



Chattahoochee County Cloth



A Presidents
Uncle Comes
Out of
the Darkness

Chattahoochee County Cloth

By Howard D. Lawrence

For sixty years it had been neatly folded in a Libby's Fruit carton, undisturbed and almost forgotten. Suddenly, a flurry of activity and interest surrounded the artifact as it was brought out from the dark vault of the Chattahoochee County courthouse in Cusseta Georgia. The thirty-ninth President of the United States Jimmy Carter was in the area for the Thanksgiving Holiday and wished to see the Confederate uniform of his ancestor Lieutenant Gilbert Perry Gordy, 3rd Georgia Cavalry, CSA.

"At first the ladies at the courthouse wouldn't let him see it," recounts Dun Gordy a distant relative of the President. Past Commander in Chief or not, they needed the probate judge present and President Carter would have to return later. Maybe it was procedure or just politics, but the President did come back that afternoon and was finally able to gaze on the almost complete cavalry uniform of his great uncle who died fighting for the Confederacy. He was very interested in family history and knew something about the acorn squash color homespun material and the Civil War.

His family's roots in Georgia on the Carter and Gordy side went back seven generations, practically to the Revolutionary War and along with peanut farming and politics, the President also had a strong love of history.

The story of how the uniform found its way to the courthouse vault is almost as mysterious as the original owner, Lt. Gordy. An old yellowed type written note was found in the box with the uniform, its author anonymous. Titled "History of This Suit of Clothes" it reads:

"On the old Gordy homestead. About three miles west of Cusseta, wool was sheared from sheep, thread spun from this wool and cloth woven for this thread on a hand loom and this suit cut and sewed by hand by Mrs. Mary Scott Gordy for her son Gilbert Perry Gordy". "The women of the Confederacy endured more suffering and hardship than can be enumerated".



Gilbert rode off to war on October 29th, 1861 with the "Chattahoochee Rangers" a local militia company led by Captain Beverly A. Thornton. In a short time they would become the nucleus for Company B, 3rd Georgia Cavalry a hard fighting regiment in The Army of the Tennessee. Little is known about Gilbert's war record, wounding and final resting place. There are scant few papers on his service and muster rolls for the regiment are almost nonexistent. What we can glean is that he was promoted to 3rd Lieutenant on

August 17th, 1863, was wounded sometime during the Atlanta Campaign, possibly in the skirmishes repelling Union General George Stoneman's Cavalry raid, sent home to recuperate and died of his wound on October 4th, 1864. In addition to Gilbert, parents Wilson and Mary Scott Gordy provided the Confederacy with five more of their children, an incredible number even in the Civil War South. The oldest, James Thomas Gordy joined "Joe Browns Pets" in May 1864 and served as a "Wagon Master" in Co. B, 6th Georgia State



Not only did President Carters Confederate connection evolve from his mother's Gordy lineage, his paternal side is also represented. Great Grandfather Littleberry Walker Carter served the entire war with Battery A, Sumpter Flying Artillery. The Battery was heavily engaged at Gettysburg and both Littleberry and his younger brother Wiley Carter were both present. While watching the 1976 Democratic Primary election returns from Pennsylvania, the President noticed he had carried the district that included the scene of the great battle. Jimmy Carter smiled and remarked, "We ought to tell the Georgians we finally won at Gettysburg." Both brothers survived the war and took paroles at Albany Georgia, a few miles from the Carter farm at Plains. Courtesy Library of Congress.



Carrie Gordy was just an infant when her father died in 1864. In her final years she wrote a relative back in Chattahoochee from her home in Elk City Oklahoma. "I have the suit of clothes Father wore when he was wounded. Grandpa raised the sheep and sheared the wool. Grandma carded and spun the thread, wove the cloth and made the suit by hand she told me; sometime I think I will present it to the Cusseta U. D. C." She finally did, with the covenant that it stay forever in the county where it was made. Courtesy Chattahoochee County.

All that remains of Lt. Gordy's sword belt, one hanger and the blunted 50 caliber bullet that wounded him. Courtesy Chattahoochee County.



The single ring bullet that wounded Gordy. Possibly a reader can identify the gun used to fire it. Courtesy Dun Gordy, Detail Courtesy Chattahoochee County.



A folded handkerchief found in the pocket of the coat revealed the bullet that caused the Lieutenant's death. The remarkable completeness of Gordy's uniform down to the hat and white cotton socks shows the careful care and reverence of his widow. Courtesy Dun Gordy.



“You can always tell the rank of a Cavalryman by the seat of his pants; the more wear the lower the rank” The Gordy trousers show many reductions to the waistline and the seat of the trousers are worn and patched indicating much hard service in the saddle. Courtesy Dun Gordy.

Militia. He was the President’s mother “Miss Lillian” Gordy Carter’s grandfather. A second son William joined an unknown regiment possibly the 64th Georgia, and was killed or died sometime late in the war. Green B. Gordy served as a cavalryman in the 6th Louisiana joining in April 1862. After the war he became quite wealthy and was ultimately murdered in his adopted state. Private Henry M. Gordy served in the Army of Northern Virginia as a member of the 10th Regiment Georgia Infantry. After the war Henry, like so many veterans was addressed at the higher rank of lieutenant but his service records only indicate

the status of private. In the last year of his life he “wanted to march around the square again” and was seen doing just that at the age of 90 “he marched alone on limping feet around the courthouse square”, still a tall and commanding figure, “ he was perhaps the last surviving member of that valiant band”. He passed away in 1927. And finally the youngest, George Gaines Gordy enlisted in the same company as his oldest brother James, Company B, 6th Georgia Militia in July 1864. He was 17 years old and served until the end of the war.



The pants are made of a typical coarse homespun wool weft and cotton warp. Many Southern families wove cloth and fabricated uniforms for loved ones far from home. A further note found with the uniform reads, “The women of the Confederacy endured more suffering and hardships than can be enumerated” The hole below the left knee was probably the location of the fatal wound that killed the Lieutenant. Courtesy Chattahoochee County.

When the war started Gilbert Perry Gordy was a 30 year old married father of an infant daughter named Carrie. Some years after his wounding and death his widow remarried and moved from Georgia to Oklahoma. Still carefully caring for the uniform of her late husband all those years, she eventually left it to her daughter Carrie, Lt. Gordy's only child.



The youngest brother in the Gordy clan, George Gaines Gordy was just 17 when he served in the Georgia Militia in 1864. In later life he became a legislator and prominent member of the Chattahoochee community. After the First World War the Federal government appropriated the Gordy homestead and family graveyard for the new infantry school at Fort Benning. George's son refused to let his father's remains lie in "Damn Yankee Ground" and with his young son went to the military reservation with a mule cart and removed and reburied the body in Mount Olive Cemetery, Cusseta Georgia. Courtesy Dun Gordy.

Late in her life sometime in the 1920's, Carrie Gordy Parks wanted her father's uniform sent back to his home county in Georgia "where it was lovingly made" and made arrangements for its safe keeping with the local Kasihita (Cusseta) chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The "suit of clothes" became the prized possession of the UDC ladies and when they disbanded the chapter in the 1940's, it was turned over to the Chattahoochee Probate Court, lovingly packed away in the fruit carton and quickly forgotten.

The publicity brought by Jimmy Carters visit focused new attention on his ancestor's uniform and suddenly funds were being sought for its preservation and eventual display. Thanks to the efforts of then Probate Judge Kenneth Van Horn and State Senator Ed Harbison of Columbus, money was appropriated from the state budget for repair and display of the historical garment. Senator Harbison who is black stated, "It's just literally rotting away in a box down there." An admitted history buff, Harbison said about the money needed "I not only have no problem doing it, I'm very proud to do it. It's a significant historical item and needs to be preserved."

Since the President's visit and all the subsequent media attention, the uniform has been restored and briefly displayed at a local museum. Unfortunately, a permanent venue away from the Chattahoochee Courthouse hasn't been found yet. "We're still looking for an appropriate place to display the coat in the Chattahoochee area" an official of the county

quoted. Until then Lieutenant Gordy's uniform has returned to its dark room, albeit without the fruit box, still waiting for a more suitable home.

FINIS

Special Thanks to Gordy descendant Dun Gordy and Judge James McGlaun and the staff at the Chattahoochee Courthouse.



POSTSCRIPT

Jimmy Carter isn't the only President to have Confederates in the closet. Both Bill Clinton and Lyndon Johnson share the honor of being direct descendants of Confederate infantrymen. Harry Truman was a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans and often recounted stories of the War in Missouri with a somewhat southern perspective. Woodrow Wilson grew up in Virginia during the war and remembered his mother caring for wounded Confederate soldiers. His father was supposedly a Chaplain in the Confederate Army. Even Northern bred Teddy Roosevelt had a Confederate past. His mother Martha Bulloch Roosevelt grew up on a Georgia plantation. Her two brothers served in the Confederate States navy, James, as the principle government supply agent in England and Irvine as a Midshipman on the CSS Alabama.

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