

Thus ended a trip which I can never forget. It was a wonderful experience for a boy of my age, and I doubt whether any other boy will have an opportunity to take a trip such as this one to the Black Hills.



Courtesy of Mrs. Lila Finne

Hamilton Family—Standing: James H. Jr.; Seated: l. to r.: James H. Sr., John Carlin, Charles Clarence, Amelia; small boy: Harry D.

THE DEATH OF CYPHERT TALLY

by

J. L. Swift

The Civil War years were a tumultuous era in our country's history, characterized by both internal and external strife. In our own State of Iowa, one dramatic incident stands out as an example of the deep conflicts in beliefs and sympathies that existed, not only between Northerners and Southerners, but between citizens of the same geographic locale. It was during this time that a known group of dissidents in the North were actively engaged in condemning the Lincoln administration's war policies. This group's ideology was known as the Copperhead Movement and its adherents were actively opposed to the suppression by force of the Southern insurrection. The Copperheads were sympathetic to the Southern cause and advocated a cessation of Northern enlistments in the Union

Army; "they denounced the war as an 'Abolition Crusade'."¹

George C. (Cyphert) Tally was a Baptist Minister and a noted Copperhead. He was a fearless and bold defender of the Southern Rebellion and a "firm believer in slavery as a Divine Institution."² On August 1, 1863, a mass meeting of Peace Democrats³ was held near English River in Keokuk County; Keokuk County contained a large settlement of Copperheads. Tally was the chief speaker at this meeting and the gathering was also attended by pro-Northerners who carried weapons to defend themselves against a threat made by the Copperheads that they would destroy South English, a known Union stronghold. Tally, blatantly displaying the disloyal Butternut badge, so outraged the citizens of South English by his speech that insults were exchanged and physical violence erupted. Shots were fired and Tally was killed by one of the South English citizens.

After Tally was shot, his followers quickly left town and swore vengeance. Southern sympathizers from Keokuk, Wapello, Mahaska and Poweshiek counties assembled on the western border of Keokuk in preparation for war on the South English citizens. Governor Kirkwood's help was sought and he immediately dispatched several companies of militia to the scene. The Copperheads dispersed upon seeing the State Troops and a bitter battle and further bloodshed were thus avoided.⁴

The following article relates the incidents leading up to and including Cyphert Tally's death. It reveals the name of the man who shot Tally and who, therefore, became a hero in his own right.

The author of this account, Mr. John L. Swift, practiced law in North English, Ia. from 1907 to 1930 when he took his law office to Marengo, Ia., where he stayed until his death. His clients knew him as a dependable lawyer who would go

¹B. F. Gue, *History of Iowa* (4 Vols., New York City: The Century History Company, 1903), II, p. 82.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

³Copperheads were also often referred to as Peace Democrats. William J. Petersen, *The Story of Iowa* (4 Vols., New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1952), I, p. 439.

⁴ANNALS OF IOWA, Vol. XXX, No. 7 (Jan. 1951), pp. 529-530.

to any lengths to fight for their rights in an honorable way. Mr. Swift's son Harold found the manuscript after his father's death and Mr. Donald S. Garrett, of South English, was kind enough to offer it to the ANNALS for publication.

In August, 1908, Mr. Edward Cabler, a resident of English River Township, living about one and one half miles north of South English, called at my office in North English for the purpose of making his last will. After making several visits, the instrument was prepared to his satisfaction, and was executed by him on August 18, 1908. This will remained in my custody until the death of Mr. Cabler on March 1st, 1916, when it was filed for probate in the office of the clerk of the District Court of Keokuk County, Iowa. Certain children of Mr. Cabler thereupon filed objections to the probate of the will, the matter was finally set for trial in the District Court, when the objections were withdrawn and the will was duly admitted to probate on March 9th, 1917.

In his will Mr. Cabler recited that he was then seventy-six years of age. Mr. R. B. Sears of North English, a brother of Mr. Cabler's deceased wife, was nominated as executor, and upon the probate of the will duly qualified and administered the estate.

In one of our many conferences during the contest of the will and the administration of the estate Mr. Sears remarked: "Well, Ed has passed away and I can tell now what I never told before. He was the man who shot Cyphert Tally."

As Mr. Sears is perhaps the last living participant in the skirmish in which Tally was killed, the following statement made by him of the events of that August day in 1863 may be of interest.

Mr. Sears' Statement*

I was born in Henry County, Indiana, in 1850. The next year my parents brought me to Iowa, and I have lived in the North English neighborhood ever since.

My sister Susan was fifteen years my senior. During the war she was married to Edward Cabler, a private in Co. F, 5th Iowa Inf. After her marriage, my parents being quite old, I lived at her home which was situated on the north fifty-five

*The text of this statement appears in its original form. No editorial changes have been made.

acres of the east half of section fourteen, township seventy-seven north, range eleven west of the 5th P. M. The South English River touched the corner of this land, and the town of South English was up the bluff of the river and a good mile and a half due south.

From some of Ed Cabler's papers which are in my possession I confirm my recollection of his army record. He was enrolled as a private in the said company on July 15, 1861. He was discharged at New Madrid, Mo. on March 22, 1862, having contracted chronic diarrhoea, measles and typhoid fever, which resulted in general debility, disease of digestive organs, heart and lungs.

After his discharge from the army, I was almost a constant companion of Ed's. We performed the many chores around the farm, and often hunted up and down English River. Ed grew to manhood in Kentucky and was a crack rifle shot. He retained this ability to shoot a rifle expertly until about one year before his death.

On the morning of the Democratic Rally at South English, which as I recall it was on August 1st, 1863, I went with Ed to the grove where it was being held. This was then known as the Noffsinger Grove. It is now the homestead of Hurlburt Slate, coming to him through his mother, a Noffsinger. It is situated on the south east quarter of the south east quarter of section twenty-three, township seventy-seven, north, range eleven, about twenty or thirty rods north of the town of South English proper. We found plank seats arranged for the audience, but Cyphert Tally spoke from a wagon. This wagon was arranged somewhat on the style of an old fashioned band wagon, and contained about twenty men. A like wagon also occupied by about the same number stood near by. No guns were in evidence except one held by one Sam Knight, a man with whom I was well acquainted, and who had a No. 8 double barrellled shot gun loaded with buck shot. Knight lived near what is now known as Green Valley, some three or four miles north and eight east of South English. It appears on the old Iowa maps as Foote. Some time during the morning he left the wagon and I had a short conversation with him. He told me how his gun was loaded, and told me that he "was going to get at least one blue bellied

Yankee." He later returned to his wagon before it left the grove. I think he was the only "Copperhead" who left the wagons at the grove.

Excitement ran high at the grove, and there were many wordy altercations. I saw one Mrs. Starkweather, a loyalist, become engaged in a quarrel with a woman wearing a Butternut badge who was sitting next to her. During this quarrel Mrs. Starkweather tore off the other woman's badge, and in return Mrs. Starkweather's dress was torn to strips. Later, after the shooting, I saw Tom Moorman, a merchant of South English and who will be mentioned later, call her into his store to select a dress from any pattern in his store. She did so, and he cut off and presented to her the necessary amount for her to make a new dress.

At the conclusion of this dispute Ed said to me that there would certainly be serious trouble before the day was over and that we had better go to his home for our rifles, and we started immediately. When we reached his home we discovered that we had not enough bullets and Ed and I molded a supply and loaded our rifles, while my sister Susan tied the patching on the bullets. We then hurried back to South English. There were then no fenced roads and we took the shortest and best path. As we toiled up the hill Ed said, "Boy, make every shot count." We entered the town through an alley running north and south through the block and immediately west of the Amos Fluckey saloon. This alley had never been cleared of its original growth of hazel brush and our purpose in taking this route was to conceal our guns. When we reached the street running east and west through old South English, we crossed this street and concealed our guns in the bar room of the Dan Phelps hotel which then stood on the south side of the street, on which is now Lot Seven in Block One in the Original Plat. The Amos Fluckey saloon was straight across the street north of this hotel, and the J. F. White store was immediately east of the Fluckey saloon. A Republican speaker was addressing a small group of people near the Phelps hotel, and Ed and I mingled with the people in the hotel bar room and on the street until the two loads of Copperheads from the grove appeared.

The two wagons mentioned above left the grove and drove south to the main street of South English on a road about eighty rods west of the hotel. They turned east on the street leading towards the hotel, apparently with the intention of leaving town on the road running south from the corner east of the hotel. The men in the wagons were now all armed and flourishing their weapons.

Eighteen loyalist men had concealed their rifles in the hotel barroom, and seeing the Copperhead forces approach we hurried to secure them. It appeared to me that there might have been some concerted plan as to where our men were to station themselves as they scattered through the crowd which had gathered, but I was then a boy thirteen years of age and if such an arrangement had been made I was evidently considered too young to be told of it. I recall that at least one went to a window on the second floor of the hotel. I stayed with Ed and we ran across the street north and a little east and stationed ourselves in front of the J. F. White store. With us at this station was Jim Moorman, a son of Tom. Jim had been shot through the leg in battle and was now on crutches. Owing to his lame condition he had not time to go to the barroom for his rifle, but was armed with a four barrel revolver. He and Ed were in uniform.

As the wagons approached our station some one in the wagons shouted "Cowards." A loyalist in the crowd answered "Copperheads." Then came "Abolitionists" and its reply, "Traitors." Tom Moorman came running up from his store in the block east of the hotel, carrying a revolver. This revolver was accidentally discharged and I saw the bullet strike the ground. Cyphert Tally rode in the first wagon in a standing position armed with a gun in one hand and a knife in the other. When Moorman's revolver was discharged he immediately opened fire, apparently shooting at Ed Cabler and Tom Moorman, they being in uniform. One of Tally's shots took effect in the neck of a horse ridden by Dr. Arthur of North English. Tally was then about forty feet from us. I saw Ed Cabler take careful aim, saw the flash of his gun and heard the roar of its discharge, and for good or for bad, the soul of Cyphert Tally stood before his maker. The gun and knife fell from his nerveless grasp and his body fell with blood

trickling from a wound in his forehead and down over his beard. Death must have been instantaneous.

During the fracas I discharged my rifle once, but I think without effect. Sam Knight, apparently forgetting his resolution to get one blue belly, jumped from his wagon as soon as the shooting started, and ran up the hazel brush alley by which Ed and I had entered town. So far as I could learn he continued on his course until he arrived at his home near Green Valley.

Of course firing became general immediately upon the discharge of Moorman's revolver. The crowd upon the street contained many persons wearing the Butternut badge. This perhaps prevented a general fire from the men in the wagons as they might be shooting down their own friends, wives and children, if they fired broadcast into the street. We believed that more than Tally had been killed or wounded in the wagons, for they immediately drove to the farm home of Dr. Miller, one-fourth of a mile away to the south, and an hour later might have been followed by the trail of blood spilled from the wagons.

One Wes Funk acted as a marshal for the Copperhead forces. He wore a large red sash, draped over one shoulder and under the other arm, and on his breast was pinned the hated Butternut. After the wagons had left he attempted to rally the Copperhead forces remaining in South English. Jim Moorman, crippled as he was, grabbed the horse's bit and shouted "G - - D - - - you, give me that badge." Funk started to obey but was not fast enough and Moorman tore the badge from his clothes. After this there was apparently no further effort to re-organize those men in town, but it was feared that the wagons might return from the Dr. Miller home. Lieut. Henry Downs, who was married to my cousin, was dressed in his officers uniform, being home on a furlough. He took charge of the situation and organized the loyalist men, armed and unarmed, into a company and patrolled the streets, restoring order. From a distance it would appear that a large armed force was in charge. I am satisfied that the instant shooting of Tally took the wagons, containing the organized Copperhead delegation, from town, and this or-

ganized patrol prevented their return.

I cannot recall, if I ever knew, the names of all the men who had rifles concealed in the bar room. To the best of my recollection they included Put Sprague who was a chum of Ed Cabler's, Eli Sprague, a brother of Put's, Lieut. Henry Downs above mentioned, a Mr. Sloan, Dave Glandon who later died in the army, Seth Sweet, who had enlisted in the army but rejected for physical disability, Jim Moorman, who being crippled could not get the rifle in time as stated above, and Amos and Aaron Fluckey.

Before the Copperhead Army had been dispersed by Governor Kirkwood, it sent word to South English demanding the surrender of the men who had killed Tally under threat of burning the town. But the town was then well guarded by recruits from the surrounding country and no attention was paid to the demand.

Later they sent word that if Ed Cabler ever came to the Black Hawk Mill, over on the Skunk River, he would not return alive, and it was many days before Ed ventured over there. Word also came that they would get him some night at his home, and for a long time Ed and I slept in the second story near the head of the stairs, armed with good hickory clubs and our loaded rifles, while pickets were furnished by the neighbors to guard the ground and give warning of the approach of an enemy. But none ever came, and Ed finally died a natural death.

In later years when Put Sprague visited Ed I have heard him speak of Ed Shooting Tally, and while Ed never admitted it in so many words he never denied it. Also, in our hunts up and down the English, Ed and I often practiced "Shooting Tally."

I do not think he ever regretted his part in the affair. The country was in a highly inflamed state and under the eloquent appeals of Tally the disafection was spreading. Rewards had been offered for traitors, dead or alive, and I am satisfied that Ed felt he had performed as high a patriotic duty as ever he had on the field of battle. And I think he always believed, as did I, that a general riot was avoided and many innocent lives were saved by his prompt action.

State of Iowa, Iowa County, ss.

I, R. B. Sears, being first sworn, say that I have read the foregoing statement, and that the matters therein recited are true as I verily believe.

R. B. Sears

J. L. Swift,

Notary Public.

State of Iowa, Iowa County, ss.

I, Sam Slate, being first duly sworn say that I was born in 1865, and that I have lived on the farm adjoining the farm occupied by Edward Cabler all of my life. I was intimately acquainted with Edward Cabler during all of said time and until his death, and have often hunted with him.

During the earlier years Edward Cabler always carried his gun when on the road and when not actually engaged in his work, and he was always an expert shot. He spent a great deal of time in hunting deer and wild turkey, and I never knew of him missing when shooting squirrel or shooting at a mark. He retained this ability very late in life.

I have often heard my father speak of the Skunk River War, and know that it was the common understanding among the people of my neighborhood that Edward Cabler was the man who fired the shot that killed Cyphert Tally.

Dated this 2nd day of June, 1922.

Sam Slate

Subscribed and sworn to before me by Sam Slate this 2nd day of June, 1922.

J. L. Swift,

Notary Public.

COPY

Webster, Iowa, June 5, 1922.

I, Seth Sweet, living in the above town, say that I have read the statement of R. B. Sears regarding the death of Cyphert Tally. That I am the same Seth Sweet mentioned in said statement. That I was in front of Amos Fluckey's saloon on the north side of the street when Tally passed in the wagons.

I believe the matters received in said statement are true.

(Signed) Seth Sweet

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