

# Confederate Veteran

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[image-picture of a man]

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Though men deserve, they may not win, success;  
The brave will honor the brave, vanquished none the less.

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by Dale Gallon

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The Colors Twice Lost  
by Don Hillhouse

To a fighting unit in the War Between the States the loss of the colors in action with the enemy was perhaps the most embarrassing event that could occur. Besides its' practical uses as a means of maintaining alignment, and as a rallying point in times of trouble, the flag was a physical manifestation of the collective unit psyche, its' colorful combination of bunting, silk, and cotton the very heart and soul of the unit. Its' battle scars and inscriptions served as constant reminders of other fields and fallen comrades; reminders of duty to country and cause. Assuringly [sic] the safety of this badge of honor was often considered more important than life itself.

After the war the old banners maintained their hold on the aging veterans as venerated relics of their service, and today exercise a similar power over researchers, collectors, and museum-goers.

What follows is the story of one of those flags, that of a little known [sic] Florida regiment captured in an obscure action near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in late 1864 during Hood's ill-fated Tennessee Campaign. The story continues into the early days of this century as the flag is located by the old vets hoping for its return and, in more recent times, is rediscovered and immediately disappears.

The 1st Florida Cavalry (Dismounted) was consolidated with the 4th Florida Infantry on December 3, 1863, at Dalton, Georgia, after each regiment had been virtually wiped out at Missionary Ridge. Sometime soon thereafter a new flag, a 2nd National or Stainless pattern, was issued to the consolidated regiment and the old ones sent to Tallahassee.

As a part of Finley's Florida Brigade the 1st and 4th (along with the 1st and 3rd Consolidated, 6th, and 7th Florida) fought in all the major battles of the ensuing Atlanta Campaign and on November 30, 1864, was a participant in the grim hand-to-hand combat in and beyond the breastworks on the Confederate left at Franklin.

The Florida Brigade, commanded by Colonel Robert Bullock, Tyler's Brigade commanded by Brigadier General Thomas B. Smith, and Brigadier General Henry R. Jackson's Brigade comprised William B. Bate's small division. By Bate's own estimate the division did not number over 1600 men after Franklin.

On the morning of December 2, while the army was on the march from Franklin to Nashville, Bate received orders from Lieutenant General John B. Hood to take his division and a battery of artillery to Murfreesboro and destroy the railroad, bridges, and blockhouses. It was intended that this movement on Murfreesboro would protect the right flank of the Army of Tennessee during its' approach to Nashville and interrupt the movement of supplies to Chattanooga and Atlanta from Nashville by the Federals.

Bate's force passed to the west of Murfreesboro on the morning of December 4 and proceeded cross-country to the Nashville Pike. The division reached the pike at a point on the Nashville side of Overall's Creek about five and one-half miles from Murfreesboro and directly across the creek from Blockhouse 7 which guarded the railroad bridge. The Florida Brigade (except for the 6th Florida) was positioned across the Nashville Pike and extended north toward the railroad to protect Chalaron's 5th Company Washington Artillery which had unlimbered a few hundred yards behind the creek to begin the reduction of the blockhouse. Some light skirmishing occurred about midday followed by a Federal attack late in the afternoon. During the latter, Major General Robert H. Milroy, of Shenandoah Valley fame, led a two pronged [sic] attack across the railroad and turnpike bridges in an attempt to capture the Confederate guns.

[image-large flag in the 33rd Mississippi Vols]

[quote within the article: Assuring the safety of this "badge of honor," the flag, was often considered more important than life itself.]

The assaulting force consisted of three regiments of infantry and a section of artillery. A regiment of cavalry which had participated in the earlier skirmishing also took part. One of the infantry units, the 174th Ohio, was so large that Sgt. Washington M. Ives of the 4th Florida wrote in a letter home that the attacking force comprised two full brigades. This is not too surprising since the Ohio regiment outnumbered Ives' entire brigade about three to one!

The attackers crossed the creek and succeeded in driving back the Floridians (who, in the absence of the 6th Florida, numbered only 200 men according to Ives). This forced Jackson's Brigade to take a break from their work of tearing up railroad track to come to Finley's support. The approach of darkness, combined with Milroy's uncertainty, brought an end to the assault. After dark both sides fell back, each apparently relieved at not being pursued by the other.

[image-The flag of the 1st Florida Cavalry and 4th Florida Infantry from The Battle Flags of the Confederate Army of Tennessee, by H. Michael Madaus and illustrated by Robert D. Needham.]

Bate reported losses of 15 killed and 59 wounded. Among the wounded was Colonel Robert Bullock, commanding Finley's Florida Brigade. Major Jacob A. Lash, of the 4th Florida, then took command of the brigade. Sgt. Ives wrote that many in his brigade were badly wounded and that of the Floridians' 50 casualties the 1st and 4th lost the majority (about 34), including one killed.

Milroy acknowledged a loss of 7 killed and 62 wounded in a letter to his wife, while his official report gave a total of 64. He also claimed taking 20 prisoners. Milroy was ecstatic over the performance of the 174th Ohio, as he wrote his wife, "...being a new large Regt. it looked like a small Brigade in line of battle and advanced in splendid order for the new Regt. and opened a terrific fire on the Rebs [sic] who were rolled back rapidly before the fire of the 174th—A number of prisoners were picked up by the 174th as they advanced, laying flat on the ground who stated that the sheet of lead above them was so terrific that they dare not get up to run away." Milroy, of course, failed to mention the vast superiority in numbers enjoyed by his force or the indecisive results of the action.

His exaggerated claims of success were likely the result of his frustration at being assigned to this post away from the main action, his intense desire for advancement and recognition, and his contempt for the West Point establishment, "who are selfish, as clanish [sic], as jealous of their cast(e) as are the Brahrmins [sic] of India and equally as intolerant [sic] towards any officer not a West Pointer, who presumes to intrude among the Stars which they regard as a military sacrilege."

The next morning Bate resumed the activities of the previous day. Blockhouses and railroad bridges in the direction of Nashville at Stewart's Creek, Read's Branch, and Smyrna were taken and burned. At this point Major General Nathan B. Forrest arrived with two divisions of his cavalry under Brigadier Generals Abraham Buford and William H. Jackson, the infantry brigades of Sears and Palmer, and Captain J.W. Morton's Battery. Forrest then took command of the whole force since he outranked Bate. Bate later complained, "The order to keep in view the object of my mission, viz. to destroy the railroad, seemed to be revoked, and offensive operations against Murfreesboro assumed, which did not accord with my judgment, as I was satisfied there were 8,000 or 10,000 Federals within, strongly fortified and with a large amount of artillery in position." Bate's lower estimate of the Federal strength agreed almost exactly with Milroy's report.

Bate had received a report from Army Headquarters on the 4th giving the enemy strength as 5,000, which he undoubtedly passed along to Forrest.

On December 6, Forrest ordered the Confederate in [rest is missing]]

[rest is missing] in the face of the Federal advance. At this point Milroy's entire force, advancing in double line of battle, emerged from the woods that had concealed their approach. This advance was aimed precisely at Bate's left flank.

Forrest, seeing disaster looming, ordered the whole line to move by the left flank. The movement was undertaken, but Sears and Jackson moved too far to the left, leaving a gap between Jackson's right and Finley's left near the pike. Bate, seeing this gap, ordered Smith to fill it. Smith executed the move neatly with the enemy closing in, but a gap of 75 yards or more still existed between Smith's right and Finley's left. Finley's men had halted in the temporary works built by Jackson. This further exposed their left flank as the works faced southeast and thereby did not squarely face the onrushing enemy. Before the line could be dressed the blow fell. The Federal line advanced diagonally on the Floridians' left and in Bate's words, "struck Finley's and Palmer's brigades, crumbling and driving them from the temporary works." As Sgt. Ives described it, "Our troops were kept moving backwards and forward until 4 p.m., when the Yanks made a charge on a part of our line which had been overlooked and broke the line where Finley's Brigade rested."

[image-The Battle of the Cedars, Phage I, December 7, 1864]

[image-The Battle of the Cedars, Phase II, December 7, 1864]

In 1912, W.M. Ives received a letter from A.N. McGinnis about the battle. McGinnis had been a member of the 174th Ohio, the regiment that had overrun the Floridians. Addressing his former foe as "comrade" he recalled the advance, [sic] "I thought every breath was my last one as we crossed that cotton field...the artillery turned on us with grape and canister how they did make the slivers fly off the fence and the bark of the trees." Continuing with a description of the attack and aftermath, "If you people had lowered your guns behind your breastworks you would have cut us all to pieces. You shot high, the trees showed from 8 to 12 ft. from the ground. As we passed over your breastworks I see men piled up three deep dead and wounded. Our regiment got a battle flag said to belong to the 1st and 4th Florida."

The Federals occupied the works vacated by Finley and Palmer but did not exploit the breakthrough. Milroy was recalled to Fortress Rosecrans by Major General Lovell H. Rousseau, his superior, who feared a large force was approaching town from the north. The remainder of the Confederate force withdrew across Overall's Creek to join the shattered remnants of Finley and Palmer.

Bate stated his losses at 19 killed, 73 wounded, and 122 missing, as well as the loss of two 12-pounder Napoleons of Chalaron's Battery. Casualty figures for the Florida Brigade as a whole are not known, but a review of the Compiled Service Records for

the 1st and 4th show that at least twenty-seven officers and men were taken prisoner on the 7th. Sgt. Ives later said the unit had had only 60 men for duty on that day. Milroy reported his losses at 22 killed and 186 wounded. He claimed 197 prisoners were taken, among them 21 commissioned officers. Milroy was again unrestrained in his self-praise, writing to his wife, "This flank movement and its splendid results sealed my reputation among the officers and soldiers I then commanded. They all swear I am the best General living...". While this statement was certainly another shameless attempt at self-aggrandizement, it must be admitted that on this occasion the Wizard of the Saddle had been out-generaled and outfought by the lightly regarded Milroy.

In his own report, Forrest attempted to absolve himself of responsibility for the defeat stating, "...the infantry, with the exception of Smith's brigade, from some cause which I cannot explain, made a shameful retreat, losing two pieces of artillery." A more accurate assessment of what had occurred is that Forrest had failed to admit to himself that Milroy had seized the initiative by bringing a force to the field from Fortress Rosecrans, a move which should have made him concentrate his forces, especially in light of the report on the size of the Federal force. Instead, with part of his cavalry out of contact on a raid on Murfreesboro from the north and the rest scattered to the southwest, Forrest was lulled to sleep by Milroy's apparent move back to Fortress Rosecrans. The unavailability of cavalry to determine Milroy's location and intentions when he withdrew to the cover of woods and intervening hills after the initial contact not only made the subsequent flanking movement and attack possible but, in fact, invited it. Forrest had only himself to blame.

Colonel John S. Jones, of the 174th Ohio, claimed in his report that his regiment was responsible for the capture of the two guns, 60 of the prisoners, and one stand of colors, the latter secured by Sgt. William F. Wallace who also captured the officer commanding the color company. As only one flag was lost by the Confederates on the 7th, this must have been the 2nd National pattern flag of the 1st Florida Cavalry (Dismounted) and 4th Florida Infantry.

The flag may have never passed beyond Colonel Jones as Milroy noted merely "one battle flag" and Rousseau incorrectly described it as "a stand of colors belonging to the First and Third Florida" (another consolidated regiment in Finley's Brigade). This despite the fact that the flag was clearly marked "1st and 4th FLA. VOLS."

Finley's Brigade, along with the rest of Bate's Division, soon rejoined the Army of Tennessee in front of Nashville, just in time to take part in the disaster on the Confederate left. The Florida Brigade was outflanked and overwhelmed with the loss of many men as prisoners. Finley's Brigade was surrendered by General Johnston in North Carolina in April, 1865, having been reorganized as the 1st Florida Regiment Consolidated.

What then of the flag of the 1st and 4th Florida?

On January 16, 1902, Washington M. Ives wrote to Francis P. Fleming. Fleming was a veteran of the 2nd Florida Infantry, 1st Florida Cavalry (Dismounted), former post-war Governor of Florida, and at the time was involved in re-establishing the Florida Historical Society.

Ives indicated to Fleming that he had received information that the flag of the 1st and 4th was in Columbus, Ohio, and described an effort by the United Confederate Veterans R.E. Lee Camp in Jacksonville to have it returned. He clearly and accurately described the action of almost forty years past stating, "Green Bof [sic] Co. I (4th) was color bearer and carried it until Dec. 7, 1864, when it was taken from him on the Wilkinson Pike north of Murfreesboro." Clearly he was seeking the prominent Fleming's support for the project reminding him, "You served under the flag awhile."

A.N. McGinnis of the 174th Ohio mentioned in his 1912 letter to Ives that he had seen the flag at a regimental reunion in Columbus in 1902. He further stated, "I have a piece about 1 in. square in my possession now, have it for a relic."

Ives received another letter concerning the flag in 1903 from John Hewitt, a resident of Columbus, Ohio and a Confederate veteran. Incomplete records preclude establishing the matter with certainty, but the tone of the letter indicates that Hewitt may have served with Ives during the war. Hewitt may have also been involved in the earlier attempt mentioned above to have the flag returned to the veterans in Florida. He wrote, "I go to the Statehouse here occasionally and look at the old bunting of the 1st and 4th. Have a feeling that I will get it this winter, and of course, if I do, will return it to our organization." He continued, "The 174th Ohio voted to let us have it at the last meeting of our legislature, but two bitter old federal soldiers on the military committee refused and fought against it and so defeated our plans." Hewitt's confidence in the ultimate success of his mission was apparently misplaced as the flag appeared in a list of captured flags held by the State of Ohio published in the Confederate Veteran in April, 1909.

In 1971, the flag was rediscovered by the Ohio Historical Society while moving to a new building. Robert Needham, of Columbus, illustrator for H. Michael Madus' *The Battle Flags of the Confederate Army of Tennessee* was contacted. Needham was known to the Historical Society by his artistic work on both the Madus book and similar work as a member of the Ohio Battle Flag Preservation Committee. He had done preservation work on a number of Confederate flags for the State of Florida earlier that year and was acquainted with Robert Williams, Director of Florida's Division of Archives, History, and Records Management.

[image-The Floridians were driven from their position (Shown in the center of the photo above, at the right of the curve) in the Wilkinson Pike. The federals advanced from the far lane lined by trees.]

[image-Below, Fortress Rosecrans as it appears today. The War's largest earthen fortification was the object of Forrest's offensive.]



Williams was contacted and arrangements made for the return of the flag. On December 3, 1971, Williams went to Columbus and accepted the flag on behalf of the State of Florida. Robert Needham generously included a color painting of the flag on a large card. The Columbus newspaper carried the story and included a photo of the presentation ceremony.

Unfortunately, at this point the story ends. The current whereabouts of the flag are unknown.

No article has been found in the Tallahassee newspaper corresponding with that in Columbus. No acquisition information has been found in the records of the Museum of Florida History. No record of loan, trade, or disposal has been located. In fact, no one has been found who can ever remember seeing the flag or its painting in Tallahassee.

An inventory currently in progress at the museum along with efforts by the museum staff to contact previous staff members may yield the flag or information regarding it. Their interest in this matter is welcome and their efforts to solve a problem created long before their arrival is greatly appreciated. Their chances of success could be enhanced from outside sources. Anyone possessing information of any kind about this flag since its disappearance in 1971 is urged to come forward. The solution to this problem may be very simple, its possession by someone perfectly legitimate, but until it is found and the story of its recent travels fully told a cloud of suspicion will continue to hang over the whole affair. Though the first loss of these colors was an embarrassment to those involved, it could be accepted as the fortunes of war. Their second loss, being less understood, cannot be so easily accepted.

In the last paragraph of his 1902 letter to Francis Fleming, W.M. Ives provided the motivation for continuing the search by poignantly stating, "If R.E. Lee (U.C.V. Camp) gets it, they will loan it to us to show it to our children." This writer is one of those children, being the Great-great Grandson of Private James D. Hunter of Company D, 1st Florida Cavalry (Dismounted) who, according to Federal Prisoner of War records, was captured December 7, 1864, near Stones River, Tennessee.

Mr. Hillhouse is a member of Headquarters Camp No. 584. He has a particular interest in Florida's role in the War and is currently involved in several projects on that subject. In addition to the Confederate ancestor mentioned above he is proud to be the direct descendant of five other Confederate veterans.

[image-December 3, 1971 presentation ceremony at the Ohio Historical Society. L to R -Joseph Thatcher, Robert Needham, Col. William Haines, and Robert Williams]