

Thomas B. Utley, Confederate Cavalryman

by

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It was a Sunday afternoon a half century ago. I was spending the afternoon at my grandparent's home south of Lavina, as I often did after church. With nothing particular to do, I started snooping around in the compartments under the dining room sideboard where they kept their paperwork. Along with my grandfather's Purple Heart certificate and a certificate my grandmother got for growing a Victory Garden during the war, some of the artifacts stored in one of the compartments was a family Bible. I don't remember if it was the Coleman or Utley family Bible - my grandfather was a Coleman but his mother was an Utley. Whatever it was, inside the Bible I found some writings that I believe were by my great-aunt giving some of the history of the Utley family. One item caught my eye – she mentioned that someone in the Utley family had ridden with the legendary Confederate cavalryman General Nathan Bedford Forrest during the War Between the States and had become a first sergeant. I didn't know a lot about Forrest at the time other than that many of his men were from around the same neck of the woods where I was growing up and that he had conducted some military operations in the area. I was under the impression that there were two brothers with Forrest and that they were my grandfather's uncles.

That was sometime around 1961 or 62. In 1963 I graduated from high school and joined the Air Force and went off on my own military adventure. My interest in the second American civil war (the first was the American Revolution) was placed on a back burner. It wasn't until I was living in the Lynchburg, Virginia area not far from Appomattox in the early 1980s that it was rekindled. I began checking books out of the library about the war and the men who fought it, particularly those who were associated with cavalry on either side, men like Stuart, Ashby, Custer, Forrest and Mosby, which was only natural since he had once lived in the community of Amherst just up the road from our house. In the 1990s while living in the Houston area I "went online" and a brand new world of research opened up to me. In the late 90s I was transferred to Ohio where I was living by myself and passing the time writing and working on several web pages on America Online. One day out of curiosity I decided to do a search for Civil War soldiers

and came across the names of two Utley brothers from the Lavinia, Tennessee area and deduced that they were the ones my great-aunt had mentioned in her account.

A few months ago I learned that questionnaires sent to Tennessee Civil War pensioners are available from the Tennessee state archives in Nashville and that one of them was submitted by Thomas B. Utley of Carroll County, Tennessee. I contacted the Tennessee archives and a few days later a manila envelope arrived in the mail containing copies of the questionnaire and a personal account Tom Utley had submitted to the state sometime around 1912.¹ I was excited to be able to see with my own eyes what my distant relative had written (or had dictated to a family member to write for him.) Based on information contained in the document and available on the Internet, I learned that Thomas B. Utley and his brothers James and John were not my grandfather's uncles, but were his cousins. The Utley brothers' father Green Utley and my great-great-grandfather Merritt Utley were the sons of one Allen Utley of Wake County, North Carolina. Thomas stated that he was sheriff of Wake County. While Green was Allen's son through his first wife, Merritt was his son through his second (he was married three times and had families with each wife) and was 27 years younger than Green. Somehow, they both ended up in Carroll County, Tennessee. Green evidently migrated to Tennessee sometime in the 1820s while Merritt was still a boy. His first son, William Eaton, was born in Carroll County in 1828. Thomas, the youngest son, was born fifteen years later in 1843. James and John and some sisters were in between. There is some question as to what Thomas' middle name was; one Confederate roster shows his name as Thomas Benton but a genealogical site claims his middle name was Baker and that he was called "Bee." The same site claims that John's middle name was Benton.

The questionnaires were designed to capture information not only about the veteran's wartime service but also about his life before and after the war, particularly during the antebellum period. Several questions were about slavery and the relationships between slave holders and those who owned no slaves. Tom put down that his family owned 325 acres in Carroll County's Sixth political district and that they owned 13 slaves, one of whom was a girl who lived in the house with the family and helped his mother and sisters with cooking and housework. He says that she had been taught to sew. He said the family worked side-by-side with their slaves in the fields and that slave owners and non-owners associated freely with each other without animosity. The family lived in a four-room log house that had been covered with weatherboarding. He and his brothers and sisters attended school at a local subscription school. Tom was in school from age 8 to 18 and attended four months out of the year. His brothers attended a college in McLemoresville, a town a few miles away.

Tom and James Utley enlisted in what came to be known as a Partisan Ranger company near Terry's Bridge, which he said was about twelve miles southwest of the county seat of Huntingdon, on March 12, 1862.^{2 3} The company was under the command of Captain Thomas Hutchinson. James Utley was elected third lieutenant. The other two officers were 1st Lt. Alis Chambers and 2nd Lt. J.J. Williams. Another company was raised in Huntingdon about the same time by Captain J.B. Algee. The two companies combined at Terry's Bridge for training, then moved north to the vicinity of Paris where Confederate cavalry had fought an engagement with Federal cavalry from Fort Heiman, an earthen fort that had been constructed on the west

¹ The Civil War questionnaires were recorded in 1915, but Tom Utley included a letter with his dated in 1912.

² Terry's Bridge was undoubtedly somewhere in the vicinity of the present day community of Terry.

³ The Partisan Ranger Act was passed by the Confederate Congress on April 21, 1862, more than a month after Tom Utley enlisted. It authorized the commissioning of officers and enlistment of men in irregular units to supplement the regular Confederate States Army. Walter Grizzard states that the two companies were Partisan Rangers in his letter to Thomas Utley.

bank of the Tennessee River a few miles north of Paris at the beginning of the war.⁴ It was occupied by Federals after the fall of Forts Donelson and Henry a few weeks before. The Battle of Paris was fought the day before Tom enlisted with Hutchinson. The mission of the two Carroll County companies was to patrol between Paris and Fort Heiman and to harass Federal shipping on the Tennessee River, of which there was plenty of it because the Federals were advancing southward along the river to occupy Savannah in preparation for attacking the Confederate Army of Mississippi at Corinth.

Along with his questionnaire, Tom submitted a letter from Walter B. Grizzard, who had been an officer in Algee's company, to give an account of their actions. Neither Tom Utley or Grizzard make reference to the huge battle at Pittsburgh Landing that took place a month after the two companies were formed.⁵ Grizzard indicates that the two companies were sent to southern West Tennessee to the vicinity of Pocahontas and that they took part in the Battle of Hatchie Bridge during the Confederate retreat from Corinth. By the late fall of 1862 the two companies were on the east side of the Tennessee River in camp near the town of Waverly where they had become part of a partisan battalion commanded by Lt. Col. Thomas Alonzo Napier, who had lived in adjacent Benton County before the war. Napier enlisted in an infantry unit as a private in November 1861 and was elected captain. He was among those who were surrendered at Fort Donelson, but escaped while being transferred to a Federal prison camp on Johnson Island on April 26, 1862. He immediately returned to West Tennessee and began raising partisan cavalry companies. A report relates that Captain Napier and two other cavalry companies were operating in Benton County in August 1862, and that they had burned two steamboats and damaged another.

On November 27, 1862 Napier was ordered to report to General Wheeler at La Vergne, Tennessee with the five cavalry companies under his command. The Algee and Hutchinson companies are not shown on the muster rolls of the five companies raised by Napier, perhaps because they were raised while he was still in prison and didn't officially join his command until later. (One Tennessee and the National Park Service site shows Hutchinson's company as being made up of men from Humphreys and Henry counties, but this is incorrect since the company was raised in Carroll County.) There is no doubt that they were under Napier's command in December 1862 because both Grizzard and Utley say they were. Whether or not they actually went to La Vergne isn't known, but it's doubtful that they did because barely three weeks later Napier was ordered to take his command across the Tennessee River into West Tennessee to join a large force under Forrest's command that had been sent on a raid to destroy the railroad that connected Columbus, Kentucky with Grand Junction, Tennessee. Just where Napier's force crossed the Tennessee River is unknown, but it was evidently in the vicinity of Johnsonville or perhaps upstream several miles at Brodies Landing. Forrest's main force crossed near Clifton some distance to the south. Napier joined Forrest at Middleburg, a community just south of Union City.

Tom Utley states that his first battle of consequence was at Parkers Crossroads, a crossroads just south of the Carroll County line in Henderson County just north of the community of Red Mound and five miles south of Clarksburg. Coincidentally, the battle took place approximately ten miles from the farm where he had grown up. However, by that time his father had most likely sold the farm and moved a few miles to the southwest to south of Lavinia.

⁴ There is some question as to the actual location of the fort. The state of Kentucky and the U.S. National Park service place it across the river from the location of Fort Henry just north of the Kentucky-Tennessee state line but turn-of-the-century maps from around 1900 place it further south in Tennessee near Paris Landing. The Tennessee Valley was flooded in 1944 when Kentucky Lake was created and the actual location may be under water, as Paris Landing is.

⁵ Although the battle was fought over Pittsburgh Landing on the Tennessee River, the Federals referred to it as the Battle of Shiloh after a Methodist church located near their headquarters on the first day of the battle.

Most of their neighbors in the Sixth District were Unionist and Green Utley was prompted to sell his farm and move to a neighborhood more sympathetic to the South.⁶ Forrest and his force of some 1,800 men had been operating in West Tennessee for almost two weeks by the time they reached Parkers Crossroads on the morning of New Year's Eve. His men had ripped up several miles of railroad and captured the Federal garrison at Trenton where Lt. Col. Isaac Hawkins, the commander of the recently organized 2nd West Tennessee Cavalry (USA) surrendered his command rather than giving battle to Forrest.⁷ Hawkins was a Huntingdon resident and many of his men were from Carroll County. His men also captured Federal troops at Rutherford and Kenton. After raiding as far as Moscow, Kentucky, Forrest returned to West Tennessee with the intention of re-crossing the Tennessee River and returning to Middle Tennessee.

The Federals had managed to organize their forces and were attempting to cut Forrest off before he could reach the Tennessee River. Forrest reached McKenzie's Station on December 27 and learned that a large Federal force was occupying Huntingdon. He learned of a road leading from McKenzie's station through the Obion River bottom to McLemoresville, where another road passed through the countryside to Lexington, which his men had captured almost two weeks before. His men struggled through the bottom where the bridges were too badly deteriorated to support heavily laden wagons and artillery. Forrest finally decided to give his men a rest at Flakes Store west of Clarksburg, before proceeding on to Lexington. The McLemoresville-Lexington Road intersected the Huntingdon-Lexington Road at Parkers Crossroad, where another east-west road running from Spain to Brodies Landing crossed. While Forrest with his force of about 1,800 men was moving toward Parkers Crossroads, a large Federal force under Col. Cyrus Dunham was moving in the same direction on the road from Huntingdon. Dunham got word that Forrest was in camp at Flakes Store on the evening of December 30 and set off early the following morning to set up an ambush at Parkers Crossroads.

Tom Utley was with the Napier Battalion, and was right in the thick of the fray. The battalion was dismounted and sent forward on foot as skirmishers while their horses were left behind. As the battle progressed, Dunham's troops were driven south and eastward by Forrest's artillery and skirmishers. During the battle, one of Dunham's officers had a confrontation with Dr. John Parker, for which the crossroads was named, that led the doctor to change his allegiance from the Union to the Confederacy. After the battle, he put in his will that when he died, he wanted to be buried with his head facing north so he could "rise up on Judgment Day and kick the Yankees back up north"! His wish was granted.

Forrest sent in a flag of truce to Dunham asking for his unconditional surrender. While they were negotiating, another force arrived behind him from the direction of Clarksburg. He had sent out patrols to warn of approaching Federals but they evidently got on the wrong road and failed to see the approaching troops. Napier and his men were operating far forward of the rest of the Confederate force. At some point Napier fell mortally wounded. The new Federal brigade, under Col. John W. Fuller, approached without warning from Clarksville and caught Forrest by surprise. The Federals overran some of the horse holders, but not all of them, and captured them and the horses. The regiment under Maj. Nicholas Cox was quickly overwhelmed and forced to surrender. Tom Utley reported that Forrest sent word to the officers to return to their horses and ride around Dunham's troops and reassemble to the south. Tom ran to the

⁶ The circumstances of Green's move are unknown. His younger brother Merritt had moved to West Tennessee and married a young woman from Lavinia and it is likely that he moved in with him. Green was almost 70 years old by that time.

⁷ The 2nd West Tennessee Cavalry was made up of Unionists from Carroll, Gibson and Henderson Counties. It was later designated as the 7th Tennessee Cavalry (USA). N.B. Forrest was the organization's nemesis. In the spring of 1864 Hawkins surrendered to Forrest's men a second time at Union City expecting to quickly be paroled. However, Lincoln and Grant had decided not to accept paroles and the West Tennesseans were sent to Andersonville Prison in Georgia, where large numbers of them died of disease and malnutrition.

place where he had left his horse but discovered that they had been moved. He was on his way to the new location when he spotted another member of his company riding his horse. He hailed the man and told him he was on his horse and he wanted it. The man jumped off and Tom took possession of the horse, which recognized its owner. Men were running and riding to the south and he joined them, riding near the Williams House.⁸ At one point his horse jumped over something. He looked back and saw a horse's head sticking out of a hole in the ground. It had apparently fallen into a well. He had no time to determine the fate of the rider. He continued his ride until he was well to the south of the Federal troops.

The Confederates were outnumbered by more than three to one but all but some 300 men, mostly from Major Cox's battalion, escaped and reassembled on the road to Lexington. Instead of pursuing the retreating Confederates, the Federal commander ordered his men to prepare for an attack and put them in fixed positions. Forrest rested his men in Lexington for a few hours then continued toward Clifton. Napier's battalion broke off from the rest of the force at some point to make their way to a crossing point somewhere north of Clifton, possibly at Brodies Landing. Unfortunately, a page is missing from Tom Utley's narrative that may have told where they crossed. The next page takes up with him in a rowboat full of soldiers in the Tennessee River with a pair of unruly oarsmen and their horses trailing behind them in the river. The two oarsmen were arguing and paying little attention to what they were doing; the boat started spinning in the river. The confused horses were trying to get into the boat so they had to turn them loose and let them swim on their own. They turned back toward the shore from which they had embarked. The two men at the oars rowed back to shore and Tom and some of the others got out to round up the horses, one of which was his. They got back in the boat and started again for the Middle Tennessee shore but the two oarsmen got into it again. They stood up and were about to come to blows when Tom decided to take matters into his own hands. He rocked the boat and flipped both of the men into the water! Both went under. The other soldiers pulled them back into the boat. Their dunking had cooled them off (literally!) They began rowing feverishly for shore with the horses swimming behind. Fortunately, the troops who had already crossed had built a roaring fire and they were able to warm themselves and dry their clothes. Neither of them could figure out how they wound up in the water and Tom certainly wasn't going to tell them! He noted that one of them had been wearing a Federal overcoat. It had literally frozen stiff. He believed it could have stood up on its own.

Napier's men returned to Waverly and went back into camp. Apparently Algee's and Hutchinson's companies were combined at some point, either prior to the West Tennessee raid or after. Algee and Grizzard were soon captured. They had gone back to Huntingdon on furlough and were captured while returning to their unit, which was now in Middle Tennessee. Command of the battalion went to Lt. Col. H.C. Greer. However, General Braxton Bragg, the commander of Confederate forces in Tennessee, decided to consolidate Napier's former command, which had been designated as the 10th Tennessee Cavalry, with Cox's battalion, most of whom had been captured at Parkers Crossroads, and command was given to Cox when he returned to Confederate control.⁹ The new battalion, which bore the 10th Tennessee Cavalry designation, was ordered to Shelbyville where it was assigned to General James W. Starnes' brigade.

Shortly after their arrival in Shelbyville, Bragg decided to move his army southeastward toward Chattanooga. Starnes was assigned to protect the rear of the column and Hutchinson's company was in the rear guard. As the column was passing through Tullahoma, there was a lull in firing from the pursuing Federals. Starnes told Hutchinson to pick out two men and send them to check the situation. James Utley volunteered to go and was told to pick one enlisted man to accompany him. Tom volunteered to go with his brother. They were in a wooded area

⁸ The Williams House was west of the crossroads, just south of where the McLemoresville Road junction with the road from Spain (which no longer exists.)

⁹ Greer evidently returned to West Tennessee to raise additional Partisan Ranger companies.

when they heard a single shot from somewhere nearby. It was followed by another. When they returned to their company, they learned that the first shot was fired by a Federal sniper who had positioned himself in a tree. His shot struck General Starnes and mortally wounded him. The second shot was fired by a Confederate cavalryman who dropped the sniper "like a squirrel." Starnes, who was one of Forrest's most able commanders, was taken to a home in Tullahoma but did not survive the wound.

While serving with the 10th Tennessee Cavalry, Tom Utley and his brother James fought in some of the most famous engagements of the war in East Tennessee, including Chickamauga. For a time they were attached to General James Longstreet's corps and fought in several engagements in the vicinity of Knoxville. James drowned in the Tennessee River along with eight others when their boat capsized during a river crossing. Tom's regiment moved south to Dalton, Georgia. He was almost 70 years old when he wrote his narrative for the Tennessee historical office and his wartime service was half a century behind him and was fading in his memory. He provides no details, but at some point he went back to West Tennessee where Forrest had returned in late 1863 to take command of cavalry and raise a new mounted army in the region. Tom Utley provides no details of how he ended up in Forrest's new command or when.¹⁰ However, he states that he fought in the Battle of Brice's Crossroads which took place on June 10, 1864.

The Battle of Brice's Crossroads was fought about 32 miles south of the Mississippi-Tennessee border some twelve miles north of Tupelo, which Forrest had deduced was the objective of a Federal cavalry operation. Although Forrest's West Tennesseans were outnumbered by two to one, they routed the Federal force and sent them back to the sanctuary of the large Union garrison at Memphis. Forrest suffered 429 casualties but inflicted 2,610, including the capture of some 1,500 Union troops. The Union forces included some colored troops, who suffered heavy losses perhaps because the former slaves refused to surrender as a result of U.S. propaganda that Forrest's men had massacred Negro soldiers at Fort Pillow two months before.¹¹ Tom Utley makes no mention of having been at Fort Pillow, but his last unit, Wilson's Regiment, played a major role in the tumultuous battle.

In his questionnaire, Tom Utley states that he was in Company F of the 21st Tennessee Cavalry, which is the unit he was with at the end of the war. However, National Park records show him on the roll of the 20th Tennessee Cavalry, also known as Russell's Regiment. He mentions that his brother John served with the 20th Tennessee but makes no mention of serving with the regiment himself. Existing records show him as a first sergeant while with the 10th Tennessee Cavalry, a private with the 20th Tennessee and a sergeant with the 21st Tennessee. One record shows that he was enlisted into the 20th Tennessee by Captain Tom Hutchinson in the spring of 1864 for three years. This is probably a mistake because Hutchinson enlisted him in a partisan company in March 1862 and NPS records don't show Hutchinson as being with the 20th Tennessee. He doesn't say how or why he left the 10th Tennessee in East Tennessee and Georgia and returned west. It is possible that his enlistment was up or even that he deserted, as many West Tennessee soldiers, did then joined one of the new regiments Forrest

¹⁰ This site <http://www.tngenweb.org/civilwar/csacav/csa10cav.html> states that Cox's regiment was given furlough in late 1863 for the men to return home and recruit new men. They then reported to Forrest in Mississippi where he was organizing an army of cavalry. They were assigned to the 21st Tennessee Cavalry. During the organization, Forrest reassigned the experienced officers and NCOs rather than allowing the new units to elect them as a means of providing experienced leadership.

¹¹ The Battle of Fort Pillow is the most controversial battle of the Civil War. The Federal garrison included white cavalry who had been raised in northwest West Tennessee and colored artillerymen from a regiment based in Memphis. Casualties were heavy among both the white and Negro Federals and Northern politicians claimed that Forrest had ordered a massacre.

formed when he returned to Mississippi and West Tennessee. He may have been reassigned to the 21st Tennessee Cavalry to provide experience.

Tom Utley doesn't mention participating in the November 1864 raid into West Tennessee and the attack on the Federal supply base at Johnsonville. In preparation for the attack on Johnsonville, Colonel Tyree Bell's brigade, which included Wilson's 21st Tennessee, set up camp for a few days at Lavinia, near where Tom's parents were living at the time. After the historic raid, Forrest left West Tennessee and returned to Middle Tennessee, then moved southeast into Georgia and Alabama after the Battle of Nashville. His command was in Alabama when General Joseph Johnston signed the surrender papers that effectively ended the Civil War.¹² Tom Utley's war came to an end on May 9, 1865 in Gainesville, Alabama.

In his narrative, Thomas Utley states that he was in over 50 "fights" during his more than three years as a Confederate cavalryman. Yet, not a single bullet ever clipped his clothes. He never surrendered until just before the end of the war, but then he managed to get away although the Federals killed his mule. He and the men he rode and fought with often went hungry and were short on shoes and clothing much of the time. He said they ate pretty well in "roasting ear" time and when the persimmons were ripe.

One of the questions regards the difficulty the paroled Confederates had getting back home after the war. This question was no doubt prompted by the remembrance of the marauding bands of outlaws that were active in West Tennessee for several years after the war. West Tennessee had truly been a region of "brother against brother, neighbor against neighbor" and the animosity continued after the war. Union sympathy was strong in eastern West Tennessee, particularly in Carroll and Henderson Counties. A number of what were essentially gangs had formed throughout West Tennessee and by the end of the war, their activities were primarily criminal. The pro-Confederates were called guerrillas while those who favored the Union were bushwhackers.¹³ Even though the war was over and the Confederate soldiers had been paroled, bushwhacker gangs saw them as targets of opportunity. Tom Utley said that he had no problem getting back home. He was one of the more fortunate ones.

Thomas Utley returned to Carroll County but not to the farm where he had grown up. His father, Green Utley, had sold it early in the war to get away from his Unionist neighbors and moved some eight miles to a place south of Lavinia where his younger brother had settled. Tom and his father remained there until the end of 1866 when they purchased another farm just north of Spring Creek in Madison County. A nineteenth century map of Madison County shows Tom's house a mile or so north of the community on the Spring Creek-Medina Road just south of Forked Deer Bottom. He apparently submitted the questionnaire sometime in either late 1912 or early 1913 because the letter he included from Walter Grizzard is dated September 1912. Thomas B. Utley passed away in 1925. For some reason, he was buried in Jackson instead of in the family cemetery on the Utley farm north of Spring Creek.

The questionnaire asked for the names of fellow company members and for those of Civil War veterans from either side with whom the respondent was in touch. Because the document was hand-written in script with a pencil, it's hard to make out some of the names but here they are as I can best surmise:

¹² Although General Robert E. Lee's surrender of the Army of Virginia is commonly believed to have ended the war, a much larger Confederate force under General Joseph Johnston, which included the remnants of the Army of Tennessee, remained active in the South. After three days of negotiations with Federal General William T. Sherman, Johnson surrendered his army on April 26, 1865. However, Confederate troops in Alabama, East Louisiana, Mississippi and West Tennessee were not part of the surrender. General Richard Taylor surrendered on May 4 and, after several days of deliberation, Forrest surrendered his command five days later on May 9.

¹³ Because West Tennessee was technically under Union control, the Confederate guerrillas were a legitimate form of warfare. The Union bushwhackers were not because there were Federal troops occupying the area. Bushwhackers were primarily involved in retaliation against the families of Confederate soldiers early in the war but by the end of the war they were harassing everyone as were the former guerrillas.

Company Members and Officers

Captain Thomas Hutchinson
1st Lieutenant Alis Chapman
2nd Lieutenant J.J. Williams
3rd Lieutenant James A. Utley (Thomas Utley's brother - did not survive the war)
J.A. Adams
Will McDougal
Edd McDougal
Dr. Will Caly (?)
Dock Drownsley (?)
Edd Lifsey (he spelled it Lisfey)
Frank Lifsey
Bose Scott
Bob Pierce
Bard (?) Williams
Jack Williams
Grampus Greer
John Loony
William Bouden
Lige Chapman
Arch Jordan
Nick Jordan
Tice Palmer
Sam Druming
John Druming
Crockett Glenns
John Mitchell
Will Hoover
John Hoover
Tom Hoover
Dacer Penick
Will Fields

Living Veterans in 1912 that Tom knew:

J. Askew	Spring Creek, Tennessee
J. R. Adams	Milan, Tennessee
Will Stewart	Spring Creek, Tennessee
Boss Gray	Spring Creek, Tennessee
F. M. Tubbs (Federal)	Spring Creek, Tennessee
T.A. Reed	Claybrook, Tennessee
John Elam	Claybrook, Tennessee
Jack Williams	Milan, Tennessee
Joe Griff	Jackson, Tennessee
John Stovall	Jackson, Tennessee
Tom Gates	Jackson, Tennessee
Walter B. Grizzard	Huntingdon, Tennessee (should be added)