

They Were There

By
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Next year (2014) marks the 150th anniversary of Price's Raid into Missouri and the Battle of Pilot Knob. To honor and remember those who participated, our newsletter will tell some of their stories over the next several editions. If you have a story from someone who was there, please consider sharing it. Please email your story to jabney@hughes.net or mail it to John Abney at P.O. Box 183, Ironton, MO 63650.

Willis Cole and Frank Hogins

At the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, Willis Cole and Frank Hogins had two things in common. They were both young, black men and they were both slaves. Yet, by the often strange circumstances brought about by war, they would find themselves on opposite sides of the fighting during the Battle of Pilot Knob.

Willis Cole was born into slavery near Memphis, Tennessee on 15 November 1840.¹ When the area fell into Union hands in 1862, he escaped slavery and became a teamster for the 1st Wisconsin Cavalry and served them in that capacity for the next 13 months.² When the 1st Wisconsin returned to Pilot Knob in early 1863, Cole came with them.

Cole helped to build Fort Davidson in 1863 and continued working as a teamster, now under Captain Dyer, the post's Quartermaster.³ Once the

new fort was completed, Cole hauled the artillery ammunition from the old fort, Fort Curtis to Fort Davidson.⁴

When Ironton was attacked by Price's forces on 26 September 1864, Cole joined a group of 60 to 70 free blacks, forming a company under the control of Captain Lonergan, the Provost Marshal at Pilot Knob.⁵ Cole survived the battle on the 27th and the subsequent retreat of Ewing's forces. Cole eventually made his way to St. Louis where he found work as a roustabout on a steamboat around March, 1865.⁶ He returned to Ironton in 1872 and after the death of his first wife, Hannah, in December 1883⁷, he later married Maria Brannum in September, 1884.⁸



Willis Cole later in life. *Photo from the collection of the Iron County Historical Society*

Later in life, Cole recorded parts his life story and Civil War experiences in a series of letters, quoted here, and now part of the Battle of Pilot Knob Research Collection in the Library of the Missouri History Society in St. Louis.

¹ Willis Cole, death certificate no. 36739 (1920), Missouri State Board of Health, transferred to: Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City. Digital image, (<http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/deathcertificates> :accessed 27 February 2013).

² Henry C. Wilkinson, transcriber, Statement of Willis Cole, 8 July 1904, Box 3, Folder 3, Battle of Pilot Knob Research Collection, 1862-1914, Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis, 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Hannah Cole, 12 December 1883 burial entry, John Albert Undertaking Ledger, Ironton, Missouri. Digital image, (<http://www.sos.mo.gov/mdh/>: accessed 27 February 2013).

⁸ Willis Cole and Maria Brannum marriage certificate, *Missouri Marriage Records*. Jefferson City, Missouri, Missouri State Archives microfilm. Digital image, (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 February 2013).

Willis Cole died at the Iron County Poor Farm on the day after Christmas, 1920 and was buried in the Poor Farm's cemetery two days later on December 28th.⁹

Like Willis Cole, Frank Hogins was also born into slavery in Tennessee, though he was born in Dickson County in about 1837 and moved with his owner's family to Pope County, Arkansas in 1841.¹⁰ In September 1863, his owner's son, Reece B. Hogins, then 16 years old, enlisted in Company A of Hill's Regiment of Arkansas Cavalry.¹¹ As was a fairly common practice, he took one of the family slaves (Frank) with him.

Hill's Regiment was assigned to Cabell's Brigade of Major General Fagan's Division during Price's Raid. Young Reece was shot through the thigh while charging Fort Davidson on 27 September 1864 and Frank was said to have carried his wounded master "for miles on his back, trying to get him to safety. In spite of Frank's valiant efforts, he (Reece) was taken prisoner and instead of running away, Frank returned to the company and served until the end of the war."¹²

Reece's carded service record reflects that he was taken prisoner on 17 October 1864 and was held at both the Gratiot Street Military Prison in St. Louis and at the Alton Military Prison in Alton, Illinois.¹³

Both Frank and Reece would survive the war and return to Pope County. Reece Hogins would eventually be elected the sheriff of Pope County

and would later serve as the Warden of the Arkansas State Penitentiary.¹⁴

Frank remained with the family after his emancipation and one Hogins family member, Ben Hogins, "remembers knowing Frank; and says he had his own little table in the dining room, and at big family dinners he was urged to sit at the big table with the others, but always said, 'No, it isn't proper!' No one ever had a more loyal friend, or was held in higher regard by a family."¹⁵ When Reece passed away, it was said that there was no one outside the immediate family that was more a sincere mourner than Frank.¹⁶

When he was 78, in 1915, at "the solicitation of friends among the white folks, among whom he has many, 'Uncle Frank' made application for a Confederate pension."¹⁷ His application was initially denied because he hadn't actually enlisted.¹⁸ A subsequent application was approved in 1917. That subsequent application contained a notarized statement from two veterans of Hill's Regiment, W. H. Poynter, Sr. and F. L. Lee, which stated that, "He [Frank] could have deserted camp as other colored help did, but he stayed with the Confederates till the war was closed. We consider his service as valuable as any regular soldier in the company."¹⁹



⁹ Willis Cole, death certificate.

¹⁰ Barrow, Charles K. and Segars, J. H. editors and compilers. *Black Southerners in Confederate Armies* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Co., 2007), 75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Arkansas, NARA M317, roll 26, carded records of Reece B. Hogins, Pvt., Co. A., Hill's Arkansas Cavalry. Digital image, (www.fold3.com: accessed 6 February 2013).

¹² *Black Southerners*, 75, 76.

¹³ Compiled Service Record.

¹⁴ *Black Southerners*, 75.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Arkansas State Auditor. Arkansas, Confederate Pension Applications. Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Arkansas. Digital image, (www.familysearch.org: accessed 6 February 2013.)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*