

Last season I began a conversation with our long time member Jim Davis. Jim shared with me some information about his ancestors that served in the Civil War. This past off season we started researching these relatives. The list kept growing on a daily basis. This list has now reached a staggering figure. To date Jim has identified 111 ancestors that fought on the Confederate side and 7 on the Union side. Jim now has stacks of papers full of notes and information.

It is somewhat overwhelming to sort out and keep focused on who is who. I believe it would be hard pressed to find anyone else that can claim so many ancestors that were involved in this conflict.

I spent nearly 5 hours at Jim's house the other day and we were able to pick out some of those that have very rich and interesting stories.

One of the more colorful is that of **Powhatan Boling Whittle**. Powhatan was named after his ancestor chieftain Powhatan who was the leader of the Indian tribes around Jamestown Virginia. Pocahontas was Chief Powhatan's daughter.

Powhatan Boling Whittle was born on June 26<sup>th</sup> 1829 in South Hill, Mecklenburg County Virginia. His family owned and operate the Whittle grist mill. Powhatan attended the University of Virginia. He was a large man for the times standing over 6 foot tall and weighing over 200 pounds.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Powhatan organized company G of the 38<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantry and was the commander of the company with the rank of Lt. Col. Company G was known as the Mecklenburg Rifles. The 38<sup>th</sup> Virginia was mustered into service in Danville Virginia in June 1861.

The 38<sup>th</sup> Virginia was engaged in many battles that included Williamsburg on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1862. In this battle Powhatan was wounded in the right leg. The wound was not very serious and Powhatan was back in action in time for their next engagement at Malvern Hill on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1862. In this battle Powhatan was wounded in the left arm which resulted in it being amputated. Powhatan was not with his regiment during the 2<sup>nd</sup> battle of Manassas, still recovering from his wound.

The 38<sup>th</sup> Virginia then fought at Antietam Maryland on September 17<sup>th</sup> 1862. The 38<sup>th</sup> Virginia was attached to General James Longstreet's 1<sup>st</sup> Corps and would remain with him until he was transferred to the western theater. They went on to fight at Fredericksburg Virginia, from December 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> 1862. In early Aril of 1863, the 38<sup>th</sup> Virginia went with Longstreet on the Suffolk Expedition.

Longstreet's 1<sup>st</sup> Corps joined up with the rest of Lee's army in late June 1863 at Culpeper Virginia and prepared for Lee's invasion to the North. The 38<sup>th</sup> Virginia was attached to Longstreet's Corps, Pickett's Division and Armistead's brigade. The 38<sup>th</sup> was joined with the 9<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 53rd, and 57<sup>th</sup> Virginia regiments, giving it a strength of just over 2,000 men.

On July 1<sup>st</sup> 1863 the Battle of Gettysburg began. Armistead's brigade saw little action on the first two days of fighting, although much of Longstreet's Corps were fighting at the Peach Orchard on July 2nd, Pickett's division and Armistead's brigade did not participate.

On the third day of battle, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, Lee ordered a cannonading all along the Seminary Ridge aimed at Cemetery Ridge with the hopes of softening the Union line. Lee had failed on the first two days with assaults on Culp's Hill, Little Round top and probing for weak points in the Union positions. His plan was to hit the center with a massive charge. Because Pickett's division had the freshest troops, he was chosen to make this attack.

Pickett's brigades lined up in the trees along Seminary Ridge and stretched for over a mile with over 12,000 men. They stepped forward and started their march across an open field a mile away from Cemetery Ridge. Their objective was Cemetery Hill. It was a very warm and muggy day. The air was thick with smoke from the cannons that hung like fog. This condition only worsened with musket fire as the battle progressed. Armistead's brigade lined up behind Garnett's brigade. The 38<sup>th</sup> Virginia was positioned on the far left which was partially in the Spangler woods. Next to the 38<sup>th</sup> was the 59<sup>th</sup> then the 53<sup>rd</sup> the 9<sup>th</sup> and then the 14<sup>th</sup> on the far right. Although this brigade was taking casualties, it didn't suffer nearly as much as Garnett's brigade. As they neared the Emmitsburg Road, the objective was now focused on a copse of trees to their front, for it was the only visible land mark. Garnett's brigade was devastated with flanking fire and double canister shots. Armistead's brigade climbed the fence and crossed the road. At this point the 38<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> Virginians were being shredded by flanking fire to their left. Commander Col. Edmond's of the 38<sup>th</sup> was trying to position his men to check the flanking menace when he took a bullet to the head. Powhatan had already taken a shot to his right arm, the only arm he had left, but he kept pushing on. With Edmond's killed Powhatan took command and was then struck a second time hitting his left leg. Command now fell to Major Cabell. Powhatan now laying on the battlefield, ordered Cabell to pull back across the Emmitsburg Road. The 8<sup>th</sup> Ohio infantry had already seized the colors of the 38<sup>th</sup>. With the 38<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> Virginians being cut to pieces, the 53<sup>rd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> pushed forward and were able to breach the Union line briefly. General Lewis Armistead fell mortally wounded. He was taken into custody and died the next day.

The 38<sup>th</sup> Virginia went into battle with 400 men. 55 were killed, 135 wounded and 40 either missing or captured. In a battle of this magnitude, charging over open fields and subjected to canister fire, men go missing. If you take a direct hit from a canister shot you disappear.

Powhatan has been listed on many publications as being mortally wounded and some have him as being captured. There is no truth to these accounts. Powhatan not only survived Gettysburg, he survived the war. Powhatan was promoted to Colonel and after recovering from his wounds again, he re-joined his regiment as its Commander

The 38<sup>th</sup> Virginia after Gettysburg didn't see much action until they regrouped and tried to fill the ranks and make it a viable fighting regiment. They went back into action at the Battle of Cold Harbor and again sustained awful loses. After the Battle of Cold Harbor, Powhatan retired to the Quartermasters Department and Military Court System.

After the War, Powhatan moved to Georgia and practiced law and was Judge of the Corporation Court for the city of Macon Georgia. He lived in Valdosta Georgia and served on the Legislature. Powhatan passed away in Valdosta on February 21<sup>st</sup> 1905 at the age of 75. He was buried in the Davies Whittle Cemetery, Mecklenburg, Virginia.

Article written by Brad Cox.

Edited and approved by Jim Davis.

