

WHITESMOKE SUN / COURIER

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From the Unit Literary Corner, a book review of the book *Rebel Private*, by Pvt. Mike Bazzo.

" In 1915, one of the most famous and, most likely unheard of, veterans of the confederate army passed away. He was famous because he left to history one of the most complete and fascinating first hand accounts of what life was like for the civil war private. He is largely unheard of because as a private, his diary does not detail the exploits of your typical general and were it not for a few barely legible copies of his book surviving a house fire, William, A. Fletcher may have faded into military history. Fortunately, both he and his book survived and have become part of American Lore. The book was used by Margaret Mitchell as a basis for her novel, *Gone with the*

Wind.

Rebel Private: Front and Rear, Memoirs of a Confederate Soldier by William A. Fletcher is aptly described by Southern author Shelby Foote as one of the best accounts he knows of concerning a confederate soldier's devotion to truth. I'll just say it was one heck of a good read! The book opens in an atmosphere of impending war and Fletcher describes the extremely poor family he came from and his belief that going to war was a solution to unburden his family with further expense. He hailed from St. Landry Parish, Louisiana and joined up just after the fall of Fort Sumter. He chronicles his exploits as a member of the 5th Texas Infantry, Co. F during the battles of 2nd Manassas, Fredericksburg, Valley Campaign leading upto Gettysburg, and Chickamauga. His account of supporting the right of Pickett's charge and being stuck on the side of Round Top is absolutely moving, not to mention his battle descriptions, run-ins with Yankees and his capture and valiant and daring night time escape from a moving Yankee prison train.

During the war, Fletcher was wounded three times in battle. On one occasion he was shot through the lower abdomen which broke his hip. His account of lying on the battlefield among the dead and dying from both sides is eerie and in a memorable scene, he drags himself to a spot under a shade tree and has a conversation with a soldier who had part of his face missing. His accounts are detailed and philosophical, especially those concerning the mood after the surrender at Appomattox.

Fletcher survived the war and became an industrial tycoon by inventing a milling process for lumber. He married and had 5

landowner and lumber businessman. He was an integral part of the revitalization of Eastern Texas after the civil war. Though he became well know he remained a philanthropist, donating large amounts of money to the Catholic sisters who nursed him back to health after his hip wound.

Of particular interest is his mention on page 40 of his childhood schoolmate who was the brother of his sister's husband. He doesn't mention the man's name but a footnote states that Fletcher's sister, Mary Elizabeth Fletcher, married Austin Allen of Opelousas, Louisiana in 1854. William Fletcher mentions meeting the wounded brother of Austin Allen in a hospital and that "he [the brother] was a member of a Louisiana regiment." I, along with Jim Tebbetts, checked the Louisiana Regiment registry on-line and found that there is one soldier that fits that description, a solder from St. Landry Parish and in a Louisiana regiment, his name is James D Allen. Booth's record of Louisiana soldiers shows the following: Allen, James D., Pvt. Co. F. 8th La. Infty. En. Camp Moore, La., June 23rd. 1861. Present on All Rolls to Oct., 1863. Federal Rolls of Prisoners of War Captured Rappahannock Station, Va., Nov. 7th, 1863. Sent to Washington, Nov. 11th, 1863. Paroled until Exchanged at Pt. Lookout, Md., March 9th, 1864. Rolls from April 30th, 1864, to Oct., 1864, "Present." On Rolls of Prisoners of War Paroled at Appomattox Court House, Va., April 10th, 1865. Record Copied from Memorial Hall, New Orleans, La., by the War Dept., Washington, D. C., June, 1903, "A Good and Willing Soldier. Res., St. Landry Parish, La. Eyes. gray. Hair, dark. Complexion, dark. Height, 5 ft. 8 in.

Occupation, overseer. Age when Enlisted. 27. Single."

Research from Wayne Cosby shows the following: James Allen was 27 years of age and a native of Louisiana. James was the son of James and Mary Allen of St. Landry Parish. He was single and working as an overseer when he enlisted at Camp Moore on June 23rd, 1861. Allen was present with his Company up to being captured at Rappahannock Station, VA on Nov. 7th, 1863. Sent to Point Lookout, MD, he was exchanged on March 9th, 1864 and returned to his command. He was present at all other actions and was paroled at Appomattox Court House, VA on April 10th, 1865. James came home and married Mary Alzina Singleton on Oct. 7th, 1865. His comrades described him as "a good and willing soldier". Small world.

The book is available at Border's book store in paperback. Do yourself a favor and give a read. You won't be able to put it down.