

TWO SOLDIERS: A TRUE VIGNETTE OF THE CIVIL WAR

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Soldier One

Calvin Holston was only twenty-four on February 1, 1863, when he enlisted in the United States Army in Nashville, Tennessee. A 5'8", blue-eyed, fair-haired farmer, he was a fine specimen of young manhood.

Calvin's new commander, Lt. Smith of Company G, 4th Regiment, Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry, advised him to get his affairs in order as he could be called any time. However, Calvin wasn't called for muster until August 8, 1863.

He reported as ordered to his new home of Company G and went about the business of becoming a full-fledged U.S. Cavalryman. For the rest of the year his duties carried him between Nashville, Murfreesboro, and Shelbyville, Tennessee. He had the usual set-backs of diarrhea and catarrh and had to be hospitalized a short time for both.

From the time he joined up, one thought was never very far from his mind: having to leave and go so far away to fight that he couldn't visit his beloved, back in Rutherford County.

That December a big decision was made and his wife-to-be said "yes." On December 24, 1863 in Rutherford County, Tennessee, a marriage license was issued to Calvin Holston and Evergreen Darrell and a ceremony performed. One would have to agree Calvin had indeed experienced one busy year.

Soldier Two

Outside the little town of Cleveland, in Bradley County, Tennessee, a young farm boy named Joseph Wilson Gass turned seventeen the day after Calvin signed up. Joe happened to be living in an area of Tennessee where the sympathy of the population was divided between North and South. That didn't really bother Joe as he already had three uncles fighting in Company G, 4th Regiment, Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry around Shelbyville, Tennessee. He had long since made up his mind to join their Company when his time came.

Joe did have a problem with some of the boys in his area who were joining or had already joined the C.S.A. They kept coming around pestering and taunting Joe to come and join with them.

Since he was strong-willed with a mind of his own, in late August 1863 with the growing season about over, he decided to run away and join his uncles in Shelbyville. Since he was only seventeen, having been born February 2, 1846, he had an additional problem of being under-age. Be that as it may, he

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ran away from home on or near September 21, 1863, and made his way to Chattanooga, some fifteen to twenty miles away, bound for Shelbyville.

He discovered upon arriving in Chattanooga that he could not continue alone as all means of transportation between Chattanooga and Shelbyville were being raided and harassed by the Rebels.

We know at this point that he made contact with a Mr. William J. Hicky (who may or may not have been someone he knew locally) and got Mr. Hicky to swear to an affidavit that he was his guardian and that Joe Gass was indeed eighteen years old.

On September 21, 1863 in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Joseph W. Gass enlisted in Company M, 5th Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, U.S. Army for three years or the duration and was mustered into his outfit in Shelbyville. He was a fair-haired, blue-eyed farmer, standing about 5'9" tall.

Together

During the last three months of 1863, several circumstances set the stage: both Cavalry regiments were in the same area; Joe Gass' uncles were in the 4th Cavalry along with Calvin Holston; Joe visited his uncles when he could, getting to know Calvin; as they became friends they became knowledgeable about each other's lives as well as their dreams.

It was also during this time that they found out that the 5th Cavalry was destined to stay within the borders of the state while the 4th Cavalry could be called upon to go anywhere needed for the War effort.

Calvin didn't care for that news at all and confided in his wife that he was going to try to work something out. He said he had a friend in the 5th Cavalry he was going to talk to about it.

Joe Gass, in the meanwhile, would have loved to be closer to his uncles but up till now had done nothing to further his cause. Shortly after the first of the year these two young gentlemen agreed to trade places, each for his own reason. They visited each Commanding Officer and expressed their wishes. The officers in command told them to go ahead and swap, each answering to the others name, until they had the necessary time to make a written transfer. Said transfers, perhaps due to circumstances beyond the officers' control, were never initiated.

In early January 1864, Calvin Holston became Joseph W. Gass and Joe Gass became Calvin Holston.

Calvin no doubt felt pretty good about his bargain with Joe. As each day went by he became used to answering to the name Joe Gass. They also moved in and out of the area but never very far. During the first five or six months he got to visit his wife at least twice, even though each visit was brief.

Then on June 3, 1864, they moved close to Nashville, which the Union

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forces controlled. He had been given permission to visit the blacksmith shop as his mount was in need of new shoes. While he was there a drunken U.S. soldier entered the shop and in a spirit of bravado and complete carelessness, drew his sidearm and started firing aimlessly into the shop interior. Calvin and another soldier were wounded. Calvin was hit in the arm and the abdomen and was taken to General Hospital #15 in Nashville. There he passed away on June 7, 1864.

During his stay in the hospital of approximately four days, he was listed as Joseph W. Gass. A death certificate was made out for Joe Gass. However, while there he told some of the staff his real name, which only proved confusing and was not properly noted. He was, according to his wife, buried under his real name.

As did Calvin Holston, Joseph Gass soon found that he could adapt to answering to the name of Calvin. His uncles no doubt were both amused and delighted that he had worked out a way to stay with them in Company G.

It wasn't long before his introduction to the world of war started as they rode out of Columbia the morning of January 3, 1864. Several months, states, and skirmishes later, Joe/Calvin and his Company met up with Major General Rosseau for a raiding party to destroy the Montgomery and Atlanta Railroad. Moving through Alabama and Georgia, they tore up miles of track and destroyed many bridges. Rebel resistance was fierce, and they lost most of their horses and arms as well as a hundred men.

By September 1864 the Company was back in Tennessee, embroiled in the Battle of Tarpley Shop, ten miles south of Pulaski, Tennessee. So it was here, on the 27th day of September 1864, that Joseph W. Gass had his last day of active duty in the Civil War--a wounded veteran at the ripe old age of eighteen years and about seven months. For it was here he received a gun-shot wound in the right ankle. He was taken first to the field General Hospital in Pulaski where the lower one-third of his right leg was amputated. Then on October 1st he was transferred to General Hospital #3 in Nashville and again on December 17th to Joe Holt General Hospital in Jeffersonville, Indiana. There he stayed until April 7, 1865, at which time he was transferred to General Hospital #19, Nashville, Tennessee, then on to Cumberland General Hospital, Nashville on April 20th. He was finally discharged from there on June 28, 1865. Of course, all this happened under the name of Calvin Holston (including the Discharge Certificate), who had been killed one year before.

Aftermath

Many problems were left for those still living: Calvin Holston's widow deserved a pension; Calvin's son (whom he never saw) deserved a pension; and a wounded one-legged veteran named Joseph Gass also deserved a pension.

These three things came to a successful end. Approximately five years was needed to accomplish this along with reams of paper work and deposition after deposition. Calvin's widow got re-married, Calvin's son grew up, and

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Joe Gass, "peg-leg" and all, ended up back on the farm working and raising a family of nine children.

Reflections

Should two young men, in times of dire emergency, take their fate and, indeed, their very souls into their own hands to try and shape their lives to their own designs, or should they play out the hands they have been dealt?



JOSEPH W. GASS (seated) AND FAMILY

EARLY SEVIER COUNTY, TENNESSEE OBITUARIES

Donated by L. T. Davenport
Gatlinburg, Tennessee

EDITOR'S NOTE: Around the turn of this century the donor's mother kept a scrapbook of obituaries from the Sevier County newspaper. From July 7, 1897 through June 15, 1904, the newspaper was known as the Vindicator; after that date (till 1952?) it was known as Montgomery's Vindicator. What follows are extracts from some of those obituaries. Unfortunately, the year of the obituary is not always given. If it could be determined from an adjacent obituary or from In the Shadow of the Smokies: Sevier County, Tennessee Cemeteries, compiled by the Smoky Mountain Historical Society, the year has been added in brackets. The earliest known year is 1899, and the latest is 1910. Copies of the full set of obituaries have been donated to the Sevier County Public Library and to the McClung Historical Collection of the Knox County Public Library.

ANDES - Mary, the wife of **I. L. Andes**, of Walden's Creek, died Friday, Jan. 3 [1908], after a lingering illness. She was a daughter of the late **Andrew Henderson**.

ANDES - The messenger of death has again invaded our midst and taken from us our sister, **Mary E. Andes**, who was born July 9, 1845. On Sept. 32 [sic] 1866 she was united in marriage to I. L. Andes, with whom she lived happily until her death. Unto them were born ten children, five sons and five daughters, of whom two daughters preceded her to the spirit land.

ATCHLEY - Flora, wife of **A. C. Atchley** died Tuesday, Aug. 8 [1900], after a lingering illness. She was born Oct. 11, 1875, and was married to A. C. Atchley March 1, 1891 by Rev. C. L. Boling. The union was blest with four children, three boys and one girl. She was interred in the Alder Branch Cemetery.

ATCHLEY - Janie, widow of **Perry Atchley**, died Sunday night, July 23, 1905 and was buried in the Alder Branch Cemetery. She is survived by four children.

ATCHLEY - Jesse E. Atchley, formerly of this county, but late of Knoxville, was run down and killed by a Maryville and Knoxville train Saturday morning near Vestal Lumber Co. [1907]. His wife was a sister of **Dr. Catlett**. They have three children, all of whom are grown and married. He was a carpenter by trade.

ATCHLEY - Joseph Atchley, of the fifteenth district, died July 8th, 1907 after a lingering illness. He was past three score and ten, and was a consecrated Christian man. He was interred in the Eden Cemetery Tuesday.

ATCHLEY - Miss Nan Atchley died Wednesday, August 15 from a violent attack of typhoid fever. She was born Nov. 16, 1838. At an early age she professed