

## **Christmas 1864 Franklin, Tennessee**

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

FRANKLIN There was little Christmas cheer in Franklin after back-to-back battles in the winter of 1864.

By Christmastime, many wounded soldiers remained hospitalized in Franklin's homes and public buildings, where they had been taken after the Nov. 30 Battle of Franklin. And after Dec. 17-18, when the Federals had regained control of Franklin, wounded Confederates were loaded into open boxcars in the cold and snow, and sent north to prison camps.

At places like Carter House, where fighting had been heavy, cleanup was still a grim necessity. On Christmas Day that year, for example, the family's oldest son and Confederate soldier Moscow Carter hitched up a wagon, not for some joyful purpose, such as carrying presents to friends, but for dragging 17 dead horses out of the yard instead. The animals had lain by the Carter House smokehouse since the Nov. 30 debacle. Yankee dead, who had been hastily buried near the trenches around Carter House, were also reinterred about this time on a hill behind Carter House where the gymnasium is now.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him nor earth sustain; heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign. In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed the Lord God incarnate, Jesus Christ.

At Carnton Plantation, where many wounded and dying were taken after Nov. 30, there were no holiday parties, no concerts, no dress balls. The wounded were still being nursed in the plantation home owned by the McGavock family, noted Paul McCoy, Carnton's education director.

While at Col. McGavock's, he and his wife (Carrie) were very kind and attentive to us, wrote a soldier named Smith of the 43rd Mississippi, Adams Brigade. I . . . soon began to eat heartily, and my wound began to heal . . . A regimental surgeon, Dr. Trip, from a Louisiana regiment, attended the wounded of our room regularly every day. He made no attempt to set my leg until the 25th of December . . . placing it in a box the length of my leg, and kept in this about four weeks. Though somewhat uncomfortable, I slept fairly well.

In Oh For Dixie, the diary of Capt. William V. Davis of the 30th Mississippi, Davis recorded Christmas Eve day as having some sunshine. Foot sore, Davis wrote. Have breakfast and toddy, Yanks robbing citizens, Dr. Gourier lances foot. Oh the pain and agony I endure. Have ale and whiskey. Sleep but little. Christmas dawned cloudy, though, said Davis, who was convalescing at a home on West Main Street.

Have eggnog. Dr. Temple dresses wound. Dr. Brothers calls in. High fever in foot. Gourier sent to Nashville under arrest. Mitchell the nurse stays all night with us. Have turkey.

Enough for him, whom cherubim, worship night and day. Breastful of milk, and a mangerful of hay; enough for him, whom angels fall before, the ox and ass and camel which adore.

In those bleak winter days following the Battle of Nashville, other wounded men did not fare as well, said Thomas Cartwright, director of Carter House.

The Confederate wounded that were here, about 3,000 that were captured by the pursuing Federal cavalry, were put on boxcars open boxcars in the snow and cold and sent north to prison. Many were severely wounded.

If you had an arm amputated, they put you on the boxcar and sent you north. And all the doctors. Usually doctors were considered noncombatants, but they sent them north.

Hardin Figuers, a 15-year-old boy whose home was on Main Street, just a few blocks from the Public Square, remembered the gruesome transport.

A few days after the Federals reoccupied Franklin railroad traffic was renewed, and the wounded (Confederates) were taken away in open rackcars, such as cattle are . . . shipped in. Only a few of them had overcoats or blankets, the weather was dreadfully cold, the young man wrote.

A fight ensued over at Figuers house, when a wounded Confederate officer resisted being moved.

Col. William Lavel Butler of the 25th Alabama had been) shot clear through from side to side with a Minie ball and was desperately wounded, Figuers remembered. The officer in charge of removing the wounded had him examined by a surgeon, whose opinion was that he had sufficiently recovered to be sent to prison. Butler knew his own condition and that to be removed that day while the snowstorm was raging would be certain death, so he replied to the officer: "This is murder to remove me now. The officer replied: "You are a prisoner and must go.

For many wounded Confederates, being loaded into open cars and sent to the prison camps meant death. According to Cartwright, Wilkin Bond of the 3rd Mississippi died on March 3, 1865, from measles at Camp Chase, near Columbus, Ohio.

John Singley of the 30th Georgia, was captured in Nashville and sent to prison and died on May 29, 1865, at Camp Chase, Ohio. (Matt Bond, Wilkin's brother, had been killed in the Battle of Franklin.)

In downtown Franklin, Dr. Roberts, a surgeon with the 20th Tennessee, Tyler's Brigade, was moved to Nashville that Christmas Day.

"On December 25, 1864, my associates and myself, with the wounded of Bates division, were all moved to Nashville, and placed in the large building on South College Street . . . where I, as the ranking surgeon, assumed charge of the twelve hundred wounded there assembled from the battlefields of Franklin and Nashville."

Angels and archangels may have gathered there, cherubim and seraphim thronged the air; but his mother only, in her maiden bliss, worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

Other Confederates that Christmas season were part of a running retreat from Nashville. The withdrawal started on the 17th and moved through here with battles at Holly Tree Gap and where the Dotson's area is, Cartwright said. The Confederates were holding the main Union trench lines and then they withdrew to Winstead and Breezy hills and held off the Yankee cavalry there. Gen. S.D. Lee, Confederate Corps commander, was wounded there.

They withdrew and had a vicious fight at the West Harpeth off Columbia Pike just past the Peytonsville bypass, Cartwright said. The Confederates withdrew to Spring Hill and then Columbia where Nathan Bedford Forrest connected with the army at Columbia on the 19th of December. Then he and E.C. Walthall, a Confederate division commander, took up the rear guard, a combination of troops. The men were barefoot, and it was snowing and cold they would ride in wagons until threatened and then fight. They were leaving bloody footprints in the snow, fighting towards Richlands Creek toward Columbia.

On Christmas Day at a place called Anthony's Hill, just the other side of Pulaski, it wasn't too merry of a Christmas for the Federal cavalry.

Forrest attacked a section of Federal guns, and the confederates chastised them and pursued them and captured a cannon. It was a great Confederate victory.

Then they kept on withdrawing. At a place called Sugar Creek just over the line into Alabama the next day, the Federals were hit again, and that ended the pursuit of the Federal cavalry. They (Confederates) crossed the Tennessee river on Dec. 28 and went to Tupelo, Mississippi, where they went into winter quarters.

George H. Thomas, the Federal commander in this area, would write that the Confederate army was more or less a rabble or a mob but the rear guard was undaunted to the last. That's a great compliment.

What can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part; Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.