

Civil War in Roanoke-Chowan: Brief History in Troubled Time

At a glance, the Civil War in the Roanoke-Chowan:

IN 1861—As war drums sounded in the nation, young men of the Roanoke-Chowan gathered in the spring of 1861 to form volunteer companies...

LATER IN THE SAME year, the war came home to people of the Roanoke-Chowan when a federal fleet descended on the still-incomplete Confederate defenses of the Outer Banks...

THEN, IN EARLY 1862, a giant federal force struck again at eastern North Carolina, Roanoke Island fell, and the sounds and rivers of the state were left at the mercy of Union gunboats...

ON FEBRUARY 19, 1862, a federal force churned up the Chowan River, aiming to seize a bridge on the upper Blackwater. At Winton, the unit stopped, was fired on by a small group of Confederate troops...

FOR THE REST OF 1862, the Roanoke-Chowan watched uneasily as Union forces overran much of the eastern part of the state. Union cavalry units rode unhindered on the Gates shore of the river...

AT HAMILTON on the Roanoke, Confederate forts guarded the upper reaches of the river.

MEANWHILE, IN VIRGINIA, dozens of young Roanoke-Chowanians met death in the great Seven Days Battle around Richmond in the summer of 1862.

IN NORTH CAROLINA, Roanoke-Chowan men were in the force which saw New Bern fall to the enemy in March.

The Union seizure of eastern North Carolina brought new mobilization, and several hundred more Roanoke-Chowan men joined companies being formed...

AS WINTER of 1862 came, many Roanoke-Chowan men came home on furlough, to tell stories of battles in Virginia, and on the bloody slopes of Antietam Creek.

North of Murfreesboro, along the Blackwater River, other Roanoke-Chowan men spent the winter guarding against sudden crossings by Union forces...

THE SPRING OF 1863 came with new hope for the Confederacy, but it ushered in what was to be a hectic year for the Roanoke-Chowan.

Confederate armies gathered in Virginia for a major offensive. Most of the Roanoke-Chowan's soldiery was in the army that General Lee maneuvered toward Pennsylvania...

BUT BACK HOME, they loved ones were experiencing war at the Roanoke-Chowan doorstep.

Federal forces in eastern Carolina saw a chance to smash the Confederate lifeline, the railroad from Wilmington to Richmond.

A strong cavalry force landed at Winton in July, marched for Weldon. Hastily-organized cavalry and infantry units of the Roanoke-Chowan had already skirmished with federal reconnaissance units...

At Potocasi Creek, between Winton and Murfreesboro, local cavalrymen skirmished with the bluecoats, then fell back.

AS THE YEAR 1864 came in, Roanoke-Chowanians serving with the Army of Northern Virginia prepared for another year's campaigning.

In North Carolina, as winter went on, the Confederacy tried a desperate gamble to clear the enemy from the eastern part of the state.

It was a short-lived success. Already, Union patrols had penetrated into the area.

AS SPRING CAME IN 1865, even the tiny home guard units which had tried to stop the attacks of the U. S. cavalry and the outrages of outlaw "buffalo" bands...

After a short fight, the little Confederate command, less than 1,000 men in all, surrendered to the overwhelming Union power...

Among those who laid down their arms were the men of Company G. Captain Julian Picot was the officer in command.

By now, Roscoe Riddick was commanding Company B, Charles King was in command of Company H and C. E. Riddick was commanding the mixed unit of Gates and Bertie in Company F.

Early in the fall of 1863, the regiment charged across the Raccoon Ford to attack an enemy battery near Bristol Station.

Then, in late July, made bold by Union success on the slopes of hills near Gettysburg in faroff Pennsylvania, federal forces made an attempt on the Charles-ton defenses.

Battery Wagner was the focus of federal attention, as several thousand bluecoated men stormed in behind heavy naval gunfire.

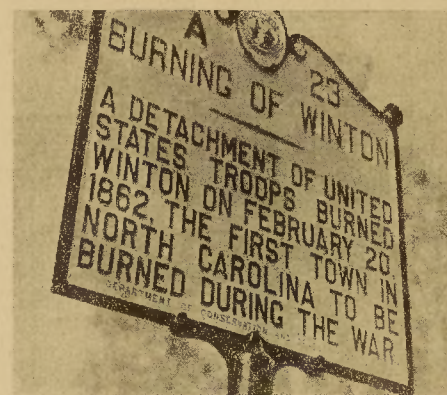
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In these units, the small companies served until the surrender at Appomattox as cavalry pickets for the Army of Northern Virginia.



WINTON MARKER TELLS FAMOUS INCIDENT

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of the area who had fought in the awful actions in Virginia and Pennsylvania came home on furlough to tell of war.

IN NOVEMBER, 1863, federal troops were again landing at Winton, cavalry patrols ranged toward Murfreesboro.

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at Harrellsville, as small parties of Union troops landed from gunboats to destroy stores of supplies gathered to be sent to the Confederate army.

AS THE YEAR rolled on, despair deepened. From Virginia came news of the bloody battles of the Wilderness. Young Col. Thomas Miles Garrett of Hertford and Bertie was killed in action in the fighting. The summer before, youthful Col. Harry Burgwyn of Northampton had died on the hills of Gettysburg.

In the Roanoke-Chowan, small units of Confederate and Union cavalry fought in little battles along dusty roads and at Chowan River landings.

Increasing bands of deserters and other outlaws were causing fear among local people. The shortages of war were causing civilian hardship. Hundreds of families of soldiers lived on doles of corn and bacon from meager stores of supplies bought by county officials with depreciated Confederate currency.

AS THE YEAR RAN OUT, federal troops again controlled Plymouth. Winton had become a favorite landing place for Union patrols. On the upper Chowan and Blackwater, Roanoke-Chowan cavalrymen fought to hold the line of the river against increasing federal pressure.

IN EARLY 1865, the Union pressure mounted. A cavalry column struck from south of Petersburg, penetrated into Northampton County. Murfreesboro people again saw bluecoated horsemen galloping down the town's streets.

In the same month, larger groups of Union raiders hit at Colerain. Youngsters of the Junior Reserves marched in the rain to the Chowan River landing to see the enemy gone.

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were called to a final effort. Many Roanoke-Chowanians saw battle at Bentonville in Johnston County in the largest action of the war on North Carolina soil.

Then, as April came, so came the news.

More than 500 Roanoke-Chowanians had given their lives. They lay buried in graves near Richmond, at Gettysburg, in shallow mounds on the slopes of Shenandoah Valley hills, in hospital cemeteries, and in unmarked diggings scattered throughout the battle area.

More than 100 men of the section made their way back from the dark and stench of federal prisoner-of-war stockades.

Thus, the story of the Roanoke-Chowan in the Civil War, a time of heroics, of sacrifice, of colorful events, and terrible tragedy.

Thousands Went to Colors: R-C CSA Soldiers in Many Units...

Roanoke-Chowan men didn't want their state to secede from the Union when the question was put in early 1861.

Voters in all four counties—Hertford, Bertie, Gates, Northampton—turned down the secession proposition when it was put then.

A few months later, however, President Lincoln called for 75,000 federal troops to put an end to the incipient southern rebellion.

Roanoke-Chowanians joined thousands of North Carolinians in the ranks of the Confederate army.

Some 1,000 men from Hertford County, 600 men from Bertie County, 500 men from Gates County.

Confederate companies were usually organized in the various counties, and then companies were banded together into regiments at training camps in the state.

This is the breakdown of total Roanoke-Chowan units in the Confederate ranks:

NORTHAMPTON—Five companies of infantry, three of cavalry, and one of artillery were organized in Northampton. Two other companies of infantry and one of cavalry included substantial numbers of Northampton men.

In addition, a company of Northampton cavalry served in a Virginia cavalry regiment.

HERTFORD—Seven companies of infantry, two of cavalry and one of artillery were organized in Hertford. Men from the county served in one mixed infantry company and two mixed cavalry companies.

BERTIE—Three companies of infantry and one of cavalry were organized in Bertie. Men from the county served in two mixed infantry companies and two mixed cavalry companies.

GATES—Four companies of infantry were organized in Gates County. Men from the county served in one mixed infantry company and one mixed cavalry unit.

Thus, men from the four counties made up 19 infantry companies, six cavalry companies, and two artillery companies, in addition to six other companies made up wholly of men from two or more of the Roanoke-Chowan counties.

This does not include, of course, a sprinkling of men from the counties serving in other companies throughout the Confederate army. The total of this group is small, however, probably not over 100.

See NUMBERS, Page 4

Home Guard, Militia Aided In R-C Civil War Defense

After young men marched away to the battles in Virginia, the old-time militia remained as the home defense forces for the Roanoke-Chowan in the Civil War.

In each county, the old militia companies were denuded of most of their personnel by the volunteer Confederate units which formed during the spring of 1861.

But, with encouragement from the state government, militia units were reorganized with older men, those medically unfit for service with the Confederate army, and younger men.

The 15th Regiment of North Carolina Militia was regularly organized and ordered to patrol the lower Halifax River. It included a company from Northampton County.

Companies of this regiment, loosely-organized and generally only called out in an emergency, did engineering work on Roanoke River strong points. The forts at

Rainbow Banks on the Roanoke were largely constructed by militiamen and their slaves. Conine Creek in Bertie was also blocked by militiamen.

Later in the war, these militiamen were officially known as the "Home Guard." In 1864, as the manpower squeeze tightened, many of these units were organized into regular regiments, known as the Junior Reserves and the Senior Reserves.

Several companies of young Roanoke-Chowanians joined these units, and their story is told elsewhere.

Militiamen and Home Guard soldiers were used intermittently in the area to guard military stores and foodstuffs. Harrellsville in Hertford County was an important supply point where goods from the lush corn-anchoring areas of the Bertie Peninsula were collected for shipment to the armies.

It was usually guarded by Home Guardsmen.

Hertford Soldiers in 31st Surrendered on Roanoke

More than 90 Hertford County men who marched away to battle in the autumn of 1861, six months after many of their fellows had joined the first volunteer companies of North Carolina Confederates, didn't have to wait long to taste war's bitterness.

Hertford men of Company C of the 31st Regiment were captured within six months after they marched away.

The regiment, formed from eastern North Carolina companies in September, marched to Roanoke Island in December.

Across the shallow sounds, Union forces already had the Outer Banks of North Carolina, after an expedition in the summer had successfully seized unredeemed Confederate defenses there

(and captured another company of Hertford men, members of the 17th Regiment).

The 31st, untested in fighting, was easy prey for the giant Union expedition of General Burnside, which came in February, 1862, to seize Roanoke Island and assure federal control of coastal North Carolina for the remainder of the war.

After a short fight, the little Confederate command, less than 1,000 men in all, surrendered to the overwhelming Union power, put ashore under the guns of the largest fleet ever assembled in American waters.

Among those who laid down their arms were the men of Company G.

Captain Julian Picot was the officer in command. Picot, a famous teacher at Buckhorn Academy, had succeeded J. J. Yeates, a fellow Hertford counsiller, as captain of the unit when Yeates had been named a major shortly before the unit marched to Roanoke Island.

The surrender was to end Picot's military career. He returned to Hertford after being paroled from federal prison in September, 1862.

He was succeeded by Isaac Pipkin, member of another famous Hertford family, when the regiment was re-formed in September, 1862.

Many other of the 95 Hertford men decided that their surrender and 12 months in prison constituted enough service. Many stayed home when the unit was reorganized in Raleigh in September, 1862.

Other officers of the ill-fated unit, after its reorganization, included John L. Everett, promoted from corporal, and John D. Gatling, who rose from First Sergeant.

Soon after its reorganization, the 31st marched to eastern North Carolina for skirmishing with federal troops based in New Bern.

To South Carolina Later, it headed South, and was assigned to defense duty around Charleston, South Carolina.

This important post was still open in early 1863, although federal naval forces were drawing an iron blockade around the beautiful port city.

The 31st was assigned to duty near Big Battery Wagner, a key post in the city's harbor defenses.

Then, in late July, made bold by Union success on the slopes of hills near Gettysburg in faroff Pennsylvania, federal forces made an attempt on the Charles-ton defenses.

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Gates, Hertford Companies in Famed Unit: Fifth Regiment Fought in Battles With Army of Lee for Three Years

Roanoke-Chowan soldiers from Gates and Bertie made up nearly one-third of the Fifth North Carolina Confederate regiment.

Companies B and H were composed of Gates County men, while young men of Bertie had formed Company F.

Captains were T. P. Thompson for Company B, Thomas Miles Garrett for I, the Bertie men, and S. B. Deuge was the commander of Gates men of Company H.

The unit organized at Halifax in the summer of 1861, and from then on was in the thick of fighting as south and north locked in an irremissible conflict.

The regiment marched immediately off to the north, and was one of the few North Carolina units present for the battle of Bull Run, when northern and southern armies first locked in major battle.

Not actively engaged, the regiment was assigned as a picket force on the Confederate front. It remained until late spring, 1862, when in May, the regiment was

ordered southward to a position near the famous old Virginia capital of Williamsburg.

Down the historic Yorktown peninsula, a giant Union army under McClellan advanced toward Richmond's spires.

The Fifth North Carolina met McClellan's advance in a bloody action near Williamsburg.

Many Killed In the confused rearguard battle, Captain Garrett was wounded. Jonathan Liecster, Trotman Spivey, William Riddick, Meredith Savage, John Langston, Elbert Knight, Thomas Hoffin, Thomas Jones, John B. Ralph, Jesse Umphlett, William Bunch and Robert Lee, all of Gates, were killed.

Lt. Joe Hayes of Bertie was killed in the fight.

It was one of the most costly actions of the war for the regiment which was to see much action.

The bloodshed was to signal a time of death for the Fifth.

Within the next five months, the

unit was reduced to a handful as it fought around Richmond (Jacob Powell was killed at Cold Harbor—he was sergeant of the Bertie men)—and in northern Virginia as Confederates under Lee maneuvered Union troops out of the state and fought at Antietam in Maryland (Aquilla Todd of Gates died at South Mountain in the campaign).

Young Garrett, a school teacher-lawyer who had taught many Bertie youngsters before donning the gray coat of the CSA, was promoted to colonel of the small regiment in December, 1862. The unit fought as best it could in the actions at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. Again, in the latter action, Col. Garrett was wounded as he led his men in action.

Death at Gettysburg The regiment marched to Gettysburg in greatly reduced number, and on those bloody slopes, another group of young Roanoke-Chowanians lost their lives, including Elbert Knight, John King, Richard Blount, James T. Morgan, George

At a Glance: R-C Confederate Units

At a glance, these are the units in which Roanoke-Chowan men served as soldiers of the Army of the Confederacy.

FIRST NORTH CAROLINA REGIMENT—Company F was from Hertford County with Northampton men, called "The Hertford County Grays." Organized spring, 1861.

17th NORTH CAROLINA REGIMENT—Company C and Company D from Hertford. Organized spring of 1861 as 7th Volunteers. Company C known as "Hertford Light Infantry." Captured at Fort Hatteras on Outer Banks. Reorganized in winter of 1862 as 17th North Carolina.

19th REGIMENT (Second Cavalry)—Company C from Gates and Hertford. Organized August, 1861.

31st REGIMENT—Company C from Hertford. Organized September, 1861.

59th REGIMENT (Fourth Cavalry)—Company D from Hertford. Organized summer of 1862.

68th REGIMENT—Companies D, E and K mostly from Hertford. Organized in summer of 1863 when federal forces on coast threatened inland invasion of North Carolina.

THIRD BATTALION, LIGHT ARTILLERY—Company C from Hertford. Known as "Moore's Artillery." Organized spring of 1861.

12th BATTALION OF CAVALRY—Known as "Wheeler's Cavalry." Composed of Roanoke-Chowan companies. Organized independently as companies in 1862. Into battalion, May, 1863. Company B from Bertie with some

Hertford men. Later assigned to 59th Regiment (Fourth Cavalry).

15th BATTALION OF CAVALRY—Known as "Wynn's Cavalry." Organized summer of 1863. Company A from Hertford. Stayed in area throughout remainder of war.

Bertie County FIFTH REGIMENT—Company F from Bertie. Organized July, 1861. Colonel Thomas F. Garrett of Bertie was commander until killed in spring of 1864.

11th REGIMENT—Known as the "Bethel Regiment," first state unit to see action in first battle of war at Bethel Church, Va. Company B from Bertie. Won fame at Gettysburg. Organized early spring, 1861. Reorganized summer of 1862.

19th REGIMENT—(Second Cavalry)—Company H made up of men from Bertie and Northampton. Formed summer of 1861.

32nd REGIMENT—Company G from Bertie. Organized as battalion in summer, 1861. As regiment year later.

59th REGIMENT (Fourth Cavalry)—Company F from Bertie. Organized summer of 1862. Company I (earlier of Wheeler's Cavalry) joined regiment in late 1863. Composed of Hertford and Bertie men.

68th REGIMENT—Company F from Bertie. Organized in summer of 1863 when federal invasion of central North Carolina threatened.

70th REGIMENT (First Junior Reserves)—Company K had some Bertie men. Organized in May, 1863. See UNITS, Page 2

Colorful Home Guard Outfit: Wheeler's Cavalry Served in Battles in Home County

(A story of the main action of this unit of the Confederate Army is described in a story in another section.)

Wheeler's Cavalry was composed of Roanoke-Chowan mountaineers who gathered in the year, 1862 to guard their homeland from federal cavalry raids.

The unit, commanded by colorful Major S. J. Wheeler of Murfreesboro, included a company from Hertford-Bertie, and two from Northampton. Captain H. E.

Hoggard was commander of one Northampton unit, Capt. E. A. Martin of the other. Joseph O. Cherry of Bertie commanded the unit of mixed Hertford-Bertie men.