

Frisby T. Dix: Eighth Alabama Infantry Regiment

By Roger Ballard

The Eighth Alabama Infantry Regiment (the Eighth) was the first Confederate regiment to be enlisted for the war with men recruited from Butler, Coosa, Dallas, Mobile, and Perry counties. This company was raised on May 18, 1861, at Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama, as the "Alex Stephens Guards" and was mustered into Confederate States Army (CSA) service on June 9, 1861, for the period of the war.

The Eighth served first at Yorktown, Virginia. It fought in the battle of Williamsburg on May 5th and at the Seven Pines on May 31 and June 1, 1862. In these engagements their losses were very severe. One hundred men were lost at Williamsburg, and at Seven Pines there were 32 men killed, 80 wounded, and 32 missing. The Eighth was then trans-



Editor's note: Roger Ballard elected to present this article to the Society via the *Bulletin*. His love for Southern history—especially that of Alabama—led him to author this article.

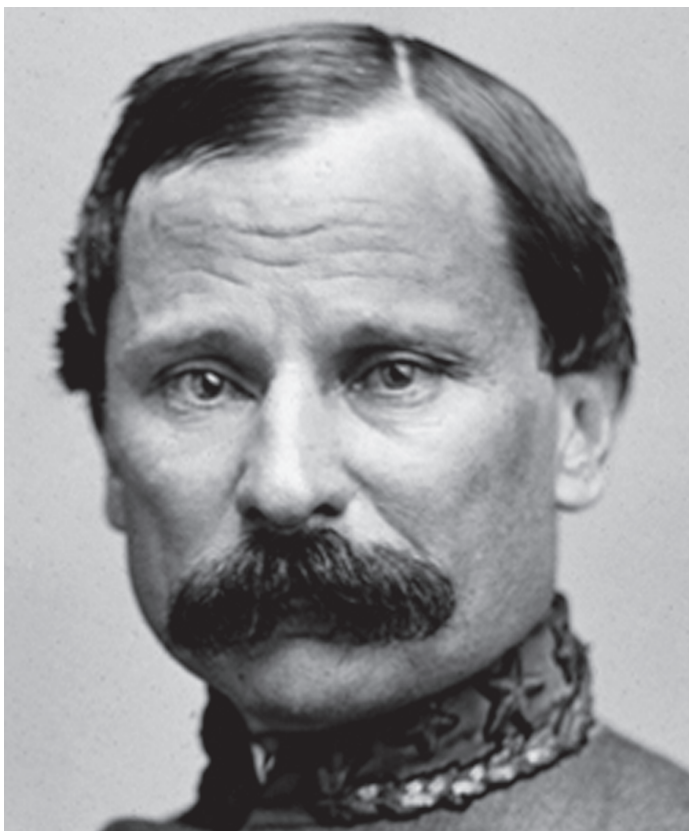


Figure 1. Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox, a native of Wayne County, North Carolina, was born May 29, 1824. He was graduated and commissioned from West Point in 1846. His service in the Mexican War was most gallant. After the war, on June 8, 1861, he resigned and fought at first battle of Manassas as colonel of the Ninth Alabama Infantry. After the battle of Seven Pines, the Eighth Alabama was in the brigade of General Wilcox with the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 14th Alabama Regiments (1862). He was promoted to brigadier general and later to major general after the Gettysburg Campaign. Wilcox served with the army of Northern Virginia in virtually all of its major battles. He died on December 2, 1890. He was universally esteemed in the North as well as in the South. Four of the pallbearers at his funeral were former general officers of the United States Army and the other four were former general officers of the Confederacy.

ferred to the brigade of General Cadmus M. Wilcox (Figure 1) along with the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 14th Alabama regiments who fought together to the end of the war.

The Eighth was greatly distinguished at Mechanicsville, June 26, 1862. Two days later it was prominent in the assault upon the enemy at Gaines' Mill and on June 30th was again in the midst of the conflict at Frayser's Farm. At the second battle of Manassas it was under a destructive fire and lost approximately 60 men as it held in reserve. The Eighth took part in the capture of Harper's Ferry, and then it crossed the Potomac River and was in the thickest of the fight at Antietam on September 17, 1862.

The Eighth wintered on the Rappahannock, losing slightly at Fredericksburg. At Salem Church, the Wilcox Brigade bore the brunt of the Federal assault, driving the enemy back in confusion and capturing 1500 prisoners.

The Eighth fought with its usual bravery at Gettysburg on July 2, 1863. With the army, the Eighth re-crossed the Potomac and wintered in the vicinity of Orange Court House.

At Appomattox, the Eighth denied the first rumors of surrender and indignantly tore their battle flag into shreds to retain as mementos. Of 1377 men on its roll, 300 men were killed or mortally wounded, more than 170 died of disease, and 236 were discharged or transferred. Sixteen officers and 153 men surrendered, making altogether 169 men of the Eighth who were paroled. These official figures from the

captured archives show that the Eighth was one of the largest Confederate regiments at Appomattox.

Frisby T. Dix, a Virginian, joined Company C of the Eighth Alabama Infantry Regiment on May 18, 1861. His enlistment was conducted by Captain C.T. Ketchum at Mobile, Alabama, and it was for the duration of the war. He was 18 years old and unmarried. Dix's occupation was listed as a "seaman"; therefore, he may have been a crew member on a ship from Virginia carrying cargo bound for Mobile, Alabama, at the time of his enlistment. Apparently, this Virginian was swept up with the excitement of defending the Confederacy when he found himself in Alabama a little more than a month after the war had started. The state of Alabama had already passed its ordinance of secession on January 11, 1861, and had been admitted to the Confederacy on February 4, 1861. Dix's home state of Virginia had not officially responded to the war until after he had joined the Eighth. Virginia's ordinance of secession passed on April 17, 1861, and the state was admitted to the Confederacy on May 23, 1861. Their admittance to the Confederacy was 5 days after Dix had joined up in Alabama.

The following notes are from the *Record of Events* for the Eighth, which was written by the individual captains of the companies on the original muster rolls under the heading "additional remarks." These remarks vary between the individual companies on one unit depending on how much the captain felt like writing. The following concerns Company C of the Eighth Alabama Infantry Regiment in the early days of the war:

The Company was accepted on the 18th of May, 1861. They left Mobile, Alabama, on the 23rd and arrived at Richmond, Virginia, on the 27th and were mustered into service on the 28th.

We left Richmond on the 13th (June) and arrived at Yorktown, Virginia, on the 14th of June 1861.

On the 27th (June) we left Yorktown and moved toward Bethel. On the 28th, we moved on in the same direction. On the night of 28th, about 11 o'clock, we moved on to Bethel and thence on near Newport News and thence to Mr Smith's place and thence on about 6 miles towards Warwick Court House where we stopped about 2 o'clock after a march of 32 miles through mud and rain a good portion of the time at double-quick. The men were much fatigued. Many of them lost their blankets, their shoes, and other things on the march.

On the night of 29th (June) we moved on to Young's Mill where we remained until 4th July. We then moved to Hammonds' Mill where we remained until 6th and then returned to Yorktown. The discipline is moderate. The men are true and brave and many of them fine marksmen.

In all probability this report was written by Charles T. Ketchum who was the captain of Company C from May 7,

1861, to November 1861. As noted earlier, this was the same Captain Ketchum who had been the enlistment officer for Frisby T. Dix on May 18, 1861.

Strangely, almost 1 year after enlisting, Dix, who was encamped near Yorktown, Virginia, wrote a letter to General Henry A. Wise (Figure 2) seeking the General's influence to negotiate a transfer from the Eighth Alabama Infantry Regiment to a unit in his home state of Virginia. He was already known to the General and was considered a friend in the years before the war.

General Henry Alexander Wise was born December 3, 1806, in Drummondtown, Virginia. He graduated from Washington College, Pennsylvania, in 1825. Three years later he opened a law office in Nashville, Tennessee, where he practiced law before returning to Virginia in 1830. He was a

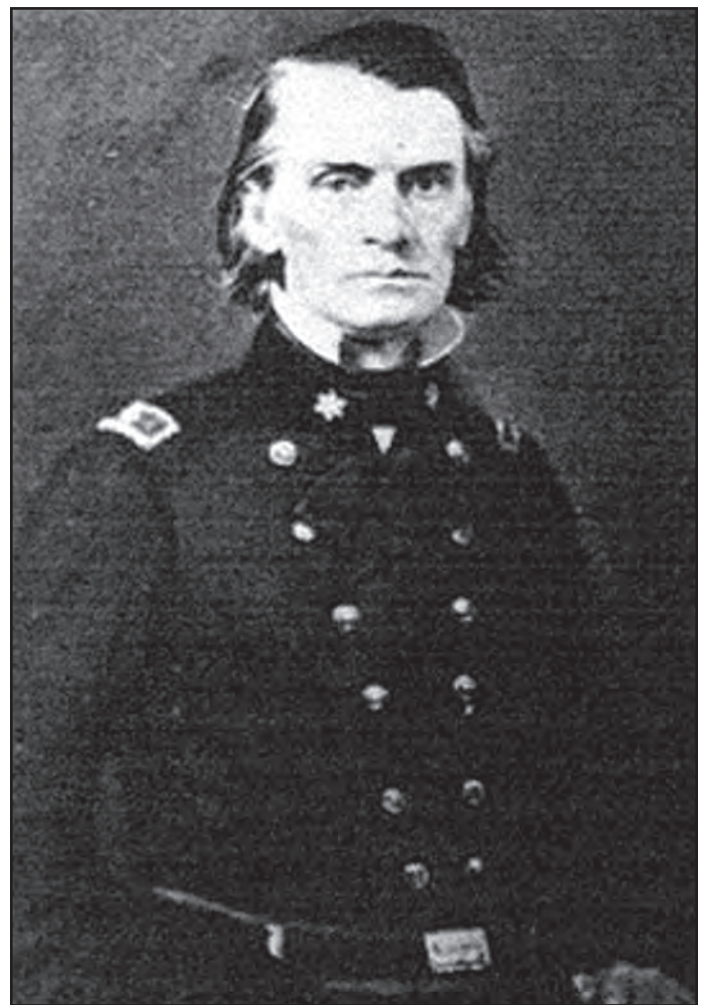


Figure 2. Henry Alexander Wise (brother-in-law to Major General George Gordon Mead) was born on December 3, 1806, at Drummondtown, Virginia. He graduated from Washington College, Pennsylvania, in 1825, he had a law office in Nashville, Tennessee, and returned to Virginia in 1830. Elected to Congress in 1833, he was later minister to Brazil from 1844-1860, and was governor of Virginia from 1856-1860. At the outbreak of war he volunteered and was appointed brigadier general on June 5, 1861. General Wise fought in the West Virginia campaign under Robert E. Lee; under Beauregard in the defense of Charleston from May 1864 to the end, he was on the Petersburg lines, and in Richard H. Anderson's Corps in the defense of Richmond. He died at Richmond on September 12, 1876.

champion of states' rights and elected to Congress in 1833. Later he was minister to Brazil from 1844 to 1847. From 1856 to 1860 he was governor of Virginia.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, without military training, Wise volunteered and was appointed a brigadier general on June 5, 1861. He fought in the West Virginia campaign under Robert E. Lee, then in North Carolina under Beauregard in the defense of Charleston and in Florida. From May 1864 to the end of the war he was on the Petersburg lines, at Drewry's Bluff, and in Richard H. Anderson's corps in the defense of Richmond. Right after the battle of Saylor's Creek and 2 days before the surrender at Appomattox, General Lee placed Wise in division command.

After the war, Wise again practiced law in Richmond and wrote *Seven Decades of the Union* which he published in 1872. He died in Richmond on September 12, 1876, and is buried in Hollywood cemetery. His brother-in-law was Major General George Gordon Meade, the Union commander at Gettysburg.

Dix had hoped that this important General friend would help restore him to service in his native Virginia. Below is the translated copy of Dix's letter (Figures 3 and 4) to General Wise and, following that, the General's reply to that letter.

Co. C 8th Reg. Ala. Volts.
In camp Hammonds Mills

Near Yorktown, VA.
March 8, 1862

Genl. Henry A. Wise C.S.A.

Sir:

I intended writing you some time since, but knowing that your duties to your country were very arduous I hesitated about troubling you with my private affairs. I desire to leave this Regiment and join either the Navy or Army of Virginia. There are very few Virginians in the 8th Alabama and it is a delicate thing to remain with men of a different state and listen to their views and opinions upon this war. Consequently I desire very much to get either a transfer or an appointment and apply to you, General, to assist me in consummating my present object.

I have followed your advice you gave me in Richmond last year but it is all to no use and now I appeal to you as a friend to help me in this my hour of deep dejection. I am confident I can yet do more good to my country being in another Regiment (Virginia).

To make a long story short, I am not treated as I wish to be treated, and I have no will to remain in the Regiment if this war lasts years, as in all probability, it will.

You have my sincere regrets in the loss of your son and trust the thought that he died nobly fighting at his post, will be healing balm to your deep wound.

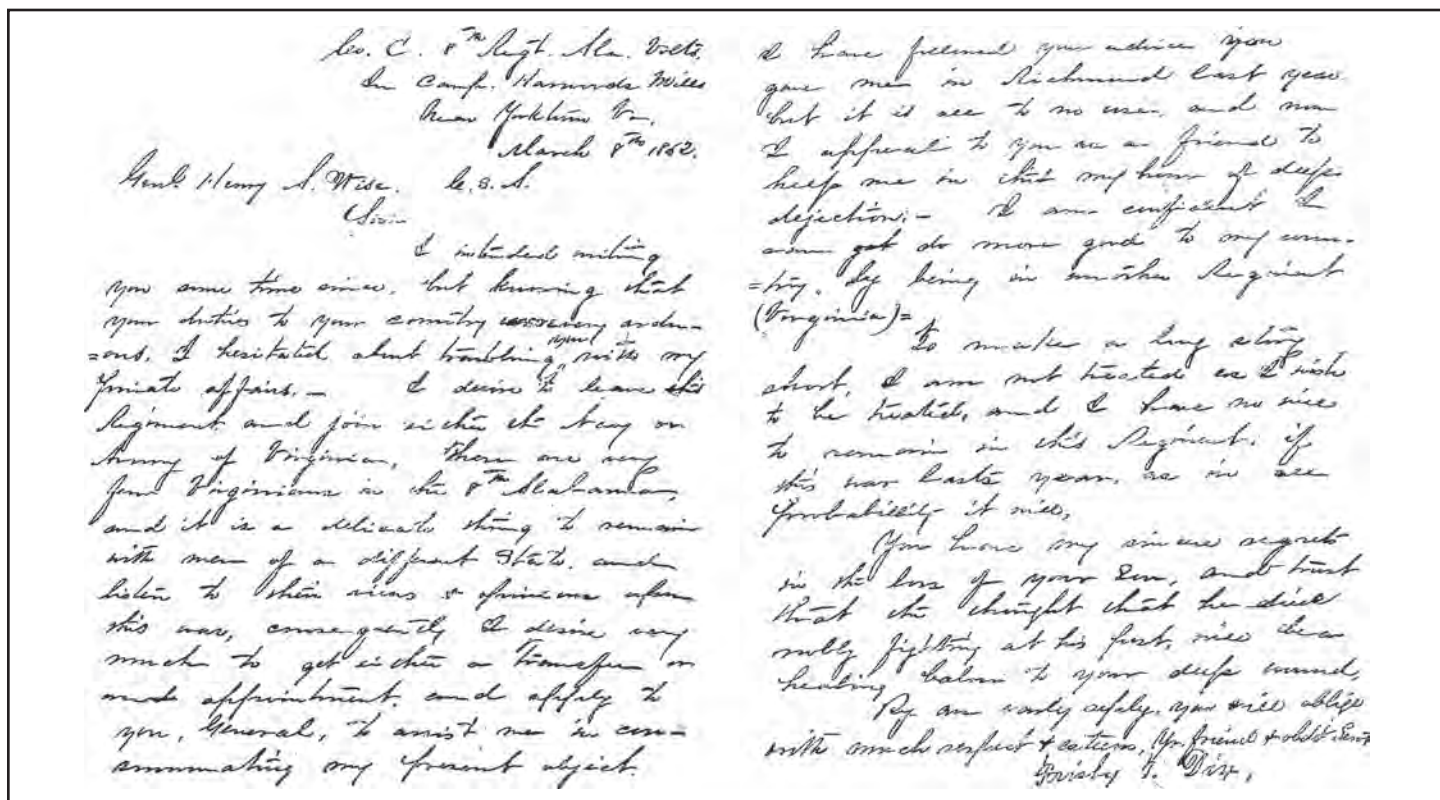


Figure 3. Copy of original letter (translated in text) from Frisby T. Dix to General Wise dated March 9, 1862.

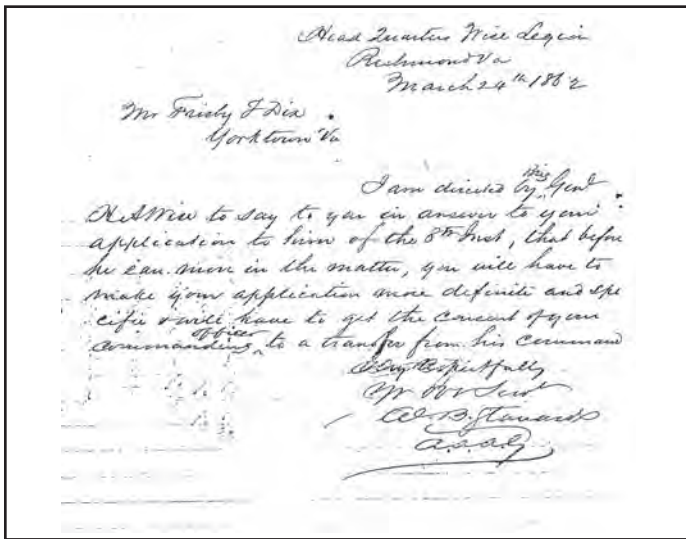


Figure 4. Copy of original letter (translated in text) from General Wise's headquarters dated March 24, 1862.

Bye and early reply you will oblige with much respect and esteem. Your friend and obdit-Servt.

Frisby T. Dix

Head Quarters Wise Legion
Richmond, VA
March 24th 1862

Mr. Frisby Dix
Yorktown, VA

I am directed by Brig. Genl. H.A. Wise to say to you in answer to your application to him on the 8th last, that before he can move in the matter, you will have to make your application more definite and specific. I will have to get the consent of your commanding officer to a transfer from his command.

Very Respectfully, Your obt. Servt

It seems that Dix believed he was unappreciated and/or had very little in common with his fellow soldiers in the Alabama unit. In his words he stated, "I am not treated as I wish to be treated, and I have no will to remain in this regiment if the war lasts years, as it in all probability it will." As a sailor, perhaps he did not have a lot in common with the Alabama soldiers who mainly came to the war directly from tending their farm lands. In any case, Dix was not successful in obtaining a transfer to a Virginia unit, and as a consequence he remained in the Eighth Alabama Infantry Regiment for the entire 4 years of the war.

When Dix wrote his letter to General Wise, he was in camp at Hammonds Mills near Yorktown, Virginia. At this same time, ex-Alabama Governor Colonel John A. Winston (Figure 5) was in command of the Eighth. He had served as Governor from 1853 to 1857, and was the first native-born



Figure 5. Colonel John Anthony Winston served in the Eighth Alabama Infantry Regiment from June 11, 1861, to June 16, 1862. He was in command of the regiment at the siege of Yorktown April 1862, and the battles of Williamsburg and Seven Pines. He retired on June 16, 1862 due to chronic ill health. His grandfather was Anthony Winston, an officer in the Revolutionary Army. He was born in Hanover County, Virginia, but moved to Madison County, Alabama, in 1810.

Alabaman to become governor of the state (he was born in Madison County in 1812 and at that time it was part of the Mississippi Territory). As Commander of the Eighth he was considered a strict disciplinarian and unpopular with his men. Winston nevertheless served with distinction in the Peninsular Campaign. Following a year's service in combat, ill health forced him to resign the army and return to his plantation.

Winston was elected a delegate to the Alabama Constitutional Convention of 1865. In 1867 he was elected to the US Senate but was refused his seat by Congress. Shortly thereafter, he was disenfranchised along with thousands of other Confederate leaders. He died in Mobile on December 21, 1871.

Winston was succeeded in his command of the Eighth by Young L. Royston, and he by Hilary A. Herbert, who commanded in many hard fought battles and was severely wounded at Antietam and the Wilderness.

Other field officers were Lieutenant Colonel Frazier, Thomas E. Irby (who was killed at the Wilderness), John P. Emrich (who was wounded at Petersburg and at Gaines' Mill), and Duke Naill (who was mortally wounded at the Wilderness).

Despite Dix's inability to negotiate a military transfer and his dissatisfaction with some of his comrades and sur-

roundings with the Eighth, he and the rest of his unit were extremely active throughout the 4 years of war. As a private at the start of the conflict, Dix participated in many hostile engagements. Records indicate that he was wounded, captured, exchanged, and promoted during his tenure.

Dix was wounded at Gaines' Mill on June 27, 1862. He is listed on the register of the General Hospital, Howard's Grove, Richmond, Virginia, with the complaint (injury) listed as follows: "In lip, arm, and forehead." The date on the hospital records (June 29) coincides with notes from the battle at Gaines' Mill on June 27, 1862, when Frisby T. Dix is listed as "slightly wounded."

On June 29, 1862, Dix also appeared on the register of Surgical Cases of the General Hospital No. 12 in Richmond, Virginia. Hospital records list the date of entry as October 22, 1862. His injury is recorded as a "Contusion—a bruise without breaking the skin causing loss of the left eye. Pupil right eye dilated. Health is weak."

During the time Dix was recovering from his wounds, his unit was engaged at Frayser's Farm on June 30, 1862, and at the second battle of Manassas on August 30, 1862, and Sharpsburg on September 17, 1862. He was back on the company muster roll for the engagements of Fredericksburg (December 13, 1862), Saleen Creek (May 3, 1863), and Gettysburg (July 2, 1863).

On the company muster toll of September 1863, Dix was listed as First Corporal and was captured at Gettysburg on July 2, 1863. He appears on a roll of prisoners of war at Point Lookout, Maryland, and his date of arrival at Fort Delaware is listed as October 27, 1863. Dix remained a prisoner until he was exchanged on October 11, 1864.

In the book *Brother in Arms* by William Davis (page 96), there is a typical letter reproduced from a Confederate prisoner of war at Fort Delaware, the same prison that held Dix. The writer of the letter tells his wife that he was captured at Wainsboro and was well except for his feet, which were very sore from marching 5 days from Wainsboro to Winchester. In the letter he suggests what to do about the future crops, sends love to the children, and hopes that it will not be long until he is home. Hopefully, he was exchanged as Dix was in October of 1864.

Dix was promoted to sergeant on December 31, 1864, as indicated on the company muster roll and he is also listed as Sergeant Frisby T. Dix on the *Appomattox Paroles* on April 9-15, 1865.

In 1903, Dr Thomas M. Owen, Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, requested Hilary Abner Herbert, the last colonel of the Eighth, to prepare a sketch of the Eighth Alabama Infantry Regiment to be printed by the department along with other sketches of Alabama Civil War military groups.

Herbert, although anxious to see such a history in print, was at the time very busy with his large law practice in Washington, DC, and proceeded slowly. The result was a manuscript, completed in 1906, far longer than what Dr Owen anticipated. What Colonel Herbert attempted to do instead was to write "the history of a representative unit of Lee's army," which he considered the Eighth to be, and thereby preserve the history of that gallant command. In a letter transmitting the manuscript to Dr Owen, Colonel Herbert stated, "It is a history, necessarily, in large part, not only of the Eighth, but also the Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Fourteenth Alabama Regiments, all of which were brigaded together in the summer of 1862 and fought together to the close of the war." These pages became the *History of the Eighth Alabama Volunteer Regiment, CSA*, and much of the information in this article is derived from Herbert's work.

At the Battle of the Wilderness, Herbert was seriously wounded. This injury prompted his retirement. He subsequently had a distinguished public service career as Congressman from the Second Congressional District of Alabama from 1876 through 1892, and as Secretary of the Navy during Grover Cleveland's second administration, from 1893 to 1897. He was the first Cabinet member from Alabama and also the first ex-Confederate appointed to a Cabinet post.

The following anecdotes are short narratives taken from Herbert's *History*.

YORKTOWN, VIRGINIA: 1861

One Confederate cavalry troop appeared to be charged with the special duty of bringing in messages for the benefit of the Eighth Alabama and they were named the "Old Dominion Dragoons."

Time and again the "Old Dominion Dragoon" was at hand with the news, "enemy coming." During all that long summer of 1861 there was no hour of the day or night when the long roll might not, and indeed it would be hard to name any particular hour of day or night when it did not and then, beat. One purpose of these frequent alarms was to keep men and officers from straying from camp without leave. They might be missed at roll call. The result was many a malediction from the members of the Eighth Alabama upon the heads of the "Old Dominion Dragoons"—a "cowardly set of buttermilk rangers, who would see a Yankee in every bush that was shaken by the wind."

THE BATTLE OF FRAYSER'S FARM: JUNE 30, 1862

An incident of this battle well illustrates the spirit [that] animated our soldiers. Little Charley Tisdale of Company F, the youngest boy in the Regiment, had been sick and absent at

Seven Pines; at Gaines' Mill he had been wounded. Charley indignantly replied, "I am not crying because I am hurt, but because these d—d Yankees won't let me get a shot at them. They knocked my gun out of my hand and wounded me at Gaines' Mill before I got a chance at 'em, and now then, before I could fire my gun, they've knocked my leg out of join[t]."

Poor little Charley, he was always brave in battle, cheery in camp, but died from pneumonia a year later.

SALEM CHURCH: MAY 1863

Near the end of this battle, the Ninth, Tenth, and Eighth Alabama led a counter-charge that "pushed back" in confusion, the troops of the 93rd and 102nd Pennsylvania.

The Alabama soldiers were the troops that, in the language of General Lee, "drove the enemy nearly a mile."

Shoes that were much needed were among our spoils. An officer reported that during that night while searching the woods for the wounded he found "Old Robinson," an Irishman of Company A, sitting on the ground by the side of a badly wounded Federal officer, quietly smoking his pipe.

"What are you doing here, Robinson?"

The gruesome reply was, "I'm waiting on this man here. We's got a bit of a job to do. I took him for a dead one, and was after pulling his boots off of him, when he said he was dyin' and asked me to wait till he was dead. And, faith, he's very slow about it!"

GETTYSBURG: JULY 2, 1863

On July 2 at Gettysburg and referring to the movement of the Eighth on this day, when it charged front forward on Tenth company with such precision in the face of a heavy fire from the enemy, it will be remembered that Captain Mordecai of Company H had complained to the commanding officer when we were at Bank's Ford about what he called "so much unnecessary drilling." On the night of the 2nd, after the battle of that day was over, Mordecai said to me: [Colonel Herbert] "Colonel, I want to beg pardon. I will never complain again about your drilling the regiment. If we had not been splendidly drilled, we would have been whipped this morning like hell, before we ever got into line."

REGARDING THE FEDERALS USE OF BALLOONS

Again the Eighth was at Bank's Ford: "and now occurred the only remembered instance, until just as we started on the Pennsylvania campaign, of firing here across the Rappahannock. The Federals had been using balloons ever since McClellan was before Yorktown. To many of us they seemed at first formidable, as an observer so high up in

the air ought to be able we thought to give our positions with accuracy. Lately, however, since we had so often been victorious in spite of these pretentious observers, we had come to laugh at the sky-scrappers that always kept so well out of range of our artillerymen. But one morning, now, perhaps about the last of May, I saw, while on picket duty just about sunrise, a balloon going up from behind a wooded hill-top only a few hundred yards away, for a near-by look at our lines. This seemed just a little too familiar, and so the next morning with the permission of General Wilcox, stationed just beyond the brow of a hill two field pieces. Again the presumptuous balloonist began his morning flight into the air. When he was up some 200 yards, both guns opened fire on him with shells. The aeronaut went down safely, but in a decided hurry, and the experiment was not repeated from that point. Captain Fagan records, in his article on Salem Church, that this was the last of ballooning in the Army of the Potomac during the war.

WINTER QUARTERS AT BANK'S FORD

After the battle of Fredericksburg, the Federal Army took up its former position on the north side of the Rappahannock, and the two armies spent the remainder of the winter watching each other across the river from the ridges or heights that rise on either side.

The Eighth Alabama was encamped on the brow of the hill that rises west of the road that leads on the south side down to the ford, and on the opposite hill, across the river, was a Federal battery, which at any time, day or night during 3 months, could have sent a shell crashing into our camp, the distance not being more than three-quarters of a mile. But here we stayed all the winter. Our tents were elevated on log structures three or four feet high, "chinked" with mud, each having a liberally daubed sticks chimney and fireplace.

During our entire stay there was no firing on either side. A tacit truce had been established. In both armies we had learned to respect each other and to know that picket-firing, unless there is some movement on foot, is only murder. An officer of the day on one side of the river riding along the picket lines was frequently saluted by a picket from the opposite bank, just as he would be by his own men. And the conversations that took place across the river were often very amusing.

Gradually men go to trading across the river. A little boat was constructed with a rudder rigidly fixed at an angle of say 45 degrees from the axis of the boat, and when the boat was placed in the water, with bow straight across and with the rudder inclined at a fixed angle downstream, the action of the current impelled it across and downward in such manner that experiments would show where to put it

in one side of the river so as to land it at a given point on the other. This boat was used until captured by the winter in exchanging Virginia tobacco for coffee, sugar, etc. After a time men got to visiting the river; and all this coming to the knowledge of General Lee, he issued an order strictly forbidding communication with the enemy; and a similar order was issued on the other side.

One day shortly after this order, the writer, as officer of the day, was visiting the picket line. One of the posts was at Scott's dam, and here so many of the huge boulders of the former dam were still in line that one could wade across the stream, it nowhere being over the rocks more than waist deep. Just as the writer rode out of the bushes below up to the post, a Federal soldier with trousers off was within 10 feet of the bank on our side. The soldier halted.

"Come on!" said I.

"I won't come," said he, "unless you will let me go back."

When by means of a cocked pistol pointed toward him he had been compelled to come ashore, and told that he was a prisoner, he said, "Colonel, this is not fair. These men told me I could come over and go back."

"Yes," was the reply, "but you knew it was against orders and I know you are violating orders on your side. There is no way to stop this except to enforce orders, and you are my prisoner."

He was a big strong manly fellow and looked me straight in the face, while the tears came into his eyes, as he replied, "Colonel, shoot me if you want to, but for God's sake don't take me prisoner. I have been in this army for 6 months. I have never been in battle. If I am taken prisoner under these circumstances, my character at home will be ruined. It will always be said I deserted."

The appeal was too much for me. He was sent back with an admonition to him and his comrades that he was the last man that would ever be released; and then, after a scolding administered to my own men, I sought General Wilcox saying "General, I have disobeyed orders."

"What have you done?" he asked, and on being informed, his answer was, "I should have done the same thing myself."

ORANGE CH, WINTER, 1863-4 (A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE WILDERNESS BATTLE BEGAN)

In the early days of May, Lee's forces broke camp and marched a few miles away down to the dreadful battlefield of the Wilderness. Never at any time since they had been cheered in 1861 on their way to Richmond had the army, at least that part of it to which the Eighth Alabama belonged, seen so many lovely women during that winter. The officers

had music at their command, the girls could furnish spacious mansions and night after night did the soldiers "chase the glowing hours with flying feet." It may seem strange to a civilian that there should have been so much gaiety when danger was so imminent.

Colonel Herbert wrote "And yet, sensible as we were of the dangers that confronted us, the days flew by, with many of us at least, as merrily as any we can count in all the checkered calendar of the past.

Possibly a dance in those days was all the merrier because of the feeling that it might be the last—the dance of death. It was only a few days before the Wilderness battle began when grim old Jubal Early, looking on with an elderly lady friend while a lot of young officers were gliding gaily over the floor with their happy partners, said to her, "Madam, if you have any message to send to the next world, you may give it to one of these young men, and he'll deliver it in a few weeks."

THE BATTLE OF THE CRATER: JULY 30-AUGUST 1, 1864

The Aftermath and Incidents: General Bartlett's Cork Leg

The slaughter was fearful. The dead were piled up on each other. In one part of the fort I counted eight bodies deep. There were but few wounded compared with the killed.

There was an incident which occurred in the captured fort that made quite an impression on me. Among the wounded was Yankee General Bartlett. He was lying down and could not rise. Assistance was offered him, but he informed those who were assisting him that his leg was broken, and so it was, but it proved to be an artificial leg, made of cork.

One of the officers ordered a couple of Negroes to move him, but he protested, and I believe he was given white assistance.

This General afterwards, so I have been informed, became an honored citizen of Virginia, though at the time, I must say, I never would have believed such a thing possible. One of our soldiers seeing the cork leg and springs knocked to pieces waggishly said, "General, you are a fraud; I thought that was a good leg when I shot it."

[More from the Battle of the Crater:]

After dark, tools were bought with which we reconstructed the wrecked fort. In doing this we buried the dead down in the fort, covering them with earth. The fire of the enemy was entirely too severe to carry them out. We were therefore forced to stand on them and defend our positions while we remained in the fort, which was until the following Monday night.

[More from the Battle of the Crater:]

As we went over the embankment into the fort, one of my sergeants, Andrew McWilliams, a brave fellow, was shot in the mouth; the ball did not cut his lips. It came out the top of his head. He was evidently yelling with his mouth wide open. He fell on top of the embankment with his head hanging in the fort. We pulled him down in the fort, and that night carried him out and buried him.

Into the Mouth of Hell Charged the Six Hundred

On we went, as it seemed to us, literally “into the mouths of hell.” When we got to the walls of the fort we dropped on the ground to get the men in order and let them get their breath. While waiting we could hear the Yankee officers in the fort trying to encourage their men, telling them among other things to “remember Fort Pillow.” (In that fort, Forrest’s men had found Negroes and whites together. History tells us what they did for them.) Ten commenced a novel method of fighting. There were quite a number of abandoned muskets, with bayonets on them, lying on the ground around the fort. Our men began pitching them over the embankment and over we went, intending to harpoon the men inside, and both sides threw cannon balls and fragments of shells and earth, which by the impact of the explosion had been pressed as hard as brick. Everybody seemed to be shooting at the fort, and doubtless many were killed by their friends. I know some of the Yankees were so killed.

General Sanders and the Eighth Alabama at the Crater

General John Caldwell Calhoun Sanders (Figure 6) was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and attended the University of Alabama from 1856 until the outbreak of the war. He enlisted in a company of the 11th Alabama Infantry, of which he was elected Captain. He took part in the engagement at Seven Pines, Seven days battles, and Frayser’s Farm, and was formally promoted to Colonel after sharpshooting at the age of 22. He fought at Fredericksburg, Salem Church, Gettysburg, and in the overland campaign of 1864. After Spotsylvania he was commissioned brigadier general from May 31, 1864. He was assigned to the command of Cadmus N. Wilcox’s old brigade of Alabama regiments, which included the Eighth Alabama.

He served during the opening operations of the siege of Petersburg and particularly so in the battle of the Crater, where his brigade was a part of Mahone’s Division. Sanders’ Alabama brigade occupied the “Crater,” which they had captured on Saturday about 2 o’clock, until Monday night, August 1, when under cover of darkness they were relieved by another brigade, as was also the gallant Virginia brigade,



Figure 6. John Caldwell Sanders was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in 1858. At the outbreak of the war, he left the University to enlist in a company of the 11th Alabama Infantry. At the age of 24, Sanders was commissioned Brigadier General May 31, 1864, and was then assigned to command of Cadmus M. Wilcox’s old brigade of Alabama regiments. General Sanders was conspicuous during the siege of Petersburg and particularly so in the battle of the Crater. On August 21, 1864, in one of the engagements of the Wilson Road, he was badly wounded and soon died. He is buried in Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond.

which had, by a superb charge, captured the entrenchments on the left of the “Crater.”

Sanders’ brigade was highly complimented in the morning papers, both in Petersburg and Richmond.

A short truce was called at the “Crater” so that some of the dead could be buried. During that time, the Federal soldiers who saw Sanders said that he was the handsomest and best dressed man they saw. Intellect sparkled in his clear blue eyes, and he was as modest and unassuming in private intercourse as he was chivalrous and daring in battle. Later, on August 21, 1864, he was killed in action in one of the engagements on the Weldon railroad. His loss to the army and to the state of Alabama was irreparable. He is buried in Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond.

[More from the Battle of the Crater:]

At one point during the battle of Crater, the Yankees asked for a truce to bury their dead and remove the wounded. The Federals sent a flag of truce conveying a communication, which was properly signed and addressed and the terms of the truce were agreed on. These terms were that they could remove their wounded and bury their dead in a ditch or grave to be dug half way between the lines. The work was commended and was continued for about 4 hours.



Figure 7. This Confederate soldier is not Frisby Dix, but he is holding the same kind of gun that Dix used in the war. The gun is a German Potsdam musket Model 1809 converted to percussion, .72 caliber smooth bore - 41 inch round barrel. Many of these German guns were imported and used by the Confederacy. The following markings are on the butt stock of Dix's gun: "F.T. Dix 8th Ala."

In that ditch, about 100 feet in length, were buried 700 soldiers. The dead were thrown indiscriminately, three bodies deep.

During the truce both sides came over their works, and meeting in the center, mingled, chatted and exchanged courtesies, as though they had not sought in desperate effort to take each other's lives but an hour before.

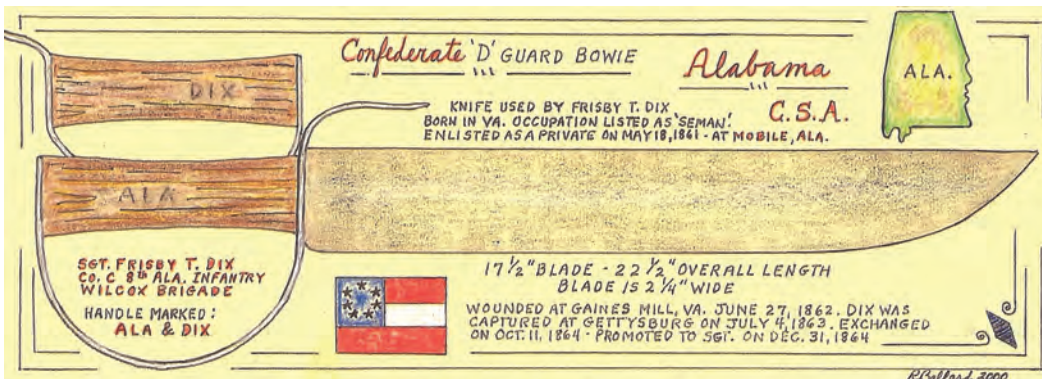


Figure 9. A Photo of the original knife carried by Frisby T. Dix.



Figure 8. German Potsdam musket.

During the truce, General Robert B. Potter, who commanded a Michigan division in Burnside's Corps, chatted with Colonel Herbert. Potter asked Colonel Herbert to point out to him some of our generals, several of whom were standing on the embankment of the wrecked fort. Herbert pointed out General Harris of Mississippi, A.P. Hill, and finally pointed out General Mahone, who was dressed in a suit made out of a tent cloth, with a roundabout jacket. It is remembered that General Mahone was quite small, and did not weigh much, if any over 125 pounds. Potter laughingly said, "Not much man, but a big general."

When the dead were buried each side returned to their entrenchments, and soon the sharpshooters were firing at each other when and wherever seen.

APPOMATTOX

With the surrender at Appomattox, this ended the career of the Eighth Alabama volunteers. But its trials were not over, even when it had listened to the immortal words of Lee's farewell address to his army. It was still without food; 28,000 men and officers had surrendered with General Lee. General Grant generously issued 25,000 rations to General Lee (of which General Horace Porter gives an account in the November Century 1887). General Lee thought this would be sufficient, but he did not know that two trains of rations sent to his army from Lynchburg, Virginia, had been captured by Sheridan the day before the surrender. So it was that 3000 of these men failed to share in the food given by the victors. The Eighth Alabama was among these, and its officers and soldiers spent their last day at Appomattox eating parched corn.

General Mahone ordered his division to be formed in a square and made a short speech. He said, in part, that

he wanted to accept the surrender in good faith—to go home and make as good citizens as we had soldiers.

When my company was formed for the last time, I was deeply moved. The original muster rolls called for 159 men and they were as good and true as ever wore the grey. Not one had ever been charged with failure to do his duty—not a man ever been arrested. Along the battlefields of Virginia were sleeping 41. Twenty-seven had died of diseases, 101 wounds. Every officer had received wounds, and every private except one.

A soldier of the regiment had just come in and reported that General Lee had surrendered the army. The men are indignant, and threaten the soldiers with a beating. He is told with much profanity that a skulked wagon dog and hospital rat were news carriers. Dr Robert Royston, an old friend and Brigade Surgeon, rode to where I was lying down. His face, so bright and pleasant, was a study—the tears were in his eyes, and choking with emotion he said, “General Lee has surrendered the army.” I cannot express my feelings—the tears came to my eyes—the only tears during the entire war. The men crowded around Dr Royston, eagerly asking questions, and they would go away with tears falling on their dirty, bronzed faces. A pathetic sight—these starved men who staggered when they walked, from exhaustion, truly they loved their land with a love far brought.

The Color Sergeant holding the flag in his stand, cried out, “You have never run in a battle, and you don’t surrender.” He tore the flag from the staff and divided it among the men. A piece about 10 inches square came to me. I have it still, and would like to know who have the other pieces.

[NOTE: “The flag’s streamers, a red and white ribbon with tassels, fell to John A. Browne of Co. D, who married and settled in Suffolk Co., Virginia. The streamers with the names of the battles fought had been given to me by Miss Nina Cave near Orange C.H. VA., in April 1864. When Browne, 32 years afterwards (in 1896), visited me, bringing along to exhibit his much prized trophies and learned from me their origin he asked me to decide whether they were mine or his. The decision was in his favor. With tears in his eyes and much hesitation he accepted it, declaring that at his death they should come to me or my family. His widow has since sent them and, pinned with the Cross of Honor given me by the V.D.C. with their story underneath, the frame that held them now hangs in my parlor.”]

H.A. HERBERT

I sent Sergeants George Smith and Renas Richardson to learn the truth of the matter, for I still doubted it. When they returned they confirmed the report. Smith had a billet wood, split from an apple tree. He stated that he saw a crowd of

soldiers and newspaper correspondents, digging up an apple tree, under which the surrender had been arranged. Smith divided his billet with the company. I still have my piece.

CAMP AT ORANGE COURT HOUSE, 1863-4

What our enemy thought, during this period, of General Lee is well illustrated by a conversation the writer had (perhaps in January) with an Irish Lieutenant of a New York regiment, whom he had met out between the picket lines when negotiating to pass a lady through the lines on her way North.

“Well,” said the lieutenant, “We are on our way to Richmond again.”

“Yes,” was the reply, “But you’ll never get there.”

“Oh, yes, we will,” came the answer. “We’ll get there after a while; and if you swap Generals with us, we will get there in 3 weeks.”

It is needless to say that the proposition for an exchange was politely declined. As we parted we took a drink of the gallant young Irishman’s good whiskey, to the toast he offered, “May the best man win.” The bigger man won. Both men were plucky.

THE WEAPONS OF FRISBY DIX

The weapons of Frisby Dix have been in the author's possession for many years. They provided the motivation for the research and resulting article. A description follows:

Frisby Dix carried a German Potsdam Musket Model 1809 that was converted to percussion. It was .72 caliber-smooth bore with a 41 inch round barrel. The markings on the butt stock are "ET. DIX—8th ALA." These markings are worn and dim, but still visible and easily read. (See Figure 7)

He also carried a large 'D' guard Bowie knife with a wood handle. On one side of the handle is carved "DIX" and on the other side is carved "ALA". The blade is 17½ inches and the overall length is 22½ inches. The blade is 2½ inches wide at its widest point. (See Figure 8)

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