

# Macon's Sole Civil War Battle Told

By LEONA B. PORTER

This is the story of Macon County's only battle of the Civil War, as it was told to Thomas W. Porter by Mrs. "Dee" Cunningham.

But first, a word about Colonel George W. Kirk.

Colonel Kirk and his gang of bushwhackers had been terrorizing the counties of Western North Carolina, about the close of the War Between the States. They came to Franklin, where Kirk made his headquarters at "Dixie Hall", the home of Capt. Julius Siler, in the center of town.

The two little girls at "Dixie Hall" were Alice, later Mrs. James Robinson, and Tim, who married Kope Elias. Tim, the younger child, climbed up to where Kirk had placed the U. S. Flag on the lattice work of the front porch, and carefully furled the flag, tying a string around its folds, saying it was not to fly over their home.

When Kirk came and saw what had been done, he indignantly inquired who had done such a thing, and Tim told him she had. He whipped out his knife and cut the string and angrily scolded her. Alice, the older girl, went upstairs to the porch, leaned out, and spat upon the flag to show her contempt.

From Franklin, Kirk and his men made raids to any part of the county where they could find money, food or livestock. Many stories were told of their high-handed robberies, with threats to the ones who refused to give up their possessions.

On Cartoogechaye, Mrs. Ambrose Conley, whose husband was away at war, worked to carry her hams, wheat and corn up to a high rock in the hills back of her home, underneath which she hid her stores. Soon after, Kirk came and ordered her to cook dinner for him and his men. She killed chickens and cooked a good dinner for them, hoping to avoid any trouble. After dinner, he told her to give him what money she had. She would not tell him of any and he ordered his men to take her straw, pile it around her house, and set fire to it. She wept and begged them not to burn her home; so finally, convinced that she had no money, they put the fires out. Others were not so fortunate.

"Dee" Cunningham, a great horse-trader, had an inside belt, with pocket, to hold his pieces of gold. When Kirk's men came to his house he took his wife into a back room, removed his money belt, and told her to put it on underneath her clothes. As she was doing this one of Kirk's men watched her through a window and he told Kirk. Kirk made Mrs. Cunningham take off her husband's money belt, with one of her own which she was wearing, and give them to him.

On Cowee, a wealthy farmer, William West, known as "Uncle Billy," had his faithful slave, "Old Tol", bury his money and silver. Kirk's band came and ordered "Uncle Billy" and "Tol" to tell where the money was hidden. They refused, so a rope was slung over the limb of a tree and one end was tied around the neck of Mr. West and the other end around "Old Tol's" neck. As Mr. West was very heavy, he went down to the ground and poor old "Tol" went up. But he loyally refused to tell where the valuables were hidden. Kirk's men finally cut them down. "Tol" suffered more than "Uncle Billy" from the effects of their hanging, but they never did tell and Kirk had to leave without his booty.

Now about the battle:

Capt. Steven Porter, who had been injured in a battle in Tennessee and invalided home, was made capt. of the Home Guard and assembled a small company of older and very young men. When Kirk's company finally was leaving for Tennessee, Capt. Porter and his company followed, overtaking them at the Iotla ford of the Little Tennessee river, about three miles north of Franklin, where the Iotla bridge now stands.

Capt. Porter and his men fired on Kirk's troop and the battle was on. None of Porter's men were killed, but the bodies of two of Kirk's men were seen floating down the river and Kirk and the others were captured and brought back to town.

Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham recovered their gold, and Kirk made no more raids in Macon County.

Back in 1904, Franklin had not one, but two schools, according to a booklet prepared by the late Walter Deal and printed by The Franklin Press. The two schools were the Macon High School and the Franklin High School.



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