



Prison Mates

by Hal Hardin

With the anniversary of the Battle of Shiloh approaching, Hal Hardin reflects on his great grandfather as well as the ancestors of fellow members of the bar.

I have always felt a special bond with my friend and colleague, Bill Harbison. It could be because we have handled a lot of matters together or because his dad, Justice William Harbison was my favorite law professor. Or maybe, just maybe, it is because our great grandfathers, Isaac Henry Hardin and William Matthew "Bee" Harbison, were once in prison together. Yes, prison.¹

Our ancestors came to Tennessee a long time ago. Bee was born on January 13, 1840 in Hickman County, near the Maury County Line. Isaac's grandfather was Obediah Hardin. Obediah fought under General Andrew Jackson at the battle of New Orleans in 1814, against the army that had defeated Napoleon. He returned to farm in the "Chickasaw Nation" in what is now Benton County, Tennessee. His small farm sat on the high hill, now overlooking the I-40 west bound bridge over the Tennessee River. After returning, Obediah then hung up his gun, became a pastor, and tried to live peacefully up to his name Obediah ("Servant of the Lord"). It was not to be for so for many of his descendents, including his grandson, Isaac Hardin.

In 1860, few in his area owned slaves or advocated slavery. Many of the settlers had suffered their own (admittedly milder) bondage under the old European apprenticeship system. Causes of war are inevitably complex, but many of the poor southern boys who headed to battle were motivated by agrarian concerns rather than any desire to maintain the Confederacy's horrible pro-slavery position. To many of them, the issue was fierce protection of land and their belief that the indus-

trious North was infringing upon their economic and states' rights. But, in short, it was another example of old men recklessly sending boys to fight their battles.

On November 7, 1861, Isaac, then still a teenager, enlisted in the Confederate army in the 49th Infantry Company H in Benton County. He was joined by Obediah's son, Lige Hardin, and Obediah's sons-in-law, Hardy Hatley and Wesley Bailey. Bee enlisted in Captain J. M. Sparkman's Tennessee Light Artillery Company, which was formed to become part of the Confederate Army of Tennessee. Bee was a private with the "Maury Artillery," which manned heavy artillery at Fort Donelson on the Tennessee River.

Just three and one-half months later, on February 16, 1862, at Fort Donelson, Isaac and Bee were captured by General Ulysses S. Grant's advancing army and sent to Camp Douglas, a prisoner of war camp located near Chicago.² At the Battle of Fort Donelson, the casualties estimated at 2,331 U.S. troops, and 15,067 Confederate. Isaac's uncle Hardy was among those killed. His uncle Wesley went to Camp Douglas along with Isaac, Bee, and the others.

Wesley died there, as did many prisoners. Lige was the only member of the Hardin group not to be captured or killed in the battle. General Grant then moved south to Shiloh. Odds are that the capture saved the Donelson prisoners' lives as they would miss the horrific slaughter at Shiloh on April 6-7, 1862; some estimate the casualties there at 10,699 Confederate and 13,047 Union.

At Camp Douglas on August 29, 1862, Isaac and Bee, like many of the soldiers, took the oath of allegiance to the United States³ before walking back to Tennessee. Bee rejoined the fight upon his return.⁴

In 1909, Bee applied for an army pension, and he was initially denied because he had been confused with another Harbison claimed to be a deserter. E.P. Adkins gave an affidavit on July 14, 1909, in support of Bee's application for a pension. He stated:

I was Harbison's messmate and slept with him and knew of his whereabouts from the time of the Franklin fight 'til the surrender. I know that he went out of Tennessee with the command when Hood went out of Tennessee. I know the said Harbison was in the battle of Nashville and was with me in that battle and we went out when Hood retreated, and he was with the Company John S. Groves, Captain, from that time until the surrender at Gainesville, Alabama . . . and I know was a matter of fact that the said Harbison never deserted . . . This Harbison was usually called 'Bee.'

Mr. Adkins' affidavit is consistent with family lore that Bee walked Home from Alabama after the war ended.

Isaac, however, walked from Camp Douglas back to Tennessee, where he farmed and was married by his grandfather, the old soldier, Obediah. Still suffering from the war, Isaac died in 1882, only 40 years old. Isaac left five children—all under the age of ten at the time of his death—one of which was my grandfather, James Lafayette Hardin. ■

(Endnotes)

¹ Also imprisoned with Isaac and Bee was attorney Sam Wallace's great grandfather, Madison Monroe Wallace. Madison enlisted with the Confederate Army on his 17th birthday, September 20, 1861. According to family history, he joined to be with and protect his older brother, William Henry Wallace. Sam's great grandfather, Wallace, was also captured on February 16, 1862, and sent to Camp Douglas. He was among those exchanged in a prisoner swap in November 1862, at Vicksburg, Mississippi. He returned to the newly reformed 50th Tennessee Infantry at Vicksburg, Mississippi, and served in multiple battles until December 16, 1864, when he was captured for a second time near Shy's Hill and sent to POW Camp Chase, Ohio. He was released April 17, 1865, walked to Dover, depending on the kindness of strangers along with way. He remained in Dover until he passed in 1926. After the war, Wallace received the Southern Cross of Honor.

The oldest son of Madison was Shelby Wallace, who moved to Nashville. The oldest son of Shelby was Lacy Monroe Wallace was Sam Wallace, Sr., father of my colleague, Sam Wallace.

² Attorney Ward Dewitt and his son Assistant District Attorney, Paul Dewitt, also had an ancestor who was captured, William Vance Whiston, a Confederate calvaryman. William spent the remainder of the war in a federal prison, where he suffered terribly but somehow survived. After the war, he became a lawyer, practicing in McMinnville, Tennessee, eventually becoming the District Attorney for the area.

³ Judge Bennett's ancestor, Milton Parchman, avoided being captured because before the battle he contracted measles and was sent to a hospital in Nashville. Milton's brother brought Milton home before Nashville was captured. He remained ill for two years. Nevertheless, he still took the oath of allegiance to the United States, explaining:

I was forced to take the oath . The Federal (sic) said I could take the oath and save my father's home and myself. If I did not take the oath they would destroy his home and everything he had and would take me off which meant certain death in my physical condition at that time. Failure to sign meant death to me and distruction (sic) to my father and mother. I had to be carried to sign the papers.

Milton died in Houston County in 1938 at the age of 94.

