

[The following article is reprinted by the Young–Sanders Center with the permission of the author Carole J. Heffley. Carole contacted the Center for information on Major James T. Coleman, brother to Lieutenant Harry Warfield Coleman. Our interest in Carole’s article is due to Lieutenant Harry Warfield Coleman and Major James T. Coleman, two brothers, both members of “Miles Legion” Confederate States of America from Louisiana. Carole believes the remains of Lieutenant Harry Warfield Coleman should be brought back to his home in Vicksburg, Mississippi. For further information contact the Young–Sanders Center.]

Easton Cemetery’s Rebel
The Story of Lieutenant Harry Warfield Coleman
By: Carole J. Heffley ©

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A stranger among us:

When Fire Captain Wayne Unangst of the Easton Cemetery, [Easton, Pennsylvania] told me years ago that a Confederate Civil War soldier was buried there, I was surprised and interested. It took until 2008, however, to research the story of how an 18-year-old Confederate soldier came to be buried in Easton at the close of the War Between the States. Harry Warfield Coleman was born on November 8, 1846, at Vicksburg, Mississippi, the last of seven children born to Lucy Marshall and Nicholas D. Coleman, including Eliza Warfield Coleman (1827–1835), Mary Francis “Fannie” (1830–1914), Lucy Marshall (b. 1832), James T. (b. 1934), Susan (b. 1836), and Charles (1842–1864). Harry was sent to Hanover Academy in Hanover County, Virginia, for his formal education. The school was directed by University of Virginia professor Colonel Lewis Minor Coleman, a family relative. Harry and his brother, Charles, are listed on the 1860 Census as living at Hanover Academy. The Academy was a prep school for the University of Virginia, and, by fall of 1860, Charles had begun studies there. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Harry’s eldest brother, James, who had seen earlier military service, joined Miles Legion, Louisiana Infantry, with the rank of Major. Charles and Harry, not to be left behind, sought the permission of their father, Nicholas D. Coleman to enlist. Mr. Coleman agreed. The boys’ eagerness to enlist was not usual. Colonel Lewis M. Coleman entered the service of the CSA as well. Charles and Harry Coleman would serve under him in the “Southrons.” A professor at Hanover Academy, Hilary P. Jones, also enlisted with “The whole school,” as local legend has it.

On November 11, 1861, three days after his 14th birthday, Harry W. Coleman enlisted as a Private in the Volunteer Southrons at Centreville, Virginia. Harry, however, fell ill within a few weeks and was discharged on January 7, 1862, after little more than a month of service. It must be noted that the battle of Centreville was fought on December 15, 1861. It is possible that the boys saw their first battle there and that Harry's "illness" may have actually been a wound suffered in battle.

Harry apparently recovered at home and, on April 15, 1862, less than 4 months later, he enlisted again, this time in the Voorhies (Voorhees) Guards, Company H, Miles' Legion, Louisiana Infantry, to serve with his eldest brother, Major James Coleman. At the age of 14, Harry entered service as Junior 2nd Lieutenant because, of his academic background or his brother's influence; but it may have been that Harry was made a 2nd Lieutenant to circumvent the April, 1862, Confederate Conscription Act that soldiers must be at least 18 years of age. Officers, though, were not affected by the Act. Harry remained a part of Miles' Legion for the duration of the war and earned a promotion to 1st Lieutenant while a prisoner of war largely due to his brother, James', influence. James apparently was monitoring Harry's welfare while still actively fighting with the CSA.

By May of 1863, Miles' Legion had taken up positions at Port Hudson, a strategic point on the Mississippi River. The battle for Port Hudson is mostly overlooked as General Ulysses S. Grant had laid siege to Vicksburg to the north. General Nathaniel P. Bank's Federal troops advanced on Port Hudson from Baton Rouge while Federal gunboats on the Mississippi River completed a total siege. The Confederate troops at Port Hudson held out for 48 days. Port Hudson fell on July 9, 1863. The enlisted men who surrendered there were paroled and allowed to go home, but the officers, Harry and James Coleman among them, were detained as prisoners of war. The officers were first sent to New Orleans and housed in the Orleans Custom House and later transferred to a private residence. The brothers were separated and James made good an escape. Harry remained a POW.

POW camps in both the North and South were places of disease, death, and horrendous, inhumane conditions. Amazingly, POWs were able to send and receive letters. Through letters, prisoners who had money sent to them by relatives were able to buy goods and food from sutlers (merchants) who visited the camps with their wares; that is, if camp officials did not steal the money first.

From New Orleans, Harry was sent to Fort Columbus in New York Harbor on October 10, 1863 and arrived at Johnson's Island, Ohio, a prison camp designated for POW officers, on October 15, 1863; Harry was sent to Point Lookout, Maryland, (Camp Hoffman) on March 21, 1865, for a humanitarian prisoner of war exchange. Humanitarian exchanges were for men so sick that they could not bear arms for at least 60 days. These exchanges ended with the fall of Richmond on April 2, 1865. Harry was then transferred to Fort Delaware arriving there April 28, 1865. Fort Delaware was known by Confederate prisoners as the "Death Pen."

When Harry Coleman arrived at Fort Delaware in April, 1865, he found that many men

already at the camp were willing to take the Oath of Allegiance. According to prison records an eye witness at the time ("University Memorial: Biographical Sketches of Alumni of the University of Virginia Who Fell in the Confederate War, by Reverend John Lipscomb Johnson, BA, printed 1871), Harry and his group refused. Although prisoners at Fort Delaware were informed about General Lee's surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia within a short time of its happening, they also knew that each other Confederate army units were still fighting. The reasons Harry gave for refusing the Oath are preserved in a letter he wrote to his cousin, known only as "Will" or "WLR", who had been a POW at Fort Delaware for almost a year when Harry arrived. Will was apparently an enlisted man as enlisted men and officers were separated at POW camps; communication between the two groups was by notes thrown over the wall when the guards weren't looking, or delivered by guards who were bribed to do so. Both letters were printed in the book, "University Memorial" and are as follows:

From Will: *"I WAS RATHER SURPRISED AT YOUR WHOLE PARTY REFUSING THE OATH. I HAD BEEN LED TO SUPPOSE BY THE ACTION OF THIS ENTIRE PRISON THAT ITS ACCEPTANCE WOULD BE UNIVERSAL... WHAT, IN GOD'S NAME CAN BE YOUR REASON, HARRY? I MAKE IT MY BOAST THAT I AM AS GOOD A REBEL AS EVER WORE CONFEDERATE GRAY, BUT I SHAME TO CONFESS TO MY UTTER DEMORALIZATION NOW... THE OBJECT FOR WHICH WE HAVE BATTLED, THAT FOR WHICH WE HAVE SHED BLOOD, SPENT TREASURE, AND MADE SACRIFICES, WAS YIELDED WHEN JOHNSTON, IN CONVENTION WITH SHERMAN, DECLARED THE WILLINGNESS OF THE STATES TO RETURN TO THE UNION... THE POWER OF THE CONFEDERACY IS BROKEN AND DESTROYED; WE HAVE NOTHING NOW TO DO BUT TO WEAR THE YOKE OF A SUBJUGATED PEOPLE. TAKE THE OATH, HARRY AND GO HOME WITH ME UNTIL THE CONTEST DIES OUT IN YOUR REGION... YOUR AFFECTIONATE COUSIN, W. L. R."*

Harry's response is recorded as follows: *"DEAR WILL:... YOU SAY YOU WERE SURPRISED AT THE ACTION OF OUR PARTY IN REFUSING THE OATH AND WISH TO KNOW OUR REASONS... I WILL GIVE YOU MY VIEWS, AS WELL AS THOSE OF MOST OF MY PARTY, BRIEFLY: WE CONSIDER THAT SO LONG AS OUR GOVERNMENT KEEPS UP A SHOW OF RESISTANCE, SO LONG AS THERE IS THE LEAST ORGANIZATION, IT IS OUR DUTY TO STAND BY OUR CAUSE... WHEN WE NO LONGER HAVE ANY GOVERNMENT, THEN WE MUST AWAIT OUR SEPARATE STATES' ACTION, AND BE GUIDED TO A GREAT EXTENT BY THEM. AS FOR ME, I DO NOT EXPECT TO TAKE THE OATH AT ALL; I WOULD WELCOME EXPATRIATION FIRST..."*

On May 5, according to the Reverend Johnson's book, Harry wrote to his remaining brother, Major James T. Coleman, stating that his views had changed a bit but that he still did not consider himself absolved from his oath to the Confederate States of America as long as any armed force represented the Confederacy. Within a few days, Harry's health gave out. He was admitted to the Fort Delaware hospital on May 17, 1865, and died there on May 20th. The cause of death is listed as "inflammation of the lungs," today known as pneumonia. What happened next is an amazing part of Harry Coleman's story.

In 1851, Harry's sister, Frances (Mary Frances or Fannie) Coleman, married Theodore Fitz

Randolph of New Jersey. Theodore had moved to Vicksburg about 1840 from New Jersey to pursue his interests in coal and iron. Since the Coleman's had a home in Vicksburg, it was apparently there that Fanny Coleman met and married Theodore Randolph. In 1852, the newlyweds moved to Jersey City in New Jersey, where Theodore was a member of the New Jersey Senate and was also running for the office of Governor. He was elected Governor in 1869 on his second try for the office and served a term as United States Senator. When he died in 1883, the *EASTON ARGUS* carried the story.

While Theodore was living in Vicksburg in the 1840's, his father James Fitz Randolph, moved from New Jersey to Easton, Pennsylvania, presumably to further his, and his sons', business interests. Easton saw heavy coal traffic from much Chunk (today's Jim Thorpe) and was a center of canal transportation to Philadelphia. The elder James F. Randolph opened an office at 7 Northampton Street (the site of today's State Liquor Store, 109-113 Northampton St.) according to an 1855 Directory listing, to conduct business in coal and iron as an agent of his sons, Theodore and James, (Jr.)

Because of the need in 1855 for the Randolph family to bury an infant listed as C. Randolph, age 1, a gravesite was purchased at Easton Cemetery. It was here that Theodore and Fanny Randolph apparently buried two unnamed infants, recorded as "T. Randolph infant" in Easton Cemetery records, one in 1864 and one in 1866. Although the couple never lived in Pennsylvania, they, and Theodore's siblings, buried family members in Easton's Randolph family plot. Seven Randolph infants are recorded as being buried in Easton cemetery prior to 1865 along with seven adults, including Theodore's mother, Sara in 1860. Theodore and Fannie Randolph are buried at Evergreen Cemetery, Morristown, New Jersey. The last Randolph family burial at Easton Cemetery was in 1933.

When Harry Coleman died at Fort Delaware, it was the usual practice to bury deceased prisoners in a mass grave in the soldier's burial ground across the Delaware River in Salem County, New Jersey. However, Harry's sister Fannie and brother-in-law, Theodore Randolph, apparently knew of his whereabouts, could even possibly have visited him, and, as recorded in "University Memorial," New Jersey Senator Randolph claimed the body. Theodore Randolph transported Harry's body to the Randolph family grave in Easton where he was buried on May 24, 1865. Without doubt, the surviving Coleman family members, Harry's father, Nicholas, and brother, James, would have desperately wanted to bury him in Vicksburg. However, moving a body from Fort Delaware to Mississippi in May of 1865 would have been extremely difficult given by the situation in the South at the time and the devastation of the Vicksburg area from General Grant's siege.

A white marble headstone was placed on the grave. A smaller flat stone, probably a grave marker that was placed first, is also on the grave. Cemetery records indicate that both stones belong to the grave of Harry Coleman. Easton Cemetery records state that Harry Coleman was 19 years of age, died May 20, 1865 and was buried on May 24, 1865.

Harry Coleman died May 20th, at night. Although embalming was not widely used at the time because of its expense, money was not a concern to the Randolph's. The body, most

likely, would have been embalmed at Salem, New Jersey, across the river from Fort Delaware. A tin, or possibly lead, casket may have been used or even the traditional wooden box. Lance Metz, historian at the Emerick Center of the National Canal Museum in Easton, poses a scenario for the shipment of Harry's body to Easton via the Belvidere–Delaware Railroad. The “Bel–Del” Railroad connected Trenton, New Jersey, to Phillipsburg with access to and from Philadelphia; shipment of the body by rail may have taken only a day. During the 1860's Theodore F. Randolph was a director of the Morris & Essex Railroad. His dealings with the Railroad would have had far-reaching connections. The body would probably have been picked up from Fort Delaware on May 21, perhaps embalmed by a local mortuary, and sent by rail on May 22 or 23, either from Trenton or Philadelphia, arriving in Phillipsburg for the stated May 24 burial at Easton Cemetery. The Confederate dead from the prison camp at Fort Delaware were routinely interred in a soldier's burial ground in Salem County, New Jersey. The burial ground, in an area known locally as Finns Point, was officially made a National Cemetery in 1875. The remains of 135 Union soldiers who had died at Fort Delaware, and 187 Confederates who had been buried on Pea Patch Island, were disinterred in November 1875 and reburied in Finns Point National Cemetery.

An 85-foot tall granite obelisk erected by the Federal government at the site in 1910 names, 2,436 Confederate soldiers who died at Fort Delaware, including Harry Warfield Coleman. Perhaps Harry's name was included as he died at the Fort and it was not noted that his body was claimed by Theodore Randolph; therefore, it was assumed that his body was in the mass grave. However, history will now record that Lt. Harry Warfield Coleman, CSA, was buried alone at Easton Cemetery, far from his family and comrades in arms.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Author Carole J. Heffley is a former City Councilwoman of Easton, Pennsylvania and a professional magazine writer. Carole was a former owner of “The Irregular” Magazine