Chapter 3

Having chased the Confederates out of Cassville, the next assignment was at Elkhorn Tavern near Pea Ridge, Arkansas, where the men of Company D scouted for Rebels and their bushwhackers, with orders to

> *scout thoroughly to Yellville, seventy-five miles in one direction; to Huntsville, forty-five miles in another; and indefinitely towards Fayetteville and beyond...*
>
> *All of this was expected from two battalions of cavalry, who had never been one hour in a camp of instruction; and now in the service from eight to nine months under the most distressing circumstances...*
>
> *But the men knew the country where they were operating. They were on their native hills again, and were active and zealous in their efforts to support that Government, loyalty to which had caused them so much suffering.*[1]
>
> *One of the notorious bands of Confederate guerrillas that infested northwest Arkansas was led by James Ingraham, or Ingram. This cunning and almost illiterate guerrilla harassed the Federals in the Fayetteville area by constantly ambushing their trains and mail carriers. Numerous detachments of loyal Arkansas troops were sent after Ingraham, but he always evaded them.* [2]

While engaging bushwhackers led by the awful man known as Ingram, Great Grandfather James Coatney said part of his horse's ear was shot off. Responding in kind, James made a run on the attacker, raising his much superior Whitney rifle to fire back. But as the shooter tried to reload his gun, the Rebel cried out, "Don't shoot me! I'm just 12 years old, and my pap is lying

over there dead."

Great Grandfather said he took the young shooter back to Elkhorn and handed him over to Colonel Bishop, adding, "They later turned him over to his mother.

"...And that was the only time I was glad I didn't rid the Ozarks of a bushwhacker."

James Ingram survived the war, only to meet his terrible fate soon after at the hands of a young gunman bent on avenging his father's death, as covered in the following press release found on the Barry County Crime and Punishment website, hosted by Bob Banks:

Fountain & Journal, Mt. Vernon, November 10, 1870

Jim Ingram Killed

ALL GROWN UP: We learn from good authority, that the notorious brigand and brushwhacker, Jim Ingram, of Arkansas, was shot and killed by a young man named Stone. During the war in 1864, Ingram had command of a company of desperadoes who murdered and plundered Union men indiscriminately; and while on one of these excursions he called at the residence of Mr. Stone, Sr., called him to the door and shot him dead. Young Stone, then aged 13 years, told Ingram that he would kill him when he grew to be a man. At the close of the war Ingram moved to Texas, where he remained until a few days previous to his death. Young Stone proved to be true to this promise, -- shooting Ingram the first meeting after his return from Texas. -- (BARRY CO. BANNER)

While at Elkhorn, duty also involved protecting the telegraph lines that ran between Elkhorn and Cassville from being cut by bushwhackers, who were causing constant interruptions in communications and creating a major distraction for Federal troops.

On one scouting trip, Great Grandfather said they caught three men cutting the lines. The trio was captured and brought

back to Elkhorn, where they were held for a few days, then beat with a bullwhip, and released.

That winter, on November 1, 1862, 30-year-old Lieutenant Thomas Gilstrap of Company A died. His younger brother, Benjamin Gilstrap, was appointed Corporal of Company D the same day.

Colonel Bishop lamented, "Lt. Thomas J. Gilstrap died with the harness on...a brave and true Union man." [3]

Although Tom Gilstrap's cause of death is unsubstantiated, the Monroe County Historian website contains a Gilstrap family record that states, "Thomas Gilstrap, b. 1832 was a Capt. in Civil War. Was hungry and thirsty, asked at a farmhouse for buttermilk, drank same and dropped dead in the yard. Supposition that poison was placed in the milk." [4]

References

1. Colonel A.W. Bishop, *Loyalty on the Frontier* (p. 50).
2. Leo Huff, *Guerrillas, Jayhawkers and Bushwhackers in Northern Arkansas During the Civil War* (p. 54).
3. Colonel A.W. Bishop, *Loyalty on the Frontier* (p. 148).
4. *Emery Bible Index*, p. 82.
http://www.monroehistory.org/april_2006.pdf

Chapter 4

Russell Mahan writes, "*The Confederates after December 1862 kept no regular soldiers in northwest Arkansas except for raids, and in order to maintain any sort of presence whatever there they had to rely on independent guerrilla units. The 'partisan rangers' authorized by the order issued on June 17, 1862, were to prove a curse that forever haunted the first Arkansas Union Cavalry. These bands of irregulars were for the most part out of control of Confederate authorities, and yet permitted and encouraged to wage warfare on Federal troops. The Union soldiers considered these bands as outlaws rather than soldiers, and their primary assignment was to exterminate them. Men on both sides were often lawless and ruthless, and a genuine hatred grew between them. Each had legitimate complaints of wrongdoing against the other.*" [1]

Still grieving the death of Tom Gilstrap, the Coatneys and Gilstraps were feeling pretty low as the First Arkansas got orders to relocate to Fayetteville. Then tragedy mounted on January 10, 1863, when 27-year-old Corporal Benjamin Gilstrap also died (cause unknown), leaving just two Gilstrap brothers, Jesse (age 37) and Wesley (age 20), to defend the Union cause.

James recalled duty was better in Fayetteville, but problems with bushwhackers robbing supplies meant they ate mostly hardtack with water. And things went from bad to worse that spring when the Coatney brothers received word their parents' home place in Crawford County was burned by bushwhackers.

Their good friend and captain, Jesse Gilstrap, gave James and William leave to check on the family home.

At the time the Coatney brothers believed their parents, George and Margaret, were safe in Springfield. But what they found at home was not good. Everything had been pillaged and, to their astonishment, they found their parents taking refuge under a rock ledge similar to historic Jakie Shelter in Golden, Missouri (one of many ancient native burial sites common to northwest Arkansas and southwest Missouri).

Their father, George, told them he had returned to Arkansas because he was determined no one was going to run him from his home. But had he known his fate, he would have stayed in Springfield. He said when bushwhackers found out James and William were in the Union Army, the outlaws came and said they were going to give the Coatneys something to tell their Yankee sons. They tied George and Margaret up, took all their food and burned the house. Then George watched in horror as they raped his beloved wife.

Needless to say, the Coatney boys were enraged. William and James tried to get their parents to name the outlaws, but to no avail. Margaret said, "The one who raped me has a very nice, peace-loving wife, and I don't want her husband dead."

However, based on past threats, the Coatney brothers immediately suspected the Olivers. So, very early one morning, William and James visited the Oliver home.

Mrs. Oliver answered the door and they asked for her husband.

Defenseless prey at the mercy of two bloodthirsty wolves, Mrs. Oliver gave a futile response, "He's still sleeping."

The Coatneys raged, "He might still be in bed, but he's not sleeping!"

James and William charged in with guns drawn. They found Oliver standing in front of the fireplace and drug him outside. James knocked him down, and held him to the ground by stepping on his neck with his boot while William held a gun to his head. They told him they didn't know for sure if he had a part in the rape but they were certain he had a part in burning their parents' home and they were holding him responsible for the safety of George and Margaret for the rest of the war – if

anything happened to them, they would kill him on sight. And, "If it weren't for respecting our mother's wishes you would already be dead!"

References

1. Russell Mahan, *The First Arkansas Union Cavalry, Federal Outpost at Fayetteville* (p. 12.). Mahan, the city attorney for Bountiful, Utah, was a descendant of Sion Brown of the 4th Arkansas (Union) Cavalry.

Chapter 5

After the Coatneys were so savagely assaulted by Rebels, James and William convinced their parents to move back to Missouri for safety. However, word eventually got out that the Coatneys had two sons in the Union army, and bushwhackers burned their home in Stone County, Missouri, as well! Like countless victims who moved back and forth across the state line to avoid the reckless carnage along the Missouri/Arkansas border, George and Margaret returned to Arkansas to start over once again, tenaciously building a four-room log house on their original farmland in Crawford County as war, and threats of war, continued to rage on the horizon.

Meanwhile, James and William remained in Fayetteville, scouting for Confederates and bushwhackers. But it was the bushwhackers my Great Grandfather despised most. Even at over eighty years of age, James Coatney would get so upset he would shake when he talked about them. He said bushwhackers were "local people killing local people for a useless cause."

My Great Grandfather said one day while on assignment, they were looking for Rebels when they met two men. They asked the men where they were going and the men said they were from Golden, Missouri, looking to join the Union army.

Great Grandfather told his sergeant that while he was assigned to Cassville, he got acquainted with every Union family between Cassville and the Arkansas line and he was certain those men were not Union men from Golden.

Agreeing with trepidation, the sergeant said, "They'll probably get more men and be back to attack us."

That night, as they prepared a place to camp, the First Arkansas men were fired on. One of the troops was shot, sparking a skirmish that ended with two bushwhackers being

Dismounted, and with no time to saddle up, Colonel Harrison ordered the men of the First Arkansas to the front to meet the Rebels head on.

My great grandfather said, "We took a lot of fire, but gave more back than we were taking.

"Then the Rebels started firing cannons, even loading the cannons with five- to six-foot lengths of chain. Chain was wrapping around everything, trees, people, horses... doing great damage.

"One cannonball hit headquarters, going through the roof of the smokehouse, and killing Private Bell."

James and William fell back into a house on the old Missouri road in Fayetteville, and from an upstairs window, as was their custom, they took turns, one loading as the other fired. The two of them, in my great grandfather's words "got shed of a good bunch of Confederates.

"There were many places on the streets of Fayetteville where you could not walk without walking on dead and wounded Rebels."

Later it was learned that the officer's visit the day before was to alert headquarters that one of their regiment had defected, supplying information to the enemy on where Union scouts would be searching, explaining why there was no sign of Rebels before the attack.

Great Grandfather's pre-war friend, William Burrows, was badly wounded during the battle. He asked James and William Coatney to escort him back to Crawford County as soon as he was able to travel, but unfortunately he died of gangrene a couple of weeks later.

Many from the First Arkansas Cavalry were killed and wounded during the Battle of Fayetteville. Some of those killed were Private Lucien Amos, age 27, Company H; Private James Bell, Company I; Private Reuben Burrows[2], age 27, Company A; First Sergeant William Burrows, age 29, Company E; Private George Davis, age 30, Company A; Private Jonas Riddle, age 24, Company A; and Private Joshua Steward, age 19, Company I.

My great grandfather lost many friends to sickness and wounds during the war, too many to recall.

Mahan writes, "The best summary of what the Battle of Fayetteville meant for the Arkansas Federals was stated by Lt. Col. Albert W. Bishop of the First Arkansas Union Cavalry. Although always partisan in whatever he wrote, he was indisputably accurate when he stated:

> *This engagement, though of minor importance as compared with the contest of the Army of the Potomac, or the struggles that have recently culminated in the capitulation at Vicksburg, is not without its significance. It was the first battle of the war in which the loyal men of Arkansas were alone opposed to the organized treason of the State, and gave a very decided reproof to the rebel slander, that the Union men of Arkansas will not fight.*[3]

After the Battle of Fayetteville, Confederate General Cabell reported with regret and humiliation that the Federals were "well armed with Springfield and Whitney rifles," and "they poured in a dreadful fire with their longer range rifles." These rifles were one-shot muskets with a rifled (i.e., grooved) barrel interior, which would put a spin on the musket ball, shooting it farther and more accurately than the old smoothbore guns. The Arkadelphia guns used by the Rebels, Cabell lamented, were "no better than shotguns." [4]

Great Grandfather James said the summer they mustered out, word among the troops was they were going to get to keep their beloved Whitney rifles. But they were gravely disappointed when it came time to leave and they learned they had to give their rifles back to the army.

During the Battle of Fayetteville my great grandfather's Confederate brother-in-law (my great grandmother's brother from Carroll's Cavalry) was captured and held at Fayetteville. His name was Matthews. Great Grandfather visited him while he was in the stockade, and Matthews admitted the battle was a major setback for the Confederates, but like many people living in virtual isolation in northwest Arkansas, he was convinced the Confederacy would win the war by year's end.

References

1. Russell Mahan, *The First Arkansas Union Cavalry, Federal Outpost at Fayetteville* (p. 14).
2. Reuben Burrows was a brother-in-law to the Gilstrap brothers, married to Nancy Gilstrap.
3. Quoted in Mahan, p. 28.
4. Quoted in Mahan, p. 22.

Chapter 7

In the winter of 1863 the First Arkansas Cavalry was briefly sent back to Cassville, Missouri, to manage the growing number of bushwhackers making numerous attacks on Union troops south of Cassville, in what is today Roaring River State Park. The troops called it "Bushwhacker Holler." While there, James Coatney was scouting with a group in the notoriously dangerous area. Making a stop at a spring to water their horses, they were suddenly fired upon by Confederates. One man was shot and another captured. The Confederates retreated as the Union scouts gave chase. In the pursuit, they found their captured comrade lying in their path, killed by the Confederates to block their advance.

This and other ruthless bushwhacker incidents in Roaring River's dense and hilly jungle made troops quite happy to receive new orders at the end of 1863, sending Company D back to Fayetteville, where the Coatney brothers spent the rest of the Civil War, scouting near their home in Crawford County.

Mahan describes the emotional conflict suffered by the loyal Arkansas soldiers at this time:

> *The life of the officers and men of the First Arkansas Union Cavalry was in most ways the same as that of a Northern regiment from, say, Minnesota or New Hampshire. However, in two important respects the stress was considerably greater for those who hailed from Arkansas.*
>
> *First, a Minnesota soldier knew his cause was just because he not only felt so personally, but also because his neighbors told him it was. With fairly minor dissent, he marched away to war with the sure conviction that he was*

doing what was truly right, and with the strong support of his family and friends. Not so for the Arkansas bluecoat. His extended family, and perhaps even his immediate family, as well as his friends and neighbors, were likely to be supporting the Confederacy. While professing patriotism for his nation, the Arkansas Union soldier was considered a traitor by most of his community. Though not a problem for some Arkansas soldiers, others were severely torn between two causes. [1]

One evening, having just camped for the night, the troops heard someone from across a little creek yell, "Can anyone hear me?"

After the sergeant answered back, the voice from the other side of the creek said, "We know you have them Coatney boys there, comin' back to do harm to their own people...

"Traitors to Crawford County, the State of Arkansas, and the whole Confederacy!"

At that, James and William Coatney started pulling on their gear, and shouted back, "We're here, and we're comin' to meet you!"

But their sergeant ordered them to stay, saying, "It's just a bushwhacker. He knows you boys have a temper and he's just trying to lure you into his trap."

Subsequently, at year's end, on a cold November night [November 4, 1863] the Coatney brothers, who called each other "Gene" and "Billy", were caught in a skirmish on a brushy hillside south of Fayetteville near Cane Hill. With fingers growing too cold to load and fire muskets in the frigid conditions, they were relieved from duty to warm up next to the campfire, when shots suddenly came raining in on them.

William heard James shout, "Billy, I got hit and the di-pen ball bounced off!" (Di-pen" being a word James Coatney liked to use in place of cursing.)

Because of the numbing cold, only later did James realize he had been seriously wounded in the left hip, the winter chill having deadened the pain of the gunshot.

James Coatney gave the following account on his 1866 pension application

We were escorting a train 15 miles so[uth] of Fayetteville, Ar. We camped on Brush Creek. About 10 o'clock at knight after being relieved of my guard duty to git warmed up by the fire, we ware fired on by brush whackers at which time I was shot on the left thigh. I was then carried to the hospital in Fayetteville. The doctors could not remove the ball. I remained in the hosp for 8 weeks.[2]

While in the hospital, James Coatney recuperated alongside Private Andrew Jones who was also injured in the assault and who offered the following statement to the pension office on James' behalf:

I Andrew Jones do here by certify I was a pvt in Co I 1st Ar Cav. I was on the expedition with one James Coatney Pvt. Co D 1st Ar Cav. on the 4th nov 1863. That on the night of said while near the fire warming with about 40 others the enemy fired into us killing one horse and wounding myself and Pvt James Coatney. Coatney was wounded in the left thigh with a gunshot. We remainded in the hosp together until I was released. Coatney was wounded on Brush Creek. I have no interest in this other than swearing Pvt James Coatney was wounded at said time. [3]

Also included in James Coatney's pension file was a statement from Private Samuel Littrell testifying to the fact:

Pvt James Coatney of Capt Gilstraps Co D was wounded at said time. I was night nurse at Fayetteville Hosp. when Pvt Coatney was brought in. I dressed his wound but the surgeon was not able to remove ball. The shot passed through his thigh and crushed his femur bone on left leg. I have known Pvt James Coatney for 18 years. He is a good man, was a good soldier, and his loyalty to the U.S. Goverment has never been doubted. I have no interest in said claim other than swearing to fact James Coatney was

wounded at said time. --Samuel Littrell, Nurse, 1st Ar Cav Vols.[4]

Affidavits from Andrew Jones and Samuel Littrell helped earn James Coatney a disability pension of four dollars a month, increasing to $10 a month in 1890, and then to $30 in 1909. Pension records also show that upon entering the First Arkansas Cavalry, James Coatney was tall, dark and profoundly thin: 5 feet, 11½ inches tall; 127½ pounds; with dark hair, dark eyes and dark complexion.

My great grandfather was offered a release from the army because of his crippling wound, which marked him for life with a bad limp, but he elected to stay, fearing his brother William would be killed if he left.

References

1. Russell Mahan, *The First Arkansas Union Cavalry, Federal Outpost at Fayetteville* (p.43).
2. Pension Application of James Coatney, Claim No. 133408, 1866.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*

Chapter 8

In December 1863, as James Coatney was convalescing in the Fayetteville Hospital, Captain Jesse Gilstrap delivered some sad news. "You and I have seen a lot in this terrible war, but I'm afraid they're kicking me out of the First Arkansas."

Jesse said it was because of problems he had with Captain Tom Wilhite.

Claiming the charges were frivolous, Jesse Gilstrap filed for an honorable discharge.

Mahan writes, "*After a year and a half of service he (Jesse Gilstrap) was put out of the Army for 'failing to make proper company returns since his appointment, lax discipline permitting his men to be disrespectful to him, sleeping out of his quarters without leave, and uncleanliness of person to a degree totally unbecoming his position.*'"

Mahan continues, "*He [Gilstrap] admitted his failure to make proper returns in a timely fashion, but denied all other accusations. He said the uncleanliness charge 'is frivolous and made only to render me contemptible at Head Quarters.' The letter was supported by and signed by Major Hunt, six captains and several lieutenants of the Regiment along with the surgeon and assistant surgeon. Notably absent was the signature of Colonel Harrison...the petition for an honorable release was granted.*" [1]

Great Grandfather suspected Captain Gilstrap's discharge had something to do with the many favors his good friend since childhood had given him and other pre-war friends. The Gilstraps had close family ties as well, in that Jesse Gilstrap's son, Josh, and William Coatney were brothers-in-law, having married two sisters, Josephine and Elizabeth Craddock,

respectively.

Whatever the reason, Jesse Gilstrap was released from duty, "a good and brave man" according to my great grandfather. Though Jesse Gilstrap left several months before the war was over, with other captains taking his place, my great grandfather always considered Jesse to be his captain, always calling him "our captain," and dismissing all others out of hand.

The two Coatney brothers and the four Gilstrap brothers were the first from Crawford County to enlist in the Union's First Arkansas Cavalry, but now with Jesse Gilstrap's untimely departure and with Jesse's two younger brothers having died while serving, only Private Wesley Gilstrap remained to eventually muster out of the army with James and William Coatney at war's end.

References

1. Russell Mahan, *The First Arkansas Union Cavalry, Federal Outpost at Fayetteville* (p.43).

Chapter 9

One scouting trip led James Coatney and his unit into the hills not far from Berryville. It was getting dark when they heard much hootin' and hollerin' that led them to a cave full of drunken bushwhackers. The outlaws were having a great time until they were surprised by Union troops holding Whitney rifles. The troops disarmed the bushwhackers and took them back to Fayetteville.

This and countless other skirmishes earned the First Arkansas respect among Ozark bushwhackers, with the Coatney brothers contributing significantly to the cause. However, there was a time James and William Coatney had a problem with the officer that replaced Jesse Gilstrap as captain, which resulted in their being brought before Colonel Harrison.

Colonel Harrison, well aware of the Coatneys' reputation for valor, informed the new captain that, "The Coatney boys have been with the First Arkansas Cavalry from the beginning and they have rid the area of many Rebs and bushwhackers, causing great misery without regret, to bushwhackers and their families. So, leave 'em be and let 'em do their job!"

Great Grandfather was very fond of Colonel Harrison, saying he always showed extraordinary concern as a leader, frequently asking his men how they were doing and how their families were enduring the war at home.

A half-century later, my father, William Samuel "Willie" Coatney, as a young boy, was sitting on his grandfather's lap, when Great Grandfather felt a sharp pain in his lower back. He reached back to rub it and felt a knot. Doctors at the Berryville hospital discovered the musket ball that hit him during the war had worked its way to the surface and just under the skin on his back. They removed the relic and Great Grandfather gave it to

my father. Needless to say, Dad was very proud of that little ball of lead.

James Coatney lived six more years. He passed in 1916 when Dad was 14.

Great Grandfather named my dad after his brother William, and he named my uncle Harrison Larue Coatney after his esteemed colonel, Marcus Larue Harrison.

Chapter 10

In the spring of 1865, James Coatney was riding up and down the rugged Ozark mountainous terrain with Major Worthington when they ran into a group of infamous bushwhackers east of Fayetteville, near Huntsville, Arkansas. They gave charge and the Major was shot in the chest at close range and killed. My Great Grandfather James said it was the third time Major Worthington had been shot during the war.

My father, Willie Coatney, said the death of Major Worthington was a hard thing for his grandfather to talk about. He said James Coatney's ever-present smile would fade when he told the story of Major Worthington. It was one of the main reasons he hated bushwhackers, "even more than his own wound."

On March 15, less than a month before General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Colonel Harrison informed Headquarters, "*It becomes my unpleasant duty to inform you that Major John I. Worthington of my Regiment was killed by a rifle ball in an engagement with guerillas near Kingston Ark. on Sunday, March 12th 1865. His remains were interred with military honors at this place yesterday. He had lately been promoted from Captain of Co 'H'.*" [1]

Colonel Harrison declared Major Worthington's death an indication that, "Although the war is slowly moving to a conclusion in the east, it continues unabated in the vastness of these wild hills and mountains."

References

1. Russell Mahan, *The First Arkansas Union Cavalry, Federal Outpost at Fayetteville* (p. 51).



Marcus LaRue Harrison, early 1860s.
Courtesy Shiloh Museum of Ozark History/ Washington County Historical Society Collection (P-1682)

Chapter 11

With the promise of mustering out close at hand, the First Arkansas continued operations about Fayetteville and Fort Smith into August 1865. During that time scouts came to a house near Carrollton, Arkansas. They knocked on the door and a young lady answered. Great Grandfather James asked about the man of the house, and she said her husband was in Tennessee with the Confederate army. She said, "We've been living on nothing but turnips for two weeks, me, my mother, and my two boys. And now we have nothing."

In spite of his hatred for Rebels, my Great Grandfather James told the lady, "We don't support your husband, but being a group of good Union troops, we'll see that your family doesn't starve."

So he and others went to a store in Carrollton and loaded up sacks of supplies. They told the store owner they were taking groceries to the starving family and that the husband would pay for everything when he returned from Tennessee.

Fearing the store owner might try to retrieve the goods after they left the area, the soldiers warned him not to go to the home, "unless he was bringing the family more food."

After the war, and after Great Grandfather had proved on his homestead, he was reminded of the incident at Carrollton. He rode back to the store and asked the store owner if anyone ever paid him for the food. The owner said it was paid many years before and that the Confederate husband and his sons were working in town. He asked Great Grandfather if he would like to meet them.

Great Grandfather said, "No. I just don't want to ever be accused of stealing anything."

Chapter 12

While on another tour outside Fayetteville, James Coatney's group passed a house where a woman and four children were crying in the yard. Great Grandfather and his sergeant rode up and asked what the problem was. She said, "Some men came and took my husband away because he was overheard making remarks in support of the Union."

She told them it had been about two hours since they took him.

In haste, the Union scouts went after the bushwhackers, but sadly found the woman's husband hanging from a tree about a mile from his home. They could only return with bad news for the weeping family.

Being softhearted, such stories always bothered me, but I'm grateful my great grandfather shared everything, having witnessed it first-hand. Union people had a hard time in northwest Arkansas and southwest Missouri, but I'm proud James Coatney had the courage to fight for what he thought was right, offering no mercy to Confederates and their bushwhackers.

In later years he would say, "I would not give my spit to a bushwhacker!"

Bitter feelings prevailed in the Ozarks long after the Civil War, causing Great Grandfather James to leave Crawford County two years after the war, with his service in the Union army becoming an excuse for old friends, now foe, to insult him and his brother William. He moved north to Berryville, next to the Missouri/Arkansas state line, where he spent the rest of his life.

Shortly after settling in Berryville with his wife Mary Ann and my grandfather Tommy, it was discovered there was a large

group of the northern band of White River Cherokees living along Kings River. Tommy was about 13 years old.

One day, Tommy and a boy named Hammons, and Hammons' little sister, were fishing Kings River when they ran into some of the White River Cherokees. The native scouts were riding impressive ponies and acting unusually friendly, encouraging the children to inspect their horses up close.

Overcome with admiration for one pony in particular, the Hammons boy expressed great interest in working a trade. Young Hammons was only ten or twelve years old, but was intent on making the trade. Sensing the young boy's determination and taking note of what he could bring to the table, the Indians agreed to trade the pony for Hammons' little sister. However, before closing the deal, young Hammons told them he would have to take the pony home to show his parents to see if it was okay, "If it suited them, then it was a trade!"

So, with pony in tow, the boys left, leaving the Hammons girl behind, with her brother instructing her to stay at the river pending further notice.

Subsequently, Mr. and Mrs. Hammons were horrified and very upset when their son came home leading a pony and told them he had left his little sister behind with the Indians. Mr. Hammons rushed back to the river with the boys to get his little girl. But upon returning, the Indians told the father it was a fair trade and refused to give her back.

Desperate for help, Mr. Hammons went back to Berryville to get authorities to reason with the Indians. But, still, the Indians refused to go back on the trade. Just short of sparking an Indian war, my Great Grandfather James was asked to negotiate with the Indians, assuming he might better reason with them since he was half-Cherokee.

Unfamiliar with the local Indians and their customs, his Cherokee heritage being grounded in east Tennessee, James Coatney agreed to give it his best shot. Fortunately, after many hours of negotiation, he finally got the little girl back, returning the coveted pony to the Indians, along with a cow to cover the cost of damages.

My dad always took pleasure in telling this story, but I always thought how terrible for the little girl. I suspect she never went fishing with her brother again after that!



Jacob Yoes, early 1860s.
Courtesy Shiloh Museum of Ozark History/ Washington County Historical Society Collection (P-1873B)