

# Capt. Tod Carter's tragic death, a life lost too soon

By Carole Robinson • Senior Staff Writer, Williamson County Herald



Theodrick “Tod” Carter, the tenth of twelve children, was born March 24, 1840 to Fountain Branch Carter and his wife, Mary Armistead Atkinson Carter.

Tod’s parents took special care choosing the name, Theodrick. According to *Captain Tod Carter: Confederate States Army*, a book penned in 1972 by Tod’s great niece, Rosalie Carter, his name had been in the Carter family since 1676.

At the young age of 15, Tod was already being described by his father, Fountain, as a boy who was “perfectly steady, learns very fast and understands what he reads better than any boy I ever saw.”

Tod had the same discipline and acumen of his father, a merchant, surveyor and prominent landowner in the young Franklin town.

A member of Franklin’s Presbyterian Church, where he served on the building committee, Fountain owned a substantial home on the “Columbia Turnpike.”

Built in 1830, it became a multi-generation family residence and, for a time, a thriving farm and cotton gin.

Education was a strong Carter family value, and like the other Carter brother’s, it is “highly probable” that Tod was a student of the private Harpeth Academy.

Tod had an ear for music and was well versed in Greek, Latin, history, poetry and the Classics, skills that allowed him to study the law at a very young age.

By 1861, he had garnered a reputation as a “brilliant young lawyer,” his practice located on Third Avenue South.

Meanwhile, the turmoil of civil conflict began to unfold with the fall of Fort Sumter to Confederate troops in South Carolina.

## **Carter brothers enlist**

The inevitability of war was on the minds Franklin families. One by one, Fountain’s sons began to enlist in the Confederate Army.

First, Moscow Carter, a veteran officer of the Mexican-American War, joined the war effort, eventually helping to form what would later become the famous Company H, the 20th Tennessee Regiment, Volunteer Infantry of the Confederate States Army.

Tod also enlisted and set out with his brother to Camp Trousdale, located on the Kentucky/Tennessee border.

The youngest Carter son, 18-year-old Francis Watkins “Wad” Carter, who enlisted even before his brothers, was able to join Moscow and Tod, ultimately serving with them in the 20th Tennessee Regiment.

### **Endurance and survival**

The war that unfolded and eventually took the lives of 620,000 was painful and horrific.

The Carter brothers endured the soldier’s life. Winters came early, even in the Southern states, and most slept on frozen ground beneath tents of gauze, according to Moscow Carter’s family journal.

Endurance and survival was the greatest challenge.

On May 1, 1862, Tod Carter was promoted to the rank of captain and appointed assistant quartermaster under Gen. Thomas Benton Smith.

Later that summer, he began writing as a correspondent for the newly created Chattanooga Daily Rebel, under the byline “Mint Julep.”

After surviving numerous battles Capt. Carter was captured in January 1864 during the Battle of Missionary Ridge, just east of Chattanooga.

Capt. Carter was transported as a prisoner of war, first to Louisville, Kentucky, then on to Johnson’s Island, a Confederate officer’s prison camp near Sandusky, Ohio.

In February, he was being transported to Baltimore, Maryland when he managed to jump from the transport train “somewhere in Pennsylvania” with the aide of another prisoner.

Although a search ensued, Capt. Carter could not be found.

He managed to take refuge with a Northern farm family that befriended him, providing a disguise and enough provisions to help him return safely to the 20th Tennessee Regiment, now encamped in Dalton, Georgia.

By March 1864, his name appeared once again in the Company H roll call records.

### **Hood’s charge/Carter’s return**

Two months later, Gen. John Bell Hood took over the Army of Tennessee, leading soldiers from Georgia toward Nashville in September.

Meanwhile, Gen. John Schofield, of the Union Army, was also leading his troops to Tennessee’s capitol city.

These Confederate soldiers fought rain, sleet, snow and dank cold conditions on their journey back to Tennessee with not much more than “sinkers” to eat. The pitiful provisions were biscuits made from unbolted wheat flour and water.

Gen. Schofield’s army made it to Columbia, Tennessee on Nov. 24, four days ahead of Gen. Hood’s army, where Tod served the high-ranking officers.

Capt. Carter received special permission on Nov. 28 to go ahead of the regiment, now encamped in Spring Hill under Gen. Hood’s command.

At 24 years of age, Capt. Carter prepared his steed, Rosencrantz, for the journey back home to his family in Franklin.

He made the arduous ride, reaching Winstead Hill on the evening of Nov. 29, and decided to stay the night at the home of family friend Green Neeley

### **Nov. 30, 1864**

While Gen. Hood's army retired for the night in Spring Hill, Gen. Schofield's army managed to maneuver past the enemy encampment without being spotted.

The army of 24,000 federal soldiers successfully arrived in Franklin as the sun reached for the horizon on Nov. 30.

Schofield's plans to move onward to Nashville were stymied when troops found that the swollen Harpeth River's main bridge through town had been destroyed.

While Schofield's troops attempted to rebuild the river crossing, Gen. Jacob Cox's Union troops prepared for a stand in Franklin.

Gen. Cox, believing that the Carter family farm and the Carter Hill, "was the key to a strong defense," took command of Fountain Carter's home at 4:30 a.m.

The troops dug a 60-foot trench just south of the family's home, destroying four barns and part of the Carter cotton gin to create head logs for the trenches.

That same morning Capt. Carter prepared to finish his journey toward home.

Slipping through the Union lines, he made it to the edge of the Carter garden, where he began to enter through the gate. As he lifted the latch, one of his relatives motioned for him "to go back."

### **Anger and Vigilance**

After a stretch of frosts and snow, the late autumn day was warm and sunny, but the weather did nothing to lift the spirits of the Carter family or the young Captain who could not reunite with his family.

Angered by the sight of breastworks across his father's farm and soldiers in his home, Tod headed back to Winstead Hill ready to wage battle while his family prepared for the inevitable conflict.

Although Capt. Carter's duties as assistant quartermaster and aide to Gen. Thomas Benton Smith exempted him from engaging in battle, he vowed, "No power on earth could keep him out of the fight."

So it would be. At 5 p.m., he mounted Rosencrantz, drew his sword, extended his arm and led the charge shouting, "I am almost home! Come with me boys!"

### **Battle in Franklin**

Just 525 feet from his home, his horse went down and a volley of nine bullets fell the young captain.

Meanwhile, his father, Fountain, his brother, Moscow, and his four young children, as well as the four Carter sisters, numerous other family members, two African American servants, a boy named Oscar and five members of the Lotz family were huddled in the basement listening to the chaos and carnage unfolding above them and worrying about the fate of Tod.

Around midnight, the family emerged and thanked God for keeping them safe. Moments later a Confederate soldier appeared with the news that Tod was wounded.

Moscow was searching for his brother when Gen. Thomas Benton Smith arrived at the Carter home informing Fountain of Tod's exact location.

Smith then led Tod's father and three of his sisters through the smoke filled darkness, as the torches of townspeople looking for wounded cast a hazy light across the dreary night.

When they found the young captain, he was "delirious" and kept calling out to Sgt. Cooper, the man, who had tried to warn Tod not to go forward too soon just moments before he was shot.

Capt. Carter was carried to his boyhood home and taken inside to a room, littered with the debris left behind by occupying federal soldiers.

His sisters stayed by his side whispering; "Brother's come home at last," with hope he would awaken.

Dr. Deering Roberts, the regimental surgeon, extracted the fatal bullet that had struck him in the head, while his two young nieces assisted.

On December 2, 1864, 24-year old Capt. Tod Carter, the "brilliant young lawyer" died in the room just across from the one where he was born.

(Sources: Information for this article drawn from the following publications, *Captain Tod Carter – Confederate States Army*, Rosalie Carter, 1972; *Williamson County Civil War Veterans – Their Reunions and Photographs*, compiled by Rick Warwick; *The Battle of Franklin – Twilight Army of Tennessee* by James A. Crutchfield)