



Tar Heel *Cincinnatus* MAJOR GENERAL BRYAN GRIMES

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Three sources of information help us understand the artifacts of Major General Bryan Grimes.

THE HISTORIC RECORD:

The historic accounts are summed up in a biography titled Lee's Last Major General, Bryan Grimes of North Carolina, authored by T. Harrell Allen of East Carolina University. This book tells the story of a man that I refer to as a "Tar Heel Cincinnatus," a 19th Century way of saying "Citizen Soldier."

Cincinnatus was the Roman who gave up politics and went home to his farm. Later Rome was about to fall to an enemy and a delegation of senators went to give Cincinnatus the news that he has been appointed to a six month term as Dictator with absolute power. They found him plowing in the field. Cincinnatus answered the call to save the city, put on his toga, left his farm and family, personally led the Roman infantry against the enemy and defeated them in 16 days. He then gave up his absolute authority, returned to his farm, and beat his sword back into a plowshare.

Cincinnatus became the model citizen soldier, a man who would set an example for Bryan Grimes and those thousands of North Carolinians who answered the call to duty in 1861. South Carolina has Wade Hampton, Georgia its John B. Gordon, and Tennessee can point to Nathan Bedford Forrest. I submit that North Carolina's most distinguished citizen soldier of the Civil War was Bryan Grimes.

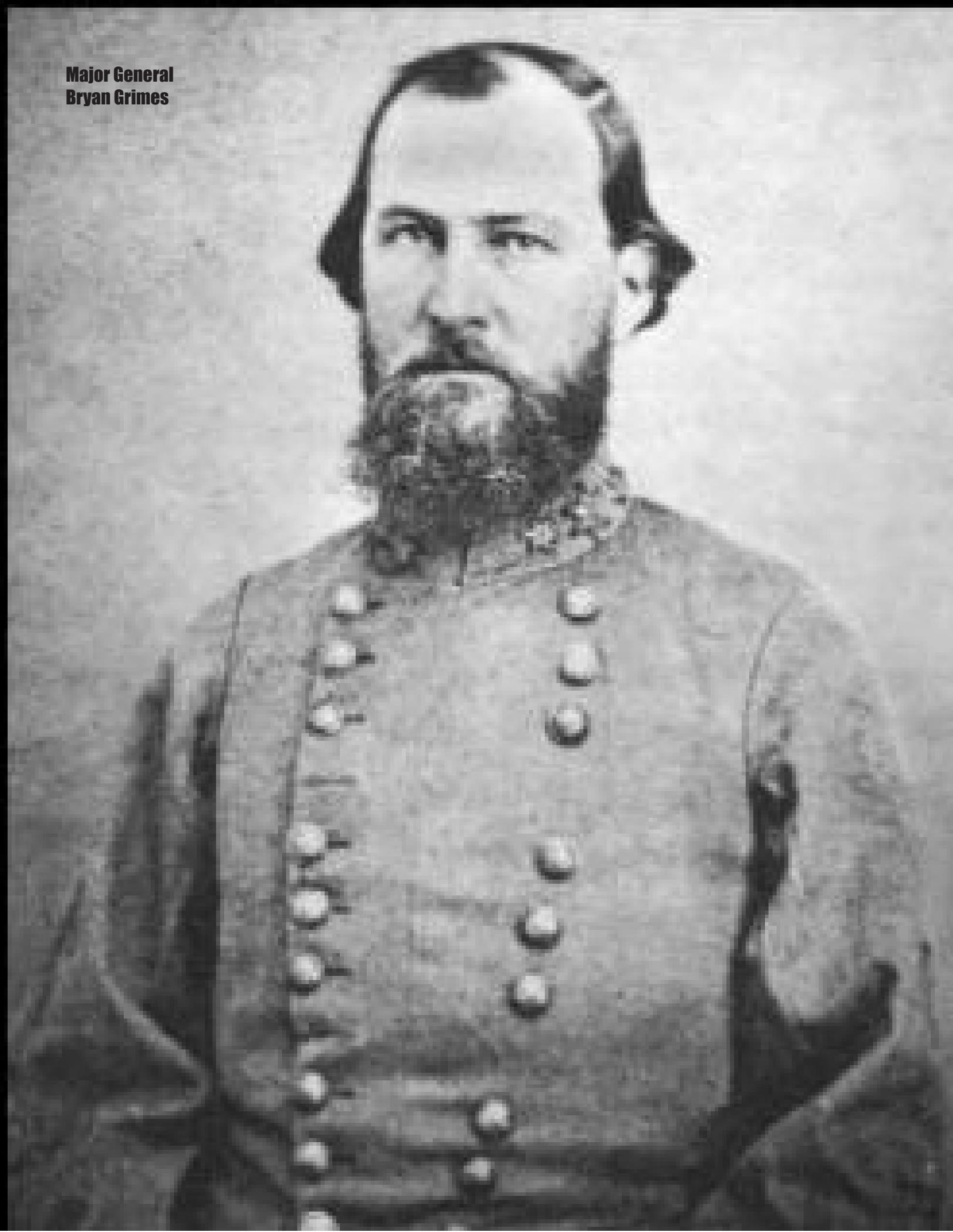
He was raised in Pitt County on the family plantation, Grimesland, and graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1848. Grimes returned home, and over the next 13 years became very successful at agriculture, his greatest interest. In 1861 he was a delegate to the North Carolina Secession Convention, signed the Ordinance of Secession, and being a man of action as much as of words, volunteered at age 33 to defend his state.

As frequently happened in those early days of the war the influential planter; who, like Hampton, Gordon and Forrest; had absolutely no military background; was offered the colonelcy of a regiment by Governor Ellis. Grimes opted for a commission as Major in the 4th North Carolina Regiment where he could learn the military trade under the leadership of West Pointer George Burgwyn Anderson of Orange County.

Bryan Grimes and the legendary 4th North Carolina barely missed the battle of First Manassas but made up for that absence by being involved in all the remaining great battles in the eastern theater, and Grimes personally saw as much of the war as any man in the Army of Northern Virginia.

He soon became Colonel of the 4th, survived typhoid, and would lose seven horses during the war. At Seven Pines his first mount was shot out from under him and he was the only officer of the regiment not killed or wounded. He went on to fight in the Peninsula Campaign of 1862 and was not in the Bloody Lane at Sharpsburg only because he was kicked severely by a horse after the Battle of South Mountain. He was back in action for Fredericksburg and went on to fight at Chancellorsville the following year. His troops were the first to enter Get-

**Major General
Bryan Grimes**



**Colonel
Bryan Grimes
4th NCST**



tysburg on the first day of that battle and his courage at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania, where his troops saved Lee's army, led to his promotion to Brigadier General after the death of Ramseur at Cedar Creek. He was in the thick of things in the Shenandoah Valley battles and in the Petersburg campaign. Grimes became the last officer of the Army of Northern Virginia promoted to the rank of Major General in February, 1865. Commanding a division, he fought to the very end and directed the last attack of the army, driving the Union forces from the Lynchburg Road, opening a potential escape route at Appomattox Courthouse.

Major General Grimes was the highest ranking officer to surrender there, other than Lee himself, and returned to North Carolina bear-

ing the reputation of an excellent, disciplined and fearless combat leader who on many occasions somehow escaped death or capture. Walter Clark, Confederate veteran and editor of the five volume North Carolina Regiments, simply said of Grimes, "There was no braver man in the whole army."

Like Cincinnatus, at the end of the war Bryan Grimes returned to Raleigh and then to Grimesland where he continued his success as an agriculturalist, raised a large family, and became one of his state's most respected sons, only to be killed in 1880 by an assassin from ambush because of his involvement in a political or legal matter.

THE WORDS OF BRYAN GRIMES

A Second source speaks to us of these artifacts, the words of Brian Grimes himself. He was a very literate man and a prolific writer of frank and detailed letters and recollections.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to be at Chancellorsville in May, 2008 heard Grimes' description of his encounter with the Stonewall Brigade on the second day of the battle. In the same letter to his wife he also said this about his experience in that action:

"In this charge my sword was severed by a ball and my clothes perforated in many places, and a ball embedded in my sword belt and scabbard, and I received a very severe contusion on the foot."



THE ARTICLES THEMSELVES

A final source of information about these items is the articles themselves. Ben Tart, who has examined the Grimes frock coat, pointed out that it is important to look at the items, let them speak, and to listen to what they tell us.

FROM THESE THREE SOURCES OF INFORMATION WE CAN SAY SEVERAL THINGS WITH CERTAINTY ABOUT THE GRIMES ARTIFACTS AND CAN MAKE AN INTELLIGENT GUESS AS TO OTHER FACTS SURROUNDING THEM.

These items did in fact belong to Grimes and were given to the Mu-

seum of the Confederacy about a century ago by the General's son Alston, who was born in 1868 and died in 1914.

THE SWORD BELT AND PLATE

This is a "common" (if that is a fair word to use) black leather U.S. pattern 1851 sword belt of the type intended for company and field-and-staff officers, with a rectangular brass officer's sword belt plate, also 1851 pattern, with the regulation eagle motif.

Further research will reveal more about these items, but the strong family and personal history tells us that this is the sword belt and plate damaged as Colonel Grimes lead the 4th North Carolina on May 2, 1863 attempting to dis-

lodge Federal troops at Chancellorsville. The damage is consistent with what would be caused by the impact of conical projectile fired from a musket to Grime's left which nearly double up the lower left hand corner of the plate. Fortunately for the wearer, it is likely that these items saved him from severe injury or death and they were retired to "souvenir" status soon thereafter.

THE SWORD AND SCABBARD

Again, there is plenty of room for work on these items but they are said to be the property of Bryan Grimes severed and damaged at Chancellorsville. The military sword is light in weigh and construction compared to other swords of the era It is missing the forward



one-third of its etched blade, and is marked as having been made in the German-influenced city of Metz in northeastern French region of Lorraine. The metal scabbard shows a prominent dent and its drag is considerably worn.

THE FROCK COAT

This is by far the most complex and intriguing item in this group of artifacts.

As we view this garment and listen to what it is telling us, we must keep in mind several things:

The Confederate government published uniform regulations but regulation uniforms were the exception rather than the rule.

Officers of differing means and tastes purchased their own uniforms and equipment and what they ended up with varied greatly depending on the skill, understanding and technique of the maker, the supplier, the place and time, and the available resources.

Army regulation called for a “tunic” but this is a looser fitting double-breasted “frock coat,” inspired by the civilian garb of the time. The size of this coat is about a modern 42, large by Civil War standards, but consider that by the end of the war Grimes was healthy and in his late 30’s.

The frock coat has only been lightly worn and certainly did not see any significant service in the field, on campaign. There is no indication of battle damage, no tears, repairs or stains.

Ben Tart concluded that this garment was Bryan Grimes “keep-at-home-in-the-drawer or keep-in-storage-at-Richmond” frock coat,



the best one he had when it came time to dress up or sit for an ambrotype.

I think it is certain that he was photographed at least twice in this garment. One of the photos is in today's program, which is probably post-war, and shows Grimes as a Major General. The other, in the Southern Historical Collection at Chapel Hill and in the book Lee's Last Major General, shows him uniformed in the same garment but as a Brigadier.

The fabric of this frock coat is a fine quality "broadcloth," in a weave known as cassimere, and may have been imported. Broadcloth was machine made and came off the loom in bolts 60 inches wide, the opposite of "homespun."

The color is now "light gray" but this is because the fabric has oxidized over the years. When Ben explored protected parts of the material he discovered that the yarn used to make the fabric was a combination of blue and gray dyed wool fibers with maybe a handful of black thrown into the mix. The fabric was not "piece dyed" a uniform color after it was woven. Ben believes the original color of the garment was "blue-gray."

The Grimes frock is adorned with Federal Staff Officer Buttons, dome-shaped with an eagle motif. Ben tells me that the most common buttons in the collection of period officer garments at the N.C.M.O.H. this same attractive and available federal staff button. Also, the buttons on this frock are from two different sources. The ones back-marked SUPERIOR/QUALITY, EXTRA/QUALITY may have been made in the north and smuggled into the Confederacy. Those marked

HORSTMANN BROTHERS/ & CO. PHIL. were made by that supplier of military goods.

Note the unused sewn-up button holes, which ended up being evenly spaced as the buttons on the garment were rearranged one or more times as Grimes advanced in rank. The original buttonholes are "keyhole" shaped, those added later are slits. This garment may have even begun life as a Colonel's frock coat. The buttons are now arranged in groups of three to show the rank of Major General. That is the same configuration shown in the photo in your program. The frock apparently at one time had its buttons grouped in twos, as is shown in the other Grimes Brigadier General photo that I mentioned.

The cuff buttons are also US staff and are non-functional.

There is light buff (or off white) wool broadcloth piping around the top of the collar and down the front.

The gold sleeve braid consists of four strands of material, regulation for general officers, but the lower strand is a different size and was added at some point, so the original configuration may have been the three strands worn by a colonel.

Also, contrary to regulation, the garment has no "facings," or different colored cloth applied to the cuff and collar, indicating branch of service.

I think the collar rank insignia is very interesting. It appears to be unchanged from the photos of Grimes in this garment.

Three stars of equal size on the collar was the rank of Colonel, but in the case of this frock coat, the center star is larger than the other

two, which would indicate the rank of general officer. But the regulation called for the general's three stars to be surrounded by a wreath which is not present here. I understand that there are other examples of Confederate Colonels wearing large center stars. Is this the rank insignia worn by Grimes as a colonel of the 4th, as a general officer, or did he leave it unchanged as he was promoted??

The stars are six-pointed and are adorned with small sewn-on 1/8 inch silver discs (now tarnished) which appear to stand out, sequin like, in the period photographs.

The lining of the body of the frock is a dark green durable wool and silk fabric called "alpaca serge," which was commonly used for that purpose. Light tan cotton material lines the sleeves.

In conclusion, there is a good bit going on here which is typical of many if not most surviving Confederate uniform items. At minimum, there remain numerous questions surrounding this garment which may have seen three changes, from Colonel, to Brigadier to Major General.

In any event, we are all pleased and grateful to have these Bryan Grimes items back in the Old North State, and to be able to hear and see what they tell us about North Carolina's most distinguished citizen soldier.

