



James C. Cook's Confederate Service— Resolving Conflicting Evidence and Family Lore

*Any source can contain information that is true, partially true, or false.
Conflicting evidence must be looked at carefully to determine which is
correct. Corroborating of associates can lead to the truth.*

The case of James C. Cook, born ca. 1821, North Carolina, and died 31 March 1901 or 1902, Washington County, Florida, who was a Confederate Veteran provides an example. His grave is marked with a Confederate headstone, placed by the United Daughters of the Confederacy.¹ The family lore says that James and one of his sons from his first marriage served together and walked home from “up north” after the war. The headstone reads:

Pvt
James C Cook
Co F
33 Ala Inf
CSA
1822
1902

This information was taken from the widow's pension filed in 1927 with the state of Florida.² The copy of this approved pension was passed around the family as “proof” of his service and believed for years. Researching his role in the war and the complete pension file would unravel this belief with conflicting evidence from far more reliable sources. The approved widow's pension passed among the family was not the whole story.

¹ Pleasant Grove Cemetery, (Shakey Joe Rd., off Douglas Ferry Rd., Vernon, Washington County, Florida), James C. Cook marker, photographed by Lori Cook-Folger, July 1994.

² Soldier's and Widow's Pension Claims, October 1899–September 1927, application no. A02824, James C. Cook, Co. A., 33rd Regiment Alabama Infantry; Confederate Pension Files; Records of the State Board of Pensions, RG 137; State Library and Archives of Florida, Jacksonville.

BACKGROUND AND THE PROBLEM

Confederate pensions were given by the state where the veteran resided rather than the state from which they served. James completed his application for a pension on 23 October 1899, in Washington County, Florida.³ It was submitted to the Florida State Pension Board on 4 April 1900, with signatures of two men who served with him, T.J. Boswell and George Williams. Dr. N.J. Dawkins reported that James had

“joint rheumatism in nearly every joint in his body. His eyes are also affected to such an extent that he can see but very little. Sometimes he is confined to his bed for several weeks and can't work at all. He is thereby totally unable to earn a support for himself and his family are unable to give him the attention necessary.”

James was in his late seventies when he completed the application more than thirty-seven years after the war ended.⁴ By this time his memories had faded and he did not remember the regiment number. He listed the state of Alabama, Company A, in Captain “Randolf Owens Company.”

The seventy-five pages in the complete pension file do not contain a response from this application but later applications by his widow state that it was denied for lack of proof of service. After James died, his widow, Emily, applied three times: in 1908, 1921, and in 1927. The 1908 and 1921 applications used the same information that James had provided, the same affidavits of comrades, and were also denied.⁵ The War Department said that James was not found on the rolls of Company E, 5th (Blount's) Battalion, Alabama Infantry. This was the only Company they found which Captain Randolph Owen commanded.

³ Soldier's Pension Claims, October 1899, application no. 2254 (A02824), James C. Cook, Co. A., 33rd Regt. Ala. Inf., Confederate Pension Files, Florida.

⁴ 1900 U.S. census, Washington County, Florida, population schedule, Vernon, E.D. 123, p. 160B (stamped), dwelling/family 74, James Cook; digital image, *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 10 March 2014); citing NARA microfilm T623, roll 1773

⁵ Widows Pension Claims, 30 November 1908 & 25 February 1921, application no. A02824, James C. Cook, Co. A., 33rd Regt. Ala. Inf., Confederate Pension Files, Florida.

Many letters in the file attest to the dire need of the widow. In 1927, she applied again and listed his service in Company F, 33rd Alabama Regiment and had two new affidavits of comrades: M.L. Bowlin and Burel F. Mathews. This time the application was approved.⁶

There are nine men listed on the rolls of the 33rd Regiment that have the surname Cook. None of these are James or his sons. Comrade T.J. Boswell does appear on the rolls but George Williams does not.⁷ Mr. Boswell joined the regiment in August 1863 and was listed as deserted in November/December 1863.⁸ Captain Owens, M.L. Bowlin, and Burel F. Mathews are not listed on the rolls. The problem is, James did not serve in the 33rd Alabama Infantry.

Following the Family Lore

James was supposed to have served with one of his sons. He had three sons old enough to serve:

- James David served in the local defense, as he was only sixteen years old.⁹
- Stephen L. has not been found in any record after the 1860 census.¹⁰
- William Sanford moved to Texas where he applied for a Confederate Pension that was approved in 1906.¹¹ The War

⁶ Widows Pension Claims, 8 September 1927, application no. A02824, James C. Cook, Co. A., 33rd Regt. Ala. Inf., Confederate Pension Files, Florida.

⁷ "U.S. Civil War Soldiers, 1861-1865," database, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 5 March 2007), search for surnames Cook, Boswell, and Williams in 33rd Regiment Alabama Infantry.

⁸ "Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Alabama," digital images, *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com> : accessed 25 March 2015), Thomas J. Boswell, 33rd Regt. Alabama Infantry; citing NARA microfilm M311, roll 350.

⁹ Civil War Service Record and Widow's Pension Claim, application no. 29822, James David Cook and Mariah Cook, widow, 21st Alabama Cavalry (Local Defense); Confederate Pension Files; Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery.

¹⁰ 1860 U.S. census, Butler County, Alabama, Precinct 15, p. 3 (penned), dwelling/family 24, J.C. Cook; digital images, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 5 August 2009); citing NARA microfilm M653, roll 3.

¹¹ Soldier's Pension no. 22112, William S. Cook, Co. H, 1st Confederate Infantry; Confederate Pension Files; Texas State Library and Archives of Commission, Austin.

Department confirmed his service in Company H, 1st Confederate Infantry (also known as 1st Confederate Georgia Infantry).

RESOLVING CONFLICTING EVIDENCE

1st Confederate Infantry

The compiled military service records confirm that James C. Cook and his son, William Sanford, both served in 2nd Co. H, 1st Confederate Infantry.¹² William enlisted 1 September 1862 and James on 14 January 1864. The Conscription Act of 17 February 1864 required men between the ages of 17 and 50 to serve in the military.¹³ Since James enlisted just weeks before this went into effect, he likely did so to be in the same unit with his son rather than wait to be conscripted into a different regiment.

They were both captured at Murfreesboro, Tennessee on 7 December 1864 and transferred to the prison at Camp Chase, Ohio. They were released a few days apart on 11 and 13 of June 1865.¹⁴ Comrades Thomas J. Boswell and George Williams both appear on the rolls of the same Company.¹⁵

The Confederate government raised troops directly as well as the states raising troops locally. When James applied for his pension and did not remember the regiment number but listed the state he served from, the War Department looked in the Alabama regiments. Had they looked in the

¹² "Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations Raised Directly By the Confederate Government," James C. Cook and William S. Cook, 2nd Co. H, 1st Confederate Infantry; Broadfoot Publishing Company, Wilmington, North Carolina; citing NARA microfilm publication M258, roll 53.

¹³ "An Act to Organize Forces to Serve During the War, 17 February 1864," The Statutes at Large of the Confederate States of America; digital edition, *Documenting The American South* (<http://www.docsouth.unc.edu> : accessed 1 March 2007).

¹⁴ Prison release for James & Wm. S. Cook, June 1865; Camp Chase, Ohio; Selected Records of the War Department Relating to Confederate Prisoners of War, 1861-1865, microfilm publication M598, roll 23, (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1965), digital images, *Internet Archive* (<http://www.archive.org> : accessed 12 March 2012).

¹⁵ "Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations Raised Directly By the Confederate Government," digital images, *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com> : accessed 25 March 2015), Thomas J. Boswell and George Williams, 2nd Co. H, 1st Confederate Infantry; citing NARA microfilm publication M258, roll 52 & 59.

Confederate States regiments his application would likely have been approved.

Why would a pension be approved for his service in the wrong regiment? Researching the other men named in the pension file lead to the answer.

The Associates

Randolph Owen was appointed Captain of Company D & E, 5th Battalion (Blount's), Alabama Volunteers on 27 January 1862. Soon after, on 18 April, the Battalion was dissolved, and men assigned to the 17th & 18th Regiments. The commissioned officers, including Owens, sent a letter to the Secretary of War protesting against it. Captain Owen was honorably discharged on 27 April 1862.¹⁶ He petitioned the Confederate Government to be reimbursed for guns he had lost to the unit.¹⁷ On 1 September 1862, Captain Owen organized 2nd Company H, 1st Confederate Infantry at Greenville, Alabama.¹⁸ The unit was on duty in the defenses of Mobile Bay until the spring of 1864.¹⁹

Comrades Thomas J. Boswell and George Williams that were listed on the original pension application by James did serve in the 1st Confederate Infantry. Comrades M.L. Bowlin and Burrell F. Mathews that were only listed on the approved widow's application do not appear on the rolls of either company. They both applied for Florida Confederate pensions:

¹⁶ "Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Alabama," digital images, *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com> : accessed 25 March 2015), Randolph Owen, Fifth Battalion (Blount's) Alabama Infantry and Unit Information; citing NARA microfilm M311, roll 154.

¹⁷ Memorial of Capt. Randolph Owen, 5th Battalion Alabama Artillery, 14 December 1863 to the CSA Congress; digital image, *A Century of Lawmaking* (<http://www.memory.loc.gov> : accessed 1 March 2007), Volume 6:529.

¹⁸ "Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations Raised Directly by the Confederate Government," digital images, *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com> : accessed 25 March 2015), Unit Info, 1st Confederate Infantry; citing NARA microfilm M258, roll 52.

¹⁹ "Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations Raised Directly By The Confederate Government," digital images, *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com> : accessed 16 April 2015), Unit Information, First Confederate Infantry (First Confederate Regiment, Georgia Volunteers); citing NARA microfilm M258, roll 52.

- Mr. Bowlin's application was approved in 1927 but dropped in 1931. B.F. Mathews was one of his comrade affidavits. Several letters in his file state that he was senile and could not remember anything that was not told to him.²⁰
- Mr. Matthews's application was first denied for lack of proof of service but later approved. He died in 1928.²¹

Company F, 33rd Alabama Infantry:

- No James C. Cook or his sons
- T.J. Boswell
- No George Williams
- No Captain Owens
- No M.L. Bowlin
- No Burel F. Matthews

2nd Company H, 1st Confederate Infantry:

- Captain Owens
- James C. Cook
- William Sanford Cook
- Thomas J. Boswell
- George William

CONCLUSION

The search for where James C. Cook served during the war began with a document that contained information that is true, partially true, and false. Searching every James C. Cook in the Confederacy would take a lifetime. Corroborating evidence from associates revealed the truth without that task.

James was quite feeble by the time he applied for the pension as evidence from the doctor's affidavit. He did not remember the regiment number but did have the name of his Captain and his comrades correct. The War Department could not find his service in the Alabama regiments and did not know to look in the Confederate States regiments.

The many letters in the pension file from the widow indicate her desperation for financial help. She likely found local men who were

²⁰ Confederate Pension application no. A08790, M.L. Bowlin, Co. F, 33rd Regiment Alabama Infantry; Confederate Pension Files; digital images, "Florida Confederate Pension Application Files," State Library and Archives, *The Florida Memory Project* (<http://www.floridamemory.com> : accessed 26 February 2007).

²¹ Confederate Pension application no. A02933, Burrell F. Matthews, Co. F, 33rd Regt. Ala. Inf.; Confederate Pension Files, Florida.

receiving or applying for pensions and asked for their help. These men's affidavits were accepted and believed by the pension board.

James C. Cook served in the 2nd Company H, 1st Confederate Regiment. His son, William Sanford, served with him and they were both released from prison at the end of the war. No record documents that they walked home together but it is most likely that they did.