

## CAROLINIANS HONOR FALLEN SOLDIER

By: E.L. "Tex" Harrelson

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I could feel the excitement mounting in my chest as I preceded Mike Booth, Ron Crawley and our local guide up the narrow asphalt track to where we thought the ruins of the Greenwood Church must be. Perhaps thirty minutes earlier, we had stopped at a Primitive Baptist Church in the Minneville area, near present day Dale City in Prince William County, Virginia to consult our map. We had obtained some local information from Pam Sackett of the Friends of Brentsville Courthouse, where our Civil War reenacting unit, the Hampton Legion, had recently completed a living history encampment and cavalry demonstrations commemorating its namesake organization's assignment to the area in July of 1861. Pam told Cavalry Captain Ron Crawley that the church's original site was on the Minneville Road. We had also heard that there were two church's in the area known as Greenwood Church, but that the older church had burned down long ago. Though we believed the grave we sought was unmarked and would be difficult to find, still, we had come equipped from South Carolina to perform our duty, and we would not be denied.



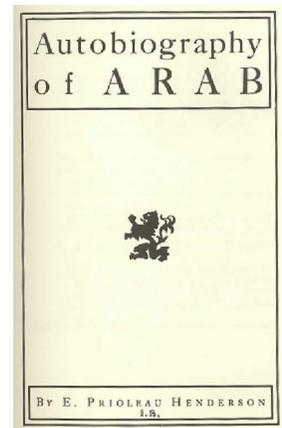
Prior to coming to Brentsville Courthouse, Virginia, Captain Crawley had taken some consecrated soil from a graveyard on his property to carry with us in the hopes of being able to lay some on the graves of South Carolina soldiers. We also had with us a canteen with clean well water from Spartanburg County, South Carolina. Our cavalry, infantry and artillery had participated in a living history event at the Brentsville Courthouse grounds as well as the Old Town Manassas museum. The cavalry had ridden the twelve miles from the railhead at Manassas to the Brentsville site to rejoin the infantry and artillery already encamped at that place. Now on Sunday, after our event was concluded, we had one more task to perform.



We had been inspired by the following words taken from E. Prioleau Henderson's memoir entitled *Autobiography of Arab*, first published in 1901, which details the experiences of Confederate General Wade Hampton's elite Iron Scouts:

A short time after this, Sergt. Mickler [commander of the Iron Scouts] was preparing to make a scout down in the "Forest." He ordered Corpl. Huger Mickler to take George Crafton and a Virginia scout, named Pierson, and go down the day before and find out the different picket posts of the enemy; also a certain reserve picket post he had heard of near Dumfries. After accomplishing this work, he would find him (the Sergeant) at Smith's house, near Old Bacon Race Church, the following night....

The Sergeant soon followed the three scouts down with his entire party, and stopped as agreed upon at Smith's house to await the coming of his brother. I heard my master say afterwards, that he and Mickler had retired for the night, leaving word with Smith to call him when his brother arrived. He said, before they got to sleep they heard a knock at the door, Sergt. Mickler sprung from the bed and asked, "Is that you, Huger?" A voice answered, "No, Sergeant, it is I, George Crafton. I have sad news to tell you about poor



Huger. He is killed.” My master says the Sergeant fell like he was shot – for they loved each other very dearly, those two brothers. Crafton entered the room and told them the particulars of his death. Said the three of them were riding abreast near Greenwood Church, where they intended hiding their horses in the pines and “taking it afoot,” when they rode into an ambush of the enemy, who without even halting them, fired a volley on them killing Corpl. Mickler. George Crafton and Pierson escaped by a miracle, their clothing being perforated in several places. Pierson had two bullet holes through his hat, besides those through his coat. Fortunately neither of their horses were hit, so they escaped, leaving their comrade’s body “in the hands of the enemy.” The Yankees the next day established a picket post at the church. They kindly allowed the citizens to bury Corpl. Mickler’s body, and the remains of the gallant Corpl. Huger Mickler still rest in old Greenwood Church-yard.

Encumbered with a four horse trailer, we were unwilling to search for the church by randomly choosing side roads. Instead, we drove along a four lane boulevard to a shopping mall lot. Parking our trailer, Ron went along the parking lot in one direction while I went down the hill following the remains of an old roadbed to the creek below. There was no bridge crossing the run, but the road seemed to continue on the other side in the form of a modern power line easement. Returning to the vehicle, I found that Ron and Mike had met a young couple, a man named David and his wife, who was five months pregnant. David informed us that he had grown up in the immediate area and that he could show us where he thought the churchyard was. At the very least he knew where some old graves were. Excited, we followed them with our truck and trailer to the other side of the small creek I had seen, passing on the way newly constructed apartments in what appeared to be a less than affluent neighborhood.

Leaving his wife in the car, David started down the road, while Ron found his burlap sack with Carolina soil and his camera. Ron handed Mike Booth the canteen with the water from South Carolina. I thought we ought to have more than that, so I climbed into the trailer and returned with Booth’s painted sign that read “2<sup>nd</sup> SC Cavalry” and another sack containing horse feed. Off we marched up a gradual slope towards where David, our local guide, indicated the old stones were to be found. Poison Ivy lined the ditch to our right and cars and trucks drove too fast for the little narrow lane, avoiding us reluctantly as we attacked the hill.

We came to a clearing, and upon entering, found there were several graves, the most recent being one from 1993, mostly from the same family. All or most of the graves had been desecrated, probably by the locals we had seen earlier. David, our young guide, indicated he and his friends used to come up to the graveyard to get high. Sometimes they thought they saw a headless horseman or something riding through the woods. How odd, we thought, that his friends thought they saw a horseman among so many other modern possibilities. Disappointed that none of the graves seemed old enough to be what we were searching for, we followed David to where he claimed to have seen an old foundation. What he pointed out was an old driveway entrance made of stone, which we believed to be from the early twentieth century. We examined the knolls in the area, finding some large quartz boulders which were blackened, possibly by fire. Ron pointed out that if the church had burned, it might well have burned some of the surrounding woods as well. We made our way back towards the graveyard, having given up hope of finding anything from the church, when suddenly we realized we had stumbled upon its foundation. We found the front stoop, which was of concrete, probably added in the twentieth century. We located a distinct foundation of stones forming a small square. We noted as well that the trees in the area could not be more than thirty years old and there were a few much larger trunks which had fallen and one large standing hulk of a rotting tree. We were sure now that we were standing in the old churchyard, not thirty yards from what must have been the old Dumfries road mentioned in *Arab*.

After making a couple of photos of our small party on the church stoop, we reconsidered the graveyard. We searched further than before, passing the newer graves and heading further into the woods along the small ridge. Upon closer examination, we found several unmarked sunken graves, lined up in rows. The ground squished beneath our weight. Enthusiastically we expanded our search. No fewer than six graves were found, none now marked, and all arranged systematically. I erected a medium sized quartz stone at the head of one of the graves and we positioned ourselves at the foot of the grave.



We observed a few moments of quiet reflection and then I began, "Huger" I said, addressing the former Iron Scout familiarly, "it's been a long time since any of your friends have been by to see you. We have come a long way to bring you some things and let you know that we have not forgotten your sacrifices for your country and your people."

I paused to collect my thoughts, "We recognize the hand of providence in this day's events, and we know that you are calling us to come see you. We appreciate you sending your guide in the form of David here, a former soldier and student of Fork Union Military Academy, to show us the way to this your last resting place."

David to our surprise, said he wanted to make some comments, and praised Huger Mickler for his willingness to take up arms for his country for the protection of his family. He stated that Huger was a patriot who fought for freedom for his people and that we should not forget his example.

Captain Crawley spoke briefly saying that it had been too long since anyone had come to see Mickler, and that it is unfortunate that so few remember the brave deeds and the noble sacrifices made by Huger and his fellow soldiers.



Taking from the small bag of earth a double handful of the rich soil, I said, "You never made it home to your native state of South Carolina, you lie here in a foreign land where you gave your life for your country. We have brought to you a piece of your home state to comfort your soul. We leave this ground here with you, in your honor and that of your many fellows who rest so far from home." Booth, Crawley and I then sprinkled the bag's contents lengthwise onto the grave. Booth offered the canteen to Ron, and we each took a pull from the water. Then, slowly pouring the water over the sunken grave, I said, "Drink this water from your South Carolina, let it cool your dry lips and quench your thirst for hearth and home." Taking the bag of grain, I spoke to the memory of the brave horses that carried our soldiers to war so long ago. "This we offer as a meal to you noble animals. So many of you were broken on that terrible rock of war, please know that we remember your service fondly." Sprinkling the feed along the tops of several graves, we noted that the plentiful deer we had seen in the area would make quick work of the sweet feed. There being nothing left unsaid, we left the little grove and returned to our vehicle with the feeling that we had just participated in something unique and wonderful.

We explained to a surprised David, our local guide, that the War Between the States was fought in the woods and fields all around us, and that practically every square mile of Prince William County was significant. He seemed intrigued by the knowledge that great deeds had been done, armies marched, and battles fought all around his home. We said our farewells and headed towards the interstate. Our trip back to South Carolina would be a long one, crossing the path of violent rainstorms in North Carolina. Though we would not arrive until six the following morning, the high point of our trip to Virginia would remain the memory of fulfilling our duty to a fellow cavalryman who died so very long ago.



***Behind the Byline:*** Edward L. Harrelson, better known to his reenacting friends as “Tex”, has been an avid War Between the States reenactor since 1994. He and his faithful mount Katy have helped to thrill and educate the public in seven states as a member of South Carolina’s Hampton Legion, a nonprofit living history organization. In his post 19th century life Ed practices law as an attorney in Hendersonville, NC near his home in Etowah.