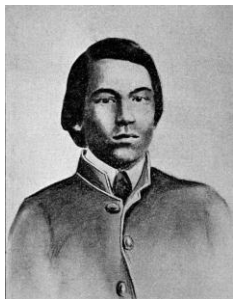


## Private Walter G. Ferguson



Walter Garth Ferguson was born in Galena, Illinois on Feb. 20, 1841. He moved to Lexington, Kentucky as a boy to live with his older sister Emily, the wife of William Bell a local dry goods merchant. In 1860 he joined one of the local State Guard units, the Lexington Chasseurs. The Bell family was Unionist as were a majority of the Chasseurs. Despite this Ferguson went south in the summer of 1861 with a group of local men to join the Confederate forces at Camp Boone near Clarksville, Tennessee.

On July 5, 1861 Ferguson enlisted as a private in Co. B, 2<sup>nd</sup> Kentucky Infantry. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Kentucky was the first regiment formed in the 1<sup>st</sup> Kentucky Brigade of the Army of Tennessee. The brigade would compile an envious combat record and become known to posterity as the “Orphan Brigade”. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Kentucky was in the heaviest fighting at Ft. Donelson. Ferguson was captured there when the regiment was surrendered on Feb. 16, 1862. The Kentuckians were sent from there to prisoner of war Camp Morton in Indianapolis.

Ferguson escaped from Camp Morton in March, 1862 and made his way back into Confederate lines where he joined the command of Col. John Hunt Morgan. He enlisted in Co. A, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kentucky Cavalry. In a few months Ferguson was selected for Quirk’s Scouts under Capt. Tom Quirk. This was Morgan’s select company of scouts for his command; only the most daring and capable men were chosen for this elite unit. A comrade described Ferguson as “one of the most daring and fearless men I ever knew.”

Ferguson served with Morgan in all his raids and campaigns in 1862 and 1863. He was wounded while scouting near Crab Orchard, Kentucky on Morgan’s First Kentucky Raid. During Morgan’s Indiana-Ohio Raid on July 5, 1863 he performed an act of heroism during Morgan’s attack on Lebanon, Kentucky. Federal forces were lodged in the railroad depot from where they poured a heavy fire on the attacking Confederates. General Basil Duke witnessed the act and later recorded in his History of Morgan’s Cavalry:

“A gallant deed was performed, on that day, by Private Walter Ferguson, one of the bravest men I ever knew; ... His friend and messmate Logwood lay helpless and wounded not far from the depot, and Ferguson approached him and under the galling fire from the windows, lifted and bore him off.”

At the end of the raid at the Battle of Buffington Island in Ohio Ferguson was captured and sent to Camp Douglas in Chicago. Before the year was over he had once again escaped Federal captivity, making his way back into Confederate lines and rejoined Morgan’s command.

On Morgan’s last raid into Kentucky in June, 1864 Ferguson was cut off from Morgan’s scattered command following the defeat at Cynthiana, Kentucky. With fellow scout James Elbert, they decided to don civilian clothes to obtain funds from friends in Louisville to enable

them to pass back into Confederate lines or Canada. Arriving in Louisville they fell under suspicion of undercover Federal detectives and were arrested on July 5, 1864. Instead of being treated as prisoners of war they were charged as spies and sent to Lexington to await trial.

The prosecution at the trial by a military court on August 12, 1864 demanded the death penalty for both Ferguson and Elbert without presenting any evidence to support the espionage charge. Despite the lack of evidence on the spying charge both men were found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging. Ferguson and Elbert escaped from the Lexington prison before the sentences could be carried out. Ferguson had escaped for an incredible third time from Federal imprisonment.

Ferguson found and joined Col. George Jessee's 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Kentucky Cavalry which was operating as partisan rangers in central and eastern Kentucky. He served as a scout for them until captured again in early November. He was returned to Lexington under close confinement for execution. Despite the pleas for leniency by a number of prominent Lexington figures including the half sister and the stepmother of First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln the sentence was carried out on Nov. 15, 1864. Eyewitnesses reported that Ferguson was "bold and composed" as he stood on the gallows which was located near the site of the present day Administration Office of the University of Kentucky. Ferguson declared he was a Confederate soldier and innocent of the spying charge. The local unionist newspaper reported Ferguson met his death bravely.

Walter Ferguson was buried in his sister's family lot in Lexington Cemetery. In 1904 the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy erected a memorial stone upon which is written the words of Revolutionary War hero Nathan Hale: "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country."