

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR ANCESTORS ...

# CONFEDERATE INFANTRYMAN TO PRISONER OF WAR

**Thomas West Cage  
(1831 – 1865)**

— *Bradley Rymph*

### VISITS TO SITES ASSOCIATED WITH THOMAS WEST CAGE:

Brookneal, Campbell County, Virginia:

October 28, 2012

Richmond National Battlefield Park,

Virginia: October 20, 2013

Hopewell Gap vicinity, Prince William

County, Virginia: June 29, 2013

Manassas National Battlefield Park,

Virginia: May 31, 2013

Gettysburg National Military Park,

Pennsylvania: June 30, 2013

Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historical State

Park, Virginia: October 28, 2012

Farmville, Prince Edward County, Virginia:

October 28, 2012

Point Lookout POW Cemetery, Southern

Maryland: October 25, 2009; November  
2, 2013

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by Bradley B. Rymph.*

**Thomas West Cage** was born in Brookneal, in south-central Virginia. On October 28, 1861, shortly after the start of the Civil War, he and his younger brother Fielding signed up for one-year enlistments in the 3rd Regiment of the Virginia Infantry, Company L, known as the “Halifax Rifles,” which was being formed that day in the Halifax County, Virginia, Court House.

Confederate records document that at least three more of Thomas and Fielding Cage’s brothers also enlisted in Virginia’s Confederate forces — Jesse D. enlisted in Company H of the Virginia 3rd Cavalry Regiment on May 21, 1861, and Joseph and Elam enlisted in the same cavalry unit four days later. In addition, these brothers’ brother-in-law Albert Dejarnette (husband of their sister Demarius) enlisted in the Halifax Rifles on January 15, 1862.\*

Not surprisingly, since he lived in Confederate Virginia and volunteered to serve as a Confederate soldier, Thomas Cage was a slave owner — though his slave ownership was certainly less than many Virginians. The Slave Schedules of the 1860 U.S. Census (the only census in which Thomas would have been listed as a head of household, since he married in 1859), lists him as the owner of one

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\* The sixth brother, William, may have been dead by the time of the Civil War as he does not appear in the U.S. Census for 1860 or any enumeration after that.

**SCHEDULE 2.—Slave inhabitants in** *Halifax County* **in the County of** *Halifax* **State** *Virginia*, enumerated by me, on the *10th* day of *August*, 1860. *John H. Taylor* Ass't Marshal.

| NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS.              | Number of Slaves. | DESCRIPTION. |      |        | Fugitives from the State. | Number manumitted. | Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic. | No. of Slave houses. | NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS.          | Number of Slaves. | DESCRIPTION. |      |        | Fugitives from the State. | Number manumitted. | Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic. | No. of Slave houses. |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|------|--------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|------|--------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------|
|                                     |                   | Age.         | Sex. | Color. |                           |                    |                                         |                      |                                 |                   | Age.         | Sex. | Color. |                           |                    |                                         |                      |
| 1                                   | 2                 | 3            | 4    | 5      | 6                         | 7                  | 8                                       | 9                    | 1                               | 2                 | 3            | 4    | 5      | 6                         | 7                  | 8                                       | 9                    |
| 1 <i>Chris LeFemine P.</i>          | 1                 | 12           | M    | B      |                           |                    |                                         |                      | 2 <i>Thomas Cage Temp.</i>      |                   |              |      |        |                           |                    |                                         |                      |
| 2 <i>Marye Collins Employer</i>     |                   |              |      |        |                           |                    |                                         |                      | <i>R. Holland owner</i>         | 1                 | 18           | F    | B      |                           |                    |                                         | 1                    |
| 3 <i>Richard owner Andrew C. C.</i> | 1                 | 70           | M    | B      |                           |                    |                                         |                      | <i>Henry Holt Temp.</i>         |                   |              |      |        |                           |                    |                                         |                      |
| 4 <i>Maria Davis owner Halifax</i>  | 1                 | 25           | M    | B      |                           |                    |                                         |                      | <i>R. Holland owner</i>         | 1                 | 40           | M    | B      |                           |                    |                                         |                      |
| 5 <i>Mary A. Collins</i>            | 1                 | 41           | F    | B      |                           |                    |                                         |                      | 1 <i>Jackson M. Price Temp.</i> |                   |              |      |        |                           |                    |                                         |                      |
| 6 <i>Richard C. Adams</i>           | 1                 | 13           | F    | B      |                           |                    |                                         |                      | <i>M. Price owner Halifax</i>   | 1                 | 25           | M    | B      |                           |                    |                                         |                      |

Portion of the "Slave Schedules" of the 1860 U.S. Census for Halifax County, Virginia, showing Thomas Cage's "ownership" of one 18-year-old female as an enslaved person.

enslaved person — an 18-year-old female.

Despite the length of his original enlistment, Corp. Thomas Cage served continuously until his death at the end of the Civil War in 1865. The Confederacy's Conscription Act of April 16, 1862, required all men who were already in the army to reenlist for an additional three years from their original enlistment date. Then, on February 17, 1864, another Confederate law extended the term of their enlistment through the end of the war. The Conscription Act of 1862 also resulted in a reorganization of the 3rd Virginia Regiment, and the Halifax Rifles were redesignated as "Company K (2nd)." (Thomas's brother Fielding and brother-in-law Albert DeJarnette also served in Company K (2nd) throughout the war.)

Company K (2nd) and other companies of the 3rd Regiment fought in several campaigns throughout the War, including some of the most historically noteworthy battles:

- ♦ April–May 1862 — Yorktown Siege
- ♦ May 5, 1862 — Williamsburg
- ♦ May 31–June 1, 1862 — Seven Pines
- ♦ June 27, 1862 — Gaines' Mill
- ♦ June 30, 1862 — Frayser's Farm
- ♦ August 28–30, 1862 — Second Manassas
- ♦ September 17, 1862 — Antietam
- ♦ December 13, 1862 — Fredericksburg
- ♦ April–May, 1863 — Suffolk Campaign
- ♦ July 1–3, 1863 — Gettysburg
- ♦ June 1–3, 1864 — Cold Harbor
- ♦ June 1864–April 1865 — Siege of Petersburg
- ♦ April 1, 1865 — Five Forks
- ♦ April 6, 1865 — Sayler's Creek

(Confederate.)

Lo | 3 | Va.

Thomas W. Cage

2<sup>nd</sup> Corp, (2d) Co. K, 3 Reg't Virginia Infantry.

Appears on

**Company Muster Roll**

of the organization named above,

for Jan + Feb, 1864.  
dated March 30, 1864.

Enlisted:  
When 28<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1861.

Where Halifax C. H.

By whom Capt West

Period 1 Year

Last paid:  
By whom Capt Tabb

To what time 31<sup>st</sup> Dec, 1863.

Present or absent Present

Remarks:

Book mark:

(642) *Frank* Copyist.

Confederate "Company Muster Roll" for Thomas W. Cage, dated March 30, 1864, but showing that he had originally enlisted in the Virginia 3rd Regiment, Company K (2nd), on October 28, 1861, for a one-year period.

## HOW WE'RE RELATED

Thomas West Cage was my great-great-grandfather through my father, Albert James Rymph.

Thomas West Cage  
(1831 – 1865)

Martha Julia Shands  
(1838 – 1917)

=



Walter Ritchie Hershey  
(1862 – 1935)

Fannie Emma Cage  
(1862 – 1914)

=



Levi Budd Rymph  
(6/10/1901 – 12/8/1987)

Jessie Mae Hershey  
(3/26/1903 – 11/15/1991)

=



Albert James Rymph  
(11/9/1925 – 2/16/2019)

Edna Mae Heath  
(11/5/1928 – 9/10/2022)

=



Bradley Budd Rymph  
(living)

José Verzosa Baquiran III  
(living)

=

- ♦ April 8, 1865 — Appomattox Court House

Thomas Cage's services files on record at the National Archives do not include notice of specific battles in which he fought. However, it is likely that he was a participant in each of the above-listed battles (except for the final one at Appomattox), unless he was severely ill. His service files do document two periods of hospitalization: admission on May 7, 1862 (i.e., two days after his company fought in the Battle of Williamsburg), to General Hospital Camp Winder in Richmond, Virginia, for "febris typhoides" (typhoid fever), and September 11–25, 1863, at Chimbarazo



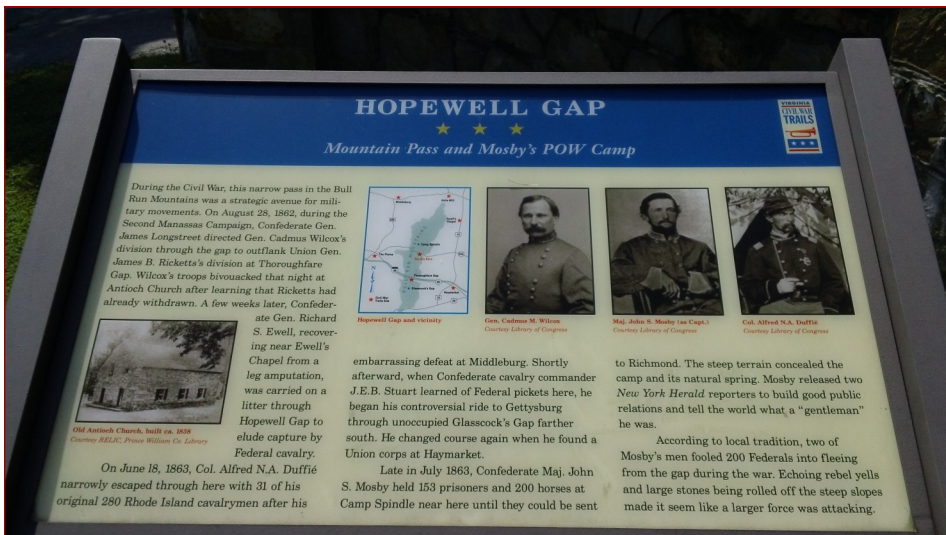


*Thoroughfare and Hopewell Gaps, Virginia /*

*top photo: Chapman's Mill, in Thoroughfare Gap west of the Manassas battlefield — the site of a skirmish between Confederate Major General James Longstreet's troops (but note including the 3rd Virginia Infantry) and Union forces as the Confederates march east to Manassas on June 28, 1862.*



*center and bottom photos: Antioch Church, near Hopewell Gap. While most of his troops advanced toward Manassas on June 28, 1862, through Thoroughfare Gap, General Longstreet sent the division of Brigadier General Cadmus Wilcox, including the 3rd Virginia Infantry, further north through Hopewell Gap. They camped the night of August 28 on the grounds of Antioch Church.*



Hospital No. 2 in Richmond, Virginia, for “diarrhea.” In addition, the Company Muster Roll dated January 31, 1863, notes him as “absent – sick.”

Space does not permit discussing all the battles in which Thomas Cage (and his brother and brother-in-law) likely fought during his almost four years’ service in the 3rd Virginia Infantry. The



*Manassas National Battlefield Park /*

*top and center photo: Brawner Farm House, where the 3rd Virginia Infantry arrived with the rest of Pryor's Brigade at the Second Manassas Battle site on August 30, 1862 (the last day of the battle) and was stationed in the woods a short distance southeast of the house.*

*bottom photo: Groveton Wood — After moving forward across the open fields and pushing back the Union forces, the 3rd Virginia Infantry got separated from the rest of Pryor's Brigade and instead stationed with General William Pender's brigade for the continued fighting late afternoon on August 30.*



following sections discuss various battles in which he fought and whose sites I have visited to walk “in the footsteps of our ancestors.”

## **“SECOND MANASSAS” AND THE ADVANCE TO THE BATTLEGROUND**

In the early summer of 1862, the 3rd Virginia Infantry participated in a series of skirmishes (known as the “Seven Days Battles”) in and around Richmond, Virginia, as Union troops unsuccessfully attempted to seize control of the Confederacy’s capital city. After these skirmishes concluded, much of the Army of Northern Virginia, including the 3rd Virginia Infantry, stayed in the Richmond area while General Robert E. Lee and his senior advisers planned their next strategy.

At that time, the 3rd Virginia Infantry was led by Col. Joseph A. Mayo, Jr. It was assigned to “Pryor’s Brigade,” under the leadership of Brigadier General Roger A. Pryor. This brigade, in turn, was within “Wilcox’s Division” under Brigadier General Cadmus M. Wilcox. Wilcox’s Division was among the Army of Northern Virginia divisions commanded by Major General James Longstreet, who reported to General Lee.

In late July 1862, Lee had begun moving some of his forces (specifically, divisions commanded by Major General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson) to Gordonsville in the Virginia Piedmont. The 3rd Virginia Infantry remained in the Richmond area

with other troops commanded by Longstreet. As the summer advanced, Jackson and his forces remained deadlocked with Union forces in the areas along the Rappahannock River area. Lee was determined to break this deadlock. In the troop movement that followed, Jackson marched his troops through Thoroughfare Gap, a narrow passage through the Bull Run Mountains west of the site where the First Battle of Manassas had been waged in 1861. Lee then determined to move the rest of his forces, including Longstreet’s wing of divisions, to the Manassas area to join Jackson in anticipation of a second battle with Union forces there.

On August 28, Lee marched with most of Longstreet’s forces to Thoroughfare Gap, where Union and Confederate forces skirmished. A large stone mill (known as “Chapman’s Mill”) changed hands three times in the fighting, but eventually Longstreet’s forces were victorious. Their victory enabled Longstreet’s troops to unite with Jackson’s at the Manassas battle site.

Rather than risk all his troops being bottled up at Thoroughfare Gap, Longstreet had decided in advance to send a few of his divisions through other passageways in the Bull Run Mountains. Brigadier



Gettysburg National Military Park /

top photo: Spangler's Barn — When Kemper's Brigade (including Thomas Cage) arrived with the rest of Pickett's Division at the Gettysburg battle site, they camped in the vicinity of this barn.

center photo: Field that Confederate troops crossed during Pickett's Charge on July 3, 1863. The target destination, the "Copse of Trees," is in the rear, slightly left of center.

bottom photo: "Copse of Trees" — Monument for "Confederate High Water Mark."



General John B. Hood was sent with two of his division's brigades over a footpath over Mother Leatherneck Mountain. Wilcox was

sent with his men (including the 3rd Virginia Infantry) on a flanking march through Hopewell Gap, three miles north of Thoroughfare

Gap. Wilcox and his troops passed through Hopewell Gap unopposed and overnighted on August 29 east of the gap on the grounds of the Antioch Baptist Church.

Very early morning on August 30, Wilcox's men resumed their advance toward the Manassas battle site, where the fighting had been underway for two

days. By 7:00 a.m., they had made their way east to reconnect with the rest of Longstreet's forces. Wilcox's Division, including the 3rd Virginia Infantry, were positioned in the woods southeast of the Brawner farm house and immediately north of the Warrenton Pike (now U.S. 29).

At the Manassas battlefield site on August 30, the troops of Union General Fitz John Porter launched an assault on the Confederate forces to his west. As the Confederate forces gained the upper hand in the fighting, Wilcox sent his brigades out of the woods and into fields in pursuit of the retreating Union soldiers. Pryor organized his pursuing brigade into two lines, with the 3rd Virginia and one other infantry regiment in the first line.

In the course of the advance, the 3rd Virginia Infantry somehow became separated from the rest of Pryor's Brigade. They asked (and were granted) permission to join Confederate General William D. Pender's North Carolina brigade (which was on the 3rd Virginia's left) in the battle. With the North Carolina brigade, the 3rd Virginia Infantry reached the enemy battery in the Groveton Woods and captured it — a critical success in a key Confederate battlefield victory.

## LEE, EARLY, AND BUFORD CONNECTIONS

**Thomas Cage** was related by marriage to some of the most important names in Civil War military history — especially on the Confederate but also on the Union side. The immigrant ancestors of his wife **Martha Julia (Shands) Cage** included families with the surnames of Lee, Early, and Beauford (later changed to Buford). As such, she was a 2nd, 3rd, or 4th cousin to the following historic figures:

- ♦ Confederate General **Robert E. Lee**, head of the Army of Northern Virginia — 4th cousin, 3 times removed
- ♦ Confederate Lieutenant General **Jubal Anderson Early** — 2nd cousin, 1 time removed
- ♦ Confederate Brigadier General **Abraham Buford** and his cousins, half-brothers Union Generals **John Buford** and **Napoleon Bonaparte Buford** — 3rd cousins, 1 time removed

These and other relationships are described separately (with accompanying ancestral charts) in the profile, "Civil War Officer and Soldier Cousins."



*Detail of Pickett's Charge in  
"The Battle of Gettysburg"  
(aka, the "Gettysburg Cyclorama")  
by French artist Paul Philippoteaux  
(Photo of artwork taken at  
Gettysburg National Military Park  
Visitor Center)*



Altogether, Pryor's Brigade had 78 men killed, wounded, or missing on August 30. The 3rd Virginia Infantry itself had 4 killed or mortally wounded and 9 wounded. Another soldier in the 3rd Virginia, Edgar Ashton, told his sister:

I think the hottest place I ever was in was the second battle of Manassas where our regiment with others, charged six pieces of cannon and captured them notwithstanding

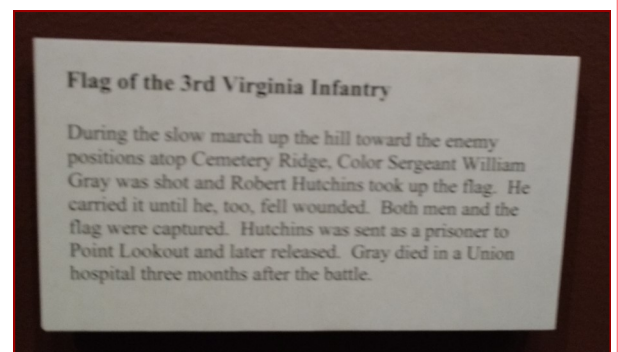
Yankees had cross fire on us in an open field. I thought my time had come but when the rebels (as the Yankees call us) undertake anything they generally go through with it.

## **"PICKETT'S CHARGE" AT THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG**

As was the case with Second Manassas, the 3rd Virginia Infantry arrived at the Gettysburg battle site on the last day of



*Flag of the 3rd Virginia Infantry (Thomas Cage's regiment), carried in Pickett's Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg and captured by Union troops. (Photo of flag taken in its display case at the Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia.)*





*"Victory or Death, The Last Stand of the Savannah Vol. Guard at the Battle of Sailor's Creek, VA., April 6, 1865" / Keith Rocco. (Scanned from "Lee's Retreat: The Final Campaigns.")*

fighting. When the fighting at Gettysburg began on July 1, 1863, the 3rd Virginia — still headed by Col. Mayo and at this time, part of a brigade headed by Brigadier General James Kemper, within a division headed by Major General George Pickett, within Longstreet's First Corps of the Confederate Army — was encamped at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.

After crossing the Potomac River on June 25, Pickett's Division had arrived in Chambersburg on June 27. When the rest of Longstreet's forces had advanced toward Gettysburg, Pickett's Division had stayed in Chambersburg, serving as a rear guard and working to destroy the Cumberland Valley Railroad there.

On July 2, well before daylight, Pickett's Division (including the 3rd Virginia Infantry) began a 25-mile march to

Gettysburg. By nightfall, they were just a few miles outside the town. As they marched, the sounds of the battle became increasingly louder and clearer. One officer in Kemper's Brigade later recalled that there was

less straggling from any cause than ever before. Our Division had never failed in any undertaking; had perfected confidence in the leaders and felt themselves to be almost invincible.

Before dawn on July 3, Pickett's Division was again en march towards Gettysburg — with Kemper's Brigade leading the way. By around 7:00 a.m., the division had arrived at the battle site and had positioned itself behind Seminary Ridge. Kemper's brigade was on the right, with the brigades of Brigadier Generals Louis Armistead and Richard Garnett on the center and left.



By 11:00 a.m., the division had repositioned itself east of the ridge in the fields of the Spangler family farm.

In his history of the *3rd Virginia Infantry*, Lee A. Wallace related the regiments key role in the Gettysburg battle:

General Lee, Colonel Mayo later recalled, “passed in front of us, coming from the right, and a little while afterwards every man in the ranks was made to know exactly what the work was which had been cut out for us.” Kemper, Mayo remembered, told him to be sure that the 3rd Virginia was told that the commanding general had assigned the division the post of honor for that day. Mayo noted the unusual absence of merriment among his men, walked over to Colonel [Waller T. ]Patton [of the 7th Virginia Infantry, also in Kemper’s Brigade] standing in front of his regiment, and remarked: “This news has brought about an awful seriousness with our fellows, Taz.” “Yes,” he replied, “and well they may be serious if they really know what is in store for them. I have been up yonder where [General James F.] Dearing is, and looked across at the Yankees.

The signal guns opened sharply after

1 p.m., followed by E. P. Alexander’s batteries of some 150 guns. The men, as ordered, fell flat on the ground. Skirmishers crawled forward to take their positions in front, and orders were passed along the line that the advance would be in slow time, without cheering. Enemy shell, intended for Alexander’s gunners, fell on the waiting infantry, inflicting heavy casualties.

Kemper’s, the most exposed brigade of the division, lost about fifteen percent of its men before the memorable charge began. The suffering of the 3rd and 7th regiments was of “particular severity,” from the hot sun as well as from the enemy’s fire....

About 3 p.m., the artillery ceased, and Pickett rode down the rear of the lines, calling on the men to prepare to advance and to “Remember Old Virginia.” With the skirmishers moving about 200 yards in front, Pickett’s division began their slow but steady advance. Garnett’s brigade was on the left, Armistead’s in the center, and Kemper’s was on the right. The 3rd Virginia was on the left of the brigade.... Good order was maintained in the ranks, even after the Union artillery opened, and the brigade moved open across the open field toward “the clump of trees.”

As they neared Cemetery Ridge, Union infantrymen opened a devastating fire which began thinning out the Virginians....

Within about a hundred yards of the stone fence, the Virginians returned the enemy's musketry. "Volley after volley of crashing musket ball sweeps through the line and mows us down like before the scythe," Lieutenant John Dooley of the 1st Virginia recorded....

Kemper, seriously wounded, was captured, and then recaptured by his brigade. Colonel Mayo took command of the brigade, and the command of the 3rd Virginia passed to Lieutenant Colonel Alexander D. Callcote, who was soon killed....

The captured part of Cemetery Ridge was held but a short time, before Pickett's men were driven back. It was all over by 4:00 p.m., and the remnants of the division fell back to Seminary Ridge. Kemper's Brigade counted 732 casualties....

The 3rd Virginia went in with a strength of about 350 present for duty. The original battle returns show 16 killed and 51 wounded, but [another] study, published in 1981, places the figure at 30 killed or mortally wounded and 25 wounded. The revised figures also include 16

both wounded and missing, 57 missing, and 73 as the total number of prisoners and missing.

Thomas' brother Fielding was among the 3rd Virginia Infantry troops captured by Union forces at Gettysburg, on July 3, 1863). He was initially sent to the Johnson's Island prisoner-of-war (POW) camp in Ohio, was later paroled at the Point Lookout POW camp in Maryland, and was part of a prisoner exchange on March 17, 1864 — after which he rejoined the 3rd Virginia Infantry.

## **"LEE'S RETREAT"**

As noted in the above list of battles, the 3rd Virginia Infantry was in place at the "Siege of Petersburg," Virginia, from June 1864 through the start of April 1865. Despite this common name for this 10-month campaign during the war, it was not a true "siege" in the sense of being surrounded with all supply lines cut off. Instead, the campaign was a series of trench warfare engagements during which General Ulysses S. Grant and his Union forces launched multiple unsuccessful assaults on Petersburg.

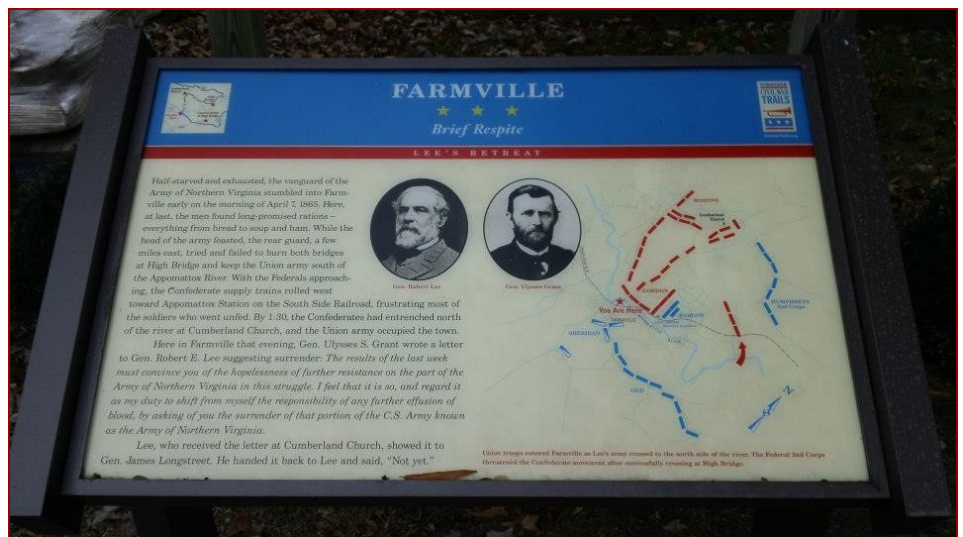
Civil War historian Anthony J. Gage, Jr., notes in *Southside Virginia in the Civil War*:



## *"Lee's Retreat" /*

top photo: Sailor's Creek  
Battlefield Historical State Park,  
near Rice, VA — Thomas Cage,  
fought here on April 6, 1865, with  
the 3rd Virginia Infantry before  
being captured that night  
(or early the next morning)  
a few miles west in Farmville.  
Battlefield is on left behind the  
park Visitor's Center.

center and bottom photos:  
Historical markers  
commemorating events at  
Farmville on April 7, 1865, as  
Robert E. Lee and his  
Confederate troops made their  
final retreat to Appomattox,  
where Lee surrendered to the  
Union forces. Thomas Cage was  
among the Confederate troops  
captured in the Farmville vicinity  
during that retreat.



The Confederate defenses between  
Richmond and Petersburg were  
being extended by General Ulysses  
S. Grant to the breaking point during

the first part of 1865. In an attempt  
to help alleviate some of the  
pressure, on 25 March 1865,  
[Confederate] General John B.

Gordon attacked and captured Fort Stedman, but could not hold it. On 27 March, [Confederate] Major [Thomas J.] Wooten, with the sharpshooters for the entire division, captured McIlwaine's Hill and held it for two days. Grant continued placing more and more units in the Five Forks and Hatcher's Run area. By doing this, he extended the Confederate line to its breaking point. The distances between soldiers could be as much as twenty feet.

After almost ten months of squalid trench warfare around the beleaguered city of Petersburg, the spring of 1865 found Confederate General Robert E. Lee and his 44,000 man Army of Northern Virginia facing an enemy force of 128,000 troops commanded by the indomitable Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant. Lee had been successful against long odds before, but never before had he and his men faced a situation as desperate as this....

It had already been a long and hard winter inside the Confederate trenches at Petersburg. Hunger, cold, illness, desertions and the constant threat of deadly snipers had sapped the spirits of the once defiant Virginians. In one five-week stretch

that winter, nearly 3,000 Southern soldiers had deserted. This equates to almost 8 percent of Lee's total strength....

Lee himself made a fruitless trip to Richmond to plead his army's case before the Confederate Congress, but bitterly told his son Custis, "I have been up to see Congress and they do not seem to be able to do anything except to eat peanuts and chew tobacco, while my army is starving."

Gage goes on to describe the course of events that led to the Battle of Five Forks, in which the 3rd Regiment, Company K (2d) fought:

The Union commander [Grant] was no longer worried that the wily Confederate[s] might slip away under cover of darkness and join [other Confederate] forces in North Carolina. On March 29, Grant assembled 50,000 troops on the Union left under one of his favorite commanders, [General Philip] Sheridan.... Two days later, Sheridan's force pushed northwestwards toward Five Forks, a strategic wilderness crossing a dozen miles south of Petersburg, Lee, rather than extending his thin lines of defense an additional four miles to meet the Union threat, dispatched



a 10,500-man force of cavalry and infantry to oppose Grant's flanking movement. The idea was that the quicker moving Confederate cavalry could bridge the gap between the existing lines and the 6,000 supporting infantry troops until they could be properly situated.

On March 31, a portion of Sheridan's force reached the outskirts of Five Forks but were repulsed by Major Generals George Pickett and Fitzhugh Lee. A terse message soon arrived from General Lee, "Hold Five Forks at all hazards," he ordered. Incredibly Pickett and Fitzhugh Lee chose the next day to hold a holiday like shad bake behind their lines, and that same afternoon the relentless Sheridan struck, routing and scattering the leaderless Confederates. In one stroke, Lee's entire right flank disappeared.

General Lee realized that he no longer could continue to resist the Union forces around Petersburg (or Richmond). The night of April 2, he began withdrawing his forces from the trenches around those two cities. He planned for them to first march westward across Virginia toward the small tobacco town of Farmville and then south into North Carolina to join up with other Confederate forces who were fighting there.

The Union forces, however, realized the Confederate strategy and moved to counter and block them. The historical brochure "Sailor's Creek: 72 Hours Before the End" relates the events that followed on April 6"

As the column winds through the countryside, it has to cross a small stream known as Little Sailor's Creek. Upon approaching the creek, at a crossroads, known locally as Holt's Corner, Union cavalry strikes the Confederates, and [Confederate General Richard] Anderson's men must stop and fight. Two miles beyond, at the next crossroads, bounded by the Marshall and Harper farms, more union cavalry cuts across the Southerners' path of retreat. Consequently, Gen. [Richard] Ewell sends the wagon train down Jamestown Road at Holt's Corner to cross Sailor's Creek further downstream. Once the Union cavalry ceases its hit-and-run tactics on the column, Anderson and Ewell proceed forward; [General John] Gordon then follows the wagon train, leaving Ewell's rear exposed to advancing Union infantry.

When Anderson ... moves to close the gap between his and [another Confederate] command, he finds that the Union cavalry has blocked

his path at Marshall's Crossroads, a mile beyond Little Sailor's Creek.

Intense battle began at about 5:15 that evening. Within a few hours, Lee's forces had been decimated — more than 7,700 of his soldiers had been killed, and more Confederate soldiers had been captured than on any other single day of the war. (Fielding Cage was among the 3rd Virginia Infantry soldiers captured in the fighting at Saylor's Creek, and he was sent to the Union's POW depot near Sandusky, Ohio.)

Realizing the desperation of the situation following his troops' devastating defeat, General Lee ordered another, immediate night-time march to the west — to the previously mentioned tobacco town of Farmville. Lee and his forces arrived there the morning of April 7. Just two days later — and 20 miles west of Farmville — General Robert E. Lee surrendered to the Union in the court house at Appomattox, Virginia. The war was over, the Confederacy was defeated, and the Union was saved.

Like his brother Fielding, Thomas Cage never made it to Appomattox with the few members of his company who survived to the bitter end.\* His official service records note that he was captured by the Union forces on April 6

in Farmville. The combination of this date and location is a bit confusing, since, on April 6, both the Confederate and Union forces would have been at Saylor's Creek, and both sets of forces would not have arrived en masse in Farmville until the morning of April 7. One possibility is that he was among the first Confederate troops to arrive in Farmville early on the morning of April 7, and that his captors recorded his capture as if it was still the night of April 6.

## POINT LOOKOUT POW CAMP

When he was captured, Thomas Cage was taken north and placed in the POW camp at Point Lookout, Maryland, located where the Potomac River flows into the Chesapeake Bay. Over 50,000 Confederate troops were incarcerated by the Union in brutal conditions at the camp, which had been built to hold only 10,000 people. Disease apparently had been rampant in the prison camp for years before Cage's arrival, but the Union forces had made few attempts to improve the situation. Since it was usually Union policy not to arrange POW exchanges with the Confederacy (although war records do indicate, as

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\* Thomas and Fielding's brother-in-law Albert DeJarnette, however, may have been in Appomattox for General Lee's surrender. His war records indicate that he was paroled near Burkeville, Virginia, on April 14, 1865.





noted above, that Fielding Cage had been part of a previous POW exchange at Point Lookout), most prisoners were destined to stay there until war's end — or death, if it came first. In the end, almost everyone at Point Lookout died from the diseases that swept through the camp. Thomas Cage was among the thousands of prisoners to die at Point Lookout; he passed away in late June 1865, after the war had ended.

Most official records of Thomas Cage's death in his service files record his death as June 21. One hand-written



Point Lookout record, however, seems to log his death, to “chronic diarrhea,” as June 27. This is interesting because another document in Cage’s service files is an “Oath of Allegiance” to the United States for a “T. W. Cage” from Halifax County, Virginia, signed on June 24, 1865.

Today, a few miles north of where the Point Lookout Prison Camp once stood, is a quiet cemetery with the graves of over 3,300 men who died at Point Lookout while they were POWs there. The graves are unmarked, except for two monuments to the soldier’s collective memory. The primary monument has plaques on its four sides listing the names of each Confederate soldier buried somewhere in the cemetery. Among the names is that of Thomas West Cage (*photos, preceding page*).

In 2008, a Point Lookout POW Descendants Organization erected a new “Confederate Memorial Park” adjacent to the official Point Lookout cemetery — specifically so the organization could fly the Confederate flag at the site 365 days a year, which is not allowed at a U.S. Government-managed cemetery. Included inside the brickwork of this memorial is a bean pot that was used to prepare food at Point Lookout for imprisoned Confederate troops (*photo, right*). One

surviving soldier wrote, “A cup of bean soup with one or two yankee beans floating in it was our breakfast.”

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