

Retirement Of Major Brown Sunday Will Mark End Of Era Of Circuit Riders

SA Officer Served Area 22½ Years

By BOB CONWAY

Sunday, June 10 will mark not only the retirement of Major Cecil Brown as head of the Salvation Army mountain mission at Max Patch; it will also mean the end of a long colorful era of circuit riders in Western North Carolina.

In the early 30's when she first started work among the mountain people — before the present roads cut into the rugged terrain of northern Haywood County—Major Brown rode for many miles on horseback to reach the church centers she set up through the area.

Many times, Major Brown did not even get to enjoy the luxury of riding a horse, but, instead, had to trudge long distances on foot to reach her destination.

For instance, she recalls walking 18 miles to preach in the Big Bend section and 16 miles to Shelton Laurel. During all her walks, Major Brown says, "I had many falls, but always managed to get up again."

In her 22 years of work in the mountains, Major Brown had one advantage: She was born and raised only five miles from where the present Max Patch citadel now stands and thus she knew the isolated country in that vicinity far better than a "furriner" ever could have.

The major still recalls the days when she was a small girl when a Methodist circuit rider and his wife came into the community of Lower Hurricane Creek once each month to preach the Gospel.

"The minister's wife took an interest in me, and I decided then that I wanted to be like her."

"When I became a young woman, the circuit riders no longer came into our region, but I felt that the mountain people needed



LAST OF THE CIRCUIT RIDERS—Major Cecil Brown—will retire Sunday as head of the Salvation Army Citadel at ceremonies to be held during the annual Singing Convention on Max Patch Mountain. Major Brown was honored Monday night at Atlanta by Salvation Army Commander

Donald McMillan, who introduced her and then discussed her work before an audience of Salvation Army officers of the South. Major Brown holds the SA's highest award—the Order of the Founder—and the 25-year medal for "faithful and honorable service".

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Major Brown entered a Salvation Army training school in Atlanta in 1927 and after graduation, served consecutively in Reidsville, Statesville, Salisbury and Goldsboro.

During all that time, however, she never forgot her dream of a mountain mission. Finally, in 1934, she obtained permission from Salvation Army executives to attempt the establishment of church centers in the Max Patch section.

"If you don't succeed," they told her, "you can have another city post."

"But I was determined," Major Brown says, "I knew that if I ever got out of the city, I would never go back."

And she never had to return because she impressed her superiors right from the start by establishing three Sunday schools in her first three months back in her native section.

The major recalls how she began her work in February, 1934. After storing her suitcase and sewing machine in her father's barn loft, she got together two weeks' supply of food and clothing, a number of song books and rode into the Big Bend section as far as she could go in her Model-A Ford. She then

finished her journey on foot — a distance of nine miles.

At first, Major Brown held most of her services in the little one-room schoolhouses of the area and also, she says, spent "many a night" sleeping in the schools on several benches pulled together.

Before retiring at night, she recalls, she always took care to lock the door because bootleggers in the area often slept in schoolhouses, too.

Major Brown also ate and spent the night in homes of the hospitable mountain people she served. "However, I felt the need of a home in which to study—where I could hang up my uniform—so I looked over the entire mountain region, and finally selected a spot near Max Patch," she explained.

Work finally was started in 1937 on what has today become the Salvation Army Citadel.

Since then, she said, the center's program work has grown tremendously and today the mountain mission stands as the only such institution of its kind in the United States. All other Salvation Army posts are situated in towns and cities.

In her 22 years of traveling through the mountains—serving as "a preacher, doctor, nurse, teacher, lawyer, farmer, and taxicab driver"—Major Brown has worn out 18 cars, several horses, and more pairs of shoes than she can remember.

She has managed to get around well in the rough terrain of the area, but she had a very harrowing experience just this winter.

Accompanied by Hugh Presnell, 18, Major Brown forded the Pigeon River in her jeep without any trouble in the afternoon. That

night about 8 o'clock, however, on her return trip she attempted to again cross the Pigeon in the Big Bend section and found that the water had become much deeper in just a few hours.

The jeep stalled in the swift current and for four hours the major and the Presnell boy sat in the jeep — with water swirling over their legs—waiting for help.

Finally, about midnight, the park ranger in that area came to their rescue—having been notified by the Presnell boy's father, Ernest, who walked six miles to reach the ranger's house.

Snow has always been a major obstacle to Major Brown's work and she says the mountain mission has been snowbound most winters but the last two or three.

She particularly remembers the winter when she helped to assist a logging crew that was isolated by a snow which measured six feet on the level and up to 30 feet in drifts.

Trudging for a long distance through the snow, she finally reached a telephone and called the State Highway Department to get help in reopening the road. The department responded by sending 60 convicts to battle the heavy drifts, but it took them an entire week to reopen the road to vehicles bringing in food and medicine for the stranded loggers.

"Since then," she says, "I have always kept plenty of beans on hand in the wintertime."

Despite the hardships of her job, Major Brown says: "I have never been afraid; if I had been a coward I never could have done what I have."

This Sunday on Max Patch Mountain, the major, on the advice of

her physician, will ring down the curtain on 30 years with the Salvation Army at a special retirement ceremony to be conducted by Commissioner William J. Dray, Salvation Army territorial commander. The ceremony will be held in conjunction with the annual Max Patch singing convention—ordinarily held in August.

Despite her retirement, however, Major Brown will not be far from the people she had worked with and loved the past years. After she leaves the mountain mission, she plans to go back to her old family homestead in Lower Hurricane Creek.

Oddly enough, no one has lived there for the past 30 years.

National Council Churches Closing Session At Lake

Dr. J. Quinter Miller, assistant general secretary in charge of field operations of the National Council of Churches, will lead a panel discussion on the question: "What is the nature of the unity we seek as Christians?" this evening at eight in the Lake Junaluska auditorium. This program is part of the Ecumenical Institute in progress at the lake. Various persons attending the institute will participate in the discussion and present different points of view.

Various workshop groups of the institute will meet in plenary session Friday morning at 9 o'clock

to present reports of their week's work to the group as a whole. This will be in dramatized form in the auditorium. Following this session, Dr. Miller will speak to the group for its closing session at 11 a.m. The institute will adjourn after lunch. There have been approximately 250 persons from the South who have attended the Ecumenical Institute.

This morning at eleven Mrs. John T. McCall, president of United Church Women of Tennessee, and Mrs. Norwood Phelps, president

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COMMISSIONER WILLIAM J. DRAY, Salvation Army territorial commander, will conduct retirement services for Major Cecil Brown of the Max Patch Citadel at 2 p.m. Sunday in conjunction with the annual singing convention at Max Patch.

Mainous Assigned To Headquarters Battery

FORT BENNING, Ga. — Army Pfc. William E. Mainous, son of Charles E. Mainous, Route 2, Canton, recently was assigned to Headquarters Battery of the 3rd Infantry Division Artillery at Fort Benning, Ga.

A meteorologist in the battery, Mainous entered the Army in January, 1955 and completed basic training at Fort Jackson, S. C. He is a 1954 graduate of North Carolina State.

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