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SHANG'S WAR

A number of years ago I presented a paper entitled "Rollie's War", recounting how the Rowlett family had fared in the War Between the States in Calloway County. My mother's reaction was "When do you plan to write about the Caplinger side of the family in the war?" Further interest was sparked when mom and I attended the 90th birthday party of cousin Jesse Caplinger in Greensburg, Kansas and met some long forgotten cousins. It turned out they were genealogy buffs and wanted to trace their Kentucky roots. Cousin Bob was able to ascertain that the Caplingers had originated in the Palatinate region of Western Germany and spelled their name Keplinger. Jakob Keplinger immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1760 and the family later moved to Augusta County Virginia and later to Shelby County Kentucky around 1792. In 1814 Daniel Caplinger moved to Trimble County Kentucky where the family lived for about 80 years. There were other German folk around them near the Ohio River and they intermarried with the Holsteins, Dietrichs, and other good Landers as well as Scotch-Irish and English. James Wesley Caplinger was born in 1836 and in 1859 married Lucy Ann Johnson from Paducah at the home of her uncle Grafton Johnson in Greenwood, Indiana. The house is still there and cousin Bob stood in the living room where their wedding vows were exchanged. We are still not sure where they met but do know that Lucy graduated from the Henry Female College in Newcastle, Kentucky in 1856. They must have been a striking couple - she was 4 feet 10 inches and he was listed as 6 feet 4 1/4 inches tall on his enlistment papers. According to Grandma, Shang was given his nickname by some of his Army buddies because he was tall and skinny and reminded them of a Shanghai rooster. He was also the bare knucks and eye gouging champ of the area. We assume that Lucy tamed him down a bit, although that didn't prevent him from joining the Army. In 1992 we invited the Kansas cousins to the Caplinger family reunion held at General Butler State Park near Carrollton, Kentucky and were able to locate the graves of our common ancestors, James Wesley and Lucy Johnson Caplinger in the old cemetery near English, just off I-64. We also located the site of the Daniel Caplinger homestead and Old Providence Baptist Church where the family had worshiped. The Kansas group knew that James Wesley aka Shang fought in the war but had always assumed he was a proper Union soldier. They were surprised to learn that he fought with the 4th Kentucky Cavalry, Company E, CSA and enlisted at Carrollton, Kentucky on September 10, 1862

as a private, along with his brother William and two other James Caplingers, probably cousins. Another misnomer arose about his area of service. We knew from family history that he was a scout, rode a donkey, and merely stood up when he decided to dismount, unhooking his legs and giving the donkey a whack. Our assumption had always been he was under General Morgan's command for the whole war and engaged in the big raid through Indiana and Ohio in 1863. My Uncle Harold, Shang's grandson, married a pretty young lady from Ohio, whose grandmother had fled from Morgan Raiders and the family joke was that his grandfather had chased her grandmother all over Ohio but couldn't catch her. This again was a misconception because the 4th Kentucky had served in the Departments of East Tennessee and Western Virginia and was involved in the Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee Campaigns. It was not until 1864 that they were actually placed under the command of Morgan for his last raid into Kentucky. A Unit History of the Regiment was compiled by George Mosgrove, an 18 year old regimental clerk when the war began and a writer and school teacher afterwards. He wrote a series of articles for the Carrollton Democrat and in 1895 his "Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie" was first published by the Louisville Courier Journal Press and was a first hand account of the action. The nucleus of the 4th Kentucky enlisted on September 10, 1862, the day when Shang signed up. The stage had been set when Bragg invaded Kentucky on September 5, 1862. In advance of Bragg, Henry Giltner, Moses Pryor and Nathan Parker who had previously been recruited by General Humphrey Marshall in 1861, infiltrated the state and enlisted a regiment of their own but their recruits remained quietly at home acquiring horses and equipment. They slipped away and met at Owenton on October 5 and were formerly organized into units. Four captains were elected, with Samuel P. Duncan the head of Company E. At Salyersville, the Regiment was formally numbered and named with ten companies under Henry L. Giltner, Colonel, Moses T. Pryor, Lt/Col and Nathan Parker, Major. The men were mostly from Carroll, Trimble, Owen, Pendleton, Oldham and Henry Counties along with twenty recruits from Southern Indiana. Mosgrove was obviously biased in favor of Kentuckians and rated them as better soldiers than the Tennesseans and Georgians. To the Confederate Cavalryman, his brother in the Infantry gave the sobriquet "The Buttermilk Ranger" because when the web-foot infantryman went out foraging he almost invariably found the cavalryman had been in advance of him. The fact is, the cavalryman was more of a ranger for cane-reed whiskey and apple-jack than for buttermilk.

As he had to be the eyes and ears of the Army he was perforce a hustler, having little rest. Virtually, his home was his saddle. He slept in it and ate in it, seldom having any cooking utensils or anything in the line of queensware. At night, when not on the march, the earth was his couch, his saddle his pillow and the sky his canopy. If he had any flour he mixed it with salt and cold water, plastered it on a board and set it before the fire to bake. Coffee he had none except occasionally when he captured a Federal wagon train. There was ever the expectancy of a dash into a Federal camp or train where provisions were usually found in profusion. Kentucky to him was a land of milk and honey, where he feasted royally. The cavalryman was usually ambitious to possess a good horse, a Mexican saddle, a pair of big spurs, a light long range gun, a brace of Colt revolvers, a good blanket, some form of oil cloth and a canteen of brandy sweetened with honey. The government seldom furnished him with anything and he was expected to get all things from the enemy which he generally did. Curtis Brasher had written in a previous paper based on his own grandfather's diary, that when the men captured a pig it was referred to as a "bear" because the porker was probably the property of some loyal citizen and was expressly off-limits. In 4th Kentucky parlance, the same animal was referred to as a "Mud Lark". General Marshall took great pains to tell the new regiment what was in store for them and at Mt. Sterling he informed them he was afraid they were mere boys who were out on a frolicsome kind of high roller" but they must unload their minds of such foolish notions and prepare to endure a long siege and see the dark forbidding reality of war." Reality began to settle in on October 28, 1862 when a snowstorm caught the men high up on an Eastern Kentucky mountain in a dense forest. They were forced to remain on the road all night in the deep snow without food or fire, so that was definitely a wake up call. Their first real action was in connection with Marshall and Morgan's Brigades which intercepted Union General Carter on a raid to Bristol, Tennessee. The Regiment marched from winter quarters several days in bitter cold before engaging the enemy at Jonesville. As they advanced the men strewed their playing cards on the ground believing they were going into a bloody battle and did not wish to be ushered into the presence of God with playing cards in their pockets. After the skirmish, however, the boys gathered up the cards and never threw them away again.

The Regiment was involved in forty-three engagements with the enemy besides numerous skirmishes and included one winter's service with General Longstreet in November 1863 when he engaged in the siege of Knoxville. Although called Cavalry, the Regiment didn't carry sabers and were, in reality, mounted infantry. Their favorite weapon was a so-called short Enfield Rifle which they captured from the Indiana 100th at the Battle of Telford's Station and used the rest of the war. It was light, accurate for long range and they were very happy to abandon their short muskets, shotguns and other nondescript weapons in deference to it. The Enfield had originated in England and over 428,000 were made from 1855 through 1864, some under license. The short model was issued in 1858 and was designed to be a Navy rifle. It weighed 8 1/2 pounds, had a barrel length of 2 feet 5 inches, as compared to the long model which had a 3 feet, 3 inch barrel length and was marked "Tower V R" with a crown stamped on it. It used a 0.568 hollow base bullet which weighed 530 grams and a powder charge of 55 to 70 grams of powder propelled it. The Enfield had five grooves which gave the bullet one turn in four feet and had a muzzle velocity of 950 feet per second. A good marksman could put ten consecutive shots within a 4 inch bullseye at 100 yards and 10 shots within 2 1/2 feet at 500 yards. At 1000 yards it could still penetrate soft pine to a depth of 4 inches. Mosgrove was prejudiced in favor of Kentuckians and rated them as better soldiers than the Tennesseans and Georgians with whom they served but had high respect for the Virginia 34th Cavalry, the Nighthawks, commanded by Col. Witcher. He also thought that Kentuckians in Blue were a notch above the other Yankees and mentioned that the only unit they dreaded to meet were the Wolford Rangers. They did surprise Wolford's men on one occasion, catching them at breakfast, but didn't deem this a fair fight. They did not meet again and Col. Frank Wolford resigned after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by Lincoln. General Humphrey Marshall was their first commanding General but they also served under Generals William Preston, John S. "Cerro Gordo" Williams, George Breckinridge, John Hunt Morgan and Alfred E. "Mudwall" Jackson. Mudwall was considered to be as weak, slow thinking and indecisive as Stonewall was the opposite so the name took. General Marshall, all 300 pounds of him, was a West Pointer who had fought the Indians and later led the Kentucky Cavalry at

the Battle of Buena Vista in the Mexican War. John Hunt Morgan, as a 19 year old served under him at that time. Marshall practiced law in Louisville, farmed in Henry County, was elected to the U.S. Congress as a Whig for three terms, was Minister Plenipotentiary to China and practiced before the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington until the Civil War broke out. He returned to Kentucky in 1861 and established a Confederate camp in Owen County for the purpose of recruitment and later went to Nashville where he was made a Brigadier General and given a nebulous Command, The Army of Eastern Kentucky. President Davis had picked him originally to lead the 1862 invasion of Kentucky but regretfully changed to Braxton Bragg, with disastrous results. Not only did Bragg snatch defeat out of the jaws of victory but he also hated Kentuckians. Lucy Caplinger's mother, Naomi Marshall Johnson was a close cousin and they were both kinfolk of Chief Justice John Marshall. John Hunt Morgan, of course, was a legend in his own time and along with his mobile strike force wrecked havoc, interrupting supply, communication and railroads behind the lines. The Kentucky population was usually supportive. Once into Kentucky the men would be allowed to visit their homes and to get fresh horses and recruit new men. And, yes, he visited his old friend Col. Thomas Woodard in Hopkinsville from October 28 until November 1, 1862 where an issue of his newspaper "The Vidette" was published. After his disastrous raid into Indiana and Kentucky in 1863, only four to five hundred of his original twenty eight hundred force escaped and so he sought a new command, the Second Kentucky Cavalry Brigade. It took some doing in Richmond since Braxton Bragg was very much opposed to him by this time. The main job of the Second Kentucky Cavalry was to protect the salt and lead mines in Southwest Virginia and this is where the 4th Kentucky Cavalry joined. In May 1864 Morgan and his new command headed back to Kentucky where they not only fought bushwhackers and Yankees but also robbed a few banks along the way. \$50,000 and the regimental Surgeon both disappeared at Mt. Sterling. It was at Cynthiana where the Rebels won the first day of the battle but lost the following when they ran out of ammunition and Union reinforcements arrived and fled. Col. Geltner was elevated to Brigadier Gen. after Morgan's death in September 1864 and remained in charge until the unit surrendered to Gen. Hobson at Mt. Sterling on April 30, 1865.

After the battles of Chicamauga and Missionary Ridge the whole of Eastern Tennessee, from Chattanooga to the Virginia line was one vast battlefield and the fighting was fierce and often continuous. Often opposing units of the two armies faced each other, again on the field of battle and the Yankees were heard to remark on more than one occasion "There's that damn Kentucky 4th again". Four days in October 1863 illustrate what a confusing mess the men were in, beginning with the Battle of Blue Springs on October 10th. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside, who had commanded the Union troops at Fredricksburg took possession of Knoxville in the autumn of 1863 and had 20,000 men in his Ninth Army Corp. While opposing him, Gen. John S. Williams had 900 men including units of the 10th Kentucky Cavalry Bataillon and Tenth Kentucky Mounted Rifles plus Carter's brigade of Tennessee and Georgia men with 800 men. They were joined in the midst of battle by the 34th Virginia Cavalry, commanded by Col. Witcher, combat veterans of the Maryland and Virginia campaigns. Burnside, with 6,000 men on the field, made a furious attack on the Confederate Center where only 150 men were lined up to fill the gap. The line was breached but both flanks held. The enemy, elated by his success, came from the woods into the open fields, lines dressed in close array, drums rattling and bugles braying, a sea of bayonets, shining guns and gleaming sabres. When the imposing array moved forward, artillery thundered and small arms rattled. The enemy went down in heaps. The beautiful dress parade was broken. Lifeless bodies were strewn upon the plain and the groans of wounded men filled us with pity. The Grand Corps d' Armee doubtlessly thinking that all hell had broken loose in East Tennessee. After night fall, the enemy began to flank the band of Rebels, so under the cover of darkness the men crept away. Gen. Williams had gone to Greenville to confer and in his absence Col. Giltner felt the men were in grave danger of being surrounded and withdrew them to Henderson's Mill, marching all night and without food. Unfortunately, Burnside had moved a large body of his troops that direction also and while still two miles from Henderson's a blue coat group of 2,500 began firing at the Rebel force in the woods. When the Rebels charged the Yanks broke and ran and after a rather brief resistance the road was clear. The 4th Kentucky then looked forward to food and rest at Rheatown, which was not to be because when they arrived at 10 a.m. the enemy attacked from the left flank as they were trying to set up camp. It became total confusion, with hope and desperation, courage and panic, fire and smoke, rifle and artillery fire. The First Tennessee and Sixteenth

Georgia broke and stampeded. The whole group retreated with severe losses to Jonesville and across the Watauga River to Blountsville, Virginia. They had fought four engagements without food, rest or sleep in three days and finally limped back to Abingdon, Virginia on October 16th. For Shang, the war was over at Cynthiana when he was captured on June 14, 1864, while under the command of Gen. John Hunt Morgan. He was taken to Louisville and kept briefly before being imprisoned at Camp Morton, Indiana, near Indianapolis until the end of the war when he took the oath of allegiance to the United States Government on May 18, 1865, and was released to return to his home where he resumed raising a family. Shang was on the local Board of Education and recruited a young lady from Louisville to teach at a nearby school. She boarded at the Caplinger house but was indignant when Shang remarked he only had one unmarried son left, William Jesse, but she was welcome to him if she liked. However, Margaret Therese Strother had studied Latin at Louisville Female High School and William was proficient in Algebra so they taught each other at night. Any yes, on Valentine's Day 1900, then went to Carrollton and married. My Mother, their only daughter, wasn't born until 1907 so she missed seeing the old gentleman but heard many tales about him from the family. Shang attended his last reunion of the 4th Kentucky Cavalry in 1897 at Eminence and was still head and shoulders taller than the rest so various men came and asked him to spot their friends in the crowd. He died on May 29, 1901 and his tombstone inscription proudly proclaims that he was a member of the 4th Kentucky Cavalry, Company E CSA. Well, I have run out of greatgrandfathers so no more Civil War tales from the family perspective. There is a connection, however, between this Athenaeum paper and an earlier one about the Battle of Cowpens. Gen. Daniel Morgan, the Continental Commander, was a distant relative of John Hunt Morgan. No doubt, some members will be disappointed that I failed to drag in politics and/or religion this time. To make amends, the title of my next paper will possibly be "Why Southern Baptist Governors Make Such Dismal Presidential Material."