

A STORY CARVED IN STONE  
by  
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For many of us, finding the grave site of an ancestor is often an impossible task filled with countless hours of research and numerous dead-ends. As for me, locating the first of four family members who fought for the Confederacy was a rich gift which came after beginning to believe that perhaps he too was one of the thousands that lay in those graves that were simply marked "Unknown".

A few months ago my family and I set out from Northern Alabama on a ziz-zag trail to follow the Civil War battlefields of 11 states. The underlying reason for our trip was that our destination would be the grave of a recently found family member. While Alabama bred, this man was not resting in southern soil, but in the cold, hard ground of Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery at Columbus, Ohio. Since we would be the first known family members to visit his resting place, the trip held special meaning. Along with personal items for our extended vacation we also loaded into the car a large container of Alabama red powdered dirt, 3 pine cones representing the three other lost family members and an 18" Confederate flag on a small pole.

Our northward curving trip took us to both large and small Civil War battlefields whose names I had only read and dreamed about in history books. Names such as Kennesaw Mountain, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, Pickets Mill, Petersburg, Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Manassas, Bentonville, Gettysburg, Franklin, Shiloh and others too numerous to mention. At each location we visited it was hard to grasp that we were standing on the very fields and hills that our grandfathers and others like them courageously fought during those bloody times in America's history; Without a doubt it was with a mixed pride, sadness and a humble heart that we said goodbye to each battlefield as we continued our way toward our intended destination.

Locating the Camp Chase Cemetery was not difficult, nor was locating the grave of Private James Jacks who was buried in the second row from the camp's one and only entrance. If there is one thing I can say about the Northern people in the city of Columbus these days, it is that they have most certainly taken good care of, given proper respect and remembered the final resting places of the 2260 Confederate men who died while incarnated there. Even in the present day, each summer the people of the city hold a ceremony at Chase Cemetery for these "Americans" who fought, suffered and died for their beliefs.

On July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1861, as a divided country was drawn into the powder smoked mists of a great civil war, a young southern boy by the name of James Jacks felt duty call and enlisted in Captain T.H. Shackleford's Volunteers. The volunteers were later incorporated into the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment and subsequently the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi Confederate Infantry. By March 12, 1862, Jacks along with 1,000 others were located at Island No. 10. Captured there in April they were sent to Camp Randall, Wisconsin and later transferred to Camp Douglas, Illinois. After five months as a prisoner, Jacks along with 726 others were exchanged and sent onboard the Steamer J.H. Done to Vicksburg. There, they were reformed with soldiers from the 50<sup>th</sup> Alabama, the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama-Mississippi-Tennessee Regiment and 40<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Regiment into what was thereafter known as the aggressive 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment Alabama Infantry.

Camped near the Vicksburg area through the winter they fought engagements at Ft. Pemberton and Baker's Creek before marching eastward. After the siege of Jackson in July of 1863 the regiment was handed over to the command of General Braxton Bragg and spent the winter of 1863-64 at Dalton, Georgia. It was there that they soon found themselves in southward moving engagements with General Sherman's advancing army. Involved in intense fighting that raged at New Hope Church, Pickett's Mill and Kennesaw Mountain, the 54<sup>th</sup> suffered very heavy losses at Peach Tree Creek and Resaca. By the time Private Jacks and his regiment reached Atlanta their cloth flag, carried by an untold number of color bearers, had been shredded by more than 40 bullet holes. In Atlanta they suffered some of the heaviest losses of all when on July 28<sup>th</sup> half of their men were either killed or wounded in an assault against Union lines.

A week later, on August 3, 1864, after having survived all the many past engagements without major wounds, Private Jacks was captured a second and final time near Atlanta by Gen. Sherman's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, 23d Army Corps. He was turned over to the Army of the Cumberland on August 5<sup>th</sup> and was found on the rolls of prisoners at Nashville on August 11, 1864. Shortly thereafter Jacks was sent to a military prison in Louisville, Kentucky and then transferred to Camp Chase in Columbus, Ohio, on August 16, 1864.

Little is known of Private Jacks's life while a POW other than the general history of the camps and written records of conditions from both the North and South. We know some camps on both sides were better than others however; life within all of them was hard and difficult to say the least. They had sub-standard barracks which allowed the cold winter winds have easy entrance to the living and sleeping quarters. Medicine was in short supply for both the North and South Armies. Open latrines and cisterns, overcrowding in the barracks that held twice the amount of men that they were designed for; all gave way to sickness which was further aggravated by the mistreatment of the prisoners by some of those in charge.

For southern boys not use to cold, freezing weather and being without adequate clothing or bedrolls one can image the hardships they endured during the winter months. There only is one entry into Private Jacks's war record during the 5 months he was at Chase. Without any other comments regarding his life, the record simply read "Died of Pneumonia January 24, 1865."

Not having a picture of James Jacks, one can only guess what he must have looked like. After hard fighting since the very beginning of the war I rather image him to have been lean and gaunt with deep set, piercing blue eyes and a thick, black beard attached to a tossed mat of hair. A quiet man whose eyes told the story of one who had survived so many engagements and yet still stood undefeated and by his beliefs to the very end. To have come so many years and miles from that youthful and innocent summer with Shacklefordd's Volunteers, it was sad to know that a soldier met death as he did. Had it been possible for Jacks to live only a few more short months the war would have been at an end and the return to peace and families would have been at hand.

We visited Private James Jacks's grave #856 twice during the 24 hours that we stayed in Columbus. On our first early morning visit we brought our small Confederate flag, the 3 pine cones and the Alabama red powdered dirt. Spreading the dirt over the grave site was somehow like bringing him back to the Southern soil he had been denied in death. I knelt on one knee and placed the pine cones at the head of his marker and then firmly shoved the flag staff into the nearby ground. As I did all of us felt a slight chill come over us as the hair on our necks stood on the ends. Without a

trace of a breeze inside the cemetery walls, the little Battle Flag started fluttering just long enough for all us to take notice and comment to the fact it was moving as though a stiff wind was flowing past it. I am not normally a person who believes in such things but having been there when it happened I do wonder if in some way Private Jacks knew and was pleased that we had finally found him way up in Ohio. I like to think that he did and that he was 'standing tall' in front of the other 2259 men because someone remembered his name and had finally paid him a visit...

Without Private James Jack, the 54<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry continued to fight on to the very end of the war. They suffered large losses at Franklin in November of 1864 and other locations such as Nashville and Averysboro. Because of dwindling numbers, the 54<sup>th</sup> was consolidated into the 37<sup>th</sup> regiment in April of 1865 and fought for the last time at Bentonville, North Carolina. With a roll call which originally held almost 3,000 names, when the end finally arrived at Goldsboro they surrendered with only about 100 men.

As for my present day family, we visited the battlefields of several more states after leaving Camp Chase behind, but for this trip the climax had been reached with the visit to Private Jack. I felt very proud and my heart swelled with the joy of meeting a special someone from the distance past. Ahead of us in the future are other trips and other battlefields; there are still three more Confederate soldiers out there for us to find among the countless graves.

Note: Information on Camp Chase can be found on the internet.