

August 6, 2000

The short, tragic military career of Pvt. Joel Mears, Co. E. 14th N.C. Infantry.

The following letter was written by my great- great uncle Pvt. Joel Mears, Company E, 14th Regiment North Carolina Infantry, Army of Northern Virginia, Confederate States of America. Joel was the older brother of my great grandfather, W.P. (William Pinkney) Mears and was born March 23, 1836 in Montgomery County, North Carolina. Their father was William Mears, to whom the letter was addressed. Joel was mustered into Co. E on July 17, 1862, exactly 2 months before the battle of Sharpsburg. The letter is presented exactly the way Joel wrote it using his spelling and punctuation.

State of Maryland

Sept. the 9th 1862

Dear father i seate my self to wright you afew lines to let you no that i am well at this time hoping that these few lines may find you all wel. We had to march 17 or 18 days we come from Richmond On to manases an up on to the Potomic When we got to Bull run we got where they had fought on saturday an we got there atuesday and there was lots of Ded yanks Alying over the field and woods i saw 2 or 3 hundred alying in one Pile put thare to Bury and left if i could sea you i could tell you Aheape. But i cante wright mutch till we git some where so we can male letters thre is no male Pases from wher to the confederacy there is Aman from NC that i send by him to male in NC We have cros the Potomic River into Mary land there is no male in 50 mi of this place goin to our stats We have lots of troops in mary land the yanks have Retretd Back Acros the River and our men after them I espect that they will Be abig Battel before long in wich I may Be in it or not i cante tel John H. Campbel* is wher clost Buy and was well the other Day i want to come home very Bad to git something to Eate some Potatoes Milk and greens and Other things that I cante get wher we cante git nothing But Bread and Meate and not anuf of that Every time But I hop that I wil git to cum home after awhile if we can whip the yanks in mary land i think that they will make peac I hante heard from home or from WP Mears since i left home if WP has left home he is in some other Ridgement When we git where we can male letters i will wright and tell you how to direct your letters we heard of abig fight in the west but you can lern more out of the papers than i can tel you we cante git mutch news on ly when we can git whol of apaper and that is not ben latly.

Joel Mears

Sept. the 9th 1862

During the invasion of Maryland in September of 1862, the 14th North Carolina Infantry was in the brigade of Brig. Gen. George Burgwyn Anderson. This brigade had marched from Richmond to join the Army of Northern Virginia. They had missed the Battle of Second Manassas by 3 days, but joined the army in time for all the operations in Maryland. The brigade was assigned to Maj. Gen. D.H. Hill's division and participated in the battles on South Mountain. This delaying action provided Gen. Lee with time to draw his scattered units together behind Antietam Creek at Sharpsburg. D.H. Hill's Division held the center of the Confederate line along the Sunken Road, thereafter known as 'Bloody Lane' on September 17. Three Union assaults were repulsed before the Confederate line broke and 300 members of Anderson's Brigade were captured. Pvt. Joel Mears was among the captured. The Confederate line reformed behind 'Bloody Lane' and held. The battle ended in stalemate and 2 days later Lee withdrew his army back to Virginia. The Confederate prisoners were transported on the B. & O. Railroad to Baltimore the next day and then sent by ship to Fort Delaware, Delaware. On October 2, 1862, Pvt. Joel Mears was exchanged at Aiken's Landing, Virginia but due to being ill with chronic diarrhea he was sent to a military hospital in Richmond, (probably Chimborozo). There he died of this disease on October 24, 1862. The letter that Joel Mears wrote on September 9, 1862 was the last anyone in his family ever heard from him. It was assumed that he had been killed in battle and was buried somewhere in Maryland. After discovering that he had died in Richmond after being exchanged, my family and I made a trip to Sharpsburg and Richmond to see if we could learn more about him. We visited the site of his capture and learned from park rangers the details of his transport to Fort Delaware and later exchange. In Richmond park ranger Eric Mink assisted us in locating Joel's grave in Oakwood Cemetery. When I saw Uncle Joel's name on the list of the soldiers who were buried in Oakwood I think my heart skipped a beat. To realize that we were the first members of my family in nearly 140 years to know what really happened to him made me both happy and sad. I didn't know that you could experience both emotions at the same time. I hope that he can rest in peace now, knowing that he is not forgotten. His grave is located in section B, row P, grave #38. We plan to have a marker put on his grave as soon as the details can be worked out.

Mike Hayes
Nephew of Joel Mears

*John H. Campbell was apparently a friend of the Mears family. He was in Co.C of the 23rd N.C. State Troops. According to records he was wounded at Gettysburg and later died of disease in February of 1865 while still in the service.