

“THE NAMELESS DEAD”:

GEORGIA, SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 1863

*Kate Cumming:*  
*Journal, September 28–October 1, 1863*

Kate Cumming had begun her nursing service with the Confederate army in April 1862 when she volunteered after the battle of Shiloh. After spending two months caring for sick and wounded soldiers at Corinth and Okolona in northern Mississippi, she returned home to Mobile, Alabama. She then began serving as a hospital matron in Chattanooga in September 1862, the same month the Confederate Congress authorized paid positions for women in the army medical department. Evacuated from Chattanooga in July 1863, Cumming was working at a hospital in Newnan, Georgia, when she learned of the fighting at Chickamauga. On September 26 she recorded news of the death of several Confederate officers and wrote: “Alas! what scenes of horror does not even the word victory bring up before us!” Out of an army of about 65,000, the Confederates lost more than 18,000 men killed, wounded, or missing in the battle, while Union losses totaled more than 16,000 men out of about 60,000.

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*September 28.*—Last evening, Rev. Dr. Husten made a speech at the depot, calling on the people to send up provisions and nurses to Chickamauga, for the purpose of feeding and nursing the wounded, as General Bragg has gone with his whole army to take Chattanooga, and requires the services of every man who is able to travel, and there are not enough left to take care of the sufferers. Our cooks have been up all night long, cooking food to send up. The same has been done in all the other hospitals.

This morning Mrs. Johnston called, and I went with her to a meeting, which was held in town, about the wounded.

Dr. Heustis addressed us, and presented a picture of suffering that would have wrung the heart of the most hardened, and said he had only told us about our own men; that if they were in such distress we could guess in what state the prisoners were.

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He told us the principal thing needed was something to eat, and he believed that in one place where the men were lying, that if a basket full of biscuits was put down in the midst of them, they would let out a shout of joy that would rend the air. He had worked day and night while there, dressing wounds and giving the men water to drink, and said he believed many persons could be kept busy doing nothing but the latter. He urged all the men to go that could possibly do so; said that ladies could not go yet, as there is no place for them to stay. The enemy had destroyed a portion of the railroad, and the wounded had to be taken to a place called the "Burnt Shed," some twenty miles distant from the battlefield, there to await transportation on the cars.

Colonel Colyer of Tennessee made a very stirring speech, and was ready himself to go. A collection was then taken up, and many hundreds of dollars given. Mrs. J. introduced me to Dr. Heustis. I told him I was very anxious to go; I knew I could get some place to stay, as I was well acquainted in that neighborhood; the Burnt Shed being only a short distance from Cherokee Springs. He tried to persuade me not to think of it. On my way home I met our chaplain, Mr. Green, who told me he was going, and that if I wished I could go with him, and stay with a very nice lady, a friend of his. I intend leaving this afternoon, and am busy collecting what I can to take with me. Dr. Devine has just received a box full of delicacies from Mississippi, for troops from that state. It is impossible to send any thing to the army at present. He has given me some nice wine and other things.

Some of the ladies of the place intend going up in a few days, but none are ready to go at present. Mrs. Colonel Griffin gave me a black man for a servant.

*October 6.*—Left here on the 28th ult., about 3 o'clock A. M. The cars were densely crowded with soldiers returning to their commands. When we arrived at the Burnt Shed, found that the rail track had been finished to Ringgold; so we passed on to that place. As I was familiar with it, I went to the nearest building, which had been the Bragg Hospital.

There was no light to be seen any place, excepting that which came from a fire outside, around which stood a crowd of shivering soldiers.

Wounded men, wrapped in their blankets, were lying on the balcony. I went into a room which was filled with others in the same state; some of whom were suffering for want of water. They all seemed perfectly resigned; the more so as we had been victorious. How they seemed to glory in it!

After finding a vacant room to put my baggage in, I went to our old friend, Mrs. Evans. She was delighted to see me, said she had often wondered what had become of Mrs. W. and myself.

She had passed through the fearful ordeal of having been under the fire of the enemy; and she was obliged to live in the woods for some days.

I remained there until after breakfast; then I went down to the main hospital, where I was introduced to the surgeon in charge, Dr. Ussery. He gave me bandages to roll; I was assisted by a young man by the name of Dearing, from Kentucky, who was disabled by being wounded in one of his arms. Mr. Green and the colored man were kept busy all day dressing wounds.

Mr. D. and myself sat on the up-stairs gallery, where we could see the wagon trains come in with their precious burdens. As many as fifty came in at one time. We rolled bandages until the afternoon, and could scarcely supply the demand. The surgeons were getting the wounded men ready to send off on the train. I was rejoiced when we were told we had rolled enough for that day. This work had been quite a trial for me, as I had been compelled to see our poor fellows brought in as they were taken from the field hospital, and I had no chance of doing any thing for them.

There had been no rain for some time, and the wagons raised the dust in clouds, and when the men were taken out of them they were almost as black as negroes.

I took the blackberry wine which Dr. D. had given me and put it in a bucket of water, which made a nice drink. With it and something to eat, Mr. D. and I went down and waited on the men; I never saw any thing relished as much as it was. When we came to Mississippians, and told them it was from Mississippi, they relished it still more. I wondered if the ladies of Mississippi who made it had the least idea by whom and where it would be used.

While in one of the rooms a gentleman came up to me and said he was rejoiced to see me, and that I was the first lady he had seen there. He told me these men were Kentuckians, and that he was leaving on the train with some wounded. He said any attention I paid to these sufferers he would take as a personal favor.

After he left I asked one of the men who he was, and was informed he was Professor Pickett, a Baptist minister, and chaplain of a Kentucky brigade, and that he was a true Christian and zealous patriot, and had done much good in the cause.

We went into the cars which were filled with the wounded. Mr. D., while waiting on the patients, ran the risk of having his arm again broken, as he had the use of but one hand.

About dark I took some cloth for bandages and went to Mrs. Evans's to remain all night. On reaching there I met a widow lady, Mrs. ——. I asked Mrs. E. what the ladies of the place were doing, as not one of them had visited the hospital that day; and I said, if they would all roll bandages, that would be all I would ask of them. Mrs. — did not seem to like my remarks, and said the surgeons had never asked them, and that the Federals had taken all the cloth they had to make bandages with. I answered her that I supposed the surgeons thought the ladies did not need asking, and that there was plenty of cloth at the hospitals. She said she would work at them to-morrow. She then assisted me with what I had.

Colonels Walter and Hays, who were stopping at Mrs. E.'s, came in. Colonel W. said, word for word, what I had about the ladies; only added that such neglect pained him very much. To this Mrs. — said nothing.

I think these two gentlemen were there for the purpose of seeing that the wounded were properly cared for. I believe they are on General Bragg's staff. Colonel W. was very talkative. He spoke highly of the Mobile ladies and their beauty; said it was a dangerous place for any one who was at all susceptible of the tender passion, and that, fortified as he was by age and a wife, he nearly lost his heart. Both of these men seemed high-toned gentlemen; such as most all our educated southerners are.

Next morning, the 30th, I arose early, and took a hurried

breakfast, and when leaving asked Mrs. — if she intended coming for the bandages. She answered, with emphasis, "I never go to hospitals, but will send for them."

On reaching the hospital, to my joy and surprise, I found that Dr. Stout had arrived early in the morning, and with him a hospital corps of surgeons and nurses; among them my kind friends, Dr. Burt and Mrs. Ellis. I knew that now the wounded would be well cared for.

Dr. Stout and his corps had been at the "Burnt Shed" for some days. He told me that when he went there, he found quite a number of regimental surgeons, and, to his sorrow, nearly all were intoxicated. He had done what he could to have every thing put in as good order as the place would admit of. He also said that no words could tell the amount of good which had been done by the Georgia Relief Committees; that had it not been for them, many of our men would have died of starvation. Part of the Atlanta Committee (I think it was) was then with him. He introduced me to some of the members; among them was Neal Brown, ex-governor of Tennessee, who was a Unionist when the war broke out; but after seeing how badly the Federal government acted, joined our side.

I had made up my mind, on seeing so many there to take care of the wounded, that I would go right back to Newnan, as I had left Mrs. W. quite sick, and much work to do.

I have always had a great desire to go on a battle-field. I can not call it idle curiosity; but a wish to see and know the most of every thing, so that I might judge for myself, and know how I may be of service.

There was a Mrs. Weir, from Griffin, Georgia, who had come to nurse her son. He had lost a leg, and was at a private house near the battle-field. This lady told me she had a young friend, whose corpse she had heard was still on the battle-field unburied. She kindly asked me to go with her.

The field was some fifteen miles distant; so we had to watch our chances of getting a conveyance. There were wagons coming in all the time with the wounded, but none going back that day; so an opportunity for getting out seemed slender. Mr. Dearing was on the watch for us. A very nice-looking covered private wagon came, and after depositing its load, Mr. D. requested the owner to take us; but he stoutly refused,

saying his horses were completely worn out. Mr. D. then told him that there was one of the ladies who had nursed at least one thousand Confederates, and was very anxious to go out to the field. He immediately drew up and invited us all in, Mr. D. going with us.

We found our kind driver quite intelligent and very talkative. He related to us many anecdotes of the late battle. His name was Tedford. The first line of battle was formed on his farm, but I believe was moved before there was any fighting. His wife's pantry had suffered from our own men. She was ordered out of the house, and took shelter in the woods. After the battle, when the men found the house deserted, they went in and took every thing they could get; even taking some preserves which Mrs. T. had hid away in an attic. They also took her clothes and tore them up; the latter might have been done for the benefit of the wounded, which Mr. T. seemed to think. He did not grumble, for he was too happy about our having gained the victory for that.

The battle was partly fought at Tedford's Ford, on his brother's farm, and he said that the havoc made there was very great.

He related an incident to us about his brother, or one of his neighbor's sons, who had been in the service during the war. He had been on duty at a post far south, and had been sent to Bragg's army when it was reinforced. He was killed on or near his father's farm.

We traveled over the roughest roads I ever was on. I thought, if this was the road our wounded had to come, they must indeed suffer; and, sure enough, we met what seemed to me hundreds of wagons, with their loads, going to Ringgold. We also saw many wounded men wending their way on foot, looking wearied enough. We stopped and spoke to them; all were cheerful.

On arriving at Mr. Strickland's house, where Mrs. Weir's son was, Mr. T. begged me to go on to Mr. Hunt's, where part of Hindman's Division Hospital was. He told me that there was a nice young lady there, Miss H., who was doing a great deal for the wounded, and he was certain she would be delighted to have my help. The temptation was a great one. I was anxious to see what a field hospital was like, and to know if I could be

of any service; and another thing, I had heard nothing certain regarding my brother. He was in Hindman's division; so I thought by going there I might hear from him.

On our way we met Dr. Ray, who had just heard of a brother being badly wounded, and was on his way to see him. He and the other surgeons had had a hard time since leaving us. They had wandered two days on foot in search of head-quarters, or any one who could tell them where to go. They had been all that time without food, but had come across a pig, which they had *pressed*. They had quite a number of nurses with them. I think he said they were at Claiborne's Division Hospital, and if I recollect the number rightly, he told me the first day they went there, there were no less than twelve hundred men to attend. This seems almost incredible, but we have had many more wounded than killed. He also told me that at first they had neither food to give the men or cloth to dress their wounds, and that at present rags were very scarce. I promised to send them some, and go and see them.

Mr. Hunt's house was a small cottage, surrounded by a garden. In the latter were tents, flies, and sheds, which were filled with wounded.

I went to the house with Mr. T., who introduced me to one of the surgeons. He informed me that this was Managault's Brigade Hospital, and also that Captain Chamberlain and Lieutenant Cooper of the Twenty-fourth Alabama Regiment were lying badly wounded in the house. I went in to see them; found them lying on the floor, but on mattresses. They were old friends, and glad to see me. Captain C. looked very badly, as besides his being wounded his health was delicate.

I was introduced to Miss Hunt, a very nice-looking young girl, and as I had already heard much of her kindness to the soldiers, knew she was a true southern woman.

My wounded friends informed me that Lieutenant Bond of the company of which my brother is a member had been to see them, and but one man had been killed in the company.

Captain C. introduced me to the surgeons—Drs. Cochran of the Twenty-fourth Alabama Regiment, Gibbs, and Gourie, who had charge of the hospital; the latter I had met before in Chattanooga. Dr. C. took me around to see the Mobilians—an old man by the name of Chillion, Mr. New, and Mr. Brown—neither

of whom I had seen before. Mr. Chillion is a brother of Mr. C., a well-known Roman Catholic priest. He is now in his seventieth year, and has been in the service since the commencement of the war. He went through the Kentucky campaign, and every other in which the Twenty-fourth Alabama Regiment has been, and kept up as well as the youngest man. The poor old man actually cried when he found out who I was. He is a Frenchman, and I could scarcely make him understand me. He requested me to write to Mrs. Chaudron and Mrs. Perey Walker of Mobile, and let them know where he was. The men were lying on bunks made out of branches of trees.

I visited the room where Mr. Hunt and his family were. They had been driven from every corner of their house, which was filled with wounded, and had taken shelter in a small kitchen. I don't know how many there were, but this room was sleeping-room, dining-room, kitchen, and every thing else for the whole family. In it were two bedsteads, and some of the family were then lying sick. I heard no grumbling or complaint from any of them, with the exception of the old man, who sat by the fire, and it is not much to be wondered that he murmured a little.

Before the battle his farm was stocked and his barn filled with grain, and now he has nothing left but the house over his head. Winter is coming on, and with it want and starvation for him and his family; as all the neighbors for miles around had shared the same fate, he could expect no aid from them.

Before the battle the enemy had full possession of that country, and helped themselves to what they wanted. After the battle our troops took what was left, the houses being empty, as the inmates were forced to fly from the bullets. There had been fighting in Mr. H.'s yard, and many killed there.

It was in this house that Captain O'Brien had breathed his last. He lived two days after he was wounded.

When Miss H. and I retired for the night, we went up into a loft in the house, which had no flooring. We had to be careful for fear of falling through the plastering. It was filled with furniture, which had been taken out of the rooms. We had a mattress, with which we made a comfortable bed.

The next morning when Miss H. got up, as there were no windows, it was as dark as night. The ceiling was so low we

could not stand upright. On coming down-stairs we found it raining in torrents, and as there were so many persons crowded together, it was any thing else but comfortable. The surgeons ate in the hall, and very kindly asked me to take breakfast with them, but I declined; I felt as if I never should eat again. The scenes with which I was surrounded had taken away all my appetite. They sent me a cup of pure coffee, which did me more good than any thing I ever took in my life. I think if Cowper had drank coffee instead of tea, he would have found it a still more cheering beverage.

I found my two friends much better than they were the evening previous. I had a small basket with me, into which I had put a few articles on leaving Ringgold, thinking I might meet some one on the road who would need them. I had no idea when leaving Ringgold of visiting any of the hospitals, as I had been told I could be of no service in them, or I should have taken plenty of every thing with me. I had a few biscuits and a box of sardines; the latter I received from the Mobile Hebrew Military Aid Society while I was in Chattanooga. I divided them around, and they seemed to be relished.

The Georgia Aid Society had as yet done nothing for this hospital. There seemed to be no food of any kind, excepting corn-bread and bacon, provided by the government; any thing else was private property. What cooking was done for the patients was done outside in the rain.

I found I could be of little service there, and became very anxious to get back to where I had left Mrs. Weir, as I knew I could very readily get a conveyance from there to Ringgold. Mr. D. tried everywhere to get some kind of a wagon, but his efforts were of no avail. He went to Mr. Tedford's to ask him for his, but our men had broken into his barn the evening before, and taken what little corn he had left to feed his mules, and he had gone in search of provender.

It rained so hard that I found it impossible to visit the patients. I was gratified to see how much solicitude the surgeons exhibited for them. They were out in the rain nearly all the morning, trying to make the patients as comfortable as possible. They said that the rain was pouring down on some of them, but it could not be avoided. They informed me that from what they had heard of many of the other brigade hospitals, the men

were in a much worse plight than theirs. They blamed Dr. Foard for not attending to their wants, or appointing a deputy. They had a number of patients who were ready for transportation, but there were no wagons.

I asked what Drs. Foard and Flewellyn were doing, and said that I thought these hospitals their especial care. Was answered, "They were watching General Bragg look at the army."

There was a man there who had had his arm cut off on the late battle-field, and he was not only walking about, but nursing the others, and apparently quite well.

I assisted Miss Hunt in making some arrow-root, and showed how she could prepare it without milk, as that article was scarce. Captain C. had a little wine, which made it very nice. There were no chickens or eggs to be had for miles around.

I have always found eggnog the best thing ever given to wounded men. It is not only nourishing, but a stimulant.

Miss H. is very pleasant, well educated, and intelligent. She was assiduous in her attention to the suffering.

Captain C. was expecting his wife, and Lieutenant C. his mother. I should like to have remained until these ladies came, but I could not.

Deus's Brigade Hospital I wished to visit, but the rain prevented me. I heard there were some Mobilians wounded there, among them Mr. Murray, adjutant Thirty-sixth Alabama Regiment.

As we found it impossible to get a wagon, Drs. Gourie and Gibbs kindly offered the use of their horses, which was gratefully accepted. Miss H. loaned me her saddle and skirt.

I took leave of my two Mobile friends with many regrets. I had seen numbers die from such wounds as theirs, and did not know but this might be the last time we would meet on earth.

As we rode out of the yard I tried to look neither to the right or left, for I knew there were many pairs of eyes looking sadly at us from the sheds and tents. I could do nothing for them, and when that is the case I try to steel my heart against their sorrows.

I saw men cooking out in the rain; it seemed like hard work keeping the fire up; a perfect war between the two elements; all around had a most cheerless aspect.

As we rode out the tents of the different field hospitals came

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in view; when we thought of the inmates and their sufferings, it only served to add to the gloom.

I looked in the direction of the battle-field, and thought of the nameless dead who were there. A nation weeps for them, and that day nature, like Rachel, was shedding tears for her children, because they were not.

I thought of the awful conflict which had so recently raged between brother and brother. "O, what a field of fratricide was there!" it makes one cry out in anguish, as did brave Faulkland of old. "Peace! peace! when will it come? Alas! who can tell?"