

5 minutes

Simon

QUARTER MASTER SERGEANT SAMUEL J. CHURCHILL.

The first Commander of Washington Post Number 12, Grand Army of the Republic, was General John N. Roberts and the last is and will be, Quarter Master Sergeant Samuel J. Churchill, our chief guest of honor here tonight.

At the early age of eighteen years he enlisted, August 6, 1861, in Battery D, Second Illinois Light Artillery. There were six guns in this battery, served by 150 officers and men, all mounted. He served for four years and one month and was mustered out September 5th, 1865. He is celebrating his 90th birthday tonight, though the actual date was November 1st.

Sergeant Churchill participated in nineteen battles in the Civil War; the principal ones being Fort Henry, Fort Donelson and the siege of Vicksburg under General Grant, and the siege of Mobile and the attacks on the old Spanish Forts under General Thomas.

When asked to relate some of his personal experiences in the Civil War Sergeant Churchill very modestly told the following incidents:-

"On one occasion, when in face of the enemy, our battery was halted. I was riding beside the rider of one of the battery horses. As we waited for orders to move a cannon ball struck off the head of the soldier beside me and my uniform was spattered with his blood. We quickly buried him by the road side.

"Another time a camp guard, while walking his beat, was torn in two pieces by a rebel shell. I was within a few feet of this soldier when he was killed.

"While serving a gun one day in a battle, a minnie ball passed within two inches of my body and flattened against the gun casing and fell to the ground. I picked it up and put it in my pocket.

"On another occasion I was sighting my cannon at a rebel battery when I saw flame and smoke bursting from a rebel gun. I yelled to my men: 'Lie down, boys, quick!' Every man dropped on the ground and I with them. In a second a cannon ball passed over the length of my gun and only a few inches above it. If I had not seen that rebel gun fired I would have been struck in the breast by that cannon ball. It buried itself in a bank just to our rear and my men dug it out. I found it ~~it~~ fit my gun so I loaded the piece with it and fired it back at the rebel battery.

"It was in the Battle of Nashville, Tennessee, on December 16, 1864, that I had the experience that gave me the Congressional Medal of Honor. My gun was close to a brick building and the shells from a rebel battery shattered the wall of this building just above us, causing all my men to seek safety. I found one of my men behind the brick building and after scolding and kicking him with the toe of my boot I induced him to return to his duty and he brought up the charges for the gun. But I could not run and continued to load and fire my gun until I had fired twelve shells and these shots were so well directed that three of the guns of the rebel battery were disabled, causing the entire battery to retreat. The rebels had been shooting too high, while my aim was very accurate. I was considered the best gunner in my division. I was then Quarter Master Sergeant, but a substitute was sent to me by my commanding officer and I was ordered to return to the guns, which I did at double quick time.

At the time and for years after, I did not realize I had done more than my duty; but in 1927 President Calvin Coolidge sent me the Congressional Medal of Honor accompanied by a certificate which recited the incident that earned for me this great honor. I prize that certificate very highly and I had it framed and it hangs on the wall in my little office room in my home. I am equally proud of the Congressional Medal of Honor."

At the banquet given in honor of Major General Hugh L. Scott, at the Hotel Eldridge in Lawrence, Kansas, on April 30, 1931, Sergeant Churchill wore his medal ~~of honor~~ and sat beside the guest of honor. During the progress of the dinner ^{Gen. Scott} turned to Sergeant Churchill ^{and} touching the medal said:-

"Man! I tried for fifty years to get one of those."

"The bravest are the tenderest,
The loving are the daring."