

WHITESMOKE SUN / COURIER

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The Smell of War

As the sun set over the grassy hills, the shadows it created on the smoke-filled Prado battlefield became long and purple. The sounds of the pounding cannonade and the incessant crack of musketry were long gone. There was a stillness now. Heavy clouds of pungent smoke lingered low in the valleys, as if to hide both the tragedy and glory that took place there. No fanfare could be heard; no marching bands praised the triumphant; no pretty girls waived as we went marching by. Louisiana was a long way away and a long time ago.

Weary soldiers from the 8th plodded along in perfect rhythm, raising clouds of dust in their wake. Through waist-high weeds and grass, the column moved in serpentine fashion amid the fragrant greenery that was at the same time a pleasing perfume and a noxious irritant.

Even before we neared camp, the scent of fresh baked cornbread was carried on the breeze. The smell of sulphur still stained us, yet the comforting goodness of home made victuals was overpowering. Like hounds on the scent, the men of the 8th quickened their steps. The closer we got to camp, the more varied were the smells that greeted us. Tater soup, warm chicken pie, venison stew, jambalaya, and of course, the cornbread, acted like the mythic Siren, luring all to submit.

Danielle and Denise had set out a table fit for kings, not the unworthy hooligans and riff-raff that were about to sit before such a cornucopia of earthly delights. Apple and berry pies complimented sugar cookies to sweeten our spirits and wine flowed from captured Union stores to warm our souls.

As darkness fell, the smoke from the cooking fires rose high in the cloudless sky and with it, the painful memories of those we left behind. We laughed and joked around the campfires and libations flowed freely. A fiddle, barely audible in the distance, brought smiles. Though the morrow would mean another fight that would require so much from so few, one experience for all would not be fleeting and would remain forever burned in our hearts: the camaraderie for which the 8th is so well known.