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The Grave of the Unknown Confederate Soldier
By Rickey Robertson

In 1864 Union General Nathaniel Banks formed a large army and began what was to be known as the Red River Campaign. General Banks and his forces were advancing north from South Louisiana up the Red River Valley towards Shreveport. If the Yankee forces could capture Shreveport, all Confederate resistance in western Louisiana would be crushed. And after capturing Shreveport, General Banks planned on pushing on into the state of Texas, where Confederate munitions and supply facilities could be captured and destroyed. With this attack all the way to Texas, Banks was hopeful that he could make Texas and western Louisiana drop out of the Confederacy. But did he get a surprise!

General Banks had a vast army of nearly 45,000 men. Confederate General Richard "Dick" Taylor, son of former president Zachary Taylor, was in command of only 18,000 men. These men were comprised of Louisiana and Texas infantry, cavalry, artillery, and support units. The Louisiana boys were itching for a fight, since they had seen and heard of the hardships to their beloved state and its citizens by the Yankee invaders and the boys from Texas were ready to settle their score too.

When General Banks and his army got to Natchitoches, La. on its northward advance, Confederate cavalry units and scouts darted to and fro, observing the Yankees as they advanced. And on occasion, the Southern boys would conduct a hit and run skirmish with the Yanks. As the Yankees advanced near Marthaville, La. at a location named Crump's Corner on April 2, 1864, the Southern cavalry and infantry hit a unit of Union cavalry in a hit and run attack. There was a heated skirmish with losses on both sides. The southern units after hitting the Yankee's turned and high tailed it north toward Pleasant Hill and Mansfield. Men were scattered throughout the area, and after the skirmish they began to try and rejoin their units. Near Crump's Corner was the homestead of William Hodge Barnhill. At the homestead was a well and spring. After the skirmish, a young Confederate soldier, cut off from his outfit, appeared up and was attempting to obtain water, when 3 Yankee cavalrymen suddenly appeared and shot and killed the young Johnny Reb. The Yankees rode away quickly, in search of other Confederate stragglers.

On April 3, 1864 Mr. Barnhill and his sons buried the Confederate soldier. There was no identification on the soldiers person, so, since April 3, 1864 there has been a grave for this Unknown Confederate Soldier on this farm. For over 98 years the Barnhill Family took care of this sacred grave. Due to the willing work of many folks such as Robert Gentry, the State of Louisiana created and opened Rebel State Park. This is one of the most beautiful and serene parks you can ever visit! In this park is the Grave of the Unknown Confederate Soldier and also the Louisiana country Music Museum. Many great and wonderful country, bluegrass, and gospel concerts have been held at the beautiful amphitheater located there. And many country music artifacts from items of Roy Acuff and other great country music legends are located there.

Last Memorial Day 2011 the Sons of Confederate Veterans and United Daughters of the Confederacy conducted a Confederate Grave Dedication service for this Unknown Soldier. Camps from Many, Natchitoches, and Newton, Tx. participated in this dedication. Full military honors, from a 21 gun musket salute, laying of roses on the grave by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the playing of the immortal "Taps" were conducted. Many in attendance stated they did not know whether to cry or shout for Dixie!

On May 26, 2012 another larger Confederate Dedication Service and all day living history event has been planned by the Sons of Confederate Veterans, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Louisiana Office of State Parks. This will be an all day event honoring this Unknown Confederate, but will also give the public an opportunity to see how the Confederate soldier was equipped, how he camped, how he lived, cooked, and survived in the field, and how he fought during the battles of the Civil War.

Rebel State park is located at 1260 Hwy 1221, Marthaville, La. 71450-3459 and can be reached by telephone at 1-888-677-3600 or 318-472-6255. For this event, if you need more information on the upcoming dedication and living history event, please contact John Hill of Newton, Tx. at 409-379-3597 or Robert Porter of Natchitoches, La. at 318-352-7941. Hope to see ya'll there !