

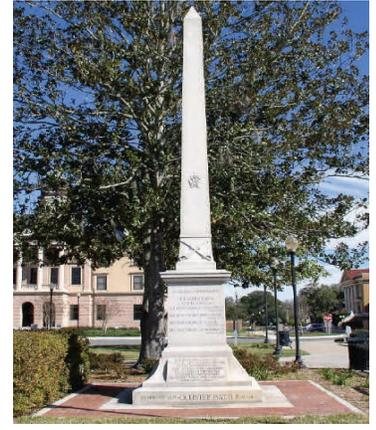


THE STAINLESS BANNER



Florida Society of the Military Order of the Stars and Bars

Issue 18: Winter 2013



The Battle of Olustee Reenactment 2013

The actual Battle of Olustee occurred on 20 February 1864 but the celebration this year was on 16 and 17 February 2013. The event begins with a parade in Lake City and this year the Florida Society of the MOS&B was represented in the parade by Ben H. Willingham, Chief of Staff of the Society and Historian General of the National Order, and his cousin Mrs. Katrina Counts of Lake City. The parade begins at the First Methodist Church and proceeds past the Veteran's Administration Hospital and turns past the reviewing stand to the left on US 90 to the end point. The total distance is about two miles and both sides of the route were lined with people watching the carriages, troops, musical groups, horses and military units pass. Since Katrina is a local Lake City resident of many years, she is known by all and along the entire route all we heard was, "Hi Katrina!" The horse would take two steps and someone else would call out for her. If nothing else her presence brought attention to the MOS&B name on the side of our carriage. Even though it was an MOS&B carriage, I felt honored to be allowed to ride with her as she really stole the show in the parade.

Back at the battlefield the MOS&B together with the Museum of Southern History put on a display of period artifacts. In the past, Randy Kerlin has headed up the effort. Randy passed away a few weeks back and we were fortunate to have Jim Shillinglaw (MOS&B #7970) who is a volunteer at the Museum step in and coordinate the transport of tables, artifacts and all items needed to set up a display. He was assisted by MOS&B members Darrell Goss (MOS&B #8043) and Gordon Terry (MOS&B #2760) as well as others so the display went on without any problems.

Our sincere thanks go to all of the MOS&B members that helped us at Olustee.

The battle itself is interesting. In the overall scheme of things, it was not necessary. But like all wars, it was driven by politics. President Lincoln was not at all secure about his election chances in 1864 and he thought an invasion of Florida would likely cause those Floridians sympathetic to the Union cause to force Florida to return to the Union which would help his election chances greatly. He justified this by saying such an invasion would cut off the food supplies to the Confederate armies as Florida was a major source of beef, pork, salt, sweet potatoes and other necessities. He was also certain that Florida's large black population would be eager to join the Union Army to fight against their masters.

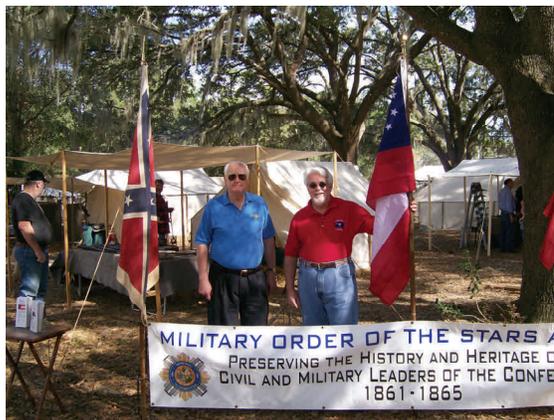


As is often the case, his generals were not at all supportive of the invasion but as the president is the Commander in Chief, he tells the military what they must do. In spite of the huge numbers of soldiers sent from Hilton Head, SC on 38 troop ships to Jacksonville, FL. BGEN Truman Seymour, commander of the Federal army at Jacksonville spent ten days arguing with MGEN Quincy A. Gilmore, Commander of the



South, on the wisdom of the invasion. Truman's experience had been every time his troops left the city and the protection of the naval guns in Jacksonville; they were ambushed and sent home with casualties. General Gilmore finally told Seymour to remain in Jacksonville while he returned to this headquarters. Seymour fearing Gilmore was returning to find a replacement for himself decided to start the invasion contrary to his orders. These ten days of bickering allowed the Confederates to bring troops, mainly Georgians under General Alfred Colquitt from South Carolina and Georgia down to Lake City where BGEN Joseph Finegan and his engineers has located an ideal spot to engage the Federals. As all expected, the invasion route was to be from Jacksonville to Pensacola stopping in Tallahassee to capture what would be the only Confederate capitol east of the Mississippi not to be captured before the end of the war. That is essentially the route of the railroad which runs between the major Okefenokee Swamp to the north and lakes, swamps and rivers to the south. Thus the Federal forces came through this narrow path where the Confederate cavalry could keep an eye on their progress. From time to time pickets would fire shots and retreat giving the

Federals confidence to continue. At one point the Confederate cavalry made a brief charge only to retreat again giving the Federals more confidence that their invasion would be successful. Finally, when the Federals reached the little town of Olustee, the Confederates opened fire. A heated battle went on for several hours until the most spectacular event of the battle took place. The Milton Battery of the Florida Artillery had mounted a 30 pound Parrott Rifle on a railcar and just as the Federal lines were beginning to break, the railcar was moved into place and fired just as the Federals began to feel the demoralization of a fresh Confederate attack, the big Parrott railroad gun open fire. One of its shells landed in the middle of the 54th Massachusetts with



disastrous effect to its already weakened morale. Federal General Seymour soon ordered a withdrawal of his army and as night fell the Federal army was in full retreat leaving cannons, rifles, dead and wounded on the battlefield. General Seymour even left one of his regimental commanders, Colonel Frilby, on the battlefield. The day was a total Confederate victory and was the single largest percentage of Federal casualties suffered in any single day battle. The Federals lost 1,861 casualties.

When all was concluded, nothing had changed. The Federal army reported that there were absolutely no Floridians sympathetic to the Union cause and they found no blacks wanting to return with them to fight against fellow southerners. Lincoln won the election in spite of the great loss at Olustee. The Confederates were forced to bring resources out of the defense of Savannah and South Carolina to fight the Federals at Olustee. Once again, at the behest of politicians' two great armies clash with the loss of human lives and limbs that never can be replaced.

Late Annual Dues

The Florida Society values all members for retaining their membership in the Military Order of the Stars and Bars. Please consider encouraging your fellow members to consider paying their dues to the MOS&B and the MOS&B Florida Society. Payments can be made to the Society Adjutant. Dues for National are \$35.00 and the Florida Society Dues are \$10.00. We are still willing to collect dues; even though, at this time, they are considered late.

At present, the Florida Society still needs to receive dues from the following chapters: General William Miller #111 (Gainesville); Lt. James B. Duke #145 (St. Petersburg); Marion Dragoons #164 (Ocala); Major William I. Turner #161 (Tampa/Bradenton); and the Capt. John Wood #288 (Miami).

Volunteer

By William H. Nicholson, Jr.

Of late I have had the word "Volunteer" flung at me many times. So I figured I would examine and dissect this word since it's of the general opinion that as a volunteer, no one can require a "Volunteer" to do any thing.

I started out by looking it up in the dictionary, and the following are excerpts from this book. **Vol-un-teeer** = 1. A person who performs or offers a service voluntarily. 2. Law= A person who renders aid, performs a service, or assumes an obligation voluntarily. 3. To preform or offer a service of one's own free will. 4. To offer oneself for particular task, of one's own free will. 5. A person who offers to do, or does, something (especially who joins the Army) of his own free will. [Like joining the Military Order of the Stars and Bars]

As one can see, a volunteer is someone who voluntarily sought an out organization and offered themselves up for service. In some organizations an oath was required to show ones devotion to the cause and in doing so, swore an oath and swore also to comply and honor that oath to the best of their ability. In doing this, they have done the same as did their ancestor when they "Volunteered" to fight for the Cause.

We are "Volunteers" as were our ancestors and as they did, we also swore and oath when we joined our organizations' Sons of Confederate Veterans and the Military Order of the Stars and Bars. And we need to revisit and read the oath from time to time to remind us why we chose the volunteer path. Our word is our bond as it was during the time of our ancestors, and it still rings true to this day. We as the leaders need to keep reminding ourselves and our men of our duty and the oath we all took, in order to remain strong and resolute, as we continue to hold fast to the title of the second oldest veterans group in America. We bare the torch of our Southern Heritage for the generations yet to come. And by doing so we set in stone a guarantee for our generations that our heritage as well as theirs will not fade into history as so many others seem to be doing in these dark and uncertain times. So you see, we are way more than mere "Volunteers", way more. Every camp commander before he closes his camp meeting should remind his members, how important it is to keep in their hearts the words *Compatriot, Honor, Duty, and Heritage* which are more than just mere words, they are words that describe all that our ancestors fought and died for and now those words describe us.

I wonder what will be said of our generation on how well we did!

35th Anniversary Celebration

The Gen. Robert Bullock UDC Chapter 2420, Ocala, Florida celebrated its 35th anniversary (to the day) on Wednesday, September 12, 2012 with our Founder's Day / Anniversary luncheon and business meeting. Guests were in attendance from several chapters and spouses, including a division officer, registrar Jan Pieroni, and Honorary President of Division, Sandy Mott; as well as William H. Nicholson, Jr., Battalion Commander, MOS&B Florida Society. The colors were presented by the Francis Marion Military Academy honor and rifle guard. Our historian, Evelyn Sapp, presented a history of our chapter, including information on the two founding members Juanita Sutton Aspinwall and Margaret Lyon Horton and the rest of the 27 chartering members. We recognized former presidents and charter members in attendance, had a wonderful fried chicken and pork roast luncheon, and attended to a very busy beginning of chapter year meeting. Dignitaries were recognized and officers for the 2012 through 2014 chapter years were introduced. We have ambitious plans for a very productive chapter year and starting out for a terrific thirty-five years.

Society Commander's Message

Gentlemen of the Order,

Happy New Year!! I want to thank you for making 2012 a great year and extend our appreciation to you our members for your continued support. 2013 has promise for being better and for those of you have not paid your National and State dues please do so.



In the first quarter of this year we will celebrate General Robert E. Lee and Andrew Jackson's birthdays and we will have a continued presence in the Olustee Parade. I thank those that visited our booth and flag presentation at the battlefield which will be manned by our Chief of Staff Ben Willingham and various members from the Capt. J. J. Dickison Chapter. Many thanks to them for their hard work.

Recruiting is always at the top of our list in order to grow our membership. I want to remind you that there is another avenue to join our organization. On our National Website and I quote "all those established as qualifying Confederates are listed. There is also a link to our Collaterals Project, which includes those with established ties to the Confederate notables: Generals Robert E. Lee, "Stonewall" Jackson, Nathan Bedford Forrest & JEB Stuart, and President Jefferson Davis. For these notables it is not necessary for applicants to prove their ancestry to an uncommon ancestor. It is only necessary for an applicant to prove a tie to someone accepted as related who appears in the online database. A number of "gateway" ancestors of these notables have been traced to William the Conqueror and to Charlemagne. Accordingly, anyone with a documented ancestry to either of these early members of royalty that has been accepted by another reputable heritage group is eligible for membership in the Order".

As a final note: as we turn the page and look forward to this New Year we reflect on old and new ties - not only in our personal lives, but also our Society's - wonderful relationships, fun times, remembering the ones we love while holding those that have passed close to our hearts as we continue our journey in life. Let's work together to make this a memorable year for our Florida Society.

Yours in the Cause ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raleigh Worstam". The signature is written in black ink and is fluid and legible.

Commander, Florida Society

Society Adjutant's Message

Compatriots,

As we start off this new year, it is important that you remain a member of the Military Order of the Stars and Bar. Some chapters have already submitted all of their members dues. While others have only submitted some members or none at all. There is still time to send in your member's dues. We value you as members. Although some chapters are small and are limited when they can meet and what they can do, it is important that the chapter retain their existing membership and recruit new members into the chapter.

The objectives of the Military Order of the Stars and Bars Florida Society is that of being Historical, Educational, Benevolent, Memorial and Patriotic. Now, how do you see making this important to you, your local chapter and your State Society. These objectives can be further defined as : (a) collecting and preserving the material necessary for a truthful history of the War Between the States and to protect, preserve, and mark the places made historic by Confederate valor, (b) assisting descendants of worthy Confederates in securing a proper education, (c) fulfilling the sacred duty of benevolence toward the survivor of the War and those dependent upon them, (d) honoring the memory of those who served and those who fell in the service of the Confederate States of America, and (e) cherishing the ties of friendship among the members of the Order.

Since each generation gets further away from the times of 1861 to 1865. We all began to have different perspectives that we bring to the table. We can all still come together for fellowship and blend together as we learn more about the period that became known as the War Between the States. In doing so, we can retain and grow the membership of the Military Order of the Stars and Bars.

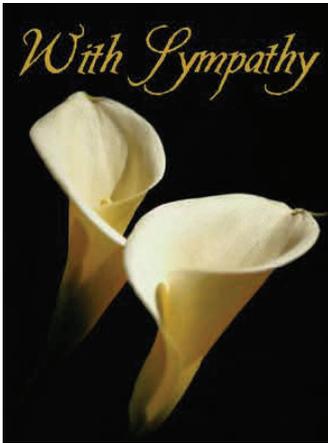
As a reminder, the annual MOS&B Convention will be held in Springdale, Arkansas from May 28th to June 1st. Then in the Fall of this year, the MOS&B General Executive Committee will hold one of their quarterly meetings in Orlando, Florida. This is a time for all Florida Society members to come meet and greet the 2012 - 2014 Officers of the Military Order of the Stars and Bars.

Thanks for your continued membership in the MOS&B, the MOS&B Florida Society, and your local MOS&B chapter.

Respectfully,

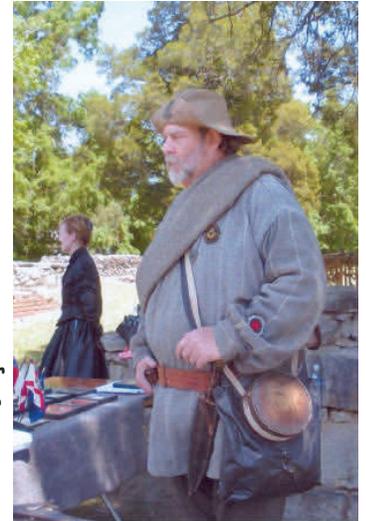
Jeffrey Sizemore

Adjutant, Florida Society



J. Randy Kerlin, Past Society Commander (1956 - 2013)

It is with our deepest sympathy that the MOS&B Florida Society announce the passing away of Past Society Commander J. Randy Kerlin. He served as Society Commander for 10 years along with serving as Genealogist General for six years. His contribution to both the Florida Society and his chapter, Marion Dragoons #161 located in Ocala, Florida, will greatly be missed. We offer our prayers to his family. Below is the write-up as it appeared in his obituary.



KERLIN, JAMES
RANDALL "RANDY", 57

Ocala - Mr. James Randall "Randy" Kerlin, 57, of Ocala, passed away on Wednesday, January 23, 2013. Randy was born in Selma, Alabama on March 22, 1955. He was a youth counselor for the Methodist Church and volunteered at the Museum of Southern History in Jacksonville. He particularly loved history including the war between the states.

He was preceded in death by twin brothers, Richard and Robert Kerlin. He is survived by his parents, Wiley C. and Ruby (Whitehurst) Kerlin.

There will be a Celebration of Life service at the First United Methodist Church Chapel in Ocala at 11 a.m. on Monday, January 28th, 2013.

Published in Ocala Star-Banner from January 26 to January 27, 2013

Chapter News

If your chapter has held a banquet, chapter project, or any other news that you would like to share with the members of the Florida Society MOS&B, please forward your pictures, and articles to Editor Jeff Sizemore at editor@mosbfl.org. Announcements of upcoming re-enactments in your area are also welcomed. Your submittals will greatly be appreciated.

Ancestor Profiles for the Florida Society Web Page

Our Society Webmaster would like your assistance is providing him a write up on your Confederate ancestor that will be included on the Florida Society webpage. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated so that we can freshen up the Society webpage. Note that other article and pictures are also welcomed.

This is most helpful in recruiting new members; as well as, give our the current membership a reason to continue accessing our webpage. Please consider submitting an article or events for this worthy cause. Webmaster Ben Willingham can be reached at ben@willingham.com.

WHY WE REMEMBER

Why, 150 years later do we still honor and remember a people, ancient to some, who lost a war? Ever wonder how many other groups of descendants worldwide annually honor their ancestors? I'm sure some do, but not with the pride and passion we do. Why is this true with our boys in gray? Most people observing our behavior would assume we won...not lost. Who honors and remembers losers? Yes, there is something special about our ancestors.

I have drawn several conclusions as to why this is so. First, if we don't take on this responsibility...then who will? The Federal Government, Hollywood, the media or how about the politically correct liberal elite? No, it is up to us and only us to carry this torch of honor. We know if it is not us, their memory will surely die. This is motivation enough.

Secondly, these soldiers are family. The blood they shed courses through our veins. We honor them as family members.

Thirdly, our boys were fighting to defend their homes from a brutal invasion that meant total destruction from a despotic leader who ignored their fathers' wonderful plan of government laid out by our constitution. Always remember that they wanted to legally leave the Union as the sovereign states they were when they joined and peaceably form their own government by following the constitution as their founding fathers intended. The South wanted no fight.

Finally, it's just plain difficult not to be proud and want to be associated with the best soldiers and officers this world has ever witnessed. These warriors were truly "Southern Knights". It is impossible to overlook the fact that 800,000 mostly badly equipped, badly clothed, badly fed but superbly led soldiers managed to hold off 2 and $\frac{1}{2}$ million Federals for four bloody years. On paper our boys in gray should have lost in six months. Who with even a single ounce of Southern blood in their veins would not have passion and pride when remembering our ancestors.

In conclusion, I would like to share two poems and a prayer:

Confederate Memorial Day

author unknown

The marching armies of the past
Along our Southern plains,
Are sleeping now in quiet rest
Beneath the Southern rains.

The bugle call is now in vain
To rouse them from their bed;
To arms they'll never march again--
They are sleeping with the dead.

No more will Shiloh's plains be stained
With blood our heroes shed,
Nor Chancellorsville resound again
To our noble warriors' tread.

For them no more shall reveille
Sound at the break of dawn,
But may their sleep peaceful be
Till God's great judgment morn.

We bow our heads in solemn prayer
For those who wore the gray,
And clasp again their unseen hands
On our Memorial Day.

Poem for Confederate Memorial Day

By Oliver Reeves

How many springs have gone since they
Who wore the uniform of gray
Last looked upon summer snow of dogwood, blooming below
Their southern skies and friendly sun,
Or watched the winding rivers run
Or knew when spring wind's gentle hand
Stretched forth to heal their wounded land.
They sleep where the azaleas spread
Their glorious colors, where the red old hills
And mountain peaks
Stand listening while nature speaks.
And from the woodlands sound the strains
Of memories; where coastal plains
Run down to join the ceaseless tide
Ebbing and flowing as they died.
Let us remember them as time
And tide move on in endless rhyme.
When spring is wearing her bouquet
For the lost legions of the gray.
While bud and blossom, hill and tree
Remember them, so shall we.

Lord, we give thanks to you for the blessing of being able to honor our ancestors who gave their all to protect us, defend our honor and uphold the original intent of our Constitution.

We give thanks for this Easter season and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross in our place to redeem those of us who have placed faith in Him.

Finally, Lord, we ask that you be a part of this remembrance as we honor these men who, like Jesus were willing to give their lives so others may live. This we ask in Christ's name.
Amen

Submitted by R. Gordon Terry, Jr., Chaplain, Florida Society, Military Order of the Stars and Bars Gordon is a descendant of Major General John B. Gordon of Georgia and a long time member of the J. J. Dickison Chapter, MOSB, Jacksonville, FL



(This picture was taken in 1861 when Hundley was still a Lieutenant. It was an old tintype photograph which has been digitally enhanced.)

Ancestor Profile: Major William Britton Hundley, II CSA

William Hundley was born in 1827 and educated at the University of Georgia; he married Mary Elizabeth Jones the daughter of the first medical doctor in Georgia to have actually received an education at a medical university. Together they began a very successful business of importing dresses and fine apparel for the wealthy ladies of the Anti Bellum South. By 1860, they had accumulated a comfortable estate and Hundley had been elected a Superior Court Judge. All of this was not enough to keep Hundley at home when his country called.

On 5 May 1861, the Confederate Congress formally declares a state of War exists with the United States. The patriots of Warren County, Georgia raise their first company of soldiers and only five days after War has officially been declared, these soldiers who were initially known as the McDuffie Rifles, are incorporated into the 5th Georgia Infantry Regiment in Macon, GA under the command of Colonel John King Jackson (promoted to Brigadier General 14 January 1862) and mustered into Confederate service. The 5th Regiment was composed of ten companies of volunteer infantry raised in the counties around Augusta.

In the election of company officers, Judge William Hundley was elected a 2nd Lieutenant. After being mustered into service, the 5th Georgia entrained at Macon for Pensacola, FL. The trip to Pensacola was long and complicated needing to travel on four different train lines. In garrison at Pensacola they would receive their basic training. General Braxton Bragg would often come from his headquarters eight miles away to watch them drill. The ten companies were all from cities or towns, and nicely uniformed, though each in a different style. After the 5th Georgia had been in Pensacola a while their uniforms led General Bragg to name them the "Pound Cake Regiment." After a bit of hard campaigning in the West, hardly two men in the 5th Georgia were dressed alike.

On 9 October 1861 the 5th Georgia receives its baptism under fire at the Battle of Santa Rosa (Fort Pickens) outside of Pensacola, FL. That day, the 5th Georgia had its first casualties when four men, one of them the brother in law of Lieutenant Hundley, are killed in action. Others are wounded including Lieutenant Hundley. The 5th Georgia would remain in Florida for the balance of 1861. After a period of recovery and garrison in Pensacola, the 5th Georgia is sent to Grand Junction, TN. There they are assigned to guard Cumberland Gap and to organize brigades on their way to Corinth, MS. Now under the command of Brigadier General John King Jackson (Jackson's Brigade is composed of: 2nd Battalion, 1st Georgia, 5th Georgia, 2nd Battalion of Sharpshooters, 5th Mississippi, 8th Mississippi), in April, the 5th Georgia participates in the Battle of Shiloh and was one of the last Confederate regiments in contact at the end of the day. Out of ammunition, the 5th Georgia along with the other regiments of Jackson's Brigade had run into heavy fire. With bayonets only, the 5th Georgia ascended the last ridge nearly to the crest, but without support, the exhausted men could go no further.

Following this engagement the initial enlistment of the 5th Georgia terminated and the original captain resigned to resume his law practice and Hundley, who chose to remain, was elected captain. Later in the war the commander of the 5th Georgia, Colonel Charles P. Daniel, will be wounded and Hundley will assume command of the 5th Georgia. Following Shiloh the 5th Georgia was involved in the Kentucky Campaign of 1862, General Jackson and his Brigade were ordered from

Knoxville to Bridgeport, AL where they were to guard Confederate communications along the rail-ways and railroad bridges between Murfreesboro and Chattanooga. With Confederate Major General Braxton Bragg starting Kentucky Campaign, the 5th Georgia starts a history making forced march from Chattanooga to Bardstown, KY and then to the eastern part of Kentucky and down through Cumberland Gap, 800 miles in two months July and August. General Bragg withdraws through Cumberland Gap putting the 5th Georgia back in Tennessee just in time to see action in the Stones River Campaign of late 1862 where during the Battle of Murfreesboro (31 December 1862 - 02 January 1863). Hundley was again wounded, this time in the shoulder but he was able to continue on with the regiment.

After the Battle of Murfreesboro Jackson's Brigade was sent back to Bridgeport, AL to defend communications from Atlanta, GA to Tullahoma, TN. This led to the Battle of Chickamauga on 19-20 September 1863 where the 5th Georgia lost sixty-one per cent of her effective force in a single battle. Hundley was again wounded. Following Chickamauga the 5th Georgia participated in the Chattanooga Campaign in October and November and most notably the Battle of Missionary Ridge where Jackson's Brigade and that of Brigadier General John C. Moore greatly slowed the Federal breakthrough on 25 November 1863. General Jackson's Brigade was involved in the Atlanta Campaign with the Army of Tennessee until 2 July 1864 when Jackson and two of his regi-ments, the 5th and 47th Georgia were detached and ordered to Charleston to report to Major General Samuel Jones. There Jones gave Jackson orders to proceed to Lake City, FL where Jackson along with the two Georgia regiments relieved Brigadier General James P. Anderson taking charge of the Department of Florida. During Sherman's March to the Sea in late 1864, Jackson and his command were sent to Savannah, GA and participated in the siege of Savannah where they were given the responsibility for the center line of the Confederate defenses. When the city of Sa-vannah was abandoned in December 1864 the remains of Jackson's Brigade was sent to Branch-ville, SC where they were to establish military depots as the quartermaster of the Army of Ten-nessee. As the end was nearing, the remnants of the Army of Tennessee, including Jackson's Bri-gade moved on to North Carolina for the Battle of Bentonville on 19-21 March 1865. Colonel Charles P. Daniels became wounded causing Major Hundley to assume command of the 5th Georgia Infantry Regiment. Although the Confederates acquitted themselves well in battle, the war was over and Major Hundley was forced to surrender the men of the 5th Georgia with General Joseph E. Johnston at Bennett Place near Durham Station, NC.

After the war, Hundley returned to his family in Warren County, GA. Having been wounded three times and under the restrictions of Federal occupation and reconstruction, he was unable to return to his earlier occupation nor was he allowed to serve again as a judge. He is listed in the 1870 census as without occupation and living in his father-in-law's home. Shortly after the census was taken, he died at the age of 42.

This is the story of one Confederate officer but surely this story was repeated many times throughout the South. Hundley believed in the cause and was willing to fight for his principles, even if it cost him his life.

Respectively submitted,
Ben H. Willingham, DCS
MOS&B Historian General
MOS&B Florida Society Chief-of-Staff
Great grandson of Major William Britton Hundley, II.

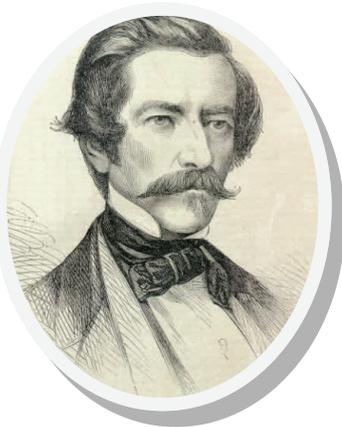


RAPHAEL SEMMES: A Man of Great Accomplishments

By Bob Hurst

Those of you who have been following this column for the past seven plus years might recall that, on several occasions, I have mentioned how I was introduced to the Confederacy when the librarian in my hometown of Talladega led me from the juvenile section (I was eight years old at the time) to the adult wing and walked me to the War Between the States section. She then selected a book about Confederate Admiral Raphael Semmes and told me that this was what I should be reading. I have been thankful for her assertiveness ever since.

Over the many years since that day, I have read and admired so much about the Confederacy and the magnificent Confederates - and magnificent they were. The names of the Confederate greats are legion - Davis, Lee, Jackson, Forrest, Cleburne, Early, Johnston, Wheeler and so many more - and the name of Raphael Semmes ranks right at the top of this list of Southern warrior royalty also. Semmes, in fact, accomplished something outstanding that was not matched by any other Confederate. More about that later.



Although Raphael Semmes has always been closely linked with Alabama, he was actually not a native Alabamian. He was born in Charles County, Maryland, in September of 1809 and by the time he was 17 years old had already received an appointment as a midshipman in the U.S. Navy. While working his way up the ranks in the Navy, the industrious Semmes also found time to study law. He was admitted to the Maryland bar in 1834 and in 1837 was commissioned a navy lieutenant.

Raphael Semmes experienced his first combat during the Mexican War between 1846 and 1848. He initially commanded a brig assigned to blockade the port of Veracruz, and later in the war joined the land forces of General Winfield Scott as an aide to Brigadier General William J. Worth. This proved to be foreshadowing.

After the war ended, Raphael Semmes moved to Mobile, Alabama - the city he would forever be associated with. He established a law practice in Mobile and also wrote a book about his experiences in the Mexican War. He maintained his position in the U.S. Navy and was eventually transferred to Washington, D.C., and assigned to the Lighthouse Service.

On February 15, 1861, he resigned from the U.S. Navy. This was barely a month after Alabama had seceded from the Union. Semmes offered his services to the Confederacy and was sent by President Jefferson Davis on a secret mission into the North to purchase military supplies for the Confederacy.

When he returned in April to the Confederate capital in Montgomery, he learned that he had been commissioned a commander in the Confederate Navy and appointed head of the Lighthouse Bureau of the Confederacy. Desiring action and not a bureaucratic position, Semmes convinced Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory to free him from his lighthouse position and allow him to convert a packet steamer to a destroyer that could ply the seas and destroy northern vessels of commerce. After the transformation, the vessel was named the CSS SUMTER and the legend of Raphael Semmes began.

For the next six months the SUMTER wreaked havoc on northern merchant ships capturing or destroying 18 of these vessels. While in Gibraltar for servicing and repairs, the SUMTER was blockaded by three Union warships and subsequently abandoned by Semmes and his crew. Raphael Semmes didn't realize it at this time but his greatest days were just ahead.

Photo # NH 57256 Capt. Semmes & Lt. Kell aboard CSS Alabama, 1863



On his way back to the South after abandoning the CSS SUMTER, he received official notification that he had been promoted to captain and was ordered to England to take command of a new ship. This new ship was named the CSS ALABAMA and the legend was about to hit high gear.

Captain Semmes and his new ship left England in September, 1862, and for two years devastated northern commercial shipping in the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. During this period the CSS ALABAMA took a total of 69 prizes and became the most feared ship on the seas. During this period the terms "Alabama" and "raider" became synonymous and Captain Raphael Semmes gained great notoriety throughout North America and Europe and great admiration among the citizens of the South.

The spectacular run of the ALABAMA came to an end in June of 1864. Semmes had sailed the ship into the harbor at Cherbourg, France, for some badly needed repairs which required a dry dock. Within days of the arrival of the ALABAMA, a Union warship, the USS KEARSARGE, arrived at Cherbourg. Captain Semmes was faced with the decision to flee or fight. He chose the latter even though the ALABAMA was out-gunned by the KEARSARGE. After just over an hour of fighting, the ALABAMA was sunk. Raphael Semmes was rescued from the water by the crew of a passing English yacht and taken to England where great praise and admiration was directed his way by English admirers.

In November of 1864, Semmes returned to the South by way of Mexico. In February, 1865, he was promoted to rear admiral and placed in command of the James River Squadron in Virginia. After the fall of Richmond, however, he blew up his ships and took his sailors out of the area.

President Jefferson Davis realized the strategic importance of Danville, Virginia, to the war effort and needed someone with command experience to lead Confederate forces in its defense. He designated Raphael Semmes as his choice and the former sailors of the James River Squadron would make up a component of the ground forces. Admiral Semmes was designated a brigadier general by President Davis as this rank was considered to be the equivalent of rear admiral in the navy. Raphael Semmes thus became the only man in the Confederacy to hold both the rank of brigadier general in the army and rear admiral in the navy. Not even Robert E. Lee could claim this distinction.

Raphael Semmes was with General Joe Johnston when Johnston surrendered his army in North Carolina. Semmes insisted that his rank on his parole be listed as brigadier general rather than rear admiral. Being a shrewd lawyer, he apparently believed that this designation would lessen his chances of being tried in court as a naval pirate because of his successes with the SUMTER and the ALABAMA.

After the War, Raphael Semmes returned to Mobile. He was elected probate judge of Mobile County but the Reconstruction occupiers of Mobile removed him from office and refused to allow him to hold the office to which he had been elected. He served for awhile on the faculty of the institution that is now known as Louisiana State University and later served as editor of the Memphis DAILY BULLETIN newspaper. He returned to Mobile in 1868 and practiced law there until his death on August 30, 1877.

He also found time to speak at various venues around the city and to write MEMOIRS OF SERVICE AFLOAT DURING THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES.

There is a wonderful bronze statue of Raphael Semmes that stands in downtown Mobile not far from the bay. It was dedicated in 1900 to honor this outstanding Southerner and to recognize the outstanding accomplishments of this most extraordinary man.

Note: Previous articles of CONFEDERATE JOURNAL are available in book form. Volume 1 (2005-2007) can be ordered online at <http://createspace.com/3540609> and Volume 2 (2008-2009) can be ordered at <http://createspace.com/3543269>.