

Captain William Scantland Sadler, CSA Article

CAPTAIN WILLIAM SCANTLAND Sadler, CAA

“the bravest of the brave” by Shirley Farris Jones

The War Between the States was a very difficult and trying time for the men, women, and children of this defining period in our nation's history. Very few families were left “untouched” as a country at war with itself struggled to survive. Regrettably, more than half a million lives were lost for the “Cause” each believed to be right and when it was all over, those who were left had to pick up the pieces and get on with the business of living with or without their loved ones and the way of life they had previously known. Many were left with only memories and footprints of a past that was now history. Such is the story of a young man from Jackson County, Tennessee.

William Sadler was born in 1832, the first born son of Betridge Scantland and Nelson Sadler. Both the Scantland and the Sadler families were among the earliest settlers of Jackson County. The couple was married on September 23, 1830, and William would soon have five sisters, Rachel Ann, Nancy, Elizabeth, Mary Jane, and Lucetta, and two brothers, Lee and Henry, to play with. Another brother, Garret, died in infancy but there was still a lot of love and laughter in the house full of children, although the parents didn't always get along too well and ultimately divorced in 1858 – which was almost unheard of in that day and time. William was a grown man by that time and the previous year, in 1857, had an “infatuation” with a young woman named Elizabeth or “Betsy” White. This “infatuation” produced a son, William Henry, nicknamed “Bose”, which is an old Scottish name for Buddy. The couple never married and Elizabeth soon married another man named John Dixon and they were the parents of twin boys. Why the couple chose not to marry is a mystery to this day as William was known throughout the community as a “good” boy and a stickler for the rules.

On June 8, 1861 Tennessee voted to join the newly formed Confederate States of America as the last seceding [sic] state. William Sadler, along with two of his brother-in-laws, [sic] soon joined the Confederate Army. The following translation is taken from the original letter written the next year on June 6, 1862 to his Mother from Camp Trousdale where they were in training, which is in the possession of his great-granddaughter, Mrs. Bonnie Mae Roberts. From Camp Trousdale, Pvt. William Sadler was sent to Corinth, Mississippi for additional training and it was here that he became a part of Bragg's Army. On May 8, 1862, William was promoted to Captain, Company G, of the 8th Tennessee Infantry. (The 8th Tennessee was comprised of men from Smith, Overton, Lincoln, Fentress, Putnam, Jackson, Moore, and Marshall Counties.) In the fall of 1862 the 8th Tennessee passed through Jackson County on their way into Kentucky to face Federal forces there. It took three days and three nights for General Bragg's troops to march through Jackson County. They were greeted by Jackson countians who cheered the men on and offered their support. William was able to visit his family for a short time and encouraged his brother, Lee, to join up. Lee enlisted on September 8, 1862, just in time for the Battle of Perryville the next month of October 8, 1862. Both William and Lee escaped the battle unharmed. But seeing this type of action must have made an impression on the brothers.

It was shortly after this that Captain William wrote a letter to his fourteen year old brother,

Henry, who was still at home on the farm. In the letter, he expressed his concern about being killed in battle and what would happen to his son, Bose. Apparently, William did not think too highly of Betsy's husband, and didn't want his son growing up at the Dixon place and "never larn (sic) to work as a man needs to." He wanted Henry to promise that if anything should happen to him that he would get the boy and "raise him up good. ... raise him as his own, if something were to happen to him during this war."

After Perryville, both William and Lee were at McMinnville for a short while and then headed to Murfreesboro. Just before the battle, the brothers were bathing and William told Lee, "If you get hurt here, I can't stop to take care of you. And if I get hurt or killed, you go on." With those words, a pact was made.

The Battle of Murfreesboro began on December 31, 1862. On the field, William was shot in the head with a Yankee minute [sic] ball. Lee saw him shot. William's last words were, "Go on! You can do nothing for me! Go on!" As previously promised, Lee passed right on by his brother, just where his body fell on the battlefield, and kept on fighting. The next day, Lee and some of William's men came back to the battlefield, retrieved William's body, and buried it behind a building nearby, leaving only a large stone for his marker. It was said of the thirty year old William that "He was the bravest of the brave." William's horse, on its own, returned home to Jackson County, a distance of almost one hundred miles.

Note: The Eighth Tennessee was in Donelson's Brigade of Cheatham's Division so their main action was against Hazen's and Cruft's Brigades at Hell's Half Acre around noon on December 31, 1862. Although Captain Sadler's name appears only in the report of officers killed, it is highly likely that he died during that ill fated attack. In all probability, Captain Sadler's remains were most likely reburied at the Confederate Cemetery on South Church Street in Murfreesboro after the war before being reinturred [sic] for the third and final time at Confederate Circle in Evergreen Cemetery several years later.

Henry, abiding by his brother's wishes, got on his brother's horse, bringing along a mule, and headed for the Dixon farm. He collected Bose, just five years old, kickin' [sic] and a screamin' [sic] taking him from his mama and brothers and stepdaddy. We all agreed to abide by William's wishes and understood his reckoning. But it was mighty hard to watch such a distraught little boy coming up the road, ridin' [sic] on a mule, towards our farm." Then We stripped him down, washed him clean, and burnt his clothes. Washin' [sic] the traces of his Dixon life away." Henry, true to his word, raised Bose as his own, and Bose came to know Henry as his father, at least the only real father figure he ever knew. In 1886, when Bose was 30 years old, he married Sarah Melvina, and they became the parents of four children, John, Kate, Mary, and Annie. Bose inherited much of his father's sense of duty and belief in justice. Bose became Sheriff of Jackson County in 1898 and again in 1916, serving a total of two terms. Bose and Vinnie both lived into old age, living full and satisfying lives.

Note: This information was provided by Mrs. Bonnie Mae West Dudley Roberts, one of the children of Kate, the eldest child of Bose and Vinnie, who married William Dillard West. She is the great-granddaughter of Captain William Sadler. With special thanks to her daughter, Mrs. Janet Dudley Meadows, great-great-granddaughter of Capt. Sadler.