

My mother's parents lived in the great woods, not far from the Alapaha river and on a body of water called Ocean Pond I never did know exactly where it was There were many bay-heads, caused by springs which rose in the pine woods and flowed toward the river, and the small branches which were surrounded by swamps were so thick that a man could not get into them except on cattle and game trails which led to the water No one knew when these trails had been made, and so far as anyone could guess, they had been there forever One of these bay-heads was about a mile from grandfather's house

The only way to get soap in those days was to make it This was done by using potash lye and some kind of fat or grease Usually the waste from hogs butchered for bacon was saved and dried in the sun, to be used when soap-making time came in the spring No one had much money, and if there were money to buy with, there was often no potash to be had, so hardwood ashes were used

The custom was to go into the woods just before soap-making time and cut hardwood, burn it, and save the ashes Then these ashes were boiled in big washpots, and the result was strained of trash and dregs, leaving a strong potash lye The hog-fats were melted down, and the lye and fats boiled together in the washpot to the right consistency It did make soap which was plenty strong It was not exactly kind to the hands and would not produce a velvety look, but with the aid of the wash-block, the battling stick, and the will to work, it would get clothes clean And a good soap-maker was a celebrity It was claimed that few people could make good soap

A fourteen-year-old boy lived in my mother's family His name was Jimmie Stewart, and I think he was a relative, but I never learned just how One bright morning in the spring, when soap-making time was near, this boy was sent into the woods with other children, all younger than himself, to cut and burn hardwood for soap-ashes

They took the axe, went along the road, and crossed the branch made by the bay head The only roads we had in those days were just trails through the woods The road through a thick bay-head was just a tunnel in the impenetrable tyty swamp, little more than ten feet wide, the trees often meeting over the road to form a canopy The tyty is not a true tree, but rather is a large bush, growing fifteen to twenty feet high, with spreading limbs which produce a thicket from the ground, and in its natural state is impenetrable for man On this morning, long ago, these children

went across the branch into the pine woods on the other side and were about a mile from home.

Their dog ran into the swamp and began to bark, and then to yelp in fear. It broke out of the swamp and raced toward the children in the open woods. A big tiger came bounding after the dog and straight at the children. Jimmie Stewart saw it coming, and knew what it was, and he knew that all of them could not escape. It would be certain to kill one of them. He screamed to the other children to run for home and turned with ax drawn to face the charging beast and certain death. It crouched and came creeping slowly until, with a roar, it sprang into the air straight at him. The boy struck with all his might, but a blow from the paw of the feline sent the ax spinning, and Jimmie went down.

At that instant the children disappeared into the swamp road and saw Jimmie and the tiger no more. They ran home and told my grandfather. He believed, of course, that the boy was dead and nothing could be done for him, and that alone, he would also be killed by the tiger. So he sent runners for his neighbors and prepared to go after the beast, but before they could get together and start, they saw Jimmie come staggering and crawling through the woods toward the house. Before the men could reach him, he collapsed. My mother, who was a small child at that time, was one of the first to see Jimmie coming. She, with the others, ran to him. She said the boy's back had been eaten off, that all the flesh, from near his neck to below his waist was gone, and his ribs were bare and when he breathed the bloody foam would gush from between them.

There were no doctors in those days, so they took him in and did what they could do for him, expecting him to die in a few hours. The men then gathered forces—dogs, horses, and guns—and went after the tiger. They knew he would be in the bay-head swamp, because there was no other cover in the neighborhood.

As soon as the dogs got into the bushes, they found the big tiger and attacked it. Then there was pandemonium. By the noise, the men knew the animal was killing their dogs. Two of the men, Tip Padget and Hamp Guthrie, went into the swamp, following a cow trail. The place was so thick that the sun could not shine through, and there was semidarkness. The trail was just a hole in the thicket and mostly open only as high as a cow's back, so that the men had to stoop to get through. Both had guns. Tip had a shotgun, but Hamp had a flintlock rifle, the barrel of which was made of a stick-steel rod, with a hole hand-bored into it for a



barrel. It was a formidable weapon, even when it was not loaded, and it could be used as a club. Hamp was ahead when he suddenly came face to face with the tiger, which had left the dogs and was slipping along the cow trail. Hamp fired and wounded the beast, but did not kill it.

The tiger sprang at Hamp and knocked him down. Both Hamp and the tiger went into action in the half-light, and Tip could not fire for fear of hitting Hamp instead of the tiger, but he knew Hamp would surely be killed unless something was done at once. He grabbed Hamp's rifle and beat the tiger over the head until it died on top of Hamp. When it died, it had Hamp's head in its mouth, but it was too far gone to bite hard enough to break his skull and kill him. One of its claws was fastened under a leader on the back of Hamp's hand. The man was badly mauled and bitten, and his life hung by a thread, but after a long time he got well. Then he found that when Tip had beaten the tiger with Hamp's rifle, he bent the barrel, and the gun was ruined. It was currently reported that Hamp argued that Tip could just as well have shot the beast with his shotgun, and he had no business to ruin his rifle. The price of a gun like that was ten dollars, good American money, and Hamp demanded that Tip pay, right then. Tip refused, and Hamp sued and got judgment and threatened to sell Tip's farm. So Tip paid, both for the rifle and the court costs. Or so the story ran.

Jimmie lived through the night and the next day, but his wounds were so frightful that it seemed impossible that he could ever get well. He lingered on for month after weary month, and finally his back began to heal. Tender and grateful hands did all that they could do for him, but there were no doctors, and it is probable that no doctor ever saw him.

Scar tissue formed and grew over Jimmie's ribs and joined them together again. My mother said that his back looked like a washboard, and there was no semblance of human skin. When, after agonized weeks, Jimmie was able to speak, he took up the story where the children left off, when they had disappeared into the swamp on their way home. Jimmie said that when he went down under the first attack, the tiger was upon him before he could rise again, and it sank its teeth into his back. Of course, there was no hope for him, but with courage and presence of mind not to be excelled, he held his breath and lay still. He said that he knew if he moved the beast would crush his skull, or turn him over and tear out his throat. He breathed when the tiger was eating him so that it would not notice the movement. It

would eat the flesh from his back, and scratch with its claws, and would then put its ear to his mouth to see if he was breathing Jimmie would hold his breath, and it would go on with its dinner After awhile the beast had finished its dinner, and after the fashion of all cats, it raked up pine straw and trash into a great pile, and completely covered what was left of him

The boy waited a long time and then peeped out from under the straw toward the way the tiger had left The tiger was standing twenty feet away and looking back, evidently undecided as to whether he was dead It did not see him move, and Jimmie lay still again. After another eternity he looked again, and it was not in sight He crawled out of the straw and stumbled to his feet and ran staggeringly toward the branch crossing When he got to the branch, the tiger was lapping water in the road It did not look up, and Jimmie hid again He knew there was no hope of getting through the swamp and escaping again, and it was two miles home around the bay head, but with the superb courage that he had shown before, he started around the head of the bay, walking, and crawling when he could not stand, until he came in sight of the house He did not remember when help got to him, nor anything, for many weeks afterward

Jimmie got well and grew into a tall and handsome young man, and was popular When he was less than twenty years old, he was feeding a sugar mill one day, and his left hand got caught between the rollers And before the mill could be stopped, it had ground his hand and arm to pieces nearly to the elbow There was nothing to do but to run the mill backward until the hand and arm ground out again The hand and arm was only a bloody pulp and worse than useless Again there were no doctors, and he had no medical attention, and the hand and arm became a useless claw.

When he was in middle life, Jimmie had a fight with a cobbler The man struck at Jimmie with a chair, but Jimmie dodged under the blow, and with the same movement he grabbed the cobbler's knife and lashed out The knife cut the man's body open, and he died Then Jimmie was sentenced to hang, but after weary months in jail, he was pardoned, the courts and the governor holding that, because of his infirmities, he was entitled to defend himself.

I had heard these stories since I could remember, and of course I had thought that Jimmie Stewart had been dead a long time I knew that my mother had not heard from him in my lifetime We did not travel much in those days, and people living twenty miles apart seldom heard from each other One day, long after I had



grown up and lived in Florida several years, and in California nearly nine years, and been back in Florida several years, I asked my mother if she knew what became of Jimmie Stewart. This was around 1917 or 1918. She said that, about ten years before that time, an old man came down the road on a hot day and stopped at the gate, and asked for a drink of water. As was her custom, she invited him in, drew cool water from the well, and brought it to him where he sat on the edge of the porch, with his feet on the ground. He drank deeply and gratefully, and sighed his contentment. He finally said, "Annie, don't you know me?" She answered that so far as she knew, she had never seen him before. He then said, "I am Jimmie Stewart." He was an old man, but was still able to walk the distance from his home which was many miles away.

She never saw him again, and years later she heard that he had died. So one of the world's bravest men passed unsung, as had many before him, and as will many hereafter, as long as men are born, strive, and die in this troubled world.

My mother was too young to be sure of the size and more than a general description of the tiger, but the Hon. W. Henry Griffin, who was born and lived all his life in the neighborhood where this event took place and was a leading citizen and officeholder for many years, wrote in the *Nashville Herald*, as follows:

*The men tied the tiger together and carried it out to the house of Green (W. G.) Akins, placing it in the yard where it lay for a day, a sight to the numbers of people, who, having heard of the great tiger fight had come for miles to see.*

*It was a male tiger, a magnificent specimen, and from the description given by those who saw it, must have weighed as much as 250 pounds and was as much as four feet in length. It was solid tawny in color, and was about thirty to thirty-six inches in height.*

Green Akins was my grandfather—my mother's father—and was the man who assembled his neighbors to hunt and kill the tiger after it had attacked Jimmie Stewart. My mother's recollection was that it was red in color and much larger than her father's hunting dog.