

The Ancestors Of George & Hazel Mullins

by Philip Mullins

Chapter 11 - The War for Confederate Independence

1860-1865

Summary: The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 led to the secession of the Southern states and war between the United States and the Confederate States. Almost all white males of military age in Pike County served in the Confederate armies. The sons of George Simmons and the grandsons of James Hope enlisted in a variety of local militia units. Some of them were killed and others wounded.

Conditions in Pike County deteriorated after 1862. Beginning in 1863, Union troops raided in Pike County and in nearby southeast Mississippi civil government collapsed. The war ended in defeat for the Confederate States.

The election of 1860 leads to secession

The election campaign for US President in 1860 was divisive. The slavery issue had become a political football by 1852 and its importance increased with every national election. The 1860 elections were dominated by the debate about whether or not slavery should be allowed outside of the old South. There were four candidates on the ballot. On one extreme was Abraham Lincoln, the Republican candidate, running solidly opposed to any extension of slavery. He had the support of the abolitionists. On the other extreme was John C. Breckinridge, the candidate of the southern Democrats. They wanted slavery extended to the new territories. In the middle was Stephen A. Douglas, supporting local self-determination of the slavery issue, and John Bell, urging compromise. History books often phrase the differences between the candidates in other words. Some historians prefer to say that Abraham Lincoln was a strong unionist, Stephen A. Douglas was a radical states-rights man, John Bell a moderate unionist and John C. Breckenridge a moderate states-rights man. The issue of slavery became bound up with different interpretations of what kind of government the nation should have. Regardless of how the issue was phrased, the important thing is that, for the first time since its foundation, the United States had hit upon an issue that could not be solved by compromise. The nation had been held together since its creation by a series of famous compromises fashioned in Congress by the nation's most famous and respected men. In 1860 the belief that any difficulty could be overcome by a compromise solution disappeared and extremists seized control of the US government. Once an impasse had been reached in Congress, the nation turned to the President for leadership. For the next 16 years the nation suffered the consequences.

In the election of 1860, the state of Mississippi gave Breckinridge 40,797 votes, Bell 25,040 and Douglas 2,283. Lincoln received almost no votes in Mississippi. George Simmons, an uncle of Solomon Simmons, is the only member of the family whose voting record is known to me. He voted for John Bell, a unionist who urged moderation and compromise. Like George Simmons, most voters in Mississippi voted for moderation and national unity. Unfortunately, the rest of the country did not. Nationwide, Abe Lincoln won the election with less than one-third of the votes cast. Stephen A. Douglas ran second. Two extremists carried the day and the stage was set for the secession of the Southern states.

The mood in Mississippi changed after the election of Lincoln. Most Southerners felt that Lincoln was a radical abolitionist and a tool of eastern business interests. South Carolina, which had been threatening secession since 1828, promptly did so. In response, the governor of Mississippi called a convention of delegates from each county to consider whether or not Mississippi should follow South Carolina out of the Union. The Secession Convention showed that the white population was unequally divided into two camps. The minority group consisted of the older and wealthier planters in alliance with the poor non-slave owning "yeomen" farmers. These non-slave owning whites were from the Piney Woods region east of Pike County and from the extreme northeastern corner of the state, a region known as the Tennessee Hills. This unlikely and unstable alliance of extreme wealth and extreme poverty was opposed by the vast middle-class of white slave-owning farmers living in the old Natchez District, the Central Hills and the Black Prairie region in the north of the state.

Because of this division, the secession convention acted hesitantly at first. Strong and influential voices speaking for national unity were heard and heeded. But the convention dragged on and finally in a burst of enthusiasm, the delegates adopted an ordinance of secession with a vote of 84 to 15 opposed. The convention went on to proclaim Jefferson Davis Major-General of the state troops and to adopt the Bonnie Blue flag as the new state flag. They called upon the remaining southern states to join Mississippi in a new confederacy to be closely modeled after the Union they had just left.

The secession of Mississippi and the Civil War that followed had been a long time coming. There were many reasons why the disagreements between the north and the south finally led to the dissolution of the union. The secession of the southern states was not caused solely by slavery or by the tariff or by the trouble in Kansas or Cuba. It was not caused solely by disagreements in Congress and the Supreme Court over interpretation of the Constitution or questions of states rights. It was not caused by Abe Lincoln or by the nullifiers or by the price of cotton. Nor was its sole cause the long-standing dispute over control of the northwest or of what we would now call agricultural and industrial policy. The truth is that each of these problems contributed to making secession a possibility. Each of these problems became a rallying cry which was used to justify and expand the secession movement once it had begun. From the point of view of the small farmers in Mississippi, the war itself came about because the United States Army invaded Virginia in an effort to force "the sovereign and free state of Mississippi" to remain in the union against the expressed will of its people. Whatever resistance there had been to secession, and there had been plenty, largely disappeared when the Union army invaded Virginia. Lincoln's show of force in northern Virginia only worsened an already dangerous confrontation.

The invasion of the South

The first invasion of Virginia by the US Army in 1861 and its subsequent defeat galvanized the people of the South. Almost to a man Mississippians responded to the state government's call to arms. To the white people of Mississippi, the struggle of the Confederate States of America against the United States of America became a continuation of the long struggles their grandfathers had waged against the British between 1776 and 1793 and again from 1812 until 1815. The people of the northern states and some of the allies of the Confederate States saw the struggle in a somewhat different light. They increasingly considered the struggle as a war against slavery. The fact of slavery became more important as the war wore on. Its existence was exploited by the federal government to weaken the South and to gain support for the war in the north. By portraying the war as a crusade against slavery, the federal government quieted many of its own domestic critics and weakened support for the Southern cause in Great Britain.

The Emancipation Proclamation, declaring all slaves in the Confederate States to be free, was not issued until January 1863. Its primary purpose was to gain the support of the Southern Negroes for the Union army. Prior to 1863 many slaves had been unwilling to cooperate with Yankee troops. Their experience

was mustered into state service at a public ceremony at the Pike County courthouse in Holmesville on April 21, 1861. This was barely four months after Mississippi had seceded from the Union. The Quitman Guards were the first and the most famous of the fighting units organized in Pike County. It had been organized as a small militia unit in 1859 with 20 or 30 members. The name of the unit honored a former governor of Mississippi who was a hero of the battle of Chapultepec in the Mexican War. In 1858 Quitman was a representative in the US Congress. The Quitman Guards had fancy uniforms and were popular with the patriotic ladies. On July 4, 1860, at the annual barbecue and rally, the ladies of Holmesville presented the Guards with a banner costing some \$250 as a symbol of their esteem.

When the war broke out, the Quitman Guards were reorganized as a militia company of about 100 men. It was the only company in Pike County to respond to the first call by state officials for a mustering of militia in Holmesville. Large crowds had gathered for the swearing-in ceremony. A week later the scene was repeated in Magnolia when the young heroes boarded a train for Corinth in northern Mississippi. Both the soldiers and the crowd were in a jubilant mood. The men had resplendent new uniforms and their folks were proud but apprehensive. The Quitman Guards rendezvoused at Corinth with nine other companies, including the Summit Rifles, to form the 16th Mississippi Regiment. The men elected their officers and enlisted for a period of one year beginning May 21, 1861. They trained at Corinth until news came from Virginia of the first battle of Manassas or Bull Run in July. This was the first large battle of the war and was a victory for the Confederates.

The 16th Mississippi Regiment was ordered to Virginia to become part of the Army of Virginia. By the spring of 1862, the Quitman Guards found themselves north of Richmond and in the thick of the action. Shortly after defeating a force of 20,000 Federal troops under General Banks in the Shenandoah Valley, Stonewall Jackson's foot cavalry, of which the Quitman Guards were a part, crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains just in time to attack the right flank of the Federal army at Mechanicsville on June 26. This forced the Union troops to retreat to Cold Harbor during the night. There the Federal troops entrenched themselves on a hill with a ravine in their front. The next morning the 16th Mississippi charged through the ravine and forced the Federal troops to retreat again. In the course of this attack about 80 men of the 16th Mississippi Regiment were killed or wounded, including George Simmons. He had been shot in the foot. At this point, the two brothers, George and Jeff, became separated. George went to a hospital near Richmond, while Jeff went with the Quitman Guards in pursuit of the Federal troops in what is known as the Battle of Seven Days. Jeff never saw his brother again.

Some years later, one of Jeff's brothers-in-law met a doctor who had been attached to a hospital near Richmond during the war. The doctor related that a soldier named George B. Simmons was brought into the hospital with a wound in his foot. The wound was infected and gangrene had set in. The doctors wanted to amputate the foot but the soldier refused, probably thinking that he would pull through after all. Having refused treatment, he died three weeks after he was wounded. He was 23 years old.

Two months after the death of George Simmons, his cousin's husband Reeves Rhodes, also with the Quitman Guards, was wounded at Sharpsburg, Maryland. Two years later another cousin, Hansford Sandifer, was wounded and later captured during fighting at the Spotsylvania courthouse near Richmond. The Quitman Guards, now known as Company E, 16th Mississippi Regiment, stayed in northern Virginia for the remainder of the war. Jeff Simmons stayed with the company until the end. His experience as a part of Stonewall Jackson's foot cavalry affected his feet and he had foot problems for the rest of his life.

The war in Pike County and surrounding areas

Meanwhile, back in Pike County, the people were also feeling the effects of the war. The young women

and their children moved in with parents or parents-in-law, and families living in Osyka or along major roads moved back to the more isolated farms. Elderly men, young boys and women took charge of the slaves and did the farming. Because the state government could only supply its troops with the basic necessities, it fell upon the folks at home to supply extra equipment if they were able. The women, as always, spent much of their time making clothing for their families and their husbands and relatives in the military. Now all cloth had to be made at home as well. This was a long and laborious process that the younger women had to learn from their mothers or grandmothers. Spinning wheels and looms that had been relegated to attics and storage sheds for a generation were repaired and put to use.

In the first year of the war, Federal naval forces seized all major forts and cities on the Atlantic coast except for Savannah, Georgia; Charleston, South Carolina and Wilmington, North Carolina. In 1862 New Orleans and Pensacola, Florida, were occupied by Union troops. The US Navy prevented neutral ships from entering to pick-up or discharge cargo. Only the occasional ship was able to escape from the blockaded ports and fewer still were able to return with supplies from England. The embargo created shortages, often, acute, of everything from needles to salt. Pioneer skills still remembered by the older people became important once again. The Confederate and state governments made great efforts to overcome the lack of manufactured goods. Efforts were made to concentrate industry in Mississippi because it was considered to be a safe area.

Tents, uniforms, hats and blankets were made by factories in Jackson, Natchez and other Mississippi towns. The cloth from the mills at Jackson or Wesson was cut at the factory and then taken to soldier's wives in the countryside to be sewn. The Cadis Iron Foundry in Osyka produced cannon barrels. The barrels were hauled by wagon to a railhead in Clinton and then shipped by rail to Port Hudson on the Mississippi River where they were mounted. One of the largest tanneries in the Confederacy was in Magnolia. It processed 600 hides a day. Because of this tannery at Magnolia, it is likely that Pike County became a center for the manufacture of boots and shoes. The military store in Osyka had some 100 dozen pairs of boots and shoes when the Federal troops burned it in 1863. These may have been made locally. Solomon Simmons may have made shoes during the war since he left a number of homemade shoes of his own manufacture in the attic of his home near Emerald.

A hospital in Magnolia cared for soldiers from all over the region. The Confederate Cemetery in Magnolia contains the graves of over 70 men who died at the hospital during the war. Military stores were set up at Summit, Magnolia and Osyka to purchase and warehouse products useful to the army. However, two years after the secession of the state, Pike County could no longer boast that it was secure from the enemy. The warehouses became the targets of Federal raiding parties.

In April 1862 the Federal army and navy captured the city of New Orleans. The Yankees made no immediate attempt to move northward up the railroad. Instead they concentrated their efforts on reestablishing control of the gulf forts and the Mississippi River. One of the largest Confederate training camps, Camp Moore, was located on the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroad one mile south of Tangipahoa, Louisiana. This prevented Union troops from moving into Mississippi from New Orleans.

To prevent the Yankees from moving up the Mississippi River, Port Hudson and Vicksburg, some 140 miles further up the river, were heavily fortified. Port Hudson is a small town above Baton Rouge. Vicksburg and Port Hudson became the last Confederate strong points on the Mississippi River. At Port Hudson, the military built breastworks that extended for four miles, and an army under the command of General Wingfield was sent to defend it. Several of our cousins were stationed at Port Hudson. Hansford Simmons recalled that two of his father's brothers were there in a company called the Beaver Creek Rifles. One of these men was given a short leave and came home to visit. When the leave was over, a

younger brother, who was only about 14, went back to Port Hudson in his brother's place. He answered roll call and performed his older brother's duties for about 30 days. The soldier returned from his leave and his child replacement went back to the farm in Pike County.

Port Hudson was attacked by Union gunboats in the summer of 1863 shortly after the Union army under General Grant laid siege to Vicksburg. The youngster who had substituted for his brother was fishing with a companion on the Bala Chitto Creek on the night the Union gunboats attacked Port Hudson for the first time. He recalled, "We heard the cannon so plain but we didn't know just where they were. It was a fair night and we could see the light of the cannon flashes." This was at a distance of 50 miles. The siege of Port Hudson lasted until July 9, 1863. When it and Vicksburg were captured, Texas and the other states west of the Mississippi River were completely cut off from the rest of the Confederacy.

James Bond, a son-in-law of Rebecca Simmons, was killed near Port Hudson at 2 PM on July 15, 1863. By then Federal troops had already captured Port Hudson and a large part of Wingfield's army. The two Simmons men with the Beaver Creek Rifles were captured. The Confederate officers were imprisoned, but the enlisted men were paroled and allowed to leave. Most of the men immediately went home. Others went with their units to Demopolis, Alabama to regroup. Eyewitnesses recall seeing these soldiers bathing in the Tombigbee River shortly after their arrival from Port Hudson. Most of them were black and blue on both shoulders from the recoil of their rifles. So many of the men had deserted that the companies were disbanded and never reactivated. Some of the men re-enlisted in other commands but most remained at home "on parole" for the remainder of the war.

Beginning in the spring of 1863, Federal troops periodically passed through Pike County destroying military stores and stealing food and supplies. After the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson in 1863, the Confederate Army withdraw its infantry from Mississippi. Only a few cavalry units were left to harass Union supply lines and to protect the state. The Union army raided more or less at will after the fall of 1863. In her book "Osyka", Lucy Varnado retells several interesting stories about these raids. One of the first and the most spectacular occurred in April and May of 1863. It is known to historians as Grierson's Raid.

"On April 30, 1863, General Benjamin Grierson's forces arrived in Summit. Here they captured or destroyed stores of food, whiskey and ammunition. The bridges and railroad rails were all destroyed. Captain Thomas C. Thodes, with only 30 men, guarded Osyka. He realized the immense value of the storehouse of military supplies in Osyka. It is said that the Masonic Lodge called a special meeting and, with the captain, planned a ruse that would save Magnolia and Osyka. Captain Thodes sent 2nd Lieutenant William S. Wren to spread the rumor at Summit that Osyka was protected by two regiments of CSA infantry, one of cavalry and a battery of artillery. Col. Grierson decided to cut across the pine land via Gillsburg and Greensburg, headed for Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Grierson's decision saved Osyka and Magnolia."

A part of Grierson's force was engaged by the home guard on the Tickfaw River just east of where Gillsburg, Louisiana, is now. In those days, the area was known as Oak Grove, as was the plantation belonging to Charles Wall. When the Yankee troops arrived at Oak Grove, Mr. Wall's son, who was a Confederate officer, was at the plantation on furlough while recuperating from a wound. The following story is quoted from the Pike County Herald of Magnolia as reprinted in Lucy Wall Varnado's book.

"On this particular occasion young Col. Blackburn from Illinois was in charge of the regiment that came through this part of the country to pillage and burn. When they reached Oak Grove, the colonel was not with the first part of the regiment which proceeded to ransack and tried to burn the place. Colonel Blackburn rode up in the meantime and asked Mrs. Wall if she would serve a meal to him and his staff.

She replied she would if he would restore order to the place, which he quickly did. He also gave orders as to their line of march, which was over Little Tickfaw and Big Tickfaw, scarcely a half mile from the house. One of the slaves overheard the command and immediately conveyed this information to his young master who was in hiding to avoid being taken prisoner. Captain Wall immediately went down into the dense swamp of magnolia and birch trees to where some of the young boys and men too old to go to war were swimming in Big Tickfaw Creek. They had their guns with them. They went quickly to Little Tickfaw Creek which the US army had to cross. There they removed the planks from the bridge. The men and boys then climbed into the tops of the trees and waited.

"Soon the regiment appeared and, of course, could not get their equipment across the bridge. The colonel sent a dozen men over and they were immediately fired upon from the tree tops. The Yankees had no idea how many Confederates were concealed in the swamps so they repaired the bridge as quickly as possible and got away taking their wounded but leaving their dead.

"After they got across the Big Tickfaw bridge, they found their Colonel Blackburn so desperately wounded that they had to leave him in a house nearby. Mrs. Wall, upon learning of the colonel's plight, sent for a doctor and took one of the slaves and went to him. He was so desperately wounded that he could not be moved to her house. She tenderly cared for him during the several days that he lived. When he passed away, she had him buried on the nearby hill side where now still rest the seven Yankee soldiers who were killed at the bridge. Before Colonel Blackburn passed away, he gave Mrs. Wall his watch and requested that she give it to anyone coming South in search of him.

"Years later after the war ended, Mr. and Mrs. Charlie J. Wall went to New Orleans. On their return trip while on the train they noticed a young man and became engaged in conversation. He told them that he was going to Osyka in search of the body of his uncle, Col. Blackburn, who was killed during the war. Mr. and Mrs. Wall were very happy to give him the information he wanted, taking young Blackburn home with them for the night.

"Next morning Mr. Wall with several Negro slaves who had remained with him took wagons and mules and exhumed the body. The young man had even brought a coffin with him. The Negroes drove him to Osyka for the train; with tears in his eyes he thanked Mr. and Mrs. Wall for their kind deed. She, in turn, gave him the colonel's watch which was being carried back to his wife."

The war ends in defeat

In the fall of 1863 Federal troops were again in the area. This time they burned Camp Moore and destroyed the supply depot in Osyka. In addition to the 100 dozen pairs of boots and shoes, the warehouse contained 4,000 pounds of bacon, 12 barrels of whiskey and large quantities of corn and corn meal. Lucy Varnado tells this story in her book. "Parham Boyd Varnado, born in 1852 the son of Isham and Margaret Hope Varnado, often related this story of the Civil War. When he was around 12, he remembers the Federal troops passing his father's plantation. The large army stopped at the home to get water from the large dug well. It took all day for the army to pass. Parham remembered the exact spot on the porch where the commanding officer sat. The army carried pontoons for crossing the rivers where there were no bridges. While Isham and the officer were talking, they heard pigs squealing. Some of the soldiers had thrown the pigs into the pontoons, hoping to eat them later. Their commanding officer had the soldiers return the pigs to the owner. This event must have taken place in the fall of 1863 since there was much military activity in the Osyka area at that time."

The raids continued throughout 1864. The minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association record that, although the annual convention was held as usual in 1864, many churches sent no delegates. The

convention was held in a church in Summit and had to be adjourned sooner than planned because Federal troops were expected to raid the place in "a few hours."

As early as December, 1862, Mississippians had become discouraged by the course of the war. Defeats in Tennessee and on the Mississippi River demoralized the troops and desertion and straggling increased. The draft law proved to be impossible to enforce and soldiers who had been captured and then paroled were allowed to say home if they wished. In 1863 conditions worsened. In the spring Colonel Grierson's three mounted regiments traveled from Memphis to Baton Rouge right down the middle of the state without meeting any serious resistance. On July 4, 1863, Vicksburg surrendered. On the 9th, Port Hudson followed. Both paroled armies, consisting mostly of local men, disintegrated. On the same day that Port Hudson surrendered, the state capital at Jackson was burned by Federal troops. The state government fled Jackson for smaller towns to the east. After July, 1863, civil law in Mississippi came to an end. Military guards were stationed in towns but farmers were forced to band together to protect their crops from marauders. These men, also called jayhawkers, were common in southeastern Mississippi. Families moved away from the main roads if possible and the remaining livestock was hidden away.

The slaves in general stayed at home and out of trouble. However, by the spring of 1864, there were an estimated 10,000 white deserters in Alabama, Mississippi and southeastern Louisiana. Military desertion had become so common that in late 1864, of the 537 men sent to conscription camps in Mississippi, 302 deserted before their units left the state. In Greene, Perry and Jones counties in southeastern Mississippi deserters and draftees banded together and raided government warehouses. In Jones County these men, led by Newt Knight, were the de-facto government. They arrested Confederate soldiers and officials who came into the area and released them with paroles written on pieces of birch bark since they had no paper. They tried to make a deal with the Federal army on the gulf coast but were rebuffed by the Federal military commander. In early 1865 the Confederates finally sent troops against them but Knight and his men either fought the soldiers to a standstill or escaped into the swamps along the Leaf River. Closer to Pike County, in Covington and Smith Counties, public unionist meetings were held. The state government responded by sending troops to arrest the unionist leaders. Although there was no open resistance to Confederate authority in Pike County, there were reports of disloyalty in Pike, Copiah, Lawrence and Marion Counties even before the fall of Vicksburg in 1863. Unionist handbills were posted in Summit and there were reports that abolitionists were talking to slaves on plantations in the northern part of the county.

The economic situation grew steadily worse. By January, 1864, the Confederate dollar was selling for two cents US. By April, 1865, the Confederate dollar was worth one and a half US cents. With Confederate money almost worthless and only a small amount of railroad, bank and state notes in circulation, the people became dependent on barter. Even taxes were paid in kind. The people were forbidden by law to sell their cotton to the Yankees and since there were few textile mills in the South, the bottom dropped out of the cotton market. Food was available and 1863 was a good year for both corn and wheat. Meat was relatively abundant, but the salt for preserving it became scarce after the mine at Avery Island in Louisiana was captured by the US in 1862. The state built a plant to manufacture salt for the families of soldiers and other salt was brought in by blockade runners or purchased as contraband.

By 1863 all manufactured goods were becoming hard to find and it was apparent that it was impossible to make everything locally. Even the State of Mississippi was forced to buy contraband goods when it launched a campaign to increase the production of cloth. The officials in charge found that no one in the South could supply the cards used to make thread. In 1863 trade with the Yankees was still illegal but the legislature made an attempt to legalize what was an already wide-spread practice. By 1864 the Confederate authorities stopped confiscating illegal trade goods and the trade with the Union-held town of Vicksburg grew to enormous proportions. In southwestern Mississippi illegal trade went through