

Captain Tod Carter

By November 30, 1864, the Carter family of Franklin, Tennessee, had been looking forward to a homecoming for three and a half years. That is how long Theodrick Tod Carter had been serving in the Twentieth Tennessee Infantry in the Confederate States Army. Tod was born on March 21, 1840, to Fountain Branch Carter and Mary Armistead (Atkinson) Carter. He was one of twelve children born to the couple and eight of them lived to maturity. The family would all gather together again on this date, but it was to be far from the joyous family reunion to which they had all so anxiously awaited all through the war.

Tod was to follow his older brother, Moscow, into the study of law. Although he was not yet twenty-one years of age when the War Between the States began, he was known as a "brilliant young lawyer." Moscow had served one year with the United States Army as a Private during the Mexican War. Fifteen years later, he was thirty-five-years-old and on May 18, 1861, he was forming a company for the Confederate States Army and on this date Tod closed his law office, gave up a promising career and joined his older brother. Ten days later Company "H" was sworn into service and sent to Camp Trousdale on the Tennessee-Kentucky border. Upon the arrival of the tenth company, the Twentieth Tennessee Regiment, Volunteer Infantry, Confederate States Army, was organized and Moscow was elected Lt. Colonel. A younger brother, Francis Watkins "Wad" Carter was transferred from the First Tennessee Regiment to the Twentieth. On May 1, 1862, Tod (photo at right) was promoted to Captain in the Quartermaster Department.



The Chattanooga Daily Rebel was established in November of 1862 and was the only news source for Confederate soldiers. Tod became a War Correspondent from Middle Tennessee for this paper, writing under the name, "Mint Julep". His report on the Battle of Murfreesboro (Stone River) is recorded here in its entirety:

Dear Rebel--The entire South is at this time voraciously devouring every particle and incident of our bloody fight in front of Murfreesboro, and I suppose you too are under the influence of the prevailing portions of this bloody conflict, and in compliance with an old promise, I will briefly recount what I saw and heard.

As you are aware, the opening forces, though skirmishing on a heavy scale for three or four days, were not regularly engaged until late Tuesday, too late to be in any manner decisive but the plans had ripened, and when night closed upon the scene, the unwanted hush of the long dark lines in deadly proximity, like the muffled stillness of the waters at the approach of the storm, bespoke the bloody carnival of the morrow. By the break of day-dawn Wednesday morning, the guns of the skirmishers began to crack, in straggling, scattering shots, gradually quickening into a

fierce and brisk fire, on the extreme left of our lines near Triune, with now and then a field piece flinging in its thunder to the stormy prelude. By sun-up, the hoarse notes of regular battle were heard in that quarter. The game was up, and the pack in full cry. Steadily the surges swept from the left toward the centre and right, growing heavier, deeper, and stronger as they came, and when the hour of noon was past, almost the entire line was submerged in the fiery tempest. Four hours it raged with the wildest fury. Gen'l Breckinridge's division was on the right, stretching across and at right angles with the Murfreesboro and Nashville turnpike when it reached it. They had been stationed during the morning, on the Lebanon pike, to defeat a flank movement, should the enemy attempt it, in that quarter, but the increasing demonstrations made near the Nashville road, lulled every fear of such a move, and determined our leaders to dislodge them from their strong position.

The division was drawn up across a broad open stubble field, on the left of Stone's River. This field had been the theatre of a bloody conflict during the early part of the day. Fragments of shell, the torn and trampled ground, broken vehicles and other debris of battle, indicate a hard-fought field. It was to be again fought and won. The enemy in heavy force hovered darkly around the skirts of a scrubby growth of timber, just across this field. Their sharp-shooters as thick as locusts, were concealed in the grass, behind trees and fences, and in the clefts of the rock along the bank of the river. Gen'l Preston's Brigade extended from the river towards the ruins of McGowan's house in the centre of the old field. This brigade moved forward in solid column. Staff officers were galloping backwards and forwards, up and down the line giving orders, field officers giving commands and, with colours fluttering wildly in the wind, they reached the crest of a long ground swell, and saw the woods and fields bristling with blue coats and Yankee bayonets. Down went blankets and knapsacks, and giving an old-fashioned Tennessee yell, they closed in. What a roar and tempest of balls! The air screamed with hissing shot and bursting shells! Long strings of the wounded and bloody limped their way to the rear, thickly sprinkled with blue-coat captives. The Minnie sung its best and merriest Southern air. Our lines moved on. While leading gallantly his boys in a charge, Tom Smith, the popular young Colonel of the 20th Tennessee, fell, shot through the breast and arm. Orville Ewing, a son of Hon. Edwin H. Ewing, and volunteer aid to Gen'l Preston, was shot through the head and killed. A nobler man and braver soldier never fell in battle. Captains Anly and Whitfield of the same staff were also wounded. The field was thickly strewn with the killed and wounded, Southern and Yankee, laying side by side in ghastly confusion. When night closed around, the field was ours. Many of your old friends fell in the fight, among them were Captain Watkins

and Lieutenant Crosswait. Although the two armies were in sight of each other and only three quarters of a mile apart, yet the entire day Thursday, and the greater portion of Friday were consumed in skirmishing and cannon duelling. Late in the evening of the latter day, Gen'l Breckinridge's division made one of the most brilliant charges of the war. The enemy had massed a heavy force in the cedar forest North of Stone's river, near Lebanon road, and were menacing this wing, which was held by this single division. Towards the close of the evening they left a large reserve in this strongly entrenched position, and advanced on us with a long heavy line of infantry, and artillery, over-lapping our command by a strong brigade. Gen'l Breckinridge charged them and a conflict ensued, bloody and desperate in the extreme. Their artillery opened upon us a most terrific fire, and our forces melted away like night shadows before the break of morning, but they struggled on in the face of the fiery sleet, like gods for their altars. For an hour the demons of hell seemed to have met in wild, blood-drunken revelry. The enemy finally gave way, and our boys dashed upon them like a tigress to her bloody banquet and drove them howling through wood and field, and over the cedar-girt hills to the river, and across the river to their den, and their reserve. And then, notwithstanding the statement of your correspondent, withdrew quietly and without opposition. The enemy fought bravely, but they met men fighting for their homes, and their little ones and notwithstanding their superior force were repulsed and driven back in slaughter. The ground was literally blue with their dead and dying. Our thinned ranks attest their courage with a melancholy eloquence.

Many of our highest and best spirits fell upon that field. Lt. Col. Labenda, the very soul of gallantry is still there. Spring will bring her sweetest flowers to that sacred spot. Our loss was heavy. As an instance, the 20th Tennessee, (God bless her, a regiment without a coward!) with less than four hundred men in the fight, lost one hundred and fifty eight! We repulsed them, yes we whipped them every where and our boys were willing to settle the war in sight of Murfreesboro. Why we retreated some future Columbus must discover,

*"He that fights and runs away,
Will live to fight another day.*

An amusing incident occurred on the battlefield in the midst of a most galling fire. One of our soldiers, a regular "gay bird", was wounded in the leg, just as a captured Yankee passed him on the way to the rear. He mounted him and rode him without bridle or spur, but at double quicktime, to the hospital.

Well good day, I must close.

MINT JULEP

It is reported that his service was steady but unremarkable until November 25, 1863, when he was captured by Union forces at Missionary

Ridge. His horse escaped and returned to camp leaving his men to believe that Tod was dead. Instead he was on his way to a Confederate Prisoner of War camp for officers at Johnson Island near Sandusky, Ohio. On February 9, 1864, Tod was transferred to the Point Lookout Prisoner of War Camp in Maryland. But he never made it to the camp. While riding a train through Pennsylvania, a seatmate gave him a little boost and he flew out the window. The train stopped and a search was conducted, but Ted made good on his escape. He made his way along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers until he reached Memphis. Then he made his way to Dalton, Georgia, where the Twentieth was encamped.

On November 21, 1864, General John B Hood led the Army of Tennessee across the Tennessee River. The men were "lashed by rain, sleet, snow, and freezing cold," and rations consisted of "three sinkers a day," sinkers being biscuits made from unbolted wheat flour without milk, grease, salt, or soda. Many of the men tied rags around their feet as their shoes had long since worn out. On November 28th, Tod was given a pass to go ahead of the Army to visit his family who were only twenty-five miles away. What a feeling he must have had to think that he would soon be sitting down to breakfast at with his father (photo at right). After "sinkers" visions of smoked bacon, tubs of fresh butter to go with flaky biscuits and sweet preserves had to be dancing through his head. In a family history, Carter's great-grand-niece Rosalie set the scene:



At home was his aged father, Fountain Branch Carter, now 67. Here too was his older brother, Col. Moscow Branch Carter, who had been a prisoner of war at home on parole for about a year. Here at home were his four sisters and his beloved sister-in-law. In addition were nine little nieces and nephews, all under 12 years of age. No doubt Tod thought of his father's fireside that November day, and the hams and bacon that always filled the smokehouse, and the good meals the servants prepare in the little kitchen in the yard ... But most of all he longed to sit once more at his father's breakfast table with all the members of his beloved family.

But it was not to be. As he approached the house in the very early morning hours of November 30, 1864, a family member was seen to be frantically waving him away. Besides the family, the house was full of sleeping Union soldiers who probably would not have been sympathetic with a family reunion. Carter hurried back to his regiment while the family scurried to the basement where they secreted a goodly supply of food.

The Battle of Franklin that began on that day was one of the bloodiest of the Civil War. Some even call it the Pickett Charge of the west. The battle devastated the Army of Tennessee leadership with six generals killed, six wounded and one captured. No other battle came close to those statistics. The Tennessee Army was virtually destroyed. The battle started around 4:00 in the afternoon and every 10 seconds a soldier died. By 9:00 that night

10,000 were dead. The bodies were stacked up six or seven feet deep, so high that the last of the casualties could not fall and died standing up. It was reported that Moscow scooped up half a barrel of brain matter with a shovel.

General Douglas MacArthur's father, Arthur MacArthur, was knocked from his horse by a shot to his shoulder. As he rose, his attacker shot him in the chest and, satisfied with the quality of his work, turned his attention to other matters—only to be run through by the sword of a very much alive MacArthur. The dying man got off one more shot at MacArthur, which hit him in the knee. Still, he somehow survived.

Tod's great-grandniece Rosalie again tells us what happened to Tod:

It was on the first charge and when nearest the enemy's works that Capt. Tod Carter dashed through the lines on his horse Rosencrantz, with drawn sword, reaching as far as his arm would allow toward the enemy. He was leading the charge [when] his horse was seen to plunge and those near him knew he had been struck. Tod was thrown over his horse's head and when he struck the ground he lay very still. The hour was five o'clock, just as the sun was setting. He had been mortally wounded only about 525 feet southwest of his home, the Carter House.

A soldier reported to the family that Tod was alive, but grievously injured in the yard. In the darkness and the smoke of battle which had settled near the earth, the family climbed over the breastworks and the trenches, carrying lanterns. They could scarcely walk for the dead piled upon the field. Into many faces they peered, looking for Tod. Other searchers filled the field carrying torches, for thousands lay upon that field of death. It was just before day that Tod was found, lying upon the cold ground. His horse, a powerful gray, lay dead near-by. His wounds had rendered him delirious, but when found he was calling Sgt. Cooper's name, and continued to call it at times until the end. Sgt. Cooper had spoken to him just a few minutes before he was shot down, telling him not to start his men forward too soon, but his reckless daring caused him to do so.

On the afternoon of December 1, according to a story, his heart-broken sisters were begging for just one word of recognition when one whispered softly, "Brother's come home at last." He did not die until the next day.

A surgeon removed the bullet from Tod's head. In 2010, the bullet was donated by the Carter family to the Battle of Franklin Trust and it is now on display in the Carter House very near to the spot where he breathed his last.



Grave at Resthaven Cemetery, Franklin, TN and the bullet from his head

Sources: *Capt. Tod Carter of the Confederate States Army --a biographical word portrait.*

Rowland, Tim (2011-09-01). *Strange and Obscure Stories of the Civil War* (Kindle Locations 2163-2165). Skyhorse Publishing, Inc. Kindle Edition.