

The Boys That Never Left Calhoun

By Don Wilson

As young men began to gather at recruiting stations across this nation in 1861 and mingle with strangers from neighboring communities they became exposed to every disease within that region. Modern explanations for diseases and medications were still years ahead. Soldiers died and they died by the thousands. They died from measles, appendicitis, influenza, pneumonia, gangrene, typhoid, tetanus, and chronic diarrhea. They died from diseases that today could be prevented by vaccines or treated by Penicillin and other antibiotics. Even minor injuries often resulted in death because the need for sterile surgical procedures had not yet been realized. Over 600,000 soldiers died during the Civil War and at least 500,000 died from various illnesses. The 100,000 or so that died as the result of injuries often died days, weeks, or even months later and died from peritonitis, blood poisoning, or some other infection that brought on systemic shock. The ones who died immediately were the lucky ones.

The young men who came to Camp Calhoun during the later months of 1861 were no different. They were exposed not only to diseases from neighboring communities, from Sturgis to Danville, but from neighboring states, including Pennsylvania and Indiana. Camp Calhoun experienced disease outbreaks of epidemic proportions. Companies would have as many as one-half of their members sick at one time and some companies could not function at all. The number who died at Camp Calhoun will never be known but many died before ever seeing the enemy. Records were frequently lost as campsites were overrun by the enemy and those in charge of records had to run for their lives. At times the need to provide medical care was far more urgent than maintaining proper records. It is increasingly obvious that wounded soldiers were returned to Calhoun from Fort Donelson and Shiloh to receive medical attention but I can find only one soldier for which the records state that he died at the Camp Calhoun Hospital as a result of injuries received at Shiloh. For dozens of others the record only says "they died from injuries." They could have been at Calhoun, St. Louis, Evansville, or any of the other river towns when they died. We just don't know.

Those who died at Camp Calhoun were taken to a civilian cemetery at the corner of Third and Poplar Streets where they received a brief military burial. They were wrapped in their blanket and protocols called for a grave to be three and a half feet deep. We can only assume they followed protocols. The Union Cavalrymen who died in the Battle of Sacramento were interred here and are recognized on the front row.

The local chapter of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans began a project to make this neglected cemetery more presentable a few years ago. Research was initiated and grave markers obtained for those who were adequately documented. One hundred and forty such markers were provided by the Veterans Administration and a nice flagpole was purchased. Further research is indicating that another 65 to 70 soldiers might have been missed in the first survey and, if the record supports it, these will eventually be

recognized also. Included in this group are the Union boys that died at Sacramento. The McLean County Cemetery Committee, also known as the Camp Calhoun Cemetery Committee, became involved in 2007. The ground was prepared and the grave markers were installed at that time. The flagpole and benches will be installed and landscape completed when weather permits. Other plans are being discussed and developed to properly tell their story. The contributions made by the Boys from Calhoun and the significance of Camp Calhoun throughout the Civil War is deserving of national recognition. We should settle for no less.

If any reader knows of a relative or other soldier who served at Camp Calhoun and died at Camp Calhoun and is not included in the presentation, please contact Don Wilson, P.O. Box 128, Calhoun, KY 42327, and be prepared to present any information you might have on this individual. Feel welcome to visit but please respect it. These men are family, too.