know so much about him as the others.

Maj. Rhett, (of S.C.) is Adjt Gen of Gen Johnston. He is a large burly man, stern in appearance and harsh in his manners. Is quite selfish, and so had himself and his horse well taken care of, didn’t care what became of rest of mankind. Is fond of a drink too. And makes Bourbon, his servant, stand around. Poor old fellow (B-) he looks as tho’ every hope had fled.

Lieuts Lane and Washington are aids of Gen Johnston. Former is son of Joe Lane, latter descendant of the great Washington. Both are fine looking fellows, young and buoyant. Yet are rather wild chaps and haven’t sown all their wild oats yet.

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**Sept 16<sup>th</sup> 1861**

We moved our encampment down to within a mile of the Court House. A very good place to encamp, though there was good water in abundance. Now we were

amongst the advanced encampments, but by no means the advanced posts. For our line of pickets down in the vicinity of W- City and Alexandria was only a few miles off said places. Had several important hills down there on which we were erecting fortifications. Mason's, Munson's, and Padgett's hills, etc... They took a regiment at a time down for picket duty at each of these hills and on some of them two. We had hardly got domes-

### **Pg. 12**

-ticated in our new camp ere we were ordered to prepare to go down on picket too. The picket always staid down there about a week and are relieved by another regiment.

### **Sept 20<sup>th</sup> 1861**

On that day we packed up, left our baggage in our tents, with a sufficient guard and off we went down to our post, which was on Padgett's Hill just just on the right of Mason's. On it were no works of all. Had a large turn out of the regiment, for all desired to go down and see the Yankees, etc. Marched about 8 miles and came to Padgett's hill, to which we were destined to go. We relieved a Ky (Kentucky) regiment. When got there ev-

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-ery one enjoyed the view from the top of the hill. For from it, we could see over an extensive range of country sloping towards the Potomac, but just on this side of the Potomac rises a high range of hills. On these the Yankees had thrown up strong fortifications, and Forts Taylor, Corcoran, and Ellsworth with their battlements frowned from the summits. Could see Arlington Heights, all bristling with cannon which didn't look to inviting to a storming party. Could see the tops of the houses in W- City, reposing in the distance. Padgett's Hill is situated about 5 miles from Alexandria and 7 miles from W- City. Yet could (not?) see the former on account of (high?) hills between. Could see the old Federal Capitol, standing in...

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...all its dignity and grandeur. It stands just like it stood 50 yrs ago, but all else how changed! The great, wise, and good men who in days by-gone were \_\_\_\_\_

to tread those halls and assemble in those council chambers, they are all gone! And I their stead walk a band of base and corrupt politicians, the miserable supporters of a despotism, who would fair take away from us our liberties and our dearest rights. The clarion voices of Clay, Webster, Calhoun no longer ring through those galleries and echo those colonnades, breathing forth the sentiment of patriotism and peace, but now in their stead the tongues of the enemies of our glorious South bellow out words of infamy and...

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...shame. In that White House no longer sits the great and good Washington, but there its old Abe Lincoln, the personification of a fool, and all that's mean and low. The old stars and stripes could be seen plainly floating on the Yankee works. The old Potomac could be seen in places with the war steamers plowing its bosom. After the fellows had taken a view of the surrounding scenery, etc., they were posted and told to look sharp for Yankees. But as moon was shining brightly, a Yankee would have been keen to creep up on one of our posts. But that night no Yankee made his appearance and all things went straight, etc.

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**Sept 21<sup>st</sup> 1861**

Early in the morning we could hear the Yankee's drums beating the morning reveille. On some places the picket guards were not more than 500 yds apart and did not fire at one another on post like they did at first and at some other places along the line of pickets. Our line of pickets extended from the banks of the Potomac away below Alexandria around in a semi-circular line coming in again to the river way above W-City – length about ten miles. Were a good many nice people living down there and we boys were want to go out to dine, take tea, etc., also to look at the pretty girls too. It seemed that we were getting back once more...

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...to the comforts and joys of home. We had not been at a table to eat for so long that made one feel strange and quite a novelty eating with knife and fork, etc. You may well imagine that we boys enjoyed all this first rate and only wished to stay longer down on picket. One night, while down there, some of our regiment got so excited on post they blazed away<sup>3</sup> much to the suffering and final death of a poor calf who unconscious of intruding was quietly walking through the bushes. Another night, they killed a negro who was attempting to pass by one of the posts. Had two pieces of the Washington Artillery<sup>4</sup> stationed down there, both of which were masked, to frighten the poor Yankees.

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On the night of the 1<sup>st</sup>, it rained very hard and those on post had a very damp time of it. Those not on duty made shelters of straw and rails, and piled in after pig fashion. How much better our negroes faired at home than ours, even the faithful old watchdog by the doorstep fared better than we in our old leaky bunks. Yet slept as soundly as ever. Whilst down there we feasted off a corn field and a potato patch belonging to a traitor and had been confiscated. Our sentinels could hear the city clock in Alexandria strike at night. So close were we.

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**Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup> 1861**

Well on the 23<sup>rd</sup> we were relieved by the gallant 5<sup>th</sup> Va. Vols, and started back to our old camp. We boys enjoyed ourselves fairly down there as had some liberty down there and didn't have to get a written passport to leave the camp. So 'twas with much regret we left and came back up to old camp, which we reached about 1 o' clock. Now we were just in the very sight of Washington and the Yankees don't seem willing to fight. We had flaunted our banner right in full view of their capital, yet they would not give battle.

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**Sept. 29<sup>th</sup> 1861**



Still in camp and living as usual. Got orders the other evening to cook and keep on hands and three days rations and beready to move on a moment's warning. The boys began to suspect a movement over into Maryland to throw off the yoke of the Lincoln despotism. For the outrages and deeds of infamy and shame perpetrated amidst that unhappy people by the minions of old Abe. Got some boxes in our Co. from home which came in good time. The nights are getting quite cool and the "\_\_\_\_\_ and yellow leaf of Autumn," reminds us of the gradual...

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...approach of the king of icy rule and sceptor. For the last rose of summer has bloomed, blushed, and died and the forests begin to look cheerless.

**October 1<sup>st</sup> 1861**

On dress parade, the orders, for keeping 3 days rations cooked on hands and being ready to march at a moments warning, were all countermanded, as said "the necessity was over." Doubtless our generals thought that if we'd act on the defensive until spring and then we'd be able to give the Yankees fits. "Hail Coumbia!" Perhaps the peace party at \_\_\_\_\_ will increase by that time rapidly.

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**Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> 1861**

In the evening about 4 o'clock, our company with exception of commissioned officers and some 4 or 5 privates, received orders to move with all our camp equipage, baggage, tents, etc. down to gurd the Head quarters of Gen Johnston and Smith. Off we went highly elated with the honor, also part of another company (Fort Lewis V.) went too.<sup>5</sup> Found our new situation more desireable than our old camp subject to all its many toils – some duties, drills, etc..We pitched our tents at the Head Quarters in Fairfax Court House – in a beautiful garden with plenty of shade trees, etc...

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...and didn't have to stand guard often. So expect to have a nice time of it here, if Yankees only stay in their dens and don't come on us. The two Gens, Johnston and Smith, quarter in the same house. We can go down town hear all the news, see the "bugs" "of the day," get something nice to eat, etc. The court house is a right nice little place, with several fine looking residences in it. Have plenty of music here, as are surrounded by 3 or 4 splendid brass bands, which at night make the \_\_\_\_\_ sing with melody. Like our situation very much indeed, as were away from the strict rules of the old camp.

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**Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> 1861**

Our brigade got orders to send all their extra baggage to the station and then to the junction or some other place of safety, also to send all the sick away to the hospitals or home. So, doubtless either expect a fight here or else contemplate a movement over into Md., to help that helpless people to throw off the yoke of Yankee despotism. Our company however got no such orders and hence remained snug in our quarters. Late in the evening our regiment (4<sup>th</sup>) came by on their way down to the advanced post s for picket duty. Of course we didn't envy their lot in the least.

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**Oct. 7<sup>th</sup> 1861**

Day was warm and clouds continually boiled up from the south. In evening it commenced to rain and during the whole night it came down in torrents. Some of our boy's who hadn't well ditched their tents came up near being flooded. Late in the evening the 19<sup>th</sup> Mississippi regiment went by going down on picket. We only pitied them. And as we thought of the old 4<sup>th</sup> there on picket in the rain, etc., we envied not their lot , we rejoiced at our good fate in getting off and placed in our present situation. O! who would not be a soldier and share all his hardships?

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**Oct. 15<sup>th</sup> 1861**

Early in the morning heard the long rolls beating in abundance so guessed the Yankees were coming in masse. But all things went smoothly during the day and at usual hour at night all prepared to go to bed after prayers had been held. But so! The order comes for the guard to strike tents, pack up what baggage could carry on back, and burn the rest up. All this was done in a short space of time. For we heard that we were going to fall back to Centreville that night. Hence all the regiments

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...around were in commotion and the fires burning surplus baggage shone brightly all around. By 12 o'clock the wagons of the Generals and Guard were loaded and on the road towards Centreville. The moon shone brightly and 'twas fine for marching. When 'twas known the army was going to fall back, all the citizens or most of them at least immediately prepared to fly from their homes, supposing they would be imprisoned, then homes burnt by Yankees. So packing up all could readily carry in wagons, etc., many came that night. I saw lovely women and tender children walking along by the ...

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...side of their wagons, carriages, etc., leaving their homes and scenes endeared to them to the mercy of the foe, such scenes as that made me feel sorry and only demonstrated more fully the horrors and misfortunes of war. We got to Centreville about 4 ½ in the morning, pretty tired. Slept on the ground all night.

**Oct. 16<sup>th</sup> 1861**

We pitched our tents in a beautiful grassy lot and the tents of the Gens. were pitched in an adjoining lot. Soon put up nice beds, etc., and prepared to rest our weary bones. Centreville is a mean dirty looking place, noted for selling whiskey, etc., Gen....

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...Johnston sent our company over on street to pry around and capture all the liquor. We got ten barrels of nice whiskey and brandy, all bottled up nice, brought it over and emptied it in the branch. The bystanders looked on with eyes moistened by regret and a longing desire to taste. Had to deploy skirmishers down the branch

to prevent the \_\_\_\_\_ (in Greek) from tasting it down below. Also we had the honor of clearing the streets of the rabble over or twice, till a guard was put at every avenue to the place. These men were kept out of the town. We are now enjoying ourselves as usual and waiting for the enemy to come on us.

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**Oct. 26<sup>th</sup> 1861**

Well we've now been at H. Quarters here for 10 days, and have had a very nice time of it too. Are getting quite lazy about getting up in the morning, and only rise when our cook calls us to breakfast. The nights are getting quite cold and the white frost of the night of the 25<sup>th</sup> told us too plainly that the "last rose of summer," had bloomed, blushed, and died; and that the cold blasts of winter were fast sweeping on towards us. On our reaching this place, we were expecting an attack from the Yanks, supposing of course they would take the \_\_\_\_\_ to battle us. But they only crept cautiously upon us feeling their way along. It...

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...seems they wanted to make an advance on our left i.e. by way of Leesburg in Loudon Co. So on the 21<sup>st</sup>, at the same place a battle was fought which resulted in the defeat of the Yankees. We had about 3000, and they 11,000 yet victory perched upon our banner and the glory of the "Stars and Stripes" paled before the brighter light of the Southern Cross. We killed and wounded about 450 captured 532 prisoners, among whom were about 25 officers and run them in the Potomac drowning about 300. Gen Evans, the hero of the day, was very much applauded for some of the brilliant maneuvers made by him on that great day. The battle was fought on the Anniver-....

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...-sary of the battle of Trafalgar, one of the greatest naval engagements of the day. Baker, a Senator from Oregon, was killed, pierced by 7 bullets. He was a most bitter enemy of the South. Said if took a million men to crush the secession, the North had them and wanted to place Northern Gov's over the Southern States, etc... but the base wretch met the fate he so richly deserved as he was leading on a Yankee regiment to crush secession. So perish all the enemies of the South!!! Have

heard that the Yanks have fallen back on the Annandale road. They \_\_\_\_\_ forget they come to overrun and subdue the South. A pretty way for invaders to act, wait to be attacked and run.

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The guard duty is not so heavy on us now, as have detailed some more men to come and help us in guarding the military geniuses of the day. Doctors White of Lexington and McFarland of Augusta are down with us now. Doctor W- is the father of our former Capt. J.J. White and has a son in our company (2<sup>nd</sup> Srgt.). He preached to us tonight out in front of our tents. We boys had heard him in Lex in our college days, as always went to the Presbyterian Church most of the students did. As we listened to his deep toned voice, as he exhorted us to be god righteous and wise, we couldn't help feeling solemn and thoughtful.

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**Oct. 30<sup>st</sup> 1861**

I was on guard last night and this day. Had a good time for it. But I've always been peculiarly fortunate in getting good and pleasant nights for guard. Our mess are living high now, as nearly all of us have gotten boxes from home lately. We had charge of a Yankee prisoner and gave him an excellent supper, when he remarked that "we boys had mighty good grub," down here. Said didn't "care a red(?)" where McClellan's army winters, he was going to reside in Richmond this winter. Well we had quite a military display this evening. Gov. Letcher...

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...was present. He made a very appropriate address and presented a Va. flag to each Va. regiment present and gave Gen Johnston flags for several other Virginia reg's. Were a good many thousand troops present, all were drawn up around a bastion fort on the road side on the Centreville heights. All the generals were present from this part of the country. After the flag presentation the Gov., in company with Gen's Johnston, Beauregard, and others, with their respective escorts, reviewed the troops present. John C. Breckenridge of Ky. was present. Upon the whole it was quite a grand military display. For the marshalling of the

squadrons, the gleaming of the bayonets, the rumbling of the artillery, and the cavalcade of the Gen's as...

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...they swept past splendidly mounted, together with the splendid music, all presented to one's mind a good spectacle of the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war." All things passed off in quite good style. And as the Gov. gave out the flags to the several regiments and told them to stand by them and never let the glory of the old Va. flag be tarnished or droop in shame, then there arose a loud long shout of applause. It was the shout of freemen and rolled en regiment after reg. – taking it up till it died away the distance. Our old Reg. (4<sup>th</sup>) is down on picket near the C House, and our company don't envy their lot at-all. Have got our tent warmed with a flue and furnace or fireplace inside in hole and flue running out the side of the tent, etc...

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**Oct. 31<sup>st</sup> 1861**

On the evening the Gov. reviewed all the Virginia regiments present, were about 19,000, and they marched by in review presenting a splendid appearance! The 1<sup>st</sup> Reg. – especially marched well as all of that Reg. were generally uniformed alike they looked much better to the spectator than any of the rest. Jones' Brigade was also reviewed, in which is the 1<sup>st</sup> Kentucky Reg. The Gov. gave them special praise; and they deserve it too. The day passed off, or rather the evening, very pleasantly, and as the bright sun took his final leave behind the western mountains, all departed from the field, and returned to their respective quarters.

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**Nov. 1st 1861**

Went on a visit to the battlefield today, in company with David E. Ruff, one of our band and a classmate at old W- College. 'Twas about four miles off and a nice little walk. However got there safe and sound. Went all over the field and saw where all the brave Southern Regiments fought and conquered the hirelings of the North. The house of old Mrs. Henry on the field, in which she was killed on the

day of the battle is completely riddled with balls, shells, etc... 'Twas but a few yds from this home that Bartow fell. A marble pillar stands on the spot now, on which are inscribed his last words, "They have killed me boys, but never give up the fight."

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A few yards higher up the hill is where General B fell, not far from where ours (4<sup>th</sup> Va Reg) lay in support of our batteries on the day of battle. Also visited the \_\_\_\_\_ stone house over on the field where fight was hottest earlier in the morning. Saw many skulls and bones of the dead Yankees as they lay bleaching on the field. . Let such be the fate of all who come from the fanatical north to subdue the sunny south. All around there seems desolate. As I stood by the graves of our fallen comrades on that fatal hill. I c'd not help feeling lonely. No living object appeared save the ground squirrel as he scampered off to his hols. No sound reached the ears save the noise of...

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...the wind as it moaned and sighed in the dark pines that stood like lonely sentinels upon the edge of that bloody field. Gallant boys they sleep on, and the din of battle will never wake their slumbers! The cannon's roar will never bring the flash of excitement to their glassy eyes. Their spirits have fled to another world beyond the bright stars that look down so calmly upon their silent mounds and keep watch by night. Gov. Letcher with his \_\_\_\_\_ was there with us. Paid our regiment quite a compliment fro enduring our perilous position and repulsing the accursed Yankees! Collecting a few relics to send home by Frank Amole, such as a piece of stone from Stone Bridge and stone house where our company fought, walking stick from same place, piece of shell \_\_\_\_\_ from post where Bee fell, etc... then we returned to our company quite fatigued with days work, yet gratified in having seen all the fields.

[\*\*\*\*A very detailed( unfortunately faded) hand drawn map of Centreville covers the last page of Vol. II of the Paxton Diaries.]

**END VOLUME II**

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<sup>1</sup> General Joseph Johnston

<sup>2</sup> Henry Ruffner Morrison

<sup>3</sup> shot their weapons

<sup>4</sup> of New Orleans, La.

<sup>5</sup> Fort Lewis Volunteers – 4th Va. Inf. from Roanoke/Salem Va. vicinity