

CALVIN C. LOWE

From farmin' to fightin'

by Shirley Farris Jones

Calvin C. Lowe was a peace loving man. But when the call for arms came, he was more than ready to go. He was not a dashing, daring cavalryman, he was not a doctor, a lawyer, nor was he a man of the aristocratic south. He did not own a plantation. He was a farmer. As his father had been. And his father before him. Calvin Lowe was just an ordinary soldier, who was willing to leave his family and his farm to fight for the Cause that he believed to be right!

The Lowe's were among some of the earliest settlers in Rutherford County, settling before 1810 in the Big Springs Community, near Murfreesboro, Tennessee. There is even a road named for them to this day. Calvin's grandfather, Charles F. Lowe and his wife, Mary Sutton Lowe, were the beginning of the Lowe family in Tennessee, when they, along with Charles' brother, Walter, and his wife who was Mary's sister, relocated to this area from Maryland. Charley Lowe was the father of eleven children, the eldest of whom was William M. Lowe. Col. Bill, as he was known, was born August 20, 1797. He married Rhoda Plummer in 1818, and they had four sons – the third born was Calvin, who entered this world on December 17, 1824. Calvin married Minerva Kelton on January 27, 1848 and they quickly settled down to farming and raising a family. Between 1850 and 1861, they were the parents of eight children, four boys and four girls. Life changed drastically in July of 1861 when Calvin joined his brother, William Sutton Lowe, and volunteered for

one year's service in the Confederacy. At the time of his enlistment, he was 36 years old, 5'10" high, fair complexion, blue eyes, and light hair. On August 23, 1861 he is shown on the Company Muster-in roll at Camp Trousdale as a "2 Sgt.", Co. L, 23rd Tennessee Infantry. This was shown as the Company of Capt. Wm. S. Lowe, his brother.

When Calvin left Rutherford County in August of 1861, he, along with many other Tennessee boys, was sent to Camp Trousdale near Nashville for training. This must have been quite a shock to a 36-year-old farmer and family man! In October the Regiment moved to Bowling Green, Kentucky, where it became a part of Brigadier General Simon B. Buckner's Division, Colonel John C. Brown's Brigade, which was composed of the 3rd, 18th, and 23rd Tennessee Infantry Regiments. In January of 1862, it was reported in Major General William J. Hardee's Division, Colonel Patrick R. Cleburne's Brigade, which was composed of the 15th Arkansas, 6th Mississippi, 23rd, 24th, and 35th Tennessee Infantry Regiments. Following the surrender of Fort Donelson on February 16, this Brigade would provide the rear guard for the southward exodus of the Confederate army. On February 23, back home in Murfreesboro, the 1st Arkansas would replace the 15th Arkansas and the Watson Louisiana Battery was added. April 1862 found them at Shiloh!

During the first day's bloody battle, Cleburne's Brigade composed the extreme right of the Confederate line, and on the morning of April 6, 1862 as the men moved forward to face the enemy, a small stream and the swampy area around it proved to be a major obstacle. Shiloh Branch, overflowing its banks and making the surrounding undergrowth and tangled vines a marshy area unable to be crossed, forced the men to divide and go around. Three Tennessee Regiments, along with the 1st Arkansas went left, while the 6th Mississippi and the 23rd Tennessee, including Patrick R. Cleburne and Calvin C. Lowe,

went right. So, in effect, two thirds of Cleburne's command was cut off by the swamp, and when Cleburne and the 6th Mississippi and 23rd Tennessee encountered the enemy, there were fewer than 1,000 men to make the attack. But attack they did! And it was these two regiments who were ordered forward by Cleburne, but unfortunately for them, the Federals were holding the high ground behind improvised breastworks, and they had to charge unprotected across an open field. Although the charge seemed to go well at first, it was soon repulsed by the largely superior Federal force. Cleburne ordered the men to reform and charge again. But courage and sheer will couldn't do the job. The Confederates were badly cut up, and of the 6th Mississippi and 23rd Tennessee, there were only about 200 survivors. Calvin Lowe was lucky, being among the injured, although struck down by a cannon ball. He was sent to the hospital at Corinth, Mississippi where he remained until his discharge. On the 13th day of May 1862 Calvin Lowe was paid a total of \$112.01 for this experience. It broke down as follows: for the pay period of December 31, 1861 to May 10, 1862, being 4 months and 10 days, at \$17.00 per month, a total of \$73.66; for pay for traveling from Corinth, Mississippi to Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a distance of 175 miles at 10 cents per mile, he received \$17.50, and for clothing NOT drawn, he got another \$20.85; making the grand total of \$112.01. So, Calvin went home. And he didn't go home empty handed!

Back to the farm, spring planting, and his family. The good things in life. Murfreesboro was under Federal occupation, but would soon have about a six month reprieve beginning with Forrest's Raid on July 13, 1862 and extending through the Battle of Stones River, or Murfreesboro, December 31-January 3, 1863. During this year after his discharge, Calvin's life would again change dramatically.

March of 1863, just prior to the beginning of the Tullahoma Campaign, Calvin was at home, minding his own business, still recuperating from his wounds at Shiloh, when a few Yankees dropped in uninvited and unexpected. Feeding an army takes a lot of food, and the Federal soldiers were going farther and farther out into the countryside each day, scouraging for livestock, corn, vegetables, looking for supplies, or anything else they could steal, when they came to the Lowe farm. The chickens Minerva Lowe had raised must have looked rather tasty to these men of an Ohio unit and they decided to take them. She decided otherwise, but they did not respect her objections. They stabbed her – in the stomach – in her seventh month of pregnancy. She died April 14, 1863. The baby girl, whom they named Martha, was born prematurely and only lived three days. Calvin was arrested, brought to the Courthouse, and held prisoner until he reluctantly took “The Oath.” In his application for Civil War pension, he states “that he didn’t know what had become of his family, his eight children ranging in age from 12 to 2, and he had to get home to see about them.”

Calvin Lowe would outlive two more wives, and father three more children. The first child born to his second wife was Jack Lowe, great-grandfather of the writer. Luckily neither of these two women would suffer the same fate as his first wife. According to his Application for Civil War Pension, he contended that as a result of his service to the Confederacy, he suffered from rheumatism and stomach trouble, from which he never recovered.

On November 7, 1901, Calvin was reunited with many of the men he had soldiered with when he attended the dedication ceremonies of a monument to honor Confederate dead on the Courthouse lawn of the town square in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. This was the same

Courthouse where he had been held prisoner by the Federal Army forty years prior. And the same Courthouse lawn where one hundred years later on November 10, 2001, the writer of this story, his own great-great-granddaughter, would have the privilege to participate in the rededication ceremonies of this same Confederate monument.

Calvin Lowe was 84 years old when he died on February 22, 1908, at his home, on the farm where he was born, on the land that he loved and defended; and that is where he rests in peace today.

SOURCES

“Application for Civil War Pension” – Calvin C. Lowe, April 5, 1902.

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