

Black Confederate Soldier Honored For Role In Civil War

By ANNA BROWN
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Union Daily Times

WEST SPRINGS — During the hard economic times in the South following the Civil War, money that could have been spent for a stone to mark the grave of a former Confederate soldier was often better used to buy food.

The Sons of Confederate Veterans have honored many former soldiers by marking their otherwise unmarked graves with tombstones from the Veterans Administration in Washington, but it isn't often the grave of a black Confederate soldier is marked.

Saturday, the Sons of Confederate Veterans, States Rights Gist Camp, marked the grave of Alex Sarter of Union, a slave who went to Virginia with his master as a body servant but wound up being issued weapons and given sentry duty.

Had Sarter's son not mentioned his father's role in the Civil War, the grave probably would have gone unmarked.

When the men of the West Springs Community were talking at Dan Whitehead's general store, Joe Sarter, 85, would talk about his father, a Confederate veteran, and show the sword he brought back from the war.

The story caught the attention of Dennis Stevens, commander of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, States Rights Gist Camp,

about two years ago. He relayed the story to his wife, Joan, who is president of the John Hames Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

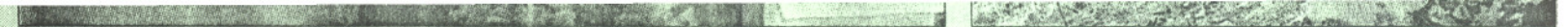
"Joan did some research at the Union County Courthouse and found where Sarter's father, Alex, received a pension for fighting for the Confederacy," said Stevens. "We have been working ever since then to get a marker for his grave."

Sarter said his father was living as a slave on a plantation in the Padderac section of Union County near the the Tyger and Broad rivers when he went to war with his master. He can't remember the name of his father's owner, but Mrs. Stevens said records show several men with the last name Sarter were part of the 18th Regiment, and slaves sometimes bore the same last name as their masters.

"My father said he served in a hospital near Richmond, Va.," said Sarter. "He took care of the soldiers' rooms, helped dress the soldiers and helped them in and out of bed."

Sarter said his father's master was killed, but the slave stayed on in Virginia. He said his father was made sentry during fighting near Petersburg, Va., and was issued a gun and equipment. "The Yankee soldiers captured him, and forced him to dig the tunnel they used for the 'Big Blowup,'" said Sarter. "He often said that during the blowup, he (Please Turn To Back Page)





Tim Kimzey/Time

Joe Sarter (top right) holds the sword his father carried as a sentry during the Civil War. The Sons of Confederate Veterans honored Alex Sarter with a grave stone and memorial service Saturday (bottom right). Sarter also spoke during the ceremony. (bottom left)

The Union Daily Times

(Continued From Page 1)

saw Charner Greer of Union County dig out with his bayonet."

The "Blow Up" or "The Battle of the Crater" occurred July 30, 1864 at Petersburg, when Northern soldiers dug under a Confederate encampment, planted explosives, and then set them off. At least 1,500 Confederate soldiers were killed.

It was probably during the confusion of the explosion and its aftermath that Alex Sarter decided to come back to Union County, and Sarter said his father always believed he would be court-martialed if authorities caught up with him because he left the war and came home.

"He said there would be 12 men with rifles, and a general would give the order and they would all shoot at him," said Sarter.

Born in March 1835, Alex Sarter was almost 98 years old when he died on Feb. 2, 1933. Joe Sarter said he believes the first year his father received a pension for \$18.98, and the amount increased \$1 every year after that. Records in the courthouse show that Sarter's pension in 1933 was \$24.98.

Joe Sarter was born in the Sedalia Community of Union County in 1908, one of Alex Sarter's 17 children. He retired as a construction worker and farmer around 15 years ago, and lives with his wife, the former Pauline Rice, in a large home on the John Hart Road. The couple has five children.

The atrocities of war his father saw left a lasting mark, Sarter said.

"Whenever he would start talking about what he saw at the hospital, he would cry like a baby," Sarter said. "They would bring the men in after battles with heads and legs off; some they wouldn't bring back anything but from the waist to the shoulder. He said he would work from early in the morning to two or three o'clock at night."

Sarter said his father was strict and brought his children up in a slavery-like atmosphere.

"I was whipped many a time with a buggy whip," said Sarter. "He told us that white ladies of the plantation had helped look after the slaves and take care of them, and we were to have the highest respect for white ladies."

Sarter's grave at Wyatt's Chapel, where his son has attended church for more than 70 years, was marked with a round-

his birth and death dates and the company with which he served, and wreath was placed on it. Keynote speaker for the ceremony was Robert Brown, commander, S.C. Division, Sons of Confederate Veterans. Members of the Palmetto Brigade formed the honor guard.

Sarter said he is proud his father served and grateful his grave is being marked.

"I don't have enough in my body to express how much I appreciate what they (the Sons of Confederate Veterans) have done," said Sarter. "My heart rejoices with the highest glory."

Stevens said that to his knowledge, Alex Sarter is the first black Confederate veteran in Union County to have his grave marked in Sons of Confederate Veterans services, and is one of the first in South

Carolina. He said it is important to mark the graves of Confederate soldiers because they fought for a cause they felt worthy to fight for — states rights.

"Many people believe the war started over slavery," said Stevens. "Very few soldiers, especially in the Upstate, owned slaves. Why would a poor farmer fight — not for a rich man who owned slaves. The fight for states rights had been going on for a long time. Confederate Gen. States Rights Gist was 30 when he was killed in the Battle of Franklin, Tenn., and his father had apparently been feeling strongly about the subject for a long time before the war to name his son the way he did."

Mrs. Stevens said records show the last two Confederate veterans to receive pensions in Union County were also black.

Miles

(Continued From Page 1)

office only counted services that clearly went to causes, like donated toys, when calculating the spending ratios.

Graham, however, could not provide details of how Miles' office went about categorizing things like postage that Pacific West listed under educational expenses.

Pacific West officials did not return a telephone message left at their office.

The executive director of one group that was criticized said Miles did not have a clear picture of what his organization did.

People Against Drugs and Aids Infections Inc. of Florence, which Miles said spent 14.5 percent of its donations directly on its cause, doesn't give money directly to high-risk students, executive director Richard Belin said.

But it does speak at every middle and high school in Florence County about drug prevention, and it funds motivational program with high-risk students where they write rap songs using anti-drug lyrics, Belin said.

The group raised \$15,450, all but \$600 of that from a Florence County grant.

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Sarter's grave at Wyatt's Chapel, where his son has attended church for more than 70 years, was marked with a rounded granite tombstone depicting

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