

John Coleman Files

Short Synopsis

Judge Daniel Coleman had 3 sons: Daniel, John and Richard. John, whose biography is attached, fell at the battle of Murfreesboro on Dec. 31, 1862. Richard was killed in the battle of Chickamauga Sept. 19, 1863. His brother, Daniel, Captain in Hawkin's Sharpshooters wrote the letter in which he tells of his brother, Richard, death.

Daniel alone survived the war. He was later elected to the Alabama legislature, where he introduced the bill founding Tuskegee Institute.

Biographical Sketch of John Coleman

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

CAPT. JOHN HARTWELL COLEMAN.

Captain John Hartwell Coleman, of Hawkins' Sharpshooters, Wood's Brigade, Hardee's Corps, was killed at the battle of Murfreesboro on the 31st of December 1862. He was born at Athens, Alabama, August 12th, 1840. His father was Judge Daniel Coleman, who was a native of Caroline county, Virginia, being born at the Concord Academy, and who emigrated to Alabama about 1819, when Alabama became a State. His father was for a long time Circuit Judge in Alabama, and taught in a law school, and was afterwards on the Supreme Bench of the State. His mother was Elizabeth Lockhart Peterson, who was born in Northampton county, North Carolina.

He was educated at the Athens Male Academy until he was about fifteen years old, when he entered the Florence Westlyan University, at Florence, Alabama, presided over by R.H. Rivers, D.D. He pursued his academical studies with great success, and graduated in 1857 with great distinction at the head of his class, having received the first honor and being selected by virtue of that honor to deliver the valedictory. After leaving college he studied law at the University of Virginia during the session of 1857-8. In 1859 he attended the law school of Chancellor Wade Keys at Montgomery, Ala., and in 1860 he was licensed to practice law. He had just begun the practice of law as the war between the United States and Confederate States began. He did not wait for the organizing of a company at his own home, but joined a volunteer company already organized, called the Madison Rifles, from Huntsville, Ala, and went with them in March, '61, to occupy Fort Morgan, on the Gulf. He remained with that company as a private soldier for several months, until he was appointed Brigade Commissary. He served as Brigade Commissary until April, 1862, when he resigned and became Captain in Hawkins' Sharpshooters. He was leading his company in a charge against the enemy,

when he fell, mortally wounded. He was carried to the Methodist church in Murfreesboro, where a hospital for the Confederate wounded had been established and died there on the night of the day on which he was wounded. The following tributes to him in the Confederate journals, at the time he was killed, bear testimony to the great esteem in which he was held:

“One of Alabama’s noblest young sons has fallen a victim upon the altar of his country. John H. Coleman, of the late Hon. Daniel Coleman, of the Supreme Court Bench. He was like his father, of that heroic, Roman mould, [sic] that gave strength and solidity to his whole character.” He was a finished scholar, graduating at college with the highest honors. He was, for his years, an accomplished lawyer, and gave promise of great success at the Bar. Enthusiastic in his temperament, he was a strong and faithful friend, a devoted and loving brother and son. But his beautiful patriotism shone brightest of all his star virtues. With him patriotism was a principle of Christian duty. He did not court the glory of the battlefield, but simply sought to discharge his duty. When the alarm of invasion was sounded, he was the first to volunteer from his county, and joined the ranks of the Madison Rifles to go to the sands of Pensacola. Thus had he served his Country’s cause twenty-two months. Alabama has lost scores of noble sons in this war, but none will she lament more deeply than the young and gifted Coleman. But his friends should not weep for him. He has died a noble death; and above all, and the crowning virtue of his life, he was a Christian and feared God. He told his brother, who leaned over his dying manly form, and asked him ‘if he trusted in God’, ‘Oh, yes. I feel that I have done my duty to my country. I have always tried to do my duty to my God - my trust is in Him.’ Beautiful consolation! Young Christian hero slain for his country’s defense!”

His last dying words, quoted above, are inscribed upon the tomb which marks the spot where he sleeps, in the little cemetery at Athens. Another contemporaneous tribute to his memory is worthy of being recorded in this little sketch:

“Among the noble army of martyrs, developed by the present revolution, the name of Capt. John H. Coleman will stand conspicuous. He fell on the battlefield before Murfreesboro, mortally wounded, while leading on his men to ‘victory or death.’ Gifted, youthful, pious, he was the pride of his family and the joy of his widowed mother’s heart. To add to the sorrow of this bereavement, he was on the eve of his marriage to one every way worthy of his noble heart and hand.”

There is nothing that the write of this little sketch, his brother, can add to these tributes written by unknown hands. But this one thought comes out of the long years now passed since his “life blood ebbed away.” He fell ere the greatest hardships of the war had come, and he was spared all of the hardships and trials that came after defeat.

“Oh, Soldier to thy honored rest

Thy truth and valor wearing;

The bravest are the tenderest,
The loving are the daring.”

Daniel Coleman’s Account of the Battle of Chickamauga
Hdqrs. Hawkins’ Sharpshooters

Wood’s Brig., In Front of Chattanooga, October 6, 1863.

Capt. O.S. Palmer,

Asst. Adjutant General.

Captain: I have the honor to submit the following report of the part taken by Hawkins’ sharpshooters in the battle of Chickamauga September 19 and 20:

On Saturday, September 19, were ordered from where we had encamped the night before, and began the march for the battlefield about 11 a.m. We marched leisurely, and did not reach the field until 5 p.m. About half an hour was consumed in arranging the lines, when we were ordered forward. The battalion moved forward in line with the brigade. Its position was on the right of the Thirty-second and Forty-fifth Mississippi Regiments, and we were ordered to conform our line to that of Brigadier-General Polk’s brigade, on our right. We did not move far before we met the enemy’s line of battle, sheltered behind a fence. They engaged us hotly for some time, but finally gave way before the impetuosity of our troops. They fell back across the field and formed again in the edge of the woods on the other side. By this time night had come on, and the position of the enemy could only be told by the blaze of their guns. The last position was hotly contested by the enemy, but they again gave way, and this time they seemed to be in much confusion. We continued to advance, and had gone about a mile, when, on account of darkness, we were ordered to halt and throw out skirmishers in front of the line. Company B, commanded by myself, was ordered to be deployed 400 yards in advance of the line and to unite with the skirmishers from Colonel Lowrey’s regiment (Thirty-second and Forty-fifth Mississippi), so as to double the line. This company was deployed and remained in this position during the whole night. We were within hearing of the enemy, they being not more than 400 or 500 yards from us. They seemed busily occupied in felling trees and chopping. The enemy did not advance, and there was no firing during the night.

Early the next morning this company was relieved by the other company of the battalion, viz, Company A, commanded by Capt. T.M. Steger, and my company returned to its position on the right of Colonel Lowrey’s regiment. We remained thus all the fore part of Sunday morning, receiving our rations and eating breakfast quietly. About 10.30 o’clock we were again ordered forward, and moved in quick time, and part of the time at double-quick time, until we ascended a ridge and came in contact with the enemy’s line concealed behind their log breastworks. There was so little protection

here, the trees being very scattering, that our men were ordered to lie down. The engagement soon became furious. The enemy's shot and shell plowed through our ranks with telling effect, and owing to their protected position I do not think we injured them much in return. We remained here about an hour and a half. The brigade on our right had been repulsed and had given way some time before. We soon heard that the left of our brigade had also given way, and the left of the Thirty-second Mississippi, owing to this fact, I suppose, soon began to give back, but, by the gallantry of the colonel, the regiment was soon steadied in its position, notwithstanding its ranks and those of our own little command were being fearfully thinned by the enemy's deadly fire. It was soon discovered that it was useless to remain where we were, and upon hearing Colonel Lowrey give the command to rise up and about face, I repeated the same command to my company, and ordered it to conform to the movements of his regiment. Owing to the gallantry and coolness of Colonel Lowrey, his regiment fell back in fine order, and this inspired my own company (which was all of the battalion now, the other company being deployed as skirmishers) so that it fell back also in good order. The good order preserved under so hot a fire was remarkable.

While we were upon the ridge many brave and gallant men were killed and wounded, and it give me pain to state that it was here I lost a brave and gallant brother, Second Lieutenant R.V. Coleman, of Company A, who fell pierced with four mortal wounds while nobly discharging his duty. I have the consolation to hope that his pure young spirit is happy with the God he delighted to serve while on earth. He is the second brother who has fallen with the command.

The men, with but few exceptions, behaved well and stood to their posts.

I would not make any invidious distinctions, but I would mention Third Sergt. [sic] R.L. Finley and Corporal Wallis, of Company B, as acting with peculiar bravery; also Sergeant Cunningham, of Company A, who fell discharging faithfully his duty as a soldier. The former, Sergeant Finley, is in every way worthy of promotion.

I regret to state that while we were falling back from our position the gallant commander of the battalion, Maj. A.T. Hawkins, while reluctantly moving back with my company and exhorting the men to keep good order, had his leg shot off with a cannon ball. The service will lose for a time, if not permanently, a cool, brave, and useful officer.

After we fell back the command was not under fire any more until late in the evening, when Captain Steger's company was sent out in front of our lines and skirmished about an hour with the enemy. He lost no men, and night coming on, and the enemy having given way on all sides, the engagement ceased.

Respectfully,

Daniel Coleman, Captain, Commanding Sharpshooters.

Major Hawkins' wound proved fatal.

Official Records, Series 1, vol. XXX, Part II, p. 172.

Records of Events Volume 33

Officers of Company B

John H. Coleman, Capt., killed December 31, 1862.