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"ROLLIE'S WAR"

We Americans have a penchant for timing the events in our lives by referring to various wars - before the war, during the war, after the war. To men of our generation The War would probably mean World War II, although to our fathers it would have been World War I and to our grandfathers it may have been the Spanish American War and to our great grandfathers it probably was the War Between the States or, in good Southern parlance, The War of Northern Aggression. Tonight's paper will be time-referenced to this latter conflict.

The musty letter in Grandpa's wallet, dated December 14, 1898, started thusly:
Gents: Through the kindness of James McCabe, the postmaster at Murray, Kentucky, I got your address. During the war, 1862-63, the writer was a member of the Fifth Iowa Cavalry stationed around Fort Henry, Tennessee and Fort Heiman, Kentucky and used to purchase tobacco from your father who was a gentleman and treated us well. Also, the tobacco was the best, at least it seemed to be. Now, what I desire is, can I get a small quantity of your best chewing tobacco, also some of your best smoking and hand twist or nigger twist, as we called it, barefoot smoking tobacco? I want it for a Christmas present for some of my old company as a novelty, of which we have 14 of them left. I just want to say, we Yankees had some pleasant times and some not so pleasant times around Fort Heiman, Murray, Conyersville, Waverly, Paris, Dresden and other places. Some of our men were scoundrels and rascals but a great number was good Yankees. Truly yours, George W. Healy, Late Company E, Fifth Iowa Cavalry. And thus begins the saga of Rollie's War, Rollie being my grandfather who was born May 31, 1861 near New Concord, Kentucky in Calloway County on the banks of Beachie Creek. Little Rollie had three separate names tagged on him while still a toddler, two of which, as we shall see, were quite antithetical. His parents, Peter Mackness and Mary Ann Johnson Rowlett were married

in Rockcastle County, North Carolina in 1844. Leaving kith and kin in 1845 they followed the westward migration route along with many others of Scotch, Irish, English and Huguenot extraction to Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas and the way West. Traveling with the family of Peter and Uncle Valde, baptised Vincenzo DeVivalde Rowlett, were a group of slaves led by Uncle Bob, grandpa's boyhood friend and black overseer. After traveling past Mount Airy in North Carolina, they followed the route through Virginia, passing through Hillsville, Poplar Camp, Jackson's Ferry, Wythe Courthouse, Abbingdon, Beamy's Station and Thornton's Ferry on the Clinch, then through Cumberland Gap into Tennessee and through Indian Tavern, Carthage, Dixon Springs, Hartsville, Gallatin, Clarksville and finally Dover, on their way to Southeast Calloway County, Kentucky. Here they bought and cleared land, raised crops and started a tobacco factory near the village of New Concord, a small hamlet originally named Humility but changed to Concord and finally to New Concord when the postmaster discovered that a Concord already existed in the state of Kentucky. The slaves made bricks while Peter and Valde devised and constructed their own equipment for processing chewing tobacco and smoking tobacco. An old business letterhead mentioned they were successors to T.W. Rowlett and Company of Reidsville, North Carolina in manufacturing tobacco. As the thriving farm and tobacco business grew, Marse Peter and Miz Mary Ann raised 8 daughters and 3 sons, Rollie being the youngest son and the second youngest child. As holders of some 30 slaves and like 90% of their neighbors in the Jackson Purchase, the Rowletts were Southern sympathizers. They had strong ties to both the old Dominion and North Carolina but always considered themselves Virginians. It was no wonder that their youngest son would be named after the President of the Confederacy. As war clouds gathered in 1860 and 1861, patriotic fervor grew. Several companies were recruited in the county, the first in early 1861 by Captain C.C. Bowman. This group headed for Virginia to serve under General Lee's command. Company H, Third Kentucky Infantry left for the Western front later in 1861 and numbered 87 men but only 25 eventually returned, the rest having fallen at Shiloh, Baton Rouge, Vicksburg,

Oxford, Fort Pillow, Selma, Macon, Tichemingo Creek and other bloody battles in which the Kentucky Confederate Brigade participated. Company G, 7th Kentucky Infantry and Captain Manoah Swann's company left in 1862. Colonel Faulkner's cavalry regiment and Captain James Melton's company, the latter mostly composed of boys under 18, were organized in 1863. Eventually, over 800 men signed up to serve under the banner of the Stars and Bars while fewer than 200 of their brothers, cousins and neighbors defected to the North. Since Calloway County didn't lie along the immediate tract of either army, it was unimportant from the strategic point of view and only a few skirmishes actually occurred on the soil between small groups of opposing forces who, from time to time, passed through. Fort Heiman on the Tennessee River in the Southeast corner of the county was occupied by both Yankee and Confederate forces. In 1862 General Smith, commander of the Union forces in Paducah, made a raid through Murray to the Tennessee River and did a great deal of damage. His detachment of soldiers became disorganized and the men went unrestrained throughout the county burning, pillaging, stealing and doing what soldiers do. On another visit in 1863 the Paducah based Yankees threw up earth works near the town of Murray but left a short time later. Southern sympathizers were arrested and imprisoned in the North and on another occasion they drove out at bayonet point the County Judge, County Clerk, Circuit Clerk, Sheriff and jailer, replacing them with Northern sympathizers. Others were imprisoned in Paducah because they would not take the oath of allegiance to the Union. On another occasion, the North and East sides of the square were put to the torch by the men in blue, the East side on Friday night and the North side on the following Monday night. Fort Heiman, across the river and slightly downstream from Fort Henry was occupied first by the Yankees as they were carrying out their campaign against Fort Henry and Fort Donaldson and used it as a base to carry on skirmish activities with the Confederate forces in West Tennessee. This was a part of the river strategy of General Grant in controlling the Mississippi, Ohio,

Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers and passing deeply into the heart of the Confederacy.

Other events directly affecting the county included the attack on Fort Anderson in Paducah in March 1864 by General Forest. Colonel A.P. Thompson of Murray, a local lawyer who commanded the Third Kentucky Brigade was killed when a cannonball fired from a federal gunboat on the Ohio struck the pommel of his saddle. Later, Fort Heiman was occupied by Confederate forces under General Abram Buford with one light brigade of cavalry, one regiment of mounted infantry commanded by a local, Colonel G.A.C. Holt, plus a battery of light artillery. These constituted the left wing of Forest's army when he made his assault on Johnsonville, Tennessee in November 1864. Warburg, also known as Blood and more recently as Newberg on the Tennessee, was shelled regularly by Grant's gunboats since supplies were run through it to Confederate soldiers across the Tennessee on a more or less regular basis. Soldiers on both sides lived off the land and commandeered horses, livestock, food for man and animal and anything else they felt like, from time to time. More terrible were the guerrillas, mostly deserters who preyed on the countryside in search of food, money and women. Foodstuffs were buried by people in mounds in the winter and cattle were staked out in the hollows and fence rows at night. Women left behind barred doors and windows against feared attacks at night while fathers and younger sons sought the shadows of barns and homes to ward off these most unwelcome visitors. Arson, rape, thievery and murder were commonplace and at least 30 citizens of the county were shot down in cold blood by guerrillas. At grandpa's farm the situation was tense. There could be little thought of manufacturing or shipping tobacco products. Neighborhood men were leaving in numbers to join the Confederates while Yankee patrols stationed at Fort Heiman or Fort Anderson came through frequently, often stopping at the farm to bivouac three or four weeks at a time, making free use of the resources of the normally prosperous farm. One Northern unit which visited the farm was Company E of the Curtis Horse Cavalry regiment. Company E was enlisted at Dubuque, Iowa by Captain Carl Schaffer for

the Fremont Hussars and was mustered into service October 25, 1861. Other companies in the regiment were enlisted in Nebraska, Missouri and Minnesota. Captain Mulligan's Irish Dragoons of the Irish Brigade came from Illinois while the Osage Mounted Rifles, which included Indians, came from Missouri. Colonel W.W. Lowe, Capt. U.S. Army was a trained soldier and organized, drilled and disciplined the troops at Benton barracks, Missouri, until February 1862 when they left St. Louis and embarked on transports to go to Fort Henry, Tennessee, arriving February 7. The Union government was not at that time able to procure the best quality arms for the regiment and the Curtis Horse took the field with half it's men armed with the Hall carbine and the old pattern saber while the other half carried the Remington revolver and the new heavy saber. On February 14 the Fourth battallion under the command of Major Kelsey went into camp at Fort Heiman, Kentucky. Major Carl Shaffer, Commander of Company E was a nobleman by birth and succeeded to his parental titles in the Barony of Boernstein, Germany, after his enlistment. He assumed the surname of Boernstein to which his estate and rank entitled him. The Major was killed on May 6, 1862 near Lockridge Mill in Western Tennessee and near Paris and Dresden. On June 25, 1862 the name of the outfit was changed from The Curtis Horse to the Fifth Iowa Cavalry Regiment and officially assigned to that state. On that date the regiment had an aggregate strength of 857 officers and enlisted men. The Fifth Cavalry was constantly called upon for scouting duty in West Tennessee to watch the movements of the enemy, to repulse occasional attacks on Fort Donaldson and Fort Henry and raid various Rebel supplies which were being accumulated at various points in West Tennessee for the Confederate forces. In February and March 1863 forces under General Forest threatened Fort Donaldson and the regiment evacuated Fort Heiman finally on March 5, 1863. After leaving Kentucky the regiment stopped briefly at Fort Donaldson before proceeding to Nashville, Murfreesboro, Lebanon, McMinnville, Maysville, Alabama, Huntsville, Alabama, The Chattanooga Campaign and the Atlanta Campaign. Later, the regiment was stationed in Atlanta until July 1, 1865 after which it moved to Macon, Georgia,

Nashville, Tennessee and finally was disbanded at Clinton, Iowa on August 11, 1865, the officers and men returning to their homes. Out of a total enrollment of 1625 soldiers there were listed 47 killed, 56 wounded, 9 who died of wounds, 132 who died of disease, 259 who were discharged because of wounds, disease or other causes, 217 captured and 17 transferred out of the unit. Mr. George Healy, the writer of the musty old letter had enlisted at age 19. He was wounded at Guy's Gap in the Chattanooga Campaign and taken prisoner during the Atlanta Campaign. After 2 months of confinement at Andersonville he was exchanged. After the war he returned to his old job at the Agriculture and Seed Store of William Chrisman and in September 1877 he and his brother bought out the business which became henceforth known as Chrisman and Healy. He and his wife, Mary, had three children, Edward M., Mary and Maude. We do know that Company E held a reunion in 1898 with 14 members present and that my grandfather did ship them some of the tobacco. We also are in possession of a thank you letter signed by all 14 men. So much for Company, E, the outfit stationed around the homeplace and back to little Rollie.

Baptised Jefferson Davis Rowlett and called by the slaves on the farm, Marse Jeffey, it seemed expedient with the Yankees around not to refer to him by that name. Accordingly, he was called Rollie by the family. The little toddler, with his older brothers and sisters, often showed his curiosity by being around the barn and paddock area where the Yankees bivouaced. Not old enough to learn fear of the Yankee soldiers, he was adopted as their unofficial mascot and given the name of Little Abe. Jeff Davis, Rollie and Little Abe Lincoln, all three rolled up into one. Any question about the true family sympathies were erased by an incident which occurred near the paddock. Aunt Matt, the second oldest daughter and age 15, was sitting on a fence when a cavalry trooper approached her. She reportedly stuck out her tongue at him and made a face. In return he said "You really don't hate Yankees, do you? Here, take my pistol and shoot me if you do." Aunt Matt not only took the pistol,

but cocked it, aimed it at the young Yankee and pulled the trigger. Fortunately, for all concerned, he had the foresight to hand her an empty weapon.

After the Yankees left Fort Heiman, in 1863, the guerrillas became much more active. Aunt Matt married Uncle Tom Marberry, a volunteer with Old Bedford Forest and he came home on leave, French or otherwise, to be with his teenage bride. On the first night home he heard horses approaching and thinking it to be a Yankee patrol from Fort Anderson in Paducah, he climbed up into the loft to hide. Three guerrillas broke down the door, grabbed the young wife, demanding money and started tearing her clothes off. Uncle Tom came down quickly with his Navy 6 revolver blazing, killing one in the room, one going out the door and a third trying to jump over a fence. Their bodies were buried in the woods in unmarked graves, unlamented. The most famous guerrilla incident in Calloway County history concerned the gang of Ab Sweat, Pudd Diggs, Hog Hart and Newt Boggess. Pudd Diggs was caught and charged with the murder of George Miller. A swift, fair trial followed with Diggs found guilty as charged and sentenced to die on the gallows at high noon one week hence. The gang sent word "Diggs will never hang," but jailer John Churchill shackled him to the floor of the jail and maintained a 24 hour vigil. On the appointed day hundreds of people, including probably the Rowletts from New Concord, went to the county seat at Murray, where a scaffold had been erected. Shortly before noon young Ed Ryan, well lubricated with spirits and full of devilment anyway, fired a shot or two into the air from the edge of town. Mass panic ensued, horses reared, women screamed, men cursed and a small boy fell out of a tree on Aunt Betty Coleman's neck. Only John Churchill and the prisoner remained and Churchill armed with just a single barrel shotgun. When nothing happened and the hoax was discovered the crowd reassembled and Diggs was properly hanged. The war ended on April 9, 1865 on Palm Sunday with Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomatox Courthouse, although the last great infantry battle of the war was fought that same day in Blakely, Alabama. General J.E. Johnston surrendered to Sherman on the 17th of April near Durham but it was not until May 4

at Livingston, Alabama when Nathan Bedford Forest surrendered that the Calloway men returned home to resume their farming and family life. Marse Jeffey grew up hearing many war stories the old Confederate soldiers had to relate. He was often shadowed on fishing trips to Blood River by Uncle Pompey, an ancient black who was the resident Uncle Remus and who told many tales about the haints and spirits, in whom he firmly believed. The scars of war, however, were not easily erased and politics were strongly polarized along the lines of ex-Yankee or ex-Confederate for many years. As late as 1903 violence erupted when Sheriff Walter Holland of the Northern group shot and killed Hardy Keys, a leader of the Southern politicians. Each year at the county fair Confederate Day was held with Confederate banners flying high and bands playing Dixie. In 1917 the last big reunion of old Confederate soldiers was held with lots of hoopala. Their names, along with all those who had served the South, were published in the local newspaper. To this day, no list of Union veterans has ever been published in Calloway County. At Murray, the ladies of the United Daughters of the Confederacy helped by Uncle Henry Dees, cashier of the Bank of Murray, gathered money to erect a statue honoring the Confederate soldiers. It was placed on the Northeast corner of the Courthouse square but had one characteristic which distinguished it from almost every other Confederate monument in the world. Instead of facing due North, the Confederate soldier on the top looked to the Northeast, directly at the front door of the Bank of Murray and so it does to this day. Friends and acquaintances of Uncle Henry suggested that this was no accident. Rollie resumed his rightful name of Jeff, grew to manhood and went into business with his father. He married a Confederate Colonel's daughter, raised a family of three sons, and when the railroad came through in the early 1900's he moved the factory to Murray where the company name was changed to J.D. Rowlett and sons, successors to P.M. Rowlett and son. He served in the Baptist Church, on the city council and on the local school board before his death in January 1933, a

Southern gentleman to the end.

I, his sole remaining grandson, must confess that I probably let fall the sacred Confederate torch. Whereas my youngest uncle, Tom, collected pennies as a child to help build the Jefferson Davis monument at Fairview, I spent many hours in my childhood avoiding Miss Gray Swann, matron of the J.N. Williams chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and sponsor of the Sons of the Confederacy which met in her home. Why any normal boy would want to shine his shoes, comb his hair, put on his Sunday suit and go and listen to Miss Gray talk about the great Confederates of the past for an hour, before being offered finger sandwiches and punch, out of a crystal punch bowl, I could never understand. Why, I'll bet Jeb Stewart, Bedford Forest and Stonewall Jackson all three rolled into one wouldn't have enough gallantry to put up with Miss Gray for over ten minutes. Grandfather, if you had had the choice, I know you would have been out fishing or playing ball, too.