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Marking two more Confederate graves

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June 10 began with rainstorms; but it soon cleared up, turning into a rare June day for the worthy task of marking the graves of two notable Vernon Countians of Civil War times. Sons of Confederate Veterans Eldon Steward, Jerry Fast, and the present writer were joined by Terry and Tom Ramsey, representing the Vernon County Historical Society.

First stop was Sandstone Cemetery, east of Milo, where just a year ago the grave of First Lieutenant Joseph Monroe Wood had at last been located. Fannie Lancaster Wood's monument in Deepwood Cemetery proudly identifies her as "Wife of Lt. Joe Wood," and it was at first supposed he might be buried there as well. Then genealogist Nancy Thompson located a brief obituary which led to a nearly illegible old spire at Sandstone marking Wood's true resting place, as well as that of an infant, Hallie. The Wood family is scattered in death. Three other children, by the lieutenant's first wife Susan, are buried in Montevallo Cemetery.

Wood was a Montevallo livery stable operator and prosperous farmer when the Civil War broke out. When Montevalloan Henry Taylor raised a company for the 6th Cavalry Regiment of the 8th Division, Missouri State Guard, the 30-year-old Joe Wood was elected its second in command. And Taylor's capture soon left Wood in full charge of the some 70 men.

Officers didn't always have full control of unruly volunteers, however. The company was awaiting orders when an Iowa unit took over Montevallo, and some of the company's men joined local civilians in a night attack on the Federals in Scobey's Hotel. But Wood took no part, indeed disapproved of the whole thing, recognizing it as militarily pointless. In the event it only angered the Federals into burning the town when they withdrew next morning.

During his imprisonment Wood's path crossed that of the other recipient of a new marker on June 10. Late in 1862 "lady Bushwhackers" Ella Mayfield and Eliza Gabbert went unescorted to Springfield to plead with the Federal provost marshal for the release of certain Vernon County men. Their pleas were successful, but they found themselves unable to pay their hotel bill! From his own prisoner-of-war pen, then, Joe Wood gallantly rushed to their rescue.

The record is silent, but presumably Wood, like his captain Henry Taylor was released on his parole of honor and eventually exchanged, for in October, 1864, we find him back in the war. As Gen. Price, with his 10,000 or more men, withdrew back south following the great raid of that autumn, Lt. Wood acted as his personal guide, with rather mixed results.

The general spent the night of October 25 in a house just southwest of Deerfield. He rose at 4 a.m. and resumed the retreat with a small escort. Weighing in at some 300 pounds, the general was so unwieldy he frequently traveled in an ambulance wagon, though on this occasion he was being driven in a carriage. "Though well acquainted with the country Lt. Wood, in the darkness, missed the Adamson Ford, where he expected to cross Big Drywood.

"After a few minutes of perplexed wandering," he confessed he'd lost the way. Just then explosions were heard to the rear, and the situation seemed critical.

"Can the stream be crossed near here on horseback?" Price inquired.

"Certainly," Wood was relieved to assure him. "Alighting from his carriage, the old General called for a horse, and one was brought him which he mounted and, following the guide, he crossed the creek without difficulty."

From Sandstone the marker installers moved on to Montevallo Cemetery, located at the dead-end of the nearest tunnel of a lane through a veritable jungle. By a felicitous accident Eliza Gabbert's grave had been discovered there a few months before.

The old marble stone at her grave was broken in several pieces, and was mostly illegible. Since her exploits were entirely unofficial, there was no hope of the government furnishing her a veteran's marker; but it was felt she deserved one, and money was raised among members of the SCV, the Vernon County Historical Society, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The Brophy Monument Co. furnished a veteran's-style marker at modest cost.

Like her friends and inlaws the Mayfield sisters, after the loss of brothers and other menfolk, Eliza Gabbert carried on the fight undaunted. She was one of several women who helped bury the gory, "ghastly" remains of seven Bushwhackers killed at her family home by the same Federal militiamen who'd just burned Nevada, on May 26, 1863. Eliza would have watched the Gabbert house go up in flames at their hands on the same occasion.

The male Bushwhackers regularly made use of their sisters to smuggle ammunition, and also to carry on usually fruitless negotiations with their Federal opponents. When the Mayfield and Gabbert boys captured 27 Feds on McCarty Creek, in 1862, they sent the girls to offer to let them go in exchange for Capt. Taylor, in prison at Fort Scott. When the offer was refused, the 27 were released anyway. But the Feds made no move to detain the girl intermediaries, though they must have known well all about their doings in aid of their enemies. Chivalry still wasn't dead, though it was dying, at least among Northerners. "Officers and gentlemen" who at the outset of the war wouldn't have dreamt of looking under ladies' hoopskirts, by its middle years were clapping them in the lockup under less

than salubrious conditions.

Hardened Bushwhackers, on the other hand, persisted to the bitter end in treating friendly or neutral women with sweeping courtesy, and enemy ones as if they were simply invisible.

Eliza Gabbert's sister Martha married Jesse VanBuren Thomas, brother of Richard, this writer's grandfather. Over the years, modern Gabbert family members have been in touch. It's a perhaps startling reminder that Eliza, and Joe Wood, and all their soul brothers and sisters, lived their now-almost-mythical lives not all that long ago, hardly day-before-yesterday.

One can't help wondering what Eliza would think of a new marker being placed over her more than a century after her death, dubbing her "lady Bushwhacker" and summing up her faded deeds of derring-do in the terse words "She did her part." We're afraid she wouldn't approve. She was a "Mid-Victorian," after all. Undoubtedly it was much more important to her to live up to her position as ultra-respectable Mrs. Dr. John Lipscomb than to remember those eyebrow-raising indiscretions of her youth!