

## Voices From The Past – Part 1

William McElwee III joined Sumpter's Partisans Corps in 1780 just before Clinton took Charlestown, S.C. His first fight was with a band of Tories under Huck at Brattonsville Plantation, York County SC. The Tories were defeated. He was then commissioned a Lieutenant. He fought with Sumpter's men in the engagements at Rocky Mount, Hanging Rock, Fishing Creek, and Blackstocks in Union County SC. Being at home on leave of absence when the Battle of Kings Mountain started he voluntarily fought with his countrymen in the battle. The inscription on his tombstone in Bethany Churchyard, York County, S.C., reads: "Sacred to the memory of William McElwee, Esquire, who departed this life November 15, 1854, in the 93d year of his age, being a revolutionary soldier in the war of 1776."

In 1889 Funk and Wagnalls of New York published a book written by Benson J. Lossing, LL.D., author of many books. This book was entitled "Hours with the Living Men and Women of the Revolution". This has become a rare book and is not available at many libraries. On page 95 he begins chapter IX with the title "The Last of Sumter's Men". Below is a excerpt from this chapter.

It was a dreary day in January 1849, when at three o'clock in the afternoon I arrived at Mr. Leslie's plantation, within two miles of Kings Mountain battle-ground in South Carolina. I had traveled with a single horse and light wagon, the rough road that skirted the foot of King's Mountain. The heavens were shrouded with clouds, and snow which had fallen during the night and mingled with mud more than fetlock deep had jaded my horse. I explained to Mr. Leslie the object of my journey, expressed a desire to visit the battle-ground of King's Mountain that afternoon, and asked him to show me the way, it being only two miles from his house.

"Your Beast is tired," said Mr. Leslie. "I have two good saddle-horses in the stable".

They were brought out. We rode to the famous field, among wooded gravel hills, viewed the topography of that strange battle-ground, made two or three sketches, and returned at twilight. The venerable William McElwee III, Mr. Leslie's father-in-law, had just arrived. He was a stout-built man, of medium stature, with an unmistakable Scotch face, flowing white hair, blue eyes, and though eighty-seven years old, seemed about as vigorous in mind and body as a hale man at sixty. He was the last known survivor of General Sumter's famous partisan band in the old war for independence. His reminiscences formed the theme of the evening's conversation.

"When and where did you join Sumter?" I inquired.

"Just before Clinton took Charlestown and Cornwallis began to overrun the State in 1780. South Carolinians were discouraged, and hundreds took British protection. Sumter would not yield, but retired into North Carolina. I followed him. There he

gathered a little band of exiles, and we returned. Sumter called for recruits. Very few came until after we struck the camp of the wicked Tory Chris Huck on a hot night in July. We killed the leader and scattered his followers to the wind. Huck was a profane and profligate wretch. He hated Presbyterians intensely; murdered one of them while on his way to a place of worship on a Sunday with a Bible in his hand, and burned a minister's house. When we struck Huck he had about two hundred mounted men. Our party numbered only one hundred and thirty-three all told. Timid men now took courage and joined Sumter's standard. Governor Rutledge made him a brigadier, and I was commissioned a lieutenant."

"You were engaged in some stirring events afterward", I said.

"Indeed I was. We struck British and Tory parties here and there so unexpectedly and sharply that Cornwallis declared Sumter was his greatest plague in the Carolinas. They called him 'The South Carolina Game Cock'."

## Voices From The Past - Part 2

Herschel's most memorable ancestor was Robert Gailbreth Browne, his paternal great grandfather. He was a sergeant in the Confederate Army. Born in 1839, and died in 1939. He lacked four months of making his one-hundredth birthday. Born in York County, S.C. he moved to Cherryville, N.C. in his teens.

Sergeant Browne returned to his home after the war. There he became a prosperous farmer, a Mason, and an Elder in the Presbyterian Church in Cherryville, N.C.

The following is a interview conducted in 1929 with Sergeant Robert G. Browne.

Q. Do you think the War Between the States could have been avoided ?

A. Perhaps, if Lincoln had not pushed U.S. troops into the South (like Ft. Sumter in Charleston). And, if there had not been so many so-called aristocrats with hot heads in Charleston. Once the Yanks invaded our soil, we had no choice. We had to fight.

Q. Was slavery the main issue that caused the formation of the Confederate States of America ?

A. It was only one of several problems with the U.S. government. Heavy taxation of our agriculture products was one "thorn" in our flesh.

Our Family only had seven adult slaves and three little pic-a-ninnies when the war started. Most men who served with me had no slaves.

Q. Do you remember your first shot fired in the war?

A. Yes, and it bothers me to remember the incident. After our training in late April and May of '61 in Charlotte and Raleigh, N.C. we were sent to Virginia. I was in Co. E of the 12<sup>th</sup> N.C. regiment.

One night in June of '61, I was on guard duty. Some time after midnight I heard apples falling off a large tree near me. That was a strange thing to happen at that time of the year. I eased closer to the tree and in the moonlight I saw a leg hanging over one of the upper limbs. I aimed about three feet above his leg and fired. A young Yank fell out gun and all. He was badly gut shot. I threw his gun away from him, and was about to shoot him again, when he asked me to pray with him. Oh! Lord this was hard to do. I recited the passage from Ecclesiastes "To every thing there is a season", the twenty-third Psalm, and the Lord's Prayer. He died in my arms. No doubt he was a spy or sharp shooter who was spying on our camp. The war came down hard on me at that moment.

Q. Did you admire all of your superior officers?

A. If I said yes, I'd be lying.

I admired the officers who had military training, or had fought in Indian wars. I despised the "Glory Boys" whose fathers had bought their commissions. Some of the later may have been brave, but most were prancing little peacocks.

Q. What officers did you like best ?

A. Of course I thought so much of General Lee and Jackson. Looking back I think General Lee's only fault was that he was too much of a gentleman to fight this new kind of war. He should have developed more gorilla units to have played havoc with the Yanks supply line. He really did not like the "hit and run boys". But they were a valuable source to confiscated food and arms. I served through the entire "whirlwind" tour of the Shenandoah Valley with General Jackson. He was a hard and demanding officer, but fair. He hated stragglers, but on more than one occasion gave the soldiers with bloody feet wagons or pack mules to ride.

My greatest honor was as sergeant-of-the-guards the day General Jackson died of his wound. I was on the porch of the house when it was announced that he had died. It was with a heavy heart that I had to pass the word on. There was much weeping and gnashing of teeth among our troops.

Q. What was the most memorable battle you were engaged in ?

A. The most horrible was the Wilderness. I had two wounds in this battle. One in my left lower arm which was not too serious, but a ricocheted bullet tore a huge chunk out of my left calf muscle.

As I was being tended to by doctors, (the night after the first day), I heard many

wounded from both sides screaming in agony as they were burning from fires in the woods. Our gun's wadding had set the thick underbrush on fire.

I went home to have my leg nursed after this battle. I only stayed on leave six weeks. With eager anticipation I returned to my old unit.

Q. Which was the saddest battle you were in?

A. Gettysburg. It was a tremendous blow to our army of Northern Virginia. General Lee cried. Many soldiers saw the great compassionate man openly weeping as we staggered back. The Yanks paid dearly at Gettysburg, too.

Q. In your estimation who were the best soldiers in the Confederate Army?

A. The boys from the hills of the Carolinas and Virginia. All their Scot-Irish and German blood lines made them some of the most tough and courageous soldiers of all time. The Texans were wonderfully wild and fearless in the battles I saw them in.

Some Yanks from the Pennsylvania Dutch country were to be admired for their strength and daring. The Northern soldiers from the big cities were, for the most part, yellow bellied cowards.

Q. How were you treated at Appomattox?

A. Oh! Dear sweet Jesus how we hated to quit the struggle. However, the officer our Company surrendered to was a caring, understanding man. He told us that he knew we would need our rifles to hunt with when we got home. He let us cut the stocks off in front of him. Most had to stack arms and go home without.

Q. What do you contribute your survival on?

A. Of course by the grace of God. And to the woodland training I got from the Catawba's as a young man.

Q. What kind of training was that?

A. In York County, S.C. I had mostly Catawba playmates during my childhood and my teenage years. They and their elders taught me a lot of woodland survival skills. What you could eat and what was poisonous. How to move quietly through the woods without your game seeing or hearing you. I learned to shoot from concealment behind rocks, trees, and gullies. Their greatest ability was ambush methods. How to out flank your opponents, etc.

There is no doubt in my mind that most of the men in my company survived the war because I insisted on them using these same Indian skills. By the end of the war Company E of the 12<sup>th</sup> had lost only about one third of our original men. Dandelions

and mushrooms kept us fed when we had little else to eat. God bless the Catawba's, they have been treated so badly.

Q. How many of your former slaves stayed with you after the war?

A. One. Aunt (Lillian). She was a great nanny to my children and some of my grands. She was a good worker. The Darkies that are still close to the soil work. The ones that are leaving for the cities are becoming lazy, and are not worth their salt. Before this century is over, we will have a lot of trouble with them.

Q. What do you see for our country in the future?

A. If we survive to our three-hundredth birthday it will be a miracle. By 2076 there will be much trouble for the U.S.. It will take honest, God fearing men and women of Anglo-Saxon stock (preferably Presbyterians) to see us through.

Please, please remember that we Confederates gave our all for the cause!