

COMPANY FRONT

January 2001



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PHOTO FRONT COVER

Brigadier General James Green Martin

North Carolina's Adjutant General in 1861.

Commanded a Brigade in the Army of Northern Virginian during the Bermuda Hundred Campaign, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg. Gen. Martin resigned due to ill health and was appointed commander of the District of Western North Carolina. The Confederate troops that participated in the engagement at Waynesville, NC in May of 1865 were under the command of Gen. Martin.

Greg Mast State Troops and Volunteers, 1995 p72&112

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EDITORIAL

FRED BURT

For several years, I have conducted Civil War battlefield tours and living history classes for the U.S. Military, Civil War re-enactors, school groups, and Boy Scouts. In almost every occasion, I am asked why the Civil War soldier fought and, more specifically, why the Confederate soldier fought for slavery. I thought I would put on paper some of the reasons I believe the Civil War soldier, on both sides, fought.

First, I want to discuss the issue of slavery. Most writers about the war tend to make slavery the only issue in the conflict. However, this was far from the case. Yes, slavery was a major issue on the far extremes of the political spectrum. The abolitionists on the one side and the hard core slave holders on the other side made slavery their number one issue. But most individuals were affected by economic issues such as tariffs and free trade and, more importantly, concerns of having an overbearing federal government usurping state's rights and the Constitution. We may find this hard to believe today, but the average citizen in 1860 owed his allegiance to his state first and to the United States second. Thus, to the vast majority of the American people. The causes of the war surrounded issues much closer to home. Consequently, these are the issues that caused the average American to leave his home and family and endure the most horrific event in our nation's history.

To the northern soldier, his primary reason to fight was to preserve the union. Most viewed the Confederacy not as another country but as a part of the nation in rebellion. Even Lincoln's call for troops after Ft. Sumter was for the purpose of

“putting down the rebellion.” Freeing the slaves did become a major reason for fighting as the war progressed to help give the war a moral reason and to help justify the horrendous casualties that the North suffered. However, when Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation (which did not free all slaves), an entire Corps in the Army of the Potomac threatened to go home because they were not fighting to free slaves but to preserve the Union. In fact, an Illinois regiment did just that. However, the truth must be told no matter what the times dictate.

For the Confederate soldier, his primary reason to fight was to defend his home. Many did not condone slavery but fought because the Confederacy was his country. One needs only to look to the Vietnam war to see a parallel in our nation's history. Many soldiers did not agree with the war but fought because it was their country's policy and they were loyal soldiers. Most Confederates did not fight for slavery because they lived in an area where the crops and livestock operations did not or could not use slaves. In fact, Shelby Foote reveals this when he relates the story of a poor, ragged Confederate soldier who was captured after an early battle. The Federal soldiers knew he could not be a slave owner and asked him why he was fighting for the South. His simple reply was “Cause y'all down here.” These men felt that their homes and families were threatened by invasion from another country. What would you do today if your home state was a separate nation and was threatened?

Another prime reason for both sides willingness to fight is a concept that unfortunately, is being lost in today's society--duty. Duty is simply defined as doing those things that are expected of you. Gen. Robert E. Lee described duty as “The sublimest word in our language. Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more, you should never wish to do

less.” I also believe that unselfish devotion to others in your organization or community goes hand in hand with duty. To those who have never served in the military or fought in a war, this concept of duty and devotion may seem foreign. There is nothing in your existence that can be compared to these experiences and the “family” that develops amongst your comrades. These men, on both sides, developed these bonds and sense of duty and would literally die to preserve them. No one wanted to let their comrades down by not fulfilling these concepts of duty and unselfish devotion.

An old adage states, “He who does not know history will be condemned to repeat it.” By studying our ancestors and their actions, which is our history, we can learn from their mistakes and not commit them again. We should be sure to learn the truth, no matter how painful or politically incorrect it may be. We must also disdain the altered history and the revisionist historian, because through them, what will we really have learned? From my own ancestors, I have learned that, because they owned no slaves when the war began, they fought to defend their homes. The Confederate battle flag is a symbol of honor and of honorable men, not a symbol of hate to those of us honoring our brave ancestors. That flag is a symbol of duty, devotion, sacrifice and is our heritage. It pains my soul to see them use this flag when I know why so many brave men fought under it just as it is painful to see our U.S. flag dishonored today.

Finally, be careful of which symbols you choose to disdain. Hate groups have also used the Christian cross and U.S. flag but I see no great outcry to ban these symbols. You must understand the motives and intent of the group before you become prejudiced about the symbol.

CLARA BARTON’S ANDERSONVILLE REPORT

Editor’s Note: The plethora of accusations and mysteries surrounding the infamous Confederate Prison camp at Andersonville, Georgia have all culminated over the past 135 years to totally obscure the truth. This report written by Clara Barton, detailing the reburial project she undertook following the war, is indicative of the propagandic proclamations which have persisted in shrouding Andersonville with infamy. True, the conditions at Andersonville were horrible, but many Southerners suffered equal hardships within the confines of Northern prison camps. General Hoffman, for instance, who is so lovingly described in Barton’s report, literally starved Confederate prisoners in order to save money, which he proudly returned to the government following the war. The value of this propagandic report, at least in the historical sense, is that it helps to show the causes of today’s Andersonville misconceptions. One must bear in mind while reading this report the nature of its origin and constantly question actions, statements, and dictations contained therein. Good historical research always begins by first learning both sides of the story, ultimately, somewhere in the middle, lies the truth. This report gets you started with one side of the story, please continue the research on your own.

(Suggested Reading: William J. Marvel Andersonville: The Last Depot.)

Having , by official invitation, been placed upon an expedition to Andersonville, for the purpose of identifying and marking the graves of the dead contained in those noted prison grounds, it is perhaps not improper that I make some report of the circumstances which induced the sending of such an expedition, its work, and the appearance, condition, and surroundings of that interesting spot, hallowed

alike by the sufferings of the martyred dead, and the tears and prayers of those who mourn them.

During a search for the missing men of the United States Army, commenced in March, 1865, under the sanction of our late lamented President Lincoln, I formed the acquaintance of Dorence Atwater, of Connecticut, a member of the 2nd New York cavalry, who had been a prisoner at Belle Isle and Andersonville 22 months, and charged by the rebel authorities with the duty of keeping the Death Register of the Union prisoners who died amid the nameless cruelties of the last named prison.

By minute inquiry, I learned from Mr. Atwater the method adopted in the burial of the dead; and by carefully comparing his account with a draft which he had made of the grounds appropriated for this purpose by the prison authorities, I became convinced of the possibility of identifying the graves, simply by comparing the numbered post or board marking each man's position in the trench in which he was buried, with the corresponding number standing against his name upon the register kept by Mr. Atwater, which he informed me was then in the possession of the War Department.

Assured by the intelligence and frankness of my informant of the entire truthfulness of his statements, I decided to impart to the officers of the Government the information I had gained, and accordingly brought the subject to the attention of General Hoffman, Commissary General of prisoners, asking that a party or expedition be at once sent to Andersonville for the purpose of identifying and marking the graves, and enclosing the grounds; and that Dorence Atwater, with his register, accompany the same as the proper person to designate and identify. The subject appeared to have been not only unheard, but unthought of; and from the generally prevailing impression that no care had been taken in

the burial of our prisoners, the idea seemed at first difficult to be entertained. But the same facts which had served to convince me presented themselves favorably to the good understanding and kind heart of General Hoffman, who took immediate steps to lay the matter before the Hon. Secretary of War, upon whom, at his request, I called the following day, and learned from this that he had heard and approved my proposition, and decided to order an expedition, consisting of materials and men, under charge of some government officer, for the accomplishment of the objects set forth in my request, and invited me to accompany the expedition in person--which invitation I accepted.

Accordingly, on the 8th of July, the propeller *Virginia*, having on board fencing material, headboards, the prison records, forty workmen, clerks and letterers, under command of Capt. James M. Moore, A.Q.M., Dorence Atwater and myself, left two guards, with loaded arms, so near that they could converse with each other. In addition to these, some forts mounted with field artillery, commanded the fatal space and its masses of perishing men.

Under the most favorable circumstances, and best possible management, the supply of water would have been insufficient for half the number of persons who had to use it. The existing arrangements must have aggravated the evil to the utmost extent. The sole establishments for cooking and baking were placed on the bank of the stream immediately above, and between the two inner lines of the palisades. The grease and refuse from them were found adhering to the bands at the time of our visit. The guards, to the number of about 3,600 human beings, and the outlet below failed to discharge the flood which backed and filled the valley, the water must have become so foul and loathsome, that every statement I have seen of its offensiveness must be

considered as falling short of the reality. And yet, within rifle-shot of the prison, there flowed a stream fifteen feet wide and three feet deep, of pure, delicious water. Had the prison been placed so as to include a section of the "Sweet Water Creek," the inmates might have drank and bathed to their hearts' content.

During the occupation, a beautiful spring broke out like the waters of Meribah from the solid ground, near the foot of the northern slope, just under the western dead line. It is still there--cool and clear--the only pleasing object in this horrid place.

The scarcity of water, the want of occupation, and perhaps the desire to escape by tunneling, impelled the prisoners, to dig wells. Forty of these, finished and unfinished, remain. Those on the highest ground being sunk in the hard soil to the depth of eighty feet. The work was done with knives, spoons, sticks, and other tools but little better. The diggers brought up the earth in their pockets and blouses, and sprinkled it about the grounds to conceal the quantity. In some wells, excellent water was reached, and in others horizontal galleries were attempted, for escape. In at least one instance, a tunnel was carried entirely through the hill, and a few prisoners are said to have got through.

The steep face of the northern hill is burrowed throughout its whole extent. The little caves are scooped out and arched in the form of ovens, floored, ceiled, and strengthened so far as the owners had means, with sticks and pieces of boards, and some of them are provided with fire-places and chimneys. It would seem that there were cases during long rains where the house would become the grave of its owner, by falling in upon him in the night. In these burrows are still found remnants of the wretched food, and rude utensils of the occupants--drinking cups made of sections of horns,

platters and spoons wrought from parts of old canteens, kettles and pans made, without solder, from stray pieces of old tin or sheet iron. I brought away a considerable number of these articles, which may one day be of interest to the curious.

Five sheds stand on the top of the northern hill. Erected in the early part of the occupation, and five more on the opposite height, built a short time before the evacuation.

Like nearly all southern land, the soil is liable to be washed away by the rains; and on the slopes of the hills, ravines are now formed, gullied to the depth of twelve feet. It seems impossible that men could have kept their footing on these hill sides, when slippery with rain.

Outside of the enclosure, and nearly parallel with its south end, is the hospital stockade--800 feet by 350. It contains twenty-two sheds, for the most part without sides, erected about three months before the place was abandoned. The old hospital, occupied up to that time, in which so many brave men died, consisted only of tents enclosed by a board fence, and surrounded by a guard. Confused heaps of rubbish alone mark the place it occupied.

About half a mile from the main prison, and near Anderson Station, is the officers' stockade--a small enclosure, in which were never imprisoned more than 250 officers--and it was chiefly used for the confinement of rebel offenders.

The cemetery, around which the chief interest must gather, is distant about 300 yards from the stockade in a northwesterly direction. The graves, placed side by side in close continuous rows, cover nine acres, divided into three unequal lots by two rods which intersect each other nearly at right angles. The fourth space is still unoccupied, except by a few graves of "Confederate" soldiers.

No human bodies were found exposed, and

none were removed, The place was found in much better condition than had been anticipated, owing to the excellent measures take by Major-General Wilson, commanding at Macon, and in humane public-spirited citizen of Fort Valley, Georgia--a Mr. Griffin, who in passing on the railroad, was informed by one of the ever faithful Negroes, that the bodies were becoming exposed, and were rooted up by animals. Having verified this statement, he collected a few Negroes, sank the exposed bodies, and covered them to a proper depth. He then reported the facts to General Wilson, and requested authority to take steps for protecting the grounds, That parotitic officer visited Andersonville in person, appointed Mr. Griffin temporary Superintendent, and gave him such limited facilities as could be furnished in that destitute country. It was determined to enclose a square of fifty acres; and, at the time of our arrival, the fence was nearly one third built--from old lumber found about the place. He had also erected a brick kiln; and was manufacturing brick for drains to conduct the water away from the graves, and protect and strengthen the soil against the action of heavy rains. We found Mr. Griffin, with a force of about twenty Negroes and a few mules, at work on the grounds. I have understood that that gentleman furnished the labor at his own cost, while General Wilson issued the necessary rations.

The part performed by our party was to take up and carry forward the work so well commenced. Additional force was obtained from the military commandant at Macon for completing the enclosure and erecting the head-boards. It seems that the dead had been buried by Union prisoners, paroled from the stockade and hospital for that purpose. Successive trenches, capable of containing from 100 to 150 bodies each, thickly set with little posts or boards, with numbers in regular order carved upon them,

told to the astonished and tear dimmed eye the sad story of buried treasures. It was only necessary to compare the number upon each post or board with that which stands opposite the name on the register, and replace the whole with a more substantial, uniform and comely tablet, bearing not only the original number, but the name, company and regiment and date of death of the soldier who slept beneath.

I have been repeatedly assured by prisoners that great care was taken at the time by the men to whom fell the sad task of originally marking this astonishing number of graves, to perform the work with faithfulness and accuracy. If it shall prove that the work performed by those who followed, under circumstances so much more favorable, was executed with less faithfulness and accuracy than the former, it will be a subject of much regret--but fortunately not yet beyond the possibility of correction. The number of graves marked is 12,200. The original records, captured by General Wilson, furnished about 10,500; but as one book of the record had not been secured, over 2,000 names were supplied from a copy (of his own record) made by Mr. Atwater in the Andersonville prison, and brought by him to Annapolis on his return with the paroled prisoners.

Interspersed throughout this Death Register were 400 numbers against which stood only the dark word "unknown." So, scattered among the thickly designated graves, stand 400 tablets, bearing only the number and the touching inscription "Unknown Union Soldier."

Substantially, nothing was attempted beyond enclosing the grounds identifying and marking the graves, placing some appropriate mottoes at the gates and along the spaces designed for walks, and erecting a flagstaff in the centre of the cemetery. The work was completed on the 17th of August, and the party took the route homeward by way of

Chattanooga, Nashville, and Cincinnati, arriving at Washington on the morning of August 24th.

The health of the party during the expedition was remarkably good, when the season of the year, the fatigue, and the want of customary accommodations are taken into consideration. Cases of slight chills and fevers were not unfrequent; but, during the entire time, we had only one case of severe illness, and that, to our grief, terminated fatally. Edward Watts, of Georgetown, D.C., a clerk in the Q M. Department in this city, sickened of typhoid fever during the passage up the Savannah river, and died on the 16th day of August. His remains were taken home to his friends. Mr. Watts was a young man of education and refinement, and of the highest type of moral and religious character; he suffered patiently, and died nobly and well. I have thought that he might be regarded as the last martyr of Andersonville.

The future of this historic spot cannot fail to constitute a subject of deep and abiding interest to the people of this entire country, and it would seem fitting that it should be preserved as one of the sanctuaries of the nation, and be in due time decorated with appropriate honors. Its susceptibility of internal improvement is very great. Water can be had for irrigation, and the climate will produce nearly all the flora of the temperate zones. Both the national gratitude and personal affection will suggest the erection of a suitable monument within the cemetery, where, if desirable, may be preserved in durable form the names of the martyrs who sleep around. And as the land on which all these interesting associations are clustered, is still the property of private individuals, never having passed from the hands of the original owners, it would seem desirable that the cemetery at least, and its immediate surroundings, become the property of the nation. A mile square will embrace

all points of general and historic interest.

There are numerous smaller burial-places in the State of Georgia which, from their seeming lesser importance, will scarcely be kept up as national cemeteries, and in reference to which, without venturing to suggest, I would merely remark, that the fifty acres enclosed at Andersonville would afford ample space for all whom it might ever be deemed advisable to remove to that point.

During the occupation of Andersonville as a prison, it was a punishable offence for a colored man or woman to feed, shelter, aid, or even converse with the prisoners on parole. To others they had no access. I have been informed that they were not allowed about the prison grounds; and so great was their superstitious horror of the cruelties perpetrated upon the prisoners that only a comparatively small number had ever found the courage to visit the cemetery up to the time of our arrival. But the presence of some many northern people on such an errand, and especially a lady, entirely overcame their fears, and they visited the cemetery and myself by scores, men, women, and children, sometimes a hundred in a day. It was no uncommon occurrence, upon opening my tent in the morning, to find a group standing in front of it, who had walked fifteen or twenty miles to see the "Yankee lady," and ask her "if it were true that Abraham Lincoln was dead, and they were free," and "how Massa Lincoln's great paper read," and "what they ought to do," and tell her how the "poor Yankee prisoners" ran before the dogs, "like us," and they could not save themselves--starved, and they could not feed them--died, and they could not see them.

Remember, mothers, that the pitying tear of the old time slave, whom your son helped to freedom, is the only tear that falls upon his distant grave today.

I have endeavored to point out to you, as faithfully as I am able, the various objects of interest, painful or otherwise, which presented themselves to my observation during the time occupied in the work of confined to Andersonville, while similar horrors glared in the sunny light, and spotted the flower-girt garden fields of that whole desperate, misguided, and bewildered people. Wherever stretched the form of a Union prisoner, there rose the signal for cruelty and cry of agony, and there, day by day, grew the skeleton graves of the nameless dead.

But, braving and enduring all this, some thousands have returned to you. And you will bear with me, and these noble men will pardon me, while, in conclusion, I speak one word to them. The unparalleled severities of our four years' campaigns have told upon the constitutional strength even of the fortunate soldier, who alone marched to the music of the Union, and slept only beneath the folds of the flag for which he fought. But they whom fickle fortune left to crouch at the foot of the shadowless palmetto, and listen to the hissing of the serpent, drank still deeper of the unhealthy drought. These men bear with them the seeds of disease and death, sown in that fatal clime, and ripening for an early harvest. With occasional exceptions, they will prove to be short lived and enfeebled men, and whether they ask it or not, will deserve at your hands; no ordinary share of kindly consideration. The survivor of a rebel prison has enured and suffered what you never can, and what I pray God, our children never may. With less of strength, and more of sad and bitter memories, he is with you now, to earn the food so long denied him. If he ask "leave to toll," give it him before it is too late; if he need kindness and encouragement, bestow them freely, while you may; if he seek charity at your hands; re-

member that "the poor you have always with you," but him you have not always, and withhold it not. If hereafter you find them making organized effort to provide for the widow and orphan of the Union prisoner, remember that it grows out of the heart sympathy which clusters around the memories of the comrades who perished at their side, and a well grounded apprehension for the future of their own, and aid them.

In conclusion, tremulously, least I assume too much, let me hasten to commend to the grateful consideration of this noble, generous people, alike the soldier who has given his strength, the prisoner who has sacrificed his health, the widow who has offered up her husband, the orphan that knows only that its father went out to battle and comes no more forever, and the lonely, distant grave of the martyr, who sleeps alone in a stranger soil, that freedom and peace might come to ours.

One word of explanation, in conclusion, and I have done. You have long and justly felt that some report of this expedition, embracing a record of the graves identified and reclaimed, was due you. And three thousand letters addressed to me upon the subject, have revealed only too plainly and painfully the bitter anxiety with which you have watched and waited.

A mere report, unaccompanied by the "record," seemed but a hollow mockery, which I would not impose upon you, and this is my first opportunity for such accompaniment. For the record of you dead, you are indebted to the forethought, courage, and perseverance of Dorence Atwater, a young man not yet twenty-one years of age; an orphan; for years a soldier; one tenth part of his whole life a prisoner, with broken health and ruined hopes, he seeks to present to your acceptance the sad gift he has in store for you; and, grateful for the opportu-

nity, I hasten to place beside it this humble report, whose only merit is its truthfulness, and beg you to accept it in the spirit of kindness in which it is offered.

THE LAST BATTLE OF THE EAST WAYNESVILLE, NC MAY 6, 1865

JAMES L. HARRISON JR.

Accounts of many of the major battles of the War Between the States have been repeated so many times and with such numerous annexations of information that indeed some of the stories have become legends. Often it requires considerable research to separate facts from fiction about these expanded versions.

Today, it is the battles of lesser significance and the less well known skirmishes which are getting a lion's share of attention.

Accordingly, my topic at hand deals with the final armed confrontation of the War in the East, that being near Waynesville, North Carolina on May 6, 1865. The Confederate Military History designates the date as May 8th; and, while there appears some bit of uncertainty as to the exact date, it seems from comparative records that May 6th is the correct date.

The events at Waynesville were so com-

pletely overshadowed by the unfortunate capture of President Davis at Irwinsville, Georgia, on the 10th of May that the attendant facts relative to Waynesville were almost totally neglected at the time--and for years later as a matter of fact.

A few notes pertaining to the history of the Waynesville area will be of interest. At the outset of the War Between the States Waynesville itself was just a hamlet of some twenty (20) houses and a population of around one hundred (100). The rural environs were rather heavily populated for the time.

Waynesville is located in Haywood County in the mountainous region along the North Carolina-Tennessee border. In fact, Waynesville itself is surrounded by lofty mountain peaks.

Prior to the outbreak of hostilities Union sentiment was quite strong in North Carolina and especially in the western area where Waynesville is located. This is evident from the fact that the first call for secession was defeated by a substantial majority at the polls.

However, on April 15, 1861, Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 troops to expand the Federal Army in preparation for action against the Confederacy. North Carolina was given a quota, and this made secessionists out of most of the once pro Union sympathizers and especially so in Haywood County.

Rev. William Hicks, who earlier had been against secession, was elected as the county's delegate to the Secession Convention held on the 20th of May in Raleigh. Hicks was now an ardent secessionist, and he voted for North Carolina's joining with the Confederacy.

Haywood County furnished around 925 men for the Confederate Army, plus another 150 or so who served in the Home Guards. Most of these men were active throughout the War and served in

fields of action far from home. Approximately 750 of them lived to return home following the war.

At the time of the War Between the States, as well as at the present time, it is impossible to discuss the mountain region of North Carolina without making some reference to the Cherokee Indians of the area. While there are examples of some hostilities in the early days, for the most part the Cherokees were friendly to their white neighbors and almost to the man supportive of the cause of the Confederacy.

Almost every Cherokee man capable of bearing arms was in the service of the Confederacy--either locally or in field action. It is thought that more than, 2,000 Cherokees from western North Carolina alone served in the Confederate Army.

The strength of the Indian commitment to the Confederacy can be highlighted by making reference to an event occurring 35 years after the War. At a convention of Confederate Veterans held in Louisville, Kentucky, twenty (20) Cherokees from North Carolina were in attendance for the very first time at any such gathering. Their presence was proudly noted, and they went home and organized their own United Confederate Veterans camp named Sou-noo-kee in honor of an Indian killed in Confederate service at Cumberland Gap.

Aside from occasional bushwhacking there was very little war activity in Haywood County and the general area throughout most of the War. The area had the natural protection of the mountains, plus the able military leadership of Col. W. W. Stringfield who was in command of the district from Asheville to Murphy.

Colonel Stringfield was ably assisted by Col. James R. Love and Lt. Robert T. Conley, as well as others. Also, as the War neared its end Col. Thomas and his Cherokee Battalion were back in their home

area for the final engagements.

Indeed Col. Stringfield envisioned big events yet to come in Western North Carolina. He speculated that in the event Richmond had to be evacuated Lee's army might fall back into the Smokies to fight another day--not a fanciful dream at all, though it did not occur.

Neighboring East Tennessee was a trouble spot for the South during most of the War, especially after Knoxville fell into Union control in September, 1863. The stability of Western North Carolina was often threatened due to the closeness of Yankee forces in East Tennessee.

The most hated man in this area during and likely after the War as well was the Federal raider Col. George W. Kirk, a renegade Tennessean who was in Union service. Kirk had made sporadic raids into Western North Carolina as circumstances permitted, and the circumstances were never more favorable for such raids as in the spring of 1865.

On or about March 1, 1865, Kirk with a force of about 600 men moved into the Cattaloochee area where he was attacked by a small detachment of defenders who were forced to retreat. Then with no defenders further opposing him at this point he moved on into Waynesville, stealing horses, mules and various provisions on the way.

In Waynesville, Kirk burned the home of Col. Robert Love for spite. He likewise burned the local jail but not until he had set all prisoners free. Every house in Waynesville reportedly was looted by the renegade Kirk.

Resistance quickly developed as Kirk moved out of Waynesville. He camped for the night near the Pinnacle on Balsam Road, and during the night the Yankees were fired upon by a Confederate cadre of some one hundred (100) men. Kirk's big guns, however, forced the local defenders to fall back,

but Kirk also was on the move after having pillaged Waynesville.

Instead of continuing in his intended direction into Jackson County by way of Balsam Gap, on the following morning Kirk marched back into Waynesville and pressed toward Coco Gap where he was met by Lt. Conley, whose sharpshooters drove him back across the Balsams. Later met by additional defenders from both Jackson and Swain Counties, as well as a company of local Cherokees near an old Indian church, east of Quallatown, not far from present day Cherokee, Kirk was driven back into Tennessee on March 6th.

Incidents in Western North Carolina prior to the spring of 1865 were few and far between. As already noted the mountains themselves provided a natural defense for the region in that day and time.

Concerning the dates of the mentioned skirmishes, here too there is some discrepancy as to the actual dates of the action; yet the consensus is that it occurred on or about the dates mentioned, i.e. in the first few days of March, 1865. The Confederate Military History and most local accounts give the dates in early March.

None of the local skirmishes were of particular significance except for the fact that they gave the mountain area of Western North Carolina its first taste of battle activity. Also, the events attendant to the skirmishes provided another example of the depraved looting and pillaging carried on in so much of the South during the War Between the States. Even though Waynesville and the general area was raided by Yankee forces, the local troops were successful in driving the raiders back into Tennessee just a month before Appomattox.

Confederate forces evacuated Asheville on April 29, 1865, but those willing to fight to a bitter end moved west further into the mountains where

Waynesville is situated. The leader of the Southern Army moving into the Waynesville area was Col. James R. Love--already mentioned, and he was under the command of Gen. James G. Martin.

On May 6th, exactly two months after Kirk was driven out of North Carolina and nearly a month after Appomattox, and new Federal force of about a thousand (1,000) men moved into Haywood County under Col. L.C. Bartlett.

Interestingly, Gen. Martin had dispatched Col. W.W.Stringfield to Knoxville on or about April 25th with a flag of truce, but Col. Stringfield and his group were all thrust into jail for refusing to take an oath of allegiance, an entirely improper demand to be placed upon a truce bearer. News of this event, of course, had not gotten back to Confederate officers at Waynesville.

Thus, with the entry of a new threat to the local populace on May 6th immediate steps were taken to defend Waynesville. Col. Bartlett had marched his Yankee troops into Waynesville and camped for the night.

According to legend, Col. W.H. Thomas and a number of his Indian force took to the mountains surrounding Waynesville during the night building numerous camp fires and generally sounding off with their war whoops, all of which greatly alarmed the Yankee invaders and had them ready to surrender on the following day.

At this point, I would like to interject a first hand report from one of the prominent participants in the Waynesville event, that being Lt. R. T. Conley. A published item over his signature was published in the Atlanta Constitution on July 12, 1892. This likely is the most reliable report we have preserved of those events in early May, 1865.

I quote Lt. Conley as follows:

“I will give you a short and accurate history of the last gun fired by regular Confederate soldiers acting under orders.

“This occurred on the afternoon of May 6, 1865, at White Sulphur Springs, near Waynesville, North Carolina.

“...After the capture of Asheville, the latter part of April, Col. James R. Love, First Regiment, Thomas’ North Carolina Legion, with 200 men, fell back to Balsam Gap, nine (9) miles south of Waynesville. Col. Thomas, with about 200 men, part Indians, occupied Soco Gap, fifteen (15) miles west of Waynesville. I, in command of the skirmishers of Thomas’ Legion, was ordered to make my way from Col. Thomas at Soco Gap to Col. Love at Balsam Gap, with my sharpshooters.

“My route was via White Sulphur Springs, near Waynesville, where Col. L.C. Bartlett, Second New York Infantry for the U.S. Army, was encamped. I encountered some of Col. Bartlett’s men at the springs, charged them with my skirmishers, driving them from the springs and killing one of them, named Arwood, who now lies buried in the federal part of the cemetery at Asheville.

“Arwood, was doubtless, the last man killed by regular command east of the Mississippi. I yet have his gun as a relic.

“It is proper to state that we were 100 miles from a railroad and knew nothing of the armistice between Sherman and Johnston, nor of the surrender of Gen. Johnston, until the 7th of May, when a truce was agreed upon between our Col. Thomas and Col. Bartlett.

“A parley was held on the 8th of May, and we agreed to surrender, retaining our arms for our own safety at home, and we did surrender on May

9th, 1865,.....

“With the above facts as a basis for the claim, why should not the ‘tar heels’ have the honor, White Sulphur Springs, North Carolina, be the place and May 8, 1865, the date of the last soldier to fall and last gun fired in the War Between the States?”

Today there is a rock monument with a bronze tablet standing near the site of the last shot fired in the East during the War Between the States. It was erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1920, and it duly recognizes the role of Lt. Conley.

The bronze marker on the monument reads as follows:

“Near this spot the last shot of the War Between the States was fired under the command of Lt. Robert T. Conley of the Confederate Army May 6, 1865.”

Of course, the assertion that this was the last shot of the War is not accurate, inasmuch as a week later there was a battle fought at Palmetto Ranch, near Brownsville, Texas.

It is accurate to say that the shots fired at Waynesville and the killing of a Yankee named Arwood was the final action in the East. This especially makes the Waynesville incident important in the history of North Carolina and certainly of interest to all of us who have an undying devotion to the cause of the Confederacy.

Speech given by Mr. James L. Harrison, Jr., April, 1994 at a dinner sponsored by Confederate Battle Flag Camp 1511 of Manatee and Sarasota Counties, FL

Transcript Provided by Robert L. Bell and Harold Majors.

ACTION AT STRAWBERRY PLAINS BRIDGE

JAMES KEELAN AND THE BATTLE OF STRAWBERRY PLAINS BRIDGE, TN NOVEMBER, 1861

Shortly after the election, in August, in Tennessee, which resulted in a vast majority in favor of separation, and the permanent Constitution, it was considered necessary to place a strong guard at the Bridge at Strawberry Plains, in East Tennessee, as a large majority in this part of the State were Union men, Lincolnites, enemies of Southern Rights, and threatening to destroy the railroad bridges. But the Lincolnites, finally professing to be willing to submit to the will of the majority of the state, and renouncing all intention of resisting the Confederate Government, the guard at Strawberry Plains Bridge was removed, and the Bridge left to the care of the ordinary watch--one man--whose business it was to proceed after every train, both by night and day, and to see that no fire nor any obstructions whatever had been left on the bridge; and, moreover, to see that no illegal passage was made by persons across on the bridge. Such was the condition of affairs at the Bridge, up to the eighth of November. Fortunately for the Railroad Company, and for the Southern Confederacy, James Keelan was the man at this time employed to watch the bridge. The watch has a box, or bunk, as it is sometimes called, in which he rests. It is placed on the lower sill of the bridge, at the east end, about four feet from the ground; from this box the watch can step to the shoulder of the pillar on which the sill rests. A man on the ground would be able to strike, with a bowie knife, a man standing in the box, about the knee; and a man on the shoulder of the stone pillar on a level with the watch, standing in his box. Above a man's

head standing in the box, two large braces, crossing, and let one into the other, shield a man thus standing, from the blows of his adversary. On Friday evening, the eighth of November, a man who, it is very certain, was engaged in the attempt to burn the bridge, was seen to pass the bridge. He learned that no armed guard was there stationed, Shortly after midnight, on the night of the eighth of November, about forty mounted men, some of them from a distance of more than twenty miles, entered the farm of Capt. William Stringfield, by laying down the fence--we say forty mounted men, as near as can be ascertained from the signs left by themselves and their horses. These desperadoes, it is evident, were armed with repeaters, bowie knives, tort-pine, and loco matches; their pine being split into sticks about two feet and a half in length, about an inch and a half in diameter, and shaved with a knife, about midway, into fine splinters, left fast at one end, so as ready to take fire from the lose match. Thus armed and equipped, after entering the farm, the rascally incendiaries proceeded across the field until they came to a point near Holston River, above the bridge, where, it seems, they left their horses, with a guard of about ten men; thirty proceeded down the river until they came within a short distance of the bridge, when about fifteen spread out around, it would seem, to guard off any approach to protect the bridge, while about fifteen proceeded to fire the bridge. The moon had disappeared; all was silent about the bridge; the people of Strawberry Plains were profoundly sleeping; darkness shrouded every object. But the immortal Keelan was awake; the lion was aroused in his lair; the hero rose up, and stood in his box; he heard their approaching footsteps, as the rascals came down the foot way which passes under the bridge, on the east aide of the river; nearer and nearer they came, until under the bridge

they halted. "I shall see, presently," thought the undaunted Keelan, "what all this means." Quick, after some whispering, which the watch could not understand, up mounted one of their number on the shoulder of the pillar, and within a few feet of the unflinching Keelan. "I could," says the hero, "Have laid my hands on him." The rascal struck his match; it ignited; he applied it to his stick of torch pine, carefully prepared, as before stated; the match took, and a bright blaze revealed to the view of the undaunted soldier the fearful odds, about fifteen large and savage desperadoes, looking fierce as demons just revealed from the pit of darkness, their arms, silver-mounted, glittering in the sudden light. "I did not stop," says the intrepid soldier, "to count them, I think, from the appearance of the crowd, there were about fifteen. I had to be quick," says the soldier, "for the fellow was just about to place the torch between the scantling and weather boarding. I could have touched him," says the hero, "with my single shot pistol. I did not, however, put it against him, but I put it very near him, and shot him in the right breast, as he was in a position quartering to me. Off he tumbled to the ground, among the crowd below; the torch was knocked out by the fall, and all was dark again." The brave Keelan had now his country homemade dirk, about thirteen inches long, and his rifle; but the demons were so close upon him that he could not use his rifle. Now commenced the most terrific struggle; the appeal was made to the cold steel. Up came two dare-devils upon the shoulder of the pillar, on a level with the hero, while the crowd below were striking at him from the ground, cutting and hewing to pieces the box in which he stood. By reason of the narrowness of the shoulder of the pillar, those two mounted on a level with the hero could only come at him, one at a time. "It was very dark, and

I continued to carry my left arm up and down, to shield my head and face, until I heard the crack of the bowie knife on the brace over my head, and then I grabbed him with my left hand, and thrust my dirk into him with my right arm. I felt that my dirk went into him up to the hilt, "says the soldier, "and as I drew it out of him, off he tumbled to the ground, among the crowd below; who were clattering like hail, with their bowie knives, upon my box, in which I was standing. Quick at me came the other man, who was upon the shoulder, on a level with me, he continued to strike and fall back. I could not reach to get hold on him; he struck the brace above my head several times, and I also received several blows on my left arm and one on my right; they did not hurt me, however, in the least. At last, when I made a grab, I got him by the hair, and then, as I drew him to me, I gave him every inch of my dirk; I felt it quiver as it went into him; as I drew it back, down he went; off he tumbled to the ground among the crowd below." At this stage of the battle a generous foe would have said, stop, men; it is enough; this is too brave a man to die; spare him--but not so with the host of demons by whom the lone hero was surrounded. "Cursed be their wrath, for it was fierce, and their anger, for it was cruel." "At him again, my braves of the red melt; let me at him; G--d d--n him, I can fetch him." Said one of their number, mounting up on a level with the surviving hero. "I was sensible," says the unflinching soldier, "that I was wounded, as the blood was running over my mouth, and it made me feel savage, and as this fourth fellow came at me, I wanted to get him. I made my grab quick, and caught him by his cap; it slipped off, and I went back hard against the weather boarding at my back, and in the rebound I came near falling out of my box. It was then the rascal struck the blow which cut off my left hand, and split

my head; but I, at the same time, poked it into him. He got the steel good; for, as I drew back, he went off to the ground heavily, and squalled out, 'help, my braves!' They now commenced shooting and retreating. I tried to use my rifle, and found I could not lift it. I did not exactly know the reason then, but found out afterward that they had cut off my left hand, and shot me in the right arm. They shot furiously, but I did not know at the time that they had hit me; but they put three balls into me."

God be praised none of the wounds inflicted proved mortal; his skull was split four inches, yet the brain was not injured. The rascals, after firing a volley of shots at him, beat, hastily, an ignominious retreat, by the way in which they came, leaving, as was discovered, next morning, lying on the battleground, and scattered on the line of their retreat, a No. 1 Colt's repeater, a splendid bowie knife, a fine beaver cap, a blanket, which had been worn as a cloak, an overcoat, profusely besmeared with blood, and through which had been thrust the death dealing dirk of the immortal Keelan, a box of loco matches, together with all their torch pine. When the demons were fairly gone, the conqueror, no one coming to his relief, his left hand cut off, his right arm rendered helpless by a deep wound from a bowie knife and a ball, shot by the retreating incendiaries, his blood fast running, his body a gore, by one leap came to the ground, from the shoulder of the pillar, and proceeded near three hundred yards, through a rough meadow, crossing two fences, to the house of Mr. William Ellmore, dark as was the night; but the fire of the hero's eye was not quenched, nor was the never-dying courage of his soul, in the smallest degree, abated. He came to the house of Mr. W. Elmore, and roused the sleeping household, when he entered the house and met the light, "Merciful God:" exclaimed Mr. Elmore, "Keelan, have you

went to sleep on the road, and has the train ran over you?" "I wish to lie down," said the hero--a bed was preparing--"not upon the bed; I shall ruin it; make a pallet on the floor." A pallet was made, and he laid himself down. "Now, said the great conqueror, "I will tell you all about it," and proceeded to give a brief narrative of the astonishing battle; all of which was found true when day light appeared; and much more than could then be told was discovered. While the hero was telling about the battle, a messenger was on his way for a physician--Dr. R. Sneed, who lived hard by, a man eminent as a physician and surgeon. When the doctor came he quickly and successfully went to work. As the hand of the mighty warrior had been cut off in battle, a little below the wrist, through all the small bones, sinews, veins and arteries, spreading to the extremities of the hand, "this," said the doctor, "if it ever gets well, will require six months to heal. I will cut it off a little above the wrist, and cure it easily and quickly." "Not so," said the man, who did not intend to die; "let it be," said the hero, "when it gets well, with that little stump I can hold up my gun. Vesuvius: Etna: Stromboli: and all the volcanoes in this vast world: what are all you eruptions and flames in comparison with the fire still burning for battle in the bosom of Keelan, the man of never-dying heroism? Does the man one time think of dying? No; nor does he intend to die. The furious and high blooded charger, that has seen service; on the eve of battle, in sight of the foe, his ears pierced forward; his eyes flash as fire; he furiously paws the earth and grinds the iron bit that restrains him. Keelan, the immortal hero of Strawberry Plains Bridge, is looking forward to another mighty and bloody battle. No person who then saw him thought it possible that the man could live. But Keelan, wonderful man, is holding on, and saving every scrap to be

thrown into the scale which is to turn up in the next bloody fight. The little stump was not cut off. And, God be praised; the immortal hero is fast getting well, and is now out of all danger. And, thanks to the skillful and attentive Dr. R. Sneed, under whose care, in the Providence of God, the great soldier will survive his many deep and sore wounds. The reader may possibly here pause, and be inclined to inquire, were those bridge burners a puny set of poltroons? We answer, they were a company of desperadoes, villainous and savage; a select company of strong men, Lincolmites, died in the wool, whose watch word was "blood and rape, burning and plunder," and who had been sworn into service by the gods Venus and Dacchus, and by the hand of old John Brown, that they would neither eat bread nor drink whiskey, until they had reduced the bridge to ashes; such were the enemies against whom the immortal Keelan fought. For Keelan; Jehovah's buckler was his shield, and his enemies fell before him accursed; and the battle ground was made slippery with the blood of the slain. The bridge cost in building more than one hundred thousand dollars; all was at stake on the dreadful issue, besides millions the the Southern Confederacy. The lives and property of Southern men, and the salvation of their wives and daughters from worse than death itself, all depended on the fearful cast. God, by his servant, Keelan, fought for his people. Soldiers of the Confederate army, emulate the deeds of Keelan; his astonishing victory speaks to you in language unmistakable, that God is with you. The God of Keelan, fellow soldiers, is your God. The thick bosses of Jehovah's buckler are before you, and the shafts of your enemies shall fall to the earth accursed. When you go to do battle in defence of your dearest rights, think of the immortal Keelan. Let your war cry be heard in tones of thunder, and as the commingled sound

of the countless swellings of the waves of many waters--Keelan! Keelan! Remember Keelan!!! Our homes, our wives, our children, our friends.

When we say that James Keelan is a brave man, and a hero, we only speak common praise. Wonderful man; the Confederacy shall always boast of him, and be proud of his name; the nations of the earth shall speak his fame; the Universe shall talk of his mighty achievement, and children yet unborn shall be taught to lisp the name of Keelan. The immortal hero, James Keelan, has, with the point of his death dealing spear, dipped in the blood of his foes, with his lone hand, written his name high, high, on the pinnacle of fame, along with the mighty Washingtons, Jacksons, Bartows, Zollicoffers and Napoleons of the world. On the pages of history will live immortal the name of James Keelan, while the names of his adversaries, the enemies of Southern Rights, will be lost, and will rot in the vortex of Abolitionism. Their Tory bitten carcasses shall descend to ignominious graves, there to rot in infamy, and be remembered only to be despised; while their deeply sin-stricken souls shall be driven away to the portals of Hell, where their astonished ears shall be stunned with the perpetual and eternal screams of devils and demi devils, crying in derision, the rascals have come! The rascals have come!! Tory! Tory! Tory!!! The unflinching soldier, who determined to do or die, James Keelan, shall finally and eternally reap congenial joys in the fields of the blest.

Transcription of newspaper article written by Radford Gatlin of the Daily Intelligencer Print, Atlanta, GA, 1862