

Company D, 12th Alabama Infantry Regiment
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Gen. Edmond Winchester Rucker No. 2534, UDC

The men who would become Company D, the Coffee County Rangers, of the 12th Alabama Infantry Regiment began their service to the Confederacy as the Coffee County Volunteers, a cavalry company organized under the auspices of the February 1860 law enacted by the Alabama State Legislature to provide for the military organization of the state. The muster roll is dated 6 December 1860, with John Canty Brown as Captain. They were organized into the 12th Alabama Infantry at Richmond in July of 1861, and were outfitted three months later: "Whilst encamped near Centreville, Virginia, during November 1861, the 12th Alabama Infantry received grey dress uniforms which consisted of scissor tailed coats and caps that fell over in front with a place for letters."¹

The regiment was brigaded under General Richard Ewell, who was soon succeeded by General Robert Emmett Rodes, a Virginian and VMI professor who had spent nearly a decade of his life in Alabama working as a civil engineer. The 12th Alabama would fight as part of Rodes' Alabama Brigade for most of the war.

Taking part in the Peninsular Campaign, Company D underwent its baptism of blood at Seven Pines, May 31 – June 1, 1862, the first great battle pitting the Army of Northern Virginia against McClellan's Army of the Potomac. The 12th Alabama was part of Brigadier General Daniel H. Hill's Division, facing untried Federal troops under Brigadier General Silas Casey. Hill's men broke through on the first day of battle, forcing Casey's division back to a second line of defensive works. Later that afternoon, they succeeded in pushing the Union force back again, to a mile and a half beyond Seven Pines, but the 12th Alabama lost 70 killed and 141 wounded,

¹ Robin Smith and Ron Field, Uniforms of the Civil War: Illustrated Guide for Historians, Collectors, and Reenactors (Guilford, CT: Lyons, 2005), 185.

more than half the force it had engaged.

Among the dead at Seven Pines was the regiment's colonel, Robert Tignall Jones, a Virginian by birth who had settled in Perry County, Alabama. Despite being a strict disciplinarian, he was re-elected Colonel in 1862. Rodes considered him the finest officer in the brigade. He was considered to be a man of action rather than words, as his behavior upon receiving the new Battle Flag indicated. "When Gen. Beauregard sent the new battle-flag to the regiments, most of the colonels made addresses, and now, said the men of the Twelfth, Colonel Jones will make a long speech. He mounted his horse and had the regiment drawn up. 'Unfold that flag,' said he to the orderly. 'Men!' he continued, pointing to the bunting, 'There is your new battle-flag. Wherever you see it moving, do you follow.' He then dismissed the regiment as usual, and rode off."²

General Rodes was a casualty at Seven Pines as well. He described his wounding: "Just after the Twelfth Alabama had fallen back and about an hour after the brigade had assumed its most advanced position ... in assisting General Kemper to place his brigade ... I received a wound in the arm, which in a short time became so painful as to compel me to turn over the command of the brigade to Colonel [John Brown] Gordon, of the Sixth Alabama. I did not leave the field, though, until sunset."³

In his official report of Seven Pines, Rodes noted for gallantry Captain Exton Tucker of Company D, along with several other men of the 12th Alabama. The advancing regiment had charged directly through the Union camp.⁴

² Willis Brewer, Alabama, Her History, Resources, War Record, and Public Men: From 1540 to 1872 (Montgomery: Barrett & Brown, 1872) 493

³ Gustavus Woodson Smith, The Battle of Seven Pines (New York: C. G. Crawford, 1891) 53

⁴ Colonel Bristol B. Gayle, Official Reports Vol. 11, 981, "The Alabama Civil War Infantry Commands (and References to Their Services in the Official Records." <http://www.civilwarhome.com/alaunits.htm>. (2003)

On the death of Jones at Seven Pines, Lieutenant Colonel Bristol B. Gayle succeeded to the colonelcy of the regiment. On September 14, 1862, the armies of Lee and McClellan met at South Mountain (Boonsboro Gap), a location that separates the Shenandoah and Cumberland Valleys from eastern Maryland. Rodes' Brigade, in rear guard action, lost heavily; among the dead was Colonel Gayle. Command of the regiment passed to twenty-five-year-old Samuel Bonneau Pickens, the youngest colonel in Confederate service, who would see the 12th through the war. Pickens, a native of South Carolina, was a grandson of Revolutionary War General Andrew Pickens. As a cadet at the South Carolina Military Academy (The Citadel), Pickens was part of the unit that fired from Morris Island on the steamer Star of the West, in an attempt to prevent it from reaching Fort Sumter with men and supplies. Pickens personally pulled the lanyard of No. 2 gun. This action on January 9, 1861, marked the firing of the first shot of the War Between the States.⁵

The men of Company D took part in the bloodiest engagement of the war at Sharpsburg on September 17, 1862. Rodes' Brigade, then consisting of the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 12th, and 26th Alabama Regiments, helped to hold the Confederate center at the Sunken Road, where the carnage was so great that it earned the name "Bloody Lane." Rodes later reported from his headquarters: "We did not drive the enemy back or whip him, but with 1,200 men we held his whole division at bay without assistance during four and a half hours' steady fighting, losing in that time not over half a mile of ground."⁶

After the severe losses at Sharpsburg, Rodes' Brigade did not participate at Fredericksburg, although it came under fire. Enlistments over the fall and winter brought it to a stronger force, and Rodes was made division commander.

⁵ "Citadel's Ring of History," The Post and Courier [Charleston]. <http://www.charleston.net> (August 30, 2007)

⁶ Official Records: Series 1, Vol. 19, Part 1 (Antietam – Serial 27), 1033-1039

Colonel Edward O'Neal led the brigade at Chancellorsville, fought April 30 – May 6, 1863. The 12th Alabama charged three lines of Union breastworks. James Earnest Bailey of Company D, who was killed in the battle, was recommended to the Roll of Honor; he was the son of Greenberry Wilburn Bailey and Clarissa Kyser of Coffee County. Colonel Pickens was recognized by Brigadier General Alfred Iverson for his role in the battle: "I then communicated with Col. S. B. Pickens, commanding Twelfth Alabama, whose gallantry on this occasion I cannot too highly commend, so completely and courageously did he lend himself to aid me in preparing the line to resist an attack, and ordered him to hold the enemy in check till I could procure re-enforcements."⁷

At Gettysburg, the 12th Alabama was on the left, pushing the Federals through the town and supporting Pickett's Charge. Rodes' Division as a whole suffered almost forty percent casualties in the battle, including eleven regimental officers. O'Neal's Brigade, now comprising the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 12th, and 26th Alabama, lost 41.2% of their number, with 90 killed in action, 422 wounded, and 184 missing or captured.

By 1864 General Cullen Battle was commanding the brigade. Cullen Andrews Battle was born in Georgia, and moved with his parents to Eufaula, Alabama, as a child. He later wrote that his proudest moment came over the winter of 1863 – 1864, when enlistments were due to expire. He challenged his Alabamians to reenlist for the duration of the war. Every man answered the call, setting an example for the entire army.⁸

The 12th fought at Spotsylvania, where Rodes' Division occupied the northwest face of the Mule Shoe Salient, the only weakness in the long Confederate entrenched line. The men of Company D would face some of the most savage fighting of the war, as Lee's army suffered a

⁷ Official Records: Series 1, Vol. 25, Part 1 (Chancellorsville – Serial 39)

⁸ Cullen A. Battle, *Third Alabama! The Civil War Memoir of Brigadier General Cullen Andrews Battle, CSA* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2000)

major assault from Union General Hancock's II Corps, then slowly fought to regain lost ground. After a full day and night of facing intense firepower, and at times engaging the Federals hand-to-hand, the remnants of the Confederate Second Corps retired behind a fallback line at the base of the Mule Shoe, leaving behind over 10,000 dead.

Heavy losses would be endured again at Winchester, September 19, 1864. Several wives of Confederate officers were in the town of Winchester, and when Union General Sheridan attacked, it was Robert Rodes who prevented the capture of General John B. Gordon's wife. Rodes and Gordon were directing a counterattack when Rodes was struck in the head by a Union shell fragment. He died on the field outside Winchester. The counterattack allowed the safe retreat of General Jubal Early's army, but many felt that the South had lost its most talented major general in the fall of Rodes, who was, in the estimation of those who served under him, "the very embodiment of a warrior."⁹

Returning to Petersburg, the 12th Alabama took part in the fighting around the city, and was present at Appomattox Court House. Of the original 1196 men of the regiment, fifty surrendered at Appomattox on April 9, 1865, along with 70 of 321 additional recruits. According to Confederate records, Company D was commanded at the surrender by Corporal Wade Hampton Cardwell. Brigadier General Thomas F. Toon in his history of the 20th North Carolina Infantry, summed up his regiment's military history in words that could also apply to the soldiers of the 12th Alabama: "... initiated at Seven Pines, sacrificed at Gettysburg, surrendered at Appomattox."¹⁰

⁹ Robert R. Krick, The Smoothbore Volley That Doomed the Confederacy (Baton Rouge: LSU, 2004) 133, 141

¹⁰ Jason Amico, From Whence No Traveler Returns: Robert Rodes and the Men Who Served Him
<http://www.civilwarinteractive.com/ArticleRodesAmico.htm> (1999)

The Men of Company D

Five men served as Captain of Company D. John Canty Brown was a merchant living near Buzbeeville, Coffee County, when he raised the cavalry company that became the Coffee County Rangers. He was promoted to Major, and resigned March 6, 1862. After the war, he worked as a grocer and farmer. Brown is buried at White Pond Cemetery in Alford, Florida.¹¹

Exton Tucker, a neighbor of Canty Brown in Buzbeeville, had enlisted in Brown's cavalry company as 1st Lieutenant. He succeeded Brown as Captain of Company D, and was killed at Sharpsburg while commanding what remained of the 12th Alabama in the bloody midday fighting in the Sunken Road on September 17.¹² Born in 1829 in Elbert County, Georgia, Exton was the son of Coffee County planter Ethel Gaines Tucker and Nancy Ann Davis. He was survived by a widow Mary and young son John. His younger brother Neri captained Company F of the 45th Alabama Infantry. Neri Tucker survived the war and died in Opelika.

Succeeding Captain Tucker was James T. Davis. Davis had enlisted as a Private in August of 1861 for the duration of the war, and was elected 1st Lieutenant on November 26, 1861 at Union Mills. He was promoted to Captain less than a year later, September 25, 1862. His last signed requisition as captain was for half a quire (12 sheets) of paper and six steel pens, which he received. Davis was killed in action at Gettysburg early on the first day, and buried on the battlefield.

Isaac J. Horn was a clerk in the employ of Alexander McCaskill in 1860. He was the son of Hill Kijah Hinton Horn and Dora Ann McCurdy. General Samuel B. Pickens wrote of him:

¹¹ National Cemetery Administration. U.S. Veterans Gravesites, ca.1775-2006. <http://www.ancestry.com> (2008)

¹² Brian Downey, "Antietam on the Web" <http://aotw.org/> (2008)

"2nd Lt. I. J. Horn ... [was] promoted from the ranks to [his] present position by order of Genl Jackson (on 25 Sept 1862). Lieut. Horn won his promotion I understand ... at the Battle of Sharpsburg. When our line was forced to give way on that memorable day, he assisted (although a Private) in rallying the Regt., and when our line again advanced and charged, he was in front encouraging the men by word & action. In the recent battle of Chancellorsville he was in command of a company and acted with his usual bravery – he was seriously wounded in the fight."¹³ Horn was promoted to Captain on July 1, 1863, upon the death of James T. Davis. Suffering from rheumatism and other physical complaints, he tendered his resignation on April 7, 1864. His file contains a parole signed June 8, 1865, from Montgomery, giving a physical description: Isaac Horn was 6'5", with dark hair and grey eyes. He survived the war by only a few years, dying November 9, 1867. He is buried at New Hope Cemetery in Coffee County. Four of his brothers also served in Company D: Sergeant Michael J. Horn, 2nd Lieutenant Edward L. Horn, Private Rowland W. Horn (killed at Seven Pines), and Private Josiah J. Horn (discharged for disability in 1861).

Regimental histories list "McCassells, killed at The Wilderness" as a Captain. This was Archibald D. McCaskill, who joined Company D as a Second Lieutenant in July 1861. His older brother Alexander J. McCaskill captained Company H of the 46th Alabama Infantry, and was mortally wounded at Champion Hill, the pivotal battle of the Vicksburg Campaign, in 1863. The 1860 Federal Census of Coffee County, Alabama (Buzbeeville), shows the McCaskill brothers as merchants with \$19,000 in personal property. Also in their household was Isaac J. Horn, who was employed by them as a clerk. Archibald McCaskill was wounded at Sharpsburg, and tendered his resignation from the 12th Alabama on September 11, 1863. Archibald D. McCaskill is also recorded as being elected Captain of Company G of the 61st Alabama Infantry, another

¹³ Col. Samuel B. Pickens to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper, May 19, 1863

Coffee County company, in May of 1863. Both the 12th and the 61st were included in Battle's Brigade, Rodes' Division, at the Wilderness, where McCaskill was killed in May of 1864.

Archibald and Alexander McCaskill were the sons of Kenneth McCaskill, a Scot who settled in Pike County, Alabama before 1850, along with his parents David and Catherine.

There were other brothers who fought side by side as Coffee County Rangers. Two sons of Nathaniel A. and Elizabeth Cardwell served. Wade Hampton Cardwell, born in 1840, survived the war and raised a family in Escambia County, Florida. His older brother, William McKenzie Cardwell, born in 1833, was killed at Seven Pines, leaving a wife and three children.

Nathaniel Matheny of Virginia moved to Coffee County and contributed three sons to Company D. John, born in 1826, died of illness on October 26, 1861, leaving a widow and six children. His records provide a physical description: 6'2" tall, with blue eyes and light hair. His younger brother Asa D. Matheny was killed at Seven Pines. The youngest of the brothers, Daniel B. Matheny, died in a Richmond hospital in 1862. When Nathaniel issued a claim for the death of Daniel, he was accompanied by another son, William H. Matheny, who witnessed the claim. Nathaniel then witnessed William's claim for the death of James N. Matheny, who died of wounds on May 31, 1862 – William's son, and Nathaniel's grandson, also of Company D.

Two Simmons brothers served with Company D, both sons of William James Simmons, Sr. and Lucretia Analiza Brown of Brunswick County, North Carolina. Sergeant William James Simmons, Jr., died of measles in September of 1861. His younger brother Alfred died in May 1862. William Jr., age 20, and Alfred, age 18, were laborers on the farm of Christopher Kyser in 1860. Kyser's son Daniel W. Kyser served alongside the Simmons brothers.

William Pritchett, a minister born in Virginia, sent two sons to war with Company D. William T. was enlisted by Captain Brown in 1861, his younger brother Jephtha enlisted in 1863

at the age of seventeen. Both brothers survived the war, although William was wounded at Chancellorsville and was imprisoned at Point Lookout, Maryland, until June 16, 1865.

All six sons of George G. and Elizabeth Dyess who were of age to serve, enlisted. Two served with Company D: Frederick H. Marion Dyess, killed at Seven Pines, and William Thomas Dyess, who lived another fifty-three years.

There were two men of Company D still living in Coffee County, who were recorded on the 1907 Census of Confederate Soldiers. Jonathan C. Johnson, born September 11, 1936, was living in Elba. He survived until 1925 and is buried at Chestnut Grove Methodist Church Cemetery. John Stroud, born in 1826, was in Victoria (formerly Buzbeeville). Stroud died in 1910 and is buried at Pleasant Ridge Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery. Others who were not listed in the 1907 Census but died and were buried in Coffee County include William Thomas Dyess (1833 – 1918) and 1st Sergeant N. B. Keaton (1830 – 1912), both buried at New Hope Cemetery.¹⁴

In April 1863, a letter was presented to Alabama Governor John Gill Shorter, signed by Colonel Samuel Pickens and three captains of the 12th Alabama, asking that the Regiment's old colors be preserved in the State Archives. The flag was the First National under which it had fought until the new Battle Flag was received from General Beauregard – “the torn and tattered battle flag of the Twelfth Alabama, the banner that has so long pointed us on to victory, under which we have marched and fought, and fought and marched, under which his last look straining towards its cross of stars, many a heroic Alabamian has freely sealed his devotion with his blood.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Donna Clark, Confederate Veterans Buried in Coffee County (n.p.: 2007)

¹⁵ Correspondence, Montgomery Weekly Advertiser, April 15, 1863: 2.

The letter spoke of the memories associated with the flag, a lasting reminder of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. “How many have fallen under it, let our lists of killed and wounded attest: Seven Pines, Cold Harbor, Boonsboro, Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, be ye our silent, faithful witnesses! Under it, when for the first time it was given to the battle breeze, fell our noble gallant Colonel, R. T. Jones, whose last command, ‘Forward,’ himself lived not to execute, of whom the officer and the gentleman, we, his State and his country may be justly proud. Under it at Boonsboro fell, mortally wounded, Col. B. B. Gayle, who, though young in years, was old in gallantry and courage. Under it at Sharpsburg, fell Capt. Exton Tucker, commanding the regiment, bravely urging forward his command, both by word and example.”¹⁶

Governor Shorter acceded to the request. His reply is as timely today as it was in 1863: “Your gift will ever speak of a Jones, a Gayle, a Tucker, gallant, gifted and true, mourned and lamented, yet honored and remembered. Your flag shall have its place in the archives of the State, there by its memories of the noble deeds of the gallant 12th, and its heroic dead, to inspire to higher resolutions of virtue present and future generations of Alabamians.”¹⁷

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

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