

JAMIE STUART

Darling of the Army.

State

5-28-1933 James Henry Rice, Jr.

The United States Regular army and the Confederate army boasted many a bright youth. The list is too long to cite here without description, for which there is no space.

However, one of our South Carolina boys, born in the middle of "Our Golden Prime," made a record of which the Greeks, three millennia ago, would have boasted and preserved inviolate for the glory of all ages, had he been born in Hellas.

For the present, I shall omit details, and simply say that James Stuart, son of John A. Stuart, editor of the Charleston Mercury for 15 years, during which period Hon. William Elliott wrote his letters, now in book form as "Carolina Sports by Land and Water," was born in Beaufort, in the house we know as the "Sea Island hotel," in 1825. As a small boy, he became desperately ill; his death appeared sure. With his little wan face turned upward and the sunken eyes showing a child's wistful yearning for the beautiful world he loved and expected to leave shortly, he said to his mother, who sat by his bed: "Mother, when I die, please bury me in old St. Helena. You know how I love to go there and hear the birds sing in those big trees."

His weeping mother tried to soothe him and to comfort him, though her heart was breaking; but she promised what he asked, in case he died—a promise she kept long after.

Jamie did not die then; but took a mysterious turn and got well. After finishing school, Jamie went to West Point, graduated and entered the army, serving as first lieutenant in the war with Mexico.

From the beginning of his service, he was always at the front. The first man to go over every entrenchment was Lieutenant Stuart; the man to lead every forlorn hope was Lieutenant Stuart, even to the walls of the City of Mexico, where the first man over was Lieutenant Stuart.

Men are often jealous of such achievements, the base side of human nature crops up; and it shows the mettle of the American army in the Mexican war that no man envied Jamie Stuart. Every officer loved him and so stated in reports; the men idolized him; for Jamie did not have a trace of selfishness, sought no credit, put others before himself on all occasions. When on top of the wall, overlooking Mexico, with a hot fire on him, he paused, handed his hand to another young officer and hauled him up. That officer was Arthur M. Manigault, afterward general in the Confederate army and adjutant and inspector general of the state, at the time of his death, in 1886.

General Manigault often came to visit us at Locust Grove; I knew him intimately from my childhood. His son, the late Arthur M. Manigault, rice planter on North Santee, and proprietor of the Charleston Evening Post, never forgot my love for his father. Outside of Judge Henry A. M. Smith, I was perhaps Arthur's only friend; he wanted none.

Jamie Stuart came out of the Mexican campaign, covered with glory, though he sought to shift the credit to others, and disavowed any due himself.

However, South Carolina was ruled in those heroic days by men who rated honor high and dauntless courage equally high; they had no idea of letting Jamie Stuart off, without halting him before them to receive his due. The legislature voted him a beautiful sword and sent for him to receive it.

Jamie came, shy as a girl, and told the big men that he deserved no credit; that he loved his native state and had tried to serve it (how often do you hear that now?) and was glad his service had found favor with the rulers of the state. Then he slipped out, overcome like Ellen Douglas, when suddenly aware that she was in the presence of her king.

More work was ahead. There was a threatened Indian uprising in the Northwest; and the rifles, commanded by Col. (later general) Phil D. Kearney, were ordered out to quell it. Jamie, then brevet captain, went along. When the troop arrived in Oregon, the Indians were quiet, and there was no need for action of any kind. Colonel Kearney ordered his troop home.

Jamie Stuart and his bosom friend, Captain Walker, determined to return by way of California and started with a small detachment. No hostile Indians were known, no danger was apprehended. The two young officers went along leisurely, enjoying the fine climate and lovely scenery, pitching their tents at night by some stream or under the big trees.

When they neared the Rogue river, in southwest Oregon, the Rogue River Indians suddenly went on the warpath, just why is not known to this day; but they did.

Gen. Dadey H. Maury, who knew Jamie Stuart well and had served with him in Mexico, wrote, in his "Recollections of a Virginian," that there was no braver officer in the Regular army than Captain Stuart; and that, if there were another equally brave and fearless, it was Captain Walker. He and Jamie were fast friends.

One night Jamie called to Walker, saying he wished to speak with him. Walker went over to his tent; and Jamie told him that his death was at hand and that he wished Walker to attend to certain things for him; write to his mother and his fiancée, a young lady in Virginia, informing them of his last hours, and to bury him there, at the root of a big California live oak.

Walker was overcome by Jamie's language and tried to dispel his gloom; he could not. Jamie told him that he had just had a vivid dream. An Indian came to his tent door, drew his bow and aimed an arrow at Walker, then shifted and shot him; that he could feel the arrow in his vitals and feel the blood gush.

The dream was soon to be a reality. That very day there was a skirmish with Indians and the chief was captured. Walker and others urged Jamie to shoot the Indian there and then; but Jamie said he could not kill a helpless prisoner.

Ah! if he had only done as Walker urged him to do; Jamie made the chief understand that his life was safe and that no harm would be done him. Interpreters were present, so there could be no misunderstanding.

After reassuring the chief, Jamie turned his head, and, with a sudden movement, the chief shot him through the body, and Jamie fell, mortally wounded. Next instant that Indian had 20 balls through his body and the men hastened to their dying officer. Walker tenderly lifted his head and gazed into the dimming eyes—the beautiful hazel eyes, which the girls delighted to look in—and shortly Brevet Captain James Stuart had rejoined his ancestors and was translated into immortality.

Obedying his wish, Walker had him buried under the great live oak and marked the spot. His few belongings were sent on to his sorrowing mother in Beaufort.

Few deaths have so stirred this nation. When the sad fact became known, all the high officers of the army joined in a request that his body be brought East and interred in Arlington. A special detail was sent for it and the body brought back.

The ranking officers of the army wished to learn his mother's wishes before proceeding further, and a detail was sent to Beaufort to wait on her, making known the wish of the army and of the nation that her son rest in the national cemetery.

His mother, Claudia Rhett, sister of R. Barnwell and Edmund Rhett, thanked the officers, but said firmly she could not consent to it.

She had given Jamie her sacred word that he should be buried in old St. Helena and she wanted her boy by her. What mother would not have felt the same?

So there, amid his kith and kin of generations, where recently Hal M. Stuart was laid away, they buried Jamie: Brevet-Captain James Stuart, honored by the army, by his state and by every officer and man who knew him.

Born in 1825, he was murdered by a man whose life he had spared in July, 1850, and nobody doubted that Jamie would have spared that Indian's life, even had he known it would cost his own.

How sweet and uplifting to mind and heart is the contemplation of such a character! If states are to endure, such a love as he had, such service as he rendered, whether in camp or field, forum or legislative halls, must be the foundations for it.

"A noble life, crowned with heroic death, rises above and outlives the pride and pomp and glory of the mightiest empire on earth."

Let us keep in everlasting honor Jamie Stuart, the young Marcellus of "Our Golden Prime," fit to walk into "the vasty halls of death," bootied and spurred, a peer among earth's best and bravest.

JAMES HENRY RICE, Jr.